

UNIT 5

ARTHUR MILLER AND *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

I. INTRODUCTION: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES (1915-2004)

Intellectual of the American theater --> 'plays of ideas'

Theater = instrument of passion

Pull towards realism (not naturalism)

Purpose = locate individual security in social, political & moral context -->

Lay bare psyche of a culture

Translate social world -> private anxieties (personal fault + public betrayal)

Apparent security of family & characters --> national myths & social fiats

Miller the man = Miller the dramatist

Classic American liberalism --> Jewish identity

Perfectibility of man --> Nazi death camps --> responsibility for one's action

Harlem 1915 & Jewish immigrants, well off & 1929 moved to Brooklyn -->

weathered Depression (destroys family business)

Work with father, 19 University of Michigan (journalism & English) -->

began to write --> married fellow student & settled in Brooklyn

'Honor at Dawn', 'They Too Arise', 'The Golden Years', 'The Half Bridge'

II. ARTHUR MILLER'S LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

Idealism --> Depression (flunk American myths) --> Human relationships

fractured (Value became price; pragmatism displaced principle)

+ Emersonian - Marxist (+ liberal humanism - economic determinism)

1920s = 'nothing had any consequence' --> 1930s = rationality of the world

The Man Who Had All the Luck (1944), *Situation Normal* (1944), *All My Sons*

(1947) --> (public reputation + economic future) 'The Hook' (1951)

1950s --> House Un-American Activities Committee

The Crucible (1958), *A View from the Bridge* (1962), *After the Fall* (1964),
Incident at Vichy (1964), *The Price* (1968), *Playing for Time* (TV 1970s)

Last plays = exposing in language & action a complicity (individual to
 persecutors & discharges dramatic tension)

Stylistically = experimentalist ('realism, as a style = defense against assertion
 of meaning')

The Archbishop's Ceiling (Watergate) (1975), *Some Kind of Love Story*
 (1982), *Elegy for a Lady* (1982), *The American Clock* (1980)

No challenge essential premises of society = moralized capitalism (return to
 liberal virtues of pre-urban New England)

Reinvest individual with moral responsibility (stripped from economic
 determinism & forces of history)

Dominant image = individual in relationship to family and society

Space for action ever diminishing --> resistance = imagination = value &
 theater = testament

III. MILLER'S CHARACTERS

Awakening of the moral conscience & need for spiritual liberation

Characters' guilt = product of human nature defined by contradiction

Tension self/society = source of persistent liberalism & work as tragic

Physical surroundings crush individual & limit his freedom

Miller's (= Ibsen's) method --> rational structure to existence

Miller (= Freud) --> guilt primary social mechanism (responsibility)

Character = not merely convenience of plot --> subject of his work

Strategy = stripping of illusions & falsehoods

Language = express an inner world & penetrate evasions

Dominant mood = loss (respect, love, direction, sociality)

Most characters = blind to the consolation of personal relationships

Female characters = continuity (conservatism) + Male characters = melody
 ==> potential weakness

Interior monologues (power & force, but no bonds with those around us)

Miller's real skill = abstract issues --> human dilemmas & lyrical as value

IV. ARTHUR MILLER'S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* (1949)

Origins = short-story ('In Memoriam')

Story of aging salesman, baffled by lifetime of failure

Willy Loman = anxieties of a culture (existential world --> determinisms)

More than dramatization of American dream

Irony of Willy's life = people's estimations of his value --> Everyman

Relationship Willy-Biff --> Family (Am. mythology)

Philosophy of competition --> Lyricism defers to materialism (pragmatism)

Drama = Biff's necessity for Willy's abandonment

Fault = individual & self-interest systematized into capitalism

Dissatisfaction (lack of success confuses spiritual with financial failure)

Willy had the wrong dreams (possession of soul through world)

Linda's actions = compassionate concern but connection with his death

Originality = staging --> created theatrical correlative to Willy's tortured mind

(Action moves between past & present) --> Realistic texture & distortions

created by his memory = Blend of realism and expressionism

Eric Bentley = tragedy destroys social play & vice versa

Willy (America's past) --> lost the space for his dreams to assume reality

Ambiguity in play's conclusion

742 performances (American Perry Award, New York Drama Critics' Circle

Award & Pulitzer prize)

