INTRODUCTION
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Arthur Miller, along with Tennessee Williams, is one of the two playwrights of the post-war American theatre to be considered a major dramatist. He is regarded as a "social dramatist," but often labelled either a Marxist or a humanist. Some critics believe that his work presents a social commentary on the economic structure of the United States. William Weigand sees him sermonizing on the pathetic martyrdom of an oppressed middle class. He finds Miller pursuing Clifford Odets' Marxist themes.\(^1\) Eleanor Clark, in her discussion of the play, *Death of a Salesman*, traces the scene where Willy Loman is "brutally fired" to party line literature of the thirties.\(^2\) Where critics do not go so far as to find in Miller a social reformer bent on condemning the evils engendered by capitalism, they evaluate his plays in terms of the contemporary values and decline they depict. For a critic like Harold Clurman, the merit of Miller's treatment of his material lies in moralistic rationalism and "his talent is for a kind of humanistic juris-


\(^2\)Eleanor Clark, 'Death of a Salesman,' *Partisan Review*, 16 (1949), 633.
prudence. While it is acknowledged that Miller's purpose is to render humane judgment, a critic like Paul West argues that the implicit warning contained in Miller's plays against materialistic success can be seen in the light of Christian existentialism. The blaming of the system, according to Henry Popkin, is carried in terms of a "liberal parable of hidden evil and social responsibility."

Some of the critical opinions cited above might tend to give the impression that Miller should be regarded as a writer with a message, affirmative or negative, humane or socialistic. His early socialist associations and his hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1956 might reinforce this impression. In an article entitled 'The Shadow of the Gods' Miller refers to the individual's relation to his social context in the face of the economic and political imperatives. In this essay Miller expresses his basic attitude towards the role of social forces in drama and towards a synthesis of the psychological and social:


I hope I have made one thing clear ... - and it is that 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 to prevent him from being what he is not. The fish is in the water and the water is in the fish.\(^6\)

In the play, *All My Sons*, Chris Keller more or less instructs his father in the following words: "You can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it."\(^7\)

An articulate defender of the "social play," Miller has written at some length on this genre and declared that, contrary to critical opinion, the social play need not be synonymous with social criticism, although the two are often seen as identical. To summarize Miller's views, a social play, in contrast to a non-social or a psychological play, demonstrates the impact of social forces - the class structure, the economy, the system of values, family patterns and so on - on the lives and psychology of the characters so much so that


the basic similarity of men, and not their uniqueness, is emphasized. Finally, according to Miller, the social play addresses itself to the question, as did classical Greek drama which he regards as the forerunner of all social plays, "how are we to live?" in a social and humanistic sense. Miller reiterates the view that it is futile to attempt to explore the psychological side of man in vacuo, without recourse to his social milieu. He writes, "I can no longer take with ultimate seriousness a drama of individual psychology written for its own sake, however full it may be of insight and precise observation." Though fascinated by "interior psychological questions," and the consequences of fanatic self-assertion, an overriding theme in Miller's plays, from his first successful Broadway production, All My Sons, to The American Clock is the quest for community, a quest involving, for Miller, the portrayal of the struggle between "family relations" and "social relations," or between Gemeinschaft (community)


9 Ibid., p. 7.
Miller writes, all plays we call great, let alone those we call serious, are ultimately involved with some aspect of a single problem. It is this: How may a man make of the outside world a home? How and in what ways must he struggle, what must he strive to change and overcome within himself and outside himself if he is to find the safety, the surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honor which, evidently, all men have connected in their memories with the idea of family? 

