

ARTUR MILLER: THE MAN AND THE MYTH

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Although with some delay, I do not want to miss the opportunity of making my opinion about the memoirs of Arthur Miller public. They were published in England in a carefully prepared edition with a splendid presentation at the end of 1987, under the auspices of the prestigious publishing house called Methuen; and with the title *Timebends-A Life*. One year later, at the end of 1988 they were presented to the Spanish public in translation as *Vueltas al tiempo* published by Tusquets Editores. Not an entirely appropriate title if one bears in mind that the author deliberately broke away from the chronological evolution of events, and the scenes float in the air as if disconnected, with a certain disorder and even some ambiguity. There is a conscious remoteness from the real facts, seen from the fortress of a fresh mind, free from all pathos. This does not constitute a confession but is a pseudo-impressionistic account which the truth, *his truth*, is not told but implied. A more suggestive title would have been preferable: one which was less tangible, more plastic, far more eloquent. Something in the line of *Recodos en mi camino*.

One can deduce from his memoirs that not only his dramatic production but also his life and personality appear to be thrilling. And he has thrilled numerous critics, journalists and theatre-goers like few other 20th century playwrights. Until now, Miller had always been reluctant to reveal details of his private life. He had allowed many others to comment upon and interpret specific decisions and moments in his private life with impunity and with no denial on his part. He

even permitted authors of a certain prestige like N. Mailer¹ to pillage his privacy and try to crack the idol. He weathered the storm with enviable stoicism and awaited his time with dignity and self-assurance. And his time came with *Timebends-A Life*. I do not consider the question of why he decided upon it now and not before or later to be important. Our attention should merely be centred on the many thrilling revelations that the playwright makes on the long, winding path that he follows as he describes his life and the country in which he happened to live.

I would like to begin by stating that the comments which have been published in the last two years, both in magazines and in newspapers of all kinds, do not do justice to the book. Those which I have been able to read –and they have been numerous– in the form of articles, reviews, interviews and opinions are the product of haste and superficiality on the part of the journalists; and they merely point out those moments in the life of Miller which, because of their morbidity, seem more attractive to the general public: his “subversive” university life and the years before success came, his relationship with Marilyn, his problems with the American Administration, his divorces, his relationship with Hollywood, etc. I am sure that these are not the only point of interest –even for the general public– in the life of A. Miller, the playwright. And, in fact, these are not the matters which take up most of the book. There is another kind of information which is much more relevant and there is, above all, a mature vision of both *Life and Man*. In the same way that Alfieri in *The View from the Bridge* scrutinized the anguish of the human heart from his half ethical/half theological watch-tower, Miller delves deeply into the mystery of life with brutal sincerity as well as with his intellectual and physical maturity –he is now 76 years old. The coldness of his analysis, the objectivity of his observations, his nobility and his courage, the opportunity of his comments, the dignity of his reflections surprise us. He admits his mistakes and he does not try to avoid his part of the blame in certain decisions. He does not shy away from the responsibility of some of his acts and he even refers to those who cruelly criticised him with generosity and kindness. His discourse is calm, from the whims of his youthful years, with certain touches of agnosticism and even, sometimes, pessimism. He does not try to convince or preach to anybody, simply reason beginning with a profound sense of impotence when confronted by the inevitable: *the fugacity of life, the triviality of success and the fragility of myth*.

A large number of pages at the beginning of the book are dedicated to memories of his family, to his adolescence and to his time as a student in Ann

1. See the chapter dedicated to Miller/Marilyn relationship in N. Mailer's biography of M. Monroe entitled *Marilyn. A Biography*, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1973.

Arbor, Michigan. The memoirs of his childhood and adolescence are moving but offer no new information to the scholar devoted to Miller's works. Indeed, they seem to be a homage to his loved ones, especially to his mother, whom he adored. There is no search for the roots of his ideology, nor possible explanations in code for a better understanding of his dramatic output or his aesthetic preoccupations. Curious revelations appear sporadically like the one which refers to the inspiration of the brothers Victor and Walter in *The Price* (c.f. p. 13), the genealogy of characters like Solomon or Ben or even his lucubrations about cars as a symbol of social prestige (c.f. p. 45).