V. ARTHUR MILLER: THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER

Confront dead level of banality with depths of guilt = liberal parable
 Ordinary people vs. extraordinary demands & accusations
 Crime punished by victim --> Inarticulate characters (disaster --> speechless)
 Families not belong to ethnic group --> representatives of society
The Crucible (political parallel to our time in the Salem witch trial)
 Willy Loman requires to be 'well-liked' (vs. public role)
Death of a Salesman = plainest, most emphatic form = Expressionism
 Uncle Ben = American will to success (Social Darwinist school) <--> Willy's
 way to success = being impressive, being persuasive, being well-liked
 Success = due of every citizen <--> failure = crime
 Sex = evil & false value
 Proletarian life = alternative to commercialism (submerged rebellion against
 oppressive capitalist system)

VI. ARTHUR MILLER: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POLITICAL DRAMATIST IN AMERICA

Attitudes not radical & innovatory but puzzled (not break with countrymen)
 Literary development with the times --> UN-Am. Activities Committee 1956
 Father's image diminished with the Depression
 Theatre Guild National Award of 1937 (Tennessee Williams)
 Money came later from radio scripts
 Miller's plays work to 'unseen goal' --> self & society apart
 Miller's obsessions with 'good name', law, authority, self and society, the
 Unpardonable Sin and the inevitability of suicide in extreme situations -->
 arguments -> simplified analyses (<-- trust human ability to learn & change)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS (UNIT 5):

1.- Which do you think are the most relevant biographical events in Arthur Miller's life?

2.- Name some of Miller's earlier plays and plots.

3.- How can you characterize Miller's development as a writer?

4.- Describe Miller's world vision and philosophy as reflected in his literary work.

5.- Which are the main themes and plots of Miller's *The Crucible* and *Incident at Vichy*?

6.- Explain the main functions of Miller's characters in his work.

7.- Which are the themes and plot of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*?

8.- Can you describe the most relevant literary characteristics of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*?

9.- What do you think are the main aims of Miller's work?

10.- Explain Miller's work as a dramatist in social and political terms.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS (UNIT 5):

1.- Which do you think were the most relevant biographical events in Arthur Miller's life?

Arthur Miller was born in Harlem in 1915 (not then what is now). Then it was a radically mixed, largely middle-class area, though changing fairly rapidly. The Miller family, Jewish immigrants from Austria, were fairly well off, and in 1929 moved to Manhattan and settled in Brooklyn where they weathered the Depression, though the Wall Street crash, which occurred when Miller was fourteen, destroyed the family business.

After leaving school Miller went to work with his father but, unable to stand the life, he tried to find another job, in doing so encountering a fierce anti-semitism. Confronted with evidence of irrational prejudice, he tended to be drawn to rationalistic accounts of social process, firstly flirting with communism and then being drawn to liberalism. At the age of nineteen he went to the University of Michigan, beginning as a journalism major and then switching to English. Here he began to write in earnest and met others whose political views chimed with his own. He married a fellow student from Michigan, the daughter of an insurance salesman and a Catholic. They settled in Brooklyn and lived on her income in a publishing company and his own from a series of radio plays, slight efforts in which he took little pride.

2.- Name some of Miller's earlier plays and plots.

'Honor at Dawn', Miller's first play, won the University of Michigan Avery Hopwood Award. Essentially a 1930s product, it outlines the growing social awareness of Max Zabriskie, inadvertently caught up in a strike, who, in the course of the play, comes to understand the need for such concerted action in order to defeat the corruption and the injustice which he sees around him. In 'They Too Arise', his next play, there is the same sense of family struggling to sustain its dignity and its values in the face of financial collapse, the same portrait of a younger generation resisting the slow slide into pragmatism.

'The Golden Years', written between 1939 and 1940 and due to the collapse of the WPA (Works Progress Administration) Theatre Project, unproduced and unpublished, moves closer to addressing the more fundamental issues underlying this concern with a corrosive materialism. The play is an account of the conquest of Mexico by Cortés. Then he returned to the war as a context in his next play, unproduced and unpublished, 'The Half Bridge' (1941-43). A melodrama with Nazi spies, villainous plots, and a man redeemed from corruption by the vulnerable innocence of a woman, it nevertheless reflected Miller's sense of an American idealism betrayed by time and by human failure.

3.- How can you characterize Miller's development as a writer?

In the 1920s people believed that 'nothing had any consequences'. There was no value, in short, economically or in anything else. It was a valueless, totally fictional world. But the events of the 1930s convinced him of the rationality of the world. What he derived from his contemplation of history was that it could be changed but not merely through the redistribution of economic power. In fact he developed a decidedly non-Marxist faith in the individual.

