CHAPTER I

THE CHANGING VISION OF ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller's plays are almost invariably concerned with man's viable connection with his society, his world, his universe. Any break in this bond is bound to result in a catastrophe. His drama does not advocate a mechanical submission to the social forces as they are, but rather explores the possibility of a new configuration of order and perception. This leads to the search for the self, which in Miller is inevitably associated with social awareness. A man who lacks such awareness can establish only his personal self but not the extrapersonal one which constitutes his real identity. The Miller hero attains self-knowledge not in isolation but in a larger context of his surroundings and in full recognition of his higher responsibility. He is made to learn that man as an integral part of the whole system should have a sense of sharing the common fate. He must keep his integrity even in the face of all threats, try to influence the mass, and he is responsible for all his actions and their consequences, whether in relation to himself, his family or the others. However, there are some who often fail to recognize their imperfections. They remain mostly self-deluded and hence self-ignorant.

Miller believes that to define human behaviour one has to reach out beyond the biological "drives" of man to his social as well as moral "impulses". Perhaps what makes a person human is the "conflict in him between the forces of life and death" ("The Writer and Society", Conversations with Arthur Miller 154).

The ideal state of being has no element of conflict in it, but the world we live in has its poles sharply defined. It is apt to think that "until man arrives at a point where he realizes that conflict is the essence of life, he will end up by knocking himself out" (Miller, "AM Discusses The Crucible", Conversations 26). Miller's plays examine the destructive forces in man in perfect balance against those which necessitate his search for the life-giving and decree his human nature. This is basically "what I am writing about", the author says, "and what my morality consists in — I mean, of course, the moral element in my plays". The search is of cardinal virtue because it reflects the individual's "own concept of his uniqueness and his fear of its disappearing". The twentieth-century playwright may not believe in "the secret existence of what used to be called an immortal soul", but Miller's preoccupation with the self, with "a unique identity of a moral kind", suggests his struggle to find an acceptable substitute (Miller, "The Writer and Society", Conversations 154-58).

In Miller the search for self is almost analogous to a quest for values. When the search is for mere personality and other-directed standards, the self is hardly realized. Viewed in this light, the "name" theme in his plays has various dimensions. Sometimes it connotes just an aspiration for fame and reputation, which is obviously of little importance in the context

of self-knowledge; sometimes a struggle for integrity and also truth through self-immolation or self-expiation. The latter kinds directly speak of a moral awakening in the hero. Miller's interlacing of the two motifs of name and moral responsibility is highly reminiscent of F.H. Bradley's :

> [In] the court of conscience .... [a man] must answer .... for all his deeds. There is no question of lying here; and, without lying, he can disown none of his acts .... what he ever at any time has done, that he is now; and, when his name is called, nothing which has ever been his can be absent from that which answers to the name (3-4).

In the process, the individual discovers the moral imperative within himself, and the discovery is not one of "some abstract or metaphysical quantity" but of an ethical enlightment.

From this point of view, the need to evaluate and wholly realise himself is "the only fixed star" for the Miller protagonist, and the struggle he undertakes "demonstrates the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity" (Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man", Theatre Essays 6-7). Man is meant to serve death unless he insists on creating good faith "by act of will". It is an insistence not on "the level of instinctual wishes" but on "the level of awareness" (Miller, "All and the Meaning of Tragedy", Conversations 203). The essence of virtue, it must be noted, lies in this will which is the identification of oneself with a certain end that would

give satisfaction. And the satisfaction is that of perfection.

What lies at the heart of Miller's ethics as well as at his protagonists' quest is the freedom of choice and action, well conceptualized by Bradley : "My will is myself, and myself is superior to my desires, and exercises over them an independent faculty of choice, wherein lies freedom and with it responsibility" (10). In "Many Writers : Few Plays" Miller relates one of his personal experiences that is no less instructive in this respect :

> I think of a night ... when a storm knocked out my lights in the country.... I sat a long time in the blacked-out living room, wide awake, a manuscript unfinished on the table. The idea of lying in bed with one's eyes open, one's brain alive, seemed improper, even degrading. And so, like some primitive man discovering the blessings of fire, I lit two candles and experimentally set them beside my papers. Lo ! I could read and work again.

