

MAN AND SOCIETY IN "A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE" FOR ARTHUR MILLER

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ABSTRACT:

The research addresses man and society in the play "A View from the Bridge" for the writer Arthur Miller. It is a social play in which Miller interprets the social world into personal anxieties and community betrayals, and attempts to disclose the split of the 'self' of the individual who experiences ethical ambiguities.

He, as a social dramatist, demonstrates the financial difficulties of the brothers "Rodolpho" and "Marco" who immigrate from Italy to USA searching for a better life and a better situation, believing that there are equal opportunities and freedom in America.

Miller by writing this play wishes to make a better society cares for its people and respects them. He censures the society for being incapable of offering equal chances, opportunities and jobs for its individuals and drives them to immigrate to other countries.

Keywords: *man, society, private self, public self, social, opportunities, chances, jobs.*

1- INTRODUCTION:

Arthur Asher Miller (October 17, 1915–February 10, 2005) is an American writer who wrote for the American theater many plays, including the famous ones "All My Sons" in 1947, "Death of a Salesman" in 1949, "The Crucible" in 1953 and "A View from the Bridge" in 1955 with a revision in 1956. He also wrote a lot of screenplays such as "The Misfits" in 1961.

Miller attracted the attention of the public, especially during the late 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s, and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the St. Louis Literary Award, the Prince of Asturias Award, the Praemium Imperiale prize and the

Jerusalem Prize in addition to the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Lifetime Achievement Award⁽ⁱ⁾.

Miller wrote "A View from the Bridge" as a straight reaction to the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) located in America. Miller was assumed to sympathize with communists, but he rejected to tell the names of other suspected friends, but his friend Elia Kazan gave their names to this Committee, which made Miller angry. In the play "A View From the Bridge", Eddie Carbone symbolizes Elia Kazan because he regards this behavior as a disgraceful treachery⁽ⁱⁱ⁾.

The play relied on a true story. Miller was writing a research about Pate Panto who was a dockworker executed as he was trying to rebel against

a union, as well as another story about a longshoreman who attempted to stop his niece from getting married to a brother of his, so he notified the immigration bureau about his relatives to solve this issue. Yet, he after a short time vanished and was said to be killed at the hands of one of his brothers⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾.

Nevertheless, Miller tried to keep away from the mere realism in narrating the story, so he said, **“In writing this play originally I obeyed the impulse to indicate, to telegraph, so to speak, rather than to explore and exploit what at finest had seemed to me the inevitable and therefore unnecessary emotional implication of the conflict”**^(iv).

The play revolves around Eddie Carbone, a dockworker who betrays his relatives and is estranged society. The first version of the play "A View from the Bridge" was written in 1955 with only one act. But, the author was in some way discontent with this, so he made of two acts yet no longer than the first version. However, the main change he made to the play was enlarging the part of Eddie's wife to not only make the second version of the play more human and warmer but also a clearer statement^(v).

2- THE DUAL SELF:

In the author's previous dramas, the search for self was directed outwards, while in "A View from the Bridge", it was directed inwards. The author in this play completes his vision of social drama, saying, **"social drama in this generation must do more than analyze and arraign the social network of relationships. It must delve into the nature of man, as he exists to discover what his needs are so that those needs may be amplified and exteriorized in terms of social concepts. Thus, the new social dramatist, if he is to do his work, must be an even deeper psychologist than those of the past and he must be conscious at least of the futility of isolating the psychological life of man lest he always falls short of tragedy"**^(vi).

In order to understand the nature of duality of self in A View from the Bridge, it is necessary to think

about the move from the objective presence of characters in the author's previous plays to their subjective presence in this play. His characters undergo two kinds of realities: subjective and objective. In his previous plays, his characters are usually portrayed as victims of the social system under which they live. Yet, "A View from the Bridge" shows a contrast to his previous plays, especially "Death of a Salesman" and "The Crucible", with respect to psychological and social factors, because the double influence involving the characters' objective reality and the subjective reality directs and controls the search for self. While the author probed the protagonist's psychological and social motivations, the basic meaning in "A View from the Bridge" lies in the relation between the person and the society^(vii).

In "A View from the Bridge", we find a search for self concerning the protagonist's inner strength due to the acceptance or refusal of the public image he bears and that image influence on the one is always tragic. For the person to succeed in life, he desperately tries to wear a mask socially accepted and performs a role in front of the society. By doing this, he is estranged from his own self. Therefore, the author shows the duality of self "a private self and a public self" in his dramatic works. There exists the unavoidable loss of identity, which is associated to the social survival of human and the sore awareness of this loss of self guides human to wish to discover his individual identity. Simultaneously, different social forces prevent human endeavors from stress his true self in his public life^(viii).

