CHAPTER IV

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The play, After the Fall, reveals, in the form of a confessional monologue, Miller's new assessment of the society in the 1960s. Miller sees destiny as destructively pre-determined in a world revealing "the urgent need inside the protagonist to keep his spirit alive against all odds, even if he has to embark on a self-destructive course of action."¹

The theme of After the Fall is an extension of Biff's statement in Death of a Salesman, "I'm just what I am, that's all" (p.217). This statement of amoral experience is expressed in terms of the truth which the protagonist of the play, Quentin, discovers. He learns in the course of the play to accept the world seen after the fall. He questions

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?²

Miller's attempt in *After the Fall* is come to terms with the fact of the violence, which he does in an age of violence as it were. The theme is an indication of Miller's sensibility to contemporary problems concerning the study of man and the survival of the race which Miller points out is the true subject of the committed dramatist. More than *Death of a Salesman*, *After the Fall* could be characterised as a play unravelling the interacting complexities of "the Inside of his Head." The form of the play marks more or less a return to the kaleidoscopic glimpses and technique of *Death of a Salesman*, a technique which Miller identifies with the form of a confession. *After the Fall*, in the words of C.W.E. Bigsby, "represents not merely the confession of an individual anxious to resolve the paradox of his life but also man's attempt to catalogue the sins of a generation in a search for comprehension."³

²Arthur Miller, *After the Fall* (London: Bantam Books, 1964), pp.162-163. Subsequent citations from *After the Fall* are from this edition. The page numbers are given in parenthesis against the quotations.

The form of the play, to be more precise, follows the pattern of the stream of conscious technique. After the Fall relies on an associational process in order to depict Quentin's compelling need to understand himself. Quentin sees that "his success as an attorney has crumbled in his hands as he sees only his own egotism and no wider goal beyond himself." The play consists of Quentin's recollections which reveal in a way the essential egotism of humanity. It employs two main symbols which are seen as examples of personal cruelty and egotism destroying love. These symbols are the tower of a German concentration camp and the committee on un-American activities. They are both personifications of personal failings deriving their power from innocents who stand by and victims who succumb. Miller uses both these symbols to highlight literally the individual acts. When Quentin's mother Rose discovers that her husband has lost all their money in a stock crash, all that she can think about is "My bonds." The bond of love.

4Arthur Miller, 'A Foreword by the Author,' The Saturday Evening Post (1 Feb. 1964), 32.
which Quentin as the son had imagined between his mother and his father is seen shattered under stress. This contributes to his own distrust of love as a force and to his awareness of a guilt with which an insistence on innocence can be invested. He recalls yet another incident of personal viles and treachery. Lou, who has been arraigned by the committee of activities has been degraded by his wife, Elsie. When Lou protests, she cuts him down with contempt by saying "This is hardly the time for illusions" (p.37). The generic connection between this and other instances of cruelty is suggested by the instant recall of Rose's vicious denunciation of Ike and the lighting of the camp tower. The play, After the Fall, turns its search light on the human being who has battled with himself and known the meaning of confusion, regret, despair and so on. "The action takes place in the mind, thought, and memory of Quentin," (p.1) a successful New York lawyer, whose revealing of his mental processes shows the quest for the recovery of lost innocence. Quentin stands under the shadow of the blasted stone town of a German concentration camp, a symbol of violence and brutality of the present
age. He is engaged in introspection and building up through reminiscences his past life and all its connection with public and private violence. The reminiscences include his childhood and the parental love showered on him, his two unhappy and unsuccessful marriages with Louise and Maggie, his involvement with friends and numerous women, his radicalism which made him suspect in the eyes of Jitterburg, his confrontation with situations which put to the test his concept of integrity. Quentin asks himself whether he should marry Holga or not in spite of his marital failures. With pitiless candour and unsparing self-scrutiny, Quentin sets out to examine the course of his life. In the course of this examination, he turns an inward gaze and tries to analyze what his own responsibility is in murdering love, in masking truth and in practising cruelty upon others. After the Fall sets aside the belief in the perfectibility of man and thereby raises its revolt against the conventional responses to social questions at the hands of the dramatist of the 30s and the 40s. Miller declares that the sooner the man discovers his imperfection the better. Miller is concerned with the task of identifying this element in a play like After the Fall.
He faces this fact as a fact of existence and shows that the self-centred and imperfect man of After the Fall has a capacity to renew love even in the face of his imperfection. To Miller man is the victim of a hostile society. Individual and corporate cruelty are a legacy of the fall. They are not an inbuilt fault of a society. Man is a victim of himself. Like Hawthorne before him, Miller recognises that guilt is a part of man's humanity. If in All My Sons Joe dies because he has realised that his responsibility extends beyond the family, to man in general, in After the Fall the fact of complicity is in itself sufficient. Death is an irrelevant theatricality. As an individual Quentin has seen how two marriages have wrecked. Almost every person in this play seems to betray love. In Quentin's words, "I loved them all, all! And gave them willing to failure and to death that I might live, as they gave me and gave each other, with a word, a look, a trick, a truth, a lie--and all in love!" (p.162). As Quentin viciously puts it when dissecting Maggie's thoughts:

5C.W.E. Bigsby, 'The Fall and After— Arthur Miller's Confession,' Modern Drama, 10 (Sept. 1967), 128.
And I am full of hatred; I, Maggie, sweet lover of all life — I hate the world! — — — Hate women, hate men, hate all who will not grovel at my feet proclaiming my limitless love for ever and ever!" (p.154).

