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The Intimate and the Epic: Two Tendencies beyond Realism in Arthur Miller's Dramatic Works

A critical study of *Death of a Salesman, A View from the Bridge, After the Fall* and *The American Clock*

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Abstract

Almost 65 years after the successful Broadway run of *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller is still deemed one of the most consistent and influential playwrights of the American dramatic canon. Even if his later plays proved less popular than the early classics, Miller's dramatic output has received regular critical attention, while his long and eventful life keeps arousing the biographers' curiosity. However, most of the academic works on Miller's dramatic texts are much too anchored on a thematic perspective: they study the plays as deconstructions of the American Dream, as a rebuke of McCarthyism or any kind of political persecution, as reflections on the concepts of collective guilt and denial in relation to traumatizing events, such as the Great Depression or the Holocaust. Especially within the Anglo-American critical tradition, Miller's plays are rarely studied as dramatic objects whose performative nature implies a certain range of formal specificities. Neither are they seen as part of the 20th century dramatic and theatrical attempts to overcome the canons of Realism. In this dissertation, I intend, first of all, to frame Miller's dramatic output within the American dramatic tradition. Then, resorting mainly to the theoretical notions of Peter Szondi and Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, I aim to identify and analyze the two main formal devices employed by the playwright in order to deconstruct the fossilized domestic Realism that had settled on the Broadway stages: the intimate and psychological form – *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* – and the epic/narrative approach – *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock*.

Keywords: Arthur Miller, American Drama, Realism, Aristotelian Theatre, Intimate Theatre, Epic Theatre, Novelization.

Resumo

Cerca de 65 anos após a estreia na Broadway de *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller continua a ser considerado um dos dramaturgos mais consistentes e marcantes do cânone dramático norte-americano. Ainda que as suas peças mais tardias tenham sido menos populares que os clássicos iniciais, a escrita dramática de Miller tem sido recebida com regular atenção crítica e a sua longa e preenchida vida continua a suscitar a curiosidade dos biógrafos. Contudo, os trabalhos académicos que se debruçam sobre a obra do autor estão demasiado ancorados numa perspetiva temática: as peças são estudadas como desconstruções do Sonho Americano, como críticas ao McCartismo ou a qualquer espécie de perseguição política, como reflexões acerca dos conceitos de culpa e negação coletivas em relação a eventos traumatizantes como a Grande Depressão e o Holocausto. Na tradição crítica anglo-americana, em particular, as peças de Miller são raramente estudadas como objetos dramáticos cuja natureza performativa implica um determinado conjunto de especificidades formais. Tampouco são analisadas como parte integrante dos processos dramáticos e teatrais de desconstrução dos cânones realistas que marcaram o século XX. Nesta dissertação pretendo, em primeiro lugar, enquadrar a produção dramática de Arthur Miller na tradição teatral americana. Seguidamente, e recorrendo sobretudo a noções teóricas de Peter Szondi e Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, tentarei identificar e analisar os dois principais dispositivos formais usados pelo dramaturgo para ultrapassar o Realismo doméstico (já quase fossilizado) que dominava os palcos da Broadway: a forma íntima e psicológica – *Death of a Salesman* e *After the Fall* – e a abordagem épica/narrativa – *A View from the Bridge* e *The American Clock*.

Palavras-chave: Arthur Miller, Drama Americano, Realismo, Teatro Aristotélico, Teatro Íntimo, Teatro Épico, Romancização.

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"If art reflects life it does so with special mirrors"

Bertolt Brecht

"Je n'invente rien; je fais mieux, je continue"

Émile Zola

"TYRONE: Mary! For God's sake, forget the past!
MARY: The past is the present"

Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*

Introduction

This dissertation intends to be, first of all, a contribution to the still fragmented research on what Susan Harris Smith called the "bastard art", "the canary in the mine shaft of American literary and cultural studies" (Smith 1997: 1) – American drama.[1] Being deemed, by many academics and theatre professionals, as commercial and aesthetically conservative, American playwriting and theatrical practices are generally conceived as an "attenuated, fossilized imitation of Ibsenian and Chekhovian realism" (Lyons 1993: 162). Even some works by the playwrights who made it to the Pantheon of contemporary drama (Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, David Mamet and Sam Shepard) are often dismissed as mere variations of the conventional realistic matrix from which modern American drama was born. Which is somehow true. But, as some critics have noticed, Realism has proved to be a dominant characteristic of American arts (including narrative fiction, painting and cinema) during the 20th century. Gerald Berkowitz, in *American Drama of the Twentieth Century*, states with great certainty that Realism is "the natural voice of American drama" (Berkowitz 1992: 2) and many other academics (as I will have the opportunity to quote in the first chapter of this dissertation) maintain that the realistic framework is closely connected to and motivated by the American social and cultural experience.

Bearing in mind this specificity of American drama – which obviously distinguishes it from the more self-reflexive and philosophically concerned European trend – and setting aside some prejudices and preconceived ideas that have built up throughout 20th century criticism, I believe it is highly important to re-evaluate the dramatic output of America's contemporary playwrights.

This dissertation will focus on some of the dramatic works by Arthur Miller, who, alongside Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, has received great critical acclaim and is unanimously considered one of the classic masters of American playwriting. I will not attempt a very specific approach to one of Miller's plays in particular. I am interested, instead, in a

[1] In his panoramic article "Drama as a cultural sign: American dramatic criticism, 1945-1978", C. W. E. Bigsby characterizes the study of American drama as "a comparatively recent phenomenon" that "did not start on any scale until the 1950s" (Bigsby 1978: 331) and states that, despite some inconsistent quality that quite often affects American theatre, there has been a "corresponding failure of criticism to identify the nature of that theatre's achievements" (*idem*: 332).

more systematic analysis that will allow an understanding of the tension, throughout Miller's output, between the realistic conventions, typical of the American dramaturgy during the first half of the 20th century,[2] and the aesthetic and formal devices derived from the different modernist experiments, which proposed a non-naturalistic representation of reality and the retheatricalization of the stage.

By resorting to four plays written within a time span of little more than 30 years – *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *A View from the Bridge* (1955, 1956), *After the Fall* (1964) and *The American Clock* (1980) – I mean to analyse the dialectic relationship between the realistic tradition, which in my opinion, Miller never quite abandoned, and an experimental trend that is quite evident from *Death of a Salesman* onwards. Although there are, among his later works, texts where a convergence of these two tendencies is quite evident – *Ride down Mount Morgan* (1991) and *Mr. Peters' Connections* are two examples –, they are not *experimental* anymore: they are the prolongation of Miller's long established aesthetics and their techniques are not original. On the contrary, Miller's later plays quite often seem conservative when compared to the works of more recent authors such as David Mamet, Sam Shepard, Tony Kushner or Paula Vogel. Therefore, I chose two texts – *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *A View from the Bridge* (1955/1956) – which were written by a budding playwright trying to find his place in the American dramatic tradition, taking advantage of its strong points but avoiding its conservative and outdated forms and themes, and another two – *After the Fall* (1964) and *The American Clock* (1982/1984)[3] – which belong to a second stage in the playwright's career and were more or less coeval with the beginnings of the American performative avant-garde movement.

The first chapter of the dissertation will consist of a brief characterization of the American theatre from the last quarter of the 19th century, when a truly native dramatic tradition, still very much influenced by the models imported from Europe, was born, until the 1940s. In the first part of the chapter, I will trace the evolution and establishment of Realism as the dominant aesthetic. Being aware that the concept of Realism has a slippery and chameleon-like nature, I acknowledge the need to discuss its various characteristics and limits before writing about a realistic drama in America. However, I also mean to prove that, while some European realistic and naturalistic authors and texts were of great importance for the development of modern drama in the United States, the themes and situations approached

[2] Growing up during the Golden Age of Broadway commercial theatre, Miller deemed the predominantly realistic conventions of American drama uninteresting and conservative.

[3] Although the first official production of *The American Clock* only took place in 1982, Miller had started writing the play in 1970, changing and revising it for more than 10 years.

were in compliance with the American social experience and moral values, which led to what Jane Schlueter called "domestic realism" (Schlueter 1999). Moreover, the highly popular genres of comedy and melodrama, the favourites of middle-class audiences, were never quite forsaken. Instead, there was a peculiar merging between these *well-made* and conventional forms and the realistic characteristics.

In the second part of the chapter, my main subject will be the experimental dramaturgy which sprouted in the 1910s, during the Little Theatre Movement, and which represented a counterpoint to the mainstream dramatic tendency. If, in the late 1940s, Arthur Miller decided that his dramaturgy should take a direction beyond an already repetitive and outdated Realism, the path had been prepared by authors such as Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Elmer Rice, Thornton Wilder, Clifford Odets and even Tennessee Williams, who, aiming to produce an aesthetically and ideologically renovated drama, started experimenting with avant-garde devices which were first proposed in Europe.

The following chapters, which are preceded by a prologue that seeks to explore Miller's own theoretical views on his dramatic poetics, will focus exclusively on Miller's texts. The division between second and third chapters corresponds to the identification of two major trends in Arthur Miller's dramaturgy that reworked dramatic realism and experimented beyond it. Although many of his plays could be described within a realistic framework – we should bear in mind that Miller's first great success on Broadway was a well-made Ibsenian drama, *All my Sons* (1947) – the author's belief in the symbiotic relationship between form and content led him to look for different formal strategies that would exacerbate the perspectives, themes and messages he aimed at exploring in certain moments of his writing.

Curiously, the two trends I was able to identify correspond roughly to the two main paths that, according to Raymond Williams, were developed during the avant-garde movement in Europe. In *Politics of Modernism*, Williams states that Naturalism, with its living room convention and linear plot, ended up not being suitable for the portrayal of either "[s]ocial and economic crises in the wider society" or of the "crises of subjectivity – the privacies of sexuality, the uncertainties and disturbances of fantasies and dreams" (Williams 1989: 85-86). Therefore two contrasting, and even opposed, theatrical tendencies bloomed: Expressionism, concerned with the subjective, irrational and psychological dimension of human existence; and a more political and social theatre, from Piscator and Brecht's epic dramaturgy.

In the second chapter, I will focus the analysis on *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*, which, under the influence of monodrama, Expressionism and the interior monologue

developed in narrative fiction, represent Miller's effort to give voice, through a declared perspectivism, to the personal dilemmas and frustrations of his characters. In spite of never neglecting the social dimension of his texts, which is, by the way, quite evident in both *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*, the playwright was interested in exploring the theme of guilt through a subjective perspective and the representation of memory mechanisms. I intend to prove how the formal devices the playwright comes up with manage to transport the readers and the spectators into the protagonists' psyches.

The more "epic" side of Miller's dramaturgy will be the object of my attention in the third and final chapter of this dissertation. By analysing the two version of *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock* within the theoretical framework of the Epic Theatre I aim to explore the relationship between *Verfremdung* strategies (for instance, the introduction of narration and of the author's own point of view in the dramatic fabric as well as the conspicuous stylization of characters and actions) and the social and political dimensions of the plays.

Being a dissertation in the field of American Literature, this is also a study essentially focused on the literary aspect of drama. However, I completely agree with Susan Harris Smith when she states that "dramatic literature must be understood in its widest possible manifestations and contexts, from production of texts to reception of performances" (Smith 1997: 2) and, throughout my analysis of Miller's plays, there will be references to factors such as scenography, lighting and acting, which have to do with the physical and contextual aspect of the theatre and which vary with every new *mise en scène*. However, the text is at the core of this study and my purpose is to understand how, apart from each director's aesthetic choices, it is in the text – through its structure, style, scenic directions, etc. – that the author projects the formal devices that will exist on the stage. In a moment when a good deal of contemporary theatre, in a postdramatic mood, leaves aside the literary playtext to explore other theatrical languages, the main perspective of this dissertation is much in tune with the opinion of the Portuguese theatre director Jorge Silva Melo who, in a recent interview, defended the need for the literary element in theatrical productions: "they are all producing the same theatrical spectacle, which believes in something I don't believe in at all: the theatrical specificity, the scenic authorship over the literary one. Goldoni in the 18th century took exception, and quite correctly, to the stage as ultimate authority of the spectacle. Finding that the *commedia dell'arte* had become a dogma, he decided to start writing" (Melo 2011). Arthur Miller showed, throughout his career as a playwright, that he clearly subscribed Jorge Silva Melo's point of view and this dissertation will take as its main object the dramatic text

in its capacity of structuring the play, because, according to Miller, the *poem* is the core-element in the theatre performance. As he wrote, in the "Introduction" to his *Collected Plays*, "I prize the poetic above else in the theatre, and because I do I insist that the poem truly be there" (Miller 1958: 8).

*

Most of the playscripts used in this dissertation are quoted from the Methuen Collection of Arthur Miller's complete dramatic works: Miller, Arthur (1958). *Plays: One. All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, the Crucible, a Memory of Two Mondays, a View from the Bridge*. London: Methuen Drama, 2007; Miller, Arthur (1981). *Plays: Two. The Misfits, After the Fall, Incident at Vichy, the Price, the Creation of the World and Other Business, Playing for Time*. London: Methuen Drama, 2009; Miller, Arthur. *Plays: Three. The American Clock, the Archbishop's Ceiling, Two-Way Mirror*. London: Methuen Drama, 2009. However, for the first (one-act) version of *A View from the Bridge*, which is not included in the Methuen Collection, I followed Tony Kushner's edition of Arthur Miller's works for The Library of America – Miller, Arthur. *Collected Plays 1944-1961*. Ed. Tony Kushner. New York: The Library of America, 2006. The same goes for the second version of *The American Clock*, which is quoted from volume II of the Library of America Collection: Miller, Arthur. *Collected Plays 1964-1982*. Ed. Tony Kushner. New York: The Library of America, 2012.

Part I

Chapter One – The American theatre tradition, 1880-1945. A brief characterization

1. Dramatic mainstream and Realism in *the American grain*

In the essay "Notes on Realism" (1999), Arthur Miller, looking back at the first years of his career as a playwright, refers to the predominance of Realism in the American theatre thus: "When I began writing plays in the late Thirties, 'Realism' was the reigning style in English-language commercial theater, which was just about all the theater there was at the time in America and Britain" (Miller 2000: 301). Miller's assertion introduces us to the predicament of a budding playwright, who strove to write beyond the realistic framework and explore the more *poetic* and non-representational forms that the avant-garde and experimental theatre had come up with. But what exactly is this "Realism" that Miller criticizes (without, however, totally repudiating it) in many of his theoretical texts? What are the conventions and formal strategies used in the realistic theatre which he tried to overcome? Is it even possible to put forward a univocal definition of Realism? And, in the case of the American drama, how and why did this aesthetic become so popular and dominant and what other tendencies represented a counterpoint to it? Finally, is it possible to say that there is a specific American Realism? The answer to these questions should provide us with a general overview of the theatrical aesthetic tradition that, on the one hand, informed Miller's writing and toward which, on the other, he directed his criticism.

Before addressing the more specific issue of the realistic theatre, it is perhaps relevant to understand how far there is a truly American dramatic tradition and how it is perceived by academics and writers.[4] Although there is a handful of critics – of which John Gassner was the major representative – who maintain that there is a typical American drama and defend its literary and theatrical qualities,[5] the truth is that there has always been a strong devaluation of American drama and theatre that ended up in a kind of paradox: on the one hand, it was accused of never having overcome its colonial status, which was made clear by its lack of originality and the fact that it kept "stagnating in its parasitical dependence on the style and

[4] Throughout this chapter, I will use the terms "drama" and "theatre" interchangeably, in order to emphasize the necessary interdepence, during the history of Aristotelian theatre, between dramatic writing and theatrical practices.
[5] Susan Harris Smith's work *American Drama. The bastard art* is clearly an attempt to rehabilitate the status of the American dramatic tradition and an appeal to its inclusion in the academic *curricula*.

substance of foreign [European] works" (Brunstein qtd. in Smith 1997: 45); on the other hand, however, critics like Eric Bentley and Joseph Wood Krutch kept comparing American plays to European standards and believed that only through the imitation of Europe's leading avant-garde experiments could American drama gain artistic relevance. In 1953, Krutch wrote: "We have no one who has assumed a stature comparable to that of Shaw or Ibsen […] no American of any time has been a really major figure in either the intellectual or the literary world. Four or five Europeans of the late nineteenth century were both" (Krutch, qtd. in Smith 1997: 27). One year later, in "The American drama (1944-1954)", Bentley was still rambling on about the superiority of European theatre, now apropos set designers: "If we look at the designs of Christian Bérard of Paris, Teo Otto of Zurich, or Caspar Neher of Salzburg, we find more of a style – more of a realized modernity – than even the most brilliant men are giving us here" (Bentley 1954: 250-251).

From the late 19th century until the early 1920s, the American drama was deemed by many as practically inexistent. Walt Whitman, for instance, treated the subject quite dismissively by commenting, in his "Democratic Vistas" that "of what is called the drama, or dramatic presentation in the United States, I should say it deserves to be treated with the same gravity, and on a par with the questions of ornamental confectionery at public dinners, or the arrangement of curtains and hangings in a ball-room, – nor more, nor less" (Whitman 1964: 412) and James Gibbons Huneker considered that American theatre was "beneath critical contempt" (Smith 1997: 38). In a 1916 text, "Mr. James Joyce and the modern stage. A play and some considerations", Ezra Pound did not state the inexistence of native drama, but lamented that the innovations used by American novelists did not translate into dramatic literature: "Must our most intelligent writers do this sort of work in the novel, *solely in the novel*, or is it going to be, in our time, possible for them to do it in drama?" (Senelick 2010: 266).

Nevertheless, many critics – especially from the last half of the 19th century until the establishment, between the Wars, of Eugene O'Neill as the great American playwright – saw American drama through a somewhat utopian and eschatological perspective: it was constantly deemed as an "infant" in the present moment, while the coming of a truly native playwright who would inaugurate the canon (which many thought to be O'Neill) was always on the horizon. Susan Harris Smith summarizes this critical position quite clearly: "As a general rule, the critics […] anxiously scanned the theatrical horizon looking for the saviour who must be on the verge of emerging to redeem American drama from its provincialism, crudeness, lack of poetry, and so on" (Smith 1997: 95).

If it is true that many critics and theatre practitioners have always viewed American drama with exaggerated pessimism and have been deterred, by an inferiority complex in relation to the European standard, from recognizing the quality of much native dramatic output, it is also undeniable that the American dramatic canon has been made of successive inconsistencies. As C. W. E. Bigsby puts it, there has been a "failure of the American theatre to rise to a level of sustained seriousness" (Bigsby 1978: 332). As a matter of fact, the inexistence of a consistent and recognized theatrical practice in the United States is for many an issue that goes back to the foundation of the country. In his seminal work, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville reflects upon the state of the dramatic art in the United States and on the distant relationship between the American people and the theatre. Stressing the importance for the (non-)development of American drama of the Puritan's prejudice towards any kind of literary and theatrical practices – a factor that will be picked up by recent experts on theatre studies[6] – Tocqueville characterized the fortune of the theatre amongst the Americans thus:

> The Puritan founders of the American republic were not only hostile to all pleasures but professed a special abhorrence for the stage. They thought it an abominable amusement, and so long as their principles prevailed without question, the drama was wholly unknown among them. These opinions of the founding fathers of the colonies have left deep traces in the minds of their descendants.
> In America extreme regularity of habits and great strictness of morals have up to now told against the growth of the drama.
> There are no subjects for drama in a country which has seen no great political catastrophes and in which love always leads by a direct and easy road to marriage. People who spend every weekday making money and Sunday in praying to God give no scope to the Muse of Comedy […]
> The Americans, whose laws allow the utmost freedom, and even license, of language in other respects, nevertheless subject the drama to a sort of censorship (Tocqueville 1952: 264).

Obviously, the American theatre survived this initial puritanical prejudice against the arts of the stage. The theatre is a resilient artistic form and, even if it met some resistance on the part of the first generations of Americans, it managed to become a popular entertainment until it the *movies* took over in the first half of the 20th century. The problem for many is exactly the word "entertainment". Having come up against a disdain on the part of the

[6] In *American Drama. The bastard art*, Susan Harris Smith, following Tocqueville's thought, states: "Historically, American drama has always suffered from a bad reputation. One might argue that the tradition of scepticism about drama, dating back to colonial America, suggests that the well-documented Puritan distaste for theatre and drama continues to hold sway over the general populace as well as academic institutions" (Smith 1997: 23).

nation's ruling and cultural institutions[7] and influenced by several economic and political factors that fostered the private management of artistic establishments, the American theatre had to be, first of all, commercially profitable. Only then could there be (although it was not always necessary) some aesthetic and ideological value. The literary tradition, which was so consistent in some European dramaturgies, and which is pointed out by American critics as the great handicap of American theatre (playwrights in the United States should not only be on Broadway, their texts should be studied in the classroom), was in a first stage put aside. The producers' priority was to attract as many spectators as possible and the most appealing shows for the American audience – which Sheldon Cheney described as the "half-educated product of our stereotyped grade schools; the newly rich; the sentimental ladies" (Cheney qtd. "Introduction", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II 1999: 12) – were not the highly literary but the

> popular entertainments […] minstrel, and vaudeville shows, circuses, burlesques, and 'happy parties,' which exhibited the specialties of the variety troupes. The peculiarly American genre of the 'extravaganza' (a combination of ballet troupe and chorus with a slim plot and as much 'stocking' as American prudery would allow) shared the audience with Gilbert and Sullivan and Offenbach (Murphy 1987: 3).

In compliance with the commercial logic that, since the 19th century until just now, has been ruling the stage industry in America, the key-person in the theatrical enterprise is the impresario, who, most of the time, chooses the dramatic repertoire having in mind the profit of a production. This fact, *per se*, lets us guess the succession of sheer conservative, populist and aesthetically dull plays that had long runs on Broadway and toward which Arthur Miller directed his violent criticism. If, throughout the 20th century, some playwrights gained importance in the theatrical system and were able to hold on to some control over the productions of their plays,[8] American playwrights, especially until the end of the 19th century, were "panderers to public taste or […] helpless pawns to managers" (Smith 1997: 24).

In fact, mostly because of the lack of an efficient Copyright Law (which was only passed in 1891), the American playwright was not a recognized or supported figure and there were almost no reasons for his or her plays to be produced or printed. Instead, the tendency

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[7] Apart from very few attempts, in the 20th century, of the government to support the theatre (from which the Federal Theatre Project is perhaps the most well-known example), there has never been a consistent plan for the creation of a publicly subsidized theatre in the United States.

[8] Nevertheless, even contemporary playwrights, especially the newcomers, are still relegated to a secondary position. The advertising techniques are a very good example of this situation. For instance, the posters for the Broadway production of *Mountaintop* (2011) featured the names of the actors (Samuel L. Jackson and Angela Bassett) in the first plan and at the bottom, in small print, the name of the budding playwright Katori Hall was announced.

was to provide an audience still much attached to European models with English, French and German melodramas, standard comedies and Shakespeare classics, in which the protagonists were played by celebrity actors like Edwin Booth. As Brenda Murphy summarizes,

> [u]ntil the International Copyright Law was passed in 1891, it was always more profitable for a manager to pirate a European play than to buy one from a native dramatist [...] Thus, between 1865 and 1891, a manager could pirate a European drama but would have to pay for an American one, and because audiences generally were thought to prefer European sophistication and exoticism, the European play was usually the manager's first choice. Consequently, there was little incentive for Americans to write plays (Murphy 1987: 3).

If comedies turned out to be quite popular among the American spectators, especially after the First World War, the melodrama had an impressively successful implementation in the US during the 19th century and left long-lasting marks on the American dramaturgy. Known as the *tragedy for popular audiences*, melodrama was one of the theatrical manifestations of the bourgeois drama, whose development started in the second half of the 18th century, accompanying the economic and social rise of the bourgeoisie and its rejection of the aristocracy's values. Dismissing the prevailing aristocratic theatre "because of its inherently misleading fictions, its lewdness and amorality, its function as a mere distraction from the serious and the utilitarian" (Williams 1989: 83), the bourgeoisie longed to see a truthful and, above all, positive image of itself on stage and feel an identification with the realities and characters presented. The noble and untouchable heroes of French classical tragedy are replaced by characters from the emerging bourgeoisie, of which Lessing's Emilia Galotti is the most famous example. Therefore, in the dawn of the 19th century, the bourgeois drama appeared as quite a revolutionary and democratic form, which rejected both the ideological, moral and aesthetic principles of classical art. As Patrice Pavis, agreeing with other academics like Peter Brooks, puts it:

> au XVIIIe siècle, le drame bourgeois se voulait une forme oppositionnelle, voire révolutionnaire, portée aux valeurs aristocratiques de la tragédie classique, dont le personnel se situe aux antipodes de la cellule familiale bourgeoise. Au XIXe siècle, le drame bourgeois, sous sa forme élégante (drame romantique) ou populaire (*mélodrame* et *vaudeville*), devient le modèle d'une dramaturgie où triomphent l'esprit d'entreprise et les nouveaux mythes bourgeois ("Théâtre bourgeois", Pavis 1996: 362).

Whereas some examples of the "elegant form", as Pavis calls the more serious and ambitious Romantic drama cultivated by Goethe, Schiller or Hugo, became part of the Western dramatic canon and prevailed until the present day and age, the most popular dramatic forms in the 19th century were the melodrama and the well-made play, which clearly

dominated the French and British Victorian stages and had a great appeal in America. For a growing gentile and half-educated middle-class, raised on the values of nationalism, utilitarianism, personal sentimentality, prescriptive gender roles and supremacy of the family, the simplistic take on reality typical of the melodrama would naturally be very popular. Moreover, the melodramatic theatrical conventions – the prescribed roles, such as the innocent heroine, the brave hero and the despicable villain, the Manichean conception of reality, the contrived plots, the fascination for exotic and Gothic ambiences, the highly sentimental tone and over-exaggerated acting– were much more in compliance with the taste of this new audience whose "lack of any cultural background" (H. D. Howarth, "Mélodrame", *in* Kennedy, vol. II, 2003:842) was quite evident.[9] Initially marked by a democratic purpose and optimistic structure of feeling in which virtue and innocence always win, the melodrama found its way quite easily into the American theatrical scene of the 19th century, as the success of Boucicault's melodramatic plays, such as *The Octoroon* (1859), and Steele Mackaye's smashing hit *Hazel Kirke* (1879) have proved. According to Christopher Bigsby and Don B. Wilmeth, it was the perfect dramatic form for a population increasingly comprised by immigrants and a progressively industrial society in which social and economical gaps were becoming more and more obvious:

> The playwright René Pixerecourt wrote, he explained, for those who could not read. He staged the collision between good and evil in such a way that the moral universe was presented purged of ambiguity. Melodrama was a dramatic form that purported to peel off social deceits and expose the polarities of human nature. The very broadness of its appeal was its philosophic and financial justification. Perhaps that accounts for the enthusiasm with which the form was embraced by American audiences. It is democratic in its assertion of the moral superiority of the powerless. Melodrama implies, finally, that it is possible to tell the counterfeit from the real and that the illiterate playgoer can understand the text as clearly as anyone. This became important in an immigrant society, such as America […] melodrama nonetheless reflected a widespread and democratic suspicion of those who exercised undue power: the landlord, the businessman, the domestic tyrant. So, melodrama could be seen as dramatizing opposing impulses in the culture. It acknowledged the potential collapse of social form but stressed the virtue of continuity ("Introduction", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II 1999: 2-3).

Although much bourgeois drama addressed contemporary social issues, especially through the personification of society's evil systems and practices, by the end of the 19th century, its "revolutionary" momentum had deteriorated and it ended up embodying the conservative moral values of the ruling bourgeoisie. The celebration, at the denouement of most melodramas and well-made plays, of the love between the hero and heroine through

[9] In *Le Naturalisme au Théâtre*, Zola, describes the melodramas and well-made plays of the school of Scribe and Sardou as "une littérature légère, d'une digestion facile, qui ne demande pas un grand effort pour être comprise" (Zola 1881: 39).

marriage indicates that, ultimately, "[w]hat melodrama did was insist that the essential life was domestic, the perfect social unit a marriage, and hence that any challenge to such a union carried with it the threat of a greater collapse of order" *idem*: 3). Furthermore, if in most of the naturalistic plays in the tradition of Ibsen, Zola, Strindberg and Shaw (who intended to uncover the contradictions and dark aspects of bourgeois society) the discussion of social and moral issues prescribes the action,[10] in the traditional melodramas and well-made plays these issues could be mentioned and briefly discussed, but the number-one priority was the perfect resolution of the usually intricate plot.

It is acknowledged, by practically every critic and theatre practitioner, that, by the last quarter of the 19th century, the bourgeois drama – represented by the melodrama's sentimentality, and the well-made play's mechanical plot with its predictable twists and turns – became somewhat exhausted and inadequate. For Patrice Pavis, the rapid social and ideological changes happening at the end of the 1800s and the rise of a working class which defied the bourgeoisie's values (like the bourgeois had once challenged the aristocracy) led to the bad reputation of melodramatic theatre that prevailed until our day and age: "avec l'arrivée d'une nouvelle classe s'opposant directement aux intérêts de la bourgeoisie, le théâtre bourgeois prend un tout autre sens et devient, chez le jeune BRECHT par exemple, le synonyme de dramaturgie «de grande consommation», fondée sur la fascination et la reproduction de l'idéologie dominante" ("Théâtre bourgeois", Pavis 1996: 362). Times of change call for a renovated art. And in literature, changes were already taking place in the novel.[11] However, as Harold Clurman once said, the theatre is a mass medium, therefore falling ideologically and aesthetically behind other artistic forms (such as narrative and poetic literature), which are meant to be perceived individually. So it was only from the 1870s onwards that European drama shifted toward Realism and Naturalism. Influenced by a positivist episteme – manifested in August Comte's scientific view of society in *Système de Philosophie Positive* (1824), Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), Hippolyte

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[10] In the long essay "The Quintessence of Ibsenism", George Bernard Shaw, an admirer of Ibsen, pointed out what he considered to be the revolutionary innovation of the Norwegian playwright's dramaturgy, in comparison to conventional melodramas and well-made plays: "Formerly you had in what was called a well made play an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, and unravelling in the third. Now you have exposition, situation, and discussion; and the discussion is the test of the playwright. The critics protest in vain. They declare that discussions are not dramatic, and that art should not be didactic […] The discussion conquered Europe in Ibsen's Doll's House; and now the serious playwright recognizes in the discussion not only the main test of his highest powers, but also the real centre of his play's interest" (Shaw 1932: 135).

[11] In *Le Naturalisme au Théâtre*, Zola calls for a transformation in the theatre similar to the one happening in the naturalistic novel: "Un courant irrésistible emporte notre société à l'étude du vrai. Dans le roman, Balzac a été le hardi et puissant novateur qui a mis l'observation du savant à la place de l'imagination du poète. Mais, au théâtre, l'évolution semble plus lente" (Zola 1881: 11).

Taine's *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise* (1864), inspired by the methodology used in natural sciences, Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'Étude de la Médicine Experimentale* (1865) and Karl Marx's dialectical materialism in *Das Kapital* (1867) – , the realistic and naturalistic works meant to observe reality in a meticulous and objective way, without letting any kind of *corrective lenses* affect its observation. For Zola, the major theorist of Naturalism, "[l]es écrivains naturalistes sont donc ceux dont la méthode d'étude serre la nature et l'humanité du plus près possible, tout en laissant, bien entendu, le tempérament particulier de l'observateur libre de se manifester ensuite dans les œuvres comme bon lui semble" (Zola 1881: 179).

The highest priority is the truth and its faithful artistic representation; enough with the verisimilar but untrue plots, completely cut-off from reality, the repetitive stories of innocent love and protected honour. For the realists and naturalists, there is much more artistic and also scientific worth in the depiction of the daily habits of a contemporary family than in the far-fetched plots typical of melodramas and well-made plays. According to George Bernard Shaw, who was a fervent supporter of the realist movement in the theatre, the bourgeois theatre, which represented the worldview of the Idealists (the ones who keep defending false values) and the Philistines (the ones who abide by these values without questioning them), must be replaced by the Realists' (the few who assess and question the established values in their relation to reality) theatre. Contemporary reality must be shown on the stage and the audience must be confronted with coeval social and moral issues, whether they are pleasant or not: "N'est-ce pas merveilleux? Paris s'étonne qu'un galant homme fasse des enfants et ne les aime pas; Paris s'étonne que l'avortement soit à la porte de tous les concubinages. Ces choses ont lieu tous les jours, seulement il ne les voit pas, il ne s'y arrête pas; il faut que l'expérience les montre violemment, que le coup de pistolet parte, que la goutte d'acide tombe, pour qu'il reste stupéfait lui-même de sa pourriture en gants blancs" (Zola 1881: 160).

