

ARTHUR MILLER

Price

Unit-III

Arthur Miller

CHRONOLOGY

- 1915 : Arthur Asher Miller born on 17 October in New York City to Isidore and Augusta Miller. Second of three children.
- 1929: Father's clothing business declines because of the Depression, forcing the family to move to Brooklyn.
- 1933 : Miller graduates from high school, but is rejected from Cornell University and University of Michigan. Works at a variety of jobs and writes his first short story "In Memoriam" depicting an aging salesman. Reapplies to University of Michigan and is granted a conditional acceptance after writing to Dean that he is now "a much more serious fellow."
- 1934 : Studies journalism at University of Michigan where he becomes night editor of *Michigan Daily*. Studies playwriting under Professor Kenneth T. Rowe.
- 1936 : First play, *No Villain*, is produced and wins University of Michigan's Avery Hopwood Award.
- 1937: Receives second Avery Hopwood Award for *Honors at Dawn*, but the play is never produced. Receives the Theatre Guild's Bureau of New Plays Award for *They Too Arise* (revision of *No Villain*).
- 1938: Comes in second for Avery Hopwood Award for *The Great Disobedience*, which is produced at University of Michigan, Graduates and moves to New York.
- 1939: Completes another revision of *They Too Arise* (now entitled *The Grass Still Grows*), Writes scripts for Federal Theatre Project until it is closed by Congress. He then writes radio plays for CBS and NBC.
- 1940 : Completes *The Golden Years*. Marries Mary Grace Slattery. They will have two children, Jane (1944) and Robert (1947).
- 1941 : Completes two radio plays, *The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber Who Was a Man* and *William Ireland's Confession*. Also works at various odd jobs.
- 1942 : Completes radio play, *The Four Freedoms*.
- 1943 : Completes *The Half-Bridge*.
- 1944 : Tours army camps gathering material for screenplay, *The Story of G.I. Joe*, and book, *Situation Normal*. First Broadway production, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, closes after four performances, but wins Theatre Guild National Award and is published in *Cross Section: A Collection of New American Writing*.
- 1945 : Publishes first novel, *Focus*, on anti-semitism. Completes radio play, *Grandpa and the Statue*, and a one-act play, *That They May Win*. Attacks Ezra Pound for his pro-Fascist activities.
- 1947 : *All My Sons* opens on Broadway and wins New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Auctions off manuscript on behalf of Progressive Citizens of America. Becomes involved in variety of anti-Fascist and pro-Communist activities.
- 1949 : *Death of a Salesman* (originally entitled *The Inside of His Head*) opens in New York with Lee J. Cobb in the title role. Jo Mielziner designs the innovative set. Wins the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Miller publishes the first of his many theatrical and political essays.

- 1950: Adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* opens; but closes after thirty-six performances.
- 1953: *The Crucible* opens in New York to mixed reviews that differ on play's relevance to McCarthyism. Play wins Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards.
- 1954: Denied passport by State Department to attend opening of *The Crucible* in Brussels because of his alleged support of the Communist movement. Miller supporters claim this move is a retaliation for the parallels between McCarthy era tactics and the Salem witch trials evident in *The Crucible*.
- 1955: Contracts to write a film script for New York City Youth Board, but is dropped from film after a condemnation of his leftist activities appears in a New York City newspaper. *A Memory of Two Mondays* and the one-act version of *A View from the Bridge* produced as double-bill in New York.
- 1956: Two-act version of *A View from the Bridge* opens in London. Testifies before the House Un-American Activities Committee and refuses to name names of others attending meetings organized by Communist sympathizers. Divorces Mary Slattery and marries Marilyn Monroe.
- 1957: Indicted on charges of contempt of Congress for refusing to name suspected Communists. Publishes *Collected Plays*.
- 1958: US Court of Appeals reverses contempt of Congress conviction. Filming begins of Miller's *The Misfits*, starring Marilyn Monroe.
- 1959: Awarded Gold Medal for Drama by National Institute of Arts and Letters.
- 1961: *The Misfits* released. Divorces Marilyn Monroe. Opera versions of *A View from the Bridge* and *The Crucible* produced.
- 1962: Marries Ingeborg Morath, an Austrian-born photographer. Daughter, Rebecca (1963).
- 1964: *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy* open in New York.
- 1965: Elected president of PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists), an international literary association.
- 1967: Publishes *I Don't Need You Any More*, a collection of short stories.
- 1968: *The Price* opens on Broadway. Serves as a delegate to the Democratic Party National Convention.
- 1969: Publishes *In Russia* (travel journal) with photographs by his wife, Ingeborg Morath. Films *The Reason Why*, an anti-war allegory. Refuses to be published in Greece to show his opposition to the government's oppression of writers.
- 1970: Two one-act plays, *Fame* and *The Reason Why*, performed at New York's New Theatre Workshop. The Soviet Union, in response to *In Russia*, bans all of Miller's works.
- 1971: *The Portable Arthur Miller* published. *The Price* and *Memory of Two Mondays* appear on television. Helps win release of Brazilian director/playwright Augusto Boal.
- 1972: *The Creation of the World and Other Business* produced in New York, but closes after twenty performances. Protests oppression of artists worldwide - very active politically through the 1970s. Permission granted for all-black production of *Death of a Salesman* in Baltimore. Revival of *The Crucible* in New York.
- 1973: Revival of *Death of a Salesman* in Philadelphia - first time the play is performed within one hundred miles of Broadway since 1949.
- 1974: *Up from Paradise* (musical version of *The Creation of the World and Other Business*) produced in Ann Arbor, Michigan. *After the Fall* appears on television.

- 1975 : Revival of *Death of a Salesman* in New York at Circle in the Square.
- 1977 : *The Archbishop's Ceiling* has limited run in Washington Dc. Publishes *In the Country* (travel journal) with photographs by Inge borg Morath.
- 1978 : Visits China. *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller* published. *Fame* appears on television. Protests the arrests of dissidents in Soviet Union.
- 1979 : Publishes *Chinese Encounters* (travel journal) with photographs by Inge borg Morath.
- 1980 : *The American Clock* opens in New York. In spite of its success in South Carolina, the play closes in New York after a few performances. *Playing for Time*, adaptation of Fania Fenelon's book, appears on television.
- 1981 : Arthur Miller's *Collected Plays, vol. II* is published.
- 1982 : Two one-act plays, *Some Kind of Love Story* and *Elegy for a Lady*, open in New Haven.
- 1983 : Directs *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing with Chinese cast. Revival of *A View from the Bridge* in New York. Revision and revival of *Up from Paradise* in New York.
- 1984 : Publishes *Salesman* in Beijing with photographs by Inge borg Morath. *Death of a Salesman* is revived on Broadway with Dustin Hoffman in lead role. Involved in dispute with the Wooster Group over their unauthorized use of scenes from *The Crucible* for their production of LSD.
- 1985 : Revival of *The Price* opens successfully on Broadway. Hoffman version of *Death of a Salesman* produced on television. *Playing for Time* produced in Washington Dc.
- 1986 : *The American Clock* and *The Archbishop's Ceiling* produced in London. Revival of *The Crucible* in New York and Washington Dc.
- 1987 : *Timebends: A Life* (Miller's autobiography) published. *Danger: Memory!* (two one-act plays, *Can't Remember Anything* and *Clara*) produced in New York. *All My Sons* appears on television.
- 1989 : Revival of *The Crucible* in New Haven. Opening of Arthur Miller Centre, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.
- 1990 : Revival of *The Crucible* in New York and London. Screenplay for motion picture *Everybody wins*.
- 1991 : *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* opens in London.
- 1992 : *Homely Girl, A Life* published.
- 1993 : *The Last Yankee* opens in New York. Continuing a lifelong commitment to the freedom of writers, Miller contributes to volume on censorship entitled *Censored Books: Critical View points*.
- 1994 : *Broken Glass* opens in New York and London.
- 1995 : *Plain Girl* published in England. Eightieth birthday marked by Gala Performance at the Royal National Theatre in London and Gala Dinner at the Arthur Miller Centre.
- 1996 : Film version of *The Crucible* released.

LIFE AND CAREER

"The plays are my autobiography. I can't write plays that don't sum up where I am. I am in all of them. I don't know how else to go about writing". (Miller in an interview to BBC recorded in 1995 to mark his 80th birthday).

Arthur Miller is undoubtedly one of the three greatest American playwrights of the 20th century – the other two being Eugene O' Neill and Tennessee Williams. Miller's plays though dealing with American issues, appeal to audiences from Brazil to Russia and Iceland to China. In China, **Death of a Salesman** has enjoyed immense popularity though China till recently was a communist state. In India, Miller's plays, specially *All My Sons* and **Death of a Salesman**, have been translated into many languages and staged in many parts of the country.

Birth and Childhood

Miller was born in 1915 in a then fashionable part of Harlem, New York in a middle-class Jewish family. He was one of the three children, the others being an elder brother Kermit and a younger sister, Joan. His father, almost illiterate, was a successful manufacturer of ladies coats. His mother on the other hand, was an avid reader and taught public school. She was intensely devoted to her children and had high ambitions for them.

School

The Millers observed Jewish customs and holidays and provided their family with a sound moral and religious background. Miller attended a public school in Harlem but much to the disappointment of his mother, he was an undistinguished student. However, he was a competent athlete and a rather good football player.

Moving from New York to Brooklyn

In 1929, when Miller was fourteen years old, The Great Stock Market Crash occurred, creating havoc in America. This was a traumatic experience for the young Miller who wrote about the effects of the Depression in a number of plays, specially **Death of a Salesman**. His father's business, like that of thousands of others, suffered and the family consequently moved to Brooklyn. Although the Millers were now living in middle-class poor surroundings, the place was rather rural with great elm trees and flat grasslands.

Miller's neighbourhood was just a few blocks long and essentially Jewish. Socializing between neighbours was limited but everyone knew his neighbour. "I don't recall any time when the cops had to be called," Miller wrote years later. "Everyone was so well and thoroughly known that the frown of his neighbour was enough law to keep things in line". (Arthur Miller, 'A Boy Grew in Brooklyn, **Holiday** (March 1995), p 119.

For the young Miller the school days passed pleasantly and leisurely. At James Madison High School he neglected his studies and devoted his time and energy to football and athletics. His only responsibility during these days was the job he held with the local bakery, delivering bread and rolls each morning before school. The job not only required strict punctuality but also the utmost care in delivering the right bag to the proper house.

High School

He progressed from James Madison to Abraham Lincoln High School, football being his main interest. So carefree was his life that years later he recalled, "I can fairly say we were none of us encumbered by any thing resembling a thought". Indeed, Miller's only encumbrance was a knee injury he sustained in one of the games which would later on exempt him from military duty.

The young Miller became aware of the economic chaos caused by the Great Depression of the 30s. He saw millions of Americans suddenly become penniless and unemployed. Some committed suicide while others took whatever jobs came their way. The domestic situation became increasingly painful. His father's garment factory which employed about a thousand workers suddenly lost business. His maternal grandfather, his savings depleted by the depression, started living with his daughter. Indeed, the crash left such a profound impression on him that it became a recurrent theme in many of his plays.

In 1932, Miller graduated from high school and applied to Cornell University and the University of Michigan. But he was rejected by both and began looking for a job.

Early jobs

He went to work in his father's garment factory but soon found the job distasteful what with the atmosphere claustrophobic, the workers loud, vulgar and aggressive. In the next few months he held a number of jobs from truck driver to an announcer at a local radio station. Finally, he became a shipping clerk at an automobile parts warehouse in New York where he worked for more than a year for fifteen dollars a week.

He applied again to the University of Michigan and to his surprise and joy was accepted on the condition that he achieve good grades at the end of the first semester.

In the warehouse he learned about hollowness and despair and hope and fulfillment. The experience would always be with him. He drew upon this experience when he came to write his autobiographical play, **A Memory of Two Mondays**.

University

The University of Michigan with its sprawling green campus and radical atmosphere was a paradise compared to the warehouse where Miller worked for about two years. He "fell in love with the place" and he "resolved to make good". He did though with much difficulty and hardship. He had never been a distinguished student and a two-year absence from studies hardly helped. By dint of hard work and application he achieved proper grades.

With each passing day, Miller grew more and more fond of Michigan. Its main difference from the depressing and hopeless world he had been exposed to in Brooklyn and New York was its vivacity. The atmosphere of the University was one of hope and fulfillment rather than of despair and despondency. The campus was full of speeches, meetings, leaflets and issues. Informal courses in politics were available to anyone who was receptive. His fellow students were as exciting to Miller as the causes they supported and attacked. In sharp contrast to his previous dull and drab social life his classmates came from different backgrounds. They were sons of bankers, advocates, doctors, engineers, and even unemployed recipients of dole; they came from all parts of America. Interacting with them was part of Miller's education at the University of Michigan. No wonder he loved every minute of it.

Since Miller's parents were in no position to bear the cost of his education, to support himself he washed dishes in the cafeteria to pay for his meals, and earned a modest salary as editor of the **Michigan Daily**. He also did some other odd jobs to maintain himself.

Though he began a journalism major, he soon moved to the English department, which provided him an incentive for creative writing. He attended Professor Kenneth Rowe's Course on play writing who impressed Miller with his learning and ability as also his dedication and interest in his students.

"He may never have created a playwright, no teacher, ever did", Miller observed later on, "but he surely read what we wrote with the urgency of one who actually had the power to produce the play".

While Miller's interest in play writing was encouraged by Prof. Rowe, it was reinforced by an alumnus of the University, Avery Hapwood. The latter left a considerable legacy out of which the University founded an annual award for creative writing. Miller submitted the play **Honors at Dawn** in 1936 for this competition. He was surprised and elated when it was announced that he was the winner of the prize which was worth two hundred and fifty dollars! Suddenly he had achieved recognition, money, and most importantly, the realization that play writing as a vocation was open to him. His hopes were further encouraged the following year when a second Avery Hopwood prize of \$250 was awarded to him for his play, **No Villain**.

Both **Honors at Dawn** and **No Villain** remain unpublished and unproduced. Their essential merit today lies not in their intrinsic merit but in the themes, characters and situations they foreshadow in Miller's later and more mature work.

Honors at Dawn is about a young man named Max Zabriskie who unwittingly and reluctantly supports and participates in a strike at his factory. He is fired for his role in the strike, although he is hardly aware of the cause for which his fellow workers have been fighting. With hardly any hope of getting a job, under the influence of his

elder brother he goes to college. Max initially regards the University as a citadel of learning and idealism. But his optimism is soon shattered and he becomes disillusioned. He finds corruption all-pervasive in many walks of university life and is shocked to learn that his brother is in the pay of the administration to spy upon young radicals. Shocked by his brother's betrayal and disgusted with college life, he returns to the factory, but this time with a new sense of commitment and a full understanding of the cause for which he and his co-workers are fighting. The play ends with Max taking a bad beating but, realizing that he has finally gained at a new "dawn" the honors of individual integrity and social responsibility that he had vainly sought at the University.

Honors at Dawn is melodramatic, didactic and naive. It is clearly influenced by the protest literature of the Depression era. Yet, for us the worth of the play lies in that it has themes, Miller would develop in greater depth and intensity in later work.

Set against a negative image of university life, the conflict between the Zabriskie brothers is a precursor of sibling rivalry that characterizes Miller's later plays. Equally significant is the conflict between the individual and his society. These themes would recur later in **All My Sons**, **Death of a Salesman** and **The Price**.

Like many later heroes, Max is a confused man who is out of touch with reality. Also, his self-awareness begins with the revelation that his brother is bribed by the University. This device takes the form of a pair of spectacles in the novel, **Focus**, a letter in **All My Sons**, an accusation of witchcraft in **The Crucible** and a mistaken identity in **Incident at Vichy**.

It cannot be claimed that the early Miller of this play had fully worked the thematic considerations and dramatic structure of the later and more mature plays. But at the same time it cannot be denied that **Honors at Dawn** contributed, in however small a way, to the profound growth and development of Miller's dramatic art.

They Too Arise is an enlarged and revised version of Miller's second Avery Hopwood Award winning play, **No Villain**. It continues the pattern established in **Honors at Dawn** of linking familial conflicts with societal problems that affect the family.

The play opens in the drawing room of Abe Simon's home in a New York City suburb in the 1930s. The Simon family comprises Abe, a manufacturer of women's coats (like Miller's father), his son Ben, who works with him, his wife Esther, and his young daughter Maxine. Although it is late, the family is waiting for the arrival of the younger son, Arnie, who is studying at the University of Michigan.

The tensions in the family are obvious. Although there is a strike in the factory the Simons are far from united. Esther, who is alienated from her husband and son, remonstrating with Ben for not marrying the daughter of a wealthy businessman and faulting Abe for being ineffective. Estranged from his wife he becomes indifferent to her and spends most of his time in the shop and showers great affection on his daughter. Caught in the conflict between his parents and frustrated with his job, Ben becomes increasingly bitter and unhappy. His bitterness surfaces when his eighty year old maternal grandfather comes to stay with them. His arrival intensifies the conflict between Abe and Esther. Though she and her sister have been taking care of their old father by turns, Abe resents the burden thrust upon him by his prosperous sister-in-law.

The only pleasant topic of discussion is Arnie and even he becomes the cause of conflict when Ben questions the wisdom of his father to offer him (Arnie) a share in the shop because his younger brother has always disliked the work. Moreover, he has become a radical in the college and might support the workers in their ongoing strike.

