

MAN AND SOCIETY  
IN  
ARTHUR MILLER'S  
**A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study is about man and society in Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* which is a social play. As a social dramatist, Miller shows the financial difficulties of the two brothers Rodolpho and Marco who immigrated from Italy to America looking for a better life. They immigrated to America because they believed in American equal opportunities and freedom.

Miller wants to create a better society, which respects its people. He blames the society which is unable to provide equal opportunities and employment for its citizens and pushes them to immigrate to other countries.



## A View from the Bridge

*A View from the Bridge* is one of Miller's a screen plays. He attacks the society which fails to provide opportunity for consistent style of life for its citizens and the emigrants. He shows the life of the people who emigrated from Europe to America looking for a better life on a better land.

*A View from the Bridge* is originally called *The Hook*. It was written with the assistance of Elia Kazan, who previously directed the playwright's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*.<sup>1</sup>

The play is a one act verse drama which was a mild failure on Broadway in 1955. Miller always wanted to create a play which will simply tell the tale he himself heard, but after writing it he ultimately found that he has created a cold play.

In 1956, *A View form the Bridge* was revised for a new London production. The verse became prose, the length was expanded to two acts and the characters were allowed to speak more. The result was that it became human and sympathetic.<sup>2</sup>

Miller has given considerable thought to the elements of Greek drama because he thinks that the virtues of Greek drama have been lost in modern theatre and he distinguishes the concept of ultimate law in Greek drama. This play is almost Greek in structure, the themes are epic, the community is involved throughout the play, and the big development happens in public places, just like the Greek plays.<sup>3</sup>

The story centers around the house of Eddie, a working man, husband to Beatrice and guardian of an orphaned niece, Catherine. Catherine's

cousins (Marco and Rodolpho) have arrived from Italy and entered America illegally. Eddie Carbone informs the United States authorities of Marco and Rodolpho's arrival and that they entered the country illegally. Therefore, he is a man of guilt. Marco sees Eddie only as an "animal", the opposite of man, to be killed.<sup>4</sup>

Eddie is the main character in the play. He is a very ordinary man, decent, hard working and charitable, a man no one can dislike. He is constantly self interested and wants to promote and protect his innocence. But like the hero of ancient drama, he has a flaw or weakness which makes him act wrongly.<sup>5</sup>

Eddie's father is of Italian ancestry who emigrated from Italy to America and ;therefore, he has been brought up with the strong, passionate Italian/ Sicilian codes of honor and loyalty. Eddie's believes that he can protect Catherine from marriage or any male relationship and wants her to himself. While Eddie waves between communal and state law and cultures, his motivations do not change. He looks at himself as above the others and he is ruled by personal love and guilt; therefore, the social and psychological consequences of his wrong actions destroy him.

Eddie's love for Catherine is sick as it is possessive "You can't take no job. Why didn't you ask me before you take a job?" (Act: 1, p.150 ). Eddie does not want to let Catherine have a job, although he is not for her. Being the man of the house, Eddie feels that he should choose for her a husband. He does not comprehend his feeling towards Catherine until Beatrice clearly articulates his desire in the conclusion of the play "You want some thin' else, Eddie, and you can never have her!". (Act: 2, p. 180). He does not realize his feeling for Catherine because he has constructed an

imaginary world where he can suppress his urge. Eddie's suppression what destroyed him because he has unlimited outlet for his feeling even his own conscious mind.<sup>6</sup> Eddie transfers his energy to a hatred of Marco and Rodolpho which makes him act completely irrationally. Eddie fails in life but seeks redemption and victory in death. By avenging Marco, Eddie believes that "wholeness" is a whole interest in himself. Eddie's tragic flaw is that he constructed a world in which he is unable to escape or recognize it.<sup>7</sup>

Eddie is a tragic, mad character helpless in the face of his own terrible fate and childless in the face of his wife and Catherine. Eddie Carbon can be considered as an epic character because all his actions are unordinary. He has known well the fate he will suffer if he betrays Marco and Rodolpho. He works too much, gives too much and never, ever shows remorse about the actions that lead him to death and disaster.