The term "Realism" suggests that all the formal devices in the work of art lead toward a real or true imitation of reality, which, according to the positivist episteme, is considered possible. But when it comes to the artistic creation, which is inevitably bound, on the one hand, to formal conventions, and, on the other, to the imaginative faculties, the concept of Realism, with its implicit faithfulness to the real, is a handful. In his *Poetics* Aristotle was already preoccupied with the balance between the mimetic (representative) and the poetic (creative) dimensions of art and at the beginning of the 20th century Edward Gordon Craig, one of the most important avant-garde directors of contemporary theatre, wrote in *On the Art of the Theatre* (1909): "I find them [naturalists] one and all to be mere examples of a new

artificiality – the artificiality of Naturalism" (Craig qtd. in Styan 1981a: 1). Even Zola, the harbinger of a theatre that took the mimetic aspect to the limit, admitted that the peculiar nature of the theatrical art prevented an absolute imitation of reality: "Il serait absurde de croire qu'on pourra transporter la nature telle quelle sur les planches, planter des vrais soleils. Dès lors, les conventions s'imposent, il faut accepter des illusions plus ou moins parfaites, à la place des réalités" (Zola 1881: 89).[12] So, the impossibility of a total and objective imitation of reality makes the term "Realism" quite slippery. What exactly makes a play realistic? And, since the two concepts have been used, what is the difference between realistic and naturalistic theatre?

Many critics and academics use both concepts to describe a theatrical practice that, from the text to the set design and the acting style, reduces its artificial aspects and theatricality to the minimum. However, J. L. Styan and Thomas Postlewait, for instance, describe Naturalism as a specific branch of Realism, which, strongly influenced by the scientific determinism of the late 19th century, seeks to "show that powerful forces governed human lives, forces of which we might not be fully aware and over which we might have little control – the forces of heredity and environment" (Styan 1981a: 6). If naturalistic works are framed by a realistic aesthetic, they present a very specific (scientific) perspective, focusing on pointing out the historical, political, economic and hereditary forces that drive the characters' actions. For instance, while most of Chekhov's dramaturgy and some of Ibsen's plays, like *Hedda Gabler*, are much more concerned with the realistic portrayal of the characters' psychological and moral dilemmas (even if there are some strokes of scientific determinism along the text), Zola's dramatic adaptations of his novels and plays like Gorky's *The Lower Depths* or Hauptmann's *The Weavers* strive to represent primarily the conditions that determine the characters' course through the drama.[13]

One of the great champions of the distinction between Realism and Naturalism was Georg Lukács, who in "Realism in the Balance" defends the realistic works by Balzac and

[12] In his preface to *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition*, William Demastes addresses the paradoxical nature of the realistic theatre – it tries to represent reality objectively, knowing all along that it is an impossibility: "the playwright is there, actively filtering and realigning elements of action while trying to produce an illusion of noninvolvement or objectivity on the stage. This first level of deluded objectivity would probably be less problematic if we all agreed on the objective truth or reality of the filter that a playwright chose. If the crafter were filtering through and ordering events that displayed a universally acceptable – that is, consensus-derived – objectivity, then Realism, despite the fact of its being subjectively crafted, would still remain an essentially 'objective' form. But Realism is doubly subjective in that it is controlled by a crafter who is *not* some shamanistic revealer of *the* rules of reality. The rules of reality are themselves subjects of debate, and the realistic form attracts just the type of confederacy that can present this plurality of visions" (Demastes 2007: xii).

[13] Thomas Postlewait, "Realism and Reality", Kennedy, vol. II, 2003: 1114.

Tolstoy for their ability to capture the real in its totality and dialectical dynamism, against the naturalistic trend which, due to its milieu theory, “thwarted any real artistic breakthrough to a dialectic of appearance and essence” (Adorno et al. 2007: 39). If realistic works present “characters as a nexus of the social and individual” (Adorno et al. 2007: 61), naturalistic “exact imitations of life […] remained static and devoid of inner tension” (Adorno et al. 2007: 39)[14].

In fact, the main tendency of naturalistic texts, whether narrative or dramatic, is the assertion of an almost conservative pessimism toward human existence: people are inevitably conditioned by exterior factors which annul their inner will. Focusing on the depiction of squalid social *milieux*, the naturalistic writers generally have their characters give in to incontrollable hereditary, economic and political forces. Perhaps the major difference between the realistic dynamism and the naturalistic atavist determinism that Lukács diagnosed could be perceived in Ibsen’s famous attempt to distinguish his works from Zola’s: “Zola […] descends into the sewer to bathe in it; I to cleanse it” (Ibsen qtd. in Styan 1981a: 10-11). Although some dramas by the Norwegian playwright present characters who succumb to the environmental forces – for instance, in *Ghosts*, Oswald, who was raised away from home in order not to be morally corrupted by his promiscuous father, inevitably inherits some of Captain Alving’s character traits and, above all, his father’s fatal disease, syphilis[15] – there is, in plays like *A Doll’s House*, an apology of willpower and the belief that, like Nora (who rejects the prescribed role of the Victorian wife and mother), humans are capable of acting freely no matter what their social and hereditary conditions are.

In the United States, dramatic Naturalism was not a very consistent and dominant trend. Although there were, during the beginning of the 20th century, some plays that explored the dark and squalid environments of urban low-life through a deterministic perspective, the full naturalistic view was almost always taken over by the optimistic resolutions of conventional plots. For instance, Edward Sheldon’s 1908 *Salvation Nell*, which, according to Brenda Murphy, “took the greatest step toward integrating setting with character and action to create the forceful sense of character-determining milieu that realistic [and naturalistic] critics

[14] “While naturalism, as propounded by Émile Zola, is clearly a *type* of Realism, more often than not its unique epistemological and ontological foundations are identified as belonging to Realism in general. This conflation appears to be a primary reason many critics condemn Realism as a single-visioned, tyrannical oppressor of alternative visions of reality. Naturalism, after all, is a very specific vision with a cornerstone epistemology fundamentally Newtonian in its belief in inescapable/unalterable causality, that all actions lead to necessary and predictable reactions […] But Realism is not necessarily bound to causal/linear invariance. Realism is free to offer such visions but free to offer other as well” (Demastes 2003: xii-xiii).

[15] As Oswald says in the play, “The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children” (Ibsen 2008: 138).

demanded" (Murphy 1987: 88),[16] gives us a protagonist – Nell – who is miraculously saved from her low-class, violent and corrupt environment by the Salvation Army and ends up saving (also miraculously) her abusive lover Jim.

Eugene O'Neill, who ended his career writing one of the most outstanding examples of American Realism – *Long Day's Journey into Night* – started out writing Naturalist-inspired short plays, such as *The Web*, which Brenda Murphy describes as "a study of the social and economic forces that promote prostitution" and *Warnings*, "a play in which environmental and social forces lead inexorably to the protagonist's suicide" (Murphy 1987: 113). Although there were, during the first two decades of the 20th century, some plays that, influenced by muckraking journalism, disclosed social problems and explored the lower depths of American society,[17] it was only in the 1930s, after the economic and social consequences of the Great Depression spread throughout the entire country, that Naturalism made its way into the theatre through the works of Clifford Odets, John Steinbeck, Irwin Shaw and Sidney Kingsley. According to Brenda Murphy – and I completely agree with her opinion – only in the 1930s did the "belief in environmental determinism, the intense focus on human misery, and the cosmic pessimism of the naturalistic" become evident on the American stage (Murphy 1987: 148). With a penchant for Marxism, these plays explore, above all, the economic determining forces that rule the lives of characters such as the dwellers of the squalid neighbourhood portrayed in Kingsley's *Dead End* (1936), who have absolutely no chance of escaping their terrible *milieu*, or Joe Bonaparte, from Odets' *Golden Boy* (1937), who gives up on his dream of becoming a violinist in order to have a financially comfortable life as a professional boxer, but ends up dying (or committing suicide) after accidently killing his opponent on the ring.[18]

The naturalistic specificity is above all thematic and ideological; it is "Realism with a program".[19] Aesthetically, it abides by the realistic techniques of representation, which result in a minimization of theatricality.[20] Trying to answer the question which I also asked a couple of paragraphs above (What makes a play realistic?), Brenda Murphy identified six essential theatrical aspects (following Aristotle's division of dramatic elements in his *Poetics*) which underwent a realistic transformation: stagecraft, acting, character, dialogue, thought and

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[16] In one of the most famous lines in the play, Nell tells Jim: "You an' me didn't have no chance – did we, Jim? An' it ain't all our fault if didn't come quite up ter the mark" (Barnes 1970: 128).

[17] Charles Klein's 1905 play *The Lion and the Mouse* was a successful denunciation of corruption and of the dark side of Capitalism.

[18] For Brenda Murphy, the naturalistic tendency of American drama in the 1930s was, nevertheless, merged with a melodramatic pathos ("Plays and Playwrights: 1915-1945", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II, 1999: 327).

[19] Murphy 1987: 149.

[20] Demastes, William, 2003: x-xi.

structure. The set designs of realistic plays show the progressive thirst for an accurate representation of reality on stage that developed during the 19th century. In fact, many romantic dramas and melodramas were staged with remarkable "actualism" (William Gillette), that is, the presence of real furniture and props on stage, to accurately recreate exotic or ancient environments. The concern with the dramatic illusion caused partly by the stage apparatus was a factor that began preoccupying theatre practitioners in the end of 18th century. Bertolt Brecht, in "From the Mother Courage model" (1949), quotes Goethe who, in 1826, wrote of the Elizabethan stage: "There is no trace here of these aids to naturalness which we have become accustomed to thanks to the improvement in machinery, in the art of perspective and in the wardrobe" (Goethe qtd. in Brecht 1957: 218). However, for the theorists of Realism and Naturalism, such as Henry James and Émile Zola, the "actualism" practised in the productions of romantic plays and bourgeois melodramas did not have intrinsic value: the sets should bring to the stage an exact reproduction of a certain environment because it is important for the audience to understand the *milieux* in which the characters act: "A real environment had to be reproduced on the stage because within this perspective [naturalistic] an actual environment – a particular kind of room, particular furnishing, a particular relation to street or office or landscape – was in effect one of the actors" (Williams 1989: 85).

As far as acting was concerned, the histrionic style typical of romantic drama which, with its *points* and over exaggerated gestures and diction, was suitable for the display of conflicting emotions and a candid sentimentalism, was replaced with a "quiet, natural, psychologically complete" (Murphy 1987: 35) style. The actors' work started by the Saxe-Meiningen Company and Antoine's Théâtre Libre would be ultimately accomplished by the Moscow Art Theatre under the teachings and theories of Konstantin Stanislavsky, putting into practice Zola's precept that actors should live the play, not act in it.[21] Stanislavsky's proposal of the fusion between actor and character with the aid of some highly psychologist methods like the *affective memories* and *the magic if* was obviously motivated by the characters' complexity in most realistic plays. Unlike the stereotypical *dramatis personae* of bourgeois melodramas, the realistic characters are made of a psychological and emotional depth that individualizes them – Ibsen's Nora, Chekhov's Vanya or even Williams' Blanche DuBois cannot be mistaken with anyone else. In the preface to *Miss Julie*, one the most important theoretical texts of dramatic Realism and Naturalism, Strindberg expresses his belief that only complex characters are feasible within the frame of a realistic and naturalistic dramaturgy:

[21] Zola 1881: 130.

> So I do not believe in simple stage characters, and the summary judgements that authors pass on people – this one is stupid, that one brutal, this one jealous, that one mean – ought to be challenged by naturalists, who know how richly complicated the soul is, and who are aware that 'vice' has a reverse side, which is very much like virtue (Strindberg 2008: 59).

Henry James, who was an admirer of Ibsen's plays, could not help noticing, however, that the playwright's "habit of dealing essentially with the individual caught in the fact" (James 1893: 258) led him to sometimes forget the "type-quality" of his characters. The strife towards the creation of real individuals is also obviously associated with the transformation going on in the linguistic aspect: instead of the pretentiously poetic and ornamented discourse, the lines became natural and colloquial, in an effort on the part of the playwrights to faithfully represent the daily conversations of ordinary people. The on-going dialogue almost replaces the asides and soliloquies, which are only kept when the situation makes them feasible and prevents the breaking of the fourth wall, one of the absolutely mandatory features of Realism. For example, O'Neill resorts often to the "alcohol technique", getting his characters to speak long and quite revealing soliloquies while they are drunk. The exact reproduction of dialectal and regional linguistic variations was also a usual feature of realistic drama. In the United States, there was actually a very popular dramatic sub-genre of regional plays (the western melodramas, for example) in which the characters' linguistic peculiarities were, on the one hand, an important element in the construction of the play's environment and, on the other, a touch of eccentricity which pleased the New York (and generally urban) audiences. If the transformations of the four categories above (stagecraft, acting, character and dialogue) are quite evident and almost self-explanatory, the thought and structure categories demand a more thorough reflection that will lead to the issue of the specificity of the American dramatic Realism.

As far as the thought category is concerned – and by thought I understand the worldview that informs the plays and that motivates their themes – there is, in the most accomplished realistic and naturalistic plays, a clearly positivist and somewhat skeptical perspective that refuses "a movement toward transcendence or harmony" and conveys "a continual return to the mundane" (Murphy 1987: xii). Instead of the absolute values and indisputable closure that suffuse classical and romantic plays, the realistic dramaturgy leans toward the representation of the ever-changing rhythms of contemporary and ordinary life. Unlike the conventional structure of comedies, tragedies and well-made plays, with its exposition, conflict and denouement, the ultimate realistic plays – of which Chekhov works,

some of Ibsen's plays or even two of O'Neill's late texts[22] are good examples – present its audience or readership with an open-ended structure, suggesting that there is more in the characters' lives than what we are able to witness, and sometimes their action is developed throughout a rather extensive temporality, which is usually a characteristic of the novel.[23]

According to Raymond Williams, Realism (and Naturalism, in particular) was, ideologically, a first stage of Modernism because, similarly to the later avant-garde movements, it criticized and defied the values and practices of bourgeois society (for instance, Ibsen questioned severely the prescribed role of women) and, through a shocking and violent approach, managed to expose the "crises, the contradictions, the unexplored dark areas of the bourgeois human order of its time" (Williams 1989: 85). While pointing out the revolutionary and anti-bourgeois thematic of naturalistic drama, Raymond Williams admits that it was also "a summary" or "intensification" (Williams 1989: 84) of what he identifies as the five essential aspects of bourgeois drama since its beginning in the 18th century: 1) the use of contemporary material, 2) the presence of the indigenous, 3) everyday speech forms, 4) social extension, 5) secularism. Naturalistic drama intensified these factors to such an extent that its focus on the mundane and pedestrian side of human existence was considered at the time "low and vulgar or filthy" (*idem*: 85).

There was, therefore, some continuity between the bourgeois frame of romantic drama and well-made plays and the realistic and naturalistic dramaturgy. This continuity, I believe, lies above all in formal and aesthetic aspects. J. L. Styan, discussing the controversial reception of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, wrote: "The play offered a true advance in style, but it was its content which provoked outrage and hostility" (Styan 1981a: 22). As a matter of fact, Realism stands on the brink of what was defined by Georg Lukács[24] and Peter Szondi[25] as the *crisis of the drama*. If the cutting-edge playwrights of realistic and naturalistic movements, such as Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov, are credited as vital influences for the deconstruction of *absolute drama*[26] that was later carried out by Modernist and experimental drama, the truth is that most of the formal transformations lie underneath the conventional dramatic structure

[22] *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*.
[23] In many of Chekhov's plays, who admitted in a letter to Vera Kommissarzhevskaya that *Three Sisters* was "complex like a novel", there is a wide temporal span between the first and the last act.
[24] *The Sociology of Modern Drama* (Lukács 1965).
[25] *Théorie du Drame Moderne* (Szondi 1965).
[26] The term is used by Szondi to designate the drama which was developed in the Renaissance and lasted until the end of the 19th century and whose theoretical matrix comes from Aristotle's *Poetics*. According to Szondi, absolute drama is "une dialectique close sur elle-même" (Szondi 1965: 14), that is, a unity where absolutely no exterior factor or agent (including the author) is allowed in, and which can be characterized as an intersubjective action mediated by dialogue and happening in the present tense (Szondi 1965: 69).

of their plays. Discussing Strindberg's naturalistic plays, Szondi pinpoints the still Aristotelian character of naturalistic drama: "Le naturalisme avait beau se donner des allures révolutionnaires et l'être parfois dans le domaine du style et de la «vision du monde», dans le théâtre son orientation était conservatrice. Au fond, il tenait surtout à préserver la forme dramatique traditionnelle" (Szondi 1965: 38).

What is meant by Szondi's commentary is that, although the realistic dramaturgy pushed to the limit some of the Aristotelian dramatic principles, such as the strife for verisimilitude (which quite often becomes a strife for truth), it was still abiding by the general dramatic principles which stemmed from Aristotle's *Poetics* and which oriented the dramatic output from the Renaissance until the crisis of the absolute drama, at the end of the 19th century. One of the pillars of Aristotelian theatre is that *mimesis*, that uncontrollable impulse of human beings, is carried out by characters who act out the plot, and not through the mediation of an epic narrator: "This in fact, according to some, is the reason for plays being termed dramas, because in a play the personages act the story" (Aristotle 1991: 4; 1448a26-1448b1). Unlike some presentational modes that would be developed during the 20th century and of which Brecht's Epic Theatre is perhaps the best achievement, the realistic and naturalistic drama is still dramatic (or Aristotelian) because its action is played by the characters themselves and not demonstrated or narrated by an *epic self* that – as it happens in many modern plays written after the practices and theories of Piscator and Brecht – distances himself from the action (his object) to analyse it.

Another Aristotelian principle consecrated in the *Poetics* that oriented the Western dramatic canon for centuries (and by which realistic drama abides) is the organic structure of the *fable* (plot), which, according to the Stagirite, should resemble a beautiful living creature:

> A well-constructed plot, therefore, cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and end in it must be of the forms just described. Again: to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude (*idem*: 9; 1450b22-1451a15).

The organic conception of the plot implies the enchainment of its several parts through a logic of cause and consequence and the exclusion of every element that does not point toward the conflict and the denouement of the *fable*. Although the use of the three unities propounded, above all, by the Renaissance commentators of the *Poetics* became less and less mandatory, the coherence or unity of the plot, with its parts bound consequentially, was a dominant feature of Western theatre until the crisis of the dramatic form. Patrice Pavis, in his

assessment of Aristotelian drama, wrote that "[l]e théâtre dramatique (que Brecht opposera à la forme *épique*) est celui de la dramaturgie classique, du réalisme et du naturalisme, de la *pièce bien faite*" (Pavis 1996 : 102). Even if realistic playwrights like Ibsen and Shaw tried to reject the mechanical plotting of the well-made play by claiming that the faithful imitation and discussion of real contemporary life was all that mattered, they nevertheless were much influenced by the processes used in the Scribean *pièce bien faite*, which is, for Hélène Kuntz, "l'ultime avatar du «bel animal» aristotélicien" ("Bel animal (mort du)", Sarrazac 2010: 32),[27] with its action building up to the climax and unravelling in the *scène à faire*. Ultimately, Realism and Naturalism are a prolongation of this last avatar of Aristotelian drama. Even the preoccupation with plausibility and the dramatic illusion of reality, which was pushed to the limit within the realistic aesthetics, was, according to Zola, a necessity of all drama since the Renaissance: "Depuis le quinzième siècle, il s'est produit ce que je nommerai un besoin d'illusion plus grand. Les conventions, les erreurs de toutes sortes ont disparu, une à une, chaque foi qu'une d'entre elles a fini par trop choqué le public" (Zola 1881: 106).[28]

Realistic drama, the enhanced manifestation of this dramaturgy of illusion (which was, according to Brecht, one of the main characteristics of the Aristotelian/dramatic theatre, alongside the emotional and cathartic identification), found its place in the American theatrical scene at the end of the 19th century and is still considered the natural and predominant aesthetic of the dramatic output in the United States. Although there is a preconceived idea that American dramatic Realism is a post-WWI phenomenon, Brenda Murphy, in *American Realism and American Drama* (1987), proved that the realistic aesthetic started permeating the theatrical scene still in the 19th century. As John Gassner also summarized it:

> Prevailing confusions start with the assumption that American Realism is a twentieth-century, more specifically post-1918, phenomenon, for which the American drama has been alternately praised and scorned. Actually, Realism came into vogue in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in a large number of plays and with considerable variety. In some of the plays […] the authors and producers emphasized local colour, local character types and local speech. Character drama began to make its appearance with realistic portrayals (Brown and Harris 1967: 11).

[27] "La pièce bien faite est l'aboutissement et probablement l'«achèvement » (parodique sans le savoir) de la tragédie classique. Attaquée par les naturalistes (ZOLA, entre autres), elle a pourtant influencé des auteurs comme SHAW ou IBSEN" (Pavis 1996: 257).

[28] In the Introduction to *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition*, Brian Richardson maintains that the strife for verisimilitude and realism has always dominated the Western drama with an Aristotelian matrix: "since the origin of the drama, playwrights have regularly critiqued what they perceived to be unrealistic scenes and conventions precisely because of their implausibility" (Demastes 2003: 2).

Throughout the last quarter of the 19th century, popular melodramas such as Steele MacKaye's *Hazel Kirke* and Bronson Howard's *The Banker's Daughter*, started incorporating superficial realistic elements: the characters were psychologically and morally more complex while local and national typical figures were introduced (Rip Van Winkle and Mulligan are taken as the epitome of the American-bred characters), the dialogues became more colloquial and, above all, the sets and stage apparatus were of a "Belascoesque facsimile Realism" (Bigsby and Wilmeth 1999: 223), which featured real-size reconstructions of restaurants, boarding schools, street scenes and train stations.

Since then, Realism has become the most popular and familiar dramatic aesthetic for the American audiences. As Charles R. Lyons, in "Addressing the American Theater", points out quite poignantly,

> Because plays, films, and television train and retrain audiences to accept the psychological, sociological, economic, biological, and aesthetic conventions in which late-nineteenth-century writers and producers configured their sense of the real, Realism remains the form in which American audiences are most comfortable (Lyons 1993: 162).

The crucial question is why did Realism become so predominant in the American theatre and what is it that makes American dramatic Realism so particular? First of all, it is important to stress that European realistic plays and theoretical texts had only a partial importance in the development of the realistic dramatic aesthetic in the United States. It is a fact that realist novelists and playwrights such as Henry James and William Dean Howells were quite familiar with the writings of European realists and naturalists (for instance, James corresponded with Bernard Shaw about his own plays). However, as James Rosenberg points out, in his essay "European influences",

> these influences have almost invariably been limited to the realm of technique [...] American playwrights, in going to school to Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Shaw, etc., have picked up bits and pieces of technique and have rarely if ever absorbed any of the passionate response to life's texture which characterizes the work of the European masters (Brown ad Harris 1967: 54-55).

If, throughout the first half of the 19th century, American playwrights fed upon, and quite often copied, European melodramas and well-made plays, they continued being highly influenced by the Continental Realism and Naturalism. However, as Rosenberg claims, the influence was now prominently formal and not thematic, because American audiences demanded a native drama that dealt with national issues. Therefore, the formal and aesthetic

conventions of realistic theatre responded to this native feeling and allowed American playwrights and theatre practitioners to put together realities and environments that were very familiar to their audiences. So, the imitation of European models was, for the most part, merely stylistic and technical. The challenge of bourgeois values present in the works of most of the cutting-edge European playwrights and the exposure of shocking contradictions of the dominant social practices were not so evident in the first examples of American dramatic Realism. According to John Corbin,[29] most plays by Ibsen, Hauptmann, Strindberg and even Shaw, were not well-received, or remained practically unknown, because of "their greater intellectuality, their more local and individual presentation of life, and the gloominess or unmorality of their themes" (Corbin qtd. in Smith 1997: 92).

Brenda Murphy, who thoroughly studied the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries in *American Realism and American Drama*, analyzes the reception in the United States of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* only to comment that "the American theater was far behind the European in the serious depiction of contemporary life" (Murphy 1987: 13). Although both plays were produced in the US within a few years from its writing, they were either produced for very restricted audiences – that is the case of *Ghosts*, which was first produced in Chicago but in Norwegian – or they were substantially bowdlerized, in order not to offend the most conservative spectators like William Winter, for whom "Ibsen is not a dramatist, in the true sense of that word, and Ibsenism, which is rank, deadly pessimism, is a disease, injurious alike to the Stage and to the Public, – in so far as it affects them at all, – and therefore an evil to be deprecated" (Winter qtd. in Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II, 1999: 5). *A Doll's House*, for example, had a first production in Milwaukee in 1882, in a version by W. M. Laurence called *The Child Wife* and, in 1883, it opened as *Thora*, with a conventional happy ending which contrasts with the couple's separation in the original version.

For every play that, like James A. Herne's *Margaret Fleming* (1890) or Rachel Crothers' *A Man's World* (1909), challenges the established social values (in their particular case, the prescribed roles of women), there were many others which suited much better the American middle-class morality and which were, therefore, received with great success. What happened during the last quarter of the 19th century and roughly the first two decades of the 20th century was that the popular and commercial American theatre developed a purely superficial Realism, which never abandoned the conventional comedic or melodramatic structures, so dear to a middle-class audience that sought in the theatre an entertainment that

[29] "The Dawn of American Drama" (1907).

would take their minds off the several anxieties that affected the country throughout this period. There surely was social commentary and criticism, but it was always subjugated to the tightly constructed structure of the play, in which a definite denouement of the conflict, usually with a happy ending, was mandatory. This superficiality of the American dramatic Realism was perfectly described by John Gassner in the essay "Realism in the Modern American Theatre":

> A related defect early in American Realism was the forced optimism, characteristic of American society, which encouraged 'happy endings', problems lightly resolved, and malefactors quickly converted to virtue […] Fundamentally, then, early American Realism proved intellectually confining, dramatically inconsistent, and critically lax. And, with changes in idiom and manners, ordinary American dramatic Realism still suffers from these defects – despite noteworthy sporadic engagements to the psychological and sociological realities of the twentieth century (Brown and Harris 1967: 13).

The optimism referred by Gassner is undoubtedly the most prevalent mood in the high society and domestic comedies by playwrights like S. N. Behrman, Robert E. Sherwood or Philip Barry, which hit Broadway especially in the 1920s and in which the romantic union of the protagonists in the end (even if they separate during the course of the plot) suggests an apology of marriage and family as the pillars of American society.[30] These realistic familial plays, which became so popular in the 1920s and 30s, were very much in the Anglo-American tradition of the domestic comedy which, according to Brenda Murphy, "allowed the playwright to poke fun at the flaws in societal and familial structures while providing the audience […] with the comfortable sense of affirmation provided by the comic form" (Murphy 1987: 61).[31]

Although there has been on the American stage, as Susan Harris Smith wrote, a "multiplicity of dramatic expressions that have been gathered under the reductive rubric of Realism" (Smith 1997: 173) – which include the more naturalistic plays mentioned above, the plays based on one character's psychological dilemmas, like George Kelly's *Craig's Wife* (1925), the proto-feminist comedies by Rachel Crothers or the social realistic dramas by Clifford Odets – there is a common characteristic that became the trademark of modern

[30] Mitchell's *New York Idea* (1906), Behrman's *A Brief Moment* (1931) and Barry's *The Animal Kingdom* (1932) are just three examples of the typical realistic American comedy of manners, in which the protagonists, after a process of divorce, end up admitting that marriage is the best solution.

[31] The American realistic comedy was very much influenced by the English comic tradition, as reworked by Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw. S. N. Behrman admitted openly that Wilde's plays were an important inspiration ("Query: What makes comedy high?", Frenz 1968) and J. L. Styan, while analyzing Shaw's later works, wrote: "In a final analysis, the distinctive quality of *Candida and Man* and *Superman* would own little to naturalism, and much to a keen sense of a comic stage traditional to English drama, one in which social and sexual conventions are kept well in proportion by a gentle teasing" (Styan 1981a: 69).

realistic American drama: domesticity. From the more commercial plays that attracted massive audiences to the Broadway (but which did not make it to the dramatic canon) to the classics by Eugene O'Neill, Clifford Odets, Tennessee Williams, William Inge and even Arthur Miller, the family – its issues, contradictions and web of relationships – is the most predominant object of representation in American drama. If in European Realism there is a philosophic and universal ambition, in its American counterpart the focus is much more on the private and sentimental dimensions of human existence. As James Rosenberg wrote,

> while some American domestic dramas may exhibit cosmic longings (*Our Town* most notably), they generally have their greatest impact when frankly focused on the private, the personal […] the family is the basic unit of bourgeois life, […] the United States is the one nation on the world which has never known anything other than a bourgeois structure […] and that middle-class family life is therefore not only a natural, but indeed an inevitable, subject for American writers (Brown and Harris 1967: 56).[32]

If European realistic drama was, according to Raymond Williams, the first stage of the development of a modernist and anti-bourgeois theatre, in the American tradition, realistic drama became, on the contrary, the main artistic medium – until the 1930s, when it began competing with cinema – through which middle-class values were kept and spread. This "bourgeois Realism"[33] – as Brenda Murphy calls it –, which dominated the Broadway seasons and was continuously promoted by the Theatrical Syndicate, the Shubert Brothers and even the Theatre Guild (during its later years), is a degeneracy of the controversial and anti-bourgeois Realism and Naturalism to which Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Zola, and many others, committed their dramatic works. For Raymond Williams, it is a *naturalistic* (not the naturalist) "accommodation to the norms of the orthodox culture" (Williams 1989: 85). The British scholar means, therefore, that the naturalistic conventions (the fourth wall, the photographic sets, the individualized characters and colloquial dialogue) are used superficially, without any kind of critical or meta-reflective element, in the interest of middle-

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[32] The idea that American drama focuses mainly on the family (and resorts to Realism to do so) has been often sustained by some critics and playwrights themselves. In 1904, William Dean Howells wrote that "The English plays have to do with man as a society man, both in the narrower and the wider sense, and the American plays have to do with man as a family man […] with us the main human interest is the home, and […] with the English the main human interest is society" (Howells qtd. in Murphy 1987: 40). Arthur Miller, in "The Family in Modern Drama" (1956) and "On Social Plays" (1955), argues that the strong link between Realism and the depiction of family relationships and private life are a prominent feature of American drama (Miller 1978).

[33] "During this period, the greatest number of plays were by far written in the mode of what is generally called bourgeois Realism - they were representations of the middle class, concerned middle-class problems, and reflected a middle-class view of the world […] These domestic plays could be light or serious, cast in the mode of comedy, melodrama, or that peculiar hybrid [*sic*] of the period, comedy-melodrama. What distinguished them was their focus on marriage, divorce, and family life" ("Plays and Playwrights: 1915-1945", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II, 1999: 318).

class values.[34] Reminiscing about his first years as a playwright, Arthur Miller could not help but notice the degradation of the initial principles of Realism, of which the American case is quite exemplary:

> The Realism of Broadway – and the Strand and the Boulevard theater of France – was detested by the would-be poetic dramatists of my generation, just as it had always been since it came into vogue in the nineteenth century. What did this Realism really come down to? A play representing real rather than symbolic or metaphysical persons and situations, its main virtue verisimilitude, with no revolutionary implications for society, or even a symbolic statement of some general truth. Quite simply, conventional realism was conventional because it implicitly supported the conventions of society […] we thought of it as the perfect style for an unchallenging, simple-minded linear middle-class conformist view of life. What I found confusing at the time, however, was that not so very long before the name 'realism' had been applied to the revolutionary style of playwrights like Ibsen, Chekhov, and, quite frequently, Strindberg, writers whose whole thrust was in opposition to the bourgeois status quo and the hypocrisies on which it stood (Miller 2009c: xii).

Miller's distinction between the "revolutionary" and the "conformist" realistic modes leads exactly to the somewhat contradictory nature of Realism which became quite evident on the American stage: if it meant, on the one hand, to be an artistic movement that critically exposed social evils and conservative moral values – and we should bear in mind that for many Marxist writers and theorists Realism was the only aesthetic which allowed a truthful representation of society and the totality of its structures[35] – it was, nonetheless, an artistic product of bourgeois society, as Lukács, for whom the highest representatives of realistic literature were Balzac and Tolstoy, admitted; even if it criticized the bourgeoisie ethos, it nevertheless dealt mostly with bourgeois themes and concerns. Moreover, Realism was profoundly bourgeois, according to Lukács[36] and Roland Barthes, in its apology of individualism: "Bourgeois art is an art of detail. Based on a quantitative representation of the universe, it believes that the truth of an ensemble can only be the sum of the individual truths that constitute it" (Barthes qtd. in Demastes 2003: 74). The connection between Realism and individualism pinpointed by both Lukács and Barthes is quite helpful for the understanding of the allure of realistic drama in the United States. The American society, which was founded

[34] In "Domestic Realism: Is it still possible on the American stage?", June Schlueter considers that, in spite of some recent experimentalism, the domestic realistic play, continues to be (unfortunately) the dominant paradigm in American theatre and continues to uphold the same conservative moral values and aesthetic options: "Domestic Realism, in pretending to represent the world as it is, serves to reaffirm traditional relationships between male and female, arguing for restoration or improvement but not for change. Moreover, in shaping its story into a causal structure, it tames the imagination, discouraging the unconventional bursts of energy and shifts of direction necessary to replace a paradigm" (Schlueter 1999: 16).

[35] Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance" in Adorno et al., 2007.