In Quentin's two marriages, in the relief he finds when Lou dies, in his deserting his father, in his mother's betrayal of him as a boy, in her betrayal of the bankrupt husband, in Mickey's decision to betray his friends to the house investigating committee — in all these, the theme is the individual's betrayal of love to save himself. If Quentin is accused of self-absorption, this accusation can be levelled against every other character in the play except Holga. Quentin's second marriage is like the love of Gay and Roseline in The Misfits. It reveals the delusion about the recapturing of innocence. In a ghastly scene Quentin refuses to help his wife to save her own life. The Nazi concentration camp is a macrocosm reflecting and paralleling what the individual does at the microcosmic level. When Quentin looks as if he had committed a sacrilege, Holga reads his emotion and tells him: "Quentin, dear — no one they didn't kill can be innocent again"(p.30).
Innocence seems to have departed from the scene of human life. If this were the message of the play, *After the Fall*, it would be one of the bleakest plays of our time. Holga, who goes with Quentin to see *The Magic Flute* brings a bleak hope when she says:

Holga: I had the same dream returned each night until I dared not go to sleep and grew quite ill. I dreamed I had a child, and even in the dream I saw it was my life, and it was an idiot, and I ran away. But it always crept onto my lap again, clutched at my clothes. Until I thought, if I could kiss it, whatever in it was my own, perhaps I could sleep. And I bent to its broken face, and it was horrible ... but I kissed it. I think one must finally take one's life in one's arms, Quentin.

(pp.30-31).

Holga is not blind to the violence of man. She has learnt to face upto it. She tells Quentin the story of her life which is something like a parable. What she has learnt from the facts of war, Quentin discovers in the inability of love to overcome the cruelty which springs from egotism. "What burning cities taught her and the death of love taught
me; that we are very dangerous!" (p.162). He accepts
the image of the idiot child and understands the need
for love. Quentin walks up to Holga at the end of the
play and in doing so he accepts his responsibility for
his past cruelty. He recognises also that this cruelty
stems from the nature of man," ... 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 —
as to an idiot in the house — for give it; again and again ...
forever?" (p.163). The question mark at the end of the
sentence emphasises that there is no certainty that this
is a reasonable basis on which to live.

This is a remarkable statement from a battered man.
In this kind of conclusion the play comes to it has been
seen as a forerunner to Who is Afraid of Virginia Wolf?
which seems to emphasize that an end to dreams is not an
end to hope. Like Quentin, the protagonist in After the
Fall, there is the protagonist of Albert Camus' The Fall,
who is a successful lawyer and who comes to realize that
his fame and success derive solely from his egotism. Like
Quentin, Camus' protagonist too finally arrives at the
necessity of acceptance:
I realised once and for all that I was not cured, that I was still cornered and that I had to make do with it as best I could. Ended the glorious life, but ended also the frenzy and the convulsions. I had to submit and admit my guilt. I had to live in the little ease.\footnote{Albert Camus, \textit{The Fall} (London, 1963), p. 80.}

The little ease of which he speaks is a cell in which it is impossible either to stand straight up or lie down. He endorses the notion that man's aspiration has its limitations and that an honest self-examination concludes with acceptance. In both Camus' \textit{The Fall} and Miller's \textit{After the Fall}, the confessional structure and texture are employed and the individual is seen as confessing on behalf of man. In \textit{The Fall} Clamence keeps a stolen painting and arranges everything "so as to make myself an accomplice."\footnote{Ibid., p. 107.} Quentin leaves a note for his wife to read" in order to ... somehow join the condemned,\footnote{Miller, 'After the Fall,' \textit{The Saturday Evening Post} (1 Feb. 1964), 47. Omitted from final printed version.} Camus aims at revealing the foundation of success built on self-esteem and condescension.
To Miller, as the play After the Fall reveals, acceptance implies accepting the violence and cruelty of man. It is an acknowledgement that this is man "but that a constantly renewed love is the only response which can restore integrity and defeat fear." 9