The basic crisis in Eddie's duality of self is produced by the social environment where he lives. With regard to Eddie's social environment, his infidelity attains factual ratios since it flies in the face of the customs governed by his ethics which are the ethics of his friends, colleagues and neighbors as well and not only his mere independent formation^(ix).

The character of Eddie grows noteworthy as it brilliantly exhibits the unavoidable game reciprocally played by the person and society within various sociological and psychological backgrounds

and circumstances, and eventually their effect on one another. As Crawford and Rossiter (2006), for example, state **"young people's interest in identity is usually personal and psychological. On the other hand, the focus of community interest in identity is often sociological: the concern is to hand on the distinguishing characteristics of the community, ethnic and religious identities in particular"**^(x).

It is obvious that the author was excited to generate a modern form of tragedy similar to classical Greek tragedy, even if the hero is constantly the ordinary American man. The inference of Eddie's homosexual desire is important in the play of "A View from a Bridge" as it certainly augments the tragic force by generating dual concealed desires: incestuous desire and homosexual desire, resulting in further desperate forces psychologically and unconsciously controlling the hero. Weales (1969) refers to these dual desires **"the boy's [Rodolpho's] presence nags at him [Eddie], almost forces him to put a label on his incestuous love for his niece and his homosexual attraction to the boy himself"**^(xi). His dual suppressed feelings and desires towards Catherine and Rodolpho arrive at a peak with the reality of their sexual relation, in that these unaware desires grow strong enough to compel Eddie to take a tragic act to stop their marriage through betraying Marco and Rodolpho his undocumented relatives and handing them over to the immigration authority^(xii).

These hidden desires are not directly embodied in speech or consciously recognized by him, but his eyes and looks expose him. For instance, Rodolpho persuades Catherine of his love with this sentence **"All the answers are in my eyes, Catherine"**^(xiii). Actually, the title "A View from the Bridge" shows different visual impressions and looking activities, implying how Eddie looks at the targets of his desire, i.e. Catherine and Rodolpho, and in what way the people around him like his wife Beatrice and the lawyer Alfieri look at him, as Abbotson (2000) puts it "Most of Eddie's pent-up emotion is conveyed in the stage directions rather than through what the characters say"^(xiv).

3- MAN AND SOCIETY IN THE PLAY:

The location of "A View from the Bridge" is New York in a slum neighborhood away from the glamour and magnificence world. The Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn in New York in which Eddie lived was an area of Italian and Sicilian immigrants. Miller's characters imagine their lives and the world they belong to from Brooklyn Bridge^(xv).

The play is about Eddie Carbone, a dockworker, whose is married to Beatrice and a custodian of his orphan niece "Catherine" whose cousins "Marco and Rodolpho" come from Italy and illegally enter USA. Eddie notifies the American authorities about the illegal entrance of Marco and Rodolpho to the country. Thus, Eddie is a man guilty of betrayal. Hence, Marco finds Eddie and looks at him as an animal of no humanity and should be killed^(xvi).

In this play and Miller's other plays, family is essential and focal. The protagonist Eddie Carbone is a failure as a husband, ruins his family due to jealousy, refuses "Beatrice" his wife for his niece "Catherine" who loves "Rodolpho", and accuses "Rodolpho" of homosexuality, as Nelson (1970) says, **"Certainly Eddie Carbone's semiconscious desire for his niece, his frigidity towards his wife and the possibility of his latent homosexuality, gives greater emphasis to the psychosexual factors than any previous Miller drama"**^(xvii).

Eddie promised to take care of his niece. So, he brought her up and was her godfather. Then, his desire towards his niece controlled him due to her beauty and feminine maturity; therefore, Eddie's protection of Catherine turned from affection into incestuous desires and grew to be a threat to his wife Beatrice who predicted the future consequences. Thus, she many times warned Catherine to act as a grown-up, saying, **"Because you think you're a baby. I told you fifty times already, you can't act the way you are. You still walk around in front of him in your slip(...)**Well you can't do it. Or like you sit on the

edge of the bathtub talkin' to him when he's shavin' in his underwear"^(xviii).

