

The Impact Of Ibsen Upon The Social Plays Of Arthur Miller

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Abstract

Arthur Miller's social drama deals with the alienation and victimization of the individual in modern American society. In this respect, he is influenced by Ibsen whose plays also deal with the struggle of the individual against the conditioning power of society and his feeling of alienation from society. This paper examines some aspects of the dramatic influence of Ibsen on the social drama of Arthur Miller which can be summed up in the following points: (1) Miller uses dramatic structures especially the retrospective analytical technique characteristic of Ibsen's drama; (2) he deals with the social forces which victimize the individual in modern American society in a way similar to Ibsen's treatment of the same subject; (3) he presents the individual as a victim as does Ibsen whose social plays portray the paradoxical predicament of man (the attempts of the individual at fulfillment always end in tragedy and he remains bound willy-nilly to the society he tries to break free from). Miller's tragedies also point out that the protagonists are always attached to the same society that is persecuting them and causing their sufferings. With Miller tragedy occurs during the course of man's struggle to find a place in society; and (4) he, like Ibsen, shows that the individual still bears a moral and social responsibility towards himself and other fellow human beings within the context of his social milieu.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence Ibsen has exerted on the development of Arthur Miller's social drama. Although this paper is not concerned with the impact of the nineteenth-century **zeitgeist** on Ibsen's dramaturgy and philosophical thinking, by way of introducing my topic I would like to point out, though briefly, that Ibsen's treatment of the question of human identity and the position of the individual in society, which has bearing on the social idealism of Miller, preoccupied the minds of contemporary philosophers and thinkers.¹ Ibsen is, as Henry James calls him, "a sort of register of the critical atmosphere, a barometer" of his age (James, 1972 : 234). Though Ibsen claims that he has not read many books and that his reading is mainly restricted to newspapers, he, as Martin Esslin asserts, is "a brilliant sounding-board for all the philosophical cross-currents of his time, whatever the means by which he might have become aware of them (Esslin, 1980:76). The problem of man's feeling of alienation from his own society has arisen as a result of decline of religious faith and advances in science, philosophy and other fields of human knowledge in the nineteenth century.² When man discovers that he has been living in a false system, destructive to his self-integrity, he begins to look for an alternative existence in which he can fulfil himself and attain inner truth. But this quest brings man into direct conflict with his old world, and alienates him from his own society upon realizing his impotency to shake off the conditioning power of his environment whatever that might be.

Ibsen responds to the cultural upheavals and intellectual revolutions of his age from the very beginning of his dramatic career, his early drama (i.e **Catiline, Brand** and **Peer Gynt**) shows his discontent with his milieu (the Christian world) because it has been contaminated by middle-class capitalism and bourgeois pettiness. He seeks to create through his drama an ideal world, a "third empire" as he puts it in **Emperor and Galilean**, in which the individual attains fulfilment. Ibsen explains his ideal search as follows: "the important thing is to remain true and faithful to yourself. It is not a question of willing this or that, but of willing what you must do because you are yourself and cannot do otherwise (Clurman, 1977: 10). For Ibsen the imposition of authority of any sort whether it is that of the state, traditions, inheritance, family or others enslaves the soul and hinders fulfilment of the self; hence Ibsen rejects all forms of conformity. No wonder then that he was often attacked by contemporary critics and detractors as an anarchist, a family destroyer and a rebel³.

Indeed Ibsen did not enjoy in his life-time the literary recognition that he received posthumously from modern writers all over the world. In fact, he used to get hostile criticism from critics of his day in his native Norway as well as in other European countries whenever a provocative play of his, like **A Doll's House, Ghosts** or **A public Enemy**, was published or produced. Ibsen was aware of this criticism his plays attracted. At the same time, he knew that he had some followers in various European countries who recognized the significance of his drama to the drama of the day, and to the future of modern drama in Europe. Ibsen was confident that future generations would acknowledge his dramatic talents and respond to his plays sympathetically.⁴

The contribution of Ibsen to modern drama has duly discussed by various scholars. Building on previous studies of this kind, my paper deals with what I see as Ibsen's most relevance to the drama of Arthur Miller, mainly his writing about man's feeling of alienation from society, a theme which has become the focal subject of twentieth-century drama. Ibsen shows in his plays that society is false and evil; it has become a force hostile to the fulfilment of the aspirations of the individual. His plays present the conflict that occurs between the individual and society which mostly ends with the victimization and defeat of the individual (Northman, 1973: 221 - 228). As Raymond Williams puts it, "What happens, again and again in Ibsen, is that the hero defines an opposing world, full of lies and compromises and dead positions, only to find, as he struggles against it, that as a man he belongs to this world, and has its destructive inheritance in himself (Williams, 1966: 98). At the same time, Ibsen indicates that the individual is not wholly free from responsibility; he is responsible for the actions and choices he makes within the context of his social milieu (Northman, 1973: 224).