At this point Arnie enters and is warmly welcomed by all. He is overwhelmed by his family's affection and the atmosphere is relaxed for the time being. This is where the first act closes.

The second act opens in Abe's factory. In spite of Ben's objections, Arnie, who does not understand the issue involved in the strike, agrees to help his father. Soon after, Arnie is bashed up when he unwittingly crosses a picket line. He criticizes his father for keeping him in the dark and supports the workers facing financial disaster. Abe pleads with Ben to agree to marry the girl of a wealthy businessman that may save the family. Much against his wishes but for the sake of the family, Ben accepts the marriage proposal.

In the concluding scene of this act, which takes place in the Simon home, Arnie is trying to persuade his father to accept the workers' demand and asks Ben to break off his engagement. Ben, however, with his feet firmly planted on earth, asks his brother to abandon his noble ideals and rescue their father from financial ruin.

As the two brothers are quarrelling, Esther cries that her father is having a heart attack.

As the third act opens, Abe is besieged by creditors and in despair realizes that his business is finished.

The last scene is in the Simon home. The death of Esther's father brings her and Abe together. After experiencing defeat and death they discover their love for each other and the family decides to come to terms with life and its realities. Ben calls off his marriage and decides to strike on his own in the world. Arnie warmly and proudly welcomes his brother's act. As the two brothers prepare to go to bed, Abe says softly to Esther; "We gotta learn how to laugh again, we gotta learn how to laugh". The play ends with these words.

They Too Arise is undoubtedly didactic and melodramatic and has many other dramatic weaknesses. But like **Honors at Dawn** it deals with characters and situations which Miller was to develop in the later plays. The characters form the center of a family which will develop in depth and complexity in Miller's later work.

Abe Simon with his selfless desire to sacrifice himself for his sons, is an early portrait of Joe Keller and Will Loman, to give only two examples.

"We're finished Through", he exclaims, "But Ben, some day I want you should – I wanna, see you on top. You can do it Ben, without me".

Abe's anguished cry will be echoed by Patterson Beeves in **The Man Who Had All The**, Luck; it will figure in Joe Keller's painful justification of his deeds in **All My Sons**; it will form the core of Willy, Loman's extravagant dreams for Biff and Happy; and it will reverberate again in **After the fall** in the Fathers impotent rage at the discovery of his ruin.

If Abe embodies many characteristics of father figures Esther is similar to many mothers in later plays. She, a dutiful and protective wife, is not unlike Kate Keller and Linda Loman. They all provide their sons with the best possible homes.

Arnie and Ben provide a pattern of two contrasting brothers that is repeated in many later plays. Though temporarily blinded by their father's, formula for success they, or at least one of them, gains self-knowledge and realize the hollowness of their fathers dream.

So, **Honors at Dawn** and **They Too Arise** are significant not so much in their intrinsic merit as in prefiguring the characters and situations that Miller was to develop in later drama .

Miller graduated from the University of Michigan in 1938. He was armed with B.A degree, two playwriting awards, a fiancée, Mary Slattery and a lot of high hopes. The Michigan years proved to be fruitful and crucial; he learned a lot about the world and himself.

He later commented about this period, "I felt I had accomplished something there. I knew at least how much I did not know ... It had been a small world, gentler, than the real one, but tough enough."

After his marriage he turned to radio writing while his wife did secretarial work. After the outbreak of the Second World War, he wrote scripts for radio and worked on ships in the Navy Yard. But he despised radio as it placed too many restrictions on him. He had to deal with the censors, meet the deadlines and cram each story into a half-hour limit. However, he continued to write radio scripts for it gave him some economic stability.

Miller wrote a vast number of radio plays. While some celebrate the integrity and potential of the common man, others, are openly and unabashedly patriotic.

His radio scripts are noteworthy for what they reveal of his thematic considerations and dramatic technique. The plays reveal a number of non realistic experiments. Fanciful and fantastic situations, the use if a narrator, rapid and plastic shifts of scene, and the collapse of chronological time – all these elements which are perfected in **Death of a Salesman**, **A Memory of Two Mondays**, **A view from the Bridge**, and **After The Fall**- are

even employed boldly and interestingly in his radio plays. Of them all perhaps, the most interesting is the fanciful '**The Pussy Cat and the Expert Plumber who was a Man**'. It is a delightful comedy about a talking cat called Tom who blackmails some politicians into contesting for governorship before he is exposed by a bold and honest plumber.

Although Miller was a successful scriptwriter for radio, he was dissatisfied. His first love was play writing, the radio plays were no more than potboilers.

His first major play after he gave up radio was the **Man Who Had All The Luck**. The play had its premiere in 1944 and Miller hoped the play's title would apply to the author as well. But it closed after only four performances. For him success was still a couple of years away.

The protagonist of **The Man Who Had All the Luck** is a young man who works as a motor mechanic in a small town. Though happy with his job, he is unhappy in his personal life. He cannot marry his sweetheart, Hester because her father is opposed to the marriage. The rest of the play dramatises David's rise to fame and fortune through luck and chance. As David is contemplating giving up Hester, he learns of the death of her father in an accident. Now, they are free to marry. But at this point a rich farmer brings an expensive car for repairs with the offer that if he can fix it the owner will extend his patronage to him. At this moment a stranger appears, informs him of his plans to open a garage. Though a potential rival he becomes friendly with David and offers to help him with the car. Exhausted, David falls asleep and Eberson fixes the car. The next day David earns the benefits promised by Dibble, the owner of the car.

The second act opens three years later. David is now a rich and famous man. While he is marching to fame and fortune he is dogged by the fear that good fortune will not last forever. To test his luck he invests in a number of ventures all of which turn out to be successful. At the end of the play, David's lot is better than ever and it is wholly gratuitous.

The play suffers from many inherent defects, the chief being that many critical situations and the incidents depend on coincidence and chance. Miller's main problem is to persuade the reader or spectator to believe these strange happenings. That Miller himself was dissatisfied with the play is obvious from the fact that he did not include it in his **Collected Plays**.

Miller's old football injury kept him out of the Second World War. So it was with great readiness that he accepted an offer by a film producer to collect material for a film about the war. He threw himself heart and soul into the project. He spent a couple of months visiting recruitment centers, training schools. When after he turned in his reports his interest in the war continued. He had become so involved in the project that he shaped his material into a book with the title **Situation Normal**. It is a book of first-rate reportage and personal impressions that was published in 1944. The central point of the book is Miller's interview of a soldier called Watson. For him Watson was to some extent the victim of a society that taught him no sense if commitment to anything beyond self and family. His story looks forward to the main themes of **All My Sons**. In **Situation Normal** Miller did not explore in depth the implications of the conflict between self-interest and commitment to society that he probed twenty years later in *After the Fall*, **Incident at Vichy** and **The Price**.

While doing various odd jobs in the 30s Miller encountered anti-Semitism. Though there is no direct influence of this on Miller's novel **Focus** the book is imbued with anti-Semitism. To start with **Focus** was conceived to be a play but gradually Miller realized that the material could best be dealt with in the form of a novel. It tells the story of Lawrence Newman, a New York executive who becomes, more and more disoriented as the action progresses. The novel, which is about anti-Semitism in America, proved remarkably successful. Nevertheless, he returned to the theatre with **All My Sons**, a play written during the war but produced in 1947. It was an immediate and phenomenal success.

ALL MY SONS

The idea of the play was provided by an actual incident. During a casual talk a relative told the Millers about a family in their neighbourhood that had been ruined because the daughter had reported to the authorities that her

father had supplied defective spares to the Army during the war. The girl's story had a profound effect on him. He describes the impact in the following words in his introduction to the Collected Plays:

*I knew my informant's neighborhood. I knew its middle-class ordinariness, And I knew how rarely the great issues penetrate such environments. But the fact that a girl had not only wanted to, but had actually moved against an erring father transformed into fact.....what in my previous play [**The Man who had All the luck**] I had only begun to hint at had no awareness of the slightest connection between the two plays. All I knew was that somehow a hard thing had entered into me, a crux toward which it seemed possible to move in strong and straight lines. Something was crystal clear to me for the first time since I had begun to write plays, and it was the crisis of the second act, the revelation of full loathsomeness of an antisocial action".*

Miller transforms the daughter into a son and plans the climactic confrontation between him and his father in the second act. Also, he was determined to write a well-made play like Ibsen whose influence on him is direct and pervasive. Like most of Ibsen's dramas Miller's new play is meticulously structured and carefully plotted. The guilty past of Joe Keller is revealed through revelatory dialogue as in Ibsen's **Ghosts**. In the Norwegian's work a close relationship is established between past actions and present consequences and so it is in **All My Sons**. Another similarity between Ibsen and Miller is in dealing with the theme of sins of the fathers being visited on their children, a theme which is at the core of his new play. He fully understood Ibsen's attitude to life. He explains in the introduction to the collected plays:

"His [Ibsen's] intention [was]to assert nothing he had not proved, and 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. In other words, contrast his realism not with the lyrical, which I prize, but with sentimentality, which is always a leak in the dramatic dike. He sought to make a play as weighty and living a fact as the discovery of the steam engine or algebra. This can be scoffed away only at a price, and the price is living drama."

In the words of Nelson "The thematic image of **All My Sons** is a circle within a circle, the inner depicting the family unit, and the outer representing society, and the movement of the drama is concentric, with the two circles revolving in parallel orbits until they ultimately coalesce."

All My Sons tells the story of Joe Keller, the owner of a small factory who allows defective aeroplane parts to be supplied to the Air Force during the war. His hopes of not being caught are dashed when twenty one pilots die in accidents caused by the faulty planes. When it is found that the accident occurred because of his cracked cylinder heads, he passes the blame to his partner who is imprisoned. In this way he escapes responsibility and **when the war is over he is merrily running his factory**.

When his son Chris returns from the Army, ignorant of his father's guilt, he joins the family business. Soon he becomes engaged to Ann Dee Ver, the daughter of Joe's ex-partner who is in jail and the fiance of Chris's brother Larry, who was killed in the war. But Mrs. Keller is opposed to their marriage because she refuses to believe that Larry is really dead and is convinced that he will soon return. Another obstacle to the marriage is her imprisoned father.

The central action of the first half of the play consists of the attempts of Chris and Ann to overcome the difficulties in their path. They overcome Mrs. Keller's objection and even succeed in persuading Ann's brother George that his father was solely responsible in shipping defectives spares. All seems to be well for the time being. But tension mounts as it is revealed that Joe was equally guilty. Now the dramatic interest shifts from other characters to Chris and Joe, the guilty father and the prosecuting son. The confrontation between these two now becomes the central action a of the play.

With mounting intensity the play focuses on the two, Joe desperately trying to defend his actions and Chris not forgiving him to all. Despite all his attempts the son fails to make his father realize the enormity of his deeds.

Then Ann discloses that she received a letter from Larry in which he revealed his intention of committing suicide as an atonement for his father's crime. Now Joe realizes his responsibility and it dawns upon him that the pilots who died were 'my sons'. At the end of the play he seeks expiation in death.

The first act of the play is a vivid example of Miller's ability to treat his theme in a particular context. Through casual and informal conversation and leisurely pace and accumulation of detail he draws the portrait of a small mid-Western town. After this the portrait of Joe Keller, a pleasant and affable man is convincingly drawn. He is not ruthless, heartless businessman but a devoted family man and a nice neighbour. It is his single-minded devotion for and commitment to his family, which is his tragic flaw and that brings about his ruin. He is narrow-minded. He is so preoccupied with providing for his family that he neglects his responsibility to the society. He believes that the deaths of thirty one men was a 'mistake' rather than a crime. He has no hesitation in advising Ann to ask her father when he is released to return to the factory. He is not a cold-blooded murderer but a loyal husband, a loving father and a nice neighbour.

In the main confrontations with Chris, Joe explains everything he believes in and stands for. At the end of the second act when he is forced to admit his guilt he pleads with his son to understand his reasons:

What could I do! I am in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty cracked, you are out of business; you got a process, the process don't work you're out of business, you don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good, they close you up, they tear up your contracts, what the hell is to them? You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? I never thought they'd install them.....Chris, I did it for you. I'm sixty one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you Don't get another chance do ya?

Joe Keller believes there is nothing, dishonest in being loyal to one's Family. His second appeal to his son Goes a little beyond the worth of the Individual effort and sanctity of family Life but is shall defined by them. You want me to go to jail', he asks His son. 'If you want me to go, say so.' What's matter, why can't you tell me I'll tell you why you can't say it. Because You know I don't belong there.....Who worked for nothing in that war? When they work for nothing, I'll work for nothing. Did they ship a gun or a truck out a Detroit before they got there price? Is that clean? It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; War and peace, it's nickels and dimes, What's clean? Half the goddam country Is gatta go if I go! That's why, you cant tell me.

Joe's problem is not that he is unable to differentiate between right and wrong but his own concept of morality in which loyalty to family is more important than responsibility to society. He is both a sinner and one sinned against. His society has encouraged him to subscribe to false values. In this sense society is partly responsible for his actions. Because of his intense and selfish loyalty to his family he has committed a crime against society. So, Miller dramatizes a conflict not so much between good and evil as between family and society.

Chris is pitted against his father. He is an idealist who refuses to accept his father's justification of his actions. He tells Ann what the war has meant to him.

"They were not just men," he says, referring to his fellow soldiers. One time it'd been raining several days and this kid came to me, and gave me his last pair of dry socks. Put them in my pocket. That's only a small thing....but... that the kind of guys ! had. They did not die; they killed themselves for each other.....And got an idea....watching them go Down. Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me to one new thing was made. A kind of responsibility. Man for man....to know that, to bring that on earth again like same kind of monument and everyone would feel it standing there, behind him, and it would make a difference to him and then I came home and it was incredible!..... there was no meaning in it here; the whole thing to them was a kind of a bus accident. I went to work with Dad, and that rat-race again. I felt.... ashamed somehow. Because nobody was changed at all. It Seemed to make suckers out of lot of guys to his father's plea that he acted in his interests, Chris retorts: For me! Where do you live,

where have you come from? For me ! – I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the Goddam business? Is that as far as your mind Can see the business? What is that, the world the business? What the hell do you mean you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? (collected plays : pp 115-116)

In reply to his mother's question as to what more they can be Chris answers :

'you can be better; he exclaims. Once and for all you can know There's universe of people outside and your'e responsible to it And unless you know that you threw away your son because that's why he died.' (bid, pp.126-127)

Finally, Chris brings his father to a genuine understanding of the meaning of his crime and so at the end of the play he commits suicide.

It is noteworthy that Miller is an economical play wright. The secondary characters are all significant. There is no character, no dialogue which does not advance the action, reveal character, or is irrelevant to the theme. Neighbours like Lydia and Frank Lubey represent those who during the war stayed at home and led ordinary lives. They provide a contrast to Joe, Chris, Larry, and Ann. Perhaps the most fully realized minor character is Dr. Jim Bayliss, who is a next door neighbour. Chris, as his friend, has encouraged him to specialize and do research rather than general practice. But under the influence of his wife he abandons research and becomes a general physician.

Miller's dialogue is highly artistic. A striking feature of the dialogue is the frequency of questions and their effectiveness. The questions reveal the dilemma of a naturally garrulous man like Joe who finds it impossible to communicate with other. "What do I do? Tell me, talk to me, what do I do?" Joe asks Kate in the final scene when Chris returns after an angry outburst. Joe enquires : "Exactly, What's the matter? What's the matter? You got too much money? Is that what bothers you? Questions like these abound in the play.

To emphasize the contrast between the comfortable life of the Kellers and the gravity of the revelation that cost twenty-one lives, Miller sets the small talk of every day suburban life against the condition of Chris' men lost in the battle. The family conversation deals with such mundane objects as meat, champagne, clothes, car etc. The imagery of the play, derived from nature, also employs contrast. Kate's faith in astrology contrasts with Jim's reference to 'the star of one's honesty'. The apple tree, symbolic of Larry, has been blown down the night before by a storm, which symbolises the violent action about to erupt.

In act two as Joe's guilty secret is revealed, each line of dialogue between father and son gathers intensity until it explodes in Chris's outburst. The short lines strike like rapier thrusts:

Chris : Dad....Dad you killed twenty one men!

Keller : What killed?

Chris : You killed them, you murdered them ?

Keller :How could I kill anybody!

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

In contrast to this sharp exchange are the longer speeches. Two prominent examples are Joe's defense and Chris's accusation; their style and content differentiate each speaker. The stage directions emphasize the contrast: "Their movements are the those of subtle pursuit and escape. Keller keeps a step out of Chris's range as he talks." Joe's speech is characterized by repetitions, the rhythm reflecting his thought processes, as if he is wondering what to say next" : I'm in business, a man is in business."

The act ends with Chris's speech which is the most significant in the play. It begins with eight questions, the rising crescendo in each like a hammer below: 'Don't you have country? Don't you live in the world?

When **All My Sons** had its premiere on Broadway in 1947, two years after the war, it was enthusiastically received by critics and audiences. Louis Kronberger wrote in his review, "**All My Sons** slashes at all the

defective parts of our social morality : but most of all it slashed at the unsocial nature of family loyalties, of protecting or aggrandizing the tribe at the expense of society at large. He called Miller as easily first among our new generation of play wrights.” Brooks Atkinson in the New York times of 30 January 1947 praised Miller’s ‘many-sided. Genius : ‘Writing pithy yet unself conscious dialogue, he has created his characters vividly, plucking them out of the run of American society, but presenting them as individuals with hearts and minds of their own He drives the play along by natural crescendo to a startling and terrifying climax .’