However, it is not only these merely technical details which most interest the scholar, but also the frequent keys which he offers for a more successful interpretation of his aesthetic values. He warns us with great conviction that he abandoned his traditional religious feelings early on in his life converting them into something more tangible and, in his opinion, much more useful; although, as would be proved later, equally controversial and dangerous: "Judaism for me and Catholicism for Mary (his first wife) were dead history, cultural mistifications, that had been devised mainly to empower their priesthoods by setting people against one another. Socialism was reason."² He takes us to the thirties when, not only in America but also in Europe, young intellectuals became bewitched as if by magic by the values of Marxist Socialism. Their faith in these values was so strong that it turned into a sort of religion. By way of illustration, we could mention the following important names: W. H. Auden, S. Spender, C. Odets and Miller himself; all repentant later in their lives and won over by the idols of the capitalist system. Miller confesses the admiration he felt at that time for the Marxist theories, his criticism of capitalism as a cruel, inhuman and unfair system – this is clear in plays such as *All my Sons*, *Death of a Salesman* and *The Price*, his preference for characters oppressed and mistreated by society and the Establishment, his overwhelming humanity seeking solutions to the inevitable conflicts inherent to human coexistence. The Marxist theories represented, at that time, a guarantee, and a significant number of intellectuals from many different countries bowed before them with reverential attitude. Only 50 years later (although the Iron Curtain had still not fallen) Miller acknowledges such a pitiful miscalculation and offers us his balanced viewpoints upon those experiences: "No one of my generation can be understood without reference to his relation to Marxism as 'the God that failed'; but I have come to think the phrase is wrong. It was an idol and no God. An idol tells people exactly what to believe, God presents them with choices they have to make for themselves."³

2. Arthur Miller, *Timebends-A Life*, Methuen, London, 1987, p. 71.

3. *Ibidem*, p. 259.

Bearing this in mind, his memories of his student days in Ann Arbor are also moving. The fresh and young university student becomes obvious when confronted by the terrible efficiency of a well-oiled repressive system, which worked with the blessing of the Establishment and which encouraged the fanatics in their urge to “purify” society, although, in many cases, this was to benefit themselves. As everybody knows, the author was severely handicapped because of the sincerity with which he defended his ideology, but his allusion to the general feeling of paranoia which reigned in Ann Arbor in McCarthy's era is worth noting: “A member of the Student Council told me that as a resident of a cooperative rooming house she was running into more and more people who thought she must be a Communist for not living in a privately owned house or an official university dormitory.”⁴

Miller went to study at Ann Arbor at the end of the thirties when it was considered to be one of the most radical enclaves in Mid-West America and he returned in 1953 sponsored by the magazine *Holiday* to write a report about the changes which had taken place since then. And Ann Arbor had changed so much that he did not even recognise it. The university had meant to him a big change in his life and there, he not only made contact with the most progressive groups at that time but he also managed to prove to himself what he was worth as a playwright, by winning for two years running the prestigious *Avery Hopwood Award*. The wonderful memories of that era clashed violently with the tense atmosphere of persecution and paranoia that he discovered on his return. But this change had not only taken place in Michigan, it was a devastating reality throughout the whole country. McCarthyism had by then penetrated deeply into the social tissue of the community. Intellectuals, actors, writers, journalists, workers, all of them had felt the call to order effected by the *HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee)* like a cold knife cutting into their flesh. And our author was no exception. He was called to testify and he made it quite clear that he was not prepared to collaborate with the Committee. He makes no mention here of whether his marriage to Marilyn –the star who was most respected and loved at that time– helped him to remain firm or if he would have acted differently had this not been so. But these observations, about the writers and artists of the time are very revealing: “After many months, many proposals, many actual attempts to publish one or another reply to the prevailing paranoia, not a single line from any of us had seen print anywhere. The shock, if not dramatic, was noticeable: whatever our reputations, we were little more than easily disposable hired hands. Everywhere teachers were being fired for their associations or ideas, real or alleged, as were scientists, diplomats, postmen, actors, directors, writers...”⁵