Like Bernard Shaw who champions the cause of Ibsen in England, Arthur Miller considers himself to be a professed follower of Ibsen; he admits the influence of the latter on his playwriting techniques and development of his social thinking, and demonstrates the relevance of Ibsen to modern American society. Influenced by Ibsen, Miller deals with the victimization and alienation of the individual in his capitalistic American society. He has grasped Ibsen's theme that modern capitalistic society has become a force hostile to the integrity of the individual and to his attempt at fulfilment. In this paper I will attempt to determine and discuss the impact of Ibsen on the social plays of Miller particularly his treatment of the social forces that victimize the individual, and his conception of the kind of moral and social responsibility that the individual should have towards himself and his fellow human beings; and to indicate variations in the way Ibsen and Miller portray the position of the individual within their respective societies. Ibsen looks at society as a false system which one should challenge despite all adverse circumstances to achieve one's inner truth. Ibsen admires the fight for freedom; he declares that, "the only thing I care about liberty is the struggle for it I care nothing for the possession of it" (Clurman, 1977: 2). Miller portrays twentieth-century American society which he sees as a destructive and evil force victimizing the individual for the mere living in it. The best an individual can do in this society is to conform, or "to settle for half", as Miller puts it in **A View From The Bridge**⁵. In other words, in Miller's capitalistic society the individual can do nothing but compromise, and even if he does so he still remains a victim, as Willy Loman is, because the very nature of this societal system is inimical and destructive.

Miller acknowledges his indebtedness to Ibsen. In answer to Ronald Hayman's question, "I read some critic who said you consider yourself dramatically a descendant of Ibsen," Miller says:

It all comes from one essay I wrote. What I was saying was that you can no more dismiss Ibsen than you can

dismiss some kind of architecture. He was a strong influence on my early youth but I have no debt to him in the sense that one is insisting upon re-creating him all the time. What he gave me in the beginning was a sense of the past and a sense of the rootedness of everything that happens (Hayman, 1972 :6)

Indeed Ibsen's influence on Miller appears in plays like **All My sons**, **The Crucible**, and **Death of a Salesman**.

Ibsen's influence is felt in the dramatic techniques and social ideas of Miller. For instance, Miller manipulates in **All My Sons** dramatic techniques characteristic of Ibsen's drama. The play is characterised by a retrospective analytical structure that is commonly used by Ibsen in a number of plays. Ibsen's retrospective technique usually shows first an ordinary dramatic situation into which gradually the consequences of a crime committed in the past build up to a climax. Among the works of Ibsen that illustrate this technique are **Ghosts** and **The Wild Duck**. **Ghosts** examines the past actions of the characters that have led up to the present dilemma. The play shows that Mrs. Alving has committed a sin against herself when she accepted to marry a man she did not love and remained in wedlock simply to keep social appearances, although she had known his degeneracy. The play also reveals that the late Mr. Alving had had an affair with his woman servant and that he had begotten a child, Regina, from her, and that Mrs. Alving concealed the relationship of Regina to her son. Now Oswald discovers that Regina is his half-sister (so he cannot marry her), and that his father was a rake. It is also revealed that Oswald has inherited syphilis, a fatal disease by then, from his father, and so is doomed to destruction.

Ibsen uses the same dramatic structure in **The Wild Duck**. The action of the play reveals the fraudulence of Werle; he had thrown the blame on his former partner, Ekdal, over some timber-business in which he himself was embroiled. Ekdal was imprisoned and Werle was set free. The present action of the play centers around the attempt of Gregers, Werle's son, to destroy the lie upon which the life of his father has been based and to influence Hjalmar, Ekdal's son, to believe in his idealism, and the confusion of the latter when he discovers that Werle has had an affair with his wife and that Hedving is Werle's bastard daughter, and not his.

Miller uses Ibsen's analytical retrospective technique in **All My Sons**. He says that, "the shadow of Ibsen was seen on this play**All My Sons** begins very late in its story. Thus, as in Ibsen's best-known work, a great amount of time is taken up with bringing the past into the present ... (Miller, 1957:20). The play reveals that Joe Keller committed a crime in the past for which he had escaped responsibility: he had allowed the sale of faulty engines to the American Air Force, which caused the crash of a number of planes during the war. Joe Keller and his partner were brought to trial. Joe blamed his partner for the sale. So his partner was imprisoned while he was set free although he himself was really responsible for the sale. The play also presents

the attempts of Chris Keller, Joe's son, to find the truth, and of his father to avoid responsibility. Joe Keller's crime is finally revealed when a letter from Larry, the dead son of the Kellers, is produced, in which he holds his father responsible for the crashes of planes in the war, and announces his intention to die in combat as a kind of expiation for his father's crime. This letter precipitates the tragic ending of Joe Keller; he shoots himself when he recognises his responsibility for the crime he committed in the past took not only the lives of other pilots but also his own son's as well. One finds certain similarities between Miller's play, on the one hand, and Ibsen's **Ghosts** and **The Wild Duck**, on the other; Mrs. Alving's revelation that Regina is Oswald's half-sister hastens his tragic end; and Chris Keller is playing the part of social reformer that Gregers plays in **The Wild Duck**-- When Chris discovers the fraudulence of his father he sees it as his duty to destroy the lie upon which the life of his father has been built up.