Eddie an ordinary man, straight, hard worker and benevolent, who is disliked by nobody. He is always self concerned and wishes to support and guard his innocence. Yet, like the ancient drama hero, he has a defect or flaw, making him behave in a wrong way^(xix).

His father is an Italian emigrated from his country Italy to USA, thus he has been raised with the original Italian and Sicilian principles and ethics of honor and fidelity. Eddie thinks that he is able to protect Catherine from matrimony or relationship with any man because he wishes her for himself. Even if this matter is against the codes of ethics, laws and society norms and customs, his wish and desire towards his niece never change. He sees himself higher than the others and is controlled by his personal love and guilt, so he is ruined by the socio-psychological consequences of his flaws^(xx).

His love for Catherine is possessive and this is obvious when he says, "**You can't take no job. Why didn't you ask me before you take a job?**"^(xxi). he does not permit her to have a job, despite the fact that she will not be for him. He feels as a man of a house that he should select a husband for her. He does not understand his emotions towards her, but his wife Beatrice tells him in a clear way about his desire in "**You want some thin' else, Eddie, and you can never have her!**"^(xxii). His sexual repression is the very thing that destroyed him and the desire was in his mind with no full realization^(xxiii).

He, in his mania for Catherine, breaches the society ethical code. He is incapable to realize his lust towards her because the social code would not allow him to do that. Consequently, due to this society barrier, he grows psychologically suppressed and inclines to an illogical conducts. Hence, he leaves himself without the psychological reality typical for his community culture^(xxiv).

He turns his energy and hatred to the brothers Marco and Rodolpho, making him behave unreasonably. He is a failure in real life, yet he searches for salvation and triumph in death. By revenging upon Marco, he thinks that "wholeness" is a whole interest in oneself. His tragic fault lies in his construction of a world where he can not escape or realize^(xxv).

He knows very well the fate he will face if he betrays Marco and Rodolpho. He works hard, presents a lot, but he never shows regret towards the acts that result in his death and tragedy.

Catherine attempts to liberate from Eddie little by little to be nearer to Rodolpho. She censures Eddie for betraying Marco and Rodolpho, yet she still shows her care towards him as she says "**I never meant to do nothing to you**"^(xxvi) while he is dying. Both women have no problems with each other and the relation between them is good. Yet, Eddie's wife Beatrice is justified to be jealous. Catherine recognizes that Eddie has committed a horrible thing in informing the authorities about the two brothers, but she can do nothing about it.

Both women are weak characters to the end. Miller depicts the women as almost feeble and incapable to change the destiny of their husbands, lovers or relatives in the Italian American society. For example, while most of the play revolves on Eddie's passion for Catherine, Catherine has no significant effect on the play events. She is weak in that she looks for his consent and forgiveness till the end of the play. Beatrice also seeks his consent, yet she acts maturely towards Catherine and Eddie and almost controls his character in that he looks for her love and forgiveness for the first time. The personality of both women centers around male figures. They lacks womanhood, children and decision^(xxvii).

As we said before, Marco and Rodolpho are brothers entered USA illegally. They are not near in age and different in act and speech. Rodolpho is slim and elegant with blond hair. He talks continually whereas Marco is silent most of the time because he

knows little English. He is aware of what is happening and what he hears. He always thinks before talks because he accepts as true that actions speak louder than words, and this will be clear and evident when he kills Eddie in the end^(xxviii).

Rodolpho is not in favor of anything American. He is in love with Catherine, yet shocked at her proposition to return back to Italy. While Marco feels homesick, misses his family too much and has come to America to improve the situation of his family. Rodolpho excels in English because he uses every mean to learn how to speak English in a fluent way. Marco is more slowly and less correctly with simple dignity and clarity. Rodolpho also likes singing and dress-sewing. They both are proud of themselves, still Marco owns an intensive sense of community conventional values. Rodolpho forms the biggest threat to Eddie. He wishes to be a US citizen whatever be the cost, that is why he perhaps does not love Catherine, but wants to marry her in order to have the American citizenship. So, he may marry any American girl to have a job and identity^(xxix).

Eddie's hopeless trial to prevent Rodolpho from marrying Catherine does not succeed and eventually the state of affairs comes up where he pulls her toward him and kisses her fervently. His concealed desire is openly exposed in Act II in the kissing scene. When he kisses Catherine on her mouth, the audience feels somewhat uncomfortable and embarrassed because this relationship is not normal between an uncle and a niece and forbidden^(xxx).