Catherine and Beatrice are likeable characters. Beatrice is a much more stable character while the young Catherine is uncertain. Beatrice is mature and has a clear view of matters. Eddie's ceasing to have sexual relations with her helps her to see his problem. She talks to Catherine and Eddie, but her relationship to Eddie seems more than of a friend than that of a wife and lover.<sup>8</sup>

Catherine tries to free herself from Eddie gradually to be closer to Rodolpho. She is better in her condemnation of Eddie after he has betrayed Marco and Rodolpho, but she shows that she still cares for him, when she says " I never meant to do nothing to you" (Act:2, p.189), as he is dying. The two women have a good relation with each other. Beatrice has reason to be very jealous. She knows that Eddie has done a terrible

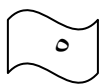
thing in calling the authorities, but she is at seventeen, Rodolpho calls her "this" and "adult woman" while to Eddie she acts both as a daughter and beloved. She is a simple pretty girl from Brooklyn but Eddie sees her a "Madonna" that literally means "My lady".

Beatrice and Catherine remain weak characters. In the Italian American society of Red Hook Brooklyn, Miller has portrayed the women as virtually helpless and unable to affect the fate of their husbands or any male figure. Although much of the actions center on Eddie's love for Catherine, Catherine does not have a significant impact on the events of the play.

Catherine is a weak female throughout the play before Eddie's lust for her. She seeks Eddie's approval and forgiveness even at the end of the play. Beatrice is the mature female figure, who wants the same male approval that Catherine seeks. Beatrice, is jealous of Eddie's relation with Catherine , seems more aware of her need for Eddie's approval than Catherine does, she is equally desperate about it.

Beatrice has power over Eddie's character . For the first time he seeks out her forgiveness and love. The two women in this play have no apparent inner-life except their concern with male figures. As individuals ,they have little consequences or meaning. Beatrice thinks that Catherine needs to grow up and become a woman. To do this she needs to decide by herself whether she wants to marry Rodolpho or not. The women in ***A View from the Bridge*** suffer from womanhood. Catherine believes that she can achieve womanhood by deciding to marry Rodolpho and follow his orders. The similarity between Catherine and Beatrice is that both of them are childless.

Marco and Rodolpho are two brothers who have entered America



illegally. They are widely separated by age. Rodolpho is more prominent in the first act and the beginning of the second, while Marco becomes more important at the end of the play. They look differently, act differently and their speeches are different.<sup>7</sup> Rodolpho is slender and graceful and has blond hair. Eddie nicknames him 'Danish'. He is strong enough to work but weaker than the thickest Eddie. Rodolpho speaks almost incessantly while Marco is often silent. He has some difficulty in speaking English. He is very attentive to what is going on and what is being said. He thinks then speaks clearly and believes that actions speak louder than words, whether in carrying a ship or in threatening Eddie.

Rodolpho is against any thing which is American. He loves Catherine but is appalled at her suggestion that they return to Italy. Marco, on the other hand, clearly misses his family and has only come to the U.S.A. out of love of them. Rodolpho has learned from tourists, records, and books how to speak English fluently. Marco is more slowly and less correctly with simple dignity and clarity. Rodolpho has learned many ways to support the family like singing and sewing dress skills which have nothing to add to him. Both Rodolpho and Marco are proud but Marco has a strong sense of the traditional values of the community. Rodolpho tries to calm his brother and offers Eddie a chance to make peace, a chance which Eddie spurns.

Rodolpho is also the greatest threat to Eddie Carbon. He reveals little about himself. Rodolpho wants to be an American citizen at all costs and there is a great possibility that he does not love Catherine. He wants to marry Catherine to gain citizenship through their marriage. He is ready to marry any girl in America to have work. He has little life of his own.

Eddie kisses Rodolpho because he thinks of him as a woman and unmanly. He thinks that Rodolpho is homosexual.

Marco has appeared as a man who is ready to punish any one who injures the others and feels no responsibility to society like Eddie. Marco has been considered the most striking character in *A View from the Bridge*. He moved illegally to America with his brother to work as longshoremen while their original country (Italy) is going under economic depression because of

the outcome of World War II. His plan is to make enough money to survive and to be able to send some of the money to his wife and his three kids back in Italy. The author uses the plot, dialogue, actions and symbolism to emphasize Marco's honor which is his prominent characteristic. Although Marco is a foreign citizen and has illegal stay in America, but some look at him as a hero and justify Eddie's act, because he left his family to give them support and to save his eldest son who is sick in chest. Through him we discover the violent side of American society. For example when he challenges Eddie to lift the chair at the end of the first act, he does this to save his brother's face and his family's honor. He does not talk about his family. Instead, he works as hard as he can for them. As a final insult to Eddie, Marco spits in his face in front of everybody, because in Italian culture, that act is considered as the extreme expression of anger towards a person and it is rarely left without punishment. He is also a religious person because he has gone to the church before facing Eddie. He is ready to give up his life and commit a mortal sin in a sinful society to defend his honor because Eddie has broken the trust, so he must be punished according to Marco's culture. At the end he is portrayed as the victim since he hasn't done anything to

Eddie but still gets arrested. He has no choice but to return to his hungry wife and sick children in Italy. Without him Eddie would have been left unpunished and remained alive.