4. Ibidem, pp. 94-95.

5. Ibidem, p. 310.

If in the author's words the situation was tragic, probably, the conclusion that movement was neither spontaneous nor authentic but set-up by a small group of politicians thirsty for power and protagonism is even more tragic: "Ten, twenty, thirty years later it became clear that a good part of what drove this domestic campaign was a conscious decision, first by a sector of the Republican Party, out of power for nearly two decades, to equate the basic New Deal ideas with disloyalty, and then by acquiescent Democrats to see the lights."⁶ This is precisely where the message of *The Crucible* stems from and now we understand much better what the playwright meant when in 1957 he wrote: "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 a holy resonance."⁷ John Proctor was not so much terrified by the idea of prison or death but by the discovery that it is so easy for a privileged group to become owners of "the truth" and persuade an entire community that they are on a divine mission to preach it and impose it with blood and fire.

If it becomes quite clear what the thought about key concepts such as repression, the possession of truth, political ethics and coexistence in freedom; his attitude towards art and literature as something necessary to satiate man's spiritual thirst and as useful instruments in orientating and re-directing certain aesthetic attitudes are equally clear. Miller does not believe in the idea of pure art for the enjoyment of the sybarite. Art and literature must have a function and a purpose in accordance with the Marxist theory: "My play's failure (first one) did nothing to weaken my conviction that art ought to be of use in changing society. This was, of course, a common idea in the thirties in part because it was so simple to understand. Stalin had called art a 'weapon' of revolution and writers 'engineers of the soul' and indeed something like that concept goes far back in human history."⁸ Miller had implied something similar on previous occasions but up till now he had never given his opinions about such an important point for the definition of his aesthetic values so clearly. This declaration of principles is, if one might say so, more significant in Miller's case than in that of other contemporary playwrights because of his dual status both as an author of tragedies and as a distinguished theoretician in the techniques and aesthetics of dramatic art. Moreover, it is of vital importance if one wishes to comprehend the evolution of his complex line of subjects and his full identification with the theory of catharsis in the classic sense of the word. As if these observations were not sufficiently clear and perhaps because he intuited that *his borrowed words* could

6. Ibidem, p. 311.

7. A. Miller, "Introducción" to the *Collected Plays*, The Viking Press, New York, 1957, p. 39.

8. A. Miller, *Timebends*, ed. cit., pp. 93-94.

lead to misunderstandings, he is careful to add later that it is necessary to be cautious about the distinction between aesthetics—propaganda and attitude-militancy. The poet should be different to the priest in that the former desperately seeks *the truth*; the latter, however, believes himself to be the holder of *the truth*.

For what I seemed to be saying was that art, at least good art, stands in contradiction to propaganda in the sense that a writer cannot make truth but only discover it. . . Marxism is in principle neither better nor worse than Catholicism, Buddhism or any creed as an aid to artistic truth-telling. All one could say was that a philosophy could help an artist if it challenged him to the sublime and turned him from trivializing his talent.⁹

Within this same outline he also refers to other subjects which, although of less importance, should not be considered as trivial. The reader finds it odd that the writer should worry so much about his first attempts in the world of success and easy money; his watchful disposition in the face of the “threat” of fame as a force capable of invading his private life after the acclamation of *All my sons* (1947); his joy on realizing that economic welfare and social prestige were possibly in his immediate future, all of which was clouded by his profound and sincere anguish about gradually moving away from “social reality”, especially from the problems connected to labour relationships. His desperate search for new themes for his plays, for which he even delved into the underworld of the New York harbour: corruption, repressed violence, the brutality of the working conditions, the rigid ethical values on immigrant groups, the suffering of the illegal workers. Part of all this would later serve as inspiration for *A View from the Bridge*, although before that he was to suffer for months in the obsessive pursuit of the possessive and attractive figure of the Salesman.