Some critics emphasized the topicality of the play, regarding it an expose of war profiteering.” But this aspect of the play should not blind us to the fact that Miller is dramatizing a universal and not a local situation.

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

When **Death of a Salesman** premiered at Broadway in 1949, two years after the success of **All My Sons**, it had a powerful impact on audiences. Men and women wept openly; during the interval spectators asked in wonder how Miller knew their stories. And this experience was repeated again and again all over the country, indeed all over the world. "They were weeping", Miller said in an interview on the Canadian Broadcasting Company network in 1979, "because the central matrix of the play is... what most people are up against in their lives..... They were seeing themselves, not because Willy is a salesman, but the situation in which he stood and to which he was reacting, and which was reacting against him, was probably the central situation of contemporary civilisation. It is that we are struggling with forces that are far greater than we can handle, with no equipment to make anything mean anything."

Death of a Salesman tells the story of a man's life in its final painful days. The protagonist is Willy Loman, a travelling salesman who lives in Brooklyn and covers the New England territory by car. Sixty years old, he is physically and mentally tired and can't meet the rigorous demands of his job any longer. His exhaustion is apparent in the opening with Willy, with back bent and shoulders drooping, carrying two heavy suitcases containing his merchandise. Despite the support and love of his wife, Lynda, he knows his life has been a failure. This awareness has driven him to attempt suicide several times. His depression is further enhanced by the inability of his two sons to achieve success in life. Happy is anything but happy; he is a shallow and vain braggart who is stuck in an inferior position in a department store and Biff, from whom Willy had great hopes, has turned out to be a petty thief and a vagabond. It is Biff's return home after a long absence that sets the play in motion.

Through a series of elaborate flashbacks, occurring in Willy's mind the reasons of his family's tragedy are gradually revealed. He has instilled false values into his sons. He has told them that the key to success is an attractive personality, smartness, a ready smile, an interesting joke and a fine appearance. He has neglected to impress upon them the value of honesty and hard work. In this respect he is the architect of their ruin.

Acting upon his father's advice, Happy becomes a frustrated, good-for-nothing fellow while Biff leads a desultory aimless life. When Biff was in school he caught his father in an adulterous affair in a Boston hotel. This traumatic experience led him to understand that his father was a hypocrite and a liar.

With his sons now home after a long absence, Willy makes one last desperate attempt to achieve happiness. Both he and Biff visit prospective and current employers. Instead of getting a desk job and a promotion, Willy is fired by the son of the founder of his company for his old age and growing incompetence. And Biff wastes a whole day waiting to see the man he has hoped to sell a promotion scheme. In anger and frustration, he steals a gold fountain pen as he is leaving the office.

Biff finally realizes that his father has brought him up on false and exaggerated dreams rather than solid virtues. In the play's central scene he tries to share his knowledge with his father but he spares him further agony and instead breaks down weeping on Willy's shoulders. Overwhelmed by his son's love for him, Willy decides to sacrifice his life for him. He drives into the night to kill himself and so provide Biff with twenty thousand dollars of insurance money. Willy's suicide may be regarded as both an atonement for past sins and an affirmation of his love for his family, especially Biff.

The drama ends with a requiem around Willy's grave. In contrast to the hundreds he dreamed would flock to his funeral only his immediate family, his friend Charley, and Charley's son, Bernard, are present. In brief eulogies each person tries to assess Willy's life and death.

Death of a Salesman has many things in common with **All My Sons**. Both plays depict the conflict between the family and society. However, in **Death of a Salesman** the action resolves more around the family; man's social responsibility is there but it plays a less vital role than the father's conflict with his sons. In both plays father's authority is challenged by their sons. Both fathers have loyal, devoted and supportive wives. Both are haunted by a guilty past which casts a shadow on their present lives. In the case of Joe Keller the guilt of

supplying defective aircraft parts gnaws at his conscience; Willy Loman realizes that his adulterous affair with the woman in the Boston hotel has destroyed Biff's life.

However, despite its similarities with **All My Sons**, **Death of a Salesman** is structurally different from the earlier play. The structure is a blend of realism and expressionism. Although steeped in realism, the play goes much beyond it because it portrays the processes of a disoriented mind. So, the form of **Death of a Salesman** is perfectly suited to the protagonist's nervous breakdown. One important feature of this structure is the breakdown of chronological time to connect the past with the chaotic present. This is not a simple flashback technique but rather a complex juxtaposition or intermingling of past and present, illusion and reality.

The form is necessary to the theme and characterization of the play in at least two respects. First, it shows Willy's painful search for elements in the past which have brought about his ruin. He recalls characters and incidents which, he thinks, have led to his fall. The second significant result of the play's structure is that by linking Willy's final days with the past that has shaped them, it gives his life and death a dramatic cohesiveness. In other words, Willy's suicide is vividly linked to past events which have led to it. The flashbacks are not scattered through the play at random. Miller selects and arranges them in a definite pattern that gives depth and meaning to the hero's life and reveals his character.

Basically, the flashbacks fall into two categories. One group consists of events involving Willy and his brother, Ben. Willy is presented as the respectful and supplicating child seeking guidance and assurance from Ben who is an epitome of success for him. In the second group of flashbacks Willy is giving rather than seeking guidance to his sons, especially Biff, how to achieve success. Both sets of flashbacks culminate in the one depicting his infidelity, a symbol of his ultimate failure.

Willy's life is full of errors of judgment, moral lapses and false hopes but perhaps his greatest mistake has been living with the wrong dream. He articulates this dream in the advice he gives to his sons in the first flashback when he compares them to Bernard.

"Bernard is not well liked?" Willy asks rhetorically. 'He's liked,' Biff replies agreeing with his father, 'but he's not well liked.'

'That's just what I mean,' Willy exclaims.

"Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. 'Willy Loman is here!' That's all they have to know, and I go right through," (Miller, 'Death of a Salesman,' Collected plays, p. 146)

This is the success formula to which Willy has dedicated his life and those of his sons. Here he's the root of his tragedy.

Lynda is a key figure in the tragedy. She is the greatest supporter of her husband. When Biff says Willy has no character toward the end of the first act, she replies angrily.

"I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's human being and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person." (p. 162).

But for all her love and devotion to her husband, she is a woman of limited understanding. She says in the requiem:

"I can't understand it, at this time especially. First time in thirty-five years we were just about free and clear. He only needed a little salary. He was even finished with the dentist."

Charley replies, "No man only needs a little salary'. When this is lost on her he makes a moving defense of Willy's life."

"Nobody dare blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is, no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a simile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back – that's an earthquake Nobody dare blame this man. A salesman is got to dream boy. It comes with the territory. A few lines after these lines Biff replies with what is the essential theme of the play, 'Charley, the man didn't know who he was.' Biff's self-realization is expressed in those words", I know who I am"

At the heart of all Miller criticism is the major question which is asked again and again. Does Miller write tragedy? When the play was attacked as a tragedy he wrote a defense in **New York Times** soon after the opening of the play in an essay called "Tragedy and the Common Man". The main points have to do with the terms originated in Aristotle's **Poetics**: the exalted subject, the tragic flaw, action, pity and fear, the catharsis (or purging) of these emotions.

According to Miller in the essay, "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were." He could have added the obvious that in the long history of mankind from slavery to democracy the common man had acquired an importance never known before. Miller further points out:

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

"Tragedy, then," says Miller, "is the consequence of man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly."

How does Willy Loman qualify as a tragic hero? First of all, as Miller has pointed out elsewhere, Willy must be responsible for his actions; he must be aware of and understand the issues involved. The passive protagonist could never become more than a pathetic figure, arousing pity and not terror – Willy must act out of his convictions and beliefs. What then does Willy believe; upon what will he stake his life? Willy has devoted his entire life to starting small and ending big. And he pursues it to the end.

He recommends it to his sons, Biff and Happy. Even after more than thirty years of service with his company, he is taken off salary and put on straight commission like a beginner, he sticks to his dream. When Happy announces an outlandish scheme to sell sports goods, Willy responds enthusiastically: "You guys together could absolutely lick the civilized world." Even in his advice to Biff on what to say to Bill Oliver, the prospective employer, we can detect the old formula: "It is not what you say, it's how you say it because personality always wins the day."

This, then, is the essence of Willy Loman's dream, this is the way to achieve success in life. The tragic condition, according to Miller, will be met when Willy sacrifices his life in the pursuit of his dream. "It is the tragedy of a man," Miller continues to explain, "Who did believe that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down for mankind by those clean-shaven frontiers men who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices."

Death of a Salesman had 742 performances on Broadway and won the Drama Critics and the Pulitzer prizes. Despite this, however, the play was attacked by some critics. Eric Bentley criticised it on the following grounds:

The tragedy destroys the social drama; the social drama keeps the "tragedy" from having a genuinely tragic stature. By the last remark I mean that the theme of this social drama, as of most others, is **the little man as victim**. The theme arouses pity but no terror. Man is here too little and too passive to play the tragic hero.

More important even than this, the tragedy and the social drama actually conflict. The tragic catharsis reconciles us to, or persuades us to disregard, precisely those material conditions which the social drama, calls our attention to Or is Mr. Miller a "tragic" artist who without knowing it has been confused by Marxism? (Theatre Arts, Nov. 1949, p. 13)

Miller rebutted this criticism in his celebrated essay, "Tragedy and the Common Man", that appeared in **The New York Times** soon after Bentley's savage attack. Miller defends Willy as a tragic figure who far from being a "Victim", is an active agent and whose fate arouses both pity and fear.

Exactly the opposite argument was advanced by Elenor Clark in **Partisan Review**;

It is, of course, the capitalist system that has done Willy in; the scene in which he is brutally fired after some forty years with the firm comes straight from the party-line literature of the thirties and the idea emerges lucidly enough through all the confused motivations of the play that it is our particular form of money economy that has bred the absurdly false ideals of both father and sons. Immediately after every crack the playwright withdraws behind an air of pseudo-universality and hurries to present some cruelty or misfortune either to Willy's own weakness, as when he refuses his friend's offer of a job after he has been fired, or gratuitously from some other source, as in the quite unbelievable scene of the two sons walking out on their father in the restaurant.

The whole play, according to Clark, is characterized by an intellectual muddle and a lack of candor that regardless of Mr. Miller's conscious intent are the main earmark of contemporary fellow-traveling.

On the other hand, critics who praised the play because they regarded Miller as a Marxist were not wholly satisfied with it. They find the presence of Willy's capitalistic friend Charley in the Requiem irksome. Nor do they like Miller's tacit approval of Bernard's success in the capitalist system.

But **Death of a Salesman** is neither a leftist attack on American capitalism nor an approval of this system. Miller has rightly stated that his play in particular and art in general, cannot be simply equated with political theories:

"I do not believe that any work of art can help but be diminished by its adherence at any cost to a political program, including its author's and not for any other reason than that there no political program – any more than there is a theory of tragedy – which can encompass the complexities of real life. Doubtless an author's politics must be one element and even an important one, in the germination of his art, but if it is art he has created it must by definition bend itself to his observation rather than to it is opinions or even his hopes. If I have shown a preference for plays which seek causation not only in psychology but in society, I may also believe in the autonomy of art, and I believe this because my experience with **All My Sons** and **Death of a Salesman** forces the belief on me." (Miller, 'Introduction, Collected Plays, p. 36)

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

Soon after the last performance of **Death of a Salesman**, another play by Miller, **An Enemy of the People** opened on Broadway. This is an adaptation of the play by his mentor and master, Henrik Ibsen. This is Miller's only attempt, at adapting another man's work. Though his purpose was to show the relevance of Ibsen today, the play was far from successful and folded after only thirty – six performances.

An Enemy of the People describes the trials and tribulations of one Dr. Thomas Stockmann, a physician who has helped to develop the mineral baths that may become a tourist attraction. When the project is completed, he is rewarded with a lucrative position as the inspector of the baths. Soon, the doctor discovers that the baths are contaminated with typhoid germs. So, he proposes to publicize his findings and have the baths demolished and rebuilt. Happy that he has discovered the germs in time he is confident that his community will hail him as a hero. Several important political leaders support Dr. Stockmann. But there is one important politician, his brother, the mayor, who opposes him. He argues that the repairs will require a considerable amount of money and labour. He suggests an alternative plan – the baths be kept in operation while repairs are undertaken slowly and secretly. The good doctor tries to convince his brother that if the baths are not closed typhoid epidemic may break out. But the mayor is guided by financial considerations. The doctor takes his case to the entire village which supports the mayor rather than him. Not merely that. He is branded a traitor, an enemy of the people. As the play ends the doctor refuses to be cowed down and vows to continue his battle for truth and honesty.

THE CRUCIBLE

Miller has stated that the inspiration for his plays has been “What was in the air.” In the early 1950s it was the hearings of the powerful House Un-American Activities Committee, presided over by the redoubtable senator McCarthy, which declared that the American Communist Party posed a threat to the nation. Party members, sympathizers, “fellow travelers, indeed any one suspected” to be a friend of Russia, could be summoned by the committee. They were grilled and asked to reveal the names of friends and associates who were Communists, Marxists or even socialists. McCarthyism became a menace in democratic America. Miller was struck by the similarities between the committee hearings and the witch trials of seventeenth century Salem, Massachusetts.

In **The Crucible** John Proctor is an ordinary man who achieves extraordinary moral victory when he is tested in the crucible of the 1692 Salem witch trials. In his struggle against the mass hysteria of his community and their unjust and authoritarian court, he loses his life but preserves his “name”, his integrity.

The Crucible premiered in 1953, ran for about 200 performances and won both the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson awards as the most distinguished American Drama of the Year. It had a successful off-Broadway production five years later. Moreover, in the 50s and 60s it had three London productions, including one by Lawrence Olivier for the National Theatre, which Miller regarded as the best staging of the play till then.

The Crucible describes the disintegration of a society under the influence of mass hysteria. Beginning slowly and then gaining momentum, it dramatizes the storm that breaks over Salem. When the play opens, a group of adolescent girls are discovered by the local minister, Reverend Parris, indulging themselves stealthily in the forest under the guidance of a superstitious Barbados servant, Tituba. To escape punishment some of them including Parris’ daughter Bety and niece Abigail Williams fall into ‘mysterious’ trances. Two of their neighbours, the farmer John Proctor and the respected matron Rebecca Nurse look upon the girls’ activities with compassion and understanding. Soon, however, a dread spreads in the town and the girls are suspected to indulge in witchcraft.

When Tituba is threatened with hanging for indulging in strange forest rituals, she confesses to demonism. Abigail, who had earlier told Proctor privately that the whole thing was a prank, now says she practiced witchcrafts, and as she discloses the names of other culprits mass hysteria spreads like wild fire in the town. It is quickly spread by many citizens, partly out of superstition, partly out of their guilts, suppressed desires and frustrations.

Ann Putnam, whose daughter is one of the victims and whose other eight children died in their infancy, is convinced that witchcraft is responsible for her misfortunes as is evident in her outburst to Rebecca Nurse:

“You think it God’s work you should never lose a child, or grandchild either, and I bury all but one. There are wheels within wheels in the village, and fires within fires.”

Her husband, Thomas is equally convinced of the existence of demonism in Salem but his reasons are more mercenary and selfish than his wife’s. He brands his enemies as witches because he wants to avenge the legal reverses over his land and property.

On the other hand, the Reverend John Hale of Beverly, who has been invited by the community as an authority on witchcraft, regards it as a challenge to his profession and authority.

So, superstition, malice, self-interest are so rampant that they smother to the few voices of reason that want to be heard.

To escape the madness, John Proctor returns to his farm and family. But when he comes to know that Rebecca Nurse and other friends have been accused of being witches and are being persecuted, he goes back to Salem to rescue them. He is shocked to learn that Abigail Williams who had worked for the Proctors and had a brief affair with him, has accused his wife Elizabeth of witchcraft. As she is arrested Proctor realizes that the vortex has engulfed him.

The trial takes place in the third act of **The Crucible**. The panel of Judges is presided over by Deputy Governor Danforth, who agrees to hear the evidence of Proctor’s current servant Mary Warren. She, however, falters in

her testimony and in desperation Proctor confesses that he committed adultery with Abigail and that is why she has implicated his wife. Elizabeth is summoned by the tribunal to verify his story. She, however, tells a lie to protect his good name. Hale believes Proctor's charge but the Deputy Governor and the presiding officer Danforth remains unconvinced.

Just as Hale proceeds to condemn Abigail, she indulges in hysterics as do the other girls. The action moves to a crescendo when she charges Proctor with witchcraft. Sickened by the proceedings, Proctor denounces the tribunal.

"You are pulling Heaven down and raising up a whore," he shouts at Danforth force and quits the court.

The final act belongs to Proctor: It is the day if his scheduled execution His Wife's life has been temporarily spared because she is pregnant but Rebecca Nurse has been sentenced to die along with him.

"There are orphans wandering from house to house," Hale reminds Danforth. "Abandoned Cattle bellow on the high-roads, the stink of rotting crops hangs everywhere, and no man knows when the harlots cry will end his life."