Miller's debut in the theater, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), was a profound disappointment but he was more successful with *Situation Normal* (1944). It was not until *All My Sons* (1947) that he began to think of himself as a writer (public reputation and economic future).

Miller began his career in the Federal Theater. He joined this group just before its conclusion, but he has remained in the public arena of social theater. In his plays, Miller's restless social conscience moves towards the logical nihilism of *Incident at Vichy* -from the sociability of the thirties, through the confused liberalism of the forties, to the bewildered emptiness of the sixties. The plays are the barometer of his audience, measuring through his own sense of the pressures of the last quarter of a century. Before the House UN-American Activities Committee, in June 1956, he admitted that he protested against the outlawing of the Communist party, opposed the Smith Act (whereby it is an offense to advocate the overthrow of the US. Government by force), and refused to name people he had seen at the Communist writers' meetings seventeen years earlier.

4.- Describe Miller's world vision and philosophy as reflected in his literary work.

From the beginning Arthur Miller's concern was with a baffled idealism, with the refusal of life to assume the regular pattern which seems necessary foundation for personal and public meaning. The Depression placed American myths no less than American realities under pressure. The fixed points were shifting. And, placed under pressure, human relationships fractured, as had that between his parents. Value became price; pragmatism displaced principle. And, lacking any sustainable version of individual integrity, society became little more than systematized injustice, an enabling mechanism which validated self-interest and simple materialism. His philosophy was more Emersonian than Marxist. His model had rather more to do with liberal humanism than with economic determinism. Thus, in his early plays (*The Man Who Had All the Luck*), he never proposes a fundamental change in the economic or political structure of his society. He merely insists that a moral basis for action should be rediscovered, that the crisis should result in a reconstituted definition of social behavior.

5.- Which are the main themes and plots of Miller's *The Crucible* and *Incident at Vichy*?

PLOT: *The Crucible* concerns a supposed outbreak of witchcraft in Salem in 1692. A group of girls play at summoning up devils with Tituba, a black servant. One of them, daughter of Reverend Parris, suffers what is apparently a catatonic reaction. When the Reverend Hale is summoned to test for witchcraft, Tituba is encouraged to confess and to implicate others in order to save herself. In the ensuing hysteria the girls find that their best defense lies in accusation. This finally reaches out to include the saintly but emotionally cold Elizabeth Proctor, named by her husband's former mistress Abigail Williams. Condemned to death, he is offered his life if he will confess and thus validate the court. That he is able to resist this is the evidence and source of his dignity. It is also presented as a social act, an acknowledgment of the obligation which he has to others.

THEMES: In *The Crucible* (1958), Miller chose to underscore the parallel between the situation in 1690s Salem and 1950s America, though with some tact, in the description of historical circumstances which appears at the beginning of the first act. The play constitutes a moral education in the nature of power, the central significance of guilt, and, almost paradoxically, the possibility of rational analysis. The judges remain virtually unexamined, while the minor, though crucial figures (Parris and Hale) are presented as being motivated by considerations of career and self-importance. The parallel with McCarthy is plainly. They were captured by a myth to which most of the community would have subscribed. Their fault lay in their continued prosecution of a case which was slowly revealed to be false, in their permitting their early honest error to be extended and compounded. Proctor's room for manoeuvre is reduced not merely by the reality of public hysteria but by the fact of his own past errors (process of self-betrayal interests Miller). *The Crucible* is built on a rhythm of assertion and denial, statement and retraction. The 'poetic right' -to create people of higher self-awareness than the contemporary scene affords- tempts him toward a rhetoric which brings the play at moments close to melodrama.

PLOT: In *Incident at Vichy* (1964) the action is set in 'a place of detention' in Vichy, France, 1942. It is a kind of ante-room to hell in that those who find themselves there are suspected of being Jews, or, in one case, a gypsy. They are to be sorted, therefore, into the 'innocent' and the 'guilty'; the former being given a white pass (emblem of racial purity), the latter being sent on towards their death. As they wait (also an aristocrat, an artist, a psychologist, a German officer repelled by his work, and an SS man enthusiastic for his) they discuss the reason for their arrest -an inherently ironic discussion since reason plays no part in their plight. (brutal fact of prejudice and *real-politik*)

6.- Explain the main functions of Miller's characters in his work.

