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Work and the Family: Themes in the Plays of Arthur Miller

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WORK AND THE FAMILY: THEMES IN THE
PLAYS OF ARTHUR MILLER

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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WORK AND THE FAMILY: THEMES IN THE
PLAYS OF ARTHUR MILLER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1949 Arthur Miller emerged as a successful playwright with the opening on Broadway of *Death of a Salesman*. John Brown said, in a review at the time, that Miller's play was the "most poignant statement of man as he must face himself to have come out of our theatre."¹ And Daniel E. Schneider made a prediction that proved true when he said "*Death of a Salesman* is an enduring play. It will be performed over and over for many years, because of its author's masterful exposition of the unconscious motivations of our lives."²

Critical acclaim followed each succeeding play, and in 1962 Gerald Weales said "it is generally conceded, ...that Miller is one of the two playwrights of the post war American theater who deserve any consideration as major dramatists; Tennessee Williams is the other."³ In 1969 Robert W. Corrigan said that Miller has been a major figure in American theatre for the past quarter of a century and that "Miller's

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own sense of involvement with modern man's struggle to be himself is revealed in his own growth as an artist and has made him one of the modern theater's most compelling and important spokesmen. Finally in 1971, Harold Clurman, editor of the latest collection of Miller's works, said in his introduction, "there can be no doubt at this point in our literary and theatrical history as to Arthur Miller's position in it. Among the playwrights since the emergence of Eugene O'Neill only Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets and Tennessee Williams are at all comparable to him." Clurman finds it significant also that Europeans prefer Miller to any other American playwright. Such critical evaluations make it evident that Arthur Miller's plays have lasting merit as well as contemporary box office appeal.

As one studies carefully Miller's plays a philosophy begins to take shape, and one begins to suspect that Miller's depiction of the little man (the Lomans, the Kellers and the Franzs) is not as pessimistic as people have thought nor as a superficial reading suggests. His treatment is, in fact, saturated with optimism, optimism at first quite naive and inhibited, but becoming increasingly bold as the author clarifies it for himself in each succeeding play.

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Miller's primary criticism of the American Theatre is that "it has separated the individual from his society and in doing so has merely dramatized man's alienation from the world in which he lives." Miller does not believe that such alienation and subsequent frustration are men's fate. His plays, therefore, are his attempt to put man back in the midst of society and to have him face his responsibility for other people in it. To do this he consistently uses a microcosm of society—the family. The conflicts between the characters are familial conflicts, and the action of his plays is ultimately an attempt to resolve the conflicts and restore the stability of the family. But Miller's dramatic cosmos, going beyond the front gate, calls for the same kind of relatedness among men in society as among family members. In discussing Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire, Miller says:

Here Blanche Dubois and the sensitivity she represents has been crushed by her moving out of the shelter of the home and the family into the uncaring, anti-human world outside it. Blanche and Willy are alike, he suggests, in that the blow struck against them was struck outside the home rather than within it. Of Hamlet, Oedipus, and Lear, he says:

These plays are all examining the concept of loss, of man's deprivation of a once-extant state of bliss unjustly shattered—a bliss, a state of equilibrium, which the hero (and his audience) is attempting to reconstruct or to recreate with new, latter-day life materials.

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This state of satisfaction to which one would return, he continues, stems from "the memory of both playwright and audience of an enfolding family and of childhood."  

Family harmony is symbolic of a larger harmony Miller hopes can be achieved in the family of mankind. Several critics concur with the general symbolic character of the plays, and some speak of the poetic nature of his work, implying that there is a quality that goes beyond the surface realism. Gassner, for example, admires the way Miller has fused the dream-like imaginative quality to everyday reality, and he comments that this theatrical treatment produces "a poetic drama... rare in the American theatre."  
Clurman suggests a similar idea:

But I believe Miller's plays move toward poetry. I refer not to language but to conception and intensity. The poetry in Miller's plays and in several of his stories is that of the impassioned moralist who, as in a parable, seeks to convey not so much a thought as an emotion which goes beyond the factual material employed. Virtually all the artists who have devised settings for the Miller plays have been aware of their transcendence of the naturalistic and have expressed this awareness through designs of a semi-abstract or symbolic character.

Miller himself remarks that there is little of the universal in a play about a particular family unless the playwright

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projects those qualities normally associated with family into the society of men. The dream-like poetic character of Miller's plays, then, is an effort on his part to transcend a particular point in time and delve into the question of right living in a hostile world.

Through the symbolic structure of the family Miller reveals the need for familial connectedness and gives hints as to how man can make a home of the outside world. In All My Sons Joe Keller tries to excuse his crime by saying he did it for the family. "Nothing is bigger" than the family, he says; but Kate replies, "There is to Chris." For Chris and for Miller, man ought to care about those outside the front gate in the same way as he cares about those inside it.

Clurman notes that for Miller,

The family is pivotal, but beyond the family is the family of mankind. The family has its extension in the community, the social body.... Here, then, is where Miller locates the focus of responsibility.\(^\text{10}\)

In showing man's inseparableness from the society in which he lives, Miller also deals with man's relations in the world of work. He has never believed "that you could tell about a man without telling about the world he was living in, what he was like not only at home in bed but on the job."\(^\text{11}\) Miller's protagonists are defined to a large extent by the jobs they hold and their attitudes toward them. Dedication to the job contributes in part to the undoing of both Joe

\(^{10}\) Clurman, p. xiv.

Keller and Willy Loman. And because Victor Franz has spent a lifetime doing a purportedly hated job, he and his wife are tempted to dismiss their lives as meaningless. Miller always affirms the value of professional work.

The purpose of this paper is to examine concepts of the family and of work as depicted in Arthur Miller's plays. Two more timely themes could hardly be devised. Newspaper and magazine articles attesting to changing concepts concerning the family and the working man are abundant. The prevailing belief that the "family" is outdated and old fashioned is reflected in such titles as "What's Happening to the American Family," "After the Divorce--Then What," "Is the Family Obsolete?" "Family is out of Fashion," "Family Under Siege," and "Family in Crises." Increasing numbers of youth and adults alike are rejecting marriage as an institution, and writings on the merits of such a trend are to be found daily. In a recent article entitled "Brave New Marriage," the author begins by referring to the "myth of the American marriage," and he reports that the middle class American is now making such statements as "Marriage is as obsolete as the piston-engine plane," and it is "the triumph of hypocrisy." ¹²

By the same token, the principle of work is rejected by many because it is viewed as a lifelong endeavor, the outcome of which is questionable. The view of work as part of

¹² Melvin Maddocks, "Brave New Marriage," The Atlantic, CCXXX (September, 1972), 66-69.
the "protestant ethic" is declining rapidly. According to Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the Protestant ethic of hard work, taught to children as a virtue and a calling, has been responsible for the massive effort in the Western world that has produced the industrial, technological society. He believed that the earning of money within this modern economic order was originally, if done legally, "the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling." The person embracing this ethic "gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well." Many in our society have lost such a modest attitude and are what Weber called refined climbers indulging in ostentation, unnecessary expenditure, and an enjoyment of power and social recognition.

Despite the tottering nature of the principles of the family and of labor today, Miller has upheld the two as essential for society by reflecting them as vital thematic parts of his plays. The two themes are basic to Miller's philosophy of dramatic literature and what it should accomplish. They are parts of the morality he projects. He 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

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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?  

Miller, in his attempt to depict man's struggle to make of the outside world a home, consistently places his characters in the world of work, has them talk about the job and shows how familial relationships are affected by the "business." Paul Blumberg in an article in the American Quarterly comments on Miller's concern for the world of work and insists that his is an "effort to illustrate the alienating character of labor in the modern world." One can hardly deny the alienating forces operating in an individualistic, mechanistic society. But I believe that Miller, in his preoccupation with the themes of work and family, is attempting to show more than a man's alienation by social forces. He is, if he is true to his word, attempting to show how a man can ultimately overcome the intimidations of the "job," achieve satisfaction in it and arrive at some higher values that have nothing to do with success or failure in the business sense, and that allow him to find in the outside world some spiritually gratifying characteristics of the family situation.

Though I believe that Miller is ultimately positive in his portrayal of the family, he does point an accusing finger

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at inadequacies and falsities often found in the family situation and at societal pressures that can make it very difficult for men to disengage from the traps that seem to ensnare them. Basically his is a moral position, and when he portrays flaws, it is with the assumption that the audience will recognize those flaws and supply what is missing. Unlike many modern dramatists who picture a sick society with no hope of improvement, Miller pictures a society with ailments, true, but with infinite possibilities for being better. In reacting to criticisms that Loman and other characters were of low, vulgar stock, lacking in any moral or human values, Miller replied:

By showing what happens when there are no values, I at least, assume that the audience will be compelled and propelled toward a more intense quest for values that are missing. I am assuming always that we have a kind of civilized sharing of what we would like to see occur within us and in the world. 17

Many of the familial characteristics in this paper are negative but are discussed with a view toward arriving at Miller's moral stand.

The plays chosen for this study are All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, A View From the Bridge, and The Price. They were chosen for two reasons. One is that they are the plays whose action occurs within the family circle, and consequently the plays where the homes are affected by the job. Though The Crucible and After the Fall also deal with marital

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relationships, their action does not evolve out of essentially familial conflicts. And the second reason is that, with the exception of The Crucible, they are generally considered to be Miller's best plays.

The study is divided into four parts, the first three having to do with the family and the last with work. The first section outlines the relationships of family members, including their attitudes toward themselves, toward each other, and toward society. The next two have to do with "Responsibility," as viewed by the family, and the need for "Stability" within the home and outside it. The final section examines the jobs held by Miller's characters, their attitudes toward those jobs, and the extent to which an occupation helps to influence the characters and their familial relationships. A close discussion of the family contains, of necessity, a great deal about the jobs held by the family group, so the "work" chapter is to a large extent a correlation and summary of evidence already given. It is hoped that an examination of this sort will lead to a better understanding of the philosophical position from which Arthur Miller wrote his family plays.
CHAPTER II

CHARACTER AND PHILOSOPHY

I shall begin the study of family relationships in the four plays by discussing some philosophic values held by the main characters and the ways in which these values affect their attitudes toward other members of the family, toward society, and toward themselves. Two elements of the family philosophy influence the attitudes of all: 1) the father is seen as the dominant authority figure, and 2) the father becomes involved with a search for identity, reflected in his desire to have his name perpetuated.

The father in each play is the autonomous figure. He is not dictatorial but is the final authority, paralleling the Godhead. Clurman notes that the father in Miller’s work is regarded

...with awe, devotion, love, even when he is proved lamentably fallible and when submission to him becomes painfully questionable. The father is a godhead because he is the giver and support of life; he is expected to serve as an example of proper conduct, of good. He therefore inspires and confirms belief, informing all our most significant actions, and fosters our reason for living. He gives identity and coherence to our being, creates value.1

1Clurman, The Portable Arthur Miller, p. xiii.
Joe Keller exemplifies this position consistently in *All My Sons*. "A father is a father," he shouts, a cry that reverberates throughout the play. "I'm his father and he's my son," he says to his wife emphatically, "and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!" This affirmation confirms the whole of Joe's life. It is the father's role to do what he must for his children, and the children's to revere him regardless of what he does. It makes no sense to Joe that Ann rejected her father after his commitment to prison, nor can he understand how Chris can fail to overlook his own part in the crime that convicted Deever. Joe is a man committed to his conception of his role as father.

Joe Keller sees himself as the unquestioned provider for the family. To him his position of authority is solidified to the degree that he can provide material objects and comfort for those closest to him. Time and again he emphasizes his role by stressing the importance of building a business for the sake of his wife and son. He explains to Chris that he had to ship the cracked cylinder heads during the way or else lose the business:

You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes—what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? (p. 115)

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2Arthur Miller, *All My Sons*, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*, p. 120. Subsequent references to this play are noted in the text by page numbers.
To do that, so he reasoned, he would have lost his position not only at the factory but in his own home. Losing his business meant losing the very essence of his life—his integrity, his authority.

Keller is a man who has clawed his way from the bottom of the American business system to a position of wealth and respect. He says of Chris, "I should've put him out when he was ten like I was put out, and made him earn his keep." He is a man who is hard and cold, in a business way, and who faces his work with the idea that one must take every possible advantage in order to "get ahead"—even if it means hurting someone else. He does not understand why Chris lets something like over-charging "two cents" make his "hair fall out." Joe thinks he has done nothing wrong in shipping the faulty cylinder heads. This is business, and men are in business to make money. He tells Chris,

If my money's dirty there ain't a clean nickel in the United States. Who worked for nothin' in that war? When they work for nothin', I'll work for nothin'. Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? Nothin's clean. It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clean? (p. 125)

Nothing is dishonest to Joe unless it can be proven. Chris tells him that they have not been honest with Chris's mother by not telling her and making her believe that the oldest son (Larry) is dead. Joe wants to know what he means by "dishonest." Larry has been missing for three years, but "How're you going to prove it? Can you prove it?"
Joe never understands his crime until the end of the play when a letter from Larry, written on the day of his death, is shown to the family by Ann. Mrs. Keller tells him that he may still keep Chris close to him if he will only ask for forgiveness. Joe replies, "I don't know what you mean! You wanted money, so I made money. What must I be forgiven? You wanted money, didn't you?" And when Chris confronts him with having shipped the cylinder heads, Joe tries to justify himself in three different ways, and as Chris exposes each try at justification, he moves to another point. First, he tells Chris that he knew he would be ruined financially if the heads were held back. And so, he shipped them because "I never thought they'd install them. I swear to God. I thought they'd stop 'em before anybody took off." In the meantime, so Joe explains, he thought he would have time to perfect his process, and if the heads were not discovered, then he would tell the authorities himself. He did not tell the authorities because it was too late. The planes were already in the air and twenty-one fliers were dead. His second line of justification is that business is tough. When others stopped making money out of the war, then he would also stop. His last line of justification is that he acted as he did for the sake of the family. He says: "Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I'm sixty-one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you don't get another chance, do ya" (page 115)?
A man without a material heritage to leave behind is, according to Joe, certainly no kind of person to command respect. Keller is hardly a ruthless tycoon hungering for power. In fact, Nelson suggests that

he does not view the factory as an end in itself, but as the means by which he can give his family the security they presently enjoy, and enable his son to make the best possible life for himself. Because of Keller's position of authority, he has an incessant allegiance to and protectiveness toward his family. And because of the allegiance, money is of primary importance in his philosophy of life. As long as he has the business, he feels that his son must, just by the nature of things, respect his father and continue to uphold his place of authority.