But Danforth refuses to put off the executions. He agrees to intervene on Proctor's behalf only if he confesses his collusion with demons. Finally, he surrenders and signs a confession, but when Danforth tells him that it must better shown to all the inhabitants of Salem to (Proctor) tears it to pieces. The realization dawns on him that it is better to die than betray those who have died before him and are dying everyday.

The Crucible contains a gallery of sharply drawn characters who are skillfully woven in to woof and warp of the play. The play has a large cast with more than twenty speaking parts but Miller handles than with skill and care and his minor characters are sharply etched and made memorable. Three of them – Reverend Parris, Aleigail Williams, and Giles Corey are particularly vital to the theme and development of play. Each is a gem of in depth character study.

The Reverend Parris is a key figure in the mass hysteria he helps to let loose. He is a vivid personification of the surrender of conscience for self-survival. He is more petty and mean than evil. Abigail Williams also is an embodiment of spite and hatred. She is highly frustrated after Proctor has ended their affair. Giles the irascible old man, is one of the most mysterious characters in the play. His death as a martyr precedes that of Proctor and strongly influences his final decision. Facing death by stoning, Corey refuses to confess that he is a witch.

Though the characters are based on actual persons, they are Miller's own creations. So it is with dialogue which is his own invention, though it is modeled on the spoken language of the real persons. It is bare yet eloquent in its simple images and rhythms; it carries a flavour of seventeenth century Salem, but it is not a realistic reproduction, but Miller's own version. He states that as he sat in Salem's courthouse, "reading the town records of 1692, which were of ten spelled phonetically [by] the court clerks or the ministers who kept the record as the trials proceeded, he then, "after a few hours of mouthing the words felt a bit encouraged that I might be able to handle it, and in more time I came to love its feel, like hard burnished wood. Without planning to, I even elaborated a few of the grammatical forms myself." (Introduction, The Collected Plays)

One striking feature of the speech patterns is the use of the double negative. Rebecca Nurse declares: "I am innocent and clear I never afflicted no child, I am as clear [innocent] as the child unborn." Miller also changes verbs and tenses to conform to those of the period. Aby threatens a reckoning that "will shudder you". Sometimes verbs are transformed to adjectives. Says Mary Warren, "My insides are all shuddery."

Miller uses archaic diction sparingly, to create an atmosphere of the past, ley choosing simple, everyday words such as **yea** and **nay** and **goodly**. Women are addressed as "Goody" instead of Mrs. In the above cited quotation Rebecca uses **clear** to mean **innocent**.

A characteristic of the imagery of the play is nature images relating to winter, to suggest the harshness of New England life. In contrast to these images are those of heat and fire, for the main metaphor is that of the crucible in which fire melts and purifies. Frequently used is the fire of Hell. John's passion for Abigail is described in

terms of the “heat” of animals. In the forest scene Abby uses the image of fire as both purification and passion. In the opening scene Ann, points out that there are “fires within fires” in Salem. As fire and crucible are central metaphors, the three main characters – John, Hale and Elizabeth are tested by enduring the fire of suffering which burns away their defects and makes them nobler or purer persons.

Imagery suggesting good and evil use light and dark and their association with black and white, Abigail complains that Elizabeth is “blackening” her name in the village. Lucifer’s book is “black”. Danforth tells John in act 4 that his “soul alone is the issue here, Mister, and you will prove its whiteness.” Abigail in the forest scene vows to “scrub the world clean” for the love of God and to make John “such a wife when the world is white again”. Deriving images from household work is appropriate, for she has been a servant since childhood. One of the most vivid images, based on the simple, everyday act of weaving, appears in John’s final speech, “I do think I see some spread of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dugs.”

Red colour symbolizes murder and passion. In the last act when Danforth asks Hale why he has returned, he replies, “There is blood on my head! Can you not see the blood on my head!” Abigail, asked by Parris if her name is “entirely white” in the town, replies, “There is no blush about my name.” Speaking of the soil, Proctor tells Elizabeth in act 2, “It’s warm as blood beneath the Clods.”

The modulations, rhythms, and even the diction of the Bible characterize Hale’s speeches, especially in the final act. As he and Danforth try to convince John to save his life by admitting collusion with the devil he tells him in poetic language, “I came into the village like a bridegroom to his beloved, bearing gifts of high religion; the very crowns of holy law I brought, and what I touched with my bright confidence, it died; and where I turned the eye of my great faith, blood flowed up.”

Danforth’s imagery is clear, sharp and precise; in act 3 he describes the age in these poetic words, “This is a sharp time, now, a precise time – we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God’s grace, the shining sun is up, and them that, fear not light will surely praise it”. He is hardly aware of the irony of his view, for soon the night and darkness of the trials will follow. He tells Proctor, “we burn a hot fire; it melts down all concealment,” Ironically the concealment of the accusers goes undetected, even when Proctor tries to expose them.

Is **The Crucible** a successful analogy for the McCarthyism that prevailed in America in the early 50s? Miller’s comment was, “McCarthyism may have been the historical occasion of the play, not its theme”. Had it been a one-to-one analogy between the Salem trials and the hearings of the House un-American Activities Committee, the play would be a political document and not a highly artistic play.

By 1956, Miller was a famous playwright, well-known for his crusading zeal and his fearless defence of freedom of speech. When he applied for routine renewal of his passport, the House un-American Activities Committee summoned Miller to a hearing. He refused to disclose the names of other communists and fellow travelers. He told them, “I want you to understand that I am not protecting the Communists or the Communist Party. I am trying and I will protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him. . . . I take the responsibility for everything I have ever done, but I cannot take responsibility for another human being.” He was held guilty of contempt, fined and given a thirty-day suspended jail term. He appealed against the verdict and won his case. Miller’s stand before the committee is not unlike that of John Proctor in **The Crucible**.

When Miller was briefly in Hollywood in 1950 he had met Marilyn Mouroe, and the two had fallen in love. They were married in 1956 after his divorce from his first wife. He writes about her with love and compassion in his autobiography, **Time bends**, relating the joys and sorrows of their marriage. During that time he wrote no plays, but, instead, devoted three years to a writing a movie script for her, **The Misfits**, based on his short story of the same name. By the time the film was released in 1961 they had been divorced.

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

About two and a half years after **The Crucible**, two new plays, **A Memory of Two Mondays** and **A view from the Bridge** opened as a double bill on Broadway. But both plays were disappointing.

The story of a **A View from the Bridge** was told to Miller by a friend who worked among longshoremen in Brooklyn. Miller originally conceived the play in one act in the classical style: “a hard, telegraphic, unadorned drama” that moved to its catastrophe in a “clear, clean line”. Somewhat like the heroes of Greek tragedy, the protagonist Carbone is seized by a powerful passion which leads to a fatal decision. He betrays the social code by which he lives and for which he lays down his life to regain his good “name.” Lawyer Alfieri like the chorus in Greek tragedy, introduces, participates in and comments on the action. As Miller observes, “It must be suspenseful because one knew too well how it would come out, so that the basic feeling would be the desire to stop this man and tell him what he was really doing to his life.”

For the London premiere the play was expanded into two acts. It is the revised version that is discussed here.

The story describes Eddie Carbone, an Italian American longshoreman living in Brooklyn with his wife Beatrice and his niece Catherine. He has brought up the girl from childhood and now that she is a grown up girl he does not want to part with her. Torn between an overt paternal protectiveness and sexual passion, Eddie threatens to destroy Catherine, Beatrice and two other individuals who have come to live with them.

Marco and Rodolpho, two illegal immigrants, are given refuge by Eddie. Catherine and Rodolpho fall in love and Eddie forcibly tries to destroy their relationship. But when he fails to separate them and they came closer, he reports against Rodolpho and Marco to the immigration authorities. For this he is denounced by Marco and the neighbours. Condemned by one and all, he challenges Marco to a combat. In the resultant fight he is killed by Marco and thus the play ends.

As already pointed out, the story was initially dramatized in a single act. “This version was in one act” he wrote in the introduction to his **Collected Plays** “because it has seemed to me that the essentials of the dilemma were all that was required, for I wished it to be kept distant from the emphatic flood which a realistic portrayal of the same and characters might unloose.” (p.50)

In the introduction to the original version of the play, Miller elaborated further:

“I saw the characters purely in terms of action. . . . they are a kind of people who, when inactive, have no new significant definition as people. The form of the play, finally, had a special attraction for me because once the decision was made to tell it without an excess line, the play took a harder, more objective shape. In effect, the form announces in the first moments of the play that only that will be told which is cogent, and that this story is the only part of Eddie Carbone’s life worth our notice and therefore no effort will be made to draw in elements of his life that are beneath these, the most tense and meaningful of his hours.” (Miller, “On Social Plays, **A view from the Bridge**, p. 18)

The intention was good but the result was unsatisfactory. So, Miller expanded and revised the London version into two acts. When the neighbourhood was represented by twenty actors instead of four (as in the Broadway version), the larger group, like a Greek Chorus, enhanced the audience’s understanding of the protagonist. As Miller says, “the mind of Eddie Carbone is not comprehensible apart from its relation to his neighbourhood, his fellow workers, his social situation. His self-esteem depends upon their estimate of him, and his value is created largely by his fidelity to the code of his culture.” In the revised version, “once Eddie had been placed squarely in the social context, among his people, myth like feeling of the story emerged of itself, and he could be made more human and less a figure, a force,” observes Miller.

The chorus-like character of lawyer Alfieri opens and closes the play. In the two-act version he speaks prose rather than verse, though it is poetic prose. As the play opens, Alfieri strikes the note of inevitability : Every few years there is still a case, and as the parties tell me what the trouble is, the flat air in my office suddenly washes in with the green scent of the sea, the dust in this air is blown away and the thought comes that in some Caesar’s year. . . . another lawyer, quite differently dressed, heard the same complaint and sat there as powerless as I, and watched it run its bloody course. . . . This one’s name was Eddie Carbone.”

In enlarging the play, Miller developed the character of Eddie's wife, Bea, so that she becomes a sympathetic, wronged woman. If Alfieri is the spokesman of society and human nature, she is the voice of individual neighbours. Miller also expands the role of Catherine. If she is passive in the original version, she is now active tasting love for the first time. When Eddie learns that she is going to work, he finds fault with the neighbourhood and the company. "Near the Navy Yard plenty can happen. . . . And a plumbin's company! That's one step over the water front. They're practically longshoremen." He has no answer when Bea asks him, "You gonna keep her in the house all her life?"

Catherine and Bea are enthusiastic about the brothers whom they have given shelter but Eddie is suspicious. And when Rodolpho becomes the center of attention and sings a song Eddie asks him to be quiet or else he might be picked up. When he finds that his niece is attracted to Rodolpho, Eddie questions his manhood and tells Bea that he is "like a weird" and a chorus girl. He also tells Alfieri that "guy ain't right." Eddie's sexual obsession with Catherine increases as the affair between Catherine and Rodolpho advances. In the second scene of act one Bea asks Eddie, "When am I gonna be a wife again?"

In the revised version, the characters of both women are developed. Beatrice warns her niece, "I told you fifty times already, you can't act the way you act. You still walk around in front of him in your slip." She cautions her that she is now a grown woman. "You're a woman, that's all, and you got nice body, and now the time came when you said good-by. All right." Alfieri warns Eddie and is as blunt as he can be, "we all love somebody, the wife, the kids – every man's got somebody that he loves, heh? But sometimes. . . . there's too much," he says, "too much love for the daughter, there is too much love for the niece."

When Alfieri tells him, "let her go," Eddie's reply shows that his love for her is sexual, "I take the blankets off my bed for him, and he takes and puts his dirty hands on her like a goddam thief!" Alfieri replies, "She wants to get married, Eddie. She can't marry you, can she." Angry and desperate Eddie replies "I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

Act one ends on a note of high drama – Eddie's oral threats turn physical and he becomes violent. As Catherine says she must dance with Rodolpho, Eddie starts insulting and humiliating, even casting doubts on his manhood. He challenges the brothers to a boxing match.

The next scene witnesses even more high drama. When Catherine is alone in the house with Rodolpho, she asks him whether they could live in Italy after marriage: "I am afraid of Eddie here." Catherine is a changed young woman in the revised version. In the original version she is a passive creature, a mute witness to the quarrels between Eddie and Bea. In the enlarged version, however, she is an active and sympathetic person. Rodolpho encourages Catherine to leave Eddie and takes her to the bedroom.

As they come out, Eddie enters, drunk. He orders Rodolpho to leave the house; Catherine says she will leave too. Eddie tells her not to. "He reaches out suddenly, draws her to him, and as she strives to free herself he kisses her on the mouth." A fight ensues between Eddie and Rodolpho.

Eddie's kissing Catherine confirms his incestuous passion for his niece. If this is shocking, what is even more shocking is Eddie's kissing Rodolpho. This has led some critics like Nelson to consider that there is a "possibility" of "latent homosexuality" in Eddie. But this seems to be unconvincing in the face of his sexual obsession with his niece, so much so that for this he betrays his community and destroys his good name. Alfieri tells him to let her go. However, as Eddie leaves, Alfieri suspects that in the attempt to destroy Rodolpho, he (Eddie) will destroy even himself.

Alfieri expresses the fears and suspicions of the audience about the catastrophe that is to follow. Eddie reports against Rodolpho and Marco to immigration authorities. "The betrayal achieves its true proportions as it flies in the face of the mores administered by Eddie's conscience – which is also the neighbours," observes Miller in the

Introduction to the Collected Plays.

Eddie like Oedipus is expelled from the community for an abhorrent act. He also somewhat resembles John Proctor who in order to preserve his name sacrifices his life. To the neighbours, Eddie tries to defend his act as

one wronged by strangers whom he had given shelter: “to come out of the water and grab a girl for a passport. Wipin’ the neighbourhood with my name like a dirty rag! I want my name, Marco.” Saying this he attacks Marco and a fight ensues. Eddie dies in the arms of Beatrice. Alfieri comes forward and utters the last words:

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

A view from the Bridge is a tragedy of the common man, as defined by Miller, in which the hero, regardless of his rank, is forced to “evaluate himself justly.” Eddie, like Willy Loman, is unwilling “to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status.” Miller continues further that “the commonest of men may take on. . . . [tragic] status to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest, the battle to secure his rightful place in his world.” His fate evokes fear in the audience, “fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world.”

As Miller joints out in his introduction to the two-act version, the expansion enabled him to include “the viewpoint of Eddie’s wife, and her dilemma in relation to him.” Making Beatrice active rather than passive lends depth and intensity to her portrait as well as that of her husband. But despite her being an assertive and strong character, she is unable to prevent the tragedy.

As in his previous plays, Miller creates dialogue that is both realistic and poetic. Unlike **The Crucible**, in which he invented almost a new language for his seventeenth century characters, here, his people, except for Alfieri, are uneducated longshoremen and their families. To express their feelings, Miller gives them speech that is bare, enthusiastic and rhythmic. He employs active verbs and simple adjectives with little imagery except for ordinary and everyday allusions. Descriptions are vivid and direct, as in Beatrice’s account early in the play, of a teenaged informer: he had five brothers and the old father. And they grabbed him in the kitchen and pulled him down the stairs – three flights his head was bouncin’ like a coconut.”

Omissions, double negatives and other ungrammatical devices make the language realistic but also humorous. When Catherine in act one announces a job offer, Eddie is at first hostile, then reluctantly’ agrees and offers advice:

Eddie : I only ask you one thing – don’t trust nobody. You got a good aunt but she’s got too big a heart, you learned bad from her. Believe me:

Beatrice : Be the way you are, Katie, don’t listen to him.

Eddie : [to Beatrice – strangely and quickly resentful]

You lived in a house all your life, what you know about it? You never worked in your life;”

While the speech of the longshoremen and their families sounds realistic and contemporary, Alfieri’s poetic words evoke the past with musical and alliterative proper names, “some Caesar’s year, in Calbaria perhaps or on the cliff at Syracuse.” The Brooklyn Bridge is symbolic as a link between modern Brooklyn and traditional Sicily – a bridge between the past and the present. The “view” of the title suggests an objective distancing between the action and view of it by Alfieri and the audience.

When the one-act play was staged on Broadway, the reviews were disappointing. Miller himself was dissatisfied with it: “If **A View from the Bridge** more than thirty years later has a vigorous life on stages all over the world, it is no thanks to the original production, which made it appear at best an academic and irrelevant story of revenge,” says Miller “What I had written was something different, something plain and elementary and frightening in its inexorability. the play on the stage had no tang: it lacked the indefinable webbing of human involvement that can magically unify many otherwise dimly ordinary separate parts.” (Time bends, p. 354-55)

However, two years later the British premiere of the enlarged and revised play was a great success.

A MEMORY OF TWO MONDAYS

Arthur Miller had firsthand experience of the Depression: “through no fault or effort of mine it was the ground upon which I learned to stand.” He started writing plays during the Great Depression. Although today the period is regarded with some romanticism, it was actually a frustrating time; everyone was suffering because there was no money.

Miller describes this play as “pathetic comedy: a boy works among people for a couple of years shares their troubles, their victories, their hopes, and when it is time for him to be on his way he expects some memorable moment, some sign from them that he has been among them, that he has touched them and been touched by them. In the sea of routine that swells around them they barely note his departure.” It was written, he says in the introduction to the **Collected Plays**, “in part out of desire to relive a sort of reality where necessity was open and bare; I hoped to define for myself the value of hope, why it must arise, as well as the heroism of those who know, at least, how to endure its absence. Nothing in this book was written with greater love, and for myself I love nothing printed here better than this play.”