In the essay cited above, 'The Family in Modern Drama,' Miller claims that various forms of modern drama "express human relationships of a particular kind, each of them suited to express either a primarily familial relation at one extreme, or a primarily social relation at the other." But it is a synthesis of the social and the psychological that Miller pleads for and seeks to achieve through a


12Ibid., p. 35.
viable dramatic form that could bridge the split between the private life of man and his social life. And after the realistic *All My Sons*, the search has been for fusing the realistic mode which is an expression of the family relationship within the play "and the non-realistic mode which is an expression of the "social relationship within the play." Miller often returns to this point, for instance in his essay, *On Social Plays,* published as an introduction to *A View from the Bridge.* In this essay he refers to "prose realism" as "the one form that was made to express the private life," and writes about the struggle taking place in the drama of the contemporary period as "a struggle at one and the same time to write of private persons privately and yet lift up their means of expression to a poetic - that is, a social - level." Miller's struggle with dramatic form has its beginnings in his realization of the two centres of interest - the private and the social - in *All My Sons.* His subsequent theories of social drama and its relationship to the realistic and the non-realistic


modes of theatrical expression should be regarded primarily as rationalizations of his own attempts to bridge the gap between the social and the personal. And in dramatizing the personal-social interaction, Miller states his ethical bias and points in the direction of the humanistic centre of his plays. He presents his theatrical perspective thus in a comment on After the Fall:

This play is not 'about' something; hopefully, it is something. And primarily it is a way of looking at man and his human nature as the only source of the violence which has come closer and closer to destroying the race. It is a view which does not look toward social or political ideas as the creators of violence, but into the nature of the human being himself.15

Miller, the dramatist, is most profitably looked at through his heroes and through the concern of each of them with his identity - his name, as both John Proctor and Eddie Carbone describe it. The ex cathedra utterances of Miller, as well as the ex aequa comments he makes through

15Arthur Miller, 'Forward to After the Fall,' Saturday Evening Post, 237 (1 Feb. 1964), 32.
his characters which seem occasionally to give the impression of the plays acquiring a narrative voice rather than a dramatized rendering, all point in the direction of Miller's idea of modern drama according to which the true social drama, the "Whole Drama," must recognize that men has both a subjective and an objective existence and that he belongs not only to himself and his family, but to the society around him. For Miller, the serious playwright writes social drama not simply to offer an arraignment of society's evils, which was a standard definition of the social play in the thirties. Nor does he portray the retreat into self-preoccupation which he sees as the most representative characteristic of the American theatre. Each of Miller's heroes is involved in a struggle that arises from his acceptance or rejection of an image that is a product of his society's values. The society may be as small as Eddie Carbone's neighbourhood or it may be as wide as the contemporary America with its dreams and aspirations that helped produce Willy Loman. In the words of Gerald

Wee 1*8 the thane that recurs in all Miller's plays is "the relation between a man's identity and the image that society demands of him."¹⁷ This is one of the major preoccupations of a serious playwright, and as Raymond Williams finds him, Miller has brought back into the theatre in an important way the drama of social questions.¹⁸ This drama is shaped in terms of its social realism in such a way that society is not merely the background against which personal relationships are placed, but as Raymond Williams points out in his 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel':

Neither element, neither the society nor the individual, is there as a priority. The society is not a background against which the personal relationships are studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the way of life. Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of the general life, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal


In the expression of this social realism, Miller adopts the device of the "fatal secret" in *All My Sons*. Ibsen's retrospective method involving a gradual infiltration of the past into the present is employed. *Death of a Salesman* is a near expressionist reconstruction of the realistic substance. In this play Miller has evolved a theatre which is neither argumentative nor hortatory but which, by means of the expressionistic element, gets at the truth residing behind the visible façades. While expressionism in general is attuned to delineating disintegration, in terms of Miller's own progress in the theatre, it becomes a "marvellous shorthand" for humane and felt characterisation so that something like a "social expressionism" is evolved leading to the portrayal not of Willy Loman as a man but of the image of the *Salesman*. *The Crucible*, which is a step towards a more self-awade drama shows how the Salem witch-trials are an important index of a moral crisis - a modern witchhunt.


Set in the context of the loss of social meaning, these plays deal with a complex of personal and social relationships. In *After the Fall*, Miller objectifies the psychological question to present the psychology of men not for its own sake but primarily as it issues forth in its public importance. The material of *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* is something that Miller returns to in another of his family plays, *The Price*. There is in *The Price* a greater economy of characters and incidents and a subtle use of symbols. The play portrays two brothers with their respective psychologies and moral values which conflict at the heart of the social dilemma.