Willy Loman, in Death of a Salesman, is also the authority to whom the young Loman boys go for guidance and encouragement, and for whom they have the greatest respect and admiration. All their lives Willy has taught them to be like him and to follow his ideals and his one dream of how a man should live. He expresses this dream in the advice he gives his sons when he compares them to the bookish and not very personable Bernard. "Bernard is not well liked is he?" Willy asks. "He's liked," Biff replies, "but he's not well liked." "That's just what I mean," Willy continues:

Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both

build like Adonises. Because the man who creates personal interest is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. 'Willy Loman is here!' That's all they have to know, and I go right through.  

Though Willy grows more and more uncertain of the truth of his dream, he nevertheless holds to it tenaciously as his own guide and as a goal for his boys. In return for Willy's assiduous interest in his boys' general upbringing and activities, Biff and Happy have the most ardent respect for their father's ideas and abilities. Even as teenagers they look forward with great expectation to his coming home from a sales trip. They willingly leave their friends to occupy themselves in the cellar in order to polish the car for Willy and to talk to him. Willy is so pleased by his sons' industriousness that he even promises to let them go on a trip with him soon, remarking that he would be a sensation with his boys carrying his bags into the Boston stores. Willy is moved when Biff tells him that he is going to break through for a touchdown just for him in the upcoming game. Biff is the favorite son because he follows most closely his father's credo: "be liked and you will never want." Willy is proud of Biff and confident that with his personality he cannot possibly fail at anything. Because Biff is so closely attuned to his father's ideology, he can echo pompously Willy's feeling about Bernard: "He's liked, but he's not well liked."

Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman, Collected Plays, p. 146. Subsequent references to this play are indicated in the text by page numbers.
One of the most striking instances of Willy's position of authority in Biff's eyes comes ironically just before Willy is exposed as a "fake" and a "phony" to his own son. When Biff fails math and is consequently not allowed to graduate from high school, he can think of but one thing to do. He travels to Boston where his father is on a sales trip to ask him to come back and help. He explains to Willy that he needs four more points to pass the exam but his math teacher, Mr. Birnbaum, absolutely refuses to give them to him. He puts the case before his father:

I begged him, Pop, but he won't give me those points. You gotta talk to him before they close the school. Because if he saw the kind of man you are, and you just talked to him in your way, I'm sure he'd come through for me. The class came right before practice, see, and I didn't go enough. Would you talk to him? He'd like you, Pop. You know the way...you could talk. (p. 206)

And Willy replies, "You're on. We'll drive right back." At this point Biff has complete faith in "the kind of man" Willy is, and he is certain that his math teacher will not be able to resist Willy's charisma and authoritative manner. Even after Biff is an adult and after a long rift between father and son, he can say about his father: "you've just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hardworking, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys" (p. 204).

Linda Loman accepts her husband's dream unconditionally. Clurman describes woman in Miller's work as the "prop of the male principle." "The mother," he says, "beloved of father
and son, supports the paternal legend of 'kinship.' Linda indeed does. When Willy doubts that he is making the best appearance in the business world, Linda tells him, "Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world." When his exaggerated $200.00 worth of sales is revealed to be only $70.00 for the week, Linda says "that's very good." When Willy is tempted to take Ben's offer of a lucrative business deal in Alaska, Linda discourages such a venture by parroting her husband's own philosophy: "You're well-liked, and the boys love you," and someday, she implies, he will have a better position with the firm. To reinforce this line of reasoning, she reminds him of the successful 84-year old salesman whom Willy has patterned his life after. The backbone of his authority substantiated, he can confidently look Ben in the face and assure him that it is in the business world that he can maintain his honor and integrity, and support his family adequately. "Ben," he says, "It's who you know and the smile on your face! It's contacts, Ben, contacts! ...a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked" (p. 184).

When Biff, as an adult, as much as tells his mother that he has lost his respect for his father, she says, "either he's your father and you pay him that respect, or else you're not to come here." When Biff says that Willy has no character,

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Linda rebukes him severely:

Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. (p. 162)

Even after Willy has almost lost all respect for himself, Linda demands that respect and love be given to the head of the house, the man who is the "dearest man in the world" to her. Linda is truly the primary support of Willy's "kingship." According to Miller, she was indeed made by Willy "though he did not know it or believe in it or receive it into himself. Only rank, height of power, the sense of having won he believed was real."6

Willy Loman's position as head and authority of the family is blurred by this very misjudgment of where his power lay, a misjudgment that is the basis of his insecurity and falsity. But neither he nor his family ever renounce that position. He dies happy, with the sense of having won--of having regained his son's love and respect. He dies with the feeling that he is again in charge and the giver of renewed life to Biff in the form of insurance money. Miller explains Willy's position:

Had Willy been unaware of his separation from values that endure he would have died contentedly while polishing his car, probably on a Sunday afternoon with the ball game coming over the radio. But he

was agonized by his awareness of being in a false position, so constantly haunted by the hollowness of all he had placed his faith in, so aware, in short, that he must somehow be filled in his spirit or fly apart, that he staked his very life on the ultimate assertion. 

The ultimate assertion is expressed in Willy's legacy, which he assumes will allow his son to take up the Loman dream. That the legacy is the wrong one is hidden from Willy; he utters assuredly before his death, "That boy is going to be magnificent."

Willy was "no dumb brute heading mindlessly to his catastrophe." He was a man who fostered love in his home, a man who never worked a day but for his family, a man, though misguided as to vocation, who pursued his philosophy of life (not a completely unworthy one) to the very end for those he loved. Miller says, "this man is actually a very brave spirit who cannot settle for half but must pursue his dream of himself to the end." His position of authority is never relinquished, and he keeps looking for the harmony of spiritual ease.

Eddie Carbone in A View From the Bridge is a more dominant father figure than either Willy or Joe. Though Catherine is only his niece, he has been responsible for her since she was a child, and she is as close to him as any daughter could be.

Like Joe and Willy, Eddie works for the sake of his family, especially for Catherine. As a laboring longshoreman

\[7^{\text{Ibid.}, p. 34.}\]

\[8^{\text{Ibid.}}\]
whose family has only been in America for one generation, he does not aspire to build up a factory or to become a well-to-do salesman as an example to his heirs. His goal for himself and his family is nevertheless as consuming, and he dedicates himself to it with as much fervor as they. His one aspiration is to bring up Catherine to be a lady, to help her to make something of herself that will be fitting to his vision of her as a "madonna." He expresses to Catherine his commitment to this goal: "I promised your mother on her deathbed. I'm responsible for you." His efforts to carry out this commitment show him to be the unquestioned autonomous figure of the household.

At the beginning of the play Eddie is pleased with Catherine's new outfit and says it makes her look like "one of them girls that went to college." "College girl," and "madonna" are labels good enough for Katie, and Eddie intends to see that she does not get too far below them. His code for her conduct does not include wearing clacking high heels out in public, walking wavy, which attracts guys on the street, or waving to men from the window. He is opposed, at first, to her taking the job that's been offered to her because it is not in the right kind of neighborhood. He says:

I want you to be with different kinds of people.
I want you to be in a nice office. Maybe a lawyer's

9 Arthur Miller, A View from the Bridge, Collected Plays (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 381. Subsequent references to this play are indicated in the text by page numbers.
office someplace in New York in one of them nice buildings. I mean if you're gonna get outa here then get out; don't go practically in the same kind of neighborhood. (p. 385)

For the same reason, he does not want her to go to a movie in New York; the wrong kind of people hang around Times Square.

The possibility that Rodolpho, whom he considers to be the scum of the earth, may marry Catherine, is a serious threat to her future and to his commitment. As a defense against such a possibility Eddie conjures up in his mind the idea that Rodolpho "ain't right." So desperate is he that he goes to Alfieri, the lawyer, hoping that something might be done to prevent the marriage. Helplessly he expresses to Alfieri that the one hope of his life is about to be extinguished:

"I worked like a dog twenty years so a punk could have her, so that's what I done. I mean, in the worst times, in the worst, when there wasn't a ship comin' in the harbor, I didn't stand around lookin' for relief--I hustled...--because I made a promise. (p. 409)

One is reminded of Kate Keller's lament to George Deever: "honest to God, it breaks my heart to see what happened to all the children. How we worked and planned for you, and you end up no better than us." (p. 105)

Eddie also shows his authority in other ways. He dictates and Beatrice and Catherine usually show that they want to do his bidding. When Eddie chastises Catherine for wearing high heels and walking wavy, she, almost in tears because he does not approve of her, asks "What do you want me
to do?" Similarly Beatrice is ready to tell her cousins to go some place else when Eddie at first points out a few of the inconveniences their stay will cause. When Eddie tells her she's being too touchy, she replies, "I'm just afraid if it don't turn out good you'll be mad at me."

As it becomes increasingly evident that Eddie is fanatically against the relationship between Rodolpho and Catherine, the girl is almost ready to give him up to please her uncle. Beatrice asks her, "Look, honey, you wanna get married, or don't you wanna get married? What are you worried about, Katie?" And she answers, quietly, trembling, "I don't know B. It just seems wrong if he's against it so much."

Toward the end of the play when the cousins move out, Eddie is aware that his position is slipping and that he is losing respect in his own home. The following conversation between Eddie and Beatrice reveals his desire to be restored to his rightful position.

Eddie: ...just keep in mind who brought them in here, that's all. I mean I got a couple of rights here. This is my house here not their house.
Beatrice: What do you want from me? They're moved out; what do you want now?
Eddie: I want my respect!
Beatrice: So I moved them out, what more do you want? You got your house now, you got your respect.
Eddie: I don't like the way you talk to me Beatrice.
Beatrice: I'm just tellin' you I done what you want!
Eddie: I don't like it! The way you talk to me and the way you look at me. This is my house. I want my respect, Beatrice, and you know what I'm talkin' about.

Beatrice: What?

Eddie: What I feel like doin' in the bed and what I don't feel like doin'. I don't want no--

Beatrice: When'd I say anything about that?

Eddie: You said, you said, I ain't deaf. I don't want no more conversations about that Beatrice. I do what I feel like doin' or what I don't feel like doin'.

Beatrice: Okay. 10

Eddie continues by remarking that Beatrice has changed; she jumps him all the time rather than taking his word for things. He says: "I'm tellin' you the truth. A wife is supposed to believe the husband. If I tell you that guy ain't right don't tell me he is right."

After the cousins have been taken by the immigration officers, Eddie is even more perplexed, because his good name has been desecrated by Marco. He refuses to allow Beatrice to go to Catherine's wedding because it is somehow a mark against his character if she does. She asks "why! What do you want?" And his reply is:

I want my respect. Didn't you ever hear of that? From my wife?....................

He's [Marco] gonna come here and apologize to me or nobody from this house is goin' into that church today. Now if that's more to you than I am, then go. But don't come back. You be on my side or on their side, that's all. (p. 435)

She proves herself to be on his side. When Catherine turns on him, calling him a rat, Beatrice firmly tells her: "Don't you call him that!" She chooses to stay with her husband for whom she declares her love.

The father of Walter and Victor Franz in *The Price* is the last example of the authoritative, dominant father figure. He had become a prominent, well-to-do business man, but was reduced to bankruptcy during the depression. Since Mr. Franz is not the protagonist of *The Price* (we, in fact, know very little about him directly) it may seem inconsistent to discuss him along with the main characters of the other plays. It is not, however, when one considers that he is one against whom and around whom his two sons, the main characters of the play, have woven their attitudes.

Franz was apparently a man whose business acumen and whose hardness and dominating spirit on the job would equal that of Joe Keller, perhaps exceed it. He was undoubtedly a very persuasive and determined person in private matters as well, since we are led to believe that when his wife married him she had to give up a promising musical career.

Like Joe, his life had meaning, his integrity being possible only in relation to his financial situation. Walter vows that "there was no love in this house. There was no loyalty. There was nothing here but a straight financial arrangement."[11] He was wrong about the love being absent,

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as will be discussed later, but apparently right about the importance that money played in the home. When he lost it all, "he was ashamed to go into the street," according to Victor; it was a symbol of his loss of face among his fellow men. But Franz had stood for something other than success and money. He had apparently taught loyalty, love, and respect within the family, and one of his sons had learned the lesson. Victor relates the experience of seeing once prominent men sitting on the grass in the park after the crash of 1929. He tells Walter and Esther that he could not sit by and watch his father, who had once been strong and magnificent, end up on the grass. In order to save him from losing all pride and to show the respect that he thought his father deserved, Victor gave up college and a possible career in science to stay with his father and work at anything he could get to provide food for them in those days of crisis. In trying to explain why he made such a sacrifice, he said that his father

   couldn't believe in anybody any more, and it was unbearable to me! He'd [Walter] kicked him in the face the night he told us he was bankrupt... he just kept on vomiting, like thirty-five years coming up. And he sat there. Stinking like a sewer. And a look came onto his face. I'd never seen a man look like that. He was sitting there, letting it dry on his hands. (p. 107)

He admits that it is idiotic to give up a career for such a reason, but, he continues,

   you're brought up to believe in one another, you're filled full of that crap--you can't help trying to keep it going, that's all. I thought if I stuck with him, if he could see that somebody was still ...I wanted to stop it from falling apart. (p. 107)
He has the kind of respect that will not allow a son to walk away from a once strong and dominant father.