The incident may be a trifling one, but not the ethico-philosophical implication he endows it with : "Let a storm come, even from God, and yet it leaves a choice with the man in the dark" (TE 25-26). Environment often poses threats to man's self-identity and leaves him with no choice practically. Miller also realises that society is not impotent to change one's deepest self-conceptions("Morality and Modern Drama"191). His only contention is that one must try to preserve self-integrit

by rising above conformities. Miller's work embodies man's eternal struggle to define himself.

The one unseen goal towards which most of his plays move is "the discovery and its proof -- that we are made and yet...more than what made us" (Miller, Introduction 55). The antagonistic forces of fate and free will are seen acting upon each other, an interplay that has always interested Miller. By "fate" he means the forces which a man "never bargained for, but whose contradictions nevertheless spring dialectically from the forms of his thrust" ("Interview", Conversations 196). On the other hand, "free will" is described as "the conception of what is not yet", the "element" in man in the absence of which life would be insupportable. There is something "quite permanent and unchanging" that persists in man through all the systems that have sought to control him (Miller, "The Writer and Society", Conversations 160-61). On his own admission, Miller finds "a mystical quality" in this "humanistic, but nevertheless universal, potential". However, he is mystical without being a mystic. What the humanist prizes is not the Will of God expressed in man but the individual's self-conscious need to surpass the given bounds. This is how Miller's concept of free will serves his practical and rationalistic purpose. The possession of will is a precondition for being human. For the playwright, it is never enough to know that man is "at the mercy of social pressures"; for him, it is rather necessary to

understand that "such a sealed fate cannot be accepted" (Miller, "On Social Plays", TE 63).

Man is born on the side of life, but he should learn how to give himself to death (Miller, Conversations 202-03). The hero's death must be an "illumination of the ethical", it must present itself as the price of self-integrity. Death, in this context, shows the roundness of man's search and his higher possibilities. Miller is not content "simply to spell out the anatomy of disaster". Nor can he regard man "as essentially a dumb animal moving through a preconstructed maze toward his inevitable sleep". The quest for self always shows what one "must be — or should strive to become" (Miller, "The Nature of Tragedy", TE 10-11).

The quest must illustrate the principle of living. His plays are more or less concerned with the fundamental question, "How are we to live?" And in its most humane sense, it is not "a private query". The Miller protagonist more often than not struggles to be at one with his society, though always on his own terms. It entails an inward striving for some essential humane qualities which would at once help the flowering of self and promote social relationship. In "On Social Plays", Miller observes :

> The single theme to which our most ambitious plays can be reduced is frustration. In all of them, from O'Neill's through the best of Anderson, Sidney Howard, and the rest,

> the underlying log jam, sote speak, the unresolvable paradox, is that, try as he will, the individual is doomed to frustration when once he gains a consciousness of his own identity. The image is that of the individual scratching away at a wall beyond which stands society, his fellow men.

The cause of this frustration is that in modern times the subjective life of the individual is at great odds with his social life. Again, the root of this frustration is our being "further and further away from preoccupation with Man" and drawn back "into the family, the home, the private life and the preoccupation with sexuality" (TE 54-57). Miller conceives of man, as the Greek did, as a whole. It seems to him that "the perfect society would be one in which ... the friction [between the self and society] would be able to be minimized..." ("'The Will to Live'", Conversations 346-47). Admittedly, one should think more of one's own development than of any one else's; because each one best understands his individual needs and has the best means of perfecting his own nature. But when this is done from the point of view of the whole, it can no longer be called Egoism. It is self-realization but for the sake of the whole. We seek the good both of ourselves and of others as members of a whole. Once we learn to live in such a spirit, there will be no opposition between Egoism and Altruism. Living this way only, one may realise a rational universe as the ultimate end (Mackenzie 274).

