CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION
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All customary estimates of Miller - as a social realist, a clinical analyst, and a prudential moralist tend to ignore the tragic quality of his plays. In the foregoing chapters, I have tried to examine the compatibility of Miller's social plays with the aims and ends of tragic drama in the light of the five constants of tragedy; namely, Conflict, suffering, Irony, Awakening, and a Metaphysical quality.

Conflict which is the soul of tragedy is there in each play. It invariably results from a struggle between the individual and the society. Sometimes this conflict is external and directly in the forefront in the manner of a traditional tragedy as in The Crucible, but more often it is reflected through the psychological tension in the hero's mind as in 'Death of a Salesman', 'A View from the Bridge', and 'After the Fall'. The tragic feeling is aroused when the hero is called upon to face the challenge "which he cannot find it in himself to walk away from or turn his back on." The tragic status of the hero is usually determined by how well he meets this challenge.

In each play Miller tries to bring out that "moment of commitment" in the hero's character when he "differentiates himself from every other man, that moment when out of a sky full of stars he fixes on one star." His characters might lack the nobler or heroic qualities of the Greek and

2. Ibid.
Elizabethan heroes and his themes might seem too banal or commonplace, but significant questions of choice and responsibility, love and survival, separateness and togetherness always emerge from the central conflict in each play. It turns the fate of the individual into an epitome of the fate of mankind, which in turn, raises his social plays into tragedies. What J.R. Northam said about Ibsen is equally true of Miller as well:

His greatness lies in the fact that, denied the elevated themes of theomachies and dynastic struggles, the stature of heroes and princes, and the language of poets, he yet continues by means minute yet evocative to suggest in drama, beneath the familiar prosaicness of modern life, the perpetual mystery of human personality in its struggle with necessity. 1

In fact, Miller combines some of the elements of traditional tragedy with those of the modern one so well that it gives him a unique place among the twentieth century tragic playwrights. For instance, his heroes, unlike the traditional tragic heroes, are not big or great people, but in matters of passions like love are not big or great people, but in matters of passions like love and jealousy, they are not too different from them. Be it Joe Keller or Willy Loman, John Proctor or Eddie Carbone, Quentin or Victor, they are all men of strong passions.

Suffering, the second important constant of tragedy, is also found in Miller's plays. As in all good traditional tragedies this suffering is mostly inward or psychological rather than physical. Willy, like Lear, suffers mentally and

emotionally; John Proctor, confronting an evil world, reminds us of Prince Hamlet in his suffering; similarly, Eddie Carbone's anguish and suffering bring to mind the suffering of Phaedra. Where there is no open depiction of suffering we have an over-whelming feeling of some terrible loss or a profound sense of waste as in 'After the Fall' and 'The Price'. 'All My Sons' is an exception where the hero's suffering is not fully bright out. To that extent the play is comparatively weaker as a tragedy.

The third important common factor in all these tragedies is irony, which Miller employs with a masterly touch. The most potential source of tragic irony is the gap between the hero's aspirations and achievements. Joe aspires to amass a lot of wealth and bequeath a rich business to his sons. He errs for his sons but the irony is that his sons prove instrumental in his punishment. The tragic irony in Willy's case is that he becomes a victim of his own success-dream. In trying to be a successful salesman like Dave Singleman, he even fails to be a successful father like Charley. The irony in 'The Crucible' is so well executed that it is a predominant feature of the whole play. John Proctor, has the reputation of being the wisest and maturest of all the people of Salem and fights heroically against evil, yet he becomes the cause of all the trouble since he has the trait of upon him. Similarly, in 'A View from the Bridge', Eddie is seen committing the same error of informing, against which he warns Catherine in the beginning. In 'After the Fall' and 'The Price', too, irony unevils the tragic situation and provides richness to the plays.
The awakening of the tragic hero is yet another vital element in tragedy. Normally experience leads to awakening; it comes as a culmination of suffering. That is the traditional mode of tragedy. But in Miller it is not always so. In some of his plays the awakening comes as a prelude to suffering. For instance, in the case of Quentin in 'After the Fall', the tragic awakening comes first and what follows is a whole process of intense mental torture and suffering. The same is true of 'The Price' as well. In the case of 'Death of a Salesman' the awakening is brought about in a highly dramatic manner in the form of a discovery by Willy Loman. Sometimes the awakening is simply suggested by an action of the hero as in the case of Eddie Carbone who dies in his wife's arms and indirectly accepts his error.