Miller is concerned throughout his work with the awakening of the moral conscience, and the need for a spiritual liberation. In a sense, he reminds us of Odets's characters' constant temptation to take refuge in what they assume to be an historical determinism. The guilt which suffer so many of his characters (not until *After the Fall*) is the product of a human nature defined by contradiction, by a persistent struggle between opposing forces. For Miller the tension between self and society, between an insistence on identity and a simultaneous acknowledgment of the limitations of that identity, is the source equally of his persistent liberalism and his conception of his work as tragic. And this assertion of the equal potency of free will and determinism tends to find its correlative in the *mise-en-scène*, in his sense of the physical transition between the openness of the nineteenth-century American setting and the constraints of a twentieth-century world. The rhythm of life changes and the individual is required to adjust his personal rhythm to it. The physical surroundings themselves crush the individual, limiting his freedom. In *Death of a Salesman*, from a curtain painted with leaves as if remembering the natural world, to a shift in stage lightning the first effect fades and the dominant apartment buildings appear, just as they had historically, standing thereby as an image of the constricted physical and moral world which Willy now inhabits.

Character became not merely a convenience of plot; it was in many ways the subject of his work. A moral agent, he had to be granted a degree of autonomy and social significance (responsibility) denied both by the absurdist and the Marxist, and to many by war. (no confidence in the recreation of idealism). The strategy of his plays lay in the slow unraveling of an unproblematic reality, the progressive stripping of illusions and falsehoods in a process designed to expose a truth the contours of which are presumed to be clear and unambiguous. Language is assumed to have the power both to express an inner world whose irrationalities are, taken to yield rational analysis, and paradoxically to penetrate the evasions which can equally take linguistic form.

For Miller character must have a universalized validity. According to Leslie Fiedler, his are crypto-Jewish characters, characters who are in habit, speech and condition of life typical Jewish-American, but who are presented as something general-American (*Death*).

The dominant mood is one of loss (respect, love, direction, sociality). His protagonists want to fill the gap between their lyrical dreams and their practical realities, gaining an honored place in their social environment, and also the distance from their loved ones, but betrayal and guilt weighs on them like the past which they believe so implacable. It is irony in the distance between themselves and their youth, their ideals which had to bend before necessity or because of their own selfishness which is offered as a central truth of their lives. Miller's work is avowedly anti-apocalyptic. His analysis of the collapse of the self and the decay of communality is acute; his response not so. They depend on others'

opinion to live and they finally die because of their lack of opinion about themselves. In their internal monologues, opposing views of the world, of the self and of morality, are allowed to argue.

Most characters are blind to the consolation and even transcendence available through personal relationships. The love which they feel for one another is real enough. To some degree it shapes their actions and determines their desperate strategies, which are none the less real for their failure to be realized. But it fails to hold them back from the fate in which they willfully conspire. And this is the basis of the irony which slowly erodes their confidence and their hopes.

There is no tension in most of his female characters. They are flaccid and, as a consequence, the values which they represent lack conviction and to some degree dramatic force. In fact, as Leslie Fiedler says, American writers have traditionally excluded physically women from their work or seen the moral imagination and the definitional encounter with the real as essentially a male preserve. Indeed, as representatives of a social system which grants the family iconic significance they have a central role to play. The problem is that as conservative forces, as the guardians of a materialistic system which charges them with protecting the material interests of the men they marry or to whom they give birth, they tend to lack the tension which typifies his essentially liberal protagonists. It is their (Linda's) failure to understand that, which is the final sign of her total identification with the system which destroys men (Willy). And it is this male resistance which Miller chose to regard as tragic.

7.- Which are the themes and plot of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*?

Death of a Salesman is the story of an aging salesman, baffled by a lifetime of failure in a society which apparently values only success. Miller's achievement lays in his ability to distill in the person of Willy Loman the anxieties of a culture which had exchanged an existential world of physical and moral possibility for the determinisms of modern commercial and industrial life -the country for the city. The dislocations of Willy's private life -discontinuities which open up spaces in familial relationships no less than in memory and experience- are equally those of a society chasing the chimera of material success as a substitute for spiritual fulfillment.

It is something more than the dramatization of the American dream, its corruptions and coercions. Perhaps it has its flaws but the human reality of Willy Loman is such that few works have provoked the shock of recognition which informs Willy's anguished debate with himself and with the world in which he has never felt at home.

Willy betrays himself and the others. The irony of Willy's life is that he has accepted other people's estimations of his value. The play is Miller's requiem for a country which, no

less than Willy, had all the wrong dreams as it is a gesture of absolution towards those who allow themselves to be too fully known.