Even in his reduced position, the old man has to retain at least a semblance of his dominance, of his integrity. While Victor is scrounging for something better to eat than "garbage," Franz is secretly holding $4,000 left after the bankruptcy. According to Walter, he withholds knowledge of this from Victor because he is certain that Victor will sooner or later walk out on him too. And the money preserves for him that last ounce of respect that would be fatal for such a man to lose. Even when Victor learns of this, years later, he still maintains that he could not have allowed the man to "end up on the grass."

Walter, on the other hand, denies that they were brought up to believe in one another. He says: "We were brought up to succeed, weren't we? Why else would he respect me so and not you? What fell apart? What was here to fall apart" (p. 108)? To him there was only a "straight financial arrangement" in the house and when that fell apart, there was nothing left. So he got out while he still had a chance to make something for himself. He reminds Victor of what he told him after the bankruptcy: "I told you then that I was going to finish my schooling come hell or high water, and I advised you to do the same. In fact, I warned you not to allow him to strangle your life" (p. 89). He points out to Victor that Franz could have made out without either of them by getting a job or going on welfare, since thousands of other people
did it, emphasizing that he could always see the selfishness in his father. Of his mother and father he says "they were never lovers—she said a hundred times that her marriage destroyed her musical career (p. 108)." To Walter, he was not deserting, since there had never been anything substantial there to desert.

Victor and Walter are brothers, both having grown up in the same atmosphere, often amiably and happily doing science projects in the attic, their mother's harp music penetrating from downstairs, but they have completely opposite ways of life. The father, who was obviously a dominant influence during their youth, has left them divergent legacies. For the sake of what he believes to be worth upholding within his father, Victor has lived a life of self-sacrifice. Even at those times that he doubted the wisdom of his choice, the vision of his father sitting in a chair, staring vacantly into space, reassured him that he had made the right one. Walter, on the other hand, saw in his father only the selfish part, the part that led him to charge ahead, "come hell or high water," to get from life what he could. He is still haunted, however, with the memory of his father and the suspicion that he has betrayed him. Franz is indeed a dominant figure in this family.

The play is about a crisis that has been developing in the family of Esther and Victor Franz. Actually their crisis has evolved from the choice Victor made out of respect for his father years ago. Even though Esther is probably
in her late 40's and Victor is around 50, they are still
haunted by what might have been and what can be yet. Because
of the adverse financial circumstances of their early mar-
riage, they have never had a lot of money. Victor joined
the police force in order to support his father and wife,
but it was to be a temporary thing, until he could afford
to finish school. Esther puts it succinctly: "It's that
everything was always temporary with us. It's like we never
were anything, we were always about-to-be." Victor almost
got the courage to quit the force during the war when, as
Esther says, "any idiot was making so much money," but he
didn't because Esther got scared there was going to be a de-
pression. Through the years as he kept putting off going
back to school, they began to aim for his retirement when
they could start a new life and Victor could get into some
area of science. Now that they have reared a son who is in
college, the time has come for Victor's retirement and he
cannot make up his mind to sign the papers. Esther says:

All these years we've been saying, once we get the
pension we're going to start to live...It's like
pushing against a door for twenty-five years and
suddenly it opens...and we stand there. (p. 18)

The dilemma that Victor finds himself in is that he now
does not know whether he wants to start anew or not. He is
afraid. But more than that he is reluctant to put aside
twenty-eight years as though they were just insignificant
preparation for beginning life at age 50. He says "You sign
your name to twenty-eight years and you ask yourself, Is that
all? Is that it" (p. 20)? But he is also influenced by
Esther's feeling that they have never really had anything or been anything. She says that their trouble is that "we can never keep our minds on money! We worry about it, we talk about it, but we can't seem to want it. I do, but you don't. I really do, Vic. I want it. Vic? I want money" (p. 19). It is true. Victor is not impressed by money, and to Esther he bemoans the fact that "sometimes you make it sound like we've had no life at all."

Victor further proves that his primary interest is not money as he refuses to give Walter the lesser portion of the money gotten for the furniture. Solomon reminds him that Walter took from him; he has the right to retaliate, but Victor is too fair and honest for such a proposition. Neither does he want to take the $12,000 Walter would get on the tax break if they gave the furniture to charity. He merely wants to sell the furniture at a good price and split it evenly with his brother. On each occasion, however, Esther is anxious for him to take the money.

Esther is not an entirely greedy person; the money simply stands for the kind of life that she and Vic have never been able to have. When she insists that he not wear his uniform to the movies, it's just that she doesn't want everybody to know what his salary is. Nor does she want to take the chance that they will encounter an old police buddy of his who might have had too much to drink and might make a scene. Esther really feels culturally deprived, and what she has wanted all these years is a little prestige. In spite
of these attitudes that seem to be especially exaggerated at
this time in her life, she genuinely loves her husband, and
has been a good wife. Though she is quite anxious to get as
much money as possible out of the furniture, and though she
is ecstatic when Walter offers Victor an administrative job
at the hospital, she is just as easily moved when she learns
that Victor sacrificed a more prestigious career out of hu-
man compassion, love and respect for his father.

Though pitched in the role of supreme authority, the
father in Miller's plays cannot live up to what is expected
of him by his children. In fact, he is uncertain as to his
own identity. Critics agree that the search for identity is
an important underlying theme in Miller's early plays up
through A View from the Bridge. Weales suggests that his
quest for identity is revealed in the protagonist's desire
to preserve his "name," to find the dignity, the integrity
which he has either never had or which he had at one time and
lost. 12 Miller speaks of the quest as a longing for the
safety and satisfaction remembered in childhood. He adds
that the heroes of the great plays faced similar dilemmas:

they once had an identity, a being, somewhere in
the past which in the present has lost its com-
pleteness, its definitiveness, so that the central
force making for pathos in these large and thrust-
ing plays is the paradox which Time bequeaths to
us all; we cannot go home again, and the world we
live in is an alien place. 13

12 Gerald Weales, ed., The Jumping-Off Place (London:

In Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl relates how he and other prisoners, upon entering the Nazi prison at Aushwitz, were made to strip of all clothing and jewelry, were separated from loved ones and friends, made to shave all public hair, and stand like cattle in a community shower in order to be sprayed with insecticide. Frankl says that at this moment, he realized what it was to stand naked before God. To Miller, the final act of being stripped of all dignity and honor as a human being is symbolized in the loss of one's name. When one loses his name, he stands fully exposed, naked, without a reason for living. The very man is destroyed.

When John Proctor in *The Crucible* is asked to sign his name to a confession, he refuses to do so. When asked why he will not sign his name to a written confession since he has confessed verbally, Proctor cries from the depths of his soul "Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! ... How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" Nelson suggests that John Proctor is wrong, because his soul and his name are synonymous. In refusing to give up his name he keeps his soul. I agree, and Miller probably would too, judging

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from the following statement made shortly before the opening of *Crucible*:

You go through life giving up parts of yourself--a hope, a dream, an ambition, a belief, a liking, a piece of self-respect. But in every man there is something he cannot give up and still remain himself--a core, an identity, a thing that is summed up for him by the sound of his own name on his own ears. If he gives that up, he becomes a different man, not himself. 16

Eddie Carbone's plight is similar when he cries out to his wife, "I want my name! Marco's got my name!" Unlike Proctor, however, Eddie's name has already been dirtied by his own betrayal, and his agony and ultimate death come because he cannot regain his concept of himself--that part of him which would go to any lengths to avoid breaking his tie with his community. His warning to Catherine, early in the play, not to tell anyone about the cousins reveals how strongly he feels about community loyalty. He says, "Just remember, kid, you can quicker get back a million dollars that was stole than a word that you gave away" (p. 389). Eddie broke his own code, gave the word, and lost his respect. Because Marco is the one who named the act--betrayal--it is Marco whom Eddie must blame, and from whom he must demand his good name. Proctor chose to die rather than to give up his selfhood by signing his name to a document that would incriminate his neighbors. Eddie chooses to die because he has already betrayed his neighbors. Nelson says,

To Eddie, as to John Proctor, the name has a dual significance: it is the symbol of personal integrity and supreme selfhood, but it is also the symbol of a connection, a communion with one's fellow men, without which the self becomes a vacuum.\footnote{Ibid., p. 217.}

He is right, and Eddie's cry for his name is his attempt to restore this significance.

Joe Keller's loss of identity comes in something of the same way as Eddie's. His betrayal brings about guilt and a condition of self that he cannot finally face. Ironically, the very intensity of Joe's desire to perpetuate his name through his son, Chris, is the force which causes him to sacrifice his fellow man.

Joe makes it clear again and again that his work has been for the family and that the business is to go to Chris. "The whole shootin' match is for you," he tells his son. And he wants to put a new sign on the plant: "Chris Keller, Incorporated." Chris in a sense is to become a projection of his father, only he is to be greater. Joe has "the father's unconscious desire," suggests Nelson, "to combat his mortality through the promise and potential of his children."\footnote{Ibid., p. 83.}

Though it is subordinate to the genuine love for his family, Joe wants to preserve the very essence of Joe Keller through Chris. But Chris cannot accept that essence, and Joe, too, comes to the realization that he is not the man he thought he was. He finally realizes that the inner circle of the family must eventually coalesce with the outer circle of
society, and that he has denied that connection. The man he had always thought himself to be is now blurred; he is cut off from his family and from his neighbors, and like Eddie, cannot live with the alienation.

Willy Loman fights the loss of integrity as he shouts to his son, "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman" (p. 132)! He cannot admit, as Biff suggests, that he has landed in the ash can, and that he as a person is of no more significance than "a dime a dozen."

According to Miller, "Willy Loman is seeking for a kind of ecstasy in life which the machine civilization deprives people of. He is looking for his selfhood, for his immortal soul...." Willy's selfhood is bound up in his name, and his shout of "I am Willy Loman," is an affirmation of some values that Willy stands for.

Under the surface, Willy was really look for something altogether different from mere success, money, and prestige, and he thought he found it in salesmanship. He expressed it in his story of how he decided to become a salesman—the story of Dave Singleman. He admired Dave because at eighty-four he had so many friends that he could make sales by telephoning from his hotel room. Willie explains to Howard:

And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered

and loved and helped by so many different people? Do you know? When he died—and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford going into Boston—when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that. In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear—or personality. (p. 180)

Nelson notes that Willie was only superficially impressed with the salesman's comfortable life, the number of sales he made, the green velvet slippers. What he was really concerned with was what accounted for the old gentleman's large funeral, what Nelson calls "the inherent worth of personal relationships." The coveted values he saw in the old man's life were those of being remembered, loved and helped by people; having personality, not the "slick personableness to which he has paid lip service in so many of his declamations on success," but the kind that entails respect, comradeship and gratitude; and finally the value of possessing friendship. Many things about Willy substantiate this point of view. Any mention he ever made of his sales contacts were references to how well he was received by his "friends." The comradeship of his clients and fellow salesmen was a thing to be cherished to Willy, else he would not have spent a lifetime lying to himself and to his boys about how much others thought of him and how easily he could get his foot into any door. Nor would he have been so proud of the fact

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that all the boys followed Biff around because they liked him. To be liked is a human ambition, and those who condemn Willy on the basis of this desire condemn themselves. Despite his good intentions, however, Willie selected a role in society for which he was not suited, and he was consequently never able to come to a clear understanding of his own identity.

His dilemma, then, at the end of his life is that he has lost, or never really had, the "surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honor" that, according to Miller, men have connected with the family. Not only are these qualities missing in the community among business associates, but they seem to be dwindling at home.

Biff is right when he says, "the man didn't know who he was." Willy cannot accept the man who loves building a front stoop or planting a garden. He seeks after the right values and qualities, but he misjudges where they are to be found. He even chooses to die for the wrong reason. With the knowledge of Biff's love, he chooses death, "not because life has been made intolerable by a terrible burden of guilt, but because he believes that his death is the purchase price" of security for his son.

Joe Keller, Willy Loman, and Eddie Carbone are in many ways good husbands and good fathers, but because they have a

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21 Miller, "The Family," p. 36.

confused and distorted conception of what kind of men they really are, they can finally play no meaningful role either in the family or society.

Though the search for identity on the part of the protagonists in the first three plays was either culminated too late or not at all, the outlook is not pessimistic. Weales suggests that inherent in the plays is "a vague faith in man, that the individual may finally be able to retain his integrity." Obvious optimism lies in the platitudes of Chris, the romantic death of John Proctor, and even in Biff's recognition that his father had "the wrong dreams." Weales thinks that in the case of Death of a Salesman this vague faith in man is even more evident in

Willy's vitality, in his perverse commitment to a pointless dream, in his inability simply to walk away. Willy Loman is a character so complex, so contradictory, so vulnerable, so aware--in short, so human--that he forces man on us by being one.23

This vitality, this drive toward what a man conceives to be right, is certainly part of the other two characters as well, and certainly cannot be condemned in itself.