[36] "We said previously that the new drama is bourgeois and historicist; we add now that it is a drama of individualism" (Lukács 1965: 151).

upon the values of individualism and personal freedom, has developed a soft spot for highly individualized heroes, quite often depicted as social misfits, with unique personal dilemmas. Even if many critics argue that the melodramatic types are usually underneath the character construction in most American realistic plays,[37] it is undeniable that, throughout the 20th century, American drama has been, more than anything else, a great repository of unique and unmistakable characters.

In his Introduction to *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition*, William Demastes maintains that, although it has quite often developed into an uncritical and much too linear dramatic aesthetic, Realism could reach the middle-class American audiences like no other artistic movement or aesthetic, because it relates directly to the different spectators' daily experience:

> Realism onstage allows audiences to utilize criteria developed in the process of living. It may be a 'low' art form, requiring minimal training and aesthetic expertise, but it is accessible to a large public that can use its life training to assess the virtues and weaknesses of the product onstage. Furthermore, because Realism lacks a central authority, because its standards are created through the highly individualistic process of actually living, it needs to be responsive to multiple and variable interpretations of existence (Demastes 2003: xiii-xiv).

Although I agree with Demastes in his assessment of Realism's popularity in the United States, I believe it is not only the direct and almost unmediated reference of realistic drama to reality that made it so popular among American audiences. As a matter of fact, Realism is the *ultimate avatar* of the Aristotelian dramatic tradition, with its focus on organic and coherent action, theatrical illusion and emotional or cathartic identification. John Gassner, in *The Theatre of our Times* ("*Death of a Salesman*: first impressions, 1949"), describes the American drama as Aristotelian and says of its canonical plays that "[t]hey epitomize its norm of verisimilitude, identification with the *dramatis personae*" (Weales 1967: 234). Instead of the meta-referential, purposefully artificial and deconstructive character of modernist and experimental theatre, realistic drama is the last aesthetic possibility for American audiences, who according to Martin Esslin go to theatre "above all to be immersed in a steambath of *emotion*, and not to be made to think" (Esslin qtd. in Smith 1997: 157), to be emotionally connected to a reality they believe is actually happening on the stage. It is a form that allows them to follow a logically articulated action, with a conflict that develops through the dialogue between the characters, who, most of the time, resemble their actual neighbours or

[37] In "The Innocence of Arthur Miller" (Bentley 1954), Eric Bentley considers that both Arthur Miller and Lillian Hellman are melodramatic playwrights, no matter how hard they try to mask their plays as realistic.

relatives. Because, as Henry Popkin wrote, unlike much of European avant-garde theatre, "[t]hings happen on the American stage. People may speak more charmingly in Girandoux and more ardently in Osborne, and happenings may be more significant in Brecht and more painstakingly interpreted in Sartre, but lively occurrences go bang-bang in the most typical American plays, as they do nowhere else" (Popkin 1962: 568).

2. Alternative and Experimental Routes

In the first part of this chapter, it has been established that Realism was the main aesthetic tendency of the American dramatic tradition between the last quarter of the 19th century and at least the first half of the 20th century. As a matter of fact, during the period between the two World Wars, the most popular and vulgar expression of dramatic Realism dominated Broadway and the regional stages and kept attracting many spectators, even when a much more realistic and new art – the Cinema – was clearly on the rise. According to Brenda Murphy,

> on the stages of the United States between 1915 and 1945 middle-class domestic comedy was the most popular genre of the period by far, as is indicated by the incredibly long runs of some mediocre plays: *Life with Father* (1939), 3,224 performances; *Abie's Irish Rose* (1922), 2,327 performances; *Harvey* (1944), 1,775 performances; *The Voice of the Turtle* (1943), 1,667 performances; *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941), 1,444 performances ("Plays and Playwrights: 1915-1945", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II, 1999: 321).

Nonetheless, there was more to the American theatrical scene, from the post-WWI period on, than the domestic comedies and the realistic dramas which comprised the mainstream of the theatrical tradition in the United States. The refreshing theatre of Arthur Miller (and of other playwrights that launched their careers in the late 1940s and 50s) would not be possible without the long, but sometimes unacknowledged, series of experimentalisms that began still in the 1910s and that introduced the cutting-edge aesthetic tendencies of the European avant-garde theatre to a more intellectual and restricted audience.

The theatrical practices on Broadway were admittedly born out of a commercial impulse of a group of impresarios whose main goal was to attract as many spectators as possible: the musical comedies and the more "serious plays" should provide, above all, light entertainment that would take the audience's minds off their daily concerns. Although there was, in the first decades of the 20th century (when the theatre was the dominant artistic mass medium), some room for alternative and experimental productions, the ruling logic on the

Broadway stages was one of commercialism and popularity.[38] In the 1930s – with the growing allure of the movies, which provided a completely new experience and whose tickets were much cheaper – the paramount theatre district in America gradually became a repository of plays that had already proved its popularity and that appealed to the high-middle-class audience that kept going to the theatre. With more and more spectators running to the movies, as well as actors and playwrights that traded the stage for Hollywood stardom, Broadway became, through a process of decadence that culminated in the 1950s, a languishing industry, ruled by conservative producers. As Arnold Aronson wrote,

> [t]he unorthodox and iconoclastic shows that had once survived and even thrived on the periphery of the great theatre machine were now banished to increasingly obscure venues. The phenomenal salaries and fees that Hollywood offered, especially with the birth of the television industry, lured actors and, more significantly, writers away from the legitimate stage. The result was a steady erosion of the number of new productions and an increasing conservatism on the part of producers fearful of losing ever larger sums of money ("American Theatre in Context: 1945-Present", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. III, 1999: 102).

The counterpoint to the Broadway mainstream is usually identified as the Off-Broadway movement, which began, for most critics, in the 1950s, with experimental groups such as Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre, and repertory theatres, like the Circle in the Square, which tried to stage, on the one hand, the more obscure plays by American classic playwrights, like O'Neill and Williams, and on the other, texts from the recent wave of European experimentalism.[39] However, the Off-Broadway counter-movement, which comprised an alternative for American spectators who took an interest in experimental, rather than conventional theatre, began in the 1910s, even if it was not always consistent. Influenced by the European modernist avant-gardes and the various theatrical experiments carried out by the Symbolists, Expressionists, Dadaists, and other modernist theatre practitioners, the

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[38] Arnold Aronson describes the democratic spirit on Broadway in the beginning of the 20th century thus: "The economic structure of Broadway prior to World War I was based on relatively inexpensive labor, materials, and real estate, and sizable income from "the Road." Low ticket prices meant that audiences from nearly all strata of society could afford to go to the theatre, creating a situation akin in some respects to that of Elizabethan London […] Accessible and affordable theatre meant that audiences would not wait for "blockbusters" but might venture to see a show simply because it had a popular actor, enchanting scenery, or an element of novelty. With live performance as the primary form of entertainment, theatregoing was a regular practice for much of the population" ("American Theatre in Context: 1945-Present", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. III, 1999: 99).

[39] For C.W.E. Bigsby, the first years of the Off-Broadway movement (late 40s and early 50s), were not of much use for the new American drama. Only in the early 60s did the Off-Broadway begin to promote the work of new national playwrights: "Certainly until that time Off-Broadway had done relatively little for American drama, acting essentially as a showcase for actors and a home for European avant-garde playwrights […] Admittedly, in the sixties it embraced that new role with an enthusiasm which, as Robert Brustein has usefully reminded us in *The Culture Watch*, frequently failed to distinguish the avant-garde from the merely faddish and all too often substituted anarchism and self-indulgence for control and genuine experiment" (Bigsby 1978: 345).

American theatre also had its bloom of experimentation and rebellion against the realistic paradigm that dominated the stages at the beginning of the 20th century.

Since the last decade of the 19th century, severe transformations were slowly undermining the traditional conventions of the theatre (as well as of other artistic representational media), which were still very much present in realistic and naturalistic drama. The rejection of the possibility of an objective representation of reality[40] – born out of a changing worldview informed by relativist and perspectivist theories and the growing interest in psychology, among other factors[41] – led modernist artists, in general, and theatre practitioners, in particular, to create deliberately artificial works, in which the main focus was the "radical questioning of the processes of representation" and which denied the "prior view that language [or any other medium of representation] is either a clear, transparent glass or a mirror" (Williams 1989: 33). For the modernist and avant-garde theatre artists – many critics distinguish the last ones as being both aesthetically and politically revolutionary[42] – both Realism and Naturalism had become the institutionalized aesthetic of bourgeois theatre and their living-room convention was not appropriate to explore new dimensions of human existence that proved essential. As Ernst Schürer wrote in the introduction to his anthology of German expressionist plays,

> The naturalist playwrights […] brought a breath of fresh air to the stage, but in time the public grew tired of their often superficial reproduction of life, and neoromantic, neoclassical, and symbolist plays became the rage. It was in this context that Expressionism and Expressionist drama made its entry (Schürer 1997: vii-viii).

It is a rather interesting fact that the superficiality of the realistic representation was unanimously rejected by several modernist and avant-garde playwrights, who developed dramatic tendencies that were very different from each other. For example, Eugene O'Neill, who held Strindberg as one of his most relevant influences, claimed in the Provincetown Playbill for the 1924-25 season ("Strindberg and our theatre") that "we have endured too

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[40] For Brian Richardson, representation, whether realistic or not, is always a construction: "A realistic novel or play never reflects but instead reconstitutes its object; no text or performance can ever attain the status of a definitive reproduction of the real" (Demastes 2003: 2).

[41] In chapter 3 ("Interrogating the Universe") of *Modern Times, Modern Places*, Peter Conrad develops a thorough analysis of the scientific and cultural changes that bred the modernist artistic experimentalism.

[42] Christopher Innes, in *Avant-garde Theatre 1892-1992*, distinguishes Modernism and the avant-gardes by stating that for the latter, "[t]heir aim in revolutionizing aesthetics was to prefigure social revolution" (Innes 1993: 1). Dennis Kennedy and David Pellegrini also characterize the avant-garde as "synonymous with progressivism in both art and politics in the later nineteenth century in Europe, and in the twentieth it was widely applied to distinguish socially engaged art movements from other strands of early modernism" ("Avant-garde", Kennedy 2003: 93).

much from the banality of surfaces" (Frenz 1968: 2). For the author of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, who was particularly interested in exploring the deep psychological and intimate dilemmas of his characters and their different subjective perceptions of reality, the realistic paradigm fell short of the complex reality he aimed to represent. On the other hand, Expressionism and Strindberg's *super-Naturalism*, which penetrated beyond the surface of human existence, could provide the modern man with new representational devices:

> Yet it is only by means of some form of 'super-Naturalism' that we may express in the theatre what we comprehend intuitively of that self-defeating self-obsession which is the discount we moderns have to pay for the loan of life. The old 'Naturalism' – or 'Realism,' if you prefer (would to God some genius were gigantic enough to define clearly the separateness of these terms once and for all) – no longer applies (Frenz 1968: 1).[43]

If the expressionist branch of the avant-garde theatre intended to explore the emotional, sexual and instinctive dimension of human nature, Brecht, who alongside Piscator proposed an experimental theatre with a political and sociological penchant, also considered conventional Realism and Naturalism too superficial and linear, involving the spectator in a cathartic *carrousel*: "[t]he sharp eyes of the workers saw through Naturalism's superficial representation of reality" (Brecht 1957: 111), wrote Brecht about the reception amongst workers of his experimental theatre.[44]

Through the most varied formal devices – the symbolist poetic diction and static situations, the ritualistic penchant of some symbolist and surrealist drama, the expressionist symbolic sets, puppet-like acting[45] and perspectivist unfolding of the action, the Dadaist deconstruction of the *well-made play*, or the Epic techniques of estrangement (*Verfremdungseffekte*), such as *songs*, the breaching of the fourth wall, film projections and the constant commentary on the action – the different expressions of modernist theatre carried

[43] In *Inferno*, Strindberg himself claimed: "C'est donc à moi […] de jeter la passerelle entre le naturalisme et le supranaturalisme" (Strindberg, qtd. in Sarrazac 2004: 59).

[44] While Strindberg, even in the last stage of his career, claimed to remain a naturalist (or super-naturalist, as O'Neill called him), Bertolt Brecht did not reject the term 'Realism'. Instead, he put forward a new and enlarged definition of it: "We shall take care not to ascribe Realism to a particular historical form of novel belonging to a particular period, Balzac's or Tolstoy's, for instance […] We shall not restrict ourselves to speaking of Realism in cases where one can (e.g.) smell, look, feel whatever is depicted, where 'atmosphere' is created and stories develop in such a way that the characters are psychologically stripped down. Our conception of *Realism* needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restrictions and independent of convention. *Realist* means: laying bare society's causal network/ showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/ writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/ emphasizing the dynamics of development/ concrete and so as to encourage abstraction" (Brecht 1957: 109).

[45] In a tradition that goes back to Heinrich von Kleist's essay "On the Marionette Theatre", and that also fed upon Oriental styles of ritualistic acting, some modernist theatre practitioners, such as Maeterlinck and Gordon Craig, envisioned the actor as a *Über-marionette* (Styan 1981b: 18) that should create and present its character in a powerful and stylized way rather than impersonate it realistically.

out a re-theatricalization of the stage, drawing the audience's attention not only to the represented reality but, above all, to the means of representation, to the theatrical and dramatic specificities. As T. S. Eliot wrote in "A dialogue on dramatic poetry", "[b]ut is not every dramatic representation artificial? And are we not merely deceiving ourselves when we aim at greater and greater Realism?" (Eliot 1932: 46).

However, this redirection of the spectators' focus of attention to the formal aspects of the theatrical representation (which might *in extremis* lead to what Witkiewicz called the 'theatre of pure form') does not prevent a political and social dimension. In fact, much of the German (and American) expressionist drama and, more clearly, Piscator and Brecht's Epic Theatre were formally experimental, while referring quite evidently to the social and political situation of the time (social gaps, industrial oppression, war and totalitarianism, etc.). For Christopher Innes, the idea that a more formal-oriented theatre is completely devoid of a political statement is a misconception. For him, "emphasizing stylistic exploration [even if] at the expense of statement does not really rule out commitment, despite some avant-garde claims that any drama 'fixated on politics' is outdated and irrelevant" (Innes 1993: 9). The difference between avant-garde theatre and the more orthodox social Realism is that the first attacked bourgeois society, its values and institutions not only on the thematic, but also on the formal, level: the deconstruction of the conventional processes of representation and meta-referentiality are themselves a way of resistance to conformism and a strategy to wake the spectators' consciences by raising in them the sense of *estrangement* (*Verfremdungseffekt*): most times, when the formal devices of the work of art stir the public's sensitivity, its political and social dimension become more evident.[46]

In an artistic and cultural scene where the theatre meant above all entertainment – by immersion of the audience either in a well-made plot, whose suspense and *pathos* raised the spectators' emotions, or in the flamboyance of the conventional and predictable musical comedies – , where the spectators usually sought an optimistic and comedic image of themselves, and where producers only invested in guaranteed blockbusters, the re-invention of the theatre proposed by the avant-garde movements was particularly hard to prevail. As John Frick pointed out, throughout the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, "the

[46] The Realism/Modernism contention was a recurrent feature in literary publications during the first half of the 20th century and opposed literary figures like Georg Lukács to Ernst Bloch and Bertolt Brecht. Ultimately, this contention was taken up by Kenneth Tynan and Eugène Ionesco in the 1950s. Unlike Tynan, who believed in the importance of Realism for social comment, Ionesco condemned the social realist playwrights, such as John Osborne and even Arthur Miller (in *All My Sons*, for instance), for resorting to conventional mimetic devices to criticize the capitalist social order. For the absurdist playwright, the truly revolutionary work of art starts with a revolutionary form: "To renew the language is to renew the conception, the vision of the world" (Ionesco qtd. Esslin 1961: 132).

American theatre had remained subservient to the popular taste and reinforced the dominant morality of the nation" ("A changing theatre: New York and beyond", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II, 1999: 222). Nonetheless, the conservative and profit-oriented theatre that was promoted by the Theatrical Syndicate was always met with opposition by actors, such as Minnie Fiske and James O'Neill, and critics like Sheldon Cheney and Walter Prichard Eaton. The highlight of this resistance impulse was the 1910s Little Theatre Movement, which brought experimentalism to the American stage and unveiled the work of young playwrights who would prove great influences for the authors of Miller's generation.

Spearheaded by theatre practitioners that closely followed the developments of European modernist theatre, such as Lee Simonson and Robert Edmond Jones, who actually worked with Max Reinhardt in Berlin, the small and often amateurish companies born during the Little Theatre Movement found its inspiration in the European Art Theatres, such as Antoine's Théâtre Libre, Strindberg's Intimate Theatre and Reinhardt's Kammerspiele, which reacted against the large-scale of commercial theatre. Such ensembles as The Neighborhood Playhouse (1915-27), The Washington Square Players (1914-1918), which in 1919 became the Theatre Guild, the Chicago's Little Theatre and The Provincetown Players (1915-1929), amongst others, were both showcases for the European modern theatre and promoters of budding American playwrights, whose experimentalism was not at first welcome on the Broadway stages. What is utterly interesting about the American Little Theatre Movement – and encapsulates the essence of the modern theatrical tradition in the United States – is that it was twofold. On the one hand, it produced modernist and anti-realistic texts, especially from the Expressionist and Symbolist trends – whether from European authors such as Strindberg, Kaiser, Toller, Yeats and Lorca, or American experimental playwrights like O'Neill, Elmer Rice, or Susan Glaspell – but, on the other hand, there was still a strong penchant for realistic and naturalistic problem plays which depicted and discussed social and political issues still considered immoral by the middle-class audience that attended the commercial theatres. As John Frick quite thoroughly describes,

> Those theatremakers who chose to become part of the process responded by creating a politics of art that challenged and often repudiated the dominant social mores of their time. Both by importing problem plays by foreign social critics like Ibsen and Shaw and by promoting the work of native-born playwrights like William Vaughn Moody, Eugene Walter, Edward Sheldon, and others, the American alternative theatre of the teens began to examine social issues and to reveal social truths to those willing to watch and listen. Experimentation with theatrical form(s) was equally radical. During the first decades of the twentieth century, progressive American theatremakers like Maurice Browne, Arthur Hopkins, Robert Edmond Jones, and Samuel Hume "went to school" on the theories of Wagner, Appia, Craig, Georg Fuchs, the Symbolists, and other European artists who proposed alternatives to the

> Realism and Naturalism that had become popular in both European and American theatres ("A changing theatre: New York and Beyond", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II, 1999: 222-223).[47]

In fact, the alternation between the realistic (with its mimetic character) and the modernist (with its presentational and experimental dimension) dramatic modes would permeate the development of the more alternative American theatre during the 20th century. Whereas in Europe the avant-garde movements were a stark reaction against Realism and, therefore, renounced to its principles, in the United States, the impact of Realism was considerably extended (as it was mentioned in the first part of this chapter), especially beyond 1923, the year in which the Moscow Art Theatre made its highly successful tour around the country and Chekhov's realistic plays, along with the Stanislavskian acting system, started entering the American theatre scene.[48] Besides the Ibsenian and Shavian Realism, which belonged to the problem play and well-made plot tradition, a "new Realism" (Styan 1981a: 123) – inspired by the Chekhovian portrayal of the characters' intimate dilemmas and psychological afflictions along with his plots with very little action – made its way into the American drama and set the model for plays like Elmer Rice's *Street Scene* (1929), O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and most of Tennessee Williams' dramaturgy. There was, therefore, in the repertory of the experimental ensembles that I named above some simultaneity of dramatic tendencies and an interchange between Realism and Modernism. As J. Ellen Gainor states, in "The Provincetown Players' Experiments with Realism",

> [t]he American situation was quite distinct from that of Europe, however, for the strategic reason that the various movements – Realism, Naturalism, expressionism, symbolism, etc. – we identify with 'modernism' did not arise independently, or in response to each other, as they did in Europe, but rather arrived in the United States virtually simultaneously, as Americans who had travelled abroad brought back news and examples of the new movements, or as Europeans came to this country (Demastes 2003: 60).

Undeniably influenced by experimental, stylized and presentational forms, the American theatre never forsook its realistic legacy, as the careers of Elmer Rice and O'Neill – who had an expressionist phase but ended up writing realistic plays – prove. At best, the most noteworthy experiments in American theatre were "characterized by psychological realism in

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[47] John Gassner's opinion, in his essay "Pioneers of the New Theater Movement", is quite similar to John Frick's: "It is essential to observe, finally, that no single style of theater dominated the 'little theater' movement. It was *eclectic* rather than dogmatic, so that naturalistic and poetic aims were often pursued by the same authors and producing companies [...] this tendency was most vividly exemplified by the career of the American avant-garde's chief discovery, Eugene O'Neill" (Downer 1967: 26).

[48] The influence of Stanislavsky's system became stronger in the 1930s, thanks to the work developed by The Group, whose founders (Harold Clurman, Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg) studied under Stanislavsky himself or his disciple Richard Boleslavsky.

acting, poetic diction in playwriting (applied to dark, gritty explorations of society that derived from the melodrama and the well-made play), and a semi-abstract, emblematic stage design" ("American Theatre in Context: 1945-Present", Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. III, 1999: 89).

Created from an impulse to write beyond conventional Realism, but bound, nevertheless, to the American tendency of mingling realistic conventions (especially the linguistic aspects of the dialogue, character building and maintenance of the fourth wall) and expressionist devices (stylized stages, manipulation of time, subjective deformation of reality, poetic diction, etc.), Arthur Miller's works, especially from *Death of a Salesman* (1949) onwards, presented, undoubtedly, a unique and innovative form, but were, at the same time, preceded and influenced by several milestones of modern American drama.

Eugene O'Neill was an obvious influence. Although Miller – whose plays had a very strong political and social dimension – thought that O'Neill was much too focused on the private experience of Man,[49] the experimental formal devices he came up with in order to explore the subjective points of view of his characters and their internal dilemmas were paramount for Miller's psychological plays, such as *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*. *The Emperor Jones* (1921) is a good example of this. Despite O'Neill's claims,[50] the play owes much to German expressionist drama, which – especially through the dramaturgy of Kaiser and Toller – was invading the American Little Theatre Movement. With its fragmentary *Stationendrama* structure, framed by the first and last scene, which are quite realistic (regarding the set and the dialogue between the characters), the play is an example of what Peter Szondi named the "littérature dramatique du moi", which is not ruled by unities of time, place or action, but by the *unity of the self* ("l'unité du moi").[51] A trademark of most expressionist plays (from Strindberg's *To Damascus*, to Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* or Toller's *Masses and Man*), the exploration of the solitary protagonist's psyche through its

[49] "O'Neill could say, as he did, that he was interested in relations not among men but between Man and God" (Miller 2000: 308).
[50] Both O'Neill and Elmer Rice denied having been directly influenced by German Expressionism. The author of *The Adding Machine* even wrote that "expressionism - a rather vague term at best - developed spontaneously and simultaneously in several countries and in the work of numerous writers as a result partly of the psychic dislocations that were a product of World War I, the impact of Freudianism, and the revolt (if that is the word) against the restrictions imposed upon the dramatists by the dominant Ibsenesque tradition of objective Realism" (Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. II, 1999: 332-333). However, according to J. L. Styan, O'Neill's relation to German Expressionism is "a little contradictory. In his book on the playwright, Barrett Clark reports O'Neill as saying that he did not think much of Kaiser's plays, because they were 'too easy'. He also said that he had not seen an expressionistic play on the stage before he saw *From Morn to Midnight* in New York in 1922, that is, after he had written *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*. But George Pierce Baker's playwriting course at Harvard in 1914-15 had introduced him to German expressionism" (Styan 1981c: 101).
[51] "Une autre conséquence de la littérature dramatique subjective, c'est que l'unité d'action est remplacée par l'unité du moi" (Szondi 1965: 44).

projections on reality and the portrayal of "a world that is viewed only through the eyes of the main character" (Schürer 1997: x) is the main principle of *The Emperor Jones*. Apart from scenes one and eight, which are dramatically conventional, scenes two to seven are made up of Jones' monologues as he, wandering alone through the forest, comes up against feelings of guilt and his deepest fears. The scenes present fragmentary episodes from his past (temporal and causal logics are clearly subverted), as projections of Jones' own memory and imagination: his anxieties are materialized in scene two as "the LITTLE FORMLESS FEARS […] black, shapeless" (O'Neill 1972: 28) and several characters from his past – Jeff and the prison guard, for instance – appear doing symbolic and mechanical actions, never engaging in a dialogue with Jones.[52]

If in *The Emperor Jones* O'Neill carries out a rather oneiric and symbolic exploration of the lonely protagonist's subjectivity, using typical expressionist devices – such as the drama in stations, the clear division between the highly individualized hero and the other characters who appear as stylized projections of his mind, the emotional enhancement through an extremely punctuated discourse – in *Strange Interlude* (1928), O'Neill depicts the lives of Nina Leeds and her suitors in what resembles a Chekhovian drama: the plot unfolds throughout a long period of time (about 25 years) within homely settings and the action is often made up of the characters' descriptions of their moods and feelings during their ordinary routine or family gatherings. The plot is clearly run by a logic of cause-consequence, there is no time manipulation, the fourth-wall is never breached and the scenic description of the first scene announces a conventionally realistic drama. However, the first lines of Charles Marsden are rather unexpected: after a direction that reads "*His voice takes on a monotonous musing quality, his eyes stare idly at his drifting thoughts*" (O'Neill 1995: 70), Marsden starts a long interior monologue made up of loose thoughts and broken sentences that correspond to an exteriorization of his stream of consciousness.[53] Unlike the conventional soliloquy, in which the characters consciously express their intimate feelings out loud (sometimes another character eavesdrops on some part of the soliloquy), the interior monologues in *Strange Interlude* do not leave the characters' minds, but O'Neill creates a convention that allows the

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[52] "Then gradually the figure of the Negro, JEFF, can be discerned crouching in his haunches at the rear of the triangle […] He is throwing a pair of dice on the ground before him, picking them up, shaking them, casting them out with the regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton […] He [Jones] stares fascinatedly at the other who continues his mechanical play with the dice" (O'Neill 1972: 30-32).

[53] "He hasn't added one book in years… how old was I when I first came here?... six… with my father… father… how dim his face has grown!... he wanted to speak to me just before he died…the hospital…smell of iodoform in the cool halls… hot summer… I bent down… his voice had withdrawn so far away… I couldn't understand him… what son can ever understand?... always too near, too soon, too distant or too late!... (O'Neill 1995: 70).

audience into their most private thoughts. Throughout the play, the dialogue is constantly interrupted by the characters' interior monologues, which are only heard by the audience and not by the other *dramatis personae*, weaving intersubjective discourse with personal, and supposedly, unheard opinions. *Strange Interlude* is, according to Szondi, a montage where "l'aparté n'est pas le renoncement momentané au dialogue, il est autonome, sur le même plan que le dialogue dramatique" (Szondi 1965: 128).

If O'Neill's constant search for formal devices that would allow the representation of his characters' subjectivity led the way for Miller's experiments in his psychological plays, other expressionist texts like Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (which has some thematic affinities with *Death of a Salesman*)[54] helped create a repertory of non-realistic conventions and techniques from which Miller picked different ideas, from scenic symbolism and stylization to plot fragmentation. Moreover, the epic-oriented devices featured in *A View from the Bridge*, *The American Clock* and *The Crucible*, in which narrators present, rather than represent, the main action, assembling its parts according to a certain perspective and commenting upon it, can be traced back to some of the American agitprop-inspired theatre of the 30s – from which Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) is an example[55] – and to Thornton Wilder's drama, especially the classic *Our Town* (1938). Stating that the theatre is an art that "lives by conventions" – a convention being "an agreed-upon falsehood, a permitted lie" (Frenz 1968: 58) – Wilder strove to make his plays as theatrical as possible and to confront his readers and spectators with the artificiality and the representational limits of the theatre. In *Our Town*, which portrays some of the decisive moments of Grover's Corners dwellers, Wilder is constantly drawing our attention to the theatre's fictional nature, by introducing the character of the Stage Manager that, as a narrator, treats the characters and the plot as his object, which he is constantly manipulating from the outside. As Szondi wrote: "le meneur de jeu est conscient que ce sont des rôles, et la relation sujet-objet en représente une autre, qui leur est extérieure: la relation épique entre le narrateur et son objet" (Szondi 1965: 130).[56] By having his stage manager address the audience directly – "That's the end of the

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[54] Both Mr. Zero and Willy Loman are the prototype of the working man run down by Capitalism.

[55] Odets' breakthrough play mingles realistic dialogue with a more presentational and demonstrative style and borders on the Brechtian conception of theatre, with its plot made up from clearly separate scenes, each bearing a specific title, and several attempts to create a sense of estrangement among the audience, by having the actors speak directly to the spectators, thus breaching the fourth wall (the first stage direction is very clear: a "[a] fat man of porcine appearance is talking directly to the audience" [Odets 1993: 5]).

[56] As a playwright that was profoundly knowledgeable of the theatrical art, Wilder was obviously aware of the presence of epic devices in modern drama: "Many dramatists have regretted this absence of the narrator from the stage, with his point of view, his powers of analyzing the behavior of the characters, his ability to interfere and supply further facts about the past, about simultaneous actions not visible on the stage, and above *all*, his

First Act, friends. You can go and smoke now, those that smoke" (Wilder 1957: 29) –, go back and forth in the plot's timeline (Act II) and constantly point out the unreal character of the whole play (for instance, most of the props used by the characters are meant to be imaginary), Wilder was introducing in American drama many of the *Verfremdungseffekte* that were being developed by Brecht in his epic theatre.

Finally, the influence of Tennessee Williams – whom Arthur Miller praised as the greatest American lyric playwright – must be acknowledged. It is in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) that Blanche utters the famous line "I don't want Realism" (Williams 1947: 72), but it was in his first major play – *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) – that Williams made a very clear statement against conventional Realism. The play features a narrator (Tom) that allows the audience into the memory of his escape from a broken family, leaving his mother and his crippled sister Laura behind. In the "Production Notes" to the play, the author states that, inspired by expressionist and "unconventional" devices, his aim was to create "a new, plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions" and reach "a closer approach to truth" (Williams 1945: xvi). Although Williams keeps a perfectly conventional storyline, realistic dialogues and settings, he shatters the theatrical illusion by introducing projected images and titles for the scenes, a recurring music theme, non-realistic lighting and a narrator who states in his first line that truth is different from the realistic illusion of it: "I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion" (Williams 1945: 4).

Tennessee Williams wrote, about *The Glass Menagerie*, "*The scene is memory and is therefore nonrealistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license*" (Williams 1945: 3). Whether explored through the characters' subjective perspectives or an exterior narrative voice, the experimental plays which have just been mentioned seemed obsessed with time and the idea of the past (whether personal, historical or national), its memory, analysis and the possibility of constantly revisiting it. The plays that are going to be studied in the next two chapters are a follow-up of this legacy as Arthur Miller's dramaturgy was bound to this line of American playwrights who thought about their country, their time and, above all, the Theatre.

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function of pointing the moral and emphasizing the significance of the action. In some periods of the theatre he has been present as chorus, or prologue and epilogue, or as raisonneur" (Frenz 1968: 61).

Part II

Prologue – The quest for an original form

As a playwright who began writing and reflecting on drama and theatre during the 1930s – although his experience with dramatic practice and theory was practically inexistent by the time he wrote *No Villain*, his first play[57] – Arthur Miller was clearly influenced by the modernist emphasis on the formal and medial aspects of artistic representation. In his essays and interviews, the author of *Death of a Salesman* always hints that it is impossible to understand the subject/meaning of a work of art without taking its form into account, showing an acute awareness of the dialectical and necessarily interdependent relation that exists between the two of them.

In his seminal work of 1956, *La Théorie du Drame Moderne*, Peter Szondi, who affiliates his study in a post-Hegelian historicist poetics, stresses this dialectical bond between subject and form, by quoting Hegel himself: "le rapport absolu du contenu et de la forme […] la transformation de l'un en l'autre, de sorte que le contenu n'est rien d'autre que la transformation de la forme en contenu, et la forme rien d'autre que la transformation du contenu en forme" (Hegel qtd. in Szondi 1965: 8). Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, who in his groundbreaking essays on dramatic aesthetics endeavours to develop a critical trend that, unlike more traditional academic currents, pays special attention to the formal idiosyncrasies of drama (rather than its content), is very much aware of this interdependent relation between form and meaning. Commenting on the formal transformations that began surfacing in modern drama since the end of the 19th century, Sarrazac proposes, adopting a Szondian idea, that *meaning is in the form* – "le sens est dans la forme" (Sarrazac 2009).

At the beginning of *L'Avenir du Drame*, the French essayist evokes Brecht as the perfect example of a playwright who recognized the importance of formal experimentalism for his new approach to social and political relationships between men:

> Attentif à la leçon brechtienne, je suis en effet persuadé que la complexité des rapports humains et sociaux de notre époque ne se laissera circonscrite au théâtre qu'«à l'aide de la forme» […] Par bonheur, d'autres artistes portent sur les catégories esthétiques un regard historique et s'aperçoivent, pour paraphraser Brecht, qu'il ne suffit pas, au théâtre, de dire des choses nouvelles, qu'il faut encore

[57] Miller has admitted that when he started considering the idea of submitting a play to the Hopwood Award, granted by the University of Michigan, he had read only some classics and seen very few theatrical productions, from which Ibsen's *Ghosts* left the most vivid memory in his mind. He even admitted that at college, "before sitting down to write his first drama, in all innocence he asked a classmate how long an act was supposed to run" (Roudané 1987: 4).

les dire *autrement*. Ecrire au présent, ce n'est pas se contenter d'enregistrer des changements dans notre société: c'est intervenir dans le «change des formes» (Sarrazac 1981: 20; 24-25).