Alfieri worked with Eddie's father when Eddie was young, and now he is a close family friend. He has probably the most important role in the play. He is equivalent to the chorus in classical Greek tragedy because he introduces the action as a retelling of events already in the recent past, giving details of place, date, or time. He enables the action to move swiftly from one episode to another. The difference between him and Ancient Greek

chorus is that he interacts with the other characters. He repeatedly tells Eddie that he should not interfere, but let Catherine "go and bless her". As Edie contemplates the betrayal, Alfieri reads his mind and repeatedly warns him " You have a friend in the world... put it off your mind"(Act:2 ,p.178 ). He narrates the events which are immediate, passionate and confused. <sup>9</sup>

He is the symbolic bridge between American law and tribal laws. He is a well educated man who has studied and respected American law, but is still loyal to Italian customs. The play has been told from the viewpoint of Alfieri, the view from the bridge between American and Italian cultures, Alfieri attempts to give a picture of Eddie and the 1950s Red Hook, Brooklyn family. He presents stretch embodied in Brooklyn Bridge, from small ethnic communities filled with the dock laborers to the cosmopolitan wealth and intellectualism of Manhattan. The old and new societies are codified in the immigrant-son Alfieri. Alfieri attempts to present an unbiased and reasonable view of events of the play and makes clear the greatest social and moral implications in the work.



He speaks and reveals his honest view of the facts. He can not help Eddie but must powerlessly watch the tragic event unfold before him. He can not change the future.

Miller's original solution of the difficulties in writing drama is Alfieri who combines the concept of ultimate law with modern living and knowledge. Alfieri objectively observes the Carbon family and articulates the larger, universal meaning and context of Eddie's actions and family's conflict.

Alfieri is essential to this play not because of the obtuseness of the audience, but because of the enormity of Eddie's offence against normal social values. Alfieri, as Miller says "still admires the irrational, the universal, the unleashed human spirit that reacts as it will".<sup>10</sup>

*A View from the Bridge* is a panoramic view because it sees those things from far in relation to each other and it is a detached and objective view. So the view in this play is the view of Eddie, of Alfieri, and the view that is civilized.<sup>11</sup> The bridge in this play is Brooklyn bridge and it is symbolic bridge, because it refers to a pathway of the opportunity to Manhattan and also links American to Italian cultures. The bridge is very close to the Red Hook community and it is a constant reminder of American opportunity and industry. From the bridge one can see the entire community and seek greater abstract meaning from view point.<sup>12</sup>

Alfieri, acting as the bridge, allows the people to cross Manhattan and modern intellectual American culture. Alfieri tries to unite American laws with Italian cultural practices and negotiate a place between the two.<sup>13</sup> **A View from the Bridge** is a play in which the psychological and social elements seem sometimes at odds. The social level of the play deals with the strict codes of a loyalty of Sicilian American community

in which Eddie lives with the consequences of infraction of that code.<sup>14</sup> The play seems to be a kind of Euripidean tragedy of passion in American society in which man is overcome by an irresistible and self-destructive madness. Man's passion in America is primitive as he moves on towards a more rational form of behaviour and society.<sup>15</sup> In this play, Miller tries to address the problems that are related to the writing of a modern tragedy. The dilemma which faces modern dramatist is two fold as Miller says: -

First we no longer believe that some ultimate sense can be made of social causation, and second, no single man can any longer be considered representatives of a whole people.<sup>16</sup>

Here we have a closed society in which the conflict between man and the social law would engage the passions of the whole community. Miller portrays American society in *A View from the Bridge* as a society of life or death for the poor and immigrated people like Marco. He uses the Italian, Sicilian community to explore the themes of honor and loyalty to the family and revenge after betrayal, because these are integral to Italian culture.<sup>17</sup> Miller wants to show that man should never betray his word of honour because as Eddie says " You can quicker get back a million dollars that was stolen than a word you gave away." (Act: 1, p. 89)

Society in this play is a patriarchal society. The father or the male member in the family is an authority figure. Eddie is very protective of Catherine in both positive and negative ways" I took out of my own

mouth to give to her. I took out of my wife's mouth"(Act: 2, p. 180). So Eddie loves and cares for Catherine but his love for her is both possessive and obsessive and he feels that he should choose her a husband and a job as it is done in Italy. Eddie rules the house and believes that what he says is going on.