Both Victor and Walter have this drive, but, unlike Willy, they are able to use it to define their lives. The focus in The Price is on the sons rather than the father. Clurman suggests that the two brothers represent two points of view that have developed in Miller's own mind; both are points of view that will allow a man to come to the latter part of his

23 Weales, The Jumping Off Place, p. 15.
life, recognize what he is, accept the mistakes he has made, and begin the process of self-rehabilitation. Neither Walter's nor Victor's life has been without problems, and Miller presents the side of each brother with equal force. Both lives are justified. The play is concluded on a definite optimistic note in that each brother, though not reconciled to the other, takes up his life with renewed meaning. Walter admits that his fanatic zeal to acquire success and power lost him his connection with other people. He realizes that he, like Quentin in *After the Fall*, cannot "bear to be a separate person," and he takes steps to alter his life. Victor is forced to admit that his loyalty to his father may have been in vain, but he is able to accept it on the grounds that he was compelled to take a moral stand.

The two men finally know that their own lives, their own identities, are bound up with those of other people, those in the family as well as outside it.

If one looks carefully at each protagonist in these family plays, he sees man symbolically attempting his part in the survival of the race. In connection with his drama, Miller often talks of the struggle of survival and of finding a way to live so that the world is more like a home than a jungle, and the dramatic war that he pictures is waged within the family, his symbolic cell of society. Within the family he seems to find the qualities that equip a man for

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living in society, but the lessons are almost always learned imperfectly—something goes wrong—and one or more individuals decline, causing family disintegration. The key to this symbolic cell in each play is the father, the head of the household, and when he falls the breakup of the family follows. Miller is not saying anything particularly profound about the necessity of the father being the authority figure, perhaps just the opposite; it is merely the stereotyped father that would naturally come out of his Jewish-American background. But the significance comes when such a respected person (as all are potentially) loses that respect because of faulty ideals and becomes isolated from both family and society. Such a loss is critical to the stability of the family, but the implication is that with each catastrophe, there is the hope of being better. The very intensity of the father's desire to have right values and standards and to live by them is part of Miller's optimism. An effort so persistently pursued as Willy Loman's toward that end makes it quite clear to an audience that one ought to have standards by which to live. The fact that some of Willy's values are so obviously wrong is precisely what is positive about the play. And the insight gained by the son gives even greater hope in that at least some of the affectations and falsities of the father will be discarded by him in an attempt to live more honestly.
CHAPTER III

RESPONSIBILITY

A major theme running through the works of Miller is the theme of "responsibility." In almost every case, the failure of Miller's protagonists is the failure to acknowledge responsibility for the welfare of other people. Clurman notes that in his very earliest published works Miller was dealing with this problem. In Miller's only novel, Focus, Clurman recalls an incident in which a citizen was awakened during the night by the agonized cry of a woman calling, "Police! Police!" He was able to rationalize his failure to get up and do anything about it, but later in a situation when he himself was threatened, he remembered lamentably the cries of the woman.¹ In succeeding plays, Miller invariably analyzes some aspect of his protagonists' irresponsibility and their reaction to the inevitable guilt that it incurs.

A feeling of responsibility for others brings about a sense of unity in society that is of prime importance to Miller. He said early in his career that "there is an organic aesthetic, a tracking of impulse and causation from the individual to the world and back again which must be

¹Clurman, The Portable Arthur Miller, p. xii.
reconstituted."² In part through reading *The Brothers Karamazov*, he became aware that there was some hidden order in the world and the only reason to live is to discover the nature of that order. Miller affirms that this idea not only shaped his concept of constructing a play but influenced his belief that life becomes more meaningful when lives are connected morally.³ Unity in society, related to Miller's "organic aesthetic," can be achieved, then, when men realize that there is something of the other person in each individual. But it must be realized while there is still time to extend a hand, and not as in the case of the citizen in *Focus*, who recognized his responsibility toward his fellow man only when he himself was in a dangerous predicament.

Miller's concern with "responsibility" evidently stems from his more elemental concept of what drama is all about. He says that the playwright of any worth must delve into a major question that the Greeks explored; that is, "what is the right way to live with one's fellow man?" He noted that "when the Greek thought of the right way to live, it was a whole concept; it meant a way to live that would create citizens who were brave in war, had a sense of responsibility to the polis in peace, and were also developed as individual personalities."⁴ For Miller, the development of individual

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³ Ibid., p. 37.
personalities apart from any sense of the necessity for involvement with members of the community or the society is frequent in modern life. As stated in the introduction, Miller's primary criticism of the American theatre is that "it has separated the individual from his society and in doing so has merely dramatized man's alienation from the world in which he lives." Miller does not believe that such alienation and subsequent frustration is men's fate, and it is this issue at which he directs his drama. He patterns his drama after the Greek drama, which he says was

an expression of a basic assumption of the people, who could not yet conceive, luckily, that any man could long prosper unless his polis prospered. The individual was at one with his society; his conflicts with it were, in our terms, like family conflicts the opposing sides of which nevertheless shared a mutuality of feeling and responsibility.

It is not unreasonable, therefore, that Miller approaches the themes of unity and responsibility through the family circle. Clurman sums up Miller's philosophy in this respect when he says Miller shows that

we are all part of one another; all responsible to one another. The responsibility originates on the simplest, almost animal level: our immediate kin. But this vital attachment to the family--father, mother, children, brothers and sisters--is germinal and with the maturing of the person extends beyond its initial source.

Invariably the sin of Miller's characters (he perhaps would not use the word) is some irresponsible act that has

5Trowbridge, "Pathos and Tragedy," p. 221.


7Clurman, The Portable Arthur Miller, p. xii.
devastating consequences. And the guilt incurred by such irresponsibility usually results in some self-inflicted punishment which serves to redeem the individual.

Joe Keller is a prime example in that he has an almost fanatical feeling of responsibility toward the support of his family, and in particular toward his son, Chris. Until the very end of his life Joe persistently maintains that there is nothing big enough to prevent him from performing his duty toward his family. He reminds Chris numerous times that the business he has built up through the years is really his. To Chris's threat to move away from the Kellers if his Mother cannot accept his marriage to Ann, Joe says, "don't think like that. Because what the hell did I work for? That's only for you, Chris, the whole shootin' match is for you!"

Later when Keller finds that Chris is actually going to be married, he is elated as he says,

I want a new sign over the plant--Christopher Keller, Incorporated,..................I'm going to build you a house, stone, with a driveway from the road. I want you to spread out, Chris, I want you to use what I made for you ... I mean, with joy, Chris, without shame...with joy. (p. 87)

All his life, Joe has been so exclusively dedicated to his responsibility toward his family that he can completely ignore the possibility that he might harm an outside individual in upholding that duty. When his faulty cylinder heads cause the death of twenty-one pilots, he can believe in all seriousness that this was a bad accident but something he had nothing to do with. The preservation of his family is an end which justifies any means for Joe. This
is why he says, upon finally facing Chris with this awful crime, "Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you." To his wife's cry that "it don't excuse it that you did it for the family," Keller objects, "It's got to excuse it!" For Keller there is nothing bigger than the family and he proclaims finally: "I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head" (p. 120).

Only moments later, the error of his fanaticism, partly good though it is in principle, is revealed to him. When he learns that his son, Larry, committed suicide upon hearing that his father was responsible for the death of twenty-one pilots, he finally realizes how narrow his allegiance has been. About Larry he says "Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, kid...I guess they were" (p. 126).

Eddie Carbone's feeling of responsibility toward his niece, Catherine, is perhaps more intense than Joe's. His allegiance to her is perverted in that he is consumed by it; the defense mechanisms he devises to protect her are distorted, and removed from reality. He turns an innocent and well-meaning boy into a thief and a pervert, claiming that Rodolpho wants to marry Catherine only to get his citizenship papers. So possessed is he with the need to protect her, he even believes that Rodolpho is homosexual.

Eddie's sense of duty toward Catherine is further intensified and perverted because he himself loves Catherine
in more than a fatherly way. Eddie's "old country" values are extremely strong, and he could never admit to himself the incestuous nature of his feelings for the girl who is in his eyes his daughter. This circumstance, coupled with the fact that he truly believes she is too young to be carried off by some "punk," motivates him to declare throughout the play his devotion to her welfare. As discussed earlier, he wants to bring her up like a lady, which does not include wearing clacking high heels designed to attract unworthy males, nor hanging around Times Square, nor marrying a "punk." He is consumed with sincerity when he explains his reason for denouncing the shoes: "I'm responsible for you, kid. I promised your mother on her deathbed." He will not let anything interfere with that responsibility since he worked doggedly for twenty years for her "because I made a promise." Eddie's allegiance is even more narrow than Joe's because he is not only willing to sacrifice his immigrant cousins, who are outsiders to him, but he neglects shamefully his wife. Beatrice's cry "when am I gonna be a wife again, Eddie?" lingers through the rest of the play. One is reminded of a line in Miller's first edition of View when Beatrice laments, "I just wish once in a while you'd be responsible for me, you know that?"8

Both Victor and Walter in The Price exhibit an intense sense of responsibility in carrying out their conception of

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the right way to live. Victor's choice is an idealistic one and Walter's realistic, but each commits himself to it with the same determination and unwavering quality as do Joe and Eddie.

As previously discussed, Victor, as a young man, decides to stay at home to help support his father, who went bankrupt during the depression. He makes this choice at the expense of his own promising career and subsequently spends twenty-eight years on the police force. When his brother reveals to him that all those years were in vain, that their father was probably not worth the harsh self-sacrifice, Victor still upholds his choice on the grounds that he could not morally let his father "end up on the grass." From Walter's point of view, giving up a career and becoming successful for the sake of one who would probably not have done the same thing in return is irrational. He, on the other hand, chose the road to success, from the feeling of a greater responsibility toward himself than toward his father or his brother, for he refused to help either one of them. His philosophy is summed up in what he told Victor after the bankruptcy: "I told you then that I was going to finish my schooling come hell or high water, and I advised you to do the same."

Like Willy Loman, both men have suffered recurring doubts and personal losses because of the choices they made. Victor has had suspicions that his sense of responsibility toward his father was extreme, but has kept putting off selecting a convenient time to quit the police force and start his schooling. Because of this, as Esther points out, they have led a
very temporary life, always expecting that next year they would really start to live. Walter has been haunted through the years by two things: that he didn't help his father more after his calamity and that he did not give Victor the $500 that would have allowed him to finish school. But unlike Willy, both brothers come to an understanding of the motives which led each to see his responsibility the way he did.

To this point what has been treated is the idea of responsibility within the family circle. But Miller always extends the necessity for responsibility outside the family. For it is part of his answer to the question his drama projects: "How are we to live?" How are we to live, he queries over and over, "so that the world is a home, instead of a battleground or a fog in which disembodies spirits pass each other in an endless twilight."  

About Miller, Corrigan says:

he has insisted with a continually broadening range that courage, truth, trust, responsibility, and faith must be the central values of men who would (as they must) live together.10

The plays certainly substantiate this statement, for in Miller's view the family is important in life, as well as for his drama, precisely because it is in the family that man learns the values of trust, responsibility, and faith which he must subsequently learn to carry over into the world. Clurman puts it this way:

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10 Corrigan, Critical Essays, p. 22.
The family has its extension in the community, the social body--the polis, as it was once named. Here, then is where he locates the focus of responsibility. Miller does not write that in the 1930's we dubbed "social plays." Our relation to society is particularized in immediate and close contact with neighboring individuals.

From his earliest plays, Miller was stressing the importance of responsibility toward one's fellow man. In *All My Sons*, Chris was torn between his loyalty to his father and his responsibility to the rest of the world. To Ann he explains a war experience that revealed men's connection to each other:

One time it'd been raining several days and this kid came to me and gave me his last pair of dry socks. Put them in my pocket. That's only a little thing...but...that's the kind of guys I had. They didn't die; they killed themselves for each other. I mean that exactly; a little more selfish and they'd've been here today. And I got an idea--watching them go down. Everything was being destroyed, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of responsibility. Man for man. You understand me? --To show that, to bring that onto the earth again like some kind of a monument, and everyone would feel it standing there, behind him, and it would make a difference to him.

But it is agonizing to him that he cannot find evidence in society of what he has learned. He continues:

And then I came home and it was incredible. I...there was no meaning in it here; the whole thing to them was a kind of a --bus accident. Like when I went to work with Dad, and that rat race again. I felt ashamed somehow. Because nobody was changed at all. It seemed to make suckers out of a lot of guys. I felt wrong to be alive, to open the bankbook, to drive the new car, to see the new refrigerator. I mean you can take those things out of a war, but when you drive that car you've got to know

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that it came out of the love a man can have for a man, you've got to be a little better because of that. Otherwise what you have is really loot, and there's blood on it. (p. 85)

Because of this illumination, it is unfathomable to Chris that his father does not see his responsibility in the deaths of the pilots. It is unreasonable that Keller cannot give love and security to his family without denying the existence of the rest of the world. In response to his mother's query of "What more can we be" than sorry? Chris answers with all his power:

You can be better! Once and for all you can know now that the whole earth comes in through those fences; there's a universe outside, and you're responsible to it, and if you're not, you threw your son away, because that's why he died! (p. 731)

Similarly Biff tries to get Willy to accept responsibility for having "filled him so full of hot air" that he couldn't take orders from anyone. He tries to reveal to his father that he is not a big shot who is going to bring home prizes, but a simple human being, worthy of being accepted and loves without the magnificence. He tries to get Willy to accept the responsibility of having fostered a faulty dream. But Willy cannot face the pain and guilt that come with such an admission, and he goes to his death, still under the influence of that dream, saying "that boy is going to be magnificent."