For more than sixty years of professional playwriting, Arthur Miller pursued the form(s) that would perfectly suit his dramatic project, which clearly emphasized the social dimension of the theatre. Always eager to experiment with new formal devices that would enable him to flee the conventional Realism that hit the American stage during the first half of the 20th century, Miller was not, by any means, a proponent of pure form and of an autotelic conception of art. In the 1958 essay "The shadow of the Gods", the playwright declares himself "impatient with anything, including art, which pretends that it can exist for its own sake" (Miller 1978: 179) and, in 1967, he insists: "I'm very much in favor of any kind of [formal] experimentation provided that ultimately, sooner rather than later, it gets past the early incubation stages of self-expression and starts to deal with feelings and concepts in an organic fashion" ("The contemporary theatre", *idem*: 313).

However, Miller's assertions in several of his theoretical texts and interviews attest to the absolutely fundamental and evident role that formal experimentation and the dynamic relationship between structure and meaning played in his writing. As a short parenthesis, it should be noted that, in my opinion, Arthur Miller's essayistic output and theoretical reflection on drama and the theatre are quite enlightening for the critic to understand his take on modern theatre and the main lines of his dramatic project, despite the obvious academic golden rule of *never completely trusting the author's remarks on his own work*. Some scholars have actually commented on the relevance of Miller's essays, which constantly kept up with his playwriting. Robert A. Martin, for instance, wrote that "[c]ollectively, Arthur Miller's essays on drama and the theater may well represent the single most important statement of critical principles to appear in England and America by a major playwright since the Prefaces of George Bernard Shaw" (*idem*: xxvi). Likewise, Mel Gussow, who interviewed Miller regularly throughout the years, commented, in his introduction to *Conversations with Miller*, that "[i]n contrast to Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard and, certainly, to Beckett – the subjects of my previous *Conversation* books – Miller has written widely about his own work […] There is no shortage of Miller commentary" (Gussow 2002: 13).

And the *Miller commentary* deals quite frequently with the formal and structural aspects of his craft, with the same awareness, as Peter Szondi and Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, that form and meaning are absolutely inseparable. As almost every writer who thoroughly reflects on his own literary conceptions, the author of *Death of a Salesman* found an appropriate

metaphor to describe his constant quest for new dramatic forms: the art of carpentry. Having learnt how to work with wood when he was a young man (every biographic account tells the story of how Miller built, all by himself and from scratch, the wooden studio in Roxbury where he wrote *Death of a Salesman*), Arthur Miller compared, on several occasions, writing plays to building pieces of furniture: in both, the form is the first aspect to be envisioned and it must function as the organizing principle of the work. In an interview with Mel Gussow, the playwright declared: "You get a vision of a form, which is almost like a building or a structure like a tree, and you are compelled to complete that form, to literally make it. Like that table in there, that dining-room table that I built. It's not unlike it. You can envisage an object" (*idem*: 125).

Once again, contradicting the rather prevalent idea that he is, above all, a realist playwright, who accommodates his texts to a perfectly settled and conventional form that becomes perfectly transparent, Miller affirms, in the introduction to the second volume of his collected plays, the need for formal experimentation and his conviction that a strong sense of form directs the audience's perception of the subject approached in the play:

> The truth is that I have never been able to settle upon a single useful style. Indeed, a great part of the energy that goes into a play is involved in working out its form and style. Form in the theater is particularly important, for obvious reasons, and the style of a play alerts an audience as how to receive it, and at which level of emotion the evening is purporting to function […] It has been said often enough to bear repeating – an author is better off writing the same thing in the same way, otherwise he risks losing what audience he may have gained. But fitting means to matter is the name of the game for me, and a far more rewarding pleasure (Miller 1981: 2).

As it has already been suggested in Chapter I and at the beginning of this second part, Miller's preoccupation with dramatic formal devices and his effort to make them extremely perceptible to his audience or readership (almost as an opaque filter before the subject or the mimetic reality the plays deals with) is an inheritance of the retheatricalization, which began in the later stages of Ibsen and Strindberg's writing and bloomed during Modernism:

> Ever since Cézanne in painting and modern French poetry in literature, the autonomization of the signifier has been observable, its play becomes the predominant aspect of aesthetic practice […] The theatre itself, however, only catches up with the developments of other arts later, with theories such as those by Stein and Witkiewicz […] In his text *New Forms of Painting*, Witkiewicz theorizes that the theatre of 'pure form' has to be considered as an *absolute construction* of formal elements and does not represent a mimesis of reality (Lehmann 1999: 64).

Although Miller was not a pure formalist or a radical experimentalist like Witkiewicz and other major modernists (we should also bear in mind that during the 1920s and 1930s the

avant-garde theatrical theories reached America in a vulgate version, always filtered by the dominant realistic paradigms), he endeavoured, at least in several plays and as a theoretical principle, to make sure that his spectators and readers would first be confronted with the structural and formal dimensions of the dramatic text. In a recently published essay about *Incident at Vichy* ("To the actors performing this play: on style and power") – a play which, in my opinion, does not cross the border of Realism as the author thought it did – the playwright wrote:

> the play is a creation of the mind rather than a spontaneous event which just happens to be looked-in on by them. Again for reasons of form, we are to be aware that this is being created, but created in order to illuminate a theme. The design of this play [*Incident at Vichy*] is supposed to be seen not concealed (Miller 2012a: 751).

In spite of referring, in this passage, to the relevance of formal design in drama (which must reveal itself as an artificially constructed object), Miller proves, once again, not to be an adamant formalist, by evoking the dialectics between form and content: for him, form is not worthwhile *per se*, it *illuminates the theme*.

What becomes quite obvious after reading Arthur Miller's rather extensive essayistic output is that his insistence on form (and its intrinsic connection with meaning), structure, design, as well as the awareness of dramatic artificiality, is a reaction against the realistic dramatic tradition that was set in stone on the American stages and the naturalistic acting style that went along with it (as it was discussed already in Chapter One). The need to surmount conventional Realism and come up with an original and challenging dramatic poetics was felt not only by Arthur Miller, but by the other great American playwright of his generation, Tennessee Williams. Both definitely contributed (we cannot, of course, forget the relevance of the forefathers Eugene O'Neill and Thornton Wilder) to pave the way for the more experimental playwrights and theatre practitioners of the 1960s and 1970s (some of whom, ironically, have dismissed them as traditional and consensual writers). Although his first Broadway success, *All my Sons*, was a well-made drama in the tradition of Ibsen's problem play – and later plays, such as *The Price*, *The Archbishop's Ceiling* or *Broken Glass*, did not differ much from the realistic convention, and therefore do not live up to the principles stated in his essays – Miller sketched his early dramaturgy as a contradiction of American Realism, or an attempt to write beyond it,[58] although he never rejected this aesthetic frontally. Actually,

[58] Before the major success of *All my Sons*, Miller had written other realistic plays, such as *No Villain* (which had several different titles and was rewritten many times) and the 1944 Broadway flop *The Man who Had all the Luck*. However, Miller started experimenting with non-realistic forms when he was still a fledgling playwright,

as I will try to demonstrate in the following chapters, his dramatic output reached its highest point only when a delicate balance between Realism and stylization was achieved. In fact, the juggling of these two aesthetics began, for Miller, and for other playwrights of his generation, as a pragmatic issue, since their aim for a more *poetic* and experimental drama could not obliterate the possibilities of attracting a large audience. In "Notes on Realism", the author of *Death of a Salesman* admitted to having belonged, in the 1940s, to the group of playwrights who

> were torn […] because to attract even the fitful interest of a Broadway producer [in the 1940s, Broadway, with all its commercial disadvantages and vices, was the only place for a playwright to see his work produced], and thus to engage an audience, we had to bow to realism, even if we admired and wished to explore the more 'poetic' forms (Miller 2000: 302).

Even if several of Miller's plays do not seem to be an example of the non-realistic drama he proposes in his essays, it is, nevertheless, noteworthy that, at least on a theoretical level, he was rather engaged in formulating arguments against conventional Realism. In fact, the playwright's objections to the realistic aesthetic are explained, almost obsessively, in the introductions to volumes One, Two, Four and Five of his collected plays,[59] and in well-known essays, such as "On social plays" (1955), "The family in modern drama" (1956) and "Notes on Realism" (1999), besides countless interviews. I believe that, in order to understand Miller's dramatic project and the formal devices he resorted to in the four plays that will be studied in the subsequent chapters, these objections must be explored and discussed.

Arthur Miller was quite straightforward when he deconstructed Realism's ambition to imitate reality faithfully, by resorting to the same argument that T. S. Eliot and Gordon Craig had invoked early on: every work of art is a formal object, a distortion[60] of reality and, therefore, should never intend to be its absolute representation;[61] it should, on the contrary, be thought of and perceived as an aesthetic object whose relation to reality is always mediated by

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trying to figure out the conventions of drama and of the theatre. As he told Robert A. Martin during an interview in 1969: "I wrote a verse, or near verse, tragedy of Montezuma and Cortez, for example, which had no relation whatsoever to any Ibsenesque theatre. I wrote a rather expressionist play about two brothers in the University […] I wrote two or three attempts at purely symbolistic drama" (Roudané 1987: 177).

[59] Methuen Edition (*vd.* bibliographic references).

[60] The notion of distortion, or "defamiliarization" (which indirectly influenced Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*) was theorized by Victor Shklovsky in the classic essay of Russian Formalism, "Art as technique": "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception" (Newton 1988: 4).

[61] T. S. Eliot's opinion from "A dialogue on dramatic poetry" was quoted in chapter one (*vd.* p. 45), while Gordon Craig's passage from *On the Art of the Theatre* was alluded to at the beginning of the same chapter (*vd.* p. 27).

formal devices. Almost at the beginning of "Notes on Realism" the author peremptorily wrote:

> Perhaps the obvious needs stating first: There is no such thing as 'reality' in any theatrical exhibition that can properly be called a play [...] Thus, whether a play strives for straight realism or for some more abstracted style, with the very act of condensation the artificial enters even as the first of its lines is being written. The only important question is the nature of that artificiality and how it is acknowledged by the play (*idem*: 301).[62]

This statement, alongside some others which will be quoted further on, might seem rather contradictory coming from a playwright who had a great admiration for Ibsen's dramaturgy, especially his early works, which usually are categorized as social or problem plays and represent classic examples of dramatic Naturalism. However, Miller never criticized the major realist playwrights of the 19th century and was actually very much influenced by Ibsen's preoccupation with his characters' past and its influence upon their present, as well as by Strindberg's tragic sense. What Miller reacted against was a stifling conventional middle-class Realism which was a formal and ideological degeneration of the 19th century realistic tradition.[63] The author's awareness of this degeneration of Realism/Naturalism is quite close to Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's remark in *Jeux de Rêves et autres Détours*:

> Mais, d'abord, quel naturalisme? Le naturalisme historique, qui ne se voulait, de l'aveu même de Zola, qu'une «formule» artistique correspondant à une «époque» donnée, la fin du XIXe siècle? Ou bien cet autre naturalisme, ce naturalisme endémique qui, en vérité, recouvre une maladie esthétique consistant à vouloir faire passer l'imitation pour la chose et, surtout, à figer *en nature* immuable tout ce qui est mouvement et tout ce qui est histoire? (Sarrazac 2004: 9).

While being much respectful of and even influenced by the 19th-century European Realism, of "Ibsen and several other playwrights [who] could use Realism so well to make plays about modern life" (Miller 1978: 71), Arthur Miller pinpointed what he considered to be some *weak points* of the realistic aesthetic which were exacerbated by the conventional and outdated realistic plays that dominated the Anglo-American dramatic scene during the first

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[62] In the introduction to the first volume of his *Collected Plays*, written in 1957, Miller had already voiced this point of view, by declaring that "Realism, heightened or conventional, is neither more nor less an artifice, a species of poetic symbolization, than any other form" (Miller 1958: 53). Once again, in an interview for the *Theatre Journal* in 1980, Miller insisted: "I don't agree that my plays are naturalistic at all. You see, naturalism to me has a very concrete meaning. It is an attempt to bring on to the stage a picture of life uninterpreted, as far as possible, by the artist's visible hand; as though one should feel one were actually there. Well, I don't believe in that; in fact, I am thoroughly opposed to that" (Roudané 1987: 337).

[63] In "The realism of Arthur Miller", Raymond Williams comments on this degeneration of the original Realism and Naturalism with pertinent and challenging social concerns, stating that, by the 1940s, the dramatic forms in which social questions were ordinarily raised had become, in general, inadequate: "a declined, low-pressure naturalism" (Weales 1967: 313).

half of the 20th century. In the well-known essay "The family in modern drama", the playwright praises Ibsen for achieving, in his dramaturgy, a balance between Realism and a symbolic dimension; for discerning universal stereotypes and social/political/human issues which surpass the particular and realistically portrayed situations; for creating a counterpoint between the private and the public aspects of human life. As he wrote:

> Ibsen was writing not simply to photograph scenes from life […] [w]hat he was doing, however, was projecting through his personal interpretation of common events what he saw as their concealed significance for society. In other words, in a perfectly "realistic" way he did not report so much as project or even prophesy a meaning. Put in playwriting terms, he created a symbol on the stage (*ibidem*).

However, according to Miller, many plays written in the style of what he called the conventional or "straight" realism[64] tended to be a mere exercise in reportage.[65] What the American author means to say is that even prominent playwrights, such as Clifford Odets and Lillian Hellman, were too preoccupied with creating a perfectly verisimilar, even true, dramatic portrait of a particular situation in which very specific characters relate to a unique setting. The symbolic projection or the movement towards the universal, which Miller recognized in Ibsen, is not, according to the author of *Death of a Salesman*, present in most conventionally realistic plays. Moreover, this *ad extremis* faithful imitation of everyday, familiar reality leads, in Miller's opinion to the almost complete dissolution of any literary or *poetic* quality of the dramatic text. As he said, "[t]he only trouble is that it [Realism] more easily lends itself in our age to hack work" (*idem*: 70).

As I have already discussed, some pages above, Miller never conceived of a specific aesthetic or formal device in a work of art without referring to its theme or subject, which, for the playwright, should have, above all, a social and ideological projection. A new form, therefore, would come to life when there was a need to organize new content in a new way. As he wrote in both the introduction to the first volume of his *Collected Plays*, "[a] new poem on the stage is a new concept of relationships between the one and the many and the many and history, and to create it required greater attention, not less, to the inexorable, common, pervasive conditions of existence in this time and this hour" (Miller 1958: 53), and again, in the essay "The shadows of the Gods" (1958), "the new, the truly new dramatic poem will be, as it has always been, a new organization of the meaning" (Miller 1978: 189).

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[64] Miller 2009c: ix, xii.

[65] In an interview given to Henry Brandon, in 1960, Miller described most of the American realistic drama of the first half of the 20th century as "the journalistic reportage of what was going on" (Roudané 1987: 61).

Realism,[66] for Miller, was a set of formal conventions which were the adequate artistic expression of some particular points of view, of ideological and even scientific beliefs with which he did not quite agree or which he considered outdated and devoid of great significance at the time when he started writing his more experimental plays. Objecting, like Strindberg, O'Neill and Brecht, to Realism on the grounds that it is a mere representation of surfaces, Arthur Miller associated the prominence of dramatic Realism, from the end of the 19th century on, with the modern-day inability to find absolute values and other dimensions of experience that are beyond the material everyday reality:

> The longer I dwelt on the whole spectacle, the more clear became the failure of the present age to find a universal moral sanction, and the power of realism's hold on our theater was an aspect of this vacuum. For it began to appear that our inability to break more than the surfaces of realism reflected our inability – playwrights and audiences – to agree upon the pantheon of forces and values which must lie behind the realistic surfaces of life (Miller 1958: 46).

Furthermore, besides being an aesthetic only adequate to the representation of the material and empirical world, Realism, and more specifically Naturalism, through its association with scientific, psychological and social deterministic theories, had nipped in the bud what Miller considered to be one essential dimension of human nature – free will and inner strength to struggle against external forces. For a playwright to whom the very notion of dramatic protagonist implies the possibility for individual willingness and action – "His will is as much a fact as his defeat" (*idem*: 54) – and to whom the classical notion of *agon* is indispensible in his idea of drama,[67] the realistic/naturalistic play which is set from the start to show the defeat of passive people is absolutely inconceivable:

> The idea of realism has become wedded to the idea that man is at best the sum of forces working upon him and of given psychological forces within him. Yet an innate value, an innate will, does in fact posit itself as real […] he is more than the sum of his stimuli and is unpredictable beyond a certain point. A drama, like history, which stops at this point, the point of conditioning, is not reflecting reality (*idem*: 54).

[66] In his essays, Miller uses the terms Realism and Naturalism without really distinguishing the two.

[67] As we shall have the opportunity to discuss in the following chapters, Miller maintained a very Aristotelian-Hegelian concept of drama, as far as action and conflict are concerned. From Aristotle's assumption that drama was, above all, an *action*, with an adequate structure and a beginning, a middle and a resolution, to Hegel's statement that "l'action dramatique […] se déroule dans un milieu fait de conflits et de collisions" (Hegel 1965: 322), *absolute drama* has crystallized itself in what Peter Szondi called an intersubjective action in the present tense (Szondi 1965: 69). For Lukács, who saw with great apprehension the transformation (or crisis) of the dramatic paradigm by the end of the 19th century, with the introduction of passive characters (Chekhov's, for instance) and static dramas (Maeterlinck's, especially), the definition of drama was very clear: "a drama remains possible so long as the dynamic force of the will is strong enough to nourish a struggle of life and death dimensions, where the entire being is rendered meaningful" (Lukács 1965: 150).

Finally, if major realists, like Chekhov and, of course, Ibsen, managed to bring society (and its most pressing issues) to the living room set where their characters interact; if through the perspective of highly individualized *dramatis personae*, relating to each other on the basis of family bonds, these playwrights approached relevant ethical and political dilemmas which still have a universal appeal, Miller described, especially in the 20th-century Anglo-American tradition, the tendency of realistic drama to shut itself exclusively upon private and familial issues and to forsake any kind of social dimension. According to Arthur Miller, even great playwrights, such as Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, in more realistic plays such as *Long Day's Journey into Night* or *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, were prone to focus too much on private and family aspects, always with a touch of sentimentality and sexual tension. As O'Neill once said – and Miller made sure to quote him repeatedly – he "was not interested in relations between man, but between Man and God" (O'Neill, qtd. in Miller 2009c: xii). In the essay "On social plays", Arthur Miller made his point very clear about what he considered to be a "degradation" of the original programme of Realism:

> each great war has turned men further and further away from preoccupation with Man and drawn them back into the family, the home, the private life and the preoccupation with sexuality. It has happened, however, that at the same time our theater has exhausted the one form that was made to express the private life – prose realism (Miller 1978: 56).

Of course that, as it was discussed in Chapter One, the predominance in America of prose Realism, being the most adequate form to portray a bourgeois family environment and the relationships within this confined setting – "I have come to wonder whether the force or pressure that makes for Realism, that even requires it, is the magnetic force of the family relationship within the play" (*idem*: 71) – is perfectly justified by the demands of the American society of the first half of the 20th century, eager to recognize its middle-class *ethos* and private experiences on stage.

Nonetheless, for Arthur Miller, the dramatic conventions of Realism and its ideological programme were outdated and presented very little potential, by the time he started thinking about *Death of a Salesman*. In several interviews, the author expressed the urge he felt to experiment beyond Realism, after having achieved considerable success with the 1947-Ibsenesque problem play, *All My Sons*, and proven his ability to master the realistic form. Interviewed by James J. Martine in 1979, Miller said that "[h]aving won that audience, it made it easier for me to take off with *Death of a Salesman* and to try new approaches to the theatre, and to break up some of the reigning realism – I should say naturalism" (Roudané

1987: 301). In 2000, during a conversation with Mel Gussow, he commented once again on this initial turn in his playwriting career: "As I said, the challenge for me was whether I wanted to be able to beat the realistic theatre, or not. Once *All my Sons* went on, I felt I had a licence to do what I really wanted to do, which was deal with time the way I had never seen in theatre" (Gussow 2002: 195).

In "The family in modern drama", an essential essay to understand Arthur Miller's poetics, the playwright opposes "Expressionism" to Realism and points it as a solution for his dramatic project. According to the author, these two aesthetics have been the main tendencies of dramatic history: while Shakespeare, for instance, was closer to a realistic depiction of reality, Greek tragedy and medieval plays were more expressionistic.[68] In another text – the introduction to volume five of his *Collected Plays* – Miller used the term "poetic drama" in the place of "Expressionism" and stated: "I gradually came to wonder if the essential pressure toward poetic dramatic language – if not stylization itself – came from the inclusion of society as a major element in the play's story or vision" (Miller 2009c: xiii). Again, in "The family in modern drama", the author associates family life with Realism and social issues with the so-called "expressionist" or "poetic" drama: "[i]t is a form of play which manifestly seeks to dramatize the conflict of either social, religious, ethical, or moral forces *per se*, and in their own naked roles, rather than to present psychologically realistic human characters in a more or less realistic environment" (Miller 1978: 75).

Although Miller' theory might seem appealing at first sight, I find it rather problematic. First of all, very much in the Anglo-American critical tradition,[69] the author has an excessively wide conception of "Expressionism", including in it practically every dramatic form which is not realistic or whose main purpose is not a verisimilar mimesis, from Symbolism to actual Expressionism, from Agitprop to Epic Theatre, amongst other modernist experiments, like Gertrude Stein's *landscape plays* or Artaud's theatre of cruelty. Brenda Murphy, in "Arthur Miller: revisioning realism", is absolutely right when she states that Miller, certainly influenced by the vulgate version of Expressionism that reached America,

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[68] Cf. Introduction to the Volume One of Miller's *Collected Plays* (Miller 1958: 5). His conception of the dramatic tradition developing between two main poles was not original. Eric Bentley, in the article "Acting: natural and artificial", stated that "looking back over the history of theatre, I realized that critics have fallen into two classes: those who say acting has become so natural it lacks beauty and those who say it has become so fancy it lacks naturalness. The critic's plea is either for a return to the grand manner or for a return to reality. But this is not to say that we all stand either for one style or the other, simple or grand, natural or artificial. On the contrary, as soon as we think about it, we recognize that dramatic, like all other, art necessarily involves both imitation and selection, nature and artifice, truth and beauty" (Bentley 1954: 78).

[69] In Chapter Two we will contradict the opinion of some critics who characterize (erroneously, in my opinion) *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* as expressionist plays.

"broadened its definition to include essentially all presentational theatrical idioms as opposed to purely representational realism" (Demastes 1996: 195). Miller's description of what he considered to be dramatic "Expressionism" could be applied to all the tendencies which were enumerated just above, since it is, above all, based upon the idea of retheatricalization and metatheatricality. As far as the characters are concerned, it would carry the "elimination of psychological characterization in favor of what one might call the presentation of forces" (Miller 1978: 75). On the other hand, it seems that the main important feature is the non-realistic drive:

> The moment realistic behavior and psychology disappear from the play all the other appurtenances of Realism vanish too. The stage is stripped of knickknacks; instead it reveals symbolic *designs*, which function as overt pointers toward the moral to be drawn from the action. We are no longer under quite the illusion of watching through a transparent fourth wall. Instead we are constantly reminded, in effect, that we are watching a theater piece (*idem*: 75-76).

In his very wide definition of "Expressionism", Miller never seems to take into account specific characteristics of German Expressionism (*stricto sensu*), such as the *Stationendramen* form or the technique of subjective distortion in compliance with the estranged protagonist's point of view, which have become trademarks of dramatic Expressionism since Strindberg's revolutionary dramaturgy.[70] In fact, although the playwright refers to Kaiser's *Gas* and O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* and *The Emperor Jones*, which are markedly expressionistic, he surprisingly evokes Wilder's *Our Town* which, being a metatheatrical play, is, in my opinion, quite far from Expressionism, although it is generally conceived as such. While developing his definition of "Expressionism", Miller envisions, as I have referred, a necessary connection between this dramatic mode and an emphasis on the social dimension of human experience. But is every non-realistic form (because that is very much how he defines Expressionism) more prone or adequate to dealing with society than with private issues? Is "poetry" really a more effective means to deal with social relations between men than prose?

[70] If encyclopedic definitions are sometimes slightly restraining, they also offer us sharp conceptual boundaries, which can be quite useful. In the case of dramatic Expressionism, I believe the *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* presents a clear and specific definition that does not allow traditional generalizations of the term: "Reacting against the limited and untheatrical nature of naturalism, the defining characteristics of expressionist theatre are, in addition to the depiction of powerful emotions: the rejection of individual psychology in order to penetrate to the essence of humanity; a concern with the contemporary social situation; episodic structures (*Stationendrama*); generalized, often nameless characters; strongly visual incidents in place of scenes dependent on linguistic exchange; a highly charged, often abrupt language (telegraphese); symbolic stage sets" (Kennedy, vol. I, 2003: 434) and, I would add, "the dramatization of a character's subjective perception of reality" (Bigsby and Wilmeth, vol. 2, 1999: 332).

The truth is that, in "The family in the modern drama", Miller seems to be describing a non-realistic form which, with its emphasis on "social emotions" (*idem*: 76), on the representation of characters as social forces and on the appeal to the audience's "faculties of knowing rather than of feeling" (*ibidem*), is somewhere in between T. S. Eliot's political tragedy and Brecht's Epic Theatre. The fact that in 1956, the year in which "The family in the modern drama" was written, Miller was still rewriting *A View from the Bridge* – which was clearly a modern-day stylized tragedy with a Brechtian epic subject which draws the moral conclusions of the play – might shed some light on the playwright's obsession with a dramatic form that emphasizes the social and public dimensions of human experience. However, how does Miller account for the non-realistic formal devices he applied in plays like *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*, which, never dismissing social and ethical issues,[71] are much more focused on the subjective experience of reality? After all, they might be aesthetically closer to Expressionism *stricto sensu*, since their staging of the protagonist's pilgrimage through an often industrial, strange, and inhospitable society (as Miller stresses) is not so much focused on social relations, but rather on, as Sarrazac wrote, the "individual denunciation of mass society" and the protagonist's rejection of the dehumanized social world, as well as his spiritual quest and the expression of his intimate, even unconscious, feelings.[72]

Even if some early plays, like *The Man Who Had all the Luck* or *All my Sons*, and other later ones attest to Miller's inevitable debt to dramatic Realism, the fact is that he never really believed in the illusion of an absolutely direct and unmediated imitation of reality. In the four plays which are to be studied, and which represent, in my opinion, two major tendencies that run through Miller's dramatic output, the playwright endeavoured to come up with new formal devices that would enable his plays to approach reality (and reflect upon it) from a distanced and unexpected perspective and not through uncritical *mimesis*. Miller was trying to create what Jean-Pierre Sarrazac called the *dramaturgy of the detour*, which was characterized by the French critic thus:

> L'écrivain moderne est semblable à Persée, dans son combat avec la Gorgone. Il ne peut pas ne pas vouloir affronter la réalité […] mais, s'il l'aborde de face, d'un seul regard elle le paralyse. Il lui faut

[71] Arthur Miller always assumed himself as a social playwright and in his essay "On social plays" he set as his dramatic purpose to write about the *Whole Man*, that is, about man in all his dimension: "the human being […] as a naturally political, naturally private, naturally engaged person" (Miller 1978: 57-58).

[72] In *Théâtres Intimes*, Sarrazac states that expressionist drama, as a descendant of Strindberg's *To Damascus* (and even Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*), in which the apparently external voyage is but an interior one, presents the protagonist's "quête de soi-même à travers les étapes successives du *stationendrama*" and "une véhémente dénonciation individualiste de la société massifié" (Sarrazac 1989: 90, 91).

> donc ruser. Trouver un biais. Elaborer un détour qui ne l'éloigne, dans un premier temps, de cette actualité vivante qu'afin de lui permettre, dans un second temps, de mieux l'atteindre et d'avoir raison d'elle. Le détour permet le *retour* (Sarrazac 2004: 13-14).

This effort to achieve a *dramaturgy of the detour* and surmount the conventional dramatic Realism resulted in two major distinctive tendencies: *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* are mental plays which deal with the intimate life and the personal memories of the protagonists; *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock* use epic techniques to stress the social relationships between the characters. These two trends were recognized by prominent critics and philosophers as the two main developments of modern drama since the decline of 19th-century Realism and Naturalism, which were inadequate aesthetics to represent every dimension of human experience. Although I do not agree with Raymond Williams' very Anglo-Saxon designation of these trends – *social* and *subjective Expressionism* –, his description, in *Politics of Modernism*, of the disintegration of Naturalism and the development of these new tendencies is very clear:

> Beyond this key site of the living room there were, in opposite directions, crucial areas of experience which the language and behaviour of the living room could not articulate or fully interpret. Social and economic crises in the wider society had their effects back in the living room, but dramatically only as reports from elsewhere […] Similarly, crises of subjectivity – the privacies of sexuality, the uncertainties and disturbances of fantasies and dreams – could not be fully articulated within the norms of language and behaviour which, for its central purposes, the form had selected" (Williams 1989: 85-86).

These two diametrically opposed tendencies – one is very much an articulation of the intimate contradictions and unconscious impulses of man and his subjective experience of the real, the other proposes a distanced (or estranged) and rational observation of social human relations – ultimately wound up being summed up by the dramatic projects of Artaud, on the one hand, and Brecht, on the other.

Williams' very interesting analysis of the development of contemporary drama is, somehow taken up by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac in *Jeux de Rêves et autres Détours*. Discussing the prominent figure of the witness in recent dramaturgies, the French critic alludes to these two tendencies:

> [I]l est deux grands types de témoignage. L'un pourrait être dit politique et l'autre intime […] Le dominateur commun à ces deux témoins, c'est qu'ils ne sauraient être personnages agissants au sens aristotélicien et des personnages dotés de buts d'action, comme le précise Hegel. En eux, au contraire, une certaine *passivité*, sur laquelle il faudra revenir… En revanche, à l'intérieur de cette sphère de la non-action, ils pourront se présenter de bien de façons: […] D'une part, le personnage qui se présente

> comme le témoin oculaire d'un événement, d'un accident – d'une «scène de la rue», écrit Brecht […] Elle fixe une dramaturgie et un type de jeu fondés sur la «distanciation» (*Verfremdungseffekt*) et la «démonstration», mais aussi et surtout un usage spécifique de la fable […] D'autre part, il y a l'homme comme témoin de lui-même, c'est-à-dire de sa propre souffrance. Dans *Le Pèse-nerfs*, Artaud proclame une fois pour toutes: «Je suis témoin. Je suis le seul témoin de moi-/même» (Sarrazac 2004: 31-33).[73]

In an interview with Ronald Hayman in 1970, Arthur Miller, in his rather peculiar and enigmatic way of putting things, described his dramatic project very much in the terms used by Williams and Sarrazac: "I have worked in two veins always and I guess they alternate. In one the event is inside the brain and in the other the brain is inside the event" (Roudané 1987: 199). It is exactly from these two distinct perspectives that I will read Miller's plays in the following chapters.

[73] In his fundamental work, *Le Spectateur Emancipé,* Jacques Rancière, although discussing the perspective of the spectator, reaches similar conclusions as Raymond Williams and Jean-Pierre Sarrazac and ends up identifying the same major currents of contemporary drama, "les attitudes fondamentales qui résument le théâtre épique de Brecht et le théâtre de la cruauté d'Artaud. Pour l'un, le spectateur doit prendre de la distance; pour l'autre, il doit perdre toute distance. Pour l'un il doit affiner son regard, pour l'autre il doit abdiquer la position même du regardeur. Les entreprises modernes de réforme du théâtre ont constamment oscillé entre ces deux pôles de l'enquête distante et de la participation vitale" (Rancière 2008: 10-11). Curiously, we believe it is also worth mentioning an utterly interesting but seldom quoted text by Nikilai Evreinov, "Introduction au monodrame", where the Russian theatre practitioner proves to have some common ground with Artaud as far as the role of the spectator is concerned: "nous devons arriver à la conclusion que le monodrame, entre autres, résout un des problèmes brûlants de l'art théâtral contemporain, précisément le problème de l'effet paralysant – séparateur et réfrigérant – de la rampe […] dès lors que le metteur en scène atteint, par l'illusion des images du personnage principal, la fusion avec son «moi» du «moi» du spectateur, ce dernier, se retrouvant sur la scène, c'est-à-dire sur le lieu de l'action, perdra de vue la rampe, elle restera en arrière, c'est-à-dire sera supprimée" (Evreinov 1999: 166).