Miller also manipulates other dramatic features that hallmark the Ibsen drama. For instance, Miller's social plays are characterized by one or more of these aspects: a) delaying the climax of the plot until the social themes of the play are presented and sufficiently discussed; b) concentrating on presenting one major theme which becomes the crux of the play, and insistently maintaining a sort of economy on the play structure-- each part of the play is integral to the whole, and every character, even the trivial ones, has a role to play; c) writing family tragedies in which the family becomes a microcosm of society for the social ills that afflict individuals in society are reflected in the sufferings and thwarted aspirations of the individuals; d) presenting a sense of fate or social determinism that undermines the aspirations of the individual and his drive towards fulfillment, and a touch of symbolism (i.e the white horses in **Rosmersholm** and the horoscope in **All My Sons**) which points out the doomed fate of individuals; e) Using tragicomic irony (i.e in **Death of a Salesman**) that is usually pervasive in Ibsen's plays. These dramatic characteristics appear here and there in Miller's social plays, but they are particularly descriptive of **All My Sons**, **Death of a Salesman**, and **A View from the Bridge** (Hogan, 1964: 14-26).

Finally while talking about Miller's indebtedness to Ibsen's dramatic techniques and ideas, one should mention in passing that Miller's theory about modern drama which he expounds in a number of essays such as the one entitled, "Tragedy and the Common Man," is influenced by Ibsen's concepts of tragedy as demonstrated in his social tragedies. It suffices here to point out that Miller, like Ibsen, rejects concepts of classical tragedy derived from Aristotle (though in the structure of their plays Ibsen and Miller are closer to Aristotle's unities than is, say, Shakespeare), and states that tragedy can be written about common people: "It matters not at all whether a modern play concerns itself with a grocer or a president, whether the hero falls from a great height or a small one." What matters, Miller adds, is "the intensity of the human passion to surpass his given bounds (Wood, 1968: XX-XXi), (Williams, 1966: 87-105). Ibsen's tragedies as well as Miller's are about ordinary people, written in everyday language.

Miller's debt to Ibsen is not only a matter of technique. Miller admires Ibsen and assimilates his social ideas because of

...his insistence, his utter conviction, that he is going to say what he has to say, and that the audience, by God, is going to listen Every Ibsen play begins with the unwritten words: 'Now listen here' And these words have shown me a path through the wall of 'entertainment,' a path that leads beyond the formulas and dried-up precepts, the pretense and fraud, of the business of the stage, Whatever else Ibsen has to teach, this is his first and greatest contribution (Hogan, 1964:25)

Theater becomes for Miller, as it had been to Ibsen, a place for learning and social change rather than for amusement.

In **An Enemy of the people**, an adaptation of Ibsen's **A Public Enemy**, Miller demonstrates the significance of Ibsen's social drama. He says in the preface to his adaptation that he follows Ibsen's plot "to demonstrate that Ibsen is really pertinent today" ⁶ Miller modernises the dialogue of Ibsen's play to suit American spectators, and shortens the play-- the adaptation is approximately two-thirds the length of original, with Ibsen's five-act structure reduced to three acts and five scenes. Miller, however adheres to the theme of Ibsen's play which is about

the question of whether the democratic guarantees protecting political minorities ought to be set aside in time of crisis. more personally, it is the question of whether one's vision of the truth ought to be a source of guilt at a time when the mass of men condemn it as a dangerous and devilish lie. It is an enduring theme because there never was, nor will there ever be, an organized society able to countenance calmly the individual who insists that he is right while the vast majority is absolutely wrong (Miller, 1951: 8-9).

In this quotation, which is pertinent to **The Crucible** as well, Miller says that authority in all its forms such as that of power-groups, social conventions and dominant majorities alienates the individual and usurps his free expression of thought and will.

In **An Enemy of the People** and **The Crucible** Miller reveals the social forces that deny the individual his rights and dignity. For example in his adaptation of Ibsen's **A Public Enemy**, Miller shows these social forces that deny Dr. Stockmann his right to freedom of speech and truth. For instance, Mayor Stockmann, who heads the corrupt majority, harangues Dr. Stockmann for speaking the truth and fighting corruption in society:

You're like a man with an automatic brain- as soon as an idea breaks into your head, no matter how idiotic it may be, you get up like a sleepwalker and start writing a pamphlet about it. You're always barking about authority. If a man gives you an order, he's persecuting you. Nothing

is important enough to respect once you decide to revolt against your superiors. (Miller, 1951:95)

Incidentally, Miller's adaptation is the only play in which Miller agrees completely with Ibsen- that the individual is always right and the majority is always wrong. In Ibsen's original play, **A Public Enemy**, Dr. Stockmann attacks the majority as the enemy of truth, "the most dangerous enemy of truth and freedom among us is the solid majority" ⁷ ... He proves scientifically that the water of the Baths is contaminated, but the majority, spearheaded by Hovstad, stifles his voice of truth because the main income of their town comes from the Baths.