It is not difficult to understand why this is Miller’s favourite play. It contains memories of several years when he worked as a store keeper in an auto parts warehouse. In his introduction to the TV version he noted that the dusty warehouse, cold in winter and hot in summer may seem awful to viewers today, but it was “a haven in the thirties. It was a place to go; at least you had a job — this was a great thing — that’s what remained with me — that I was so lucky.”

Miller observes that the warehouse setting, although “dirty and unmanageably chaotic,” is also, “a ‘little world, a home to which unbelievably perhaps, these people like to come every Monday morning, despite what they say.” The Two Mondays of the title are a Monday morning in summer when Young Bert is just beginning his job as a warehouse store boy, and a winter Monday morning when Bert is about to leave for college, having saved some money from his weekly salary. The people of the warehouse, as seen through Bert’s eyes, are portrayed vividly and come to life. The mood is nostalgic, even sad at times, like Gus’s describing his years at the warehouse in terms of old cars.

The play tells a simple story. Bert mixes with his fellow workers, and at the end he leaves for college while they remain. The entire action takes place in the warehouse with “factory-type windows which reach from floor to ceiling and are encrusted with the hard dirt of years”.

The main characters are three middle-aged men: Raymond who has become manager by dint of hard work; Larry, who is still a clerk after long years of service; and Tom, the accountant who is almost sacked for drunkenness when the play opens but who has given up liquor at the end. The boss Mr. Eagle also belongs to the same age group. The two older characters are Gus, who is in his sixties and his friend Jim who is in his seventies. The principal younger men are Bert, who is eighteen (Miller’s age in 1933 when he worked in the warehouse) and Kenneth, a young Irish immigrant who sings and recites poetry. There are two women, Agnes the telephone operator, in her 40s and Patricia, in her 20s.

Of all the workers the most interesting and memorable is Gus. Blunt and out spoken he wears a hat in the office. He and Jim are pals and spend week ends eating and drinking heavily. Gus’s wife, Lilly, is invariably ill. He, like Agnes, protects the drunken Tom and threatens to quit if Tom is fired. At the end of the first Monday his wife, Lilly, dies, alone and neglected while he was drinking and carousing with friends. By the second Monday he is a reformed character; he has never recovered from the death of his wife.

When Gus receives her insurance money he goes on a pleasure trip with Girm; on the second Monday they report for work drunk. He is not afraid of Mr. Eagle who will arrive soon. In a nostalgic tribute to the years gone by, Gus sums up, in a catalogue of cars now extinct, his twenty two years at the warehouse.

He and Jim leave the warehouse even though it is only nine-thirty in the morning. On Bert’s last day, at lunch

time, Girm informs that, on one last binge Gus has died.

The other workers, however, do not play with their lives and are more careful. They need their jobs. Larry has a phenomenal memory and knows where every auto part is kept in the multi story building.

He is the father of triplets and though denied a promotion buys a new car because he thinks it is beautiful. Because of the car, Patricia, the office beauty, is attracted to him. But by the second Monday he is forced to sell the car and loses Patricia too.

Within an hour and a half Miller succeeds in making the audience and readers take interest in the characters, each of whom is an individual with his own idiosyncrasies. Kenneth, who has just arrived from Ireland and is young like Bert is, perhaps, the most pathetic of them all. He is constantly singing and reciting poetry. When Bert asks him how he learned it he replies, "why, in Ireland, Bert, there's all kinds of useless occupations in Ireland." Some of his dialogue, like Bert's, is in free verse, but even his prose speeches are poetic. "It's the poetry hour, Gus," he declares." This is the hour all men rise to thank God for the blues of the sky, the roundness of the ever lasting globe, and the cheerful cleanliness of the subway system...."

While others suffer from lassitude, Kenneth is full of drive and energy. He washes, with Bert's help, the windows reaching from floor to ceiling. But by the second Monday, in winter, Kenneth is disenchanted with life and seeks solace in drink. As Bert is about to leave for college, he advises Kenneth to regain his optimism and vibrancy To this Kenneth replies:

*How's a man to live,
Freezing all day in this palace of dust
And night comes with one window and a bed
And the streets full of strangers
And not one of them's read a look through.
Or seen a poem from beginning to end
Or knows a song worth singing.
Oh, this is an ice-cold city, Mother,
And Ruosevelt's not making it warmer, somehow.*

Throughout the play Kenneth, sings the Irish ballad "The Minstrel Boy", symbolic of both myself and Bert. Though like the minstrel boy, Kenneth has hope and joy at first, he loses these by the second Monday. He thinks of joining the civil service but as he tells Bert he is going to be at the warehouse for good.

The ending is pathetic. When Bert departs his companions hardly take notice. On the other hand, Bert thinks he will always remember them. He at least is going to college, but the others are, "caught by necessity and by their lives."

Both humor and pathos are there in this "pathetic comedy." Miller asserts time and again that during the Depressive people did not lose their optimism; they could laugh and enjoy as well as bemoan the hard times. The physical humors in the play derives naturally from the situations. Gus is so much larger than life that everything he does is exaggerated. Even though he cynically disapproves of the hopes of his coworkers, he is amiable and good-natured. The reactions of the workers are both humorous and typical when the washed windows reveal a next-door brothel.

As an escape from the drudgery of the warehouse, drinking is common to almost all the workers—Gus and Jim, Tom and Kenneth. Sooner or later, they all became drunkards.

AFTER THE FALL

Miller had been absent from Broadway for about nine years. So, the public was excited when **After The Fall** premiered in 1964. However, the play was greeted with rage rather than critical evaluation. Robert Brustein commented: "Mr. Miller is dancing a spiritual striptease He has created a shameless piece of tabloid gossip, an act of exhibitionism which makes us all voyeurs." While some critics saw only "the most nakedly autobiographical drama put on public view," Miller protested that the "man up there isn't me . . . a play wright doesn't put himself on the stage, he only dramatizes certain forces within himself." The philosophical and artistic merit of the play went unnoticed, while reviewers concentrated upon the marriage of the hero, Quentin, to a popular sex goddess, Maggie. It was tempting not to notice the resemblance to Miller's marriage to the film star Marilyn Monroe, followed by divorce and her suicide by an overdose of sleeping pills.

Miller describes the play as a trial by a man's "own conscience, his own values, his own deeds." Apparently, Quentin is a lawyer.

As both prosecutor and defense attorney, he selects and considers evidence from the past before he can take a decision about the future. Miller's technique, as in **Death of a Salesman** is expressionists; incidents follow one another not in chronological order but, instead by association, one thought leading to another. "The action takes place in the mind, thought and memory of Quentin. He seeks self-knowledge with the help of Holga, whom he is going to marry. In his search he will encounter and overcome temptations that are sexual (Elsie), moral (deserting his friend Lou), and material (saving his job at Lou's expense). As Quentin is intellectually honest, he will recognize betrayals, those he commits and those committed against him by his family and friend Mickey. He will see that in the real world, after the Fall, evil cannot be faced by denial or guilt, but by assuming responsibility.

The action is like a stream of consciousness in Quentin's mind, making free associations between characters, incidents and fleeting images. The one realistic piece of setting which dominates the stage is the tower of a German Concentration Camp. As Quentin remembers people and incidents, they will be picked out by light or disappear into darkness. As in the mind, all the characters are present in the background, from which they emerge when necessary.

As the play opens Quentin, who is in his forties, separates from the others, comes to the front of the stage, and addresses an unseen listener. The listener has been differently interpreted as a psychiatrist, priest, judge, God, or the audience itself. Or he may be Quentin himself on the verge of his quest for knowledge. During the action Quentin may speak directly to the listener or participate in the action or comment on it. Making him a lawyer imposes a certain order on his account. He says, "I looked at life like a case at law."

Quentin evaluates his two previous marriages. Was he responsible for their failure? He must review these as he is about enter a third marriage with Holga, an Austrian woman who survived World War II. Has he the right, he asks the listener, to marry her? He feels guilty for failing his first wife, Louise and his second, Maggie. He also feels remorse when friend Lou's suicide saves him from defending him (Lou) before the House Un-American Activities Committee, a defense that might have cost him his job. Quentin's personal and professional conflicts reflect the larger problem that he probes and tries to resolve—the existence of evil (symbolized by the concentration camp tower) and the denial of personal responsibility.

Quentin's two marriages as he examines them, to Louise mainly in the first act and to Maggie in the second, reveal that he has searched in vain for a connection within those sacred unions, marriage and friendship. "It's like some unseen web of connection between people is simply not there," he reflects. "And I always relied on it, somehow; I never quite believed that people could be so easily disposed of." When he is informed that the head of his firm is asking him not to defend his friend Lou, he feels relieved.

Although Quentin has not had an extramarital affair, he has been tempted to do so, which Louise regards as betrayal, causing him to feel guilty. The first act ends with their divorce as inevitable.

Like other characters, Louise is presented through his eyes. She is portrayed as cold and selfish. They may have

been love when they were married; what he now recalls is a loveless marriage with mutual suspicion, betrayal and guilt. The characters of Felice, a dancer, and Elsie, Lou's wife, appear and disappear. Felice, whose divorce case Quentin has argued successfully, worships him. Felice is associated in his thoughts with Quentin's mother who also admired him. Unlike Maggie and Felice who are sympathetically drawn, Elsie is a seductress. She appears naked and inviting before Quentin (an invitation which he declines), betraying her husband Lou, his friend and client. Appearing again and again throughout the play is Holga, an Austrian whom Quentin met in Germany. She is a symbol rather than a fully developed character like Maggie or Louise. Holga carries the burden of the theme in as much as she has attained the self-knowledge Quentin seeks. "Holga teaches him the necessary lesson that guilt, loss, and betrayal are not punishments to be avoided but inevitable signs of the human condition."

The Maggie episodes develop emotionally rather than chronologically. They provide a contrast to the philosophical import of the play. Though she resembles Marilyn Monroe to some extent and may have been modeled on her, she is a convincing character in her own right. The Maggie episode is an integral part of the play reinforcing its theme in terms of human relationships and commitment. Many years later Miller would write in his autobiography the agonizing story of his marriage to Marilyn Monroe. In an article in *Life* magazine shortly after the opening of the play, however, Miller would like us to take a broader view of the play: "The character of Maggie . . . is not in fact Marilyn Monroe. Maggie is a character in a play about the human animal's unwillingness or inability to discover in himself the seeds of his own destruction . . . She most perfectly exemplifies the self-destructiveness which finally comes when one views oneself as pure victim. And she . . . exemplifies this view because she comes close to being a pure victim — of parents, of a Puritanical sexual code and of her exploitation as an entertainer".

Maggie is afraid of and haunted by her mother, who, like Monroe's was promiscuous. Quentin's own mother appears early in the play in an incident of betrayal. In **Timebends** Miller also associates Monroe with his mother.

Maggie assures Quentin, "I . . . don't really sleep around with everybody. I was with a lot of men but I never got anything for it. It was like charity, see? My analyst said. I gave to those in need." After their marriage Maggie's jealousy, vulgar language and extravagance embitter their relationship. In their last scene together she even tries to make him take the bottle of sleeping pills, so that she can snatch it from him thus making him responsible for her death.

She swallows lot of pills; he holds her wrist and reaches for her throat. Just at that moment his mother appears. Quentin informs the listener that though Maggie survives this time she commits suicide a few moments later.

The play ends as Quentin, approaching the tower, realizes, "who can be innocent again in this mountain of skulls? I tell you what I know! My brothers died here. . . . But my brothers built this place. . . . And what's the cure? . . . No, not love; I loved them all, I And gave them willing to failure and to death that I might live. . . ." Holga appears, with her greeting, the word that opens and closes the play. "Hello!" Quentin cries, "That woman hopes," and realizes that "she hopes, because she knows."

Miller describes his style in **After The Fall** as "impressionistic." "I was trying to create a total by throwing many small pieces at the spectator." The play is poetic both in structure and in its language. Quentin's final realization is expressed in, perhaps, Miller's most poetic prose. It is unparalleled in his plays for its rhythm, imagery, simplicity and perfect harmony of theme and style :

Is the knowing all? To know, and even happily, That we meet unblessed; not in some Garden of wax fruit and painted trees, that lie of Eden, but after, after the fall, after many, many deaths. Is the knowing all? And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love — to an idiot in the house — forgive it again and again . . . forever?"

INCIDENT AT VICHY

The main idea of **Incident at Vichy** according to Miller, continues the theme of **After The Fall** – “that when we live in a time of great murders, we are inhabiting a world of murder for which we share the guilt. . . . We have an investment in evils that we manage to escape, that sometimes these evils that we oppose are done in our interest. . . . By virtue of these circumstances, a man is faced with his own complicity with what he despises.”

A psychoanalyst who had hidden in Vichy, France during the second world war before the Nazis occupied the country told Miller a story on which the plot is based: “a Jewish analyst picked up with false papers and saved by a man he had never seen before. This unknown man, a gentile had substituted himself in a line of suspects waiting to have their papers and penises inspected in a hunt for Jews posing as Frenchman.” “What **Incident at Vichy** reiterates is our proclivity to evade troublesome facts so that confrontation with evil and hence our responsibility for it are avoided.”

The plot unfolds in a straightforward and linear manner. In Vichy in the waiting room of a place of detention in 1942 ten men seated in a row await interrogation by the authorities. The incharge is a Nazi major, the other officers are French. The suspects are called one by one into an inner room, where the police captain is in charge, assisted by two detectives and a professor of social anthropology. Some of the suspects will be released and leave, while others will be killed. The hopes and fears of the detainees are revealed and dramatic tension mounts as each is summoned. The occupation, looks, behaviour, attitude of each of the suspects differentiates him from others and engages the sympathy as well as suspense of the reader and the spectator.

Though the men are anxious and frightened, they try to delude themselves into believing that the questioning is only routine and as long as their papers are in order they will be discharged. A waiter among them even tells them that the Nazi major, a client at his restaurant is not a really bad chap. The audience learns that the men one being taken off the streets. There is a rumour that only Jews are being picked up. **Bayard**, a railway employee informs that a train has just arrived from **Toulouse** from which cries were heard; that the engineer is Polish suggests **Auschwitz**. **Moncean**, a complacent actor, claims that even at **Auchwitz** Jews have nothing to fear. “The important thing,” he says, “is not to look like a victim. Or even to feel like one,” for “they do have a sense for victims.” **Leduc**, the psychiatrist comments, “that is true; we must not play the part they have written for us.”

When **Merchand**, a businessman, is interrogated and released with a pass, others are hopeful. Then the waiter’s boss, who brings in coffee for the authorities, whispers to his employee that people are being burned up in furnaces. **Monceau** does not believe this and calls it fantastic nonsense.

Von Berg, a prince, has been arrested by mistake, may be because of foreign accent. When **Bayard** declares that the future belongs to the working class **Von Berg** asserts that most of the Nazis are ordinary working class people. When **Leduc** notices that there is only one guard at the door, he suggest that they overpower him and escape. But no one accepts his suggestion. **Lebeau** reveals that he and his parents could have emigrated to America before the German occupation but his mother would not leave. A gypsy evokes different responses, including the same prejudices as held against the Jews. **Bayard** thinks that the gypsy has been detained because he belongs to an inferior race; others suspect that the pot the gypsy carries is stolen one. Among the detainees are an old; bearded Jew and a fifteen year old boy. The boy’s story is poignant. He had gone out of his house to pawn his mother’s ring to buy food for his famished family.

Aristocrat **Von Berg** and psychiatrist **Leduc**, the last two of the detainees encapsulate the theme of the play. **Von Berg** says: “I would like to be able to part with your friendship. Is that possible?” **Leduc** replies that he is not angry with him: “I am only angry that I should have been born before the day when man has accepted his own nature; that he is not reasonable, that he is full of murder, that his ideas are only the little tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience.” When he says that gentiles have a dislike for the Jews **Von Berg** denies that this is true of him. **Leduc** replies:

Until you know it is true of you,

You will destroy whatever truth can come out of this atrocity. Part of knowing who we are is knowing we are not someone else. And Jew is only the name we give to that stranger, that agony we cannot feel, that death we look at like a cold abstraction. Each man has his Jew; it is the other. And the Jews have their Jews. And now, now above all, you must see that you have yours – the man whose death leaves you relieved that you are not him, despite your decency. And that is why there is nothing and will be nothing – until you face your own complicity with this....your own humanity:"

Von Berg again denies involvement in this evil, for he even tried to commit suicide when the Nazis murdered his Jewish musicians. Leduc informs him that Von Berg's favorite cousin is Nazi who persecuted Jewish doctors. Von Berg cries, "What can ever save us?" Just as he utters this the door opens and he is called to the interrogation room.

He comes out after a short while. With a pass. He forces it with the wedding ring, into Leduc's hand: "Take it! Go!" Leduc, however, is embarrassed and tells him, "wasn't asking you to do this! You don't owe me this." Von Berg insists, "Go!" As the guard appears, Leduc hands him the pass and leaves. The professor is the next suspect. On seeing Von Berg he shouts and sirens sound; the Major rushes in and confronts Von Berg. The two stand there staring at each other with fire and fury. Four new prisoners are brought in to sit on the bench, as the play ends.