Chapter Two: *The Event is inside the Brain*
- *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* -

When he first started idealizing *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller thought of a different title for his drama about the last twenty four hours of a Brooklyn-based salesman: *The Inside of his Head*. At that time, he already had a very clear vision of what the play should be like: "[t]he first image that occurred to me was of an enormous face the height of the proscenium arch which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of a man's head […] It was conceived half in laughter, for the inside of his head was a mass of contradictions" (Miller 1958: 23). Based on the figure of one of Miller's uncles and being thematically related to two of the playwright's juvenilia short stories, *Death of a Salesman* had, from the outset, a markedly original aesthetic, which served the purpose of a non-realistic dramatic exploration of the protagonist's intimate and unconscious life, his shuffled memories and own perspective on reality. What started out to be completely original within Miller's dramaturgy up until 1949 became a formal device that would be taken up and further developed by the playwright in 1964, with *After the Fall*, and repeated (somewhat banalized, in my opinion) in *Ride Down Mount Morgan* (1991) and *Mr. Peters' Connections* (1998).

Death of a Salesman was a great commercial and critical success during its first run – a condition that was absolutely crucial for any Broadway producer. But it was also a breath of fresh air in the history of American theatre (which had yet to experience the performative avant-garde of the 1960s), so much so that, ironically, some theatre practitioners of the time did not invest in the play's production, due to its formal complexity:

> Leland Hayward, an eminent artists' agent as well as producer of *Mister Roberts* and other successes, cut his planned investment in half, once he was allowed to read the script. Joshua Logan, one of the most sought after of stage directors, said he couldn't understand the thing. Cheryl Crawford, a successful producer and investor, didn't like The Salesman a bit, and refused to join in the financing. There were others (Roudané 1987: 16).[74]

Death of a Salesman has been evoked, both by American and European critics, as an example of formal experimentalism and of the major transformations taking place at the core the modern dramatic text. Nonetheless, the play is a knot in a long line of plays focused on the

[74] In the essay "*Salesman* at fifty", Miller recalls, once again, Joshua Logan's objections to the play's unorthodox structure: "No audience, he felt, would follow the story, and no one would ever be sure whether Willy was imagining or really living through one or another scene in the play" (Miller 2000: 271).

articulation of the characters' subjectivity – which Peter Szondi called "the dramatic literature of the self" (Szondi 1965: 97), – as well as the externalization of the intimate dimension of human experience, which began with Strindberg (to a lesser degree with Ibsen's last plays) and had its bloom with Expressionism and monodrama. In the United States, Eugene O'Neill – with his expressionist plays, such as *The Emperor Jones* or *The Hairy Ape*, as well as the experiments with the interior monologue, like *Strange Interlude* – and Tennessee Williams – with his memory play *The Glass Menagerie*, and the oneiric *Camino Real* – were prominent predecessors of Miller's *plays of the mind.*

If absolute drama, in the Aristotelian-Hegelian tradition, is an organic weaving of intersubjective relationships mediated by dialogue, one of the changes which affected contemporary dramaturgy was, for Georg Lukács, the emphasis on subjectivity and perspectivism. As he wrote in "The Sociology of Modern Drama":

> All becomes a matter of viewpoint. The subjective extreme descends from the minds of acting personages, as it were, and into the very foundation of the play […] The conflicts become ever more decisively and exclusively inward, they become so much an affair of man's spirit that they can scarcely be communicated to others (Lukács 1965: 165).

Although Ibsen, in his late plays, took an interest in the intimate conflicts of his characters, who appear as desperate souls trapped by the ghosts of the past, it was Strindberg – with his famous saying that *there's only one person's life we really know and that one is our own*[75] – that spearheaded an actual dramaturgy of the self which revolutionized conventional dramatic form in order to express the protagonists' subjectivity, their dreams and reminiscences of their personal past. As Szondi claimed, Strindberg's main objective, especially in the post-*Inferno* dramatic output, was to

> accéder la vie psychique, par essence cachée, à la réalité dramatique. Le drame, cette forme artistique par excellence de la communication et de la révélation dialogiques, se voit assigner la tâche de représenter les événements psychiques cachés. Il la remplit en se repliant sur son personnage central, soit en se limitant à celui-ci (monodrame), soit en appréhendant tout le reste dans la perspective de celui-ci (littérature dramatique du moi) (Szondi 1965: 42).

From *To Damascus* – a *Stationendrama* in which the dialogues between the Stranger (an acknowledged autobiographic protagonist) and the other characters are but a projection of

[75] In *Théorie du Drame Moderne*, Peter Szondi quotes Strindberg's sentence after C.E. Dahlström's translation of the Swedish playwright's *Samlade Skrifter*, vol. 18: "On ne connaît qu'*une seule* vie, la sienne" (Szondi 1965: 38).

the protagonist's polyphonic psyche[76] – to *The Ghost Sonata* and *Burned House* – where the main characters, usually through narration and commentary, draw the audience into a never-ending maze of personal memories and turn their intimacy into a dramatic spectacle – Strindberg articulated in his dramaturgy many of the philosophical, artistic and scientific changes that began evolving at the end of the 19th century and shaped modernist art, particularly, the avant-garde theatre. At the bloom of psychiatry and Freud's psychoanalytic method, which focused on the study of dreams and the conception of the human mind as composed of conscious and unconscious levels, Strindberg's dramas like *A Dream Play*, with its oneiric *tableaux* and dream-like transitions between images,[77] paved the way for surrealist drama and expressionist renowned plays. For instance, in Ernst Toller's *Masses and Man* the psyche of its protagonist, The Woman (as well as her subjective take on reality), is thoroughly represented in dream scenes.[78] What had formerly been an exterior, intersubjective form, became a representation of the intimate dilemmas and memories of its *dramatis personae*. As Jean-Pierre Sarrazac wrote, in *Théâtres Intimes* :

> A l'heure de la théorie freudienne de l'inconscient, l'avènement du véritable théâtre intime se fonde sur un moi en perpétuelle contradiction avec lui-même […] Dès lors, le drame ne se déroule plus principalement dans la sphère interpersonnelle, intersubjective […] mais dans une nouvelle sphère, intrapersonnelle et intrasubjective (Sarrazac 1989: 80-81).

The development of psychology, with its popular terms, such as William James' *stream of consciousness*,[79] fostered a generalized interest in the functioning of the human psyche, which, in literature, had its most interesting and revolutionary expression in the

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[76] "cet aspect «expressionniste» de Strindberg qui voit les personnages de la trilogie de *Damas* (la Dame, le Mendiant, César), par exemple, comme les émanations du moi de l'Inconnu, et l'œuvre toute entière enracinée dans la subjectivité du héros" (Szondi 1965: 45).

[77] In his chapter on the "Prehistories" of postdramatic theatre, Hans-Thies Lehmann dedicates two sections of it to expressionist and surrealism drama, stressing their focus on the unconscious and oneiric dimension of human experience, represented in their "kaleidoscopic succession of images and scenes of the dream", and their constant use of collage/montage, in order to "connect heterogeneous elements" (Lehamnn 1999: 65-66).

[78] In the opening stage direction, Toller wrote: "The second, fourth, and sixth scenes are dream pictures; the first, third, fifth, and seventh are visionary abstracts of reality" (Schürer 1997: 198). For instance, the sixth scene of the play – which resembles scene two of *The Emperor Jones*, where the protagonist is scared by the Little Formless Fears – represents the Woman's guilty conscience through a dream *tableau* where the protagonist is symbolically haunted by the appearance of six shadows (*idem*: 229-233).

[79] In Chapter IX ("The stream of thought") of *The Principles of Psychology*, William James put forward his theory, which became an essential reference in modernist literature, of human consciousness or thought as a continuous, almost mellifluous, process: "Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life*"; "As the brain-changes are continuous, so do all these consciousnesses melt into each other like dissolving views. Properly they are but one protracted consciousness, one unbroken stream" (James 1931: 239, 247-248).

modernist psychological novel.[80] If narrative took the lead in the literary reproduction of mental processes of free association of memories and ideas – which very often seem random and puzzling to the reader, who only has access to the surface of the characters' consciousness and not to the causal relation between ideas – drama began, although later, taking an interest in the form of the interior monologue,[81] first in plays such as O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, where dialogue and interior monologue are on the same level,[82] and then in the 1950s and 1960s, when playwrights like Beckett and, of course, Miller, granted special prominence to the characters' monologic exposition of thought and intimate emotional conditions. As Sarrazac wrote, in *L'Avenir du Drame*, "Dans les années 1950, le théâtre s'arroge donc enfin un pouvoir dont on pouvait croire qu'il resterait, sous les espèces du «monologue intérieur», le privilège du roman: extérioriser le débit mental des personnages, extravertir le soliloque" (Sarrazac 1981: 130).

If, on the one hand, this intimate and subject-centred trend within modern drama goes to great lengths to exteriorize the characters' interior conflicts, as well as their psychological states and the development of their reasoning, it is also very much concerned with the representation of distinct individual perspectives of reality, which, according to the general episteme developed at the beginning of the 20th century, came to be understood as purely relative. Nietzsche's declaration that *God has died* and that "it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations" (Nietzsche 1954: 458), officially set off a relativistic and perspectivist worldview which persisted throughout contemporaneity. The Newtonian absolutes of Time and Space, by which the world was mechanically ruled, became relative elements, altered by speed and motion, in the theories of Hermann Minkowski and his pupil, Albert Einstein. As Peter Conrad summarized, in his very informative work *Modern Times, Modern Places*, "Then, in the twentieth century, the universe suddenly ceased to obey [...]

[80] In his book *Memory in Play. From Aeschylus to Sam Shepard*, Attilio Favorini describes the growing influence of psychology and the study of memory on modernist literature: "The onset of modernism brings a surge in interest in memory across disciplines that has not been sufficiently noticed […] while one may agree with Michael Roth that Freud deserves chief credit for developing "a hermeneutics of memory" (1995, 13) at the turn of the nineteenth century, he was both preceded and followed by a brace of memographers compelled by questions of how memory characterizes the mind, catalyzes the self, and engages the world. These include Freud's associate Josef Breuer and rivals Carl Jung and Pierre Janet; psychologists such as William James, Jean Piaget, and Frederic Bartlett; philosopher Henri Bergson; sociologist Halbwachs; and such pillars of modern drama as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, and Robert Sherwood" (Favorini 2008: 6).

[81] It is perhaps important to distinguish *stream of consciousness*, the term used by William James to describe the psychological process through which our thoughts and memories are concatenated, and *interior monologue*, which is the literary technique to represent the characters' stream of thought.

[82] In *Théorie du Drame Moderne*, Szondi elects *Strange Interlude* as the most perfect example of the dramatic take on the interior monologue technique, since O'Neill "ne reproduit pas seulement les conversations de ses huit héros, mais aussi, en continu, leurs pensées intérieures, qu'ils ne peuvent pas se communiquer entre eux parce qu'ils sont trop étrangers les uns aux autres" (Szondi 1965: 128).

laws. Time adopted variable, unsynchronized tempi, and space too became mobile" (Conrad 1998: 60).

If the scientific theories of relativity had a strong impact on artistic representation (for instance, the Futurists held on to the notion of *spacetime* and the importance of motion, while Cubism strove to represent a certain object as seen through different perspectives), the developments in psychology also proved an essential influence for modernist art, especially in literature and in the theatre, where the stance of unquestioned and objective points of view (in the case of the novel, represented by the classic third-person omniscient narrator) was replaced by the idea that there are only subjective perspectives that change from person to person and which depend on the psychological state of each subject.[83] The interest in the subjective perceptions of time and duration, and in how they are worked and reworked by the human psyche – an interest expressed by Henri Bergson who, during a debate with Albert Einstein in 1922, used the term *psychological time* in opposition to the objectively measured *physicist's time* – became a recurrent *topos* in modernist literature.[84]

In the theatre, there was a whole tendency, pioneered, once again, by August Strindberg and his subjective dramatic literature, that explored reality not on the basis of an intersubjective dialogue, but as perceived by a specific character. As mentioned above, the main focus of attention in some of Strindberg's plays – such as the still naturalistic *The Father*, or more experimental texts like *The Stronger* and *To Damascus* – and in the overtly expressionist dramaturgy, is the unity of feeling and perception of one individual (almost always represented as an isolated, errant protagonist who clearly stands out from the rest of the characters) and his/her inherently *subjective deformation*[85] of reality. This theatre of *subjective perspectivism* had one of its theoretical heights in Nikolai Evreinov's reconceptualization of the term *monodrama* as a representation of the scenic reality exclusively through the point of view of one character, in order to create in the spectator a stronger sense of empathy and identification with the dramatic scene.[86] A good example of

[83] In *The Principles of Psychology*, William James argues that our perception of reality is constantly changing, as our sensibility is transformed and molded by different aspects: "There are facts which make us believe that our sensibility is altering all the time, so that the same object cannot easily give us the same sensation over again" (James 1931: 232). The American psychologist also makes a reference to what he called "*absolute insularism*" (*idem*: 226) of the human mind, i. e., the uniqueness of each mind's stream of thought and of each individual's take on reality. As James wrote, "the breach from one mind to another is perhaps the greatest breach in nature" (*idem*: 237).

[84] Peter Conrad stresses, in his discussion of the notion of psychological time, the ability of the human mind to reconcile the present with the past in an effort of simultaneous juxtaposition: "Psychological time, unlike that of history, travels backwards – reviving the dead, restoring childhood and its lost paradise" (Conrad 1998: 65).

[85] Szondi 1965: 99.

[86] I will expand on the notion of monodrama further on, while discussing Arthur Miller's two plays.

the practice of monodrama was Edward Gordon Craig's *mise en scène* of *Hamlet* for the Moscow Art Theatre (1912), where every event of the plot was staged as perceived by the protagonist's consciousness. This turn to what Jean-Pierre Sarrazac called the *theatrum mentis*[87] ultimately influenced Miller in his conception of his psychological plays, as the initial title of *Death of a Salesman – The Inside of his Head* – seems to indicate.

The drama of the Loman family – which was written during six weeks of seclusion and opened, to great success, at the Morosco Theatre on 10th February 1949 – became the classic trademark of Arthur Miller's playwriting,[88] therefore having received much critical attention. The obsessive love of a common salesman for a mythical America – in one of Willy's reminiscences of the past, he says adamantly to his brother Ben: "that's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being well liked!" (*DS*, Miller 1958: 184) – whose dreams and promises molded his entire life and perversely led him astray from reality and actual fulfillment, alongside the father-son conflict with Freudian contours, have been the two most studied dimensions of *Death of a Salesman*. Although the play's challenging form nurtured an interest on the part of Continental critics, such as Peter Szondi and Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, who direct their analyses toward the specific formal devices of modern and contemporary drama, Anglo-American scholars, generally much more focused on the thematic and cultural interpretation of literary texts, mention in passing the formal construction of both *Salesman* and *After the Fall*, hardly pinpointing its relevance for an understanding of the plays' themes and perspectives.

A good instance of this more traditional tendency in literary criticism is Eric Mottram's essay, published in 1967, "Arthur Miller: the Development of a Political Dramatist in America", in which the author, completely failing to grasp Miller's aesthetic and ethical programme, starts by writing that "Arthur Miller's theatre has never been experimentally avant-garde […] His plays are written for and largely from the point of view of a man whose attitudes are not radical and innovatory but puzzled, confused and absolutely resolved not to break with his fellow countrymen" (Brown and Harris 1967: 127). Whenever Mottram – who

[87] In *Theâtres Intimes*, Sarrazac speaks of the post-Strindbergian dramatic trend, dominated by the mental and, therefore, subjective representation of life and reality: "la caractéristique de l'ère nouvelle, celle du *theatrum mentis*, c'est de ne faire apparaître cette même vie humaine qu'à travers une série d'associations subjectives et d'actions fragmentaires où l'onirisme prend une large part" (Sarrazac 1989: 71).

[88] *Salesman* remains to this day Miller's classic play, having had a tremendously relevant literary and cultural impact, with many references in popular culture which include, for example, the TV series *The Simpsons* (in season 16, ep. 12, the Simpsons travel to China, where they attend the Beijing production of the play). *The Crucible*, however, has been Miller's most produced play, due, I believe, to its blatantly anti-authoritarian message and its very interesting intertextuality with some of Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic "romances" (*The Scarlett Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, for instance) and more recent novels, like John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick*, over the American Puritanism in the 17th century.

is clearly more focused on the playwright's supposedly stale moralism and the burden of society upon the tragic fate of Millerian protagonists – means to mention the anti-realistic devices or detours in both *Salesman* and *After the Fall*, he simply refers to them as *expressionistic plays* with *expressionistic settings*,[89] giving in to the generalization of the term "Expressionism" (which was discussed in the previous section of this dissertation) and never delving into the intimate and subjectivist dimensions of these two deeply psychological plays. With regard to *Death of a Salesman*, Mottram just characterizes it as basically "an expressionist play of degradation" (*idem*: 133), only to contradict himself some pages further on, by declaring that *After the Fall* is Miller's first "Expressionistic" play: "These ideas of self-reform as a dramatist produced Miller's first Expressionistic, Strindbergian play, in which the action stems from the self-centre of the hero" (*idem*: 152). Likewise, John Gassner, in a still very interesting and sharp essay named "Realism in the modern American theatre", refers *en passant* to the "expressionistically distorted" (*idem*: 20) memories of Willy Loman and to the "expressionistic dramatization of past events in *After the Fall*" (*idem*: 21), failing to be more specific about the meaning and functioning of this *expressionistic mode* within the dramatic universes of the two plays.[90]

As I have hinted in the previous section of my study, Miller did not write any plays which are examples of Expressionism, as it was shaped by playwrights such as Wedekind, Kaiser or Toller.[91] In the case of *Salesman* and *After the Fall*, I feel inclined to agree with critics such as Raymond Williams and Gerald Weales, who read both plays as original forms that, while borrowing some expressionistic techniques – for instance, the symbolic settings, and the centrality of the protagonists' subjective perspective of reality –, appropriate and transform them, taking a different course from Expressionism itself.[92] Because, rather than imitating an already established aesthetic, Miller produced, in *Death of a Salesman*, a new, original and very personal dramatic form (which he would rework and develop fifteen years later, in *After the Fall*) in order to overcome a problem which was central to his very own dramatic poetics right after *All my Sons*: how to effectively dramatize the protagonist's

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[89] Mottram speaks of expressionistic sets while discussing *Death of a Salesman* and *A View from the Bridge* (Brown and Harris 1967: 134, 143).

[90] In more recent criticism, Brenda Murphy, in an essay called "Arendt, Kristeva, and Arthur Miller: forgiveness and promise in *After the Fall*", also defined the work as an "expressionistic play" (Murphy 2002: 314).

[91] For the discussion of the term "Expressionism", *vd.* p. 49 of this dissertation.

[92] In the 1959 essay "The Realism of Arthur Miller", Raymond Williams stated that "*Death of a Salesman* is actually a development of expressionism, of an interesting kind" (Weales 1967: 320) and Gerald Weales, in his panoramic view of Miller's dramatic output, published in Alan S. Downer's *The American Theater*, claimed that "both *Salesman* and *After the Fall* make use of the ideas and the devices of expressionistic theater" (Downer 1967: 107). However, neither Williams nor Weales consider the two plays as purely expressionistic.

subjective perception of the past and his awareness of the burden and consequences it passes on to his present life. As Matthew C. Roudané wrote in the "*Death of a Salesman* and the poetics of Arthur Miller" (*The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*) the playwright, mainly focused on the workings of a single mind and how it brings past and present together,

> wanted […] to reinvent the nature of theatricality itself. He wanted a play whose very ontology would be even more inventive than that achieved by some of his American predecessors […] Miller wanted to formulate a dramatic structure that would allow the play textually and theatrically to capture the simultaneity of the human mind as that mind registers outer experience through its own inner subjectivity (Bigsby 1997: 75).

The obsession with the past – which marked a significant share of his dramatic output, from the psychological plays which are being studied in this chapter to the more historical ones, such as *The Crucible* and *The American Clock*,[93] or even the more conventionally realistic ones, like *All my Sons* and *The Price* – is quite often articulated in the essays and interviews of a playwright who, in a time when axiological relativisms and the Camusian sense of the absurd dominated,[94] kept insisting on the "sequential logic of morality" (Bigsby 2000: 115) and on the private and social consequences of individuals' past actions. Not willing to join many of his contemporary playwrights who, as he wrote in the introduction to his *Collected Plays*, assume "that their duty is merely to show the present countenance rather than to account for what happens" (Miller 1958: 21), Miller turned instead to his major influence, Ibsen (and, I would add, Strindberg, although his admiration for the Swedish playwright was not so overtly acknowledged),[95] who, in later works, employed what is usually called the "analytic technique". In spite of never really deconstructing the traditional dramatic form (Szondi's "absolute drama"), Ibsen transformed the conventional dramatic action, which usually features a situation of conflict in the present, into an exposition and analysis of the characters' past lives and previous events.[96] In that same introduction, in which

[93] Both plays will be discussed in the next chapter.

[94] Camus defined the sense of the absurd as stemming from the confrontation between a human appeal for rational explanations and the world's deathly silence (Camus 1942: 46).

[95] It is a fact that Miller wrote much more about Henrik Ibsen's influence on modern drama and on his own dramatic output. There is, however, one text entitled "The mad inventor of modern drama" (1985) and published in *The New York Times Book Review* in which Miller acknowledges Strindberg's genius and his undeniable influence on the development of modern theatre: "The impact of his dramatic method, reflected in his many plays, most notably *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888), and *The Dance of Death* (1900), is probably greater and less acknowledged than that of any other modern writer. If his plays are much less frequently produced than Ibsen's, his playwriting personality, his way of approaching reality, is evidenced far more deeply and more frequently in our contemporary theater. Strindberg struck strongly into O'Neill, is quite directly mirrored in Beckett and Pinter, in Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee" (Miller 1978: 414).

[96] In the section of *Théorie du Drame Moderne* devoted to Ibsen's dramaturgy, Szondi wrote : "Le concept de technique analytique,[…] si l'on reconnaît les contextes esthétiques dans lesquels l'analyse de Sophocle

Miller widely discusses his concern with the dramatization of the past, there are a handful of references to Ibsen's legacy, which, according to the American playwright, presents

> what I believe is the biggest single dramatic problem, namely, how to dramatize what has gone before. I say this not merely out of technical interest, but because dramatic characters, and the drama itself, can never hope to attain a maximum degree of consciousness unless they contain an unveiling of the contrast between past and present, and an awareness of the process by which the present has become what it is […] What is precious in the Ibsen method is its insistence upon valid causation (*idem*: 21).

So the past – more exactly, its theatrical materialization on a simultaneous level with the present action – became one of Miller's most pressing concerns during his conceptualization of the *Salesman* dramatic form, which was not taken up again until fifteen years later, in *After the Fall*. If the playwright's intention of exploring the entangled mysteries and dramatic potential in the previous events of his characters' past lives was strongly motivated by the late works of Ibsen and Strindberg, the fact is that Miller went one step further: while Ibsen managed to get his characters speaking about the past within a perfectly dramatic situation and Strindberg (slightly bolder) used, in plays like *The Burned House* or *The Ghost Sonata*, a *half-dramatic, half-epic* figure to recall and explain the past, Miller, motioned by his purpose of articulating the stream of consciousness and the most intimate and subjective dimension of his protagonists, actually broke through the conventions of the dramatic form and dramatized a free flow between the present plot and past events. Going against Thornton Wilder's commandment – "On the stage it is always now" (Frenz 1968: 61)[97] – Miller achieved, in both plays, the temporal simultaneity which was such a prominent topic for modernist writers like T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf and which very few managed to accomplish on the stage. As the playwright wrote – again in the same introduction to the first volume of his *Collected Plays*, which is definitely the best manifesto on the first stage of Miller's dramatic output – "[t]he *Salesman* image was from the beginning absorbed with the concept that nothing in life comes 'next' but that everything exists together and at the same

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[*Oedipus Rex*] est utilisée et discutée dans la correspondance entre Goethe et Schiller, alors son concept n'apparaîtra plus comme un obstacle, mais comme une clé de l'œuvre tardive d'Ibsen" (Szondi 1965: 21). Further on, discussing some of Ibsen's later plays, namely *John Gabriel Borkman*, a play that due to its emphasis on the past lives of its characters (who spend most of the action harking back to previous events – a fact that is marked linguistically by the constant use of the past tense in sentences like "If you *knew* it was reckless, you should have held back" [Ibsen 1996: 6]) fits perfectly into the category of *dramatic epilogues* (*vd.* Sarrazac 1989: 15-29), Szondi describes the main task of Ibsen's plays thus: "jeter un pont sur un abîme entre le présent et un passé qui se dérobe à la présentification" (Szondi 1965: 29).

[97] Wilder's quote is from his 1941 work *The Intent of the Artist*.

time within us; that there is no past to be 'brought forward' in a human being, but that he is his past at every moment" (Miller 1958: 23).[98]

In both *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*, the initial stage directions –which are quite long and, especially in *Salesman*, seem to be more than just technical stage directions[99] – become essential to introduce the reader or the director and his creative crew (who are the first readers and interpreters of the text when it is destined to stage performance) to the dramatic execution of a free flow between present and past. At the beginning of *Salesman*, we become immediately aware that all the present and past events, as reconstructed by Willy's mind, will take place inside and around the Lomans' minimalistic house at the centre of the setting and the main distinction between the two time levels lies in the characters' attitude towards the space restrictions of the house, combined with a rigorous light scheme (and occasionally a change of background) and the introduction of music – both suggested in the playscript, but fully executed by Joe Mielziner and Alex North in the mythical first production of the play, at the Morosco Theatre. The first direction reads:

> *Before the house lies an apron, curving beyond the forestage into the orchestra. This forward area serves as the back yard as well as the locale of all Willy's imaginings and of his city scenes. Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the past these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by stepping 'through' a wall onto the forestage* (*DS*, Miller 1958: 131).

[98] In his autobiography, *Timebends*, Miller wrote a rather similar comment on *Salesman*, which could be applied to *After the Fall*. For him, it was a play that could "cut through time like a knife through a layer cake or a road through a mountain revealing its geologic layers, and instead of one incident in one time-frame succeeding another, display past and present concurrently, with neither one ever coming to a stop […] How fantastic a play would be that did not still the mind's simultaneity, did not allow a man to 'forget' and turned him to see present through past and past through present" (Miller 2012b: 131).

[99] Although the processes of *novelization* and *epicization* of drama will only be discussed comprehensively in the next chapter (when approaching *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock*), some stage directions in *Salesman* are a good example of what Jean-Pierre Sarrazac called "roman didascalique" (Sarrazac 2010: 186-189), i. e., a network of stage directions which, generally presenting long, detailed and complex information about the characters and their environment, comprise a novelesque discourse that runs parallel to the dramatic dialogue and in which the playwright, almost as a narrator, airs his views and perspectives on the dramatic situation. The "roman didascalisque" is, of course, one of the several techniques that testify to the tendency in modern drama to bring the playwright's voice into the heart of the dramatic situation. This is quite evident in some directions of *Salesman*, where the author describes the characters much beyond what is a purely technical and functional description for the stage: "Linda, his wife, has stirred in her bed at the right. She gets out and puts on a robe, listening. Most often jovial, she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to Willy's behavior – she more than loves him, she admires him, as though his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, served her only as sharp reminders of the turbulent longings within him, longings which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end" (*DS*, Miller 1958: 131); "Biff is two years older than his brother Happy, well built, but in these days bears a worn air and seems less self-assured. He has succeeded less, and his dreams are stronger and less acceptable than Happy's. Happy is tall, powerfully made. Sexuality is like a visible color on him, or a scent that many women have discovered. He, like his brother, is lost, but in a different way, for he has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat and is thus more confused and hard-skinned, although seemingly more content" (*idem*: 136).

The first of Willy's recollections of the past is carefully signalled by changes in the background pictures (from an urban to a bucolic environment) and the introduction of a pastoral tune that evokes the flute of Willy's father, a stereotypical American pioneer: "*The apartment houses are fading out, and the entire house and surrounding become covered with leaves. Music insinuates itself as the leaves appear*" (*idem*: 142). However, the transitions from present to past become more and more sudden as the play progresses. By the end of Act Two, Willy's last mental journey to the past – his memory of the hotel-room episode, in which his son Biff finds out he has a lover and becomes fully aware of his father's pretence and betrayal of family values – is not introduced through a conspicuous scenic cue that marks the passage from present to past, but is rather progressively blended into the argument Biff and Willy are having at the Frank's Chop House, a couple of hours before Willy's demise. The assumption that, after almost two whole acts of going back and forth in time, the reader or spectator is able to understand the psychological mechanism articulated in the play, allowed Miller to create a dramatic climax that develops around a hallucinating journey between present and past into which we are inexorably sucked. Between Biff and Willy's lines, the voice of the hotel operator (who had supposedly talked to the younger Biff when he went to the hotel looking for his father) is subtly introduced, triggering the memory and infuriating Willy:

> WILLY: You stole Bill Oliver's fountain pen!
> BIFF: I didn't exactly steal it! That's just what I've been explaining to you!
> HAPPY: He had it in his hand and just then Oliver walked in, so he got nervous and stuck it in his pocket!
> WILLY: My God, Biff!
> BIFF: I never intended to do it, Dad!
> OPERATOR'S VOICE: Standish Arms, good evening!
> WILLY, *shouting*: I'm not in my room!
> BIFF, *frightened*: Dad, what's the matter? (*idem*: 201).

In fact, *Salesman* presents (in several moments) a metatheatrical capacity for reflecting upon its own themes and devices which, although frequent in contemporary drama, is not always as subtle and blended into the dramatic plot as in Miller's classic. Regarding Willy's obsession with the past – which is, of course, Miller's own obsession – there is a very ironic scene in the play where the protagonist's rather idealized memories of a past in which his sons, "both built like Adonises" (*idem*: 146), worshipped him and he could still maintain a facade of the successful self-made man is harshly questioned and deconstructed. In Act Two, Willy meets his boss, Howard Wagner, to ask him for a permanent position in the New York

office with a fixed salary (since he cannot cope any longer with his situation as a travelling salesman who lives on commissions).

When he walks into the office, Howard – a reckless capitalist, completely oblivious to Willy's clear mental and physical breakdown and whose catch-phrase is "you gotta admit, business is business" (*idem*: 180) – proudly shows his new wire recorder to Loman and plays, over and over again, the voices of his wife and kids, which he recorded in the previous evening. Pretending to be fascinated by the machine – "I'm definitely going to get one" (*idem*: 178) – Willy quickly moves on to his request and invokes the past, with its "mythical figures" like Dave Singleman – the most successful and popular salesman of the good old days – and Frank (Howard's own father), in order to convince Howard. But his boss harshly confronts Willy with the truth (announcing the final argument between Biff and his father):

> WILLY, *stopping him*: I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! […] I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! […] Your father – in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.
> HOWARD, *impatiently*: Now, Willy, you never averaged –
> WILLY, *banging his hand on the desk*: I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928! […]
> HOWARD, *getting up*: You'll have to excuse me, Willy, I gotta see some people. Pull yourself together. *Going out*: I'll be back in a little while" (*idem*: 181).

Willy's obsession for his own family past, which has become a shelter from the decadent present he is unable to face, is ironically deconstructed, when the protagonist's longings for yesterday are literally set against a mechanically exact reproduction of a past event (the previous evening at the Howards'). Loman spends a great deal of the plot reminiscing about the good old days, looking in them for an answer or even just some solace, but when the past, in all its truth, gushes from the speakers of a menacing wire recorder[100] – which is ultimately a mechanic prop that mirrors Willy's action of remembering throughout the play – he simply panics:

[100] This episode is doubly ironic because, besides Willy's confrontation with an objective and mechanical reproduction of the past, there is also the exposure of his contradictory position toward an industrial and technological America that hit its height in the post-war years. Although he praises the advent of the American machine several times in the play – "Chevrolet, Linda, is the greatest car ever built" (*DS*, Miller 1958: 147) – and trades the pastoral promise of Alaska's timberlands for a house in Brooklyn, with a fridge and surrounded by urban apartment blocks, Loman is constantly contradicting himself, – "That goddam Chevrolet, they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car!" (*idem*: 148) – revealing his repressed longings for pastoral America (before his suicide, Willy is desperately trying to plant some seeds in his small and unfertile garden) and his actual contempt, almost terror, toward the capitalist and industrial nation of the 1940s. In this particular scene, Willy is not only thrown off balance by the past, but also by a machine which he cannot control, just like his cars or his fridge, which are constantly breaking down: "I told you we should've bought a well-advertised machine. Charley bought a General Electric and it's twenty years old and it's still good, that son-of-a-bitch" (idem: 174).

> *On Howard's exit, the light on his chair grows very bright and strange* […] *Willy breaks off, staring at the light, which occupies the chair, animating it. He approaches this chair, standing across the desk from it.* Frank, Frank, don't you remember what you told me that time? How you put your hand on my shoulder, and Frank… *He leans on the desk and as he speaks the dead man's name he accidentally switches on the recorder, and instantly*
> HOWARD'S SON: "… of New York is Albany. The capital of Ohio is Cincinnati, the capital of Rhode Island is …" *The recitation continues.*
> WILLY, *leaping away with fright, shouting*: Ha! Howard! Howard! Howard!
> HOWARD, *rushing in*: What happened?
> WILLY, *pointing at the machine, which continues nasally, childishly, with the capital cities*: Shut it off! Shut it off! (*idem*: 181-182).