Miller cannot take with ultimate

seriousness "a drama of individual psychology written for its own sake, however full it may be of insight and precise observation" (TE 57). Instead, he is interested in the interplay of psychological and social mechanisms and their most exact aesthetic expression. The "totality" is, for him, always a great challenge because it demands a synthesis of varied experiences that are otherwise unrelated. He thinks that "the world has to strive toward an opening of consciousness of man as the center" so that the connections that make the "whole" are finally realized (Conversations 171-72). The Miller protagonist's quest for self may be equated with his vision of "a world ... a civilization... that will move toward the only goal the humanistic, democratic mind can ever accept with honor". His plays endorse a set of values which would lift man up above "a private aim for a private life", above the machine and to "a respect for himself" as well as for his fellow beings. It is a search for values, to repeat, that will lead us towards "a warm embrace of mankind" (Miller, TE 57-63).

Miller's mystical-humanistic belief in such a harmony derives from his childhood reading of The Brothers Karamazov :

> The book said to me :
>
> 'There is a hidden order in the world. There is only one reason to live. It is to discover its nature.... Man will only find peace when he learns to live humanly, in conformity to those laws which decree his human nature'
> ("The Shadows of the Gods", TE 180).

Man often violates his virtuous nature. By some compromise, by some error, or by some ambition, he ends up where he is no longer himself. But one must try to "get back to the structure which is human". The struggle Miller's protagonists undertake is actually his own to "reach out beyond the real world toward some humanistic call" which he wishes to be "working on human situations" (Miller, Conversations 201).

The theme of self-realization in Miller is directly linked with his tragic vision. According to him, tragedy is "the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly." He sounds almost Aristotelian in proposing that the "enlightment" of tragedy should consist in "the discovery of the moral law." He adds that in tragedies alone lies the belief in "the perfectibility of man." If Miller's tragic plays do not measure up to his theory of tragedy, it is because his creative self is not at one with his critical self.

His emphasis on "personal dignity" as the single prerequisite for heroism not only takes him along a route different from Aristotle's but contradicts his own ethical formulations as discussed above. Miller writes, "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." The flaw in the character is really nothing, "but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a

challenge to ... his image of his rightful status" ("Tragedy and the Common Man", TE 4-7). Aristotle would also suggest that a character with moral imperfections can still "elevate" us if he displays in his struggle the hightened powers of will and intellect. We could wish, Butcher rightly observes, that the Greek master "had gone farther and said explicitly ... that the morally trivial, rather than the morally bad, is fatal to tragic effect" (317). Theoretically at least, Miller prizes this sublimity of human effort more than anything else. In his own words, what counts most is the hero's "fanatic insistence" on his self-dignity :

> From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his 'rightful' position in his society.
>
> Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation.

Miller thinks that the commonest of men may take on that stature "to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest" to secure that "rightful place in his world" (TE 4,6).

However, the grandeur of action must be attended by Recognition which comes too late but always preceding disaster. According to Aristotle, a "complex" action is one in which "Reversal of the Situation" is combined with "Recognition"(39).

Unfortunately, Miller mentions nothing of it in his theatre essays. This is not to argue that the element is totally absent from his work, but it is not as inevitable as the disaster itself. Hence the self-evaluation he speaks of is often beyond the reach of his heroes.

Fanaticism, if it means a blind adherence to personal misconceptions till the end, may arouse pity but commands no admiration. The overriding concern for personal dignity, when accompanied by no higher awareness, is more in the spirit of egoism. The tragic heroes are, by nature, all egoists of one kind or another. But the hero's action must also be divested of selfish elements so as to elevate us above the narrowness of aim and desire. This Miller certainly understands and even tries to accomplish in his drama especially in terms of "commitment". However, his attempts are made clumsy by his waverings, both in theory and in art, between modern and classical sensibilities.

Keeping Aristotle in full view, Miller says that the tragic hero must discover the rightness of laws and that the end of a tragedy must confirm some aspect of the "Grand Design" (TE 55). But practically, he is confronted with the aesthetic problem of proving their existence in modern terms. The playwright admitted his difficulty in one of his interviews. The "superhuman scheme", whether it went under the name of "Zeus's laws", or, as in Shakespearean times, reflected "a different

ideology toward man", had lying in the background somewhere an "order" which was being violated and which the hero was seeking to come to some agreement with. Now we are in "a worse situation" because the conception today is that it is "a totally real universe", there is "nothing but society". This, in turn, implies the absurdity of writing tragedies in our time : we are left with a kind of "sad comedy" when we try to "do tragedy" (Conversations 301). Modern man does not live in the world of oracles and gods, his is a world of doubts and split personality. Hence the wholeness of experience or the discovery of the "divine plan" lies beyond his reach.