The reviews were by and large favourable; some however charged the characters with being symbols rather than real and lifelike. Some critics defended the play against the charge pointing out that Leduc, Von Berg and the Major grow and develop as the action advances. Both Leduc and Von Berg through argument and discussion learn and change previously held opinions.

The Major is one of the earliest sympathetic portraits of a Nazi by an American writer. Injured in battle, he has been assigned against his wishes to be in charge of the interrogation. He tells Leduc, "I would only like to say that. . . . this is all as inconceivable to me as it is to you." Leduc replies: "I would believe it if you shot yourself. And better yet, if you took a few of them with you." But the Major explains that they would all be replaced: "There are no persons any more."

Cultured, educated, soft-spoken, Von Berg does not know much about the havoc caused by the war. A patron of music and fine arts he lives in the cocoon of his luxurious villa and it is only when the Nazis kill his musicians that he realizes the reality of war. And he tells Leduc: "When I told the story to many of my friends there was hardly any reaction. That was almost Worse." Von Berg learns more than any other character. Leduc's realization does not come as surprise for his previous arguments prepare us for this. But Von Berg by surrendering his pass and perhaps his life shows that it is not enough to accept guilt, one must also assume responsibility.

Leduc's speeches emphasize the theme. Miller has the unique gift to dramatize ideas. From the beginning Leduc is the most rational, as he questions the arrest. It is he who urges the others to join him in subduing the single guard. All others interpret the situation personally; only Leduc sees the universal. Leduc's final speeches persuade Von Berg to act and enrich the intellectual and emotional content of the play.

Tension and suspense build up as each suspect is called into the inner room where his fate will be decided. The inner room symbolizes the uncertain future or death.

Though the play is set in World War II, it has remained relevant since its premiere in 1964. "The occasion of the play is the occupation of France, but it is about today," says Miller. "It concerns the question of insight – of seeing in oneself the capacity for collaboration with the evil one condemns. It's a question that exists for all of us."

THE PRICE

The Price deals with the issues of free will and responsibility that were themes of **After the Fall** and **Incident at Vichy**. Some critics think Miller was writing an apolitical play in the midst of political turmoil. But Miller saw the issues of illusion and denial in **The Price** in the context of the sixties. For him the 60s were a time when Americans were looking outside themselves for salvation; both the play and life were telling him that we were doomed to perpetuate our illusions because truth was too harsh to face. Though Miller claims that his play reflects the mood of the 60s, illusion, reality and betrayal have been his themes throughout his career.

The Depression has cast its shadow over many of Miller's plays: **The Man Who Had All the Luck**, **Death of a Salesman**, **After the Fall** and **The American Clock**. **The Price** is no exception. Indeed, though it was produced in 1968, he had known the story since the 30s but as he said, "I can't imagine writing a play just to tell a story. My effort is to find the chain of moral being moving in a hidden way. If I can't sense that I don't know where to go". It took him about thirty years to find it. He tried it in the 50s, jotting ideas for the play in a notebook, but it wasn't until the late 60s that he noticed a shift in cultural values which reminded him of the 30s. In the midst of the idealism of the anti-Vietnam war protests and the black awakening he saw "the seeds of a coming disillusionment and recognized an indifference for personal morality". To his mind the 20s were characterized by the assumption that society was immune to moral standards. As the 60s were coming to a close he felt the same mood and, therefore, the same urgent need to come to terms with fundamental issues. As he explained, "the whole question arose as to whether any kind of life was possible that wasn't completely narcissistic, whether there was any truth in any emotion that wasn't totally cynical".

The conflict between father and sons is a recurrent theme in Miller. It is the central issue in **All My Sons** and **Death of a Salesman**. It is present in **The Price** too with this difference that here it is seen from the view point of the sons. Although he is dead, Father Franz has decided the characters and destinies of his sons, Walter and Victor. In a room cluttered with the old furniture of their youth the brothers meet, or rather confront each other, after sixteen years of separation, marked by estrangement and hostility. They re-examine old values and learn that a price must be paid in the present for choices made in the past. As they defend their actions and accuse each other of selfishness and betrayal, the unlikely mediator is an eighty-nine year-old second hand dealer appropriately named Solomon. A surrogate father, he symbolically sits in the paternal chair, commenting, sympathizing, reprimanding and advising as the brothers squabble.

The plot is deceptively simple. As the house of his dead parents is about to be torn down, cop Victor meets Solomon to negotiate a price for the furniture. Victor has left a message at the office of his brother, a successful surgeon, to come to the site and approve of the price. In their two-hour confrontation each brother reexamines old family crises, blames the other and defends himself. They recognize, if not fully accept, responsibility for past actions and present situations. Although the dialogue is realistic and the time of the action is actual, Miller's symbolism, his portraits of the contrasting brothers in a common family situation, and his creation of the wise though comic Solomon make the play universal in its appeal.

That Miller regards the conflict between the two brothers as archetypal can be seen in his choice of Cain and Abel as antagonists in his next play, *The Creation of the World and other Business* (1972). Victor's and Walter's initial disagreement is upon an acceptable price for the second hand items, but deeper hostility gradually comes to the surface as they discuss the past of which the furniture is a symbol. Victor, the idealistic younger brother sacrificed his college education and career to support his father, ruined by the failure of his prosperous business during the 1929 crash. To support his father, Victor chose a policeman's job and now, nearing the age of fifty, is debating whether to take early retirement.

Act one is Victor's just as act two is Walter's. In the former, before Walter arrives, there is tension but also affection between Victor and his wife, Esther. She believes that he has suffered because he sacrificed his career to enable his brother to go to medical school and become wealthy and famous. She is convinced that the money from the sale of the furniture should go to her husband and so she is there to see that he gets the right

price: "he can never keep our minds on money! We worry about it, we talk about it, but we can't seem to want it. It do but you don't. I really do, Vic, want it! Vic? I want money!" Her wish is understandable, for all their life they have lived modestly on his meager salary. To her the money to be paid for the furniture could be utilized for all the minor comforts they could not afford. In act two when Walter offers Victor a handsome amount (if the furniture becomes a tax deductible donation), Esther is emphatic that Victor be rewarded materially for his earlier sacrifices. Embarrassed to be seen in public with him in uniform, she goes to the cleaners to collect his civilian jacket.

When he is alone with Solomon he recalls his frustrations in life: making decisions without being aware of their consequences, like dropping out of school to support his father; "we always agreed, we stay out of the rat race and live our own life. That was important. But you shovel the crap out the window, it comes back under the door - it all ends up she wants, she wants. And I can't really blame her - there is just no respect for anything but money. At the very end of the first act, just as Victor has accepted the price and is receiving Solomon's money Walter appears. He is also unhappy. Though successful in his profession he is very frustrated in his personal life. He rarely meets the children of his broken marriage and has had a nervous breakdown. He also feels guilty for deserting his father to pursue his career. Now in his mid fifties, he will try to defend his actions and argue that Victor should have thought of his career; their supposedly penniless father had saved thousands of dollars.

In the verbal warfare between the brothers, in act two Victor presents himself as the loyal son and Walter as a selfish one. The latter, however, regards him as an idealistic fool and himself a realist: "There was nothing here but a straight financial arrangement . . . And you proceeded to wipe out what you saw".

In his Author's Production Note at the end of the published text, Miller warns the actors of Victor and Walter to maintain "a fine balance of sympathy". Walter, notes Miller, "attempting to put into action What he has learned about himself", and the actor "must not regard his attempts to win back Victor's friendship as mere manipulation." Miller explains the theme of the play. "As the world now operates, the qualities of both brothers are necessary to it, surely their respective psychologies and moral values conflict at the heart of the social dilemma". He says, "the production must therefore withhold judgement in favor of presenting, both men in all their humanity and from their own viewpoints. Actually, each has merely proved to the other what the other has known but dared not face. At the end, demanding of one another what was forfeited to time, each is left touching the structure of his life".

Miller's insistence that the production be fair and balanced in creating sympathy for both brothers did not find favour with critics who cater to the taste of the audiences. He explained in an NBC TV interview in 1968 that in *The Price*: I have done something which is probably intolerable. I've suspended judgement. I've simply shown you what happens when you take these two courses and the price you pay for being responsible, and hopefully, it would agitate people to think about this". In his plays, the author noted, "you are pretty well cued in to what's happening from moment to moment and ultimately you arrive at a paradox which, because I think I don't let you off the hook, is quite intolerable. You want me to tell you".

The paradox in *The Price* comes in the second act. The audience is prepared to see Walter through Victor's eyes until Walter gives a different interpretation of past events. As Gerald Weales has pointed out, *The Price* is an extremely talky play, with a curious blend of psycho analysis and Ibsenite revelation. The revelation in act 2 creates dramatic conflict and reveals more fully the characters of the brothers. A common Miller theme illusion vs reality emerges as they re-evaluate their past and the motives for their choices.

The setting provides visible proof of the family's affluence. Expensive, heavy, solid furniture is piled up in the attic, the favourite place of Victor and his father. Living on "garbage", throw-away food from restaurants, the elder Franz sat all the time in the overstuffed arm-chair (at center age now occupied by Solomon), listening to the radio and looked after by Victor.

Victor recalls that when he asked Walter for a loan for college fees, the latter replied, "Ask Dad for money". When Victor does so, the father merely laughs. At this Victor walks to a park. In an emotional speech he reveals why he could not desert his father, blamed by his mother and abandoned by Walter.

The grass was covered with men. Like a battlefield: a big open-air flophouse. And not bums – some of them still had shined shoes and good hats, busted businessmen, lawyers, skilled mechanics. Which I'd seen a hundred times. But suddenly – you know? – I saw it there was no mercy. Any where ... One day you're the head of the house, at the head of the table, and suddenly you're shit overnight. And I tried to figure out that laugh How could he be holding out on me when he loved me?"

(The Price, Penguin, p 88)

Walter, however, quickly dispels Victor's illusion that they were brought up to believe in each other; that only he could save their father: "Were we really brought up to believe in one another?" He asks. "We were brought up to succeed, weren't we? Why else would he respect me so and not you?" He reminds Victor of their father's laugh when he (Victor) asked him for money. "What you saw behind the library was not that there was no mercy in the world, kid. It's that there was no love in this house. There was no loyalty. There was nothing here but a straight financial arrangement, that's what was unbearable" (p. 89)

Point, counterpoint, argument and counter argument as in courtroom drama – this is what sustains the dramatic conflict. As soon as one brother presents his defense it is demolished by the other. And this see-saw battle continues till the end. Each case must be presented with equal weight and force. Miller was anxious that the audience should not pass judgement on Victor or Walter. The play, Miller said, was finally about love. The brothers love each other and want to come together, but can't.

Walter's belief that they "were brought up to succeed", would explain his motivation to leave the father, attend medical college and become an eminent surgeon. But it also reveals why the crash crushed their father and why Victor chose a safe job. After the elder Franz's success ended in failure, Walter was motivated even more strongly to succeed. In the "Production Note" Miller says, "from entrance to exit, Walter is trying to put into action what he has learned about himself" . . .

Walter tries to explain to Victor and Esther how he has changed since he left home; "The time comes when you realize that you have not merely been specializing in something – something has been specializing in you; . . . And the whole thing comes down to fear, he tells them, "the slow, daily fear you call ambition and cautiousness, and piling up the money". But when he began taking risks, he says, "suddenly I saw something else. And it was terror. When Victor asks "Terror of what?" Walter responds, "Of it ever happening to me . . . as it happened to him. Overnight, for no reason, to find yourself degraded and thrown down". He asks "You know what I am talking about, don't you? Isn't that why you turned your' back on it all?" Victor replies, "Partly Not altogether, though".

There is more to come. Walter wants that Victor should accept at least some responsibility for his sacrifice and not place all the blame on him for deserting their father and not sending him (Victor) for college. Walter discloses that he telephoned their father to offer to pay the tuition (a message never delivered), insisting that his brother should not join the police and waste his talent. The father's reply was, "Victor wants to help me. I can't stop him".

Walter's last disclosure is even more painful to Victor. When Victor was supporting him, their father had about four thousand dollars. He had asked Walter to invest it fearing that some day Victor would desert him. Victor argues that he had no choice but to remain. Pointing to the harp Walter tells him; "Even then it was worth a couple of hundred, may be more! Your degree was right there. There is no doubt that Walter does feel some responsibility for his brother's lost opportunities, for he offers him a job in his hospital. Victor's reaction is an angry one: "Why do you have to offer me anything?" "There's a price people have to pay. I've paid it, it's all gone. I haven't get it any more. Just like you paid, didn't you? You've got no wife, you have lost your family, you are rattling around all ever the place?"

After they have re-evaluated their past, denied personal responsibility and defended their earlier choices, there is a faint hope that the brothers might at last sink their differences. But as Miller remarks, "they think they have achieved the indifference to the betrayals of the past that maturity confers. But it all comes back; the old angry

symbols evoke the old emotions of injustice, and they part unreconciled. Neither can accept that the world needs both of them – dutiful man of order and the ambitious selfish creator who invents new cures” (Miller, *Timebends*, 542).

Although for three decades he tried to prevent the kind of disaster his father suffered, Walter has learned a painful truth: “I only got out alive when I saw that there was no catastrophe, there never had been.” He thinks if Victor could recognize his past self-delusion, they will resolve their differences;

We invent ourselves, Vic, to wipe out what we know. You invent a life of sacrifice, a life of duty; but what never existed here cannot be upheld. You were not upholding something, you were denying what you knew they [their parents] were. And denying yourself. And that’s all that is standing between us now – an illusion, Vic. That I kicked then in the face and you must uphold them against me. But only saw then what you see now – there was nothing here to betray. I am not your enemy. It is all an illusion and if we could walk through it, we could meet. (P. 90).

But not only can they not meet, their accusations gather momentum. Victor tries to force Walter to confess to some responsibility to thwart his career.

Victor: you came for the old hand shake didn’t you! The Okay! ... And you end up with the respect, the career, the money and best of all, the thing that nobody else can tell you so you can believe it that you’re one hell of a guy and never harmed anybody in your life! Well you won’t get it, not till I get mine! Walter : and you? You never had any hatred for me to destroy me with this saintly self-sacrifice , this mockery of sacrifice? (p. 92).

Shouting, “you will never again make me ashamed! And throwing their mother’s gown at Victor, Walter leaves. His angry outburst alarms Victor. But Solomon advises him: “Let him go... What can you do?” Acting like his father in whose chair he is sitting, Solomon offers him sane advice.

Miller describes Solomon “a phenomenon”. An Old Testament figure he is an original, wise and ancient. He is Miller’s equivalent of the Elizabethan wise fool, in the same class as Feste (*Twelfth Night*) and the fool in **King Lear**. With a Russian Yiddish accent, Solomon personifies the theme of the play: on the realistic level he examines, evaluates, and offers a price for the actual furniture; in a symbolic parallel Victor and Walter reexamine the past which the furniture evokes and then realize the price each has paid for his choice. Victor cannot trust Walter because of his behaviour in the past; when Victor says it’s good furniture, Salomon remarks, “I was also very good; now I am not so good. Time, you know, is a terrible thing”. With comments applied to the furniture but true of the brothers’ relationship, Solomon reminds him that values change with the times. “People don’t live like this any more. This stuff is from another world. So I am trying to give you a modern viewpoint”. The view point each brother has of the other is not up-to-date, it belongs to the past.

The very solidity of the furniture valued in the past, is out of fashion today, says Solomon: “the average he’ll take one look it will make him very nervous... because he knows its never gonna break”. He bangs on the library table to drive home his point. “A man sits down to such a table, he knows not only he’s married, he’s got to stay married – there is no more possibilities”.

Eighty-nine year old, Solomon is reluctant to buy such a large quantity of furniture which may require more years to sell than are left to him. He came in the hope of getting some nice prices. To sell all the furniture “could take a year, a year and a half. For me that’s a big bet”. He is not a shirker; “The trouble is I love to work”.

While delaying his offer he is carefully examining the furniture, expert that he is. He is eating to keep up his energy. He eats a hard-boiled egg and a chocolate bar, describes incidents from his long life. He philosophizes, from drawing upon his vast experience. He pretends to leave at one point when Victor loses his temper, “No, I don’t need it” and telling him, “And don’t forget it – I never gave you a price”.

At last as Victor is about to ask him to go, Solomon decides, “I’m going to buy it! I mean I’ll ... I’ll have to live that’s all, I’ll make up my mind! I’ll buy it. As he hops from piece to piece, taking notes and making estimates, mementos of the affluent past appear: a robe, a top hat, evening gowns. And from all this he could go so broke, asks Salomon. “And he couldn’t make a come back?” Well, some men don’t bounce, you know, is replies Victor.

With his zeal for life, Solomon is the opposite of the elder Franz, who after the crash lost the will to live. "Listen, I can tell you bounces. I was busted 1932; then 1923 they also knocked me out; the panic of 1904, 1898... but to lay down like that." Like the furniture Solomon was strong in his youth, As an acrobat, he was the one at the bottom", in a vaudeville act *The Five Solomon's*, "may be fifty theatres". He left Russia at the age of twenty-four: "I was a horse them days... nothing ever stopped me. Only life.."