The responsibility that each of the protagonists has dedicated himself to is partly admirable because it has been directed toward the family or some member of it. But in each
case there has been a fanaticism about the dedication, and each has suffered a fall because his sense of responsibility was confined to too narrow a range. Significantly, the first three protagonists in Miller's dramatic cosmos, Joe Keller, Willy Loman, and Eddie Carbone, are unable to come back after the fall, whereas Victor and Walter are able to survive.

One might say that Victor and Walter are the sons of the earlier protagonists who have learned some things from their fathers. Since one of them takes the materialistic success route and one the moral, compassionate route, we cannot say that one or the other is Miller's answer to the right way to live. But they both have learned to "settle for half," as Alfieri in *A View From the Bridge* wishes Eddie could have done. Their sights are not lower; their aims are high, but they learn to live with partial success, resulting in a broader understanding of one's responsibility toward the world and others. I think compromise is what Miller is getting at, and incidentally what his latest play is all about. (In *The Creation of the World and Other Business*, he vainly attempts to make a compromise between good and evil). He seems to say since one cannot be a Dave Singleman, have a lovely family, dignity, comradeship and wealth, one should settle for the part that is most morally satisfying and whatever else he can get. Victor and Walter did this, as will be discussed. What kept Joe, Willy and Eddie from settling for half was pride—sheer ego, a failing that is all too often the case with self-made men or working class men whose fundamental belief is that
one makes it by the sweat of his brow or cleverness of mind. One makes it because of unadulterated, unerring dedication and drive toward one purpose. It is also a failing probable for the father who believes himself to be the rightful authority. Such a man would find it very difficult to accept even the slightest suggestion that he is wrong. Confidence in one's abilities is a natural and desirable quality, but unadated reliance on one's own powers does one of two things; it either results in a tyrant, or it breaks the man who does not reach a reasonable level of success.

The fall of these protagonists occurs because they can conceive of no alternatives to the original plan; therefore, when faced with their mistakes, their pride, their over-developed egos will not let them accept those mistakes. Ultimately, the situation reverses itself and pride and self-sufficiency change to uncertainty and regret. Victor and Walter accept their mistakes along with alternatives, and they are able to do so on the basis of a need for better human relationships—a need that is paramount in Miller's morality.

Some critics see Miller's play After the Fall as a turning point in his career, reflecting a more mature awareness of the basic philosophy Miller has always projected, and I think they are right. Corrigan, who particularly explains it well, sees this play as the beginning of a period of conscience as opposed to the period of consciousness encountered in the first plays. He sees in it not just a
search for identity that is usually foiled, but an acceptance of oneself and a willingness to question how well he has lived in society. To him it depicts man in the second phase of life as described by Erikson, who says that the individual must face up to the fact that "I have done this and that; my acts have affected others in this or that way. Have I done well or ill? Can I justify the influence which intentionally or unintentionally I have had on others?" Koppenhaver points out that Miller has Quentin pick up the pieces "after the fall" and forgive in the face of idiocy and absurdity, and even has him take Louise's advice to become concerned about one person because being concerned about others will follow. Quentin in the end, suggests Corrigan, accepts what he has done—that he is a murderer, but "he moves toward Holga with courage, not certainty, courage, born of doubt." Beginning with After the Fall Miller is concerned with the effect his protagonists have on others and their capacity to accept full responsibility for what they have or have not done. But the big question left, according to Corrigan, is "Is the knowing all?"

According to the plays, then, one must accept the responsibility of reaching out to the person who is in need.

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12 Corrigan, Critical Essays, p. 10. (The statement by Dr. Erik Erikson was taken from his psychological biography Young Man Luther).


14 Corrigan, Critical Essays, p. 10.
The citizen in Focus did nothing when he heard a cry for help; Joe did nothing when lives were threatened; and Willy and Eddie were too involved with themselves to see what they had done to their children. Miller is calling for not only perpetual self-evaluation but also for a continual self-rehabilitation program.

Miller answers the question Corrigan raises ("Is the knowing all?") when in The Price Walter says, "I've learned some painful things, but it isn't enough to know; I wanted to act despicably toward his brother and father early in his life and he wants to make up for it now by giving Victor an administrative job in the hospital and by becoming friends again with his own brother. Further action he has taken illustrates his sincerity. He has sold three nursing homes on which he was making a tremendous amount of money off the aged. He also reduced his huge rich man's medical practice and is now living in a small apartment. He says he has friends now; he has never had time for them before.

Victor also acts on what he learns, though his is a mental acceptance rather than an overt act. Whereas Walter's action involves getting rid of the things in his life that were meaningless, Victor realizes that the life he has thought valueless is after all full of meaning. He accepts full responsibility for the choice he made and he realizes that he has paid his own price. As Weales notes, he goes "beyond all attempts to shift the blame for his life to his brother, his
father, anyone outside himself." Victor is able to say to his brother in rejecting his job offer:

Walter, I haven't got the education, what are you talking about? You can't walk in with one splash and wash out twenty-eight years. There's a price people pay. I've paid it, it's all gone, I haven't got it any more. Just like you paid, didn't you? You've got no wife, you've lost your family, you're rattling around all over the place? Can you go home and start all over again from scratch? This is where we are; now, right here, now. (p. 97)

Victor can act on what he has learned now; he is no longer immobilized by the past and can sell the furniture and even take his fencing mask and foil as souvenirs. Esther can tell him not to bother to change out of his uniform. They can even by a little bit proud of their lives; as Victor says "I've done a job that has to be done and I think I've done it straight" (p. 97).

Walter may be right when he says that he and Victor are "two halves of the same guy." They just found two different roads out of the same trap. Victor lives a life of sacrifice to uphold what he believed to be worth upholding in his father and mother, and Walter walked away from his responsibility there because he felt that there was nothing in the home to uphold. Miller has depicted two ways of operating in the world and perhaps has given a partial answer to the question the Greeks asked: "How are we to live?" We are to begin, he seems to say, by recognizing the need to be concerned about another human being, whether he be father or stranger, and to act on that concern. Clurman is right

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15 Weales, The Jumping Off Place, p. 22.
when he says that the winner in the play is Victor. He is
the winner because he has the clearer feeling of relatedness
toward others. He is able to accept his life as it is and
start from there, realizing full well that he cannot become
a scientist; he cannot start over. Walter has made definite
strides but he is still not to be fully trusted, as Victor
suggests.

Gregory Soloman, the retired appraiser, is the real em-
bodiment of what the brothers have learned. A family man,
he has begun again many times both in marriage and in busi-
ness. He accepts the responsibility for failure with his
daughter, who committed suicide many years ago. He is the
antithesis of Willy Loman; at the age of 90, not certain as
the number of days he has left, he is ready to take up his
life again, accepting the responsibility of a load of an-
tique furniture that will take him at least a year to sell.
CHAPTER IV

STABILITY

Miller always affirms the necessity for stability within the family. Stability is the representation of the unity which he believes to be necessary if men are to live together satisfactorily in the world. If there is to be that "tracking of impulse and causation from the individual to the world and back again," it can be discerned on a smaller scale in Miller's microcosm of society--the family. When the stability of the family is maintained, a greater possibility for a stable community is manifested. In his article "The Family in Modern Drama," Miller discusses the correlation of family relationships to relationships between members of society and suggests that if man is to make a home in the outside world he has to treat his fellowman like members of families treat each other, and strive as they do to maintain the consideration and love that bind people together. He implies that his own plays attempt to show the necessity for this relatedness, and he points to the great plays such as Oedipus and Hamlet which illustrate the desirableness of family duty. About Our Town he says:

This is a family play which deals with the traditional family figures, the father, mother, brother, sister. At the same time it uses this particular
family as a prism through which is reflected the author's basic idea, his informing principle—which can be stated as the indestructibility, the everlastingness of the family and the community, its rhythm of life, its rootedness in the essentially safe cosmos despite troubles, wracks, and seemingly disastrous, but essentially temporary, dislocations.1

Basically Miller's plays fit his description of Our Town. Part of the optimism emanating from Miller concerns that very indestructibility of the family despite the seemingly devastating circumstances. This view may well stem from Miller's Jewishness. The cohesiveness of the Judeo-Christian family-community would certainly be a factor in Miller's upbringing and would fit well with his idea of the inherent nature of father-mother roles discussed earlier.

In this section I shall try to show several aspects of the plays that reveal the importance of family unity. First, 'the wife is depicted as the primary agent in an effort to support family togetherness. Second, outside disintegrating forces threaten the destruction of the home. One or more members of the family is aware of these forces but seems powerless to drastically alter the chain of events. Third, sexual sin is a threat to the family in three of the plays. And finally, the simple act of eating together is often suggested as a means of soothing hurt feelings and bringing individuals together.

The women of the plays, assuming traditional wife and mother roles, are the primary agents upholding the stability

of the family. Linda Loman is the strongest example because she exerts her whole being to keep the family compatible and together. But Beatrice, Kate, and Esther are similarly directed toward this end.

Linda is the mediator in the Loman house, making every effort to soothe arguments among family members and to soften or explain away criticisms they have for each other. When Willy complains that Biff is a lazy bum and in ten years has yet to make $35.00 a week, Linda explains calmly that he is trying to "find himself." On the one hand she suggests that Willy shouldn't criticize Biff when the boy just got off the train. On the other, she soothes Willy's feelings by reminding him how much Biff admires him. In the argument scenes she continues to soften the blows in this way with such phrases as "he didn't say anything, Willy," "don't argue about it now," and "Shake his hand, Willy." She wants relations in the home to run smoothly, and she wants to reduce the conflict as much as possible.

Beatrice occupies a similar position in the Carbone home. She is always attempting to restore the peace and tranquility that they once knew. Beatrice is worried about two things: first, that the love between Eddie and Catherine is too strong--more than just a father (uncle)-daughter relationship--and second, that her own relationship to her husband is not what it should be nor what it has been in the past.
Eddie's extreme protectiveness toward Catherine has kept her a baby too long, according to Beatrice, and she wants the girl to get out on her own a little more. For this reason she helps to persuade Eddie that Catherine is old enough to take a job: "I don't understand you; she's seventeen years old, you gonna keep her in the house all her life?" She reminds him that they put off letting her get a job until she finished high school, then until she finished business school, "So what're we gonna wait for now?" "Eddie," she says, "sometimes I don't understand you; they picked her out of the whole class, it's an honor for her" (p. 386).

Beatrice becomes aware of Eddie's extreme opposition to Catherine and Rodolfo's relationship, and she tries to reason with him. When he insists that Rodolfo "ain't right," Beatrice firmly says, "Listen, you ain't gonna start nothin' here" (p. 398). She is even more perturbed when Eddie tells Catherine that Rodolfo wants her only to get his American citizenship papers, and she says "When are you going to leave her alone?"

Realizing more and more that she and Eddie are growing farther and farther apart because of his fanaticism toward Catherine, Beatrice turns to Catherine to try to ease the situation. Without saying it she tries to get Catherine to see that the relationship between Eddie and Catherine has gone beyond what is natural. She tells her that if she really wants to get married, she will have to show Eddie that she is not a baby any more. "You gotta be your own
self more," she counsels; "you still think you're a little girl, honey. But nobody else can make up your mind for you any more, you understand? You gotta give him to understand that he can't give you orders no more" (p. 405). Beatrice is more persistent when she says, "Just give him to understand...you're a woman, that's all, and you got a nice boy, and now the time came when you said good-by" (p. 406). She emphasizes her point with "Honey...you gotta." Her method here is two fold. She sincerely wants Catherine to have a happy life of her own, and she knows also that the only chance she and Eddie have for better relations is to remove Catherine from the scene. Unlike Linda, who tries desperately to bring about a reconciliation between Biff and Willy, Beatrice wants to cool the intensity of love between her niece and husband. But the desired result is the same for both; they want harmony within the home and peace of mind that it brings.

The revealing scene in which Eddie finds the young couple alone in the house turns the tide. Beatrice is relieved that now they have had it out they can return to normal. "It's all settled," she says, Now we gonna be like it never happened, that's all" (p. 426). But if there is hope for Eddie and her, she certainly does not want Catherine to be completely estranged from him, and reminiscent of Linda, who insists that Willy and Biff shake hands, she says, "Come on, shake hands with her...Eddie, give her a break; a wedding should be happy" (p. 428).
After Eddie is disgraced by his disloyalty in turning in the cousins, Catherine is vehement in her rage against him, saying that he belongs in the garbage, but Beatrice refuses to allow Eddie to take all the blame, and she protests just as strongly:

Then we all belong in the garbage. You and me too. Don't say that. Whatever happened we all done it and don't you ever forget it, Catherine. Now go, go to your wedding, Katie, I'll stay home. Go. God bless you, God bless your children. (p. 436)

The family, she implies, must share the good and the bad, and she is willing for Catherine to go out of their lives completely if it means that some semblance of stability in the home can be renewed.

To retain stability within the home, Linda also makes a valiant effort to reconcile father and son. When Willie finds fault with Biff, Linda reminds him how much Biff admires his father. And when Biff criticizes his father with such claims as he has "no character," she demands that he show respect for a father who has never worked a day but for his benefit. During arguments between the two, she is the arbiter who explains away and softens the criticisms they have of each other. And when things seem to be looking up, as when Biff plans to go to Oliver for a loan and the two brothers fantasize about setting up a sporting goods store, Linda is never happier.