Miller's hero, then, must draw our attention especially by his _____ by his "total" struggle against "necessity", the inevitable :

> There are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them, and in the process of action everything we have accepted out of fear or insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined ....

This is how tragedy points the "heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom", and the "thrust for freedom" is what exalts in tragedy. Miller locates the tragic impulse more precisely in the act of "questioning" : "for a moment everything is in suspension, nothing is accepted, and ... in the very action of so doing, the character gains 'size', the tragic stature ..." (TE 4-6). His contention is that the common man is in no way

debarred from such actions.

Nobody will perhaps deny that in the twentieth century matters of cosmic significance have yielded place to such narrow concepts as "society" and "economics". The nobility of rank is also irrelevant today. Yet in what way do the Miller heroes (except John Proctor) challenge "the scheme of things"? They are destroyed more by the narrowness of vision than by the greatness of spirit. The majority are taken unawares either by a false society or by an all-devouring passion. The very struggle to fit into the socio-economic pattern turns man into "the product, and from one point of view the victim, of his surroundings" (Steinberg 82). Social realism is inimical to tragedy because it presents man as the image of the same false society rather than as the hero who would recreate himself as well as his world. Miller seems to have realized it in the course of his progress :

> In the heroic and tragic time the act of questioning the-way-things-are implied that a quest was being carried on to discover an ultimate law ... which would yield excellence; in the present time the quest is that of a man ... who is essentially a victim. We have abstracted from the Greek drama its air of doom, its physical destruction of the hero, but its victory escapes us. Thus it has even become difficult to separate in our minds the ideas of the pathetic and of the tragic (TE 59).

Yet Miller believes that the possibility of such victory must be there in tragedy because in the absence of this element "pathos reigns, and an endless, meaningless, and

essentially untrue picture of man is created..." ("The Nature of Tragedy", TE 11). He even finds Aristotle's views on "the permanent possibilities of human nature" to be prescriptive : "As Aristotle said, the poet is greater than the historian because he presents not only things as they were, but foreshadows what they might have been "(TE 10). Miller might have attempted to synthesize realism and this profound classical sensibility, but his later observations on "the victory in death" run counter to his earlier pronouncements. Defending Willy Loman, the protagonist of Death of a Salesman (1949), Miller wrote in 1957 :

> It goes without saying that in a society where there is basic disagreement as to the right way to live, there can hardly be agreement as to the right way to die, and both life and death must be heavily weighted with meaningless futility (Introduction 33-34).

His self-contradictions, in fact, explain his dilemma as a modern tragedian. He wants to create heroes on his own terms, but ironically they turn into victims. His revisions of Aristotelian standards suggest his attempt to remake the classical "in the image of our own." However, the heroic world refuses any sort of translation because the structure of experience itself has disintegrated in modern times.

What still saves Miller's work from degenerating into melodrama is the image of the individual liberator. As Raymond Williams observes, at the centre of "liberal tragedy" is a

single situation — "that of a man at the height of his powers and the limits of his strength, at once aspiring and being defeated, releasing and destroyed by his own energies". The situation seems to be a paradox. The structure is "liberal in its emphasis on the surpassing individual, and tragic in its ultimate recognition of defeat or the limits of victory" (Modern Tragedy 87). As in The Crucible (1953), by an act of will and choice the individual becomes a new kind of hero. Proctor is a liberal martyr, but his salvation lies in his own power to fight against all lies. The individual has to be his own saviour, and in his moral triumph the author reaffirms the moral law.