In *After the Fall*, the formal device that conveys the workings of Quentin's mind and its inherent traveling in time, is clearly announced in the play's opening stage direction, in which the set is presented as a metaphoric rendition of the protagonist's psyche:

> *The action takes place in the mind, thought, and memory of Quentin […] On the two lower levels are sculpted areas; indeed, the whole effect is Neolithic, a lavalike, supple geography in which, like pits and hollows found in lava, the scenes take place. The mind has no color but its memories are brilliant against the grayness of its landscape […] People appear and disappear instantaneously, as in the mind […] The effect, therefore, will be the surging, flitting, instantaneousness of a mind questing over its own surfaces and into its depths* (*AF*, Miller 1981: 127).

Although I do not really agree with the playwright's description (made during a 1964 interview for *Show*) of *After the Fall* as a "highly experimental work" (Roudané 1987: 72), I do recognize that in this play Miller developed the form of the psychological monodrama/memory play, which he had used fifteen years before in *Salesman*, and took it to a whole different level. Written for the fledgling Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center, led by Robert Whitehead and Elia Kazan, *After the Fall* premiered at the ANTA Washington Square Theatre on 23rd January 1964 and had a very controversial reception, with many critics accusing the playwright of a ridiculously garrulous self-exposure and of an inadequate use of Marilyn Monroe's personal life, especially when less than two years had passed since her death. Miller responded with several texts and interviews in defence of the play's literary and dramatic value beyond mere autobiography, as it was the case of a piece called "With respect for her agony – but with love", published on *Life* (7 Feb. 1964), where the playwright attacks the critics' obsession for the "game of Find the Author" (Miller 2012a: 740) in every single work they read, and refuses the blatant autobiographism attributed to *After the Fall*: "I would only say now that despite appearances, this play is no more and no less autobiographical than *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible* or *A View from the Bridge*" (*idem*: 741).

In spite of the playwright's adamant – almost intransigent, as was Miller's case every so often – defence of *After the Fall*, which has undeniable dramatic merit and presents a reflection, even if controversial, upon important political and ethical issues of the modern world – such as political persecution, in the form of McCarthyism, and mass murder, in the form of the Holocaust – I cannot help but agree with critics like Robert Brustein and Susan Sontag, who sharply pointed out the play's weak points, starting with its overwhelming autobiographism. Alone on the stage, the play's protagonist, Quentin, remembers the most prominent moments of his life, which, in fact, share many similarities with Miller's own personal experience: the restless childhood and adolescence during the Depression, the Witch Hunt of the 50's, and the two failed marriages, first with Louise and then with Maggie, a voluptuous, attractive and mentally disturbed singer that is too much like Marilyn Monroe. In a review published in the *New Republic* and entitled "Arthur Miller's *mea culpa*" (published on 7th February 1964), Brustein, who was always one of the most ruthless critics of Miller's works, wrote that, with *After the Fall*, "he [Miller] has created a shameless piece of tabloid gossip, an act of exhibitionism which makes us all voyeurs" (Brustein, qtd. in Moss 1966: 35). Likewise, Sontag, in the essay "Going to theater, etc." – which is a panoramic text on the contemporary theatrical scene, rather than a simple review or interpretation of *After the Fall* – starts her long list of sharp criticisms by pointing out Miller's exhibitionist and inconsequent portrayal of his very own personal life, through the main character, Quentin:

> Many people are willing to give Miller a good deal of credit for the daring of his self-exposure – as husband, lover, political man, and artist. But self-exposure is commendable in art only when it is of a quality and complexity that allows other people to learn about themselves from it. In this play, Miller's self-exposure is mere self-indulgence (Sontag 1961: 141).

Although I recognize in *After the Fall* a dramatic quality that is not easy to achieve – and what is absolutely remarkable about Arthur Miller is that even in his least coherent plays he always managed to come up with a couple of scenes that produce an outstanding dramatic effect – and although it recovers most of the formal devices used in *Death of a* Salesman, I believe it does not attain either its synthesis between form and content or the efficiency of its dramatic experimentalism. Also, as Robert A. Martin wrote, expressing a widely accepted view among Miller scholars, there is an overall shift of "mood" between the early plays – which, from *All my Sons* to *A View from the Bridge*, essentially revolve around family life (but always aiming, of course, at social problems) – and the later works – which, starting with *After the Fall*, are much more philosophical, focusing on reflection, rather than action: "If in

the early plays public issues and private tensions were closely joined, in the later plays they are overshadowed with an introspective, philosophical, and existential angst that the earlier protagonists did not have to contend with" (Bloom 2005: 123).

Perhaps one of the most significant differences between both plays is *After the Fall*'s exclusive focus on the protagonist's subjective recollection of his personal past, without a counterbalance provided by the perspectives of other characters. If it is true that Miller's main goal in both *Salesman* and *After the Fall* is an investigation of personal, even intimate, past lives – and, in this sense, Christopher Bigsby was quite right when he pointed out Miller's highly idiosyncratic interest in the exploration of the past[101] – the fact is that there is, in *Death of a Salesman*, a rather interesting dialectic between Willy's highly subjective take on reality and his constructed memory of the past, and the perspective of other characters, namely his son Biff.

While Willy is delving into past episodes of his family life in order to find some evidence (personified in the authoritative figure of his brother Ben) that will back up his decisions regarding his career and the education he chose for his sons; while he rummages through the "good" old days trying to find a silver lining for Happy and Biff's future (unconsciously presenting the reader or spectator with all his insecurities and mistakes), he is cruelly torn away from his present delusions and happy memories by Biff, who by the end of the play understands that only his father's confrontation with reality – their public failure in the eyes of capitalist America, and Willy's private betrayal of family values – can set him free. In what is one of the most famous scenes in American drama, Biff lays bare the truth:

> BIFF: No, you're going to hear the truth – what you are and what I am! […] We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house! […] I stole myself out of every good job since high school!
> WILLY: And whose fault is that?
> BIFF: And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That's whose fault it is! […] I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I'm one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn't raise it. A buck an hour! Do you

[101] "In a country where eyes are resolutely fixed on tomorrow, on the green light across the bay, he insists on the authority of a past which can be denied only at the price of true identity and the moral self" (Bigsby 2005a: 124). Bigsby's reference to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, by evoking the famous image of the novel's protagonist staring across the bay at the green light at the end of Daisy's dock, paves the way for many possible comparisons between Miller's two plays and Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece, starting by the fact that both authors seemed to be warning a fast-changing America, eager to run into the future, of how important its past is. On the other hand, Willy and Quentin – obsessing over their past lives and trying to make up for all the mistakes they made – somehow remind us of Gatsby, who, confronted by Nick, cried desperately: "Can't repeat the past? […] Why of course you can! […] I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before" (Fitzgerald 1926: 106).

gather my meaning? I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home! (*DS*, Miller 1958: 217).

In *After the Fall*, however, we have access only to Quentin's recollections of his past – from the family crises during his childhood, to the effects of McCarthyism on his relationships with close friends, or even the two failed marriages –, which are triggered during a conscious moment of self-analysis intended to help Quentin commit himself to Holga – a German woman he recently met during a trip to Europe and who has made a tremendous effort to overcome her sense of guilt for the *collective* atrocity which was the Holocaust.[102] As a matter of fact, intention is a key-element that marks a structural difference between *Salesman* and *After the Fall*: while Willy's memories of the past are clearly spontaneous manifestations of an already tired and disturbed psyche (we must not forget that, besides remembering, he also engages in completely imaginary dialogues with his deceased brother Ben and, as we learn early in the play from his wife Linda, he has been trying to commit suicide), Quentin is purposefully and consciously revisiting the earlier stages of his life, in order to understand what he can (and cannot) change about his future. The first lines of the play, in which Quentin starts a conversation with an unheard and unseen Listener, who seems to be the protagonist's psychiatrist, suggest that he is willingly about to undergo a psychoanalysis session:

> QUENTIN: Hello! God, it's good to see you again! I'm very well. I hope it wasn't too inconvenient on such a short notice. Fine, I just wanted to say hello, really. Thanks. *He sits on invitation*. How've you been? You look sunburned…. Oh! I've never been to South America, you enjoy it? That's nice […] I started to call you a couple of times this year. Last year to…. Well, I lost the impulse; I wasn't sure what I wanted to say, and at my age it's discouraging to still have to go wandering around one's mind. Actually, I called you on the spur of the moment this morning; I have a bit of a decision to make. You

[102] Through Holga, Miller approached the feeling of collective guilt which, according to Giorgio Agamben and other contemporary philosophers, was a particular post-War phenomenon in Germany: "Hannah Arendt a observé qu'après la guerre les Allemands de tous âges assumaient une faute collective liée au nazisme et disaient se sentir coupables pour ce que leurs parents et leur peuple avaient fait" (Agamben 1998: 122). In two different long speeches, Holga reveals to Quentin her feelings of guilt and shame for belonging to a people responsible for millions of casualties, and her effort to embrace life (even if it is inevitably tarnished by sin) after the Great War: "It was the middle of the war. I had just come out of a class and there were leaflets on the sidewalk. A photograph of a concentration camp. And emaciated people […] I had no idea […] There were many officers in my family. It was our country. It isn't easy to turn against your country" (*AF*, Miller 1981: 140); "Every day, one turned away from people dying on the roads. Until one night I tried to jump from the railing of a bridge. An old soldier pulled me back and slapped my face and made me follow him; he'd lost a leg at Stalingrad, was furious that I would kill myself […] I know how terrible it is to owe what one can never pay. And for a long time after I had the same dream each night – that I had a child; and even in the dream I saw that the child was my life; and it was an idiot. And I wept, and a hundred times I ran away, but each time I came back it had the same dreadful face. Until I thought, if I could kiss it, whatever in it was my own, perhaps I could rest. And I bent to its broken face, and it was horrible… but I kissed it" (*idem*: 148).

> know – you mull around about something for months and all of a sudden there it is and you're at a loss for what to do. Were you able to give me two hours? It might not take that long, but I think it involves a great deal and I'd rather not rush" (AF, Miller 1981: 128).

This major difference between the attitudes of both protagonists was duly noted by Miller himself when, during an interview with Mel Gussow, he stated:

> The play [*After the Fall*] is about a kind of a person that is not Willy Loman. He's somebody who is always trying to figure out what happened to him. Willy is doing that in a way, but he'd rather not know. He would rather just succeed. On any terms. It's the difference between a more intellectualized human being and a less intellectualized one […] I wanted to write plays in which people on stage knew as much as the people in the audience – if that were possible (Gussow 2002: 89).

So, while Quentin is consciously revisiting and drawing meaning from scattered episodes of his past, Willy Loman is invaded by memories and visions he cannot control and which, as John Gassner put it, are "not hurled at us as necessary information but presented as a compulsive act on Willy's part" (Weales 1967: 238).[103] One of the most striking examples of these uncontrollable digressions of the salesman's mind occurs in act I, as Willy speaks to an imagined Ben, while "shooting casino" with Charley:

> WILLY: I'm getting awfully tired, Ben.
> *Ben's music is heard. Ben looks around at everything.*
> CHARLEY: Good, keep playing; you'll sleep better. Did you call me Ben?
> *Ben looks at his watch.*
> WILLY: That's funny. For a second there you reminded me of my brother Ben.
> […]
> BEN: I must make the train, William. There are several properties I'm looking at in Alaska.
> WILLY: Sure, sure! If I'd gone with him to Alaska that time, everything would've been totally different.
> CHARLEY: Go on, you'd froze to death up there.
> WILLY: What're you talking about?
> BEN: Opportunity is tremendous in Alaska, William. Surprised you're not up there.
> WILLY: Sure, tremendous.
> CHARLEY: Heh?
> WILLY: There was the only man I ever met who knew the answers.
> CHARLEY: Who?
> BEN: How are you all?
> WILLY, *taking a pot, smiling*: Fine, fine.
> CHARLEY: Pretty sharp tonight.
> BEN: Is Mother living with you?
> WILLY: No, she died a long time ago.
> CHARLEY: Who? (*DS*, Miller 1958: 154-155).

[103] "*Death of a Salesman*: first impressions, 1949", originally published in *The Theatre in our Times* (1954).

Whereas in *Salesman* a significant part of the plot unfolds in the present tense – it comprises Biff's coming back home, his attempt to enter the New York business world in order to please his father and Willy's suicide, after all his projects and illusions have proved false – in *After the Fall* the present is almost offstage: in terms of dramatic construction, most of the scenes in the present serve a very specific purpose: explaining the past and creating meaningful connections between the scattered memories that run through the protagonist's mind.[104] The only exceptions to this logic are the scenes portraying Quentin and Holga's meeting at the airport, which, taking place in the present, are clearly a projection to a future of commitment, love and forgiveness,[105] an optimist "move towards redemption" (Bigsby 2005a: 232):

> *A jet plane is heard. An airport porter appears, unloads two bags from a rolling cart as Holga, dressed for travel, appears opening her purse, tipping him, and now looking about for Quentin. A distant jet roars in take-off. Quentin glances at his watch, and, coming down to the chair:*
> Six o'clock, Idlewild.
> *Now he glances at Holga, who is still looking about him as in a crowd, and speaks to the Listener.*
> It's that the evidence is bad for promise. But how do you touch the world without a promise? And yet, I mustn't forget the way I wake; I open my eyes each morning like a boy, even now, even now! (*AF*, Miller 1981: 187).[106]
> […]
> *And with his life following him he climbs toward Holga, who raises her arm as though seeing him, and speaks with great love.*

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[104] Almost at the beginning of the play, Miller employs a motif that is recurrent throughout the text and which consists of a sudden appearance of a character or situation (imitating Quentin's fluid thought) and the protagonist's explanation, probably to his psychoanalyst (but, in terms of dramatic effectiveness, to the reader/audience), of what is happening:
Felice enters in sweater and skirt, sits on the floor.
FELICE: I just saw you walking by, that's all, and I thought, why don't I talk to you? You do remember me, don't you?
QUENTIN, *with a glance at Felice*: For instance, I ran into a girl on the street last month; I'd settled her divorce a few years ago and she recognized me. I hadn't had a woman in so long and she obviously wanted to…
FELICE: No! I just wanted to be near you. I love your face. You have a kind face… You remember in your office, when my husband was refusing to sign the papers?
QUENTIN, *to Listener*: It's this: somehow, whatever I look at, I seem to see its death (*AF*, Miller 1981: 130).

[105] In a short article entitled "Arendt, Kristeva, and Arthur Miller: Forgiveness and Promise in *After the Fall*", Brenda Murphy presents a rather optimistic reading of *After the Fall*, based upon the ideas of forgiveness, promise and moral responsibility: "Quentin seeks to make a promise that signifies hope for the future through the love between him and Holga, but to do so, he must first find forgiveness for the guilt of the past […] Through Quentin's therapeutic drama, Miller suggests that it is only by embracing the totality of human nature – including the capacity for evil, which, as Arendt carefully documented, showed itself so horrifying in the twentieth century – that it is possible to find one's way to the 'wager on rebirth' that is the promise. Before one can love, one must forgive, which includes forgiving oneself one's humanity" (Murphy 2002: 314, 416).

[106] The airport scene, which closes Act One, is picked up as a very brief opening scene in Act Two, immediately followed by Quentin's memory of his relationship with his first wife Louise, even before they were married: "*She* [Holga] *is gone as Louise rushes on from another point, a ribbon in her hair, a surgical mask hanging from her neck, a lab technician's smock open to show her sweater and long skirt from the thirties. A hospital attendant is mopping the floor behind her. She sees 'Quentin.'*
LOUISE : Hello! I just got my final grades! I got an A on that paper you wrote! Ya – the one on Roosevelt. I'm a Master!" (*AF*, Miller 1981: 189).

HOLGA: Hello!
He comes to a halt a few yards from her. A whispering goes up from all his people. He straightens against it and walks toward her, holding out his hand.
QUENTIN: Hello! (*idem*: 242).

Unlike *Death of a Salesman*, which could perfectly be described as a "dramatic epilogue", according to Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's definition[107] – after all, Willy's suicide is just the last episode of his story of decadence and self-disappointment as well as the last twist of the knife in the Loman family's complete disintegration – *After the Fall*, followed by *Incident at Vichy*, inaugurates a stage in Miller's writing which is marked by an optimistic belief in the ability of man, through his own actions, to transform his and other people's lives. Many critics have agreed on a reading of *After the Fall* as a hopeful and redeeming text. Christopher Bigsby, a widely renowned authority in Millerian scholarship, besides considering it "Miller's most ambitious play" (Bigsby 2000: 101), wrote in his *Modern American Drama 1945-2000* that,

> [w]e are the product not of the past but of what we choose to make of that past and that is the grace which this play offers and his earlier works did not. This is the first major play in which he does not consign a major character to death. Quentin is redeemed not merely by virtue of acknowledging his own guilt but by accepting guilt itself or, more strictly, responsibility (*idem*: 102).

Janet N. Balakian, in the very comprehensive essay "The Holocaust, the Depression, and McCarthyism: Miller in the sixties", included in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*, shares most of Bigsby's view on the ending of *After the Fall*, by making the following assertion:

> it is this knowledge [of human nature] that enables Quentin to commit himself to Holga, the woman who finally redeems him at the end of the play, because she shares his understanding. What she has seen in the Holocaust, he has seen in his personal and professional life. Having grappled with his past and accepted his complicity, he is at last able to embrace life and move on. Thus the play celebrates human will, and, ultimately, a flawed love, as the real redeemer, while formally and thematically identifying memory as the path to responsibility (Bigsby 1997: 124).

The fact that Balakian stresses the importance of memory in relation to moral responsibility is quite interesting because, no matter how different *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* are, it is precisely memory – the representation of its workings and the way it reshapes the

[107] Discussing Ibsen's dramaturgy in *Théâtres Intimes*, Sarrazac describes most of his plays as the closing climax, or epilogue, of a long plot that started way back in the past: "Lorsqu'ils entrent en scène, les personnages de *Hedda Gabler* ou de *Rosmersholm*, du *Canard Sauvage* ou de *Solness le constructeur* ont déjà incubé comme une maladie ce 'roman familial' qui couvre leur existence commune et remonte jusqu'avant leur naissance. Il ne leur reste plus qu'à en jouer le climax, le dénouement, la Catastrophe" (Sarrazac 1989: 15).

individual in the present – that binds both plays together. In *Memory in Play*, a panoramic work about the dramatic representation of memory from the Greeks to modernity, Attilio Favorini, who concedes great importance to *Salesman* and *After the Fall*, defined "memory play" thus:

> A memory play, by my definition, is one in which the intention to remember and/or forget comes prominently to the fore, with or without the aid of a remembering narrator; in which the phenomenon of memory is a distinct and central area of the drama's attention; in which memory is presented as a way of knowing the past […] or in which memory or forgetting serves as a crucial factor in self-formation and/or self-deconstruction (Favorini 2008: 138).

Being very successful attempts to articulate the spontaneity of memory associations inside the human mind – without the presence of a formal narrator that, like Tom of *The Glass Menagerie*, a self-entitled "memory play", introduces the past in chronological order – both plays feature the act of remembering and the subjective construction of the past as absolutely decisive elements in the molding of individual personalities and their course of action in the present. Once again, as Favorini stated, while discussing the turn of contemporary drama to perspectivism and psychology, "the modernist path toward understanding self and subjectivity goes through the forest of memory" (*idem*: 88). In the case of both *Salesman* and *After the Fall* (and, many years later, of *The Ride down Mount Morgan* and *Mr. Peters' Connections*), Miller realized that the centrality of memory and of the free flow of human consciousness required a particular form that went beyond mere dramatic conventions. In *Théorie du Drame Moderne*, Peter Szondi discusses *Death of a Salesman* as an example of the paradigm change that he believed was affecting modern drama, more and more influenced by other literary modes, namely the narrative (the epic). In the chapter dedicated to Miller's play, the German scholar pointed out two characteristics which I consider absolutely fundamental in the dramatic structure of *Salesman*, but also of *After the Fall*: on the one hand, the articulation of memory, its uncontrollable stream and simultaneity within the human mind, and, on the other, the subjective construction of reality. As Szondi wrote:

> On ne contraint plus le passé à s'exprimer par le discours au cours d'affrontements dramatiques […] Au lieu de cela, le passé est représenté tel qu'il se manifeste dans la vie même: de sa propre volonté, par la *mémoire involontaire* (Proust). Il reste ainsi une expérience subjective […] Mais c'est bien le souvenir qui constitue la voie nouvelle – même si le cinéma la connaît depuis longtemps sous le nom de *flash-back* – par laquelle on introduit le passé, au-delà du dialogue. La scène se transforme sans cesse pour présenter le spectacle que la *mémoire involontaire* offre au commis-voyageur" (Szondi 1965: 144-145).

Regarding the play's subjectivist or monodramatic representation of reality, Szondi noted that all the characters who appear in the past scenes are nothing but projections of Willy's memory and, therefore, become subordinated to his subjectivity: "Ceux-ci ne sont plus des *dramatis personae* autonomes, mais ils apparaissent dans leur rapport au sujet central, tout comme les figures projetées sur écran du théâtre expressionniste" (*idem*: 145).

In fact, Arthur Miller was very much aware – on a theoretical level – of these two characteristics and of how important it was to grant them dramatic prominence through adequate formal devices.[108] In spite of the 15-year interval that separates *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* – a period during which Miller's writing obviously changed and evolved – the playwright described both plays in very similar terms and seems to have envisioned the same purpose for them: the theatrical representation of the inner processes of the human mind. In the introduction to the first volume of his *Collected Plays*, Miller claimed:

> I wished to create a form which, in itself as a form, would literally be the process of Willy Loman's way of mind […] its form seems the form of a confession, for that is how it is told, now speaking of what happened yesterday, then suddenly following some connection to a time twenty years ago, then leaping even further back and then returning to the present and even speculating about the future (Miller 1958: 24).

Likewise, in "*Salesman* at fifty" (1999), the author continued enhancing the importance of the mind – and its flowing stream of never-ending associations, which was pointed out by William James and turned into an obsession for modernist writers, such as Joyce, Woolf or Proust – in the dramatic construction of the play. Clarifying his purpose with a prosaic example (as he often did), Miller stated:

> What I had before me was the way the mind – at least my mind – actually worked. One asks a policeman for directions; as one listens, the hairs sticking out of his nose become important, reminding one of a father, brother, son with the same feature, and one's conflict with him or one's friendship come to mind, and all this over a period of seconds while objectively taking note of how to get to where one wants to go" (Miller 2000: 272).

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[108] In *Timebends*, his autobiography, the playwright explains how he managed to find the perfect form for *Salesman* from a fortuitous encounter with his uncle, Manny Newman. After accidently running into Miller in the lobby of the Colonial Theatre in Boston (where *All my Sons* was playing) and being greeted by him, Newman replied, oblivious to the greeting and without any logical transition, "Buddy [his son] is doing very well" (Miller 2012b: 131). This episode was so striking for Miller that he commented: "it was a signal to me of the new form that until now I had only tentatively imagined could exist […] how wonderful, I thought, to do a play without transitions at all, dialogue that would simply leap from bone to bone of a skeleton that would not for an instant cease being added to, an organism as strictly economic as a leaf, as trim as an ant" (*ibidem*).

This hallucinating spiral of connections between dozens of distinct thoughts and memories – which has usually been an object of representation for the narrative, ever since the bloom of the modern psychological novel, at the beginning of the 20th century[109] – is clearly a core-element of *Salesman*. In the play, Willy's current physical and emotional breakdown, and the at least partial recognition of his failure to attain the success he was promised by America,[110] is counterbalanced by memories of a past during which he still had the energy to enwrap his wife, Linda, and the kids in grand illusions[111] – "Someday I'll have my own business" (*DS*, Miller 1958: 144) – but also in which he made the first crucial mistakes that paved the way for the estrangement from his sons and his current decadence.[112]

With *After the Fall*, which is a dramatic rendition of Quentin's mental activity during a process of self-analysis (we cannot be sure whether he is in a therapy session, chatting with a friend or even talking to himself),[113] Miller takes the highly subjective association of

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[109] James Joyce's *Ulysses* is certainly a good example of a copious use of the interior monologue technique. Almost at the beginning of the novel, in chapter 3, the reader has access to Stephen Dedalus's flow of thoughts and reminiscences, while he takes a stroll: "Here. Am I going to Aunt Sara's or not? My consubstantial father's voice. Did you see anything of your artist brother Stephen lately? No? Sure he's not down in Strasburg terrace with his aunt Sally? Couldn't he fly a bit higher than that, eh? And and and and tell us Stephen, how is your uncle Si? O weeping God, the things I married into. De boys up in de hayloft. The drunken little costdrawer and his brother, the cornet player. Highly respectable gondoliers. And skeweyed Walter sirring his father, no less. Sir. Yes, sir. No, sir. Jesus wept: and no wonder, by Christ" (Joyce 1922: 39).

[110] In a conversation with Leonard Moss (1980), Miller commented that Willy's – and most Americans' – biggest frustration is precisely not being able to live up to the American dream, the mythology of absolutely guaranteed success and happiness: "What bothers everyone in this country? Frustration. You are surrounded with what you think is opportunity. But you can't grab on to it. In other countries there's no opportunity, so there's just a general feeling of fatality. Here, no matter what happens to the economy, everybody can think of somebody who made it" (Roudané 1987: 326).

[111] In "*Salesman* at fifty", Miller defined Willy's idealism and his naïve megalomania thus: "Willy rapidly took over my imagination and became something that has never existed before, a salesman with his feet on the subway stairs and his head in the stars" (Miller 2000: 272).

[112] Soon after coming home from his unfortunate trip to Connecticut (right at the beginning of the play) and becoming aware that his estranged son Biff is back from the West, Willy remembers one of Ben's visits to the Lomans' household and discloses his repressed doubts and apprehensions about the way he raised Happy and Biff – as two reckless, naïve and idealist young men, who thought that being "well-liked" was enough to be successful. First, he seems proud of the juvenile energy and initiative they put into stealing:
"CHARLEY: Listen, if they steal any more from that building the watchman'll put the cops on them!
LINDA, *to Willy*: Don't let Biff…
Ben laughs lustily.
WILLY: You shoulda seen the lumber they brought home last week. At least a dozen six-by-tens worth all kinds of money.
CHARLEY: Listen, if that watchman –
WILLY: I gave them hell, understand. But I got a couple of fearless characters there.
CHARLEY: Willy, the jails are full of fearless characters" (*DS*, Miller 1958: 158).
But then, he shows some concern about the consequences of his educating methods:
"WILLY: Ben, my boys – can't we talk? They'd go into the jaws of hell for me, see, but I –
BEN: William, you're being first-rate with your boys. Outstanding, manly chaps!
WILLY, *hanging on to his words*: Oh, Ben, that's good to hear! Because sometimes I'm afraid that I'm not teaching them the right kind of – Ben, how should I teach them?" (*idem*: 159).

[113] In "Miller in the sixties", Janet N. Balakian quotes Miller's claim that the Listener is none other than Quentin himself: "The Listener […] is, according to Miller, Quentin himself, 'turned at the edge of the abyss to look at his experience, his nature and his time" (Bigsby 1997: 120-121). Much as I respect the author's take on his own

scattered images and memories, which is successfully employed in *Salesman*, much further. Christopher Bigsby even uses the term "kaleidoscope", which I find very appropriate, because it stresses precisely the aspects of fragmentation and simultaneity involved in the play, to describe it: "Meaning resides in the individual fragments, in the juxtapositions and in the accumulating logic of layered moments, words, actions. This is a kaleidoscope in which the protagonist and, beyond him, the playwright, discovers the patterns, the stories that will emerge with each shake of the hand" (Bigsby 2005a: 229). When, in a 1964 interview for *Show*, Arthur Miller spoke about the form of *After the Fall*, he almost replicated what he had said, since the Introduction to the *Collected Plays*, about *Death of a Salesman*:

> It's an open evolution of a concept on a stage, an attempt to give form to life before your eyes […] The play is a continuous stream of meaning. It's not built on what happens next in terms of the usual continuity of a tale – but upon what naked meaning grows out of the one before. And the movement expands from meaning to meaning, openly, without any bulling around. The way a mind would go in quest of a meaning, the way a new river cuts its bed, seeking the path to contain its force […] But all of it in the open, before your eyes, creating its own form (Roudané 1987: 69).

It is rather curious that Miller uses the metaphor of the river – just like William James speaks of the *stream* of consciousness – to describe the formal processes of the play. In fact, this river that is Quentin's consciousness, incessantly flowing and connecting different thoughts and memories, is the basis of the dramatic construction of *After the Fall*. As an example of this technique, there is a short episode in Act One, in which Quentin is battling with the big question – how can we live and commit to others knowing that we are inherently guilty and doomed to sin and betrayal, and that no final redemption is in store for us? This thought immediately triggers the memory of his holidays in Europe with Holga, of his deceased mother and of Felice, the woman he once helped to get a divorce:

> QUENTIN: Holga… I bless your uncertainty. Maybe that's why you're so wonderful to be with. You don't seem to be looking for some goddam moral *victory*. Forgive me, I didn't mean to be distant with you. I – *Looks up at the tower* – think this place frightens me! And how is that possible? All empty!
> HOLGA: I'll get the flowers. And maybe we can buy some cheese and apples and eat while we drive!
> *She starts away.*
> QUENTIN: And you forgive me?
> HOLGA – *turns, and with great love*: Yes! I'll be right back! And we'll go right away!
> *She hurries away.*
> *Quentin stands in stillness a moment; the presence of the tower bores in on him; its color changes; he now looks up at it and addresses the Listener* […]

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work, I believe Miller was deliberately ambiguous with regard to the figure of the Listener, as Quentin's first speech in the play, which was quoted on page 84), demonstrates.

QUENTIN: Why do I *know* something here? […] I can see the convoys grinding up this hill; and I inside; no one knows my name and yet they'll smash my head on a concrete floor! And no appeal […] Yes! It's that I no longer see some last appeal, and here there was none either! Socialism once, then love; some final hope is gone that always saved before the end!
Mother appears; at the same time her coffin appears above.
MOTHER: Not too much cake, darling, there'll be a lot of food at this wedding. *Calling upstage.* Fanny? Cut him a small piece… well, not *that* small!
QUENTIN: Mother! That's strange. And murder. Or is it her comfort brings her to me in this place? […] Why can't I mourn her? And Holga wept in there… why can't I weep? Why do I feel an understanding with this slaughterhouse?
Now Felice approaches, raising her arm.
I don't understand what I'm supposed to be to anyone!
Felice is gone. Mother laughs (*AF*, Miller 1981: 141-142).[114]

Since both plays mainly revolve around their protagonists' subjective take on reality (although, as I have already claimed, *Death of a Salesman* still combines the representation of Willy's intimate thoughts with an intersubjective plot), there is not, on Miller's part, a preoccupation with establishing a linear chronological order between events. There is, instead, an intentional juxtaposition of scattered and fragmented elements (which becomes a rather challenging experience for an audience "programmed" to follow a straight plot), just as they supposedly appear and produce meaning in both Willy and Quentin's consciousnesses. Therefore, I do agree with Austin E. Quigley when he stated, in "Setting the scene. *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*", that

> [i]t is in their capacity to have their unfolding events reconfigured into differing narratives that the episodic structures of *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* invite comparison. In both cases Miller promotes and controls this reconfiguration by deploying not just a sequence of nonchronological events but also a series of redefined relationships among images, events and issues (Brater 2005: 68).

By emphasizing very subjective relationships of meaning and the connection between apparently unrelated episodes, but which make perfect sense in Willy and Quentin's minds, Miller was clearly trying to remove the readers or spectators from the usual intersubjective dynamic of the dramatic mode, in which the characters exteriorize their thoughts, in order to pull them into the intimate and subjective realm of his protagonists. He was, therefore,

[114] In several moments of the play, the author manages to even represent extremely quick thoughts and rapid associations, just as short stimuli of Quentin's memory, as it is stated in the opening stage direction: "People appear and disappear instantaneously, as in the mind; but it is not necessary that they walk off the stage" (*AF*, Miller 1981: 127). One instance (many can be found) of this motif is when Quentin remembers his conversation about love with Felice, which immediately triggers the memory of the women he loved in his life:
"QUENTIN: Honey… you never stop loving whoever you loved. Hatred doesn't wipe it out.
Louise appears, brushing her hair. Maggie sits up from the upper platform, her breathing beginning to be heard. And Quentin becomes active and agitated […] *Holga appears beneath the tower, her arms full of flowers* […] *Holga is gone, and Maggie and Louise*" (*idem*: 131).

following the tradition of Strindbergian and expressionist drama of the self as well as the concept of *monodrama*, especially as theorized by Nikolai Evreinov. In the 1913 text "Introduction au monodrame", the Russian playwright and director went beyond the traditional meaning of monodrama[115] and redefined it as a theatrical creation that, in order to push to the limit the principle of identification between the spectator and the scene, subordinated the dramatic reality and all its characters to the subjective perception of the protagonist. Influenced by some of the commonplaces of psychology at the time, Evreinov believed that our perception of reality is inevitably limited: "La psychologie enseigne que la capacité de notre âme à la perception est limitée en ce sens qu'elle concentre son activité sur une chose immanquablement au détriment d'une autre" (Evreinov 1999: 151).