While the depression, their parents deaths and their estrangement have cast a shadow over the lives of Victor and Walter, Solomon's nostalgic memories of his daughter are a reminder that domestic tragedy is not uncommon. Time and again, he refers to his daughter. First he compares Victor to her: "you are worse than my daughter! Nothing in the world you believe nothing you respect – how can you live? Near the end of act one he confides that his daughter, who "had, a lovely face, large eyes, has been appearing to him every night, "I lay down, to go sleep, so she sits there. And you can't help it, you ask yourself – what happened? May be I could have said something to her... May be I did say something... it's all..."

While the brothers live in a make believe world of illusions... Victor that he sacrificed his career for his selfish brother, Walter that he chose self preservation and his brother self deception – Solomon is a realist. He knows that time is a terrible thing" that change is inevitable. He knows like a wise man that adversity must be faced and misfortune accepted. Near the end of the play he alludes to his daughter for a third time. "Every night I lay down to sleep, she's sitting there, I see her clear like I see you. But if it was a miracle and she came to life, what would I say to her?" Although he respects Walter, Solomon does not hesitate offering him advice saying that the tax deduction may be disallowed, and defending Victor when he accepts a price rejected by Esther and Walter.

In the quarrel between the brothers in act two, Esther plays an active role. It is because of her that the play remains a drama and does not degenerate into a debate... Though she and Victor disagree, there is understanding and love between them, in contrast to Walter and his ex-wife. Knowing her husband, she rightly suspects that Victor will, rather than negotiate, accept a price that is too low. Now that their son is in college she is tired of leading a frugal life and believes that they deserve all the money; she is angry when Victor wants to share it with Walter, and feels relieved when the latter offers all of it to his brother. Their reactions are different when Walter discloses to them their father easily could have supported himself as well as paid for Victor's tuition. Victor remarks, "The man was a beaten dog ... How do you demand his last buck - ? But Esther reacts angrily, "It was all an act. Beaten dog! He was a calculating liar. And in your heart you knew it! No wonder it all seemed like a dream to me – it was; a god damned nightmare".

Esther has another vital role in the play; it is she who reveals, for Victor is too proud to admit it, the hardships of their married life: "We lived like mice" their furniture was "Worn and shabby and tasteless. And I have good taste". She sums up their life, "It's that everything was always temporary with us. It's like we were never anything, we were always about-to-be".

She does not want to lose the opportunity to gain some money (Walter's office of tax-deduction saving). She loses her temper and gives Victor an ultimatum.

"You can't go on blaming everything on him or the system or God knows what else! You're free and you can't make a move, Victor, and that's what's driving me crazy... You take this money! On I am washed up".
Walter's reentry saves Victor from replying.

At the end it is Esther who narrates the sad story of her married life. "I was nineteen years old when I first walked up those stairs – is that's believable. And he had a brother who was the cleverest, most wonderful young doctor ... in the world. As he'd be soon. Somehow, some way ... and a rather sweet, in offensive gentleman, always waiting for the news to come on.. And next week, men we never saw or heard of will come and smash it all apart and take it all away. So many times I thought – the one thing he wanted most was to talk to his brother, and that if they could – But he's come and he's gone. And I still feel it – isn't that terrible? It always seems to me that one little step more and some crazy kind of forgiveness will come and lift up everyone. (P. 93).

Brought closer by the confrontation, Esther and Victor go off to see a movie. She does not insist on his changing into his civilian clothes, says good bye to Solomon, and "walks out with her life". Victor puts on his policemen's

jacket and tells Solmon he will return for masks and a couple of other items. While Walter has flung at him the dress representing their mother, Victor has accepted their past family life.

The Price begins and ends, with laughter. Perhaps, it is appropriate “Though scarcely a comedy, it is a play in which humour has a vital role” points out Bigsly. That it is so is to a great extent because of Gregory Solomon. It is doubtful whether Miller could have created such a figure earlier in his works until *After the Fall* in 1964. It took long for Miller to assimilate the meaning both of genocide and survival. “Now the guilt of the survivor, gives way to the celebration of the survivor”, Solomon is the result, a man who at the very end of his life can now believe in possibility again.

There is, however, another kind of laughter in the play that is not generated by Solomon or inspired by an old record. This too comes from the past. It is the laughter which haunts Victor’s memory, the laughter with which his father had greeted his request to finance his college education. This laughter is crude and self mocking. That in the end it is wiped out by the present laughter shows that Miller is offering a certain grace. The present may be price we pay for the past but it is not perhaps without its redemption.

In discussing the language of his plays, Miller notes, “my own tendency has been to shift styles according to the nature of my subject”. In **The Price** the speech of Esther, Victor and Walter is simple, sharp and precise; it is realistic though a little heightened. The language Miller invents for Solomon, however, is distinctively his own and like that of no other character in his work. Its basic feature is its Russian – Yiddish idiom. His dialogue is in turn humorous, aphoristic and ironic. If even style is the man, it is true of him. His accent and his age differentiate him from the brothers.

His wise and witty remarks are made memorable by their idiomatic expression, which is achieved by the use unorthodox syntax and strange metaphors. Verb tenses are ungrammatical: “I never dealt with a police man”. The order of adjectives and adverbs is reversed; metaphors are exotic: “Anything Spanish Jacobean you’ll sell quicker a case of tuberculosis”. Aphorisms are expressed in a unique fashion: “In a day they didn’t build Rome”. It is characteristic of Miller's art that every element of the play has its purpose: structure, language, and symbolism reveal character and theme. He is master of economy; not a word is wasted. As Gerald Weales has noted “talk is both tool and subject”. In the first act suspense is created by the extraordinary sight as the curtain rises: lots of furniture piled high. Interest is aroused by the situation – waiting for the offer of a price, by the disagreement between Esther and Victor and by the arrival of Walter which shatters hopes of a bargain.

The conflict between Walter and Victor gathers momentum as act two proceeds. It begins with Walter’s rejection of the price offered; Esther supports Walter, Victor resents her implication that he is incompetent. When Walter suggests tax deduction, Victor suspects his motives. Now each successive speech reveals more and more of the past and upsets present assumptions. Finally, Miller avoids a happy ending, the brothers are unable to resolve their differences.

The deceptively simple realistic dialogues and action, crafted by Miller left some critics dissatisfied when the play premiered in 1968. However, the symbolic furniture piled high in the attic and a larger than life character like Solomon make the play more than realistic. Another complaint about the play was that action is static, nothing is changed during the action. This is far from true. In Solomon’s words, “what changed, of course, was the viewpoint . . . as the audience was drawn first to one character, then to the other; the result was one of the rarest of dramatic (or human) experiences, understanding, sympathy, with all”.

Verbal metaphors advance the action and reveal characters. It was Victor’s walk to the park which led to his decision to become a cop walking the beat to support his father. Looking back at this life he says, “all I can see is a long, brainless walk in the street”. His decision caused destitution that is captured in such images as: they ate garbage and lived “like mice”, burying away our existence, down the sewer”. Many images are based on the household. Advising Victor to take a decision on retirement Esther says, “It is like pushing against a door for twenty five years and suddenly it opens . . . and we stand there”. Victor reacts angrily to Walter’s offer of an administrative job. You can’t walk in with one splash and wash out twenty eight years”.

Often both past and present have a dreamlike quality Solomon tells Victor: “I pushed, I pulled, I struggled in six different countries . . . It’s tell you it’s dream, it is a dream. Esther describes the strangeness of Victor’s wearing his first uniform as “a masquerade; years later he is “walking around like a zombie ever since the retirement came up. Walter regards over assessing the furniture, for a tax credit as a “dream world”. To Esther the misery of their destitute married life is both dream and nightmare: She comments: “I knew it was all unreal. I knew it and I let it go by. Will, I can’t any more.

Both brothers emphasize that one has to pay the price for past actions which is the theme of the play. Walter describes his profession as a “strange business, with too much to learn and far too little time to learn it. And there is a price you have to pay for that. . . there’s simply no time for people” When Victor is offered a job at the hospital he suspects a payoff because he is unqualified. "There is a price people pay. I have paid it". What the play suggests is that there is no outsider who can lay down moral values. Each man must set his own price on his action and then learn to accept his evaluation.

The furniture and other items symbolize the past and the brothers' clothes the present. In the beginning of the first act Esther does not want to be seen with Victor in his uniform (why must every body know your salary). At the same time the uniform also symbolizes law and order; a person wearing it might well sacrifice his life for another, as Victor has done. Walter's camel hair coat and confidence imply success. Victor recalls to Solomon, “the few times he’d come around, the expression on the old man’s face – you’d think God walked in. The respect, you know, what I mean? The respect!” Solomon agrees, well sure, he had the power. The prosperity of their boyhood is suggested by the father’s tap hat and their mother’s evening gowns.

While the arm chair in the center of the stage (in which Solomon seats himself) symbolizes the father, who was confined it after his fall, the harp represents the mother. Walter offers it to Victor who declines – “nobody plays”. Victor was his mother’s favourite, as Walter points out with some envy: He tells Esther that his mother adored him. Both acts end with Solomon counting out the money, the price paid for the furniture, into Victor's hand, symbolizing that the present pays a price for the past.

After purchasing the furniture, Solomon is left alone on the stage. He goes over to the phonograph and plays a record, the same one heard at the beginning before any dialogue was spoken. As Victor joined in the laughter earlier, so Solomon does now, as the curtain falls slowly.

Writing about **The Price**, Miller says, “In the miltancy of the sixties... I saw the seeds of coming new disillusionment. Once again we were looking almost completely outside ourselves for salvation from ourselves the play and life seemed to be telling me that we were doomed to perpetuate own illusions because truth was too costly to face. At the end of the play Gregory Solomon finds an old laughing record and, listening to it, starts laughing uncontrollably, nostalgically, brutally, having come closest to acceptance rather than denial of the deforming betrayals of time”. (Timebends, p. 542).

Some Topics for Discussion

Before discussing any topic the student must form his own opinion based on a close reading of the play. The edition recommended is: Arthur Miller: **The Price** (Penguin Plays).

1. Discuss the conflict between father and sons and Victor and Walter.
2. Comments on the role of Gregory Solomon in **The Price**.
3. What is the role of Esther in the play?
4. Discuss the use of symbolism in the play
5. In **The Price** “The past presses on the present and the present reinvents the past”. Elaborate.
6. Bring out the contrast between Victor and Walter.
7. Discuss the significance of the title.
8. “Though scarcely a comedy, it is a play in which humour has a vital role”. Discuss.

MILLER'S 1970s PLAYS

The decade of the 1970s was a period of turmoil and turbulence. The American invasion of Cambodia leading to the bloody protests of Kent State University, the withdrawal from Vietnam after many years of protests at home, South Vietnam's collapse, Watergate and the resignation of a president under threat of impeachment all shook the very foundations of American democracy.

Miller wrote three plays in the seventies that dwelt upon cultural differences. **The Creation of the World and Other Business** and **The American Clock** offer reflections on the issues of the 70s. *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. (Written in 1977 but revised in 1984) deals with a world that has lost moral values. Two plays present an ideal and the other puts the ideal into confrontation with the real.

In **The Creation of the World and Other Business** Miller has produced his own interpretation of Genesis. It has been variously called religious parody and a comic reworking of creation. The play includes the creation of Eve, the Fall, and the Cain and Abel story, hardly suitable for the comic treatment Miller gives it. The source of humour is various anachronistic insertions, including comments by characters which sound more like 70s conversations in New York than momentous dialogues in the Garden of Eden.

In this play Miller attempted to demythologize and localize biblical events. Miller tried in it what Shaw had done in *Caesar and Cleopatra* and **Saint Joan**. Miller has made mythic figures real and life like "In the words of C.W.E Bigsby the play "is a consciously naive attempt to trace human imperfection to its source by unwinding the process of history and myth. On the surface, the play seems out of place in the Miller canon, but as he himself observed," there are reverberations of all my plays in this one. It's ray, but with an underlying earnestness."

The play is remarkable for Miller's reinterpretation of God and Lucifer, who represent forces of good and evil. The play opens with a confession by God. Miller's God is a learning God and the universe an evolving one.

Lucifer's apparent selfishness is an evil not easily identifiable as such. Far from a disaster, he sees the Fall as opportunity to join forces with God. Miller's genesis is related to the problems of contemporary world in which it appears we have chosen Lucifer over God. The play may or not be seen as an apology for Judeo-Christianity, but it is a dramatization of moral issues. It offers a new cosmology for a world in need of fundamental reevaluation, a world in which mankind in general and the individual in particular assume responsibility for their actions and for their world.

Miller idealized his conceptions in *The Creation of the world, but in The Archbishop's Ceiling* these idealizations are put to hand test. The latter play is set in the capital city of an Eastern Bloc country (Miller identifies it as Czechoslovakia). Adrian, an American novelist, makes a surprise visit to his literary friends in that city, a visit that is his poorly disguised attempt to gather material for a novel he is writing, to capture the difficulties of living under a totalitarian regime.

Adrian meets his old friend Maya, a poet who has given up poetry and joined the state-run radio. Her former lover is Marcus, a former dissident who has become an unofficial host for foreign literary visitors. Sigmund is another dissident who attacks the regime though others think it is more lenient than the old one. This group of four, plus a Danish whom Marcus picks up, meet in Marcus's government – allocated apartment, the former residence of the country's archbishop. It is a large, dilapidated, formerly luxurious set of rooms. The ceiling of the living room oppressively dominates the action. In this ceiling it is presumed there is concealed microphone allowing the state to overhear all. Miller's use of the microphone is ingenious, employed in the play at various levels. At one level, the microphone represents the violation of privacy by the totalitarian regime. At the symbolic level it represents the invasion of Lucifer into God's former house. Seen in this light, the play could seem little more than a simple allegorical tale of good subdued by evil.

Miller, however, goes beyond this superficial level by having the microphone work upon its victims at a subtle psychological level. It discourages genuine human communication. Because everyone in the room assumes that the state is overhearing what they say, they never fully reveal themselves. At another level the microphone

stands for the omnipresent ear of God which was embedded in the original ceiling decorations. That has now been replaced by the multiple ears of Lucifer, represented by the totalitarian state.

It is obvious why the play finds its setting in an East European country. But as Miller notes, we must remember that in the 70s when the play was written the “White House was bugged, businesses were bugging competitors to defeat their strategies and Watergate and the publication of Pentagon Papers ... demonstrated that the Soviets had little to teach American presidents about domestic espionage”. While Miller points out the political significance, he adds that eventually “the real issue changes from a political one to the question of what effect this surveillance was having on the minds of people who had to live under such ceilings, on whichever side of the cold war they happened to be”.

Miller returns to the American scene with **The American Clock**. The play is set in the 1920s and 1930s. The play initially depicts a rich and comfortable country. That world is shattered by the Great Depression. Yet people seem content to wait for a return to prosperity. What is required is something or some one to return America to the old prosperity. Ironically it is World War II. Which brings the country out of the Depression.

In his autobiography, **Time bends** Miller states about **The Ceiling and the Clock**:

“Both were hard-minded attempts to grasp what I felt life in the seventies had all but lost – a unified concept of human beings, the intimate psychological side joined with the social-political. To put it another way, I wanted to set us in our history by revealing a line to measure from. In *Clock* it was the objective facts of social collapse, in *Archbishop*, bedrock circumstances of real liberty.” (p. 587)

MILLER IN 1980s

During the 1980s Miller wrote four plays: **Some Kind of Love Story**, **Elegy For a Lady**, **I Can't Remember Anything** and **Clara**. The plays are dramatic, with sharp dialogue and varied styles.

Miller's themes in these plays are: grief, old age, memory, betrayal and disappointment in relationships that are friendly, sexual, political and familial. The duration of the action varies from twenty minutes to two hours. Miller has remarked that his subject determines his style, which he may change from play to play "in order to find speech that springs naturally out of the characters and their backgrounds." *Elegy* is dream like, *Love Story* is a detective story and **Can't Remember** is realistic. In mid eighties when Miller reached seventy, he write his autobiography *Time bends*. The four new plays produced in the 80s cover the emotions from comedy to tragedy.

In 1982 *Love Story* and *Elegy* were presented in New Haven, Connecticut, directed by Miller. In an "Author's Note" Miller declares that "in different ways both works are passionate voyages through the masks of illusion to an ultimate reality." The reality in *Love Story*, says Miller, is "Social reality and the corruption of justice." As the only witness to a murder for which an innocent man has been imprisoned. Angela, a call girl, holds the key to its solution. Being "delusionary", she both "conceals and unveils" the facts in order to hold the attention of private detective O'Toole, her ex-lover.

In her last interview with Tim, Angela assumes three of her multiple personalities: the tough but frightened call-girl, an eight year old girl and a cultured lady. O'Toole suspects her fears are imaginary, including her claim that cops in a "Cruiser" are parked just outside the door. During the meeting Angela discloses that she has known intimately three of the main figures in the case: the chief of detectives, murdered drug dealer who supplied him and the prosecutor, who at the trial obtained a verdict of guilty for an innocent spectator. In these associations Angela has seen police corruption, during peddling, and miscarriage of justice. Miller describes her as both "dedicated to clearing an innocent man and possibly implicated in his having been condemned. She is part where and part challenge to his [O'Toole's] moral commitment to justice, and of course the reviver of his moribund sexuality." When O'Toole threatens to abandon the case, she reminds him", I am the only one alive who knows. There are names that' knock your head off." She tantalizes him with the thought that "the whole criminal justice system could be picked up by the tail like a dead rat."