Miller has combined individual and social consciousness in his liberal tragedy. While in Ibsen the hero seeks isolation for self-fulfilment, in Miller one can achieve self-knowledge only in relation to one's fellow beings. This is not to suggest that Ibsen cancelled out the need for a return to society. The fact is that while in his work the contest of the liberal self with the others is almost involuntary, in Miller it is just the opposite. At this point, the latter's overemphasis on personal dignity seems to have been counterbalanced by his concept of community.

Most interestingly, Miller's idea of the false society as an alterable rather than unchangeable condition dilutes the tragic spirit of his drama in a diametrically opposite way. As

Raymond Williams points out, "Arthur Miller ... represents, essentially, a late revival of liberal tragedy, on the edge... of its transformation into socialism" (Modern Tragedy 103). The implied call to social action spoils the feeling of catharsis, that "calm of mind, all passion spent". The playwright clearly began his career in this tension of his tradition. On the one hand, he rejected the traditional idea of being reconciled to death as the work of fate. On the other, his realism presents a depressing spectacle of men being done in by the system. In the final analysis, his work becomes considerably complex, if not tragic by classical standards, by making room for both determinism and liberalism.

The social tragedies of Miller discover evil mostly in man's environment. In the middle plays, the emphasis shifts from his "remediable" alienation from society to his "hopeless" self-exile (Lowenthal 143). This is the time of "man his own victim." The conflict is no longer between the individual and society; now it is "the self against the self". The false and corrupt society is identified as part of one's own destructive desires. Hence it can no longer be opposed or bitterly challenged by death (Williams, Modern Tragedy 100, 105). The result is yet another paradox. The increasing concentration on individual responsibility intensifies the tragic element in his work. On the other hand,

the image of the self-alienated individual results in a tragic deadlock. The change in perspective amply shows that the author gradually lost faith in the "Grand Design" whose revelations might assure a harmonious social living.

In other words, Miller later focuses on man's imperfect nature and locates the origins of personal and corporate guilt in the existence of universal evil. He also deals with original sin in a world without God and repudiates his past belief in innocence as an inherent virtue. Personal dignity and self-integrity give way to the essential ambiguities of man.

However, this can never be the ultimate human condition in the world of Miller. The subject is, clearly, the post-lapsarian man. Yet in the recognition of one's sinful nature lies the hope of personal salvation. This may be termed "existential humanism", a modified version of Miller's early social philosophy (Centola, "An Interview with AM" 343). Each must accept guilt as a fact of existence and try to transform it into responsibility. He must learn to choose and act without any illusion of innocence. He must have the courage to live unblessed and the will to work out the truth of his self-knowledge. The ideas that were latent in the early plays now find full expression.

"It is not because of a theoretical consideration", Miller said in an interview, "that I changed the emphasis." The

shift in focus, rather, directly refers to the evolution of his life-vision : "In the earlier plays I believe what was being examined was something like the imperative toward disaster.... Later on I take the doom for granted ... and look for some kind of life-line to hang onto" ("AM : Interview", Conversations 253-54). Miller no more judges his heroes. Instead, he now reveals the contrasting tendencies of the self. Thus he achieves a better balance between the tragic human predicament and "the inexorable demand of mankind that it be human" (Miller, "AM Talks Again", Conversations 136). He has certainly developed as a writer of guilt and responsibility.

In Miller the discovery of complicity is a prerequisite for self-knowledge. The truth comes out of his own meditation and search during the years of his silence (1956-63). Later on he realises that there is in man a general tendency towards oblivion when he comes to perceive his destructive nature. He continually lapses into a state of false innocence and endlessly repeats his murderous acts ("After Commitment" 56). One should have the courage to see oneself in "the mirror of reality, of the unbeautiful world" (Miller, "The Face in the Mirror" 3). We should recognise the bestiality in ourselves so that we realise our own sadism. Guilt lies hidden in every human being : "Is it too much to say that those who do not suffer injustice have a vested interest in injustice?" If guilt could be accepted as "a concomitant of human nature" rather than as "reprehensible sin", perhaps the human race "could begin to guard against its ravages,

which always take us 'unawares', as something from 'outside', from the hands of 'others'"(Miller, "Our Guilt" 10-11). From such recognition and acceptance comes the impetus to positive action.