We now reach the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties and it strikes the reader as unusual that Miller should not make more mention of his family (he now had two children by Mary, his first wife). Miller has commented on several occasions that if in his memoirs he speaks extensively about Marilyn and very little about Mary and about Inge, this is because Marilyn was a public figure and his other two wives never were. I think that this is a solid argument which deserves our respect. However, with his silence he does not answer the serious accusations which N. Mailer once made about his identity crisis and about the way in which Miller used Marilyn for publicity in the face of his worrying lack of inspiration and to keep alive his unquenchable thirst for popularity,¹⁰ which he so dearly loved. I have always preferred to think that

9. *Ibidem*, p. 237.

10. See N. Mailer, *Marilyn*, ed. cit., (Miller/Marilyn relationship).

Mailer was exaggerating in an attempt to be sensationalist and I have always defended this belief in my previous publications.¹¹ However, the memoirs of Elia Kazan, a close collaborator of Miller's, have just been published (their collaboration came to an end when they had their differences over the HUAC but it was renewed when *After the Fall* was premiered in 1964), and in them he insists with great thoroughness on the personal situation of the playwright at the beginning of the fifties. In his own words, Miller at that time was a sick and unbalanced person:

At this time, a psychoanalysis Art was undergoing had him on edge; he was distraught and ill. The worst of it was that he was unable to write. He was longing for something nameless, a condition I recognize from my own life. What did he want? It was not complicated: call it fun, a new experience, ease of mind and heart, relief from criticism, happiness. His life, he told me, seemed to be all conflict and tension, thwarted desires, stymied impulses bewildering but unexpressed conflicts. "What a waste!" he cried one day on the train, referring to the devastating result of tensions in his friends –and of course meaning himself. Above all, he had sex on his mind, constantly. He was starved for sexual release.¹²

We will not enter into a detailed analysis of Elia Kazan's judgement, I think that its harshness speaks for itself and it is not likely that Miller will pick up the glove after having referred to Kazan in his memoirs with considerable respect and gentility. Yet it seems to be a qualified opinion which goes hand in hand with those of other critics, journalists and people from the world of Hollywood. They always considered the marriage as frivolous and never believed the playwright when he affirmed that their relationship was the product of sincere love and profound admiration for each other. Once the news was known, the criticism got worse in the sense that the marriage was the sensation of the year, the most subtle combination of the ridiculous and the sublime, the populist fusion between the educated avant-garde nonconformists and the mystique of the common herd; in other words, incredulity, and a certain amount of envy because "The Great American Brain is marrying the Great American Body."¹³

The playwright was strongly and frequently reproached at that time for having "used" Marilyn, who was completely alone and craved for affection and

11. See my book *Arthur Miller, la sociedad, el existencialismo y el mito*. Almar, Salamanca, 1980, p. 160 and my article "Las claves de la transición en la dramaturgia de A. Miller" (I), *Studia Zamorensia*, n.º IX, 1988, pp. 263-264.

12. Elia Kazan, *A Life*, Pan Books, London, 1988, pp. 428-429.

13. N. Mailer, *Marilyn*, ed. cit., p. 157.

understanding. She was not only a public figure but also a “public good” and, therefore, everybogy *could and should* have an opinion. Precisely because of this, Miller seemed to have a marvellous opportunity to argue his decision and to offer solid and convincing reasons –exonerating himself or not– which might clarify certain “ambiguous aspects” of his relationship with Marilyn Monroe; but, form some reason or other, Miller has preferred not to do so and his criteria should be respected. Nevertheless, a considerable number of pages have been dedicated to the years that the lived with the film star and this should be given due consideration.