In both this play and **Elegy for a Lady**, observes Miller, "the objective world grows deem and distant as reality seems to consist wholly or partly of what the characters need require it to be, leaving them with anguish of having to make decisions that they know are based on illusion and the power of desire." (*Time bends*, p. 590)

Elegy for a Lady deals with grief and love and old age, and about despair and hope. Its funeral tone echoes the music Miller describes at the opening: "a fine, distant fragility, a simple theme, repeated – like unresolved grief." The two characters are nameless; they are called Man and Proprietress. '**Elegy**', Miller says, "is an attempt to write a play with multiple points of view – one for each of the characters, plus a third, that of the play... like the neutrality of experience itself." The setting is dreamlike: a boutique without walls, its displays "suspended in space."

A well dressed old man enters the boutique, asking the proprietress, "Can you help me?" He is looking for a gift for his dying lover. As he selects and rejects various items, the story of his love unfolds. While he is describing the relationship from his point of view, he notices that the proprietress is the same age as his lover. The man realizes that it was their "uncommitment" that makes it difficult for him to choose a gift.

From the beginning the proprietress seems to speak on behalf of the man's lover. She insists that the illness may not be as serious as he thinks, that there are cures. She tries to comfort him with the thought that the lover may be terrified of an operation. Miller points out that "at moments the proprietress seems actually to be the dying lover herself. A play of shadows under the tree of death."

The Proprietress suggests to the man another facet of the affair. They never spoke, he says, "of negative things." "You met only for pleasure, she says. "Yes," the man replies, "But it was also that we both knew there was no where it could go. Not at my age. So things tend to float pretty much on the surface".

Her comments lead to his recognition that “if she makes it . . . it would not be good for us – to have shared such agony. It won’t cure age. Embracing him the proprietress says, “She wants to make it stay exactly as it is. . . . for ever.” He decides upon a gift – an antique watch. The lover may or may not live. What has died, and what the man is lamenting is the affair.

I Can’t Remember Anything and **Clara** were first staged in 1987. Miller observes that he became “more and more deeply absorbed by a kind of imploding of time – moments when a buried layer of experience suddenly surges upward to become the new surface of one’s attention and flashes news from below.” (**Time bends**, 590)

The play gives a gently humorous account with somber overtones, of an evening meal by two elderly friends, a man and a woman in the man’s small country house.

Leo, an armchair Marxist and Leonara, a wealthy widow, discuss death in a matter-of-fact manner. She eats with Leo everyday and drives her car dangerously. Because she believes that “this country is being ruined by greed, mendacity, and narrow-minded ignorance,” she prefers to ignore present events and evades responsibility by saying she cannot remember anything.

She departs, as he cautions her to drive carefully and observes, “We could have a lot more interesting conversations if you’d stop saying you can’t remember anything.” “Or if you could occasionally learn to accept bad news?” she retorts. He reminds her to phone when she gets home, and the play ends with her call.

Clara is the more complex of the two plays, a character study of a conscience – stricken Albert Kroll. The reviews were disappointing. One reviewer complained that “Miller is continually presenting shadowy events that haven’t quite happened within imagery that makes no sense” Miller replied that the critics failed to understand the main character or even the story.

The story is presented clearly and economically; as the action unfolds, facets of Kroll’s character are revealed, and an incident buried in the past creates dramatic interest and resolution at the end. In a blood spattered room in a New York apartment, Kroll discovers the body of his murdered daughter; he is lying on the floor in a state of shock as Detective Lieutenant Fine enters.

The action, with flashbacks, consists of Fine’s dialogue with Kroll to discover the name of the murderer believed to be a Hispanic man released from jail term served for killing a girl-friend. Clara, who was engaged in the work of rehabilitation of former prisoners was having an affair with him, Fine interrogates Kroll to know the man’s name, but he can’t remember. Kroll feels guilty for instilling in Clara the idealism that made her vulnerable.

To show the way a buried memory comes back, Miller employs flash bulbs of the police photographers to denote flashes from Kroll’s memories of Clara, some of them enacted. As she talks with her father on a visit with her lover, Kroll tries to express his disapproval, but Clara defends the murder as “rage” and an “illusion”. After the incident, Kroll admits to Fine, “I guess I am a little ashamed of one thing. I didn’t tell Clara how strongly I felt about this man.”

By the end of Kroll’s odyssey through memory he recognizes truths he earlier denied, and he regains his lost idealism. Ironically, it is not the grilling of Fine but, rather, the playing of an old record of Kroll singing which enables him to recall the name of the suspect, but, more important, his old faith in people.

Music and memory enable Kroll to gain recognition and acceptance. As Miller observes, “Must he disown it [his earlier ideal], suffer guilt and remorse for having missed his child? Or, despite everything, confirm the validity of the ideal and his former trust in mankind, in effect keeping faith with the best in himself. . . . The play ends on his affirmation; in her catastrophe he has rediscovered himself” (**Time bends**, p. 591).

Both these plays describe the pain of recollection, whether in unpleasant relationship of two aged individuals who were once young and glamorous or in an experience such as Kroll’s, of going to World War II with hope and faith only to lose them later in life.

The publication of **Time bends**, Miller's autobiography in 1987 brought a number of rave reviews. Liz Smith's judgement was that "Miller lifts autobiographical writing to the level of genius" (Daily News), Jay Parini expressed this belief that "Time bends may be among the great books of our day" (USA Today), Roger Shattuck characterized the book as "a work of genuine literary craftsmanship and social exploration" (New York Times Book Review), and Peter Ackroyd declared, "This is autobiography as art" (The Times London).

MILLER IN THE NINETIES

In 1990 Miller was seventy-five years old. He might have been forgiven if he had chosen to retire. Ibsen wrote his last play when he was seventy one while Beckett produced little after he was sixty. Miller's public career had already lasted forty-six years, longer than those of Chekhov, Strindberg, Brecht, O'Neill, or Williams. Surprisingly, the 90s proved his most prolific period since the 60s. During this decade he wrote three new plays, a film script for **The Crucible** and a novella published as **Homely Girl**, in America and **Plain Girl**, in England. He continued to take interest in politics, writing articles for The New York Times, supporting oppressed and imprisoned writers and traveling widely. In other words, he was as active as ever in theatrical, political and social life.

His new play **The Ride Down Mount Morgan** opened in 1991 in London. As Miller points out in **Staging Note**, "The play veers from the farcical to the tragic....." The farcical aspect of the play is its plot: a man married to two women in different cities is able to deceive them for the ten years until a car accident in Mount Morgan lands him in the hospital. Both wives arrive at his bedside to confront him and each other. Although his behaviour shocks the two women, he maintains to the end that he has done nothing wrong. When someone asked Miller what the play was about, he replied that, "it's in direct succession with the rest of my work. It's basically about the problem of sincerity: if you convince yourself you're sincere, you can do anything."

Lyman Felt is a man of the 1980s. A rich insurance executive in his late fifties he enjoys all the luxuries of life, but he is unhappy with his wife. On a visit to his firm's upstate office he meets the dynamic young Leah, and they become lovers. When she becomes pregnant, he marries her, telling her that he has divorced Theo. Lyman's assertion that he is beyond the law may sound familiar to those who recall the political and economic scandals of the 80s. **The Ride** says, Miller is "a completely political play." Lyman, he observes, "is the apotheosis of the individualist who has arrived at a point where the rest of the world has faded into significance. This type of character, he continues, isn't new. "It's just that Ronald Regan gave it imprimatur of society."

After attaining love, money and fame, Lyman becomes aggressive and charming . At the same time he is lonely and frightened of death. His dead father appears from time to time trailing a long black shroud, a symbol of death. In the final scene, in the presence of Theo, Leah and Bessie the shade of the father successfully covers Lyman with the shroud. The play closes with Lyman's wonder and envy at the comradeship of the little group on the ice.

THE LAST YANKEE

The Last Yankee opened simultaneously in New York and London in 1993. Leroy is “the last Yankee”, for he adheres to the founding fathers' beliefs in independence, tolerance and diligence. Miller in the play returns to the theme of **Death of a Salesman**, the destruction of the individual and the family by false values of society. The play was hailed as a “miniature masterpiece” of ninety minutes’ duration. It portrays four characters whose words and gestures are significant. The story is simple. Two husbands, one in his 40s and the other in his 60s, meet in a mental hospital and discuss their wives, who are suffering from depression. In the second scene the wives reminisce about their past lives and contrast them with the present ones. The husbands enter, and the four interact. While the older ones are still squabbling, the younger couple come to an understanding and leave for home. So life like and realistic are Miller’s characters and so deep his sympathy for them that the audience is left hopeful and overjoyed.

Yankee symbolizes the old ideals new lost in the conflicts of modern life. It also has another significance in the small town where Leroy and his wife Patricia grew up, he a descendant of Alexander Hamilton and she as the daughter, of immigrants, Yankee was the immigrants’ pejorative term for Americans.

A prosperous businessman, Frick judges people by their appearance, occupation and contacts. The American dream has worked for him, unlike Willy Loman. However, despite the material success he has achieved, his wife is unhappy and their marriage disintegrates. The couple are clear-eyed about their chances of success, but they are willing to try. Miller provides no easy answers, but the fact that the couple kiss suggests that they are hopeful..

The Last Yankee was praised in both England and America. Richard Corliss wrote in Time magazine, “In the wonderful character of Patricia Hamilton, we hear a troubled soul having a chat with herself. . . . She seeks a release from the ghosts of her golden youth. But wry or wistful, she speaks with the reckless lucidity of someone liberated from drugs and intoxicated by the impending peril of real life.” (Time, 8 February, 1993, 72)

John Peter, in England’s Sunday Times of 31 January 1993, observed, “No other American play wright has written with such power and unrighteous, un-censorious understanding about marriage under stress: the need for independence and reassurance, domination and comfort; the hopeless, helpless, battered affection people can feel for someone close but unreachable; the need to speak and the fear of being either heard or unheard.” The “half-optimistic ending”, notes Peter, rings both touching and true: it has been bought at a price. There is no rosy sunrise here, no glib, perky rebirth, only a sense of survival fleshed but by dogged hope and the burdensome, unbreakable bond called love.”

BROKEN GLASS

In 1994 **Broken Glass** opened in both New York and London and was widely acclaimed. While it ran for only two months on Broadway, it ran for a much longer period in London. Before the performance in his “Platform Lecture” Miller was applauded for a long time by a housefull crowd.

“This is a story I have known and thought about for fifty years,” stated Miller. In the 30s he had known a woman who had lost the power to walk for inexplicable reasons. “I thought about it a lot, and years and years later realized that it was a hysterical paralysis. One day I saw the image of that woman sitting there unable to move, and nobody knowing why and it seemed on exact image for the paralysis we all showed them in the face of Hitler. But I haven’t written it before because it always seemed to be part of the past. Until two years ago, when ethnic cleansing came into the news, and suddenly it became part of the present.”

The play is set in Brooklyn in 1938, but the title refers to the night of broken glass, when the Nazis in Berlin broke the windows of Jewish shops and synagogues. “I’ve probably been influenced in selecting the theme by the recrudescence of anti-Semitism in this world which is something that I wouldn’t have believed.” Miller told an interviewer. “It always comes as a surprise, whenever it happens. It’s well, that’s over with; its not going to happen anymore and suddenly there it is again.” Sylvia Gellburg, Jewish housewife in Brooklyn, is obsessed with the newspaper stories of atrocities on Jews, and when she suddenly loses the power of her legs, no physical cause can be found. Her husband, Phillip, consults a doctor who solves the mystery of her hysterical paralysis and who helps her to change.

Sylvia in way is a continuation of Karen in **Yankee**. Both women have domineering husbands; their own needs are repressed. Only when their repression takes an extreme form does anyone pay attention to them. Karen becomes so depressed that she has to be confined to an institution; Sylvia loses the use of her legs and is confined to a wheel chair. Both confinements are symbolic of a repressed married life.

Despite their serious illness, both women grow and change though Karen does so only temporarily. Sylvia’s change is the central point of **Broken Glass**. The play is so complex in the manner in which it combines the political and the personal and so full of compassion in the understanding of Sylvia and her husband – that audiences are deeply moved.

Philip Gelburg is a very complex character. He is a self-hating Jew who sometimes sounds anti-Semitic. He is proud that his name is Gelburg. He is not popular among his neighbours who regard him as disagreeable and cantankerous. At the same time, says Miller, the audience is “supposed to really feel for him,” because “he’s trying to be invulnerable.”

By discovering the causes of his behaviour, Miller creates sympathy and understanding for him. His impotence, he tells Sylvia in scene 8, was a result of what he believed was her rejection of when he refused to allow her to return to work.” Miller describes the play as “a tragedy.” The tragedy is the waste of a life, that of middle-aged Sylvia.

In scene II Sylvia brilliantly analyses the causes of her disintegration after marriage, how her potential was destroyed by a domineering husband.

Philip’s realization is less dramatic but more hurtful. Like Willy Loman, he is a victim of the American dream.

Symbolism is pervasive in **Broken Glass** Sylvia’s paralysis is a metaphor for the inability of the outside world to act in 1938 when the Nazi persecution of Jews was gathering momentum. Images of birth and death, babies and funerals, symbolize Sylvia’s rebirth and the death of her marriage.

In 2003 at the ripe old age, of 88 Miller is undoubtedly one of America’s three greatest playwrights, along with Engene O’Neill and Tennessee Williams.

ART AND DRAMATIC THEORY

Arthur Miller's articles, essays, speeches and introductions provide a rich source for his theory and practice of drama. From the fifty-two-page introduction to his **Collected Plays**, which appeared in 1957, to the 1993 essay "About Theatre Language," Miller's theatre essays are considered major contributions to modern dramatic theory. Miller discusses not only the aesthetics of his plays but also their genesis and the artistic, commercial, political and social climates of the times.

Miller admits his debt to Ibsen in **All My Sons**. He admires Ibsen's "ability to forge a play upon a factual bedrock. A situation in his plays is never stated but revealed in terms of hard actions, irrevocable deeds; and sentiment is never confused with the action it conceals." Miller also appreciates Ibsen's solution to the "biggest single dramatic problem, namely, how to dramatize what has gone before," to achieve "a viable unveiling of the contrast between past and present, and an awareness of the process by which the present has become what it is. What is precious in the Ibsen method is its insistence upon vivid causation." Miller's observations on Ibsen are equally applicable to himself.

Miller also states that "for younger writers such as myself, [Clifford] Odets for a couple of years was the trail blazer. he has dared to invent an often wildly stylized stage speech. It was as though Odets were trying to turn dialogue into jazz. It was an invented diction of a kind never heard before on stage – or off." Miller remarks that Odets's dialogue was not realistic but poetic. Likewise, although Miller's dialogue is realistic it is carefully created to suit his character. It would be more correct to characterize his speech as "poetic realism:" "Attention must be paid," "he's liked, but he's – well liked."

Death of a Salesman

"My own tendency," writes Miller, "has been to shift styles according to the nature of my subject. In order to find speech that springs naturally out of the characters and their backgrounds rather than imposing a general style." He explains that the New Englanders in **Yankee** do not speak like working men and women in **A Memory** or Eddie Carbone and his fellows in **A View**. For **The Crucible** he crafted a language that begins with the idiom of the verbatim court records of the period and proceeded to take on flavour and a poetry of its own which is bare, strong, and earthy, like the people who speak it.

Miller's drama is a drama of ideas. He says, "Idea is very important to me as a dramatist", pointing out that playwrights need not invent new or original ideas, but rather "they have enunciated not yet popular ideas which are already in the air, for which there has already been a preparation. . . . Which is to say that once an idea is "in the air" it is no longer an idea but a feeling, a sensation an emotion, and with these the drama can deal". Miller may draw his theme from ideas in the air, but his plots often are suggested by actual events he hears about. Images drawn from life, sometimes his own, may suggest a play: **Broken Glass** based on the picture of woman he knew in the 30s who for no known reason lost the power of her legs, **Death of a Salesman**, he says began as a series of images: the little frame house, now deserted Miller admits that his plays contain autobiographical elements: his friend Sidney who became a cop suggested Victor in **The Price**; Cousin Abby, Happy in **Death of a Salesman**; his own mother, who like Sylvia in **Broken Glass**, felt she wasted her life when she married. His illiterate father, says Miller, was a testing ground for the plots of his plays: "He'd ask what I was writing, and I would tell him the story. I could see in his eyes whether it was going to hit home. I can't remember a time when he was wrong. He wanted to be astonished and when he was – Boy, the power that came out of him."

Though some of his characters may be based on his own life and experience, Miller insists that they are dramatic beings, created for the stage and existing in their life there. Sometimes readers and audiences ignored this as in the case of **After the Fall**. Maggie was equated with Marilyn Monroe and Quentin with Miller. Sometimes, however, spectators or readers recognize themselves or their parents or friends in the plays, Willy Loman is the best example, but Linda Loman, Joe Keller, John Proctor, Eddie Carbone, and Sylvia Gellberg fall in the same category.

Miller's plays attempt neither "escape from process and determinism" nor "inverted romanticism" but instead seek a new balance that "embraces both determinism and the paradox of will." "If there is one unseen goal toward which his plays strive, he says, "it is that very discovery and its proof – that we are made and yet are more than what made us."

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