Society in this play is not in security; it betrays itself and the others especially when Eddie betrays both Marco and Rodolpho to the immigration bureau because in doing this he has betrayed his neighbor's cousins, his family, himself and lost the respect of the whole society and his word of honour which means so much in Italian culture. ***A View from the Bridge*** describes a society in which "You won't have friend in the world! Even those who understand will turn against you." (Act: 2, p.183 )

In this play, American society contrasts Italian society because Marco believes that he has the right to take revenge and it is his duty to do so for the sake of his family. He cannot see why according to American law Eddie goes unpunished " In my country he would be dead now." (Act: 2, p185.). In Italy the law is not all in a book and justice is more to do with feelings and emotions. So both men, Eddie and Marco, have the same beliefs and values because they believe that they are right and have gone too far to be able to give any ground or compromise. It is all or nothing.<sup>18</sup>

Miller uses irony in this play clearly. Eddie cannot realize the reality of his feelings towards Catherine. American society rejects lawyers and looks at them as in "connection with the disasters'<sup>19</sup>. Society is characterized by bloodshed for fighting and loss of life. Marco at the end of the play knows that American society is not as good as people say.

Marco has good understanding of what it is like in America. This play can be considered as a " social ironic" play in which Miller gives us an image about illegal immigrants in American society in an ironic way for two reasons.

Marco who starts in the play with the highest 'respect' for Eddie ends up 'stealing his name' and disrespectly kills Eddie. Marco himself is also ironic because in killing Eddie he removes any chance of making money for his wife and children which is the only reason of his coming to America.

Rodolpho is also ironic for reasons of respect. Eddie sees him as a threat and keeps repeating that "he is taking his respect" but all the time even until the end, Rodolpho has the highest respect for Eddie. Eddie has everything or at least everything he wants like a house, a wife, respect, friends and all the other things but at the end he refuses to accept reality and blunders onward making more mistakes and losing all that which is dear to him, so he is left with the love of his wife only.<sup>20</sup>

The underlying forces in the play are Eddie's lust and Eddie's need of respect. So these forces drive the whole play because without them Eddie would just dote upon Catherine and would not end up dead. The Italian community in Red Hook is a knit body, a society in which the blood is thicker than water.<sup>21</sup>

In *A View from the Bridge*, we have a strong struggle between society and American law. The society is dwelt by Sicilian- American customs which protect illegal immigrants within their home values respect. Some of their values come in conflict with those of American system of justice. Eddie decides to turn against his community and abides by the state laws. He loses the respect of his community and friends. So Eddie is a

character with a strong allegiance to society in which he reverts back to another custom of Sicilian American revenge. So the small society is stronger than American law.

Society is a sinful society. The neighbors knew when Marco and Rodolpho arrived in America illegally. They saw Marco spit in Eddie's face. Although Eddie takes a turn away from the community by calling the immigration bureau, he still needs acceptance and spends his last moment fighting Marco for his good name in society.

Eddie has decided to break the laws of American society because his love for Catherine is influenced by American laws of it. His betrayal is out of self interest. Eddie would break the natural law, a more stigmatizing force than either Sicilian or American laws. Ironically the failure of American law to prevent the marriage of Rodolpho and Catherine makes Eddie revert once against his community customs and seek a final Sicilian revenge upon Marco. What is important to Eddie at the end of the play is his name. Eddie's inability to reconcile between Sicilian and American cultures destroys him.<sup>18</sup>

The large part of the evil is not only in the environment but it is also in Eddie because he has rejected the Sicilian-American code of revenge. With Beatrice's plea for forgiveness, Eddie has acknowledged the dark side of his nature. Society is a powerful context for the events of the play, because it dictates the specific norm and rule for the family that control the action of characters. So we saw all the characters are forced to reconcile between American culture and the Italian culture, because the cultural and moral differences between the two provide one of the great conflicts in the play. The tight society around the characters creates great tension in the Carbon family because they are being constantly

watched.

The origin of the majority of the people in the Red Hook society is Italy, so Italy presents homeland, origin and culture. The characters' views of the country are different. Catherine associates Italy with mystery, romance and beauty. Rodolpho is actually from Italy and he thinks that Italy is a place with little opportunity that he would like to escape from. All the characters have strong belong to Italian traditions and identify it as home. Italy in this play is the basis of the cultural traditions in Red Hook and it links the society which is feeble in common social practices and religion.