Therefore, for Evreinov, the spectators can only have an absolute theatrical experience and be *sucked* into the dramatic scene if there is a deep sense of identification – which generates the feeling of co-motion – between each spectator and one single character.[116] This implies, of course, that this character's inner life is overtly exposed and that every aspect of the dramatic dynamic – from other characters to the plot and the settings – be presented as envisioned by the protagonist. And this is exactly what monodrama means to Evreinov. As he often repeated in his essay: "le type de représentation dramatique qui, aspirant à communiquer le plus pleinement au spectateur l'état d'âme du personnage, montre sur la scène le monde qui l'entoure tel qu'il est perçu par le personnage à tout moment de son existence scénique" (*idem*: 153). Evreinov's whole conceptualization of monodrama is clearly very close to expressionist drama, because both are based upon the projection of one character's subjectivity and inner experience. Again, as Evreinov wrote, "le spectacle extérieur doit être l'expression du spectacle intérieur" (*idem*:157) and "[t]oute notre activité sensible est subordonnée à un processus de projection, sur un objet extérieur, de transformations purement subjectives" (*idem*: 159).

Considered, by Joseph Danan, the dramatic equivalent of the narrative interior monologue,[117] the monodrama was a fundamental trend for 20th-century drama and its influence on Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*[118] (and, I would add, *After the Fall*), is

[115] "Sous ce mot […] on sous-entendait jusqu'ici un type d'œuvre essentiellement mélodramatique qui était joué du début jusqu'à la fin par un seul acteur […] Cependant, comme on peut aisément le deviner par l'exposé qui précède, j'aurais voulu voir le terme «monodrame» embrasser une notion de représentation dramatique d'un tout autre genre" (Evreinov 1999: 153).

[116] "c'est l'émotion et par ailleurs, dans le but de faciliter la perception, l'émotion d'une seule âme et non de plusieurs, qui doit être prise pour objet véritable de la représentation dramatique" (Evreinov 1999: 152).

[117] "Monodrame (polyphonique)", Joseph Danan, *in* Sarrazac 2010: 122.

[118] It is an interesting fact that, unlike what is usual with regard to most American drama, *Salesman* has been very often considered by Continental critics (from the French and German schools), who tend to focus more on

widely recognized.[119] Both plays feature a mechanism of *internal focalization* – i.e., the audience is fully aware that in *Death of a Salesman* the past episodes are seen through Willy's perspective and that *After the Fall* is nothing but the dramatization of Quentin's own perception of his entire life. The fact that in *Salesman* Willy is, most times, left alone on stage right before starting to reminisce is very significant, in the sense that it highlights his very personal perspective and *warns* the audience about the subjectivity of his memories. In *After the Fall* Miller stresses Quentin's monodrama by resorting to a slightly different device: although the frame of the play is a dialogue between the protagonist and a therapist (or friend), in which they revisit and discuss Quentin's past, the fact is that we neither see Quentin's interlocutor nor hear what he has to say. The playwright introduces, therefore, a false dialogue, in which – although it is possible to guess the interlocutor's lines – only Quentin's words are articulated, because what is really important to retain is the protagonist's view on his own inexorably guilty life:

> QUENTIN: […] And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love – as to an idiot in the house – forgive it; again and again… forever?
> *He is evidently interrupted by the Listener, glances at his watch.*
> No, it's not certainty, I don't feel that. But it does seem feasible… not to be afraid. Perhaps it's all one has. I'll tell her that… Yes, she will, she'll know what I mean. Well, see you again some time. Good luck and thanks (*AF*, Miller 1981: 241).

Likewise, the whole scenic apparatus in *Death of a Salesman*, as indicated in Miller's stage directions (which, of course, can be emphasized or downplayed depending on the different directors), functions as an externalization of Willy's subjective perception of reality. As mentioned above, the light scheme and the change of background patterns, from a stifling cityscape to a profusion of leaves, highlight the protagonist's feelings about a present which, with all its progress and capitalist abundance, seems menacing and decadent to him, and a familial past that keeps being idealized by Willy as the time of a pastoral America in which the Lomans' life was filled with bliss and the promise of a bright future.[120] In *After the Fall*,

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European dramatic experiments. In *Théâtres Intimes*, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac even considers *Salesman* a major influence for contemporary European dramaturgy: "Toujours est-il qu'elle [the play] a joué un rôle incontestable […] dans la généalogie des dramaturgies allemandes et françaises […] érigeant le quotidien en fatalité, Arthur Miller annonce Fassbinder et Kroetz ou Wenzel et Deutsch" (Sarrazac 1989: 108).

[119] As Danan stated, "[l]a postérité de ce théâtre à la première personne est considérable au XXe siècle, et nombreuses sont les pièces qui peuvent être regardées sous l'angle du monodrame: du théâtre expressionniste à *Mariage* de Gombrowicz, de *Mort d'un commis voyageur* d'Arthur Miller à *La Demande d'emploi* de Michel Vinaver" (Sarrazac 2010: 123).

[120] One interesting example of how the light scheme helps materialize Willy's thoughts and hallucinations occurs in Act Two, when the protagonist is at the company's office and starts imagining a conversation with his former

besides the set, which is overtly described in the opening stage direction as a structure that represents Quentin's mind,[121] it is the light scheme that draws the spectators' attention to the protagonist's stream of mental associations, also enhancing Quentin's highly subjective view on events. The most cogent example is perhaps the lighting that gets directed at the conspicuous surveillance tower (a symbol of the Nazi concentration camps), whenever Quentin projects his own feeling of domestic guilt onto a more generalized sense of humanity's depravity and treacherous nature. Expressions such as "*The tower gradually begins to light*" and "*The camp tower comes alive*" (*idem*: 136,164) are quite recurrent in the text. While recalling a day when Elsie, the wife of his friend Lou (who commits suicide for being persecuted during McCarthyism), tried to seduce him, Quentin immediately – and rather unexpectedly – makes the connection with the Holocaust:

> *Elsie appears, about to drop her robe.*
> Why couldn't I simply say, 'Louise, your best friend is treacherous; your newfound dignity suits her purpose'?... No, no, it isn't only that Elsie tempted me, it's worse. If I see a sin why is it in some part mine?
> *Elsie vanishes as the tower appears.*
> Even this slaughterhouse! Could I kill Jews? Throw ice water on prisoners of war and let them freeze to death? Why does something in this place touch my shoulder like an accomplice?... Huh? Please, yes, if you think you know (*idem*: 157).

In his definition of *monodrama* for Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's *Lexique du Drame Moderne et Contemporain*, Joseph Danan points to the seemingly contradictory nature of the form: "le monodrama, dans un geste paradoxal, s'affranchit du monologue et devient «drame d'un seul» mais à plusieurs voix" (Sarrazac 2010: 122). This paradoxical gesture of exploring a polyphonic dynamic, composed of several interacting voices,[122] within a single subjectivity is,

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employer, who has died long ago (this scene was referred to on page 81). Willy's vision of Frank is symbolized on stage by a spotlight pointed at his chair, which is now occupied by Howard, his son: "*On Howard's exit, the light on his chair grows very bright and strange [...] Willy breaks off, staring at the light, which occupies the chair, animating it. He approaches this chair, standing across the desk from it.* Frank, Frank…" (*DS*, Miller 1958: 181).

[121] In an interview published in *The Paris Review* (Summer 1966), the playwright chose Zeffirelli's 1966 Italian production of *After the Fall* (in which Marcello Mastroianni played the leading role) as the perfect scenic execution of his concept for this specific play: "I saw one production which I thought was quite marvelous. That was the one Zeffirelli did in Italy. He understood that this was a play which reflected the world as one man saw it […] The sides of these steel frames were covered, just like a camera is, but the actors could appear or disappear on the stage at any depth. Furthermore, pneumatic lifts silently and invisibly raised the actors up, so that they could appear for ten seconds – then disappear […] So that the whole image of all this happening inside a man's head was there from the first second, and remained right through the play" (Miller 1978: 282, 288). Compared to Zeffirelli's *mise en scène*, "[t]he other productions that I've seen have all been *realistic* in the worst sense" (*idem*: 283).

[122] Ever since the publication of Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, the term "polyphony" – employed by the Russian scholar to describe the weaving of a multitude of voices and perspectives in Dostoyevsky's

I believe, a structural characteristic of both *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*. In the 1964 drama, it is utterly evident, since all the characters, besides appearing on stage through Quentin's perspective, do not stand on their own personal relevance. They are, instead, reminders to the protagonist of his qualities and flaws, of the successful and the failed experiences in his life: Quentin's mother reminds him of family betrayal and of how his education could have been a humiliation for his almost illiterate father; the memory of Mickey and Lou takes him back to the lamentable episodes of friends who became informers during MacCarthyism and his fear of standing by the dissidents; Louise reminds Quentin of his failure to unconditionally love someone and Maggie of his incapacity to distinguish altruistic love from selfish power;[123] Felice and Dan, in all their selflessness and optimism, project on the protagonist's mind Holga' arrival and the promise of a renewed future. The playwright's stage directions for the last scene of the play express rather clearly the idea that all the characters hold a dramatic existence as long as Quentin summons them, while reminiscing about his past:

> *He turns upstage. He hesitates;* all his people face him. *He walks past Louise, pausing; but she turns her face away. He goes on and pauses beside Mother, who lowers her head in uncomprehended sorrow, and gestures as though he touched her chin and she looks up at him and dares a smile, and he smiles back. He pauses at his dejected Father and Dan, and with a look he magically makes them stand. Felice is about to raise her hand in blessing – he shakes her hand, aborting her enslavement. Mickey and Lou are standing together […] Now he arrives at Maggie; she rises from the floor webbed in with demons, trying to awake* (*AF*, Miller 1981: 242; my emphasis).

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novels – has been constantly evoked in the study of modernist and postmodern art, in order to highlight its shattered, contradictory and polyphonic worldview, in contrast with the *classical* monologism.

[123] The relationship between Quentin and Maggie is an overt rewriting of Albert Camus's novel *La Chute* (1956), in which Clamence, a successful lawyer like Quentin, guiltily admits to having once ignored a woman who was leaning over a bridge, ready to commit suicide. In *After the Fall*, although Quentin is eventually unable to save Maggie from her self-destructive nature, he managed, sometimes, to keep her *demons* and the devious managers and producers at bay. Miller's main question, however, was: how selfless are we in our decision to save someone? In an interview for *The Theatre Journal* (1980), the author said: "I changed the question posed in *The Fall*, probably to a more disastrous one: what if he had attempted to rescue her, and indeed managed to, and then discovered that he had failed in his mission – to overcome his own egoism which his action may even have expressed; that there were innumerable complications about rescuing somebody as a pure act of love? […] what if she disbelieved in his good faith and claimed to perceive his selfishness in saving her?" (Roudané 1987: 336). In one of the most climatic scenes of the play – in which Quentin and Maggie have their last argument, before she dies of a barbiturate overdose – the protagonist discloses his suspicion that saving and protecting Maggie was more a quest for power over another human being than an act of pure love: "QUENTIN: […] He… loved her enough to raise her from the dead. But he's God, see […] and God's power is love without limit. But when a man dares reach for that […] he is only reaching for power. Whoever goes to save another person with the lie of limitless love throws a shadow on the face of God" (*AF*, Miller 1981: 233).

Although the characters of *Death of a Salesman* appear, in the past scenes, as projections inside Willy's mind and are clearly seen through his point of view,[124] they have an autonomous existence in the dramatic plot that unfolds in the present. However, there is one character that clearly stands out for his unique dramatic ontology and contributes to the monodramatic mode of the play, bringing it closer to Evreinov's definition: Willy's older brother, Ben. In "Introduction au monodrame" the Russian playwright and director includes, at one point, in his definition of *monodrama* the idea of dream and hallucination: "Ce qui se rapproche le plus du monodrame au sens où je l'entends se manifeste dans les œuvres dramatiques qui représentent le rêve ou une hallucination prolongée" (Evreinov 1999: 156-157). The oneiric nature of the play was very evident for Miller, who even wrote, in "*The Salesman* has a birthday" (1950), that "[w]riting in that form was like moving through a corridor in a dream" (Miller 1978: 13). The word *dream* has, in fact, some prominence in the *Salesman*'s stage directions, right from the first paragraphs, in which the general mood and thematic lines (the American dream) of the play are outlined: "*An air of dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality*" (*DS*, Miller 1958: 130).[125]

It is, however, in Willy's relationship with his brother that lies most of the play's hallucinatory and oneiric mood. When the action begins, Ben has already passed away, as we learn during Willy and Charley's chat, while they *shoot some casino*.[126] Nevertheless, he is just as present for Willy as the other characters, because he stubbornly sticks in the protagonist's hallucinating mind and keeps appearing to him (just like King Hamlet's spectre to his son), influencing his final decisions. We never get to see Ben as an autonomous character or even through the eyes of the other family members. He exists as a memory and vision of Willy's disturbed psyche, as the personification of a standard of wealth and success he never achieved and as an enabler of the protagonist's ultimate suicide.[127] Ben – who forsook Willy when he was still a young boy and (according to the protagonist's memory)

[124] There is, I believe, a very strong sense of ambiguity in most scenes of the past, which stems, precisely, from the representation of Willy's subjectivity and which allows us, readers and spectators, to question the version of the past that is presented to us: did Biff and Happy really idolize their father the way Willy remembers? Did he always get to successfully humiliate his hard-working neighbour Charley and his *book-worm* son Bernard?

[125] While discussing the Beijing *mise en scène* of the hotel bedroom scene, in which Willy and his mistress, apparently dialoguing, are indeed "stating their dream-like, disjointed, and intensely compressed positions" (Miller 1983: 151), the playwright claimed that the whole play is suffused with a sense of "hallucinatory surrealism" (*ibidem*).

[126] "WILLY: That's funny. For a second you reminded me of my brother Ben […]
CHARLEY: You never heard from him again, heh? Since that time?
WILLY: Didn't Linda tell you? Couple of weeks ago we got a letter from his wife in Africa. He died" (*DS*, 1958: 154).

[127] "The fact that Ben is dead, and that his appearance in the play is staged only as hallucination, goes along with his characterization as an elusive, distant, and intangible figure. His presence in Willy's life is defined by absence" (Benziman 2005: 33).

came back to visit once – is described, right from his first appearance on stage, as a mythical character, surrounded by a certain mystique: "*Uncle Ben, carrying a valise and an umbrella, enters the forestage from around the right corner of the house. He is a stolid man, in his sixties, with a mustache and an authoritative air. He is utterly certain of his destiny, and there is an aura of far places about him*" (*idem*: 154).

Unlike Charley, Willy's down-to-earth neighbour, Ben has some kind of magic allure for the protagonist: more than an actual relative (because he was absent during Willy's upbringing), he is, for Willy, an authority, a symbol of imperial capitalism and of incommensurable financial and social success. As Galia Benziman wrote, in a cogent essay on the different images and ideas of success presented in the play,[128] "Ben is a fantastic figure not only because he is presented as existing mainly in Willy's memories, but because his life experience (or rhetoric) shows him to be a romantic, almost mythical hero […] From Willy's point of view, his older brother has always had legendary characteristics" (Benziman 2005: 34). In fact, Willy's obsession with his brother's mythical status appears to be materialized by the repetition (in Willy's head) of Ben's emblematic line "Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. *He laughs.* And by God I was rich" (*DS*, Miller 1958: 157).

Since Ben is a character that only appears in Willy's memories and hallucinations, we can never know him and judge his actions objectively. His dramatic appearance is always molded by Willy's subjectivity and it is not hard for the readers and audiences to understand that it is practically impossible to "grasp" Ben (and most episodes of the family's past) without Willy's subjective filter. Is he really that alluring? Is he an indisputable authority? He certainly does not make a great impression on Linda and the kids. However, to Willy – who craved all his life for some contact with his absent father and brother – Ben is an uncontestable parental figure, a successful self-made capitalist who can surely guide his younger brother in the right direction. During the last twenty four hours of his life – while his relationship with Biff proves to have hit the wall and he becomes progressively aware of his failure to live up to America's promise of success – Willy keeps obsessively looking for Ben's approval and validation of his decisions and life choices amongst the memories of the past.

Although he tries to keep his usual facade, by still trying to convince everyone that he excels at selling and not accepting Charley's kind help, Willy cannot help but be intimately

[128] "Success, law, and the law of success: reevaluating *Death of a Salesman*'s treatment of the American Dream" (Benziman 2005).

confronted with what he believes to be a failed life and Ben's (even if imaginary) approval is the only solace available: "Ben, am I right? Don't you think I'm right? I value your advice" (*idem*: 184). Ironically, Ben's advice or sincere approval never existed, since he was always much too busy to mind his brother's issues.[129] However, replicating somehow the medieval image, found in the Faust narrative and many morality plays, of the human protagonist being tempted by the Devil or some incarnation of evil, Willy, moved by a last delusional impulse and believing that the money from his life insurance will turn Biff into the successful entrepreneur he never was, decides to commit suicide, with the incitement and approval of Ben's spectre. The man who was always too busy to guide Willy is the one chosen by the protagonist to counsel him in his pre-suicidal hallucination:

> WILLY: Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket? […] When the mail comes he'll be ahead of Bernard again!
> BEN: A perfect proposition all around.
> WILLY: Did you see how he cried to me? Oh, if I could kiss him, Ben!
> BEN: Time, William, time! (*idem*: 219).

In *Death and a Salesman* and *After the Fall*, whose main dramatic structures revolve (as I have hopefully demonstrated) around the motifs of memory, stream of consciousness and hallucination, and which could be classified as mental plays or psychological monodramas, Miller's main goal was, in my opinion, the exploration of his favourite and recurrent themes of guilt, denial and moral responsibility, but from the very personal and intimate perspective of the protagonists.[130] Both plays draw their readers and spectators into Willy and Quentin's inner doubts, frustrations and feelings of guilt for having failed and betrayed their family and friends or for not being able to live up to the standards set by society. The two texts are perfect examples of what Jean-Pierre Sarrazac described as the intimate trend in contemporary drama, which transforms the most personal and subjective dimensions of humans into dramatic performances, at a moment when the intimate self opens up to others:

> L'intime se définit comme ce qui est le plus au-dedans et le plus essentiel d'un être ou d'une chose, en quelque sorte *l'intérieur de l'intérieur*. L'intime diffère du secret en ce sens qu'il n'a pas vocation à être

[129] In Willy's memories of Ben's visit to Brooklyn, the older brother is impatient, eager to leave the Lomans behind: "BEN, *glancing at his watch*: Haven't the time, William […] *picking up his valise:* I've got to go (*DS*, Miller 1958: 183, 184).

[130] In "The realism of Arthur Miller", Raymond Williams relates precisely Willy's feeling of guilt to the play's expressionistic devices: "the guilt of Willy Loman is not in the same world as that of Joe Keller: it is not a single act, subject to public process, needing complicated grouping and plotting to make it emerge; it is, rather, the consciousness of a whole life. Thus the expressionist method, in the final form of the play, is not a casual experiment, but rooted in the experience" (Weales 1967: 320).

celé mais, au contraire, tourné vers l'extérieur, éversé, offert au regard et à la pénétration de cet autre qu'on a choisi (Sarrazac 1989: 67).

Although there is, in *Salesman*, a blatant concern with social and ethical issues that surpass Willy's intimacy and the family environment of the Lomans,[131] the truth is that the play remains an articulation of the protagonist's very intimate feelings of guilt for having "broken a law without whose protection life is insupportable if not incomprehensible 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 1958: 35);[132] and for having betrayed the trust of his eldest son, Biff. Actually, the fact that the hotel bedroom scene – in which Biff, confronted with Willy's affair, rejects his father's authority – comes last in the protagonist's sequence of memories is quite significant. It hints, according to Daniel E. Schneider (a prominent American psychoanalyst who wrote about the connection between psychoanalysis and art), that the scene is a *repressed memory* which, due to its sexual trauma, Willy strives not to recall, although it is always at the back of his mind, influencing his present-day behaviour towards Biff and Linda.[133]

The main point is that the formal experimentation within the trend of the intimate theatre and psychological monodrama that exists in *Salesman* does not fly in the face of the familial environment that molds the play, which indisputably belongs to the American canon of family drama, and the text does not escape some traditional strokes of Realism, especially

[131] In the essay "The Family in modern drama", Miller stresses that *Salesman* is not the typical American family drama, because it projects the Lomans' problems onto a wider social background: "If, for instance, the struggle in *Death of a Salesman* were simply between father and son for recognition and forgiveness it would diminish in importance. But when it extends itself out of the family circle and into society, it broaches those questions of social status, social honor and recognition, which expand its vision and lift it out of the merely particular toward the fate of the generality of men" (Miller 1978: 74).

[132] In the Introduction to the *Collected Plays* (vol. I), the playwright, asserting Willy's tragic dimension, compares him to Oedipus, in the sense that both broke a fundamental social law and, therefore, must be punished. The interesting point about *Salesman* is that, whether or not we consider it a modern tragedy (a lot has been written on the subject), it is a highly ironic play, since the values Willy dies for are clearly renounced by the *underlying voice* of the playwright. What I mean is that it becomes very evident (mostly through Biff's commentaries, who states on his father's grave, "He had the wrong dreams" [*DS*, Miller 1958: 211]) that the protagonist (and modern-day America itself) has completely mistaken the original meaning of the American dream (freedom, happiness, independence, equality) for material success and social status. As Gerald Berkowitz put it, "the only definition of success available to him [Willy] is measured in dollars, and in numbers that are always beyond his reach" (Berkowitz 1992: 80).

[133] In *The Psychoanalyst and the Artist* (1950), Schneider claims that Willy, more than remembering the hotel scene, re-enacts it in the restaurant restroom: "Pounding his fist on the floor as he re-enacts the repressed scene of pleading with his son to forgive him for sexual philandering, Willy hammers at the present on the anvil of the past" (Weales 1967: 253). Insisting on Willy's re-enactment of this particular scene, Schneider almost paraphrases Freud's theory of repetition in the 1914 essay "Remembering, repeating and working-through", in which he believes that most patients refuse to remember or talk about the past but act it out unconsciously: "the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it" (Freud 1914: 150).

as far as the language employed in the dialogues is concerned.[134] Miller himself commented in a 1953 interview: "I tried to show the façade-like surface realism of life in realistic acting and at the same time melt this away and bring out the half-conscious, subconscious life and combine both of these with the social context in which the action was taking place" (Roudané 1987: 26).

However, in *After the Fall*, Miller steps out of the framework of family drama and aims at addressing wider issues with a supposedly universal ethical importance and emotional appeal. Although the play is frequently acknowledged as one of Miller's most important plays, I believe, following the opinion of critics like Susan Sontag and Christopher Bigsby, that there is a structural mistake in this particular drama. I do not agree, for instance, with Robert Brustein, who, as a supporter of the 1960s avant-garde movement, accused Miller of writing about themes (Depression, Holocaust, McCarthyism) that were irrelevant for a country which was struggling with Vietnam and great social commotion.[135] Miller's dramaturgy revolves, in great part, around these themes, because the playwright thought of them as crucial moments which molded modern-day history (especially America's) and from which more recent events have stemmed.

The question lies, in my opinion, in a discrepancy between form and content, which does not exist in *Salesman*, and in a rather inefficient bridging between the deeply intimate and psychological dimension of the play and its debate of humanity's inherently flawed nature and need for moral responsibility. In "Foreword to *After the Fall*", Miller wrote: "This play, then, is a trial; the trial of a man by his own conscience, his own values, his own deeds" (Miller 1978: 257). As announced by this brief description, *After the Fall* is in fact a journey through Quentin's conscience, through the most personal memories of his past life, during which he tries to account for his sense of guilt (for having been selfish or devious in the course of several relationships with different people) and evaluate himself. However, this intimate mood keeps being interrupted by rather artificial allusions to humanity's guilt and

[134] Many critics are right, I believe, in not overlooking the realistic features of *Death of a Salesman* and in approaching the play's experimentalism with some critical distance. John Gassner, for instance, claimed that the play is a "triumph of poetic realism" and that its main quality is "a question of transmutation within the boundaries of realism, as may be gathered from the fact that there is hardly anything even in the reminiscent scenes […] which is poetic or fantastic […] Essentially, Miller affirms realism in the very process of transcending it" (Weales 1967: 235). Likewise, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac considered *Salesman* to be "l'exemple-type […] de ce théâtre 'quotidienniste' qui conjugue le réalisme et un onirisme de l'essentiel […] Quant au traitement de l'espace domestique, il participe également d'une coexistence harmonieuse […] de la scène réaliste et de la scène du rêve, de l'intersubjectif et de l'intrasubjectif" (Sarrazac 1989: 107). Even Jo Mielziner, the set designer for the first production of the play, acknowledged in his work journal the combination between realism and theatricality with regard to the scenery: "Given this rather stark background, whatever props there were would have to be highly significant in character. One thing in particular loomed large: the icebox" (Weales 1967: 193).

[135] "The Unseriousness of Arthur Miller", in *The Third Theatre* (Brustein 1969).

somehow forced references to horrifying war crimes, like the Holocaust: "To know, and even happily that we meet unblessed; not in some garden of wax fruit and painted trees, that lie of Eden, but after, after the Fall, after many, many deaths" (*AF*, Miller 1981: 241).

Many have asked themselves if Quentin's guilt (for having neglected his wife or abandoned a friend in need) can really be compared to the guilt of those who killed millions of people during the Second World War, because Miller seems indeed to suggest so. For Christopher Bigsby, "[t]he link between public and private world is not always convincingly established. Like any synthesizing account of history it rests on generalizations about human experience whose plausibility is at times suspect" (Bigsby 2000: 99). Likewise, Susan Sontag, a very fierce but sensible critic of Arthur Miller, deconstructed the play quite sagaciously:

> Miller's play stands or falls on the authenticity of its moral seriousness, and on its being about 'big' issues. But, unfortunately, Miller chose as the method of his play the garrulous monologue of the psychoanalytic confessional […] The Everymanish hero […] and the timeless, placeless interior setting gives the show away: whatever stirring public issues After the Fall may confront, they are treated as the furniture of a mind. That places an awful burden on Miller's 'Quentin, a contemporary man,' who must literally hold the world on his head (Sontag 1961: 141).

More than exploring, like *Salesman*, the intimate dilemmas and culpability of the protagonist, the play tries to transform Quentin into a representative of something bigger, of humanity's feelings of "metaphysical guilt".[136] This rather forced generalization of an individual's intimate life – especially in a play which aims at being the articulation of the protagonist's psyche and mental associations – is what makes *After the Fall* a more inconsistent play than *Death of a Salesman*. Knowing that at the core of Miller's dramatic project was always the social dimension of man, I may take a risk in asserting, nevertheless, that as an American playwright he is undoubtedly more comfortable writing about the family and addressing social and political issues from the private environment of the American home. Maybe Sontag was right when she wrote, in "Going to theatre, etc.": "The best modern plays are those devoted to raking to private, rather than public hells" (*idem*: 140).

[136] The term is a direct reference to Karl Jaspers' *La Culpabilité Allemande* (1948), in which the German philosopher argues that humanity suffers from an inevitable feeling of guilt, even when individuals are not directly involved in crimes or offensive actions: "Il existe entre les hommes, du fait qu'ils sont des hommes, une solidarité en vertu de laquelle chacun se trouve co-responsable de toute injustice et de tout mal commis dans le monde, et en particulier des crimes commis en sa présence, ou sans qu'il les ignore. Si je ne fais pas ce que je peux pour les empêcher, je suis complice. Si je n'ai pas risqué ma vie pour empêcher l'assassinat d'autres hommes, si je me suis tenu coi, je me sens coupable en un sens qui ne peut être compris de façon adéquate, ni juridiquement, ni politiquement, ni moralement. Que je vive encore, après que de telles choses se sont passées, pèse sur moi comme une culpabilité inexpiable" (Jaspers 1948: 60-61).

Chapter Three: *The Brain is inside the Event*
– *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock* –

When asked, during a 1976 interview with Robert A. Martin and Richard D. Meyer, if he would consider rewriting his plays, namely his apprentice works, such as *All My Sons* (1948), Arthur Miller replied: "No, I wouldn't know what to do with it [*laughter*]. I just wouldn't know – that's the way it is. It's a chapter of your life and there it is" (Roudané 1987: 272). However, the production and publication history of *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock* contradicts Miller's statement, since both plays were rewritten and different versions have been circulating until today.

In 1955, Miller wrote a semi-autobiographical one-act play, *A Memory of Two Mondays*, at the request of director Martin Ritt, who was planning an Off-Broadway production. The text – which is a naïve and slightly sentimental portrayal of a young man's coming of age and departure for university in the 1930s having as background the dull routine of a car-parts warehouse[137] – was too short, which led Ritt to ask Miller for a double-bill. The first version of *A View from the Bridge* was, then, a one-act curtain raiser to a play that has hardly been performed since 1955. The following year, Miller rewrote the play for its London production, directed by Peter Brook. The revised text, which was extended to two acts and written exclusively in prose (the first version featured several passages in verse), became much more popular than the first version, being much more frequently chosen by theatre directors and getting regular editions.

The American Clock, on the other hand, had a more intricate writing trajectory. Miller began writing the play in 1970 but kept working on it throughout the whole decade, always making "seemingly endless changes" (Miller 2012a: 774).[138] Although the playwright directed a workshop production at the University of Michigan, the play had its first official premiere on 24th May 1980 at the Spoleto Festival's Dockside Theatre in Charleston (South Carolina). It had a run in Baltimore before opening in November at the Biltmore Theatre, in

[137] The play's candid autobiographical tone and its portrayal of one of the most striking periods in Miller's life – The Depression – denote the playwright's very personal relationship with *A Memory of Mondays*. In the Introduction to his *Collected Plays*, he even wrote: "Nothing in this book was written with greater love, and for myself I love nothing printed here better than this play" (Miller 1958: 49).

[138] The quote is from the prefatory note to the 1989 edition of *The Archbishop's Ceiling; The American Clock: two plays*, entitled "Conditions of freedom: two plays from the seventies". The text is included in Tony Kushner's edition of Miller's dramatic works (from which I am quoting) and in the expanded version of the playwright's essays by DaCapo (Miller 1978).

New York, to withering reviews. The first edition of the play dates back to 1982 and is still in print. However, after the Broadway failure, Miller revised *The American Clock* once again for its 1984 production at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles (directed by Gordon Davidson) and the much acclaimed 1986 production at the British National Theatre, directed by Peter Wood. The final version of the play was published by the Grove Press in 1989.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is relevant to compare and confront the two versions of both plays because they tell us much about Miller's concern with the theatricality of his texts and his aim to perfect a dramatic form that is not clear, or did not work effectively on stage, in the first version. Whereas the previous chapter was a study of Miller's first two mental plays, in which – paraphrasing the playwright – most of the events were presented as from within the protagonists' mind, in this section I intend to explore another tendency of the author's dramatic project, exemplified by *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock*: the hybridization between drama and the narrative or epic form.

In *Théorie du Drame Moderne*, a work in which Peter Szondi presents an outlook on modern drama framed by historical poetics (following the path of Hegel, Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno), the German scholar thoroughly described what he considered to be the major transformation in contemporary dramaturgies: the epicization of the dramatic form which culminated, according to Szondi, in Brecht's Epic Theatre.[139] Arising from an unsustainable dialectic between content and the conventional dramatic form – defined by Szondi as an intersubjective action in the present within an absolute fictional dynamic, cut off from everything that is exterior – the assimilation of epic characteristics by modern and contemporary dramaturgies is, for the German scholar, based on the distance principle between the subject (narrator) and the object (the narrated event). As Szondi wrote, grounding his argument on Hegel's reasoning,

> le principe de la forme dramatique, c'est quasiment la négation de toute distinction entre sujet et objet. «Cette objectivité qui provient du sujet, ainsi que cette subjectivité qui parvient à être représentée dans sa réalisation et dans sa validité objective (…) fournit la forme et le contenu de la poésie dramatique en tant qu'action», écrit Hegel dans son *Esthétique* (Szondi 1965: 71).

Therefore, Szondi proceeds, "[l]a contradiction interne du drame moderne, c'est par conséquent l'opposition entre une fusion dynamique du sujet et de l'objet dans la forme et leur distinction statique dans le contenu" (*idem*: 72).

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[139] Szondi tries quite often to approximate many of the dramatic tendencies and innovations taking place at the beginning of the 20th century – some of which were mentioned in previous sections of this dissertation – to Brecht's epic principles, which seems, in my opinion, slightly reductive.

According to Szondi's theory of the epicization of drama, the distance principle is usually achieved by the presence of an *epic self*, a voice that stands out from the enclosed dramatic dynamic in order to expose, narrate, or comment it. Right at the beginning of *Théorie du Drame Moderne*, the author states that "le concept d'«épique» s'impose: il désigne un trait structurel commun à l'épopée, au récit, au roman et à d'autres genres, c'est-à-dire la présence de ce que l'on a nommé le «sujet de la forme épique» ou le «moi épique»" (*idem*: 12). Further on (in the chapter entitled "Transition. Théorie du changement de style"), while discussing the formal innovations introduced by proto-modernist playwrights, such as Strindberg, Maeterlinck and Hauptmann, Szondi illustrates his definition of the *epic self* by evoking old Hummel, from Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata*:

> Le même problème [of working out the contradiction between the dramatic form and the demands of new content, which called for the epic] se pose à Strindberg dans la *Sonate des spectres*. Il le résout en introduisant un personnage qui sait tout sur tous les autres et qui peut ainsi, à l'intérieur de la fable dramatique, devenir leur narrateur épique (*idem*: 72).