The lawyer "Alferi" faces him with a direct speech which stuns and disturbs Eddie by saying, **"Eddie, I want to listen to me- you know, sometimes God mixes up the people. We all love somebody, the wife, the kids-every man's got somebody that he loves, heh? But sometimes there's too much. You know? There's too much, and it goes where it mustn't. A man works hard, he brings up a child sometimes it's a niece, sometimes even a daughter and he never realizes it, but through the years-there is too much love for the daughter, there is too**

much love for the niece. Do you understand what I am saying to you?"^(xxxi).

Homosexuality was forbidden socially not talked about openly. The author confronted troubles with the British Theatre when he referred to homosexuality in the play "A View from the Bridge" as **"Eddie Carbone accuses his wife's cousin Rodolpho of homosexuality and to prove it, grabs him and kisses him on the lips. No doubt because it was so widespread, if not yet accepted as commonplace, homosexuality in 1956 could not be referred to directly on the stage"**^(xxxii). His view of men differs in that they should look, act and behave in a masculine way, be tough, wage earners, responsible of a family and cares for them. He holds manly features which are clearly shown in his over protectiveness. He looks at Rodolpho as a woman in referring that he has blonde hair, sings, cooks, makes dresses, and is a weak fighter^(xxxiii). **"Eddie does not understand why he opposes the marriage so violently, nor do any of the other people who are involved. Searching around for a plausible reason, Eddie convinces himself that the young Italian is a homosexual whose only motive in marrying Catherine is a chance to legitimize his citizenship in America. But Eddie's real motive is the undeclared, unrecognized, unappeased hunger he has for himself. Like the heroes of Greek tragedy, he topples the whole house down on himself in the final catastrophe of a haunted play"**^(xxxiv).

Thus, Eddie kisses Rodolpho on the mouth for looking at him as a woman and thinking that Rodolpho is homosexual.

Marco, at the other hand, looks as a man ready to punish anyone harms others and does not feel responsibility towards the society like Eddie. He is the most prominent character in the play. His plan is to travel illegally from Italy to USA with his brother in order to work as longshoremen because their country suffers from an economic depression post World War II, make sufficient money to live and send some to his wife and three children in Italy, proving that he is an honorable man which is emphasized in the play

several times through the plot, dialogue, actions and symbolism. Though he is a foreigner and illegally remains in USA, yet some see in him a hero because he tries to support his family whom he left in Italy and rescue his eldest sick son. The violent aspect of the US society is obvious in him, for instance, when he defies Eddie to raise the chair at the end of Act I, by that he wants to save the face of his brother and the honor of his family. He talks little and does not mention his wife and kids. However, he is a hard-worker as much as he can. And as a last offense, he spits in Eddie's face in front of everyone, after his betrayal to them and this act in the Italian culture is regarded as an intense expression of rage toward a person and it is hardly ever left with no punishment. He is religious for he has headed to the church prior to confronting Eddie. And, he is ready to sacrifice his life and commit a fatal crime in an evil and immoral society to preserve and protect his honor because Eddie is a distrusted person and a betrayer, thus he should be punished. Without him Eddie will never be punished and will stay alive^(xxxv).

Alfieri is a close friend to Eddie and his family because he was working with his father when he was a child. He has a very central role in the play. He makes the action move quickly from one incident to another and interacts with other characters in the play. He always advises Eddie not to interfere in Catherine's life and marriage and let her go in her way and give her his blessing. When Eddie thinks of betrayal, Alfieri knows what he is thinking of and frequently advises him **"You have a friend in the world... put it off your mind"**^(xxxvi). He narrates the events which are immediate, passionate and confused^(xxxvii).

He resembles the symbolic bridge between US law and tribal laws. He is an educated man, studied US law and respected it, yet he is still faithful to Italian traditions. From Alfieri's point of view, the play is narrated, the view from the bridge between the American culture and the Italian culture, Alfieri tries to draw Eddie's picture and the Red Hook/Brooklyn family in the 1950s. He provides an extension personified by Brooklyn Bridge, from little ethnic communities full of dock workers to Manhattan multi-

ethnic prosperity, wealth and intellectualism. The old and new societies are codified in the immigrant son "Alfieri". Alfieri tries to present an impartial and rational view of the play incidents, explains, and clarifies the greatest social and moral implications in the work^(xxxviii).