In the plays of the Sixties, the Miller protagonist is more in the "crisis of conscience" than in the "crisis of consciousness", although the boundaries between such crises are more fluid than fixed. He is more in self-analysis than in conflict with external forces. He is a reflective hero, the outcome of Miller's long agonized search. The author might not have lost faith in "the ultimate innocence of the self", but it has been severely tested in the crucible of his later works (Gans, Realms of the Self 144). The protagonist no longer strives for any kind of sublimity, but rather discovers the need to revise his own imperfections.

The result is the making of existentialist-humanist drama. It is neither wholly Greek nor wholly Christian in vision, neither wholly liberal nor wholly deterministic in conception. It is a combination of all, yet challenging all in their presuppositions. It neither attempts a religious solution to the problem of evil nor presents the element as nullifying all good efforts. It is in this tension that the best of Miller's plays are conceived. No final judgement is made there, no eternal law affirmed. The condition of existence is "tragic"

because it is "unresolvable". Yet Miller has ever tried to move beyond the absurd (Miller, Conversations 349)

Ionesco defines the absurd as "that which is devoid of purpose". As he puts it in his essay on Kafka, "Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless". Again, Camus views man as an isolated being cast ignominiously into an alien universe. As he said in The Myth of Sisyphus :

> In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile....This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity (qtd. in Esslin 23).

Miller began as a liberal for whom "meaning is the ultimate reward for having lived" (TE 64). He writes in his Introduction, "the assumption — or presumption — behind ... [the early] plays is that life has meaning" (8). With his native faith strained by various factors — personal, political and aesthetic— he became doubtful about the efficacy of knowledge and reason. The socialist faith in the future is gone, replaced — as it were — by metaphysical anxieties. Yet he could say, "a man remains a man despite all these". Man becomes absurd only when he severes himself away from reality and loses his humanity. Almost like Albee, Miller is concerned with the absurdity of illusion rather than the absurdity of reality. His final statement on life has none of the ironical despair of the European absurdists. In the

plays of his mid-career, he attempts to reexplore the ultimate purpose of life; only his vision has been tempered by many a tragic experience. In the course of time, he has become painfully aware of man's separateness and rootlessness. Yet from none of his works is absent the need to make some contact, to find some moral stand. Like Sartre Miller seems to say : "I'm not a pessimist; I merely believe in optimistic toughness" (qtd. in Centola, "An Interview" 253).

In this his conviction, the author differs as much from Ionesco as from Beckett. The latter's theatre produces "an anguished awareness both of the absurdity of the human situation as well as of the impossibility of transcending this absurdity and attaining human dignity" (Acharya 21). The two tramps in Waiting for Godot end in nothingness, reflecting man's impotence. In the plays beginning with After the Fall (1964), Miller has increasingly affirmed the holiness of such concepts as dignity and honour, but never precluding the possibility of transcendence. Man can no longer claim to be a "pure being", but there is no reason why he should not accept the challenge to justify his life.

The middle plays of Miller seem to be a dramatic translation of Sartrean existentialism. Later he discarded his rationalistic and empiricist assumptions that the universe is a determined, ordered system intelligible to the contemplative observer who can discover the natural laws that govern all beings

and the role of reason as the power guiding human activity. Miller felt more and more "the threat of freedom, of having to make choices" (Conversations 354). His concepts of free will and choice as the means of change and perfection gradually take on metaphysical proportions. In the philosophy of Sartre, there are two types of being : "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself". The former corresponds to "the being of an inert object, complete and fixed, expressing no relationship either with itself or with anything outside itself". The latter is characterized "by lack of determinate structure, by openness towards the future, and by potency". From another point of view, man's realization that his existence is open towards an undetermined future, the emptiness (or nothingness) of which must be filled by his freely chosen actions, causes dread and anxiety ("angst"). He is permanently in flux and, therefore, "condemned to be free" (Flew 312, 14). Yet this free will is what may ever help him to recreate himself. Miller's plays from After the Fall (1964) through The Price (1968) clearly distinguish this element from what Sartre calls "bad faith", a form of deception of self and others. The playwright suggests that man should not try to escape the burden of responsibility by regarding himself as the passive subject of outside influences. He should, instead, rely on his personal moral insight and try to transcend his limitations through choice and action. Evidently, Miller later insists on self-determination, on the need to "take one's life in one's arms", as Holga articulates it in After the Fall (148). The

sustaining forces of life are re-discovered, but now in full recognition of their own limitations.