The analytical probing of the confessional form shows how the play is primarily a way of looking at man and his nature as the only source of the violence which has come closer and closer to destroying the race. This is a view which as Miller has rightly observed, "does not look toward the social or political ideas as the creators of the violence but into the nature of the human being himself." 10 Miller's moral insight focuses on subjective processes leading up to the intensely social consequences of the fanatic individual's self-assertion. The process of self-discovery on the part of Quentin is achieved in such a way that, according to Miller, he "himself" turned at the edge of the abyss to look at his experience, his


10 Author's Foreword to After the Fall,' Saturday Evening Post, 237 (1 Feb. 1964), 32.
nature and his time.\textsuperscript{11}

After the Fall tries to pull together the strands of the social, familial, and personal guilt which appear in the earlier plays. Guilt becomes "a fashioned baroque monster."\textsuperscript{12} Through the solipsistic monologues of Quentin the structure of the play as well as the existence of all other characters is revealed. Quentin appears a lonely island of existence. His separateness from others prevents him from loving them. For Quentin, as for Willy Loman, images arising from the family's past torment him. The early childhood incidents involving his elder brother Dan and the toy sailing boat together with Quentin's most haunting memory of his father's ruin in the Depression of the 1930s are woven deftly into the action of the play. The sailboat memory occurs first with an ironic appropriateness when Quentin accuses himself of trying to love everybody. It reminds him of his inability to mourn his mother and this modulates into his inability to mourn Maggie. He contemplates leaving Holga as he left Louise ("there is some freedom in the going") only to recall how his mother who

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 31.

idolised him as a child encouraged him to the treason of deserting his father in order to pursue his own ambition. If Louise complains about Quentin's coldness towards her, Maggie, who lives in her own private hell, faces the failure of the marriage with Quentin. Quentin desperately tries to force Maggie into an admission of her own responsibility for what is happening to them. He is convinced of Maggie's turpitude. It is inconceivable for him that she should not have been guilty, like his mother, of a heinous act of treachery. The instinctive transfer of the mother's guilt to the wife reveals Quentin's state of mental distress.

Quentin: Yes, I lied. Every day. We are all separate people. I tried not to be, but finally one is - a separate person. I have to survive too, honey.

Maggie: So where you going to put me.
Quentin: (trying not to break) You discuss that with your doctor.
Maggie: But if you loved me ....
Quentin: But how would you know, Maggie? Do you know any more who I am? Aside from my name? I'm all the evil in the world, aren't I? All the betrayal, the broken hopes, the murderous revenge? A suicide kills two people,
Maggie, that's what it's for! So I'm removing myself, and perhaps it will lose its point.

(p.149)

The key word throughout the play seems to be the word "idiot" which Quentin remembers that his mother utters at crisis after crisis. Elsie's reiterated word is "He's a moral Idiot!" (p.52). When the original clash between Quentin's parents dissolves into the concentration camp, Holga, whose hopefulness Quentin admires, describes to him a recurring dream, which she has experienced wherein she says, "I think one must finally take one's life in one's arms," (pp.30-31).

Quentin's response to this speech of Holga's contains a subtle echo of Auden's. Quentin says "It sounds foolish, but I feel .... unblessed" (p.31). "I'll always bless you. Always!" (p.8) tells Felice to Quentin on her first appearance and later too, when she "holds up her hand in blessing" (p.31). Whenever Felice is recalled, it is in association with this act of blessing. At the end of the play, Felice is again about to raise her arm in blessing when Quentin shakes her hand, "aborting her enslavement"(p.163). Felice's function in the play seems
to epitomise for the audience Quentin's capacity to inspire in others a love that he is unable to reciprocate adequately. The memory of Felice recurs again and again "enslaving him to the guilt it evokes." It is Felice's attitude of constancy which Quentin cannot bear. "It frightens me, and I wish to God she'd stop blessing me!" (p. 91). Felice, alone of his four "pre-Holga" women, sustains her love for him despite this and she can always bless him. Perhaps because of this she is the least realized of all the "pre-Holga" women in the play. Quentin's final speech, through its hesitant eloquence, brings together the major themes of the play.

'What burning cities taught her and the death of love taught me; .... that's why I wake each morning like a boy .... To know, and even hapily, that we meet unblessed; .... after the Fall .... 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 -- as to an idiot in the house-- forgive it; again and again .... forever? (pp. 162-163).

After the Fall, one of the most humane of Miller's plays up to this point is concerned with forgiveness, in spite of its candid and sentimental analysis of Maggie. The play dealing with the ideal of betrayal by the falsity within, reveals a balance between the forces of hate and forces of love.

After the Fall, and Incident at Vichy which makes more explicit the concerns of the previous play, are two plays which appear uncharacteristically close to one another in dramatizing variations on the same theme. A case for their significance as social drama has been made by Bigsby. Here in these plays Miller finds that the acceptance of the existence of the guilt provides rather a true basis for living.