In statements ¹⁴ made after the publication of his memoirs the playwright has insisted that this book is not a confession and that he was therefore only obliged to choose those aspects of his life which he wished to relate to the readers; although obviously he kept to the facts. There is therefore no need to doubt that we are being told the truth, although Miller's observations would seem to indicate that he does not tell *the whole truth*. The playwright appears to have felt obliged to offer his own version of the phenomenon called Marilyn but without a great deal of enthusiasm, and with little faith in that the readers' might understand his reasons or, even less, share them. He does, however, manage to convey a personal vision of that relationship with great self-assurance and courage, without drifting into easy sensationalism. Among his noble feelings of admiration and respect for her there is no room for superficiality or vanity. He refers to the myth with delicacy and even confesses that the excessive curiosity of the public in general perplexed him. He writes about the wife, the woman and the film star with affection, and delights in remembering this with serenity and restraint; even with love. His comments about her sensuality, sexuality and beauty are unexpectedly exquisite. He admits his lack of bearings and inspiration, his emptiness between 1953 and 1964 but never becomes morbid or self-centred. The reader becomes aware of the urgent need he feels *to consume his own confession* about some facts which have repeatedly been interpreted on many occasions and by very different people. In many cases, as it happened with N. Mailer, with the purpose of backbiting; and in others, for example E. Kazan, with more foundation but with rather ambiguous intentions. We can finally listen to the original voice elaborating his own script and searching at the same time for his own redemption. Without concealing his own mistakes, he seeks understanding but never lowers himself to ask for forgiveness; he keeps his head up high but never too self-indulgent. He does not deny his part of the blame but neither does he give his enemies an inch which they could use to support their points of view. He is never too explicit and when he guesses he might be misunderstood he

14. Fietta Jarque, “Las memorias de un viajante”, *El País*, 20th. Dec. 1988, p. 44.

remains silent. There is neither arrogance nor self-pity or victimization in his statements. I think that in this delicate subject, our author reaches an admirable compromise and the mystique of redemption through public confession shows an undoubtable cathartic effect.

He concentrates more on the person than on the myth; he seems to have resigned himself to accepting it and not understanding it. He himself has stated that a myth ceases to be as such once it is understood. Although to him, as in the case of many others, Marilyn was no myth but an innocent and naive woman whom everybody, if they could and when they could, took advantage of. He emphasizes her sweetness, her attractiveness, her beauty and nobility of spirit. He does not kick the dog when it is down. He asks for her to be understood and for himself he only asks for justice. He is not harsh in his judgement and maintains a controlled distance with no crucial revelations; neither are there reproaches or self-justification. He displays a large dosis of humanity and respect, and tries to justify his final surrender by arguing that the life they shared was no incentive for any of them. He could no longer do anything to avoid the depressive state into which the film star was sinking: "and it was plain that her inner desperation was not going to let up, it was equally clear that literally nothing I knew to do could slow its destructive progress."¹⁵

It is also worth noting that the tone which the author employs to describe his first meetings with Marilyn is so common that it is almost ordinary: a man who is still young and married falls in love with a young woman who works in films. In no way does Miller want us to see them as the famous playwright and the mythical film star. There are passages¹⁶ which refer to when they first met which are particularly beautiful solemnity: the first look, the first kiss, a wounded heart, the surrender of the soul. A chance meeting, any day in the life of an average couple. It is even revealing to see how Miller dominates narrative techniques: the excellent selection of data, the magnificent description of abstract elements, the brilliant use of vocabulary. In this sense, one agrees with him when he later stated that "de todas formas, pienso que las bibliografías íntimas, se desarrollan mejor en la ficción. No es buena idea que una película o una pieza de teatro pretenda crear toda la verdad sobre algo. . . No he ocultado muchas cosas pero tampoco ha sido una confesión. No creo en las confesiones. Pienso que las confesiones también se dan mejor en la ficción."¹⁷ There is no doubt that in this context it would have been possible to modify and it would have been easier to dig deeper and describe the degree of anguish of a sick soul which meets up with a hungry one and that they both need each other desperately.

15. A. Miller, *Timebends*, ed. cit., p. 466.

16. *Ibidem*, pp. 306-307.