It is interesting to note that with all her insight into her husband, Beatrice, like Linda, has a blind spot. But Catherine understands, and tells Rodolfo,
Then why don't she be a woman? If I was a wife I would make a man happy instead of goin' at him all the time. I can tell a block away when he's blue in his mind and just wants to talk to somebody quiet and nice...I can tell when he's hungry or wants a beer before he even says anything. I know when his feet hurt him, I mean I know him. (p. 421)

Linda does not go at Willy in this same way. She goes after him with her unquestioning defense of his dream, a dream which she only partially understands. Nelson notes that this blind spot accounts for the muttered "I can't understand it" at the graveside. He says:

Linda understands the hard-working, self-sacrificing father and husband; she understands the loyal provider. But she never quite comprehends the visionary whose right to dream she has so stalwartly defended. Although she has occasionally been swept by his dream, she has never been able to recognize its meaning for Willy.2

Linda has upheld the "great salesman" dream because it was a way to keep her family together and relatively secure. She never quite understood that it meant more than that to Willy. It meant a method of attaining the love, comradeship, and integrity embodies in Dave Singleman. That is why she cannot understand why he would do such a thing when it was the "first time in thirty-five years we were just about free and clear." Neither is Beatrice able always to see when Eddie is "blue in his mind," as when his name has been desecrated and his integrity is gone.

To maintain a stable home, Linda goes farther than supporting her husband's ideal about success and being well-liked. As Willy is more and more unable to distinguish

2Nelson, Portrait of a Playwright, p. 113.
reality from illusion, Linda increasingly rationalizes all
his actions. On that crucial day when Willy is not able to
make it as far as New England, he tells Linda that he could
not seem to keep the car on the road; it kept going off onto
the shoulder. She suggests helpfully that it was probably
the steering that Angelo didn't fix properly. Then she ex-
plains it by reminding him that he didn't ever get his new
glasses. And finally she tells him he needs a rest. When
she becomes aware that Willy really is having trouble con-
centrating on the road, and that it may indeed be dangerous,
she begins to insist on his getting a job in New York: "Why
don't you go down to the place tomorrow and tell Howard you've
simply got to work in New York? You're too accommodating,
dear" (p. 133). She will make any suggestion or try any ar-
gument to avoid admitting or having Willy admit that he is
no longer capable of performing his duties as the provider
and cohesive force of the family. The boys are only nebu-
ously attached to the family now and she cannot lose her
grip on the security and stability for which she has so long
fought.

Similarly, Kate Keller fights to keep her family togeth-
er by refusing to admit that Joe has had anything to do with
the crime his partner was accused of. One of her weapons is
her belief that her son, Larry, is not dead though he has
been missing for three years. As long as she can keep him
alive in her own mind and in the minds of others, she can
deny the possibility that Larry might have died because of
the faulty airplane parts shipped by the Keller Company. Ann is amazed that Kate and Joe hold no animosity toward her father and she says, "He knowingly shipped out parts that would crash an airplane. And how do you know Larry wasn't one of them?" Kate answers strongly: "As long as you're here, Annie, I want to ask you never to say that again... What your father did had nothing to do with Larry. Nothing" (p. 81). She knows that to admit the logic would be to admit Joe's guilt. And such an admission would destroy the home.

Miller makes Linda sole administrator of the purse strings. Often she outlines the expenses, the bills that are due and how much money is needed to pay them. As Willy goes off to ask Howard to take him off the road, Linda reminds him to ask for a "little advance," $168.00 to be exact. They owe the insurance premium, which is in the grace period, and they owe for the motor job on the car. But happily, they owe only one more payment on the refrigerator and the last payment on the house. To Linda, it is an accomplishment to have weathered a 25-year mortgage, and she is going to do everything she can to see that the security it represents remains theirs.

Even though Linda is aware that Willy's lifelong work has enabled them barely to get by, and though she knows that he borrows fifty dollars a week from Charley, she cannot face the truth with him or with herself. "Instead," as Nelson points out, "she continually helps to inflate Willy's
overblown image despite her suspicions of its falsity." Her devotion has been so strong, he continues, that she "has done to Willy what he has been doing to Biff and Happy. And she has been spurred by the same motivation: love." ³

Linda is not chiefly to blame, however, for Willy's destruction. Clurman has called the woman in Miller's family plays the "prop of the male principle without whom man falters." ⁴ Both Nelson and Clurman are right. Linda made mistakes with her husband and sons, but it would be ludicrous to suggest that Linda should have discredited Willy's dreams and hopes, all of which were supported for the sake of the family. It would be out of character to have Linda criticize Willy for bringing home $70 instead of $200; it would also be improbable to have her accuse Willy of lying about the borrowed $50.00 a week. Willy says of her, "You're my foundation and my support, Linda," and he's right. Without her his fall would probably have come much sooner and with much more force. She makes mistakes, all right, but they are the consequence of her love and devotion to her husband and her longing for security and stability within her family.

In each of the plays, an outside force has been significantly responsible for conflict within the family circle. In Salesman the force is Ben. Linda, clinging to her own version of the success myth, feasts and distrusts Ben because

³Ibid., p. 112.

he is a constant threat to the security of her home. Nelson suggests that "it is Linda who helped influence her husband to settle for the simple security of home, family, and steady job instead of following in the seven league footsteps of his legendary brother." In Lomanesque fashion she defends their way of life when Willy is tempted to take Ben's offer of a lucrative business deal in Alaska: "You're well-liked," she parrots, "and the boys love you," and someday, she implies, Willy will have a better position with the firm.

After making her stand against Ben's way of life, it is understandable that she should exert every effort to substantiate Willy's faltering belief in himself, and to keep her family unified by acting as mediator and peacemaker within the home.

In View the disrupting intruders are the immigrant cousins, Marco and Rodolpho. While they are to be instrumental in the splitting of the Carbone home, they are accepted in the beginning by both Beatrice and Eddie. Beatrice excitedly assures Eddie that she will not mind being a little crowded. And Eddie feels that

It's an honor, B. I mean it. I was just thinkin' before, comin' home, suppose my father didn't come to this country and I was starvin' like them over there...and I had people in America could keep me a couple of months? The man would be honored to lend me a place to sleep. (p. 383)

Unlike Ben, the cousins in themselves do not represent anything inherently bad. But their presence brings to the

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5 Nelson, Portrait of a Playwright, p. 111.
surface in Eddie passions that he had not had to deal with before and which ultimately destroy him. With every incident that reveals Catherine and Rodolpho growing closer together, Eddie's rage and jealousy increase until he is ready to break two laws that have been all but sacred to him: the sanctity of home and family, and the community credo that says one must not inform on immigrants. Because of the intrusion, Beatrice finds herself in the uneasy position of arbitrator.

In The Price Walter, with his principles of money and success, is the intruder in the family of Esther and Victor Franz. Though he is Victor's brother, he is literally a stranger who has haunted the couple with his inaccessibility through the years. He has served as the culprit who took away Victor's chances for success, and is therefore an object for vengeance.

Even so, Victor unconsciously looks to his brother as a model for future achievement and plans someday to become a chemist. Esther, like Linda, accepts wholeheartedly her husband's plan as well as his attitude toward Walter. She is indeed the "male prop." In fact she is more than a prop at the time of the play's action. She, like Linda, must be the one to remind her husband of his beliefs and goals. She is increasingly frustrated as they reach Victor's retirement and he is not going back to school as they had always planned. Neither can she understand Victor's refusal to take as much money as he can get out of Walter, since they have always felt he owed it to them. In effect, Esther pushes for three
things: 1) Victor to go back to school, 2) Victor to take the job offered by Walter, and 3) Victor to take Walter's share of the money. All three represent the security and stability that she and Victor have never felt they had. And with their lives more than half over, Esther, like Linda, desperately clings to the myth that Victor originally propagated.

But Victor is not like Willy, for when he questions his life, he refuses to accept the old answers, now Esther's answers; he learns something new—that he has attained some values he might never have had if he had taken the "science" route. He has the love and comradeship of his wife, a home intact, a son on his way to a good life, and the satisfaction of a job well done. Esther also learns this in the end, but for a while, the existence of Walter is a threat to their marriage.

The couple's confrontation with Walter has removed him as a possible threat to their stability. All the troubles are not resolved; there are regrets of what might have been and two brothers are unreconciled. But one gets the feeling that in this family some relationships remain indestructible.

Another force that often breaks up the Miller family is sex. Corrigan claims that "the stability of the family—the value Miller always affirms—is inevitably shattered when sex rears its ugly and sinful head." He points out that in

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6Corrigan, Critical Essays, p. 6.
the plays up to The Misfits, the woman is sexually uninter-
esting. She is the faithful wife, the devoted mother, the
paragon of virtue. Happy put it well when he said about his
mother, "they broke the mold when they made her." Corrigan's
claim can certainly be substantiated, for in three of the
early plays the sexual sin is the antithesis to the purity
the mother projects, and is, as a result, at least an indirect
cause of the protagonist's downfall, as well as a staggering
blow to the family's stability.

Biff's discovery of his father's fling on the road is
horrifying to him. Because of it a chasm emerges between his
father and him which they can never bridge. To him there is
no more profound wrong than such unfaithfulness to a mother
who mends her own stockings, while new ones go to the other
woman. In The Crucible John Proctor's adultery with Abby
is the source of his downfall. And Eddie Carbone's incestuous
passion for Catherine causes him to commit the crime of
betrayal which leads to his death. Also it causes sexual
incompatibility between husband and wife, a fact which Beatrice
bemoans more than once.

No such blatant sin appears in All My Sons, but Chris
and Ann's relationship is the beginning of Joe's undoing.
The fact that they become engaged precipitates George's in-
tervention and the subsequent revelation that Joe is respon-
sible for the crime for which Deever was convicted. Also
their prospective marriage appears almost bigamous to Kate,
who still believes Ann to be Larry's girl.
Both Corrigan and Clurman comment on this characteristic in Miller's plays as "the Puritan conscience." Clurman suggests that it is part of a moralism which emerges clearer with each play as Miller increasingly has his characters search for and find standards by which to live. 7

In the midst of family conflict and even imminent disaster, Miller consistently has some member of the family suggest some action to ease tension and bring the family together. If often is a suggestion that the family eat together, a temporary solution, and in all but one case one that does not produce the desired results. Nevertheless, significantly for Miller, such family activity is designed to heal wounds and draw members together through renewed love. And usually there is mention of their former closeness to each other.

In All My Sons Ann suddenly becomes lively and, grasping Kate's hands, says, "Let's eat at the shore tonight. Raise some hell around here; like we used to before Larry went" (p. 76)! Later after a tense speech by Joe defending Ann's father to her, he takes up the suggestion with "I'll call Swanson's for a table. We'll have steaks." "And Champagne," chimes in Chris. "Now you're talkin'!" says Joe, "big time tonight, Annie" (p. 83)! In the middle of George's outlining his incriminating evidence against Joe, Kate enters with nostalgia-laden recollections about the good old days, and suggests with great excitement: "Listen, to hell with the

restaurant! I got a ham in the icebox, and frozen strawberries, and avocados and..." (p. 105). And as George is softening to the tune of family reminiscences and just before he makes his direct accusation, Kate begs him to "Make the midnight, George," and Keller contributes: "Sure, you'll have dinner with us!" And Ann says, "How about it? Why not? We're eating at the lake; we could have a swell time" (p. 110). And he acquiesces. So these seemingly casual renewals of harmony are important suggestions of the ideal order Miller has in mind.

In Death of a Salesman Willy is in ecstasy when Linda tells him the boys want him to have dinner with him. She says,

just the three of you. They're gonna blow you to a big meal! ...................................................

Biff came to me this morning, Willy, and he said, 'Tell Dad, we want to blow him to a big meal.' Be there six o'clock. You and your two boys are going to have dinner.

Willy's optimism at the announcement is almost too joyous. It is almost too private a moment to look at. He says "Gee whiz! That's really somethin'! I'm gonna knock Howard for a loop, kid. I'll get an advance and I'll come home with a New York job. Goddammit, now I'm gonna do it" (p. 175).

Beatrice pleads with Katie to ask Eddie to the wedding: "Come on, Katie, ask him. We'll have a party! What're we gonna do, hate each other? Come on!" They cannot possibly hate at a wedding party.

The Price begins as Victor and Esther are about to go out to a movie. Esther implies that they will stop at a
restaurant when she objects to his going in uniform. She says, "I want an evening! I want to sit down in a restaurant without some drunken ex-cop coming over to the table to talk about old times" (p. 12). Happily, the play ends as they are actually on their way.

In Miller's early plays, the attempt to keep the family intact does not produce the desired results. But the intensity of the effort to do so represents part of the strength of each play. The overt affirmation of the indestructibility of the family does come with the last play, The Price. All four of the homes represented by these plays suffer the "troubles, wracks, and seemingly disastrous...dislocations" mentioned by Miller. But, as he suggests about Wilder's play, these are "essentially temporary disruptions" in the total perspective of man-family-society.

It is hard to find a common failing in these families that brings about disharmony. But if there is a commonality, it may well be associated closely with the father's position in the home—that position encompassing the father's view of himself as the head of the house, his choice of job, and the standards by which he has chosen to live. The fact that he sets the standards in almost godlike fashion is true in every case. As mentioned earlier, this view may be as a result of Miller's Judeo-Christian background, in which the father is considered the responsible head of his family. Other evidences of Judeo-Christian influence are also present: the insistence that everything must be done to preserve family ties; the near
sacrilege of the son suggesting the father has made a mistake; the importance of avoiding sexual promiscuity; and the insistence that no outside force interfere with the harmony of the family. All of these represent age-old Judeo-Christian tenets and are only naturally part of Miller's subjective world. The fact that disharmony emerges in spite of these attempts at unity shows Miller's objectivity and the questioning nature of his mind.