The **Crucible** may have been written to elaborate the ideas of **An Enemy of the People**; the play suggests that when a man takes a stand against his corrupt community or violates the established social codes of his society, as Dr. Stockmann does, the ruling majority persecutes him. For example, John Proctor, in **The Crucible**, is very much like Dr. Stockmann in that he defies the organized majority, and, as a result, becomes a victim of the authority of the majority. Miller's play shows how the organized majority, represented by Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne, which is wrong, persecutes John Proctor for his personal beliefs. He is degraded and imprisoned because he refuses to live a lie. He tells the court that Abigail is lying in order to punish him and his wife, Elizabeth, because of his refusal to marry her. Proctor even confesses his sin of adultery with Abigail and says that Abigail is trying to get rid of Elizabeth and pressure him so that he is forced to marry her, for she considers the existence of Elizabeth the only obstacle to her marriage to Proctor. But the court charges him with the sin of adultery, and refuses to believe that Abigail is faking witchcraft ⁸.

In **An Enemy of the People**, Miller refuses to compromise with society. As Benjamin Nelson points out, **An Enemy of the People**,

not only manifests his concern with the human being in his social context, but it also illustrates, more clearly than in some of his previous works, the paradoxical tension in his drama between his theoretical adherence to the concept of harmony between the individual and society and his deepening conviction that this concept cannot work. Unlike **All My Sons** and **Death of a Salesman**, which objectively balance the clash between the private man and the world in which he lives, **An Enemy of the People** radically upsets the equilibrium by demonstrating that society by its very nature is antithetical to personal choice and fulfillment. (Nelson, 1970 : 140)

Dr. Stockmann, in Miller's adaptation, announces that he is "in revolt against the age-old lie that the majority is always right ..." (p. 94-95) He rebels against the majority and refuses to compromise. Miller continues the same theme in **The Crucible**; John Proctor takes the same stand and refuses to compromise his ideals, and sur-

render to the wrong majority though he knows very well that he is going to pay his very life as a price for his sense of truth. He tears up his confession and refuses to betray other innocent people.

In **The Crucible**, Miller attacks authority which assumes religious control over one's conscience. He mentions in the Introduction of his **Collected plays** the circumstances that led him to write **The Crucible**:

It was not only the rise of "McCarthyism" that moved me but something which seemed much more weird and mysterious. It was the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance Astounded, I watched men pass me by without a nod whom I had known rather well for years; and again, the astonishment was produced by my knowledge, which I would not give up, that the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered, and yet that all they knew was terror. That so interior and subjective an emotion could have been so manifestly created from without was a marvel to me. It underlies every word in **The Crucible** (Miller, 1957: 39-40)

There is a personal significance to this statement. For example, in 1954 the state Department refused Miller a passport to attend the opening of **The Crucible** in Brussels on the grounds that he was believed to be supporting Communism (Moss, 1980: 7)

Like Ibsen's **A Public Enemy**, **The Crucible** attacks self-appointed saviours. what had happened in Salem in the seventeenth century may happen today in any society where political ideologies become the important concern of governments and dictators. In the name of social welfare and justice, atrocities may be inflicted on men because of their personal beliefs. For example, Danforth and Hathorne think their cause is just since they protect their community from the witches and Satan. They commit grave wrongs by suppressing individual freedom and expression of thought as they do in the case of John Proctor. When Hale remonstrates. "Is every defense an attack upon the court!"⁹ he actually criticises the foundations of his community upon which Danforth's justice is based. Miller thinks that in modern life repressive regimes can create 'Satan' to cover their persecution of their opponents.

In play after play, Ibsen examines the social ills of his contemporary societies pointing out the sufferings and humiliation of individuals who surrender integrity to the accepted ethics and conventions of society, For Ibsen it is an outrage against the 'essential self' when the individual surrenders his integrity to any soul-enslaving social power, be it the power of money, conventions of marriage, class-structure, or any other form of social conformity. John Northam indicates that for Ibsen, "the sig-

nal outrage in modern life is the falsification of the essential self, the blinding of the personal vision, the repression of the individual's drive towards his supreme value (Northman, 1973: 225). For instance, Mrs. Alving suffers and causes pain to those near her, particularly her son and Regina, by yielding to the marriage conventions of her society which demand that a wife should give in to the authority of her husband, simply because he is her husband, regardless of how well he treats her. Mrs. Alving (and Nora as well) is a victim of her social circumstances and environment. She thinks that she has other choice but to conform and does not realize that by compromising her integrity she in fact brings disaster on herself and others without intending to.