Many other factors that constitute the tragic quality of Miller's plays have also been studied in the foregoing chapters. The most important of them all being the concept of social drama envisaged and practiced by him. It is the concept of wholeness and seeks to account for the "total condition of man."1 Miller believes that the aim of drama is "something far wider than a purely private examination of individuality."2 For its own sake. He attempts to deal with more and more of the "whole Man," "not either his subjective or social life alone."3 The social matters in

3. Ibid., p.54.
his plays are inseparable from the subjective psychological matters. In this he resembles the Greek playwrights who were unable to conceive of man or anything else except as a whole. The fate of Oedipus, for instance, is interlinked with that of the people of Thebes. His subjective existence cannot be isolated from his social existence. Similarly, Antigone's personal relationship with her dead brother brings her into one of the most violent conflicts with the State. Her subjective as well as social life is made the subject of treatment in Sophocles' masterpiece. The same is true of Keller and John Proctor and Eddie Carbone. Keller's crime has far wider repercussions in that society of which he is a member. Proctor's private guilt actually precipitates the whole Salem hysteria and his own fate is not sealed off from that of others. Similarly, Eddie's act of informing spawns forth a disharmony in the longshoremen community and leads to social fission. Despite some very important differences of subject and technique, the Greek tragedies and those of Miller are vitally similar; their chief character is social.

Besides, in the "family-social complex" of his plays the family is used as a prism to reflect the larger social world and its pressures. The blending of the social with the familial, helps in two ways. First, it helps him transcendent the living room reality and his characters are seen confronting the non-familial or openly social challenges and forces. Secondly, since the forces which destroy the lives of his tragic protagonists are uncontrollable and lie outside the bounds of reason and justice, it helps raise his social
plays into tragedies. The tragic heroes are made to reckon with social forces that can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence. This is important in view of the fact that where the causes of disaster are temporal or remediable we may have serious drama but no tragedy at all. No socio-economic reforms could have altered Willy's fate, no more plaint laws could have resolved John Proctor's dilemma, no psychiatric therapy could have saved Eddie Carbone; a third marriage with Holga would not exonerate Quentin from his past mistakes and responsibility; lastly, a reversal of choices between Victor and Walter would not let them escape tragedy. The ultimate tragic feeling in these plays is thus associated with two things; irrevocable deeds and irreparable loss. Rational explanation might sometimes look probable but it cannot be brought to bear effectively and, things being as they are, the fate of the tragic heroes could not have been otherwise. This precisely constitutes the metaphysical quality of these plays and makes them powerful tragedies.

Still another factor that provides tragic dignity to these plays is the use of archetypal mythical patterns and symbolic action. Myth is essential to tragedy and Miller has successfully exploited its usages in his plays. The success myth, for instance, is used effectively in 'All My Sons' and 'Death of a Salesman' and even in 'After the Fall' and 'The Price'. Similarly, a sustained use of symbols is also made in almost all his plays. It cuts across their narrow realism and lends them a poetic touch.

As a dramatist Miller is not simply realistic or naturalistic. His best theatrical devices belong to the expressionistic school although his interest in society and social problems makes him a realist-naturalist. His realism, too, is very complex. It is more of a technique that combines the free verse of Maxwell Anderson, the freedom of space and time of the Expressionists, the psychological insights of O'Neill and the intellectual devices used by Brecht and Thornton Wilder. He is a social dramatist but his plays are far from mere sociological plays. His chief interest always lies in persons rather than social problems or ideas. It helps lift his themes into larger universal themes; especially the theme of the individual's relationship with society which has been treated as an archetype. What he attempts to dramatize is the failure of man and society to maintain a fruitful relationship with each other but he does so in such an adroit manner that the intensity and effectiveness of his plays as tragedies do not suffer. The ultimate success of his plays as tragedies lies in that.