Death of a Salesman is built around the relationship between Willy and his son, Biff.

The family, so much an icon of American mythology, becomes the appropriate prism through which to view that mythology. Willy feels guilty because he feels responsible for Biff's failure, but Biff equally feels guilty because he recognizes a responsibility which he cannot fulfill, the responsibility to redeem Willy's empty life. For all the Loman men it is indicative of a basic contradiction between their aspirations and the reality of their lives, between their setting and the essence of their dreams.

The fault does not only lie in the individual; it also patently lies in self-interest systematized into capitalism. Willy is puzzled when Charley boasts that his son Bernard's success had been a consequence of his own lack of concern.

Biff and Willy feel a profound if unfocused sense of dissatisfaction with their lives.

Willy Loman's life is rooted in America's past (wagon in South Dakota, his father has made and sold flutes through the frontier territory). Willy was thus born into a world in transition, a world in which the pressure of the material was already unmaking the pastoral myth on the rural nature of nineteenth-century America. Biff does much the same here, for the world of rural simplicity to which he will now presumably return had provided the context for his grandfather's desertion of Willy (where Uncle Ben had begun his myths climb to wealth and power). The frontier bred the disease. And if it also represents a natural world of pure process then even that is under pressure.

8.- Can you describe the most relevant literary characteristics of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*?

Death of a Salesman is a memory play. Miller's originality also lies in the staging through which he created a theatrical correlative to Willy's tortured mind. The action had to move easily between past and present. This realistic texture of Willy's environment was crucial but so were the distortions created by his memory, the fragments of the past through which he sorted with increasing desperation. The result was a blend of realism and expressionism which dramatized personal psychology in the context of social change. Miller's resistance to the total determinism of naturalism, however, is in a sense symbolized by his reaction against the totally realistic set (also director Elia Kazan and designer Jo Mielziner) and it would not be unreasonable to see the incomplete walls and insubstantial props as evidence of his belief in change and even transcendence.

Death of a Salesman exhibits all the most characteristic traits, in their plainest, most emphatic form. Plainness is achieved because Miller makes a principle out of his usual vagueness. The principle is Expressionism. The vague, typical hero becomes the

embodiment of typicality. Willy Loman ('lowman'), his friends Charley and Bernard, have no last name at all, and neither does Willy's employer. Furthermore, the salesman is the most representative member of our commercial society; in a sense, when the salesman dies, this society dies. (Symbolic reading of the salesman's role)

Preserving the mystery keeps Willy the archetypal salesman of our time. Also Loman's family is Anyfamily or Everyfamily for Miller does not give specific details of anything which can lead us to any conclusion about their origins. (Vague and universal). Willy is not only the product of a family but of an adventurous American past. When his brother arrives in Brooklyn he asks 'So this is Brooklyn, eh?'. The very presence of the daring entrepreneur is enough to show up the salesman who has been playing it safe all his life. Willy is also a useful instrument for Miller's social criticism. This quality of his is the first trait by which we identify this play as an example of Expressionism. Miller's definition of Expressionism in his Harvard lectures: 'It is a form...which manifestly seeks to dramatize the conflict of either social, religious, or moral forces per se'. In his most recent article, Miller finds that the Greeks and the Expressionists are alike in their effort 'to present the hidden forces'.

Miller's real skill lies in turning abstract issues into human dilemmas and in establishing the lyrical as itself a value. It is for his characters that he will be remembered, people struggling, with such honesty as they can muster, to make sense out of their lives and to leave some mark of their existence on a world coldly oblivious to human need and implacable in the face of personal anguish. Their anguish goes deeper than such causes and their struggles to justify themselves in their own eyes touch on an area of experience which is restricted to no individual, to no society and no time. Miller was never a revolutionary and has never written a play which proposes anything more radical than the restoration of American liberal principles. If his protagonists fight to the death for what is to come, it is never with the revolutionary's desire to transform the social world but merely with a desire to discover the mechanism whereby it may legitimately be claimed and inherited.

For Miller, his female characters establish a kind of principle of continuity, a sense of the sheer succession of events, a kind of principle of continuity, a kind of underlying historicity. They constitute the basic rhythm of life. But the male characters constitute the melody. And this is a potential weakness, for while such an approach does sharpen the focus of his principal characters it also inhibits a dialectic. His plays become essentially interior monologues, monologues of considerable power and force, but ones in which the principle of connectiveness, the need to renew one's bonds with those around us, is ultimately unconvincing because of his failure to grant that other a similar moral perception.