In **All My Sons** and **Death of a Salesman** Miller demonstrates Ibsen's theme, the degradation of the self resulting from compromising one's integrity to the social lies and false ethics the community lives by. **All My Sons** is very much like Ibsen's **The Pillars of the Community**, for it reveals the social lie through examining the personal lie upon which the life of Joe Keller is based. Raymond Williams points out that "In **All My Sons** we are in many ways back in the world of Ibsen : a particular lie becomes the demonstration of a general lie ... The action of the play is that the social crime is made personal (by the fact of the death of Keller's own pilot son), and from this realization made social again, in a new understanding of what society is Keller, and those he has killed, can only be victims" (Williams, 1966 : 103). The play illustrates the tragic consequences of a disaster generated by a selfish capitalistic society; to become a business tycoon of some social importance respected by the public, Joe Keller has sought success at the expense of the lives of others. He has compromised his integrity and truth by choosing to live a lie both as a public figure and as a father. He does not realize that he has offended his son's sense of justice and of universal brotherhood. To his amazement, he discovers that his life has been a waste, for he forfeits his good name, and the love of his son.

All My Sons is also similar to Ibsen's **A Public Enemy**; both plays reveals the lie upon which the lives of the characters have been founded. For example, both plays show the false foundations of capitalism which gives priority to business success regardless to its bad consequences to others. Take, for example, the following excerpt from Ibsen's play:

- Dr. Stockmann : I'm the one who has the good of the town
at heart; I want to show up defects that
must come to light sooner or later
- The Mayor : you? When your blind obstinacy would destroy
the town's chief source of income?
- Dr. Stockmann : But the source is poisoned, man. Are you mad?
We live by trafficking in filth and corruption!
The whole life of our flourishing community is
founded on a lie (p.146)

The argument embodied in this dialogue is echoed in **All My Sons**, in which Chris Keller resembles Dr. Stockmann in his idealism and militant opposition to the

crooked business ethics of his community. This does not mean that Ibsen and Miller are against material success and competition as such; they are against society when it considers commercialism or social appearances more important than human life.

Miller demonstrates in **Death of a Salesman** the destructive power of conformity and the disastrous consequences of the surrender of the self to the capitalistic ideals of material success. Capitalism here is shown as false and evil causing suffering not only to the non-conformist, but also to the conformist who lives by the conventions of his social environment. The story of Willy Loman points out a fault in the ethics of modern commercial success based upon ruthless competition. Willy Loman, like Joe Keller, surrenders to the ethics of commercial success which becomes the only way for social recognition. He tries to keep up with the image of American society which respects only money. Knowing that he no longer can cope with his demands, he resorts to make-believe and daydreams. He still thinks that his handsome sons, Biff and Happy, are born for success simply because of their good-looking appearances; "That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead"¹⁰. "There are two examples that represent Willy's myth of success: the first is his brother, Ben, who made his fortune in Africa; the second example is the old salesman who makes his fortune simply by calling his customers from his hotel room. The play is an indictment of modern American society for its emphasis on commercialism at the expense of the integrity of the individual who becomes a victim to the ethics of business. Miller condemns society for evaluating the individual on the basis of his business efficiency rather than as a human being. Because society is oriented towards commercial success, Willy Loman no longer can be a useful member of it when he fails as a salesman. Willy becomes a commodity which, like other commodities, will at a certain point be discarded.

Though Ibsen's characters are usually victims of their social circumstances, they are still responsible for the actions and decisions they make within the context of their social milieu. Ibsen blames Mrs. Alving for compromising to the conventions of her society and The Master Builder for abandoning his ideals in pursuit of wealth and fame. Ibsen's protagonists have a moral and social responsibility to bear towards themselves and others. In a similar way, Miller's characters are responsible for their actions and the choices they make. For example, Willy Loman commits an outrage against himself and consequently against his wife and sons when he allows himself to live a lie. He lies to his wife, Linda, about his weekly earnings, which he borrows from Charlie to keep good image in her eyes. He also allows himself to think that he can succeed in business, and continues to do so for years although he knows his limitations. Besides, he has been unfaithful to his wife, for he has had a liaison with a woman an unfortunate affair which has contributed to the failure of Biff in his school and career. Biff knows all along that his father has been a fake all the time though he talks of success and good public relations.

Miller sees that man should have a sense of moral and social responsibility and

should not surrender his integrity to social conformity. In **All My Sons**, Joe Keller, like Consul Bernik in **The Pillars of the Community**, has committed a crime for which he has escaped responsibility. At the end of the play he realizes that at the soldiers, killed or endangered by his selfish action, are his sons. In reply to his mother's cry, "what more can we be?" Chris says, "You can be better! Once, for all, you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible".