In the later works of Miller, the theme of self-realisation involves matters more complex. The distinction between authentic and inauthentic modes of existence fades away. The world is a stage where "action" transforms so easily into "performance", where one can be no more than a contrived self. Whatever knowledge one may gain by the end lacks veracity and proof. Illusion and reality keep changing places, and the authentic self loses itself in the intricate maze of fiction. The plays of this period examine the "problematic status" of morality and the fragmenting of experience (Bigsby, Afterword 94) Ontological and epistemological problems creep in, and the author deals with the elusive quality of the "Real". The reliability of free will is also questioned. However, behind all this scepticism there lies the fundamental need to believe and know, to assert the significance of existence. How that can be done in a world of "competing fictions" is one of the moving questions posed by Miller's most recent plays (Bigsby, Critical Introduction 237). He does not call that "hope", but it is surely an act of faith in survival. He finds it almost obligatory on his part to project "a human nature" — no matter whether a "current situation" contradicts it. As the author observes, "there's the basic tension. It could be even a tragic tension" ("Tragedy and Commitment", Conversations 175).

In the final analysis, Miller has always taken pains to locate the forces of disintegration and create a moral order that might save the world from an utter chaos. He believes with Ibsen that "the stage is the place for ideas, for philosophies, for the most intense discussion of men's fate" ("Preface to an Adaptation", TE 17). He even goes to the extent of observing that the dramatic form has "the ultimate possibility of raising the truth-consciousness of mankind to a level of such intensity as to transform those who observe it" ("Family in Modern Drama" 232). A play may not be "some kind of therapy", as he later modifies his stand, but it can certainly help us "see through the surfaces" and remove the cover of confusion from "the underlying forces that create the dilemmas" ("AM on Plays and Playwriting", Conversations 266). He wants to believe even in the midst of doubts and confusions. It is the responsibility of the writer, he maintains, to prove to his people "what they are doing, and perhaps what they ought to do in order to be ... true to their nature" ("On Recognition," TE 249-50).

However, Miller no longer feels any moral obligation as a writer. "There are times when you feel the whole weight of mankind is on your shoulders — and may be it is; but now I just kind of throw the bread on the waters and wait for the fish to come up", he said in 1980 (qtd. in Atlas 320). He has also become suspicious about the humanizing power of art.

And his disillusionment may be traced to a series of shocks that, in turn, have mellowed his attitude to life and literature. The Miller of the Eighties is evidently in conflict. "The theatre has got to be bread, not cake" — a more recent remark that perhaps reveals a renewed faith in the ultimate validating power of drama. Plays must deal with the "fundamental things" of life, he says, and open a "window" into the secret of living ("The Theatre" 55). In his later works, Miller gives up all ready-made solutions and, instead, attempts to portray life in all its ambiguities. They present no coherent vision of humanity. In fact, no such coherence is attainable when society is "various" and things are "disconnected" (Miller, "An Afternoon" 3). This is not scepticism, but rather an insight into the mysteries of life.

Collectively, the plays of Arthur Miller reveal an organic unity : most of them are permeated by a vision of the world that would be perfect. In 1956, he wrote in a letter to the Chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities :

> I was looking for the world that would be perfect. I think it necessary that I do that if I were to develop myself as a writer .... I am not ashamed of this. I accept my life .... What I sought to find from without I subsequently learned must be created within (qtd. in Gannon 32).

Miller's drama emphasizes the need for this search, a search that differentiates man from the rest of the world's creatures. Even

when his spirits are at a low ebb, for him there is "a tiger burning brightly in the moral darkness" (Schlueter and Flanagan 42). His truth is destined to survive because it essentially presents a human programme, man's perpetual struggle to become human.

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