17. F. Jarque, "Las memorias de un viajante", art. cit., p. 44.

Moving on to other matters, I think that one of the most interesting parts of the book is that in which Miller gives us his opinion about certain important figures of North American Literature. Until now, the author had never offered us this type of comment so generously. With the exception of Norman Mailer, his colleagues have always deserved his respect and admiration. One can understand the animadversion he feels towards Mailer, although at most he talks about him incisively and ironically but he never actually insults him. A magnificent example of this ironic treatment is when he describes the first time he met the novelist: one day after the premiere of *All my Sons* he bumped into a young man in soldier's uniform who surprised him with a sudden comment: "I could write a play like that."¹⁸ To the reader's surprise, this impertinence only deserves an ironic comment from Miller who finishes off with a sarcastic observation: "I am at the age when it is best to be charitable."¹⁹ However, further on, he is much harsher when he gives us his opinion of the biography of Marilyn that Miller published in 1973: "Reading his volume, with its grinning vengefulness towards both of us –skilfully hidden under a magesterial aplomb– I wondered if it would have existed. . . (had we) allowed him time to confront her humanity, not merely her publicity . . . (In) . . . his novel-that-was-not-fiction and at the same time his non-novel-that-was-not-actually-true, she would emerge precisely as she hated to appear, as a kind of joke taking herself seriously."²⁰

Particularly interesting are his references to C. Odets, whom he has admired since his student days and who he later met in New York and Hollywood. In spite of the fact that Odets easily forgot his Marxist militancy when a youth and sold his genius to a devil called Hollywood, loaded with money, Miller prefers to be understanding and merely excuses him: "Odets seemed to me to share something of Marilyn's special kind of perceptive naiveté, like her, he was a self-destroying babe in the woods absentmindedly combing his hair with a loaded pistol."²¹

The lines that he dedicates to E. O'Neill, L. Hellman, T. Williams and J. Steinbeck are also revealing. His comments upon *Look Back In Anger* are precise and suggestive, too. He happened to see *Look Back in Anger* in London at the invitation of L. Olivier who had asked him to choose a play that he should like to see. Olivier accepted Miller's choice reluctantly and both were pleasantly surprised by the freshness of the language, the sincerity of the exposition and the aggressive nature of the dialogues. It was not in vain that a new era was to begin on the British stage, something that our author considered to have arrived with some delay:

18. A. Miller, *Timebends*, p. 139.

19. *Ibidem*.

20. *Ibidem*, p. 533.

21. *Ibidem*, p. 242.

The reception of *Look Back in Anger* showed that something was stirring, but as original a work as it was, it had appeared in England some two decades after very similar attitudes of rebellion had broken onto the American stage through a not dissimilar cordon of middle-class proprieties.²²

For those who study Miller's work in depth, there is a last part of the book which is particularly interesting but which is not, in my opinion, very gratifying. Miller had written lavishly about all his plays before *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972). Since then he has published several works including *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1979), *the American Clock* (1980), *Two-Way Mirror* (1984) and *Danger: Memory!* (1986) and he has also made mention of them although with less detail. In the memoirs to which we are now referring, the author devotes several pages to these works and it is worthwhile stopping to analyse his observations.

He begins by talking about the failure of *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and *The American Clock* in America and tries to congratulate himself on the relative success he obtained in London, which is unusual in a playwright who has never had to enter the arena and make his merits public or even explain anything to anybody, because everybody – critics, journalists, scholars and fans alike – understood, enjoyed and were thrilled by his previous dramatic creation. Furthermore, in cases like that of *Death of a Salesman*, the capacity to get across to the audience transcended the author's own expectations, and the capacity of aesthetic communication, the cathartic effect achieved by his characters went beyond what could at first be expected. The premiere of *Death of a Salesman* in China and its outstanding success confirm this observation, which in the author's own words, is revealed to us as one of the most extraordinary aspects of dramatic art: "the Chinese reaction (to *Salesman*) would confirm what had become more and more obvious over the decades in the play's hundreds of productions throughout the world: Willy was representative everywhere, in every kind of system, of ourselves in this time."²³

The tragic grip, the brutal sincerity, the freshness of the dialogues, the typically classical tragic stature of the "common man", the universality of the conflicts of the protagonist, the masterly application of the cause/effect mechanism; characteristics all of which are typical of Miller's greatest successes, have become forbidden elements in his latest productions. We are afraid that the indisputable number one of American theatre in the post-war era has begun an inevitable decline. In a recent article, Alfonso Sastre referred to the playwright as "un autor