Miller also wants the individual to be true to himself and to his fellow men. Once Miller tells an interviewer that, "I am trying to define what a human being should be, how he can survive in today's society without having to appear to be a different person from what he basically is" (Allsop, 1959:59). Out of the ordeal of his personal crucible, each of Miller's protagonists realizes the truth about himself. John Proctor, refusing at the moment of truth to sell his friends, tears up his confession. Joe Keller acknowledges his responsibility and shoots himself in penance. Is not Proctor's discovery or Joe Keller's realisation the same as that of Nora's, Dr. Stockmann's and Mrs. Alving's?

The preceding discussion shows that both Miller and Ibsen believe that society limits the individual and thwarts his quest for spiritual liberation. Both playwrights believe in dignity and freedom and see man ultimately as the agent of his own fate. The two playwrights, however, vary somewhat in their perspective concerning the position of the individual in their respective societies. In all his social plays, Ibsen remains an idealistic social reformer who seeks to destroy all existing social idols and soul-repressing conventions. Ibsen insists that the individual should break free from any social taboos. Therefore, his protagonists try to destroy the established conventions of society. For example, Nora, in **A Doll's House**, is seeking a fulfilled life and self-emancipation. She seems stronger than ever by leaving her husband:

Listen, Torvald: I've heard that when a wife leaves her husband's house as I'm doing now, he's legally freed from all obligations to her. Anyhow, I set you free from them. You're not to feel yourself bound in any way, and nor shall I. we must both be perfectly free, Look, here's your ring back-give me mine (Ibsen, 1965 :231)

Nora leaves her husband and defies the social and moral values of conventional marriage. It is true that she is putting herself outside society, inviting, maybe, insults, destitution and loneliness. yet she is stronger than her husband, Helmer, who begs her to stay with him. Ibsen is said to have written **Ghosts** to show those who criticise Nora what happens to Mrs. Alving who accepts conventional marriage and conceals the bitter truth about her life with Mr. Alving¹². The challenge to society culminates in **A Public Enemy** where Dr. Stockmann accepts the accusation that he is a public enemy, and pledges to fight the majority because, "... the mob-the rabble-should go for me as if they were my equals ... that's what I'm damned if I can stand!" (P. 198) Dr. Stockmann's statement, "the strongest man in the world is the man who stands most alone," (P. 219) is true of Ibsen's provocative social drama. Ibsen's pro-

tagonists struggle against traditional society and its "ghosts" that limit their freedom and spontaneity. What they are after is a new society where they can lead spontaneous, self-fulfilled lives.

Miller, like Ibsen, continues to believe that the individual must be free and self-reliant. However, he develops his social idealism in such a way as to indicate that living in harmony with society is necessary to the welfare of the individual. In his essay "On Social Plays", Miller states his conception of the kind of ideal relationship that should exist between the individual and society. The key to social realism lies in the existence of an ideal relationship between the individual and society in which both are seen as belonging to a continuous, and in real terms, indivisible process. Miller points out that classical Greek drama describes how men should live in relationship with each other. The members of Greek society are not strangers to each other; it is inconceivable that any individual should prosper unless they all do. Miller complains that such an ideal relationship is absent in modern American society (Miller, 1978 : 51-69).

With the exception of **An Enemy of the people**, all Miller's plays indicate the playwright's pessimistic view of ever achieving fulfilment of the self and integrity in capitalistic society. The ideal society in which the individual understands the social codes of his milieu and respects them, and society grants him his basic rights of freedom and dignity, envisioned by the playwright's aforementioned essay, is farfetched for the nature of society is antagonistic to individual integrity. Ironically speaking, without the respect of this destructive society, Miller's protagonists feel alienated and are driven to self-destruction. For example, in his Introduction to **A View from the Bridge**, Miller explains the paradox of his tragedy as follows: "The mind of Eddie Carbone is not comprehensible apart from its relation to his neighborhood, his fellow workers, his social situation. His self-esteem depends upon their estimate of him, and his value is created largely by his fidelity to the code of his culture (Miller, 1961:Viii).

Miller adds that "once Eddie had been placed squarely in his social context, among his people, the mythlike feeling of the story emerged of itself, and he could be made more human and less a figure, a force (Miller, 1961: ix). Benjamin Nelson points out that Eddie Carbone "is about as average a longshoreman as Willy Loman is a salesman or John Proctor a farmer. Without the facts of ordinary life to help define him, he was little more than a grotesque; with them, his singularity is not dissipated, but graphically delineated" (Nelson, 1970 : 213-14). In other words, Miller suggests that society gives the individual identity and dignity, and that the individual loses his will and option for free action.