Alfieri is vital to the play because of the terrible nature of Eddie's offence against customary social values. As Miller states, Alfieri **"still admires the irrational, the universal, the unleashed human spirit that reacts as it will"**^(xxxix). He as a bridge permits people to cross Manhattan and the modern intellectual US culture. Alfieri attempts to combine US laws with Italian cultural practices and find a place between both. The play psychological and social aspects look as if in conflict at times. The play social level addresses the firm codes of loyalty in the Sicilian-American society where Eddie lives with the outcomes of the violation of that code^(xl).

When Eddie betrays the two brothers and inform the immigration authority about them, he betrays his neighbors, cousins, family, himself and loses the whole society respect and his word of honor which has a great meaning to the Italian culture. Here, the US society contradicts the Italian society in that Marco thinks he has the right to revenge and punish and revenge is out of his duty for the sake of his family. He does not understand why should go without punishment here as he says, **"In my country he would be dead now."**^(xli)

Marco highly respects Eddie at the beginning of the play, but at the end he steals even his name and kills him with no feeling of respect towards him. And, in killing him, he has no more chances to earn money for his family the aim for which he came to America. Rodolpho also highly respects Eddie, but Eddie regards him as a threat and although Eddie has everything he wants, a house, a wife, friends, respect, and every other thing, however he does not accept reality and makes other mistakes, losing everything dear to him, thus he is only left with his wife's love^(xlii)
^(xliii).

In the play, we notice an intense struggle between society and US law. The society is inhabited by Sicilian-American traditions which protect and shelter illegal immigrants within the respect of their home values some of which are in conflict with the values of the American justice system. Eddie chooses to be against his community and adheres to the state laws. He loses respect of community and friends. His incapability to merge and unite the Sicilian and American cultures ruins him. The evil does not only lie in the surroundings, but also in him as he refuses the Sicilian-American code of revenge. After his wife's request for forgiveness, he recognizes the dark and evil side of his character. Society has an influential context for the play incidents, because it enforces particular norms and rules on the family in that it directs the acts and behaviors of the characters. Thus, all characters are obliged to reconcile the American culture with the Italian one so as to avoid any cultural or moral conflicts in their life. The rigid society surrounding the characters generates a great anxiety in the Carbone family due to their being watched continually^(xlv).

The majority of Red Hook people are Italian, hence for them Italy represents homeland, origin and culture. Catherine connects Italy with mystery, romance and beauty. Rodolpho thinks of Italy as a place with less chances in that he prefers to run away from it. Most of the characters belong to Italy and to Italian customs. Italy here is the source of cultural customs and social and religious practices in Red Hook society and it links the society which is feeble in common.

The play demonstrates how law and society are unable to differentiate or weight correctly the personal and public truths. Akin to all the people immigrate from Europe to USA to move their habits and traditions to the new world, Rodolpho and Marco in the play came to USA to look for an imaginary world, a dream and hope that may improve their situation. They think that US is a gold mine and they will possibly have a great life in it.

At the end, both brothers fail to achieve their dreams and the goals they have come for as if Miller would like to say that life in modern age is similar everywhere.

CONCLUSION

In the play of "**A View from the Bridge**" and via the two brothers Marco and Rodolpho, Miller wishes to stage a mold of all people who come to USA from Europe due to the difficult conditions of life in their original countries. They like to stay and live in America and fulfill their American dream.

The author also shows both brothers' financial difficulties, who have immigrated from Italy to USA searching for a better life because they believe that in America there are equal chances and freedom.

The author wishes to generate a better society that respects its people. He censures the society that can not provide equal chances and jobs for its people and forces them to immigrate far away from home to another country.

In this play, the individuals feel isolated, look for self and identity in family and in chaotic world of indifference. Love, hatred, jealousy, power, greed and revenge appear to stimulate them to catastrophe. The forces that ruin their lives are out of control and lie exterior to the borders of mind and justice. Every day they have to wear a mask out of readiness or necessity.

We may conclude that the critical feeling of catastrophe and duality of self are linked with irreversible actions and irrevocable loss and the individual is made to be prepared for social forces that may not be completely understood or conquer by rational caution. As Abbotson (2000) says, **'failure, in Miller's eyes, should not be blamed on an indefinable hostile fate or social system but on individuals who refuse to accept their responsibilities and connection to fellow human beings'**^(xlv).

The characters see themselves trapped in paroxysmal depth of boredom due to their fluctuation from one self to another. Boredom is sometimes constructed upon the self sense of rupture from the world surrounding it; therefore perception is insistently and sharply headed inward yet in a dulled way outward.

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