22. Ibidem, p. 432.

23. Ibidem, p. 184.

menguante"²⁴ and unfortunately Miller's latest plays do not provide us with the arguments we need to contradict his opinion. Quite the contrary, because although it is true that *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and *The American Clock* have a certain dramatic entity and acceptable characterization, one cannot say the same for *Two-Way Mirror* and *Danger: Memory!* We think that these two plays do not even fulfil the minimum requirements desired which could give proof of the fact that they were devised by Miller. They would rather seem to be "meros apuntes teatrales" to accompany other more important works. One cannot understand why Miller decided to publish them and agrees with J. M.^a Carrascal, who after the premiere of *I Can't Remember Anything* (published together with *Clara* in *Danger: Memory!* described the play as "obrita. . . pues teatralmente no hay mucho en ella y la forma misma que tiene de finalizar, bailando ambos la samba, desmerece un tanto de la sobriedad de su ilustre autor como si éste no hubiera sabido salir del penoso embrollo en que se había metido."²⁵

Ten years ago now, in my book *Arthur Miller, la sociedad, el existencialismo y el mito*,²⁶ I outlined a theory about a thematic evolution applied to Miller's works (a theory which was partly confirmed by the author in a personal letter dated last March, 1979) in which the author seemed to display a great intellectual maturity. From an initial ethical stage, he passed on to an ontological one which in turn was followed by a mythical stage which had only just begun with *The Creation of the World and Other Business*, but which, due to a minimum of personal coherence, seemed the only plausible solution for an agnostic like Miller. I have been pleasantly surprised to see that, as far as this is concerned, the playwright is following this line; that is to say, he believes that man needs myth both for a pleasant coexistence and for survival. Man creates myths (called it God, Freedom, Justice, Revolution, Beauty, etc.) to avoid having to face up to himself, to confront his ignorance, his instincts, his anguish; and to avoid having to choose and, therefore, make a mistake. To many of those "common men" who appear in Miller's works the "freedom of the God" is worrying and they bow before "the tyranny of the idol". In many cases, especially in the first stage, it is the idols that dictate how they should behave and it is the faith in the idol concerned that gives rise to their tragedy. In the most recent plays, the Idol is changed for the Myth and an attempt is made to mystify the true reason for their decisions with such abstract concepts as Destiny, Freedom, Blame or the Unconscious. And the tragic stature of these characters gradually becomes diluted as they lose that blind faith in the cause which they defend. *Elegy for a Lady*

24. Alfonso Sastre, "A Miller: ¿Un autor menguante?", *Diario 16*, 6th Dec., 1987, p. VIII.

25. J.M.^a Carrascal, "*Peligro: Memoria*, el último arañazo de A. Miller a la conciencia americana" *ABC*, 21st Feb., 1987, (see theatre section).

26. See *Arthur Miller, la sociedad, el existencialismo y el mito*, ed. cit.

(published together with *Some Kind of Love Story* in *Two-Way Mirror*) was described by the author as “a play of shadows under a tree of death,”²⁷ and this sentence could describe perfectly the philosophy of this third stage. The obvious reference to the tree of death is ironically the mythical tree of knowledge which is described in Genesis, the central axis of the myth of Adam and Eve on which *The Creation of the World and Other Business* turns. In his attempt to discover knowledge, Man finds his own spiritual death and is then redeemed by myth.

Even though I have been delighted to verify that my theory in this respect was not in the wrong track, it is nevertheless disappointing when one realizes that the playwright's star shines less and less brilliantly. Unfortunately, it would seem that our author has not yet rediscovered the vein of inspiration which never abandoned him in his years of success; in the most recent interviews given to different newspapers he even appears as a man who is weary but not defeated. He still makes show of an enviable mental brilliance, and, according to him, he caresses important future projects. However, from his statements one deduces that he has undergone profound changes; that he no longer has the same faith in mankind of which he felt so proud when he was younger, that he does not trust in mankind to learn from its own mistakes. He has become sceptical and mistrustful even about the capacity that the theatre may have as a fermenting agent and a sieve for the very society which produces it.

27. A. Miller, *Timebends*, ed. cit., p. 590.