*A View from the Bridge* shows how law and society cannot distinguish or weight rightly the personal truth and communal truth. The play is not ended and we are thus left half way.

Like all the people who are swept from Europe to America to transplant their habits and traditions to the new world, both Rodolpho and Marco in *A View from the Bridge* came to America to search for an imaginary world, a fantasy and something that can improve their state. They believed that America is a gold mine, and that it is a possibility of a good and great life for them.

Rodolpho and Marco looked at America from a different point of view. Marco saw America as a land of smoke and smog; a land on which equal opportunities mean working hard, sorrow and misery, but Rodolpho saw it as a settlement, a shelter for poor, a new source of food and a promised land.

Finally, Marco has not been able to survive himself and his family neither in Italy nor in America as if Miller wants to say that in the

modern age life is the same everywhere.

In ***A View from the Bridge*** and through the characters of both Marco and Rodolpho, Miller wants to dramatize a pattern of all people who came to America from Europe because of the hard conditions of life in their homelands. They wanted to live in America and achieve their American dream.

As a social dramatist, Miller shows in ***A View from the Bridge*** the financial difficulties of the two brothers Rodolpho and Marco who immigrated from Italy to America looking for a better life. They immigrated to America because they believed in American equal opportunities and freedom.

Didactically speaking , through this play, Miller wants to create a better society, a society which respects its people. He blames the society which is unable to provide equal opportunities and employment for its citizens and pushes them to immigrate to another country.

## NOTES

<sup>(1)</sup> Andrew Moore, " Studying Arthur Miller's A View from the Bridge", URL:<http://www.universalteacher.com.htm>,2002.

<sup>(2)</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>(3)</sup> N. A. "Arthur Miller: A View from the Bridge", URL:<http://www.Caseygallagheraudienceservesdirectors.com.htm>,2002

<sup>(4)</sup> Rebecca Smith, *A View from the Bridge* (Oxford: Oxford Playhouse Press, 2002), p. 4.

<sup>(5)</sup> Moor, p. 4.

<sup>(\*)</sup> Stephanie Arnold, *The Creative Sprit: An Introduction to Theatre* (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2001). Subsequent reference to this edition will appear in text with page numbers.

<sup>(7)</sup> Moore, p.11. Ibid.

<sup>(8)</sup> Moore, p.20

<sup>(9)</sup> Quoted in Welland Dennis, Miller: The Playwright (London: Methuen and London Company Ltd., 191983), p.77.

<sup>(10)</sup> Moore, p.25.

<sup>(11)</sup> Neil Carson, Arthur Miller, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982) , pp. p.84.

<sup>(12)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(13)</sup> Quoted in Neil Carson, p.85.

<sup>(14)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(15)</sup> N. A. "How does the immigrant Italian Setting add to the tragedy of A View from the Bridge", URL:<http://www.courseworkbank.co.uk.com.htm.2003> .

<sup>(16)</sup> Ibid, p.3.

<sup>(17)</sup> N. A. " People do not accept the reality in A View from the Bridge", URL:<http://www.courseworkbank.co.uk.com.htm.2003>.

<sup>(18)</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>(19)</sup> Susan C. W., Students Companion to Arthur Miller (London: Green Wood Press, 2000) p.61., p.54.

<sup>(20)</sup> N. A. "The American dream to People in Sicily is the ultimate goal of their life in A View from the Bridge", URL:<http://www.courseworkbank.co.uk.com.htm.2003>.

<sup>(21)</sup> Carson, pp. 89-90.

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W. C. Susan. Students' Companion to Arthur Miller. London: Greenwood Press, 2000

### الخلاصة

الدراسة التي هي (الإنسان والمجتمع)، تتناول مسرحية الكاتب آرثر ميللر (منظر من الجسر) وهي مسرحية اجتماعية يوضح فيها ميللر الصعوبات المادية التي تواجه الأخوين رادولف وماركو اللذين هاجرا من إيطاليا إلى أمريكا للبحث عن حياة أفضل. لقد هاجر الأخوان إلى إيطاليا ظناً منهما بأن أمريكا هي بلد الحريات والفرص المناسبة في العيش. أراد ميللر في هذه المسرحية أن يكون مجتمعا أفضل يقدر أبناءه كما انه يلوم المجتمع الذي لا يستطيع أن يوفر لأبنائه الوظيفة والعيش الرغيد ويدفعهم للهجرة إلى بلدان أخرى.