Miller's protagonists are made to feel guilty when they break the traditional laws of their society and fail to keep up the expectations of their community. Their success or failure depends on society's views of them. Miller's plays indicate that once the individual violates the social codes of his milieu, he loses independence and self-esteem. In his Introduction to his **Collected Plays**, Miller says that, "...Willy Loman has broken a law without whose protection life is insupportable to him and to many

others; it is the law which says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live (Miller, 1957: 35). Miller returns to the same theme in **A View from the Bridge**. For example, Eddie Carbone understands the ethics of his society and accepts them. He is aware of the consequences of violating the honor of his community, for he asks Beatrice to tell Catherine what had happened to Vinny Bolzano who informed on one of his relations. Beatrice says: "Oh, it was terrible. He had five brothers and the old father. And they grappled him in the kitchen and pulled him down the stairs—three flights his head was bouncin' like a coconut. And they spit on him in the street, his own father and his brothers. The whole neighborhood was cryin'." (P.389) Eddie Carbone outrages the ethics of his society by betraying his Italian proteges to the Immigration officers because of his jealousy and suppressed sexual desire towards his niece, Catherine.

Eddie Carbone betrays the code of honor he and his community accept. Therefore, he is despised by his society. The only way to regain his "name" is to make Marco apologize:

- Beatrice (crying out) : What's the use of it ! He's crazy now, You got nothin' against Marco, You always liked Marco!
- Eddie : I got nothin' against Marco ? Which he called me a rat in front of the whole neighborhood ? Which he said I Killed his children ! Where you been?
-
- Beatrice : What do you want ? Eddie, what do you want!
- Eddie : I want my name ! (pp. 436-37)

Again, **The Crucible** shows what happens to John Proctor when he breaks his connections with his community and challenges the power of the court. He refuses to sign his confession because he does not want to publish his "shame": "Because it is my name ! Because I cannot have another in my life ! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name ? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" (p. 138) Obviously John Proctor is fearful of losing his good name. That is why he refuses to sign the confession.

The insistence of Miller's protagonists on social recognition and esteem leads them to their tragic end. Miller describes this insistence as follows: "the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing - his sense of personal dignity ... his 'rightful' position in his society. Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, ... (Miller , 1978 :4) . That is to say, the name becomes a symbol of the protagonist's personal integrity, and connection

with society. As Raymond Williams points out, "... the heroes of these plays (Miller's) ... are still attached to life, still moved by irresistible desires for a name, a significance, a vital meaning (Williams, 1969:79).

I have discussed the influence of Ibsen on Miller and pointed out Miller's acknowledgement of Ibsen's impact on his playwriting techniques and social ideas. Miller agrees with Ibsen that social forces such as the power of environment and social lies victimize the individual and create false relationships in society. Ibsen looks at society as evil, and seeks to destroy it; his idealistic protagonists reject the conventional status quo of society which is harmful to their integrity in favor of an ideal world in which the individual can achieve fulfilment of the self, and emancipation of the soul. Ibsen's social idealism, however, remains wishful thinking, for his plays show that the heroic attempts of his characters at fulfilment always end in tragedy; they remain bound willy-nilly to the society they try to break free from. Miller develops his social idealism slightly differently from that of Ibsen for Miller's milieu is not the same as Ibsen's; his protagonists do not aspire to destroy the established foundations of society because they cannot survive without it. In other words, Miller's social drama points out that his characters are always attached to the same society that is persecuting them and causing their sufferings.

Notes

1. Scholars discussed extensively the influence the nineteenth-century *zeitgeist* has exerted on Ibsen. Some of the "facts" scholars have established include: (a) Ibsen's plays reflect the writings of contemporary philosophers such as Hegel, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche to name just a few; (b) The seeds of Ibsen's Later plays seep deep into his early drama which has been influenced by his country's struggle for independence; hence Ibsen's quest for romantic heroism in Icelandic sagas, folklore and past history responds to the cultural nationalism of Norway; (c) Ibsen's early drama responds to the Romantic movement which has been still active in his time. In *catiline*, for instance, critics find prototypes of the Byronic hero, and reminiscences of Schiller and Goethe's early plays; (d) and scholars also find links between Ibsen and Existentialism in his treatment of the problem of human identity, the freedom of human will, and his conception of the nothingness of existence as expressed in the on-ion image of Peer Gynt. For more information on how Ibsen is the product of his age, consult the following studies: (1) Brian Johnson, **To The Third Empire: Ibsen's Early Drama** (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 3-27. (2) Martin Esslin, "Ibsen and Modern Drama," in Errol Durback, ed. **Ibsen and the Theater** (London: The Macmillan Press LTD., 1980) pp. 71-82. (3) Harold Clurman, **Ibsen** (London: The Macmillan Press LTD. 1977), pp. 1-26, 195-204. (4) Theodore Jorgenson, **Henrik Ibsen: A Study in Art and Personality** (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishers, 1978) pp. 1-46.
2. For example, Nietzsche declared the death of God in **Thus Spoke Zarathustra**; Laplace, the French astronomer, told Napoleon that he has no place for God in his cosmogeny; Dostoyevsky antagonized his church; and Andre Malraux said that, "... the mission of the nineteenth century was to get rid of the gods," See Clurman, **Ibsen**, P. 198. One should not minimize the importance of Darwinism to the philosophical receptive mind of the nineteenth century as well.
3. For purpose of illustration we recommend the reader to refer to William Archer's compilation of abuses hurled at Ibsen in the English national press following the London premiere of **Ghosts** in 1891. See William Archer, "Ghosts and Gibberings," in Michael Egan, ed. **Ibsen: The Critical Heritage**, pp 209-214
4. The impact of Ibsen has been felt in the plays of many leading modern dramatists. For example, Bernard Shaw responds enthusiastically to Ibsen; he writes **The Quintessence of Ibsenism** in which he defends Ibsen and sees him as an example of a writer who highlights the need for reforming society. Ibsen has influenced the early plays of Shaw **Widowers' Houses** and **Mrs. Warren's Profession** Which deal with social and moral issues considered taboos by Victorian audiences. In Germany, Ibsen