9.- What do you think are the main aims of Miller's work?

The plays are parables, and the characters are as typical as the prodigal son or Aesop's lambs and wolves. They are as unattached and as non-sectarian as the medieval Everyman, and that is why they cannot be individuals. There can be no more suitable emblem of our commercial society than the salesman Willy Loman, especially since we are never told what he sells. In a sense, he sells himself, but the product wears out. Whatever these plays may be, they are instructive. Each play is constructed to expose a pattern of guilt, to find out who is guilty and to impose the penalty of death. The plot drives us from one to another of the devastating points which the prosecutor-dramatist makes against his characters.

Despite the attempts of the House Un-American Activities Committee, in the 1950s, to locate Miller as a radical, what one finds in his work, from the very beginning, is not so much a Marxist analysis of alienation as an insistence on liberal values, on the absolute necessity for the reassertion of an idealism eroded by financial collapse but, most crucially debilitated by a collapse of will. And though the family is seen as an agent of social dislocation and a disabling privatism, it is not the root cause of moral decay.

Perhaps more than any other American writer -through the determinisms of the Depression, the irrational anti-semitism of the war years and the persecutions of the McCarthy era- he maintained the necessity for the individual to acknowledge a double responsibility to self and society which is the essence of classic liberalism, and he remained an incorrigibly social dramatist:

Society is inside of man and man is inside society, and you cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and prevent him being what he is not. The fish is in the water and the water is in the fish. (Miller, Robert A. Martin, ed., *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, Harmondsworth, 1978. pp. 8-

Miller's plays work as to an 'unseen goal'. But the terms of this mission themselves destroy the hope of reaching balance: self and society are placed obstinately apart by the very set-up of the actions. Miller's obsessions with 'good name', law, authority, self and society, the Unpardonable Sin and the inevitability of suicide in extreme situations, overwhelm his arguments into simplified analyses, confusions and a final paralysis of desperate warnings. Perhaps the release from such an armor can come only from a more detailed understanding of that 'little tax' which is the mainspring of trust in human ability to learn and change.

10.- Explain Miller's work as a dramatist in social and political terms.

Miller never really challenged the essential premises of his society in such a way as to suggest the necessity for or the possibility of radical change. He seemed only to advocate a kind of moralized capitalism, a return to the liberal virtues of a pre-urban New England. His struggle as a public figure was to reinvest the individual with a moral responsibility apparently stripped from him by economic determinism and the forces of history. The purpose and process of his plays has thus been to locate the individual in a social context which goes some way to explain but never wholly to define his or her identity. The dominant image of his plays is of that individual in relationship to family and society, and if from the very beginning he felt that betrayal was a natural compulsion he has also continued to insist that there is a counterforce which seeks to heal the wounds, to find the meaning of the self beyond the self.

If the space for action is ever diminishing, as the city closes in on the individual, in the darkness there remains a crucial spirit of resistance. And at the heart of that resistance is the imagination, which is still capable of projecting itself into the place and the sensibility of the other. To Miller the imagination is a value and the theater a testament to the human need to understand, to communicate and to create a reality which we can inhabit with dignity and hope. No other American dramatist has so directly engaged the anxieties and fears, the myths and dreams, of a people desperate to believe in a freedom for which they ever see less evidence. No other American writer has so successfully touched a nerve of the national (American) consciousness.

The muscular, proletarian life is recommended as a healthy alternative to commercialism. (Willy is most himself when he works with his hands, putting up ceilings, putting on the new porch). These bits of talk and action which recommended nature and manual labor to us are brief and not entirely coherent, but they form a main repository of Miller's positive values. Their brevity and incoherence imply that Miller finds it difficult to come out for the good, in any form. The positive in *Salesman* is shown in a hesitant and tentative fashion, while the bad is well shown.

Salesman represents the decline of the revolutionary mystique into a combination of conventional proletarian gestures and vague belief in friendly good folks at the grass roots. It is like a submerged rebellion against the oppressing capitalist system. *Salesman* strikes a balance between the social problem of the shattered myth of success and Willy Loman's sex and family problems. In the vagueness of Willy's identity and his occupation, in the mysterious success of Uncle Ben, in the incomprehensible magnetism of Willy's proletarian tendencies, we have not only the studied ambiguity of Miller's method but also the quality of the radical political climate. In more ways than the dramatist may know, his plays speak for the spirit of the time.