All of the plays seem to indicate Miller's awareness of the strains on today's family and the necessity for a reevaluation of its structure. They also reaffirm his faith in the family as the basic element in society. In the face of serious problems, the traditional family roles are still more or less maintained. Reevaluation occurs, however, in that the son in each play denies at least part of the values held by the father, and at least one disrupting factor is the fact that parents—in essence old men—set standards that are helpful to some and harmful to others. Chris certainly rebels against a standard which allows his family to become rich while others die as a result; and Biff and Happy seem to recognize the inconsistency in Willy's philosophy that allows him to justify the theft of a football. Miller shows that the head of the house may indeed be wrong. Perhaps even his choice of a job is a mistake, but some good can come from that mistake if one can be honest with himself and others. To admit one's error (even one's cruelty), and to face the guilt it brings is a purifying process in Miller's
plays. He is somewhat existential in saying that a man comes to a fuller understanding of himself and his own inadequacies when he faces the wrongs committed within the family. In facing those wrongs, a man can set just standards for himself and "all his sons." Harmony within the family can be maintained only when people admit they are wrong and only when compromises can be made. When a man fails (until it is too late) to realize the inconsistences contained in his deeds as related to his philosophy, Miller allows him to regain some measure of self-respect by making the ultimate decision concerning his fate. In this, he follows very closely the pattern of Greek tragedy.
CHAPTER V

WORK

In one of Miller's earliest essays outlining his dramatic philosophy, he declares that even as a very young writer, he did not believe "that you could tell about a man without telling about the world he was living in, what he did for a living, what he was like not only at home or in bed, but on the job." Miller subsequently has been faithful in revealing much about his protagonists as a result of the jobs they hold.

The job aspirations of Miller's characters directly affect the family, the concept of self, and even the course of their lives. That what a man does for a living is extremely important to Miller is obvious when one considers that often major conflicts arise as the protagonist attempts to attain certain goals in his work. Significantly, conflicts arise whether or not the character achieves his image of "success." Willy Loman and Victor Franz fail, but Joe Keller, Quentin (in After the Fall), and Walter Franz succeed.

Willy fails partially because he is not suited psychologically for the job to which he aspires and partially because

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his method of achieving success is faulty. Willy, a carpenter and outdoorsman at heart, believes that he can become a great salesman, after the fashion of Dave Singleman, by being well-liked, by telling jokes and slapping backs. Though he believes firmly that one gets ahead through personality, he nevertheless works hard, staying on the road most of every week to make the sales needed for a meagre support of his family. But he ends up being fired to make room in the business for younger, more energetic men.

Victor, for moral reasons, is never able to pursue his dream. Though he hopes to get a college degree in some scientific area, he decides as a young man to take a job temporarily as a policeman so that he can stay at home and take care of his father. He spends his life on the force and is never able to go to college.

The success of Keller, Quentin and Walter is ultimately unsatisfying because their undeviating drive results in an attitude which denies the welfare of other people. Each of them comes face to face with the emptiness of the success myth as success becomes an obsession and an end in itself. Joe Keller—a self-made man in the Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches fashion—builds a factory which makes airplane parts. When threatened with ruin, he allows faulty parts to be shipped and used during the war, resulting in the deaths of twenty-one pilots. He is able to dismiss this tragedy as an accident unrelated to him, and his business continues to prosper. While he can justify his act as a good business tactic, his family is conscience-stricken by it.
Quentin becomes a good lawyer and basks in self-esteem as a result of his benefactions toward his clients. But doubt as to his own righteousness begins to creep in as he probes the reasons for his own inability to relate to his two former wives; he discovers that his has been a surface morality and he has had no real compassion for those who touched his life.

Walter Franz becomes a highly successful surgeon, but has been so intent on making a name for himself that he has alienated his wife, children and friends. Though he has built a huge rich-man's medical practice, it fails to protect him from a nervous breakdown which almost destroys him.

The reasons for failure or success in a job seem to have been a primary concern for Miller in his career, but his mature work, beginning with After the Fall, probes deeper. He becomes less concerned with why a man fails, less inclined to find environmental causes, societal pressures, and more intent on discovering how a man can acquire some meaning, some dignity from having done a job well, whether it be that of salesman, dock worker, policeman or lawyer. Above everything Miller believes that a man must have some dignity in life—a certain respect among his fellow creatures which in turn allows him to respect himself. One of the ways a man achieves that dignity, according to Miller, is through his work.

Paul Blumberg, in discussing Miller's view of "work," sees it as an alienating force. He suggests that it is the
pressure of the job that is the undoing of the Lomans, the Kellers and the Franzs.² In view of the plays' most poignant statements about a man's work, I believe Miller's implications in this respect are of a more positive nature. The very dejection and degradation into which Miller's characters often sink, when work is not going well or the job is lost altogether, show how imperative a job is to the process of self-realization, to becoming a man with worth and dignity. When Willy Loman is fired, he is the most miserable of men. He cannot be consoled when Howard suggests that his sons can now support him, nor can he accept the job offered by Charley, a job offer he knows to be a charitable gesture. If he cannot hold down a job on his own merits, he reasons, then he is not a man, but a parasite with no respect.

In All My Sons, Joe Keller takes the most drastic measures to prevent the loss of his business. In upholding his murderous action to his son, he pleads, "What could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away" (p. 115)? Later in the play when George describes his own father's deterioration after the loss of his job and after the humiliation of being jailed, he is utterly distressed by the shell of a man who is left.

Old Mr. Franz in The Price can only sit in a chair and stare into space after his business fails during the depression. And Victor, his son, is deeply moved by the piteousness of once well-respected professional men who he notices

are now reduced to sitting on the grass in the park. And, according to studies, Miller is absolutely correct about the human disintegration that occurred among the unemployed in the 1930's. Similarly, the fact that retired men often begin to fail in health reflects the life-giving impetus which work affords. Victor himself is very reluctant to retire from the police force, and when Esther, his wife, wants to know why he doesn't go ahead and do it, he replies:

Well, it's a decision. And I'd like to feel a little more certain about it.... I suppose there's some kind of finality about it.... It's stupid; I admit it. But you look at that god-damned form and you ask yourself, is that all?.....I don't know what it is; everytime I think about it all--it's almost frightening. (p. 20)

Other instances also show how important having a job is to a man's pride and how demeaning it is to have none. Willy, Loman's own son Biff for never having a steady job: "it's more than ten years now and he's yet to make thirty-five dollars a week" (p. 6). He's a bum, according to Willy, and even Biff has a low opinion of himself, admitting to his brother, Happy, that though he loves to work on a farm, he cannot be satisfied there and is "mixed up very bad." He muses, "maybe I oughta get married. Maybe I oughta get stuck into something." Though his being "mixed up" is partially due to Willy's having "blown him full of hot air," he nevertheless laments his joblessness and feels the futility and meaninglessness of not being engaged in some steady work.

Rodolpho, in *A View From the Bridge*, succinctly sums up the value of work for many of Miller's characters. When Catherine repeats her uncle's fear that Rodolpho wants to marry her just to become an American citizen, Rodolpho indignantly replies,

You think I am so desperate? ... You think I would carry on my back the rest of my life a woman I didn't love just to be an American? It's so wonderful? You think we have no tall buildings in Italy? Electric lights? No wide streets? No flags? No automobiles? Only work we don't have. I want to be an American so I can work, that is the only wonder here--work! (p. 420)

For Miller there is inherent value in work itself, and when deprived of it a man loses the dignity and self respect that he needs to live with himself. The Protestant ethic of hard work as a virtue and a calling is undoubtedly part of Miller's philosophy. According to Max Weber the ideology 'that it is one's Christian duty to be busy--to work hard and avoid slothfulness--evolved out of the religious belief of the early Protestants. It is this work ethic that resulted in the progress of the Western World in the 19th and 20th centuries, and which became a fundamental tenet of American life.° Benjamin Franklin's "Poor Richard" philosophy, as the American embodiment of the belief in work as a virtue, is responsible to a large degree for the general infiltration of this ethic in American thought.° In his exhortations

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against idleness and sloth, Franklin, like the Protestants, advocates doing one's job as though it were a calling, the reward of which may indeed be success and wealth. Franklin aphorisms such as "early to bed, early to rise..." and "Never leave till tomorrow that which you can do today," are echoed by Linda when she exuberantly tells Willy that the boys have departed "nice and early," implying that they will undoubtedly be rewarded for their initiative. For, according to the work ethic, it is the early bird and the industrious person who is rewarded economically, though he gets nothing out of the wealth, "except the irrational sense of having done his job well." Unfortunately, Miller's characters distort the matter, and like their counterparts in actual society, they have made wealth and position ends in themselves. They frequently lose sight of the possibility that the very process can be gratifying.

Miller's protagonists not only want to make money, they want also to achieve some distinction in their jobs--some challenge and personal satisfaction. The problem is not new, for our forefathers drove themselves daily out of personal challenge and a sense of accomplishment; nor is it outdated in the modern world where work is not popular. A preponderance of articles are presently appearing in popular magazines on the question of work, particularly on how work can be made more meaningful. Such titles as "Blue Collar Blues," "Job

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Enrichment Pays Off," "Make Your Job Pay More Than Mere Money," shows how dissatisfied men are with routine work that requires no personal growth. Yet in all this questioning of the value, or lack of it, in certain factory or blue-collar jobs, few workers suggest that the answer is to quit altogether. Based on recent studies, Eli Ginzberg claims that "Most human beings, given the option, want to work—if it is meaningful work and they can make a contribution." Ginzberg vows that hard work is not going out of style, adding that "by and large, Americans have a work orientation to the world, but they want some satisfactions out of their job, just as they want some satisfactions out of their family, and out of the other parts of their lives." This "work orientation" is a phenomenon present in America since the landing of the first settlers, and Miller's reflection of it in his drama is apparent, as his characters strive for achievement.

For example, Willy does not want to be just a mediocre salesman; he wants to be the great salesman that Dave Singleman was. Joe Keller is a self-made man; he has built his business from nothing. Eddie Carbone has no high aspirations for himself, but he projects them through Catherine whom he wants to get a respectable job, outside the neighborhood, in perhaps a nice lawyer's office. Victor Franz has thought for years that he could not begin to live until he got his Master's degree in science. And Walter sacrifices everything to become a surgeon. As we have seen, some of the men fail to

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Ginzberg, "Is Hard Work Going Out of Style?" p. 56.
achieve either wealth or position. But those who "succeed" in their jobs still find a void in their lives and cannot understand why. It is this paradox which pervades Miller's plays.

Joe Keller, Quentin, Walter Franz and his father are successful in their work. Keller, an uneducated man, rises from rags to riches; Quentin is a successful lawyer, Walter a well-known surgeon, and his father an important business tycoon. But they all have made the same mistake—a mistake that Miller seems to imply is characteristic with successful men. While he, on the one hand, places his characters in the world of work, illustrating time and again the disastrous personal consequences of being without a job, on the other hand he shows that those who achieve success expend so much of their energies on their work that they lose contact with other people both within the work environment and without. It takes little imagination to recognize that Miller wants his audience to see the distortion modern man has made of the traditionally "hard work" philosophy. Weber indicates that the original "capitalists" worked and progressed because it was bad to be lazy and good to strive for improvement. But many became what he calls "refined climbers," indulging in ostentation, unnecessary expenditure, and an enjoyment of power and social recognition. Miller sympathetically places some of his characters in jobs that are

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potentially good, jobs in which the individual might well find fulfillment, and yet he agonizes with them as they too become "refined climbers," eliminating as they climb that necessary connection that Miller vows must be maintained between human beings. The characters, in effect, become so emersed in their work that they forget to care for others.

Joe, in his obsession with the job, allows innocent people to be killed--indirectly even his own son; Quentin discovers that as a lawyer he has judged too harshly and overlooked his own sins; Walter is so intent on becoming a great surgeon that he loses his wife, dissociates himself from his children, and makes few friends; and Mr. Franz has been so involved that he fails to generate love in the Franz home, as Walter so resentfully tells Victor. All come to a realization of their predicament--their utter aloneness, but each reacts to it differently.

Joe realizes too late that he has put too much emphasis on the business and is ironically estranged from his family, for whom he has worked so hard. He chooses suicide rather than face the agony of the situation. Quentin, who prosecutes the guilty, recognizes his own guilt in the failure of his personal relationships, and at the end of the play is poised to reach out with real compassion toward Holga. Walter might be seen as a Joe Keller who has killed with the surgical knife, but who now faces his alienation from family and friends brought about by attention to work, and who does something about it. Rather than shoot himself, he gets rid of the dishonest part of his work by selling his old people's
nursing homes that soak the rich and by reducing his rich man’s medical practice.

Through their work Miller’s protagonists seek the dignity and meaning without which life is empty and worthless. They sometimes have a job they are not satisfied with, they lose a job, or they work so hard to achieve success and money that they lose every worthwhile human connection. But an occupation is necessary for all Miller characters. Old Solomon in *The Price* is the epitome of the man who is literally sustained by his work. The very act of striving is a life-giving quality, according to Solomon. A 90-year old furniture dealer who has been retired for several years, Solomon sees an opportunity to pick up his life again by buying the Franz’s old furniture and fixing it up to sell. At first he is very hesitant to take on so many pieces, and when Victor presses him he haltingly says,

Listen, it’s a terrible temptation to me! ... I’m still practically a hundred per cent—not a hundred, but I feel very well. And I figured maybe you got a couple nice pieces—not that the rest can’t be sold, but it could take a year, year and half. For me that’s a big bet. (In conflict, he looks around.) The trouble is I love to work; I love it, but--

(p. 40)

As he continues to stall, Victor finally demands to know if he will take the furniture or not and what the price is. Solomon, pushed emotionally to the limits, realizes he must make a decision and blurts out desperately: "I’m going to buy it! I mean I’ll...I’ll have to live, that’s all, I’ll make up my mind! I’ll buy it" (p. 42). Now that he has
made the decision to take up his life again, he goes about figuring how he's going to get the furniture out, the price, etc.