influenced the early plays of Gerhart Hauptman, especially **Before Dawn (Vor Sonnenaufgang)**, and **Lonely Lives (Einsame Menschen)**, which portray the predicament of man trapped by the power of environment and heredity. Scholars also point out that the impact of Ibsen is felt in the plays of Chekhov, particularly **The SeaGull**, **The Three Sisters**, and **The Cherry Orchard**. See David Thomas, **Henrik Ibsen** (London: Macmillan Press, 1983) p. 160. See also Michael Meyer, **Ibsen: A Biography** (Penguin Books, 1971), P. 866. Ibsen has some positive bearing on the drama of two other important playwrights, Pirandello, who is quoted as saying, "After Shakespeare, I unhesitatingly place Ibsen first," and O. Neill who finds Ibsen "Much nearer to me than Shakespeare." See Meyer, **Ibsen: A Biography**, p. 866.

5. Arthur Miller, **A View From The Bridge**, in **Arthur Miller's Collected plays** (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), p. 439. All subsequent references to the play are to this edition and volume and will be cited within the text in parentheses.
6. Arthur Miller, "Preface", **An Enemy of the People** (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), p. 8. All subsequent references to the play are to this edition and will be cited within the text in parentheses.
7. Henrik Ibsen, **A Public Enemy in Ghosts, A Public Enemy, When We Dead Awaken**. trans. Peter Watts (Penguin Books, 1964), p. 184. 611 subsequent references to the play are to this edition and will be cited within the text in parentheses.
8. Although **The Crucible** Portrays seventeenth-century Salem society, exemplified here in witch trials, it comments on McCarthyism which, at the time of writing the play, was the most dangerous social evil in American society. Miller himself has been interrogated for his alleged communist tendencies. In writing the play, perhaps Miller sees himself as an American Ibsen, a kind of John proctor or Dr. stockmann, for he refuses to betray his communist friends. He tells the chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities that, ".... I want you to understand that I am not protecting the Communists or the Communist Party. I am trying to and will protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him .. I take the responsibility for every thing I have ever done, but I cannot take responsibility for another human being." See "The Testimony of Arthur Miller, from Part 4 of the House Committee on Un-American Activities," **Investigation of the Un-authorized Use of United States Passports**, 84 th Congress, p. 4669.
9. Arthur Miller, **The Crucible** (New York: Bantam, 1959), p. 89 All subsequent references to the play are to this edition and will be cited within the text in parentheses.
10. Arthur Miller, **Death of a Salesman** in **Arthur Miller's Collected plays**, p. 146. All subsequent references to the play are to this edition and will be cited within the text in parentheses.
11. Arthur Miller, **All My Sons** in **Arthur Miller's Collected Plays** p. 126. All subsequent references to the play are to this edition and will be cited within the text in parentheses.
12. Ibsen rewrote the closing lines of **A Doll's House** For a German production of the play when the actress playing the leading role of Nora refused to act the last scene as written on the grounds that "I would never leave my children!" Ibsen decided to change the final lines of the play for fear that less competent writer would make the alteration. Ibsen's altered ending runs like this:

Nora: ...that our life together could become a real marriage.
 Good-bye. (She starts to go).
 Helmer: Go then! (He Seizes her arm.) But First you shall see
 Your Children for the last time.
 Nora: Let me go ! I will not see them. I cannot!
 Helmer: (dragging her to the door on the left): You shall see
 them! (He opens the door and says softly) look - there
 they are, sleeping peacefully and without a care.
 Tomorrow, When they wake and call for their mother,
 they will be motherless!
 Nora (trembling): Motherless!
 Helmer: As you once were.
 Nora: Motherless! (After an inner struggle, she lets her
 bag fall, and says) Ah, though it is a sin against
 myself, I cannot leave them ! (p. 334)

Ibsen called this amendment a "barbaric outrage." In the following productions of the play he refused to allow the altered ending to be used. See Meyer, **Ibsen: A Biography**, pp. 480-481.

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