At the end of the play Victor asks Solomon when he will be taking the furniture away, and the following dialogue ensues:

Solomon: With God's help if I'll live, first thing in the morning..........................

Victor: extending his hand: I'm glad to have met you, Solomon.

Solomon: Likewise. And I want to thank you.

Victor: What for?

Solomon: with a glance at the furniture: Well... who would ever believe I would start such a thing again...? (He cuts himself off). But go, go, I got a lot of work here. (p. 114)

Solomon simply does not believe in quitting, and Victor has learned this lesson. During the emotionally draining conversation with his brother, he has come to understand that it is not possible to consider another career at his age, and as though accepting something he has been about to believe for a long time, he suddenly realizes who he is and what he must do. He is a policeman who has done a good job, and he is going to continue giving it his best as long as he is able. Miller's is almost an existential position as Victor sums up his and Walter's situation:

There's a price people pay. I've paid it, it's all gone, I haven't got it anymore. Just like you paid, didn't you? You've got no wife, you've lost your family, you're rattling around all over the place? Can you go home and start all over again from scratch? This is where we are; now, right here, now. (p. 97)
The price he paid for his compassion does not matter any more. If he did get into the wrong job, he at least has done it with honesty; there may be regret and disappointment but not bitterness and despair. Like Solomon he is willing to take up with renewed vigor the job he has come to be proud of. Miller's implication may well be that many men who perhaps are in the wrong job can still come to a sustaining and satisfying point of view if the job is important and has been done conscientiously.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning of this study, it was suggested that Arthur Miller uses the family as a microcosm of society and the familial relationships in his drama are similar to those one confronts in the world. In his treatises on drama he often refers to the family, the home, as the ideal state, and suggests that great drama through the ages has dealt with some aspect of a single problem: "How may a man make of the outside world a home?" and further, how can he find the safety, the love, "the sense of identity and honor which...all men have connected in their memories with the idea of family." Closely related to the idea of family in Miller's drama is the concept of work—a man's occupation—which consistently has a profound effect on the protagonist's concept of self and thus on the family's stability. In dealing with the problems that confront a man as a result of his job and his family, Miller extends the necessity of satisfactory human relationships beyond the domestic scene to the family of mankind.

Optimism is evident in Miller's drama in spite of the fall of his early protagonists. Most recent critics agree

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1Miller, "The Family," p. 36.
that Miller's concern for moral issues represents an optimistic view. For some time now it has been popular among contemporary playwrights to dramatize the chaos that can be seen in the modern world. In one sense they are being true to the very nature of drama, which inevitably reflects the character of a given era; on the other hand, no period of history can be totally characterized by destructiveness, confusion and nihilism. Arthur Miller is one playwright who has continually insisted that valuable things exist amid the chaos, and he has persisted in probing for them. He has often spoken of the unity which he believes exists in the world, and has indicated that his great wish is to figure out how things connect to form that unity. He admits that he has always been interested in "how the native personality of a man was changed by his world and the harder question, how he could in turn change his world." 2 How, in other words, can a man relate to other men, to organizations, to institutions, to society itself, so that he can live with a reasonable degree of happiness and satisfaction? In probing the question Miller invariably arrives at moral standards that for him and his characters are indispensable.

Willy Loman and others have often been accused of being of low, vulgar stock, lacking in any moral or human values. In reaction to such criticism, Miller explains that the presence on stage of a man who dies for the want of some positive,

viable human value, implies that the audience will recognize such a void and supply what is missing. "In other words," Miller explains, "by showing what happens when there are no values, I, at least, assume that the audience will be compelled and propelled toward a more intense quest for values that are missing."³ His assumption is at least partially true, for his plays do reveal certain moral standards that have traditionally sustained mankind. Miller knows intimately the middle class mores and he takes comparatively insignificant men, and their specific, even narrow lives, and weaves their stories into gripping dramas. This tendency is what Clurman says the British like about Miller's work. While they appreciate Miller's criticism of America, he claims that "what stirs them subliminally is precisely the vigorous, courageous, optimistic moral concern which is one of the most enduring contributions of our American heritage."⁴

As a result of the preceding examination of the plays, some conclusions regarding Miller's moral philosophy may now be suggested.

In the first place, the plays reveal that respect and dignity are attributes that all men must have for each other. The respect that each father expects from his children expands and becomes necessary for all men if they are to retain


⁴ Clurman, The Portable Arthur Miller, p. xxv.
a degree of human dignity. Moreover, a man's job contributes considerably to his sense of integrity and dignity. Second, as family members are responsible for each other, so all men are responsible for all other men. Feelings of concern for others, found traditionally in the home, necessitate the values of trust and honesty. If a man fails to develop such a sense of responsibility for other human beings, then he is untrustworthy and dishonest in his societal relationships, and becomes so isolated that, like Quentin, he eventually finds he can no longer "bear to be a separate person." And third, just as stability of the family is desirable, so are relationships within the community or in one's sphere of work. The desire on the part of Miller's family members to maintain or regain the stability of the home is an endeavor that involves respect and responsibility, and one which is projected into the community, especially in the cases of Joe Keller and Eddie Carbone.

Each of the family plays opens as the protagonist, who has always believed himself to be the accepted authority, faces loss of respect and dignity within the family. They are fathers who, near the end of life, find themselves strangers in their own homes. As they struggle to know themselves better, to redefine certain values, and to discover what has gone wrong in their relationships both to family members and to outsiders, they dig more and more into the past. The past becomes the lost paradise, the time when
everything went smoothly and parents and children loved each other and had few differences.

Respect, particularly respect and honor of one's parents, is one of the most cherished characteristics of that idyllic past. Few children could show more respect than Biff and Happy for Willy and Linda. After they become adults, Linda continues to insist that Biff respect the man who "never did a day's work but for his boys." And Biff, in the restaurant scene, shows that he believes it as he says to Miss Foraythe, "you've just seen a prince walk by." But Happy, unmoved by his father's agony, eagerly escorts his two prostitutes away from the scene with "that's not my father. He's just a guy." Little imagination is required to decide which attitude Miller wishes the audience to admire.

In All My Sons the reluctance of Chris to admit that his father has been wrong reveals how difficult it is for him to give up the respect he learned as a child. His cry, "I never thought of you as a man, I thought of you as my father," reveals the near reverence with which he has always viewed Joe. It is also clear that both Catherine and Beatrice have given Eddie the respect due him as head of the household.

One should note here that in all three of these plays, the protagonist feels the loss of respect and personal integrity because he has not been able to live up to the position he felt he should hold, a position almost godlike in nature. As one critic has noted, the fall of these
characters involves more than the children's recognition that the father is fallible—the fall is more like the collapse of deity. Small children see no wrong in their fathers. That is why Biff can accept his father's advice that taking the football in his case is not actually stealing. As the children grow up, however, they begin to see the fallacy in this kind of reasoning, and the father's interpretation of such awareness causes him to doubt his own worth. The son finds it extremely difficult to accept this fallibility, while the father sees it as impossible. The sense of identity for which the protagonist has sought is shattered as he realizes there is no possibility of perpetuating his essence (as he defines it)—or name—through his son. Miller actually is wrestling with the question of how a man can live with imperfection and evil.

Significantly in the intervening plays between View and The Price, Miller begins to resolve the problem in his own mind, and the situation in The Price offers a more optimistic view when the son learns from his father's mistakes. Victor's action of behalf of his father not only allows him to live with greater integrity but also gives an old, dejected man a few more years of dignity. Miller seems to suggest that respect is a contagious thing. If one acts as though he is concerned for and has respect for another, the other person has a greater respect for himself. The revelatory

"Nelson, Portrait of a Playwright, p. 88."
moment for Willy Loman is the instant that he recognizes Biff loves him for what he is, and he goes to his death happy because of this insight. On the other hand, Walter, who, like Happy, shows no concern for his father, also shows very little concern for his wife and children.

In his early plays, Miller's characters seem to echo Ibsen's Brand in their demand for all or nothing regarding respect for themselves and others; in his later plays, they have begun to realize the duality of their human nature and have abandoned the either/or for a position of realistic self-esteem through a dogged faith in themselves and others. Because of his inhumanity in refusing to go to the aid of someone else, Walter is increasingly haunted and eventually loses his self-respect. The result is a nervous breakdown. He eventually learns, however, that a man can still have respect for others, can even maintain a degree of self-esteem and dignity, when he accepts his faults but strives to improve. Solomon, the wise old man in The Price, is the embodiment of this philosophy. He is continually haunted by the suicide of his daughter and feels that something he did must have caused it. But he refuses to let the agony of his own guilt consume him; instead he strives to make his life significant day by day. As he says, "It's not that you can't believe nothing, that's not so hard—it's that you still got to believe it. That's hard" (p. 37). In spite of all the bad things a man does, he still has to believe in himself.
and others, and believe that goodness and significance can yet be found.

An important factor in retaining one's dignity and respect, according to Miller, is his job. When a man fails to achieve what he conceives to be his occupational goal, Miller seems to say, he loses a certain amount of dignity which not only reduces him in his own eyes but in the eyes of those around him. One cannot maintain his position as authoritative father, nor can he be a real man, if he cannot keep his dignity and respect represented by the job. And his loss of faith in himself is ultimately destructive to both him and his family.

A sense of responsibility for one's fellow man is also projected through the family plays. While it is relatively easy for family members to feel responsible for others in the family, it is another thing to have such feelings about outsiders. Yet Miller apparently believes it should be done, and at least one character in each of the plays attempts to extend responsible action into the community. One can follow this idea from Miller's first novel Focus through All My Sons to The Price. In Focus a citizen hears a cry for help but refuses to get involved. Chris, in All My Sons, denounces his father for the same inability to feel responsible for anyone outside the family. Quentin, in After the Fall, also learns that his judgment of other people is a judgment of himself, for he has the same capacity for murder as some of those he condemns. This kinship to all men causes him to
conclude that he is responsible for other people, and that he cannot live as a separate isolated person. Victor, too, recognizes this when he sees that once wealthy and respected men spend their days in the park after financial catastrophe. His feeling of responsibility, though particularized in his aid to his own father, seems to be his way of accepting the responsibility for others in the same predicament. Even though his life appears, on the surface, a more limited one than his brother Walter's, it is significant to note that the effect Victor's attitude of responsibility has had on those around him is much more desirable than Walter's. His son is a well-adjusted, intelligent boy, headed toward a good career, while Walter's children have little ambition and are apparently leading bohemian existences.

Several levels of responsibility are evident here. First there is the kind of responsibility that fathers have for children. Beyond that is the sense of caring and concern that makes one act responsibly toward other men. And further there is the courageous acceptance of one's own acts, whether right or wrong, that results in a determination to constantly evaluate and reevaluate one's life. The Kellers and the Lomans of the world are not able to make this self analysis because of pride, inflated ego that will not allow them to accept their mistaken ideology, and also because of their inability to see beyond the front gate, as Chris would have it. They can see no other alternative to the way they have lived and die, although they see that their way has flaws in
it. However, neither Victor nor Walter is ultimately destroyed because they have asked the questions: "What have I done," and "How have my actions affected others." Though it is difficult, they accept the responsibility for their own actions and act on what they have learned. Unlike Willy and Joe, they can face their guilt and start from where they are. This kind of responsibility is epitomized in Solomon who, in spite of all the odds against him, takes on a new job.

Finally, I believe, the effort to maintain stability and cohesion within the family, as seen in the plays selected, is Miller's dramatic effort to form that unity which he believes exists in the world. If unity is formed in the family and extended into the world, then men will have learned how to make a home of the world in which they live.

It is appropriate here to quote again a statement by Corrigan regarding Miller's philosophy:

he has insisted with a continually broadening range that courage, truth, trust, responsibility, and faith must be the central values of men who would (as they must) live together.⁶

Miller's stand is a moral one, for all of his characters, no matter how far they go astray, strive to live by values. The crisis of each play emerges precisely because they cannot always do so.

Miller once said that Willy Loman must be admired because of his intense and undeviating commitment to what he

⁶Corrigan, Critical Essays, p. 22.
conceived to be right and because he refused to settle for half. But through the years, between his first play and The Price, I think Miller can say with Alfieri in A View From the Bridge that "one settles for half and I like it better." Given the forces that operate in the world and the difficulty one has in overcoming his own egotism to reach out to another, I think Miller finally concludes that a man should not commit himself too soon to a belief or cause as entirely as did his early protagonists; for if it turns out that he is wrong somewhere along the line, he is doomed. Like Victor, and even Walter, he must be able to reevaluate occasionally and perhaps change his mind. As Victor says, "This is where we are; we can't start over." We have to begin where we are, he perceives, accepting our mistakes but trying to improve. In All My Sons, when Kate, heartbroken over what she and her husband have done, asks, "what more can we be than sorry," Chris replies, "You can be better." Miller seems to say that if a man can maintain familial relationships and the values of love, trust, and responsibility—integral parts of family life—and form similar bonds in his community, then he can survive. He often has to live with failure and guilt; he may have to settle for half; but he can always try to be better. Some of these moral implications turn out to be commonplaces of moral traditions, but Miller succeeds in making them seem fresh and valid.
"Arthur Miller Discusses The Crucible," as told to John and Alice Griffin Theatre Arts, XXXVII (October, 1953), 33.


Koppenhaver, A. J. "Fall and After: Albert Camus and Arthur Miller." Modern Drama, IX (September, 1966), 206-209.


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