Besides identifying, in some particular dramas by the playwrights named above, the introduction of an *epic narrator* and defining it as a figure who resorts to his or her omniscient knowledge of the dramatic situation in order to present it to the public (whether it is an audience or readership), Peter Szondi – and, after him, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac – related the odd inclusion, within a supposedly dramatic dynamic, of an epic self (or narrative voice) to the appearance, in the most ground-breaking drama of the 1890s and 1900s, of an enigmatic and outcast figure: the Stranger. A common point between plays such as Strindberg's *Burned House* (1907), Maeterlink's *Intérieur* (1894), or Hauptmann's *Before Sunrise* (1889), the Stranger – the one who as an outsider conveys a distanced outlook on the dramatic situation – was, according to Szondi and Sarrazac, a symptom of the crisis (or change of paradigm) that progressively began assailing the dramatic form, pushing it towards a hybridization with the narrative (and also poetic) mode.[140] Describing the structure of Hauptmann's *Before Sunrise*,

[140] While Peter Szondi evokes the influence of the epic mode over the dramatic form, by resorting to the term *epicization*, and Mikhail Bakhtin speaks of the phenomenon of *novelization* of drama (Bakhtin 1981), Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, in his seminal *L'Avenir du Drame*, opted for the concept of *rhapsodization*, in an attempt to achieve a more complete description of the process of transmutation of drama, which surpasses the influence of the epic or narrative. For Sarrazac, the trademark of contemporary drama is the total hybridization between the dramatic form and many other genres and verbal manifestations. As he explains, modern dramaturgies are made from "des croisements, non plus entre genres littéraires historiquement délimités […] mais entre les grands *modes poétiques*, qui renvoient, eux, à des formes originelles et sont dotés d'une assise anthropologique: l'épique, le dramatique, voire le lyrique" (Sarrazac 1981: 43).

the German scholar analyzes the introduction of an epic voice in the dramatic context and distinguishes this new narrative figure from the classical *raisonneur*:

> L'introduction d'un étranger, Alfred Loth, illustre tout cela […] La famille Krause accède à la représentation dramatique en se dévoilant peu à peu au visiteur. Elle apparaît au lecteur ou au spectateur dans la perspective de Loth, comme un objet de ses recherches scientifiques. Sous le masque de Loth, c'est donc le sujet épique qui entre en scène. L'action dramatique elle-même n'est rien d'autre que le travestissement thématique du principe formel épique: la visite de Loth à la famille Krause incarne, sur le plan thématique, le narrateur épique approchant de son objet, une démarche qui fonde la forme.
> Ce cas n'est pas unique dans la littérature dramatique du tournant du siècle. Le personnage de l'étranger, qui rend cela possible, fait partie de ses caractéristiques les plus étudiées. Mais on n'a pas vu les circonstances de son apparition et on l'a assimilé au *raisonneur* du drame classique. Pourtant cette identité n'en est pas une. Certes, l'étranger raisonne, lui aussi. Mais le *raisonneur* classique […] n'était pas un étranger, il faisait partie de la société qu'il rendait totalement transparente. En revanche, l'apparition de l'étranger dit que les hommes qu'il fait accéder à la représentation dramatique n'y parviendraient pas par eux-mêmes (*idem*: 61-62).

In *Jeux de Rêves et autres Détours*, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac follows Szondi's argumentation, delineating the geneology of the epicization of modern dramaturgies, which culminated, according to the French scholar as well, in Brecht's theatrical project. In the chapter entitled "Au carrefour, l'étranger", Sarrazac also links the unexpected appearance of the Stranger in proto-modernist drama to a timid introduction of epic techniques within the dramatic fabric, starting by the distance between the narrative voice and the narrated object. As he wrote,

> [b]ien avant Brecht et l'avènement du théâtre épique, dans les années 1880-1890, les dramaturges (naturaliste, symbolistes…) inventent une sorte de «distanciation» sauvage. Entendons qu'ils confrontent l'action dramatique – souvent minimale – à un *regard d'étranger*. Qu'ils mettent en scène un personnage plus observateur qu'agissant […] Un personnage (une Figure, plutôt) à ce point symptomatique de la crise de la forme dramatique qu'il la résume à lui seul: l'intrusion dans la forme dramatique d'un regard, d'un regard étranger; l'entrée en scène – ou à la marge, à la cantonade – de ce que Peter Szondi a baptisé *sujet épique* (Sarrazac 2004: 45).

This phenomenon of dramatic *epicization*, which was thoroughly diagnosed by Peter Szondi and further described by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, was also noticed by other prominent scholars. This proves that, at the end of the nineteenth century, there was a *de-facto* transformation of dramatic form and its set of conventions, much by influence of the narrative mode. Georg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin, authors of absolutely paramount works on the history, sociology and aesthetics of the novel, were well aware of the influence that this genre (and other narrative forms, in general) had on the development of contemporary drama. In "Sociology of modern drama", Lukács commented in passing that "[i]n sum, life as the

subject of poetry [in this context, poetry is meant as literature] has grown more epic, or to be precise, more novelistic than ever" (Lukács 1965: 157). Of course that, for the author of *History and Class Consciousness*, who called for a classical, organic and mimetic conception of drama (and of literature, in general), the hybridization of the epic and dramatic forms – which was, after all, a sign of modernist experimentalism (or decadence, for Lukács) – represented a counter-natural phenomenon.[141]

For Bakhtin, however, the impact and transforming power of a specific narrative genre – the novel – upon the 19th-century dramaturgies that shaped modern dramatic practices was an inevitable and necessary process, due to the novel's growing hegemony. In the essay "Epic and Novel", Bakhtin wrote precisely that "[i]n an era when the novel reigns supreme, almost all the remaining genres are to a greater or lesser extent 'novelized': drama (for example Ibsen, Hauptmann, the whole Naturalist drama)" (Bakhtin 1981: 5). In fact, there is not in Bakhtin's arguments, as there is in Lukács', the slightest rebuke towards the hybridization of narrative forms, such as the novel, with other genres, nor the suggestion that it is a symptom of modernist decadence. Again, in "Epic and Novel", the Russian scholar makes this position very clear, by stating: "What are the salient features of this novelization of other genres suggested by us above? They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself […] the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with the unfinished" (*idem*: 6-7).

When Bakhtin referred to the novelization of drama, he had in mind, as the passage quoted above suggests, the influence of the naturalistic novel over the 1880s drama, which was signaled on the thematic level by the portrayal of socially and morally significant subjects, typically dealt with by the naturalist novelists, such as adultery, social gaps and inequalities, or the dangers of the urban decadent jungles. On the formal level, the influence of the novel over the dramatic form is somehow evident in some realistic and naturalistic drama which, in spite of maintaining an apparently conventional and organically organized plot, managed to suppress the sense of dramatic climax – which was paramount for the Aristotelian and Hegelian conceptions of drama – and considerably extend the time span of the dramatic situation. Many ground-breaking dramas of this period, which normally deal with very complex and multi-layered characters, operated a change of paradigm from, according to Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, the *drame dans la vie* to the *drame de la vie*. In *Jeux de*

[141] In their entry "Montage et Collage", for the *Léxique du Drame Moderne et Contemporain*, Clémence Bouzitat and Florence Baillet describe Lukács' take on the dramatic form as follows: "Georg Lukács en particulier prône un art mimétique […] plaide pour une harmonie au sein de l'œuvre, un mode de composition organique, qui serait selon lui l'inverse de la pratique du montage, taxée de formaliste" (Sarrazac 2010: 133).

Rêves, the French scholar explains what he means about this transition which was, in his opinion, paramount for 20th-century dramaturgies:

> Bref, à ce moment où le théâtre cesse de nous faire assister à la représentation en mouvement d'un épisode marquant de la vie des héros pour nous donner à voir – dans le cadre du symbolisme aussi bien que dans celui du naturalisme – *la vie elle-même*, dans sa totalité et dans son dénuement, dans son caractère le plus banal et le plus ordinaire, dans son état d'objet à priori inerte et insignifiant (Sarrazac 2004: 46).[142]

The imprint of the novel on drama became quite evident on yet another feature of naturalist dramaturgies, which was referred to in the previous chapter[143] and that has precisely to do with the conspicuous extension of the playwright's stage directions, their intricate and extremely detailed web of information about the dramatic situation, the environment in which it takes place and the characters' backgrounds. Representing, as I have stated in chapter II, a truly parallel discourse to the dramatic plot, the stage directions gained, from the naturalist dramaturgy onwards, a relevance they lacked for centuries of dramatic tradition. Moreover, their length and complexity, together with the evident intervention of the playwright's voice that, just like a narrator, airs his views on the objectified plot and characters, bring the stage directions closer to a novelized discourse. This phenomenon was called by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac "*roman didascalique*" (Sarrazac 2010: 186-189) and definitely brought about a functional change of scenic directions, from a merely prescriptive role to a more descriptive one, in which the deeper insights of the authorial voice find a place to be uttered.

Many other signs of the influence of the novelistic discourse on drama could be pinpointed (for instance, as already mentioned, the psychological novel which bloomed at the beginning of the twentieth century had a significant impact on the more monodramatic and intimate dramaturgies), but Bakhtin's argument that the major transformation the novel induced on other genres, namely drama, was a continuous renovating power, a liberating break from restraining conventions of form and genre, a drive toward an almost protean polyphony and hybridism was absolutely paramount. Therefore, when Peter Szondi put forward his theory of dramatic epicization or when Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, aiming for a more

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[142] One of the most evident examples of this shift from the dramatic well-made representation, bound by a relatively strict time unity, of a specific chain of events, to an extensive portrayal (as in a novel) of distinct, almost scattered, moments in the characters' lives is perhaps Chekhov's dramaturgy. In *Tragedy and Metatheatre*, Lionel Abel refers to the Russian playwright precisely for his remarkable ability to suppress the plot almost completely from some of his plays: "Gerhart Hauptmann was not as important in novelizing the stage play as was Anton Chekhov, who tried (with some success) to eliminate plot almost entirely from his plays" (Abel 2003: 236).

[143] *Vd*. chapter II, p. 78.

thorough description of modern dramaturgies, created the concept of rhapsodization, both scholars spearheaded a school of dramatic criticism that by describing modern drama as a free, fluid and multifaceted form is ultimately harking back to Bakhtin's own theory of novelization.[144]

The marks of the epic and novelized discourse in Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock* which, as Peter Szondi convincingly argued, were preceded by the dramatic experimentalisms of playwrights such as Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Paul Claudel and Thornton Wilder, could only be conceived after the Modernist aesthetic revolution, through which generic interchange and hybridism were definitely achieved as part of Ezra Pound's injunction (turned into the movement's motto) – "Make it new!". Szondi's *Théorie du Drame Moderne* opens with a sentence that reminds its readers, nevertheless, of the boundaries between modes and genres that prevailed for centuries in the Western literary tradition, ever since Aristotle's *Poetics*, and that led, especially in the Renaissance – when the Stagirite's literary theorization was recovered and intensively commented upon[145] – to what the German scholar called *absolute drama*. As the first line of his introduction goes, "[d]epuis Aristote, les théoriciens de la poésie dramatique ont condamné la présence de traits épiques dans ce domaine. Mais si l'on tente aujourd'hui de décrire l'évolution de la littérature dramatique moderne, on ne se sentira guère appelé à faire ainsi office de juge" (Szondi 1965: 7). In fact, there is already in Aristotle's *Poetics* an evident distinction between the epic and the dramatic forms and their means of representation, which was for sure aggrandized in the Renaissance, with the bloom of the neo-Aristotelian conception of literature and its strict observation of generic conventions. In one of the initial sections of his treatise, the Greek philosopher alludes to the different modes of imitating reality that distinguish the epic – exemplified by Homer's works – from the dramatic form, which is inherently discussed through the constant reference to the most perfect manifestation of drama, according to Aristotle – tragedy:[146]

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[144] In *L'Avenir du Drame*, Sarrazac described modern drama precisely as a renovated, hybrid and polyphonic form, constantly playing with other literary genres and even non-literary verbal material: "Mais si le drame ressuscite aujourd'hui, tel le Phénix, ce n'est pas des cendres du genre défunt, c'est au contraire en s'émancipant définitivement de la notion de genre […] le drame moderne représente à mon sens une des formes les plus libres et les plus concrètes de l'écriture moderne" (Sarrazac 1981: 21).

[145] Ludovico Castelvetro and Francesco Robortello, for instance, were two of the most prominent Renaissance commentators of Aristotle's *Poetics*. While Robortello was a paramount theoretician of neoclassical comedy, Castelvetro, paraphrasing the Stagirite's seminal text, and adding some illations of his own, was responsible for the propagation of the Three Unities rule, having created the Unity of place, never referred to by Aristotle in his *Poetics*.

[146] It is a curious fact that, while Aristotle considered the epic as a form still in development and tragedy as the entelechy, or perfect actualization, of the literary text, the theorizations of Szondi and Sarrazac – with the

> Given both the same means and the same kind of object for imitation, one may either speak at one moment in narrative and at another in an assumed character, as Homer does; or one may remain the same throughout, without any such change; or the imitators may represent the whole story dramatically, as though they were actually doing the things described (Aristotle 1991: 4; 1448a19-1448a23).

Throughout the *Poetics*, the Stagirite reiterates the very clear (and long-lasting) distinction between the epic and dramatic modes of representation: while the first is grounded on a narrative discourse, which presupposes a diagetic structure based upon the distance between the narrating entity and the narrated object – even in first-person narratives this distance does not subside, since the narrator objectifies himself or herself as character –, the second presents a plot that unfolds in the present tense, through the direct actions of its characters, without the distinction between a narrating subject and a narrated object. According to Aristotle, the notion of direct action, perpetrated by the characters themselves, is therefore absolutely crucial in the definition of drama. As he stated, while enumerating the major characteristics of tragedy:

> So that as an imitator Sophocles will be on one side akin to Homer, both portraying good men; and on another to Aristophanes, since both present their personages as acting and doing. This in fact, according to some, is the reason for plays being termed dramas, because in a play the personages act the story (*ibidem*; 1448a26-1448b1).[147]

Peter Szondi's claim, in the opening line of *Théorie du Drame Moderne*, that the Western tradition of dramatic theory and criticism has, ever since Aristotle, reproached the presence of epic elements as prominent features within the dramatic texture, becomes a cogent statement when one goes back to the original text, the *Poetics*, and realizes how often Aristotle stresses the contrast between epic/narrative and dramatic. Alongside the passage which was quoted on the previous page, one other instance of this distinction comes a couple of pages further on the treatise, when the Greek philosopher states:

> Epic poetry, then, has been seen to resemble tragedy to this extent, that of being an imitation of serious subjects in metre. It differs from it, however, in that it is in one kind of verse and in narrative form […] A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form (*idem*: 6, 7; 1449b9-1449b21, 1449b22-1449b31).

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concepts of epicization and hybridism – seem to go for a counter-Aristotelian, counter organic, idea of literary and dramatic evolution.

[147] In another section of the treatise, Aristotle reiterates his definition of tragedy – or drama, in general – as an imitation through action carried out directly by the characters: "We maintain that tragedy is primarily an imitation of action, and that it is mainly for the sake of the action that it imitates the personal agents" (Aristotle 1991: 8; 1450a15-1450b21).

The idea, blatantly theorized by Aristotle – who took Greek etymology as his fundament – that drama means pure and direct action, carried out by the characters themselves (the agents), and that it is diametrically opposed to the epic form, with its narrative distance, had a long-lasting and utterly strong impact on the normative theorization of drama that would begin blooming from the Renaissance onwards. Peter Szondi, who as a proponent of a descriptive, historical and dialectic theory of drama, rejects the more systematic and normative currents by stating that "le rôle de la théorie n'est pas de prescrire ce que devrait être le drame moderne" (Szondi 1965: 151), describes the post-Aristotelian school of literary theory – which still influenced romantics like Goethe and Schiller – as grounded on the idea of preexistent, immutable forms which precede content:

> Ce qui donne aux théories anciennes du drame le droit d'exiger que la loi formelle propre à la littérature dramatique soit appliquée, c'est leur conception particulière de la forme, qui ne connaît ni l'histoire ni la dialectique de la forme et du contenu. Dan l'œuvre d'art dramatique il leur semble que la forme préexistante du drame est réalisée lorsqu'elle est unie à une matière choisie par rapport à elle. Si cette forme préexistante n'est pas réalisée, si le drame présente des traits épiques non autorisés, la faute résidera dans le choix de la matière […] l'effort de Goethe et Schiller pour distinguer entre littérature épique et littérature dramatique avait pour finalité pratique d'éviter toute erreur dans le choix de la matière (*idem*: 7-8).

In fact, the two romantic poets and essayists, who were quite far from the neoclassical normative poetics that took Aristotle's – as well as Horace's – theorization as starting points, went back to the Stagirite's *Poetics* and reiterated the stark distinction between the epic and dramatic modes of aesthetic representation.[148] In the famous short essay "On epic and dramatic poetry" – which first appeared as a supplement of a 1797 letter from Goethe to Schiller – the antithetical relationship between the two literary modes is fundamentally grounded on the temporal framing of the action, since the epic's most characteristic tense is the past, whereas the dramatic form resorts to the present (as Szondi also mentions in his definition of *absolute drama*).[149] Moreover, Goethe points out another difference between the epic and dramatic modes that would be often evoked, for instance, in Brecht's own theory and

[148] In one of the innumerous letters exchanged between Goethe and Schiller, the author of *Faust* wrote, on 28th April 1797: "I read through Aristotle's *Poetics* again with the greatest pleasure. It is a beautiful thing to witness the human intellect in its highest manifestation" (Goethe, qtd. in Dilthey 1985: 40).

[149] "The epic and dramatic poets are both subject to universal poetic laws, especially the law of unity and the law of development; furthermore, they both treat similar subjects, and both can use all kinds of themes; their great essential difference lies, however, in that the epic poet presents the event as completely past, and the dramatic poet presents it as completely present" (Goethe 1797).

conception of the Epic Theatre. When discussing the "five kinds of themes" (Goethe 1797) with which epic works and drama deal, the German poet claims that it is proper of the dramatic form to resort to *progressive themes*, because they "advance the plot" (*ibidem*) and the most pressing goal in *absolute drama* is the conflictual and dialectic movement toward the climax and the dénouement of the dramatic situation. On the other hand, the epic makes use, according to Goethe, of *regressive themes*, "which remove the plot from its goal" (*ibidem*), going against the absolutely essential "race", in *absolute drama*, toward the climax, or goal, and rather focusing on the plot's details and descriptive elements.

In yet another utterly influential milestone for dramatic theory, the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, G. W. F. Hegel keeps up the dialectical opposition between the epic and dramatic literary modes, while also considering the lyric. In chapter III of his major work, "The different genres of poetry", Hegel is regularly and explicitly stressing, throughout the text, that drama means real, direct action, carried out in the present tense and by characters who are its agents. According to the German philosopher, for whom dramatic poetry was the most complete and supreme artistic manifestation,[150] "la poésie dramatique est celui qui unit l'objectivité épique à la subjectivité lyrique, en présentant une action circonscrite comme étant une action réelle" (Hegel 1965: 320). Some paragraphs below, Hegel, who in the meantime refers to the dramatic action as "action elle-même" (idem: 321), highlights the idea of direct, unmediated mimesis, by stating that "[l]e but du drame consiste à représenter des actions et conditions humaines et actuelles, en faisant parler les personnes agissantes" (*idem*: 321-322). For Hegel, who somehow picks up Aristotle's main arguments, extending and paraphrasing their meaning, excludes from the core characteristics of the dramatic form the distanced and exterior narrativity that underlies the epic discourse and ensues a dialectic between subject and object:

> Mais cette union de l'épique et de l'intériorité du sujet agissant dans l'actuel n'autorise cependant pas le drame à décrire épiquement les aspects extérieurs des lieux, de l'ambiance, ainsi que des actes et des événements, mais il exige, pour que l'œuvre d'art soit vraiment vivante, sa représentation scénique complète […] il doit tout d'abord, comme l'épopée, nous présenter un événement, un exploit, une action; mais il doit les dépouiller de leur extériorité et mettre à sa place l'individu conscient et agissant (*idem*: 320-321, 323).

Furthermore, in a perspective that is quite akin to Goethe's, Hegel links the epic to a descriptive compulsion that gets entangled with the diegetic movement, while in dramatic mimesis (i.e., the action is shown rather than told) the plot becomes compressed and

[150] *Vd.* Hegel 1965: 320.

exclusively directed toward the climax. As he wrote: “la poésie dramatique présente un état de réduction et de simplification qu’on ne pas dans la poésie épique […] la plus grande partie de ce que le poète épique s’attarde à nous décrire, pour nous le rendre concrètement perceptible, est, dans le drame, l’objet d’une représentation réelle” (*idem*: 326, 336).

Much as this long-ago established distinction between epic and dramatic proved paramount for the Western literary developments, the history of the theatre, ever since the apogee of the Greek theatrical tradition, thoroughly proved that the dramatic form has hardly ever come across as pure, free from any kind of hybridism. Once again, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel addresses the presence of epic features in dramatic works, even though he acknowledges it as a marginal and rather unorthodox process that, with the crystallization of *absolute drama* and the consolidation of the dialogue as its main way of expression (pushing the choral and monologic interventions to the margin), became less and less conspicuous. As Hegel claimed, “[l]e drame peut contenir en outre un autre reste de poésie épique, représenté par des récits descriptifs, se rapportant, par exemple à des batailles, etc.; mais, en tant que dramatiques, ces récits doivent être, eux aussi, ramassés et vivants et être indispensables à la progression de l’action” (*idem*: 340). He then adds that “ce que les anciens faisaient dire aux chœurs étant, de nos jours, mis dans la bouche des personnages mêmes du drame […] c’est le dialogue qui représente le mode d’expression dramatique par excellence” (*idem*: 342, 343).

More recently, in his *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*, Patrice Pavis carries on a reflection upon the presence of epic traits – namely the chorus, which narrates, comments and explains the plot – in drama, while reporting their progressively secondary role in the development of the classic *absolute drama*. Taking Greek tragedy as a starting point, in which the chorus was still a mandatory element that counterbalanced the dramatic action, Pavis traces the progressive decline of epic features as the theatre became prominently dramatic:

> À partir du moment où les réponses au chœur sont faites par un, puis par plusieurs protagonistes, la forme dramatique (dialogue) devient la norme, et le chœur n’est plus qu’une instance commentatrice […] Au Moyen Âge, il prend des formes plus personnelles et plus didactiques et joue un rôle de coordinateur épique des épisodes présentés, se subdivise, à l’intérieur de l’action, en sous-chœurs participant à la fable […] SHAKESPEARE les personnalise et l’incarne en un acteur chargé du *prologue* et de l’*épilogue* […] Le classicisme français renonce au chœur dans une large mesure, préférant l’éclairage intimiste du *confident* et du *soliloque* […] Malgré son importance fondatrice dans la tragédie grecque, le chœur apparaît vite comme élément artificiel et extérieur au débat dramatique entre les personnages (Pavis 1996: 45-46).

Although Hegel and Pavis’ quoted opinions seem to support the theory that the dramatic form (just like any other literary genre) can never be absolutely exempted from

processes of hybridism and must, therefore, be permeated by epic/narrative and also lyric characteristics, they also prove that the status of epic elements[151] in Aristotelian drama was secondary and quite often deemed *unnatural* by more normative commentators. The process of epicization that, according to Szondi's theory, took hold of modern dramaturgies from the end of the 19th century onwards was essentially a *shift of accent*,[152] as Bertolt Brecht put it. Instead of remaining in the margin of the dramatic structure, the epic features became a prominent part of it and the inclusion, within the plot, of a narrative point of view came to be almost a trademark of modern and contemporary drama. Patrice Pavis, in the entry on the "Épisation du théâtre", from his *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*, describes this process precisely as a tendency to include the epic into the core of drama, interweaving it with the dramatic plot:

> La tendance du théâtre, depuis la fin du XIXe siècle, est à intégrer à sa structure dramatique les éléments *épiques* : récits, suppression de la *tension*, rupture de l'*illusion*, et prise de parole du *narrateur*, scènes de masses et interventions d'un *chœur*, documents livrés comme dans un roman historique, projections de photos et d'inscriptions, *songs* et interventions d'un narrateur, changements à vue du décor, mise en évidence scénique du *gestus* d'une scène […] le dramaturge, s'il veut rendre les processus sociaux dans leur totalité, devra faire intervenir une voix commentante et arranger la fable comme un panorama général, ce qui exige plus une technique de romancier que de dramaturge (*idem*: 117).

Likewise, Laurence Barbolosi and Muriel Plana, who signed the article on theatrical epicization for Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's *Lexique du Drame Moderne et Contemporain*, claim that the phenomenon is mostly a matter of degree, or accent:

> Épiser le théâtre, ce n'est donc pas le transformer en épopée ou en roman, ni le rendre purement épique, mais y incorporer des éléments épiques au même degré qu'on y intègre traditionnellement des éléments dramatiques ou lyriques. L'épicisation (ou épisation, sur le modèle de l'allemand *Episierung*) implique donc le développement du récit sans être une simple narrativisation du drame […] Toute fois, l'action n'est pas expulsée hors du théâtre brechtien. La narration joue contre et avec elle (Sarrazac 2010: 73, 75).

One of the theses put forward by Szondi in *Théorie du Drame Moderne* is that the ultimate way out of the crisis of the dramatic form is Brecht's Epic Theatre. In spite of having often been criticized for coming up with a too simple and slightly confining theoretical

[151] By epic elements, I mean all the choral parts, prologues, epilogues and recitations that present a narrative, necessarily distanced, outlook on the dramatic plot.

[152] In his text "The modern theatre is the epic theatre" (1930), Brecht described the famous table that schematically shows the main differences between the dramatic and the epic theatre by stating: "This table does not show absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent" (Brecht 1957: 37). The German playwright meant, therefore, that his concept of Epic Theatre promoted a more conspicuous development of epic elements, but not the complete exclusion of dramatic conventions.

solution, Szondi was undoubtedly right when he brought to light the relevance of the German playwright's groundbreaking theatrical vision and extremely consistent theory, which were grounded on the use of epic and narrative techniques to transform a predominantly dramatic theatre. Although the epic/dialectic/non-Aristotelian theatre has been widely studied by various scholars and evoked countless times throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the fact is that the discussion around Brecht's *Verfremdung* techniques (the *Songs*, the non-realistic sets, the projection of footage, the interpellation of the audience, etc.) quite often overshadows the primary meaning of Epic Theatre, i. e., a theatre that is predominantly narrative, or diegetic, instead of being dramatic. However, Laurence Barbolosi and Muriel Plana conveniently remind us that "[d]ans un théâtre épicisé, plus narratif, on introduit de la discontinuité, de la distance, des messages, de la réflexivité: devant la *fable* qu'on lui raconte, le spectateur doit en appeler à sa raison. Il doit déchiffrer les sens de cette fable, de cette parabole" (*idem*: 75).

In fact, the concepts of narrative discontinuity, distance and detachment, although slightly scattered, are present throughout Brecht's manifestos and theoretical texts. In the 1929 text "Last stage: Oedipus", the playwright – for whom the Epic Theatre was the only theatrical model compatible with the complex issues posed by modern times and the only one capable of spurring the spectators' rational and critical analysis – associates the Epic Theatre with the act of reporting, as in a narrative piece: "Our dramatic form is based on the spectator's ability to be carried along, identify himself, feel empathy and understand […] So what ought our major form to be like? Epic. It must report. It must not believe that one can identify oneself with our world by empathy, nor must it want this" (Brecht 1957: 25).

In a much later essay entitled "Theatre for pleasure or theatre for instruction" (1957), Brecht quotes Alfred Döblin in order to prove his point that the epic mode brings to the theatre the freedom to cut, interrupt, comment and build up the action as montage:[153] "The epic writer Döblin provided an excellent criterion when he said that with the epic work, as

[153] The term montage, which originated in filmaking and proved extremely fruitful in this particular artistic area, was then transposed to the theatre, thanks to important theoretical texts, such as Sergei Eisenstein's "Montage of attractions" (1923), in which the Russian cinema director proposes to liberate theatre from the conventional figurative mimesis and organic structure by juxtaposing key-elements (which Eisenstein calls "attractions") which at first sight seem independent and contrasting. In Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's *Lexique du Drame Contemporain*, montage and *collage* (which were also a key-concept for the Surrealist group) are defined thus: "Les termes de montage et de collage s'opposent au texte théâtral conçu comme un 'bel animal' […] Le montage est un terme technique emprunté au cinéma et suggère par conséquent plutôt l'idée d'une discontinuité temporelle, de tensions s'instaurent entre les différentes parties de l'œuvre dramatique. Le collage, pour sa part, fait référence aux arts plastiques (collages de Braque et Picasso) et évoquerait donc davantage la juxtaposition spatiale de matériaux divers […] Le montage est alors à la source d'une dramaturgie non aristotélicienne, fondée sur la rupture. Il permet d'interrompre le flux dramatique, invite le spectateur à la réflexion, l'empêchant de se laisser bercer par l'illusion et de digérer l'œuvre comme une production culinaire. Le montage est pour Brecht un enjeu politique et idéologique" (Sarrazac 2010: 130-131, 133).

opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remains fully capable of life" (*idem*: 70). The German playwright then goes on to stress the narrative penchant of the Epic Theatre, which allows the presence, within the plot, of a narrator/commentator that, as an "epic self", is a surrogate of the authorial voice:

> The stage began to tell a story. The narrator was no longer missing, along with the fourth wall. Not only did the background adopt an attitude to the events on the stage – by big screens recalling other simultaneous events elsewhere, by projecting documents which confirmed or contradicted what the characters said […] – but the actors too refrained from going over wholly into their role, remaining detached from the character they were playing and clearly inviting criticism of him (*idem*: 71).[154]

It is widely known that Arthur Miller was not a close follower of most of Brecht's perspectives, especially his orthodox Marxist take on human existence. However, there is on Miller's part a genuine admiration for the German playwright's theatrical vision. In the Introduction to the *Collected Plays*, he claims:

> It seems to me that, while I cannot agree with his concept of the human situation, his solution of the problem of consciousness is admirably honest and theatrically powerful. One cannot watch his productions without knowing that he is at work not on the periphery of the contemporary dramatic problem, but directly upon its center – which is again the problem of consciousness (Miller 1958: 45).

Whereas Miller did not make, in his own theoretical texts or interviews, many explicit references to the employment of epic elements in *A View from the Bridge*, he somehow admitted Brecht's influence on the writing process of *The American Clock*.[155] In the preface to the 1989 edition of *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and *The American Clock* – "Conditions of freedom: two plays of the seventies" – the author uses the term "epic" to describe the enveloping mood and formal devices of the play whose second version was classified by Miller as a *vaudeville*. Although the playwright does not go to great lengths to clarify what he

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[154] When addressing the epic/narrative detachment in his concept of theatre, Brecht insists on a new, distanced acting style that transforms the actor in a reporter of his own character's actions and a commentator of the fable, "helping the playwright to make a point" (Brecht 1957: 55). In "Interview with an exile" (1934), the playwright wrote: "the only form of acting that I find natural: the epic, story-telling kind […] The actor doesn't have to *be* the man he portrays. He has to describe his character just as it would be described in a book. If Chaplin were to play Napoleon he wouldn't even look like him; he would show objectively and critically how Napoleon would behave in the various situations the author might put him in" (*idem*: 68). As Brecht explained in his famous street scene parable, if there is a traffic accident, the epic actor will report it, describing the attitudes of the persons involved, but never impersonate them (*idem*: 121-128).

[155] Although this study is not long enough to focus on *The Crucible*, it is worth mentioning that there already are some narrative features in Miller's 1953 historical drama. Even if most of the play's American productions only stage its dramatic plot, the unabridged playscript contains several prose passages, in which an authorial voice analyzes the Salem Witch Hunt events and unveils the impact of the Puritan *ethos* on contemporary American society.

means by "epic", he nevertheless suggests a vague definition by confronting this dimension of the play with its more intimate, familial and realistic tone. In the essay Miller claims that "[u]ncharacteristically, Americans were looking for answers far beyond the bedroom and purely personal relationships, and so the very form of the play should ideally reflect this wider awareness. But how to unify the two elements, objective and subjective, epic and psychological?" (Miller 2012a: 777).[156]

Further on, while mentioning the acting style in Peter Wood's production (National Theatre, 1986), the author sets a connection between the concept of Epic Theatre and the objective, "bigger-picture" kind of approach to political and economic issues: "It was in the National Theatre that I at last heard the right kind of straightforward epic expressiveness, joyful and celebratory rather than abashed and veiled, as economic and political – which is to say epic – subjects were in the mouths of the characters" (*idem*: 781). In this passage, Miller is clearly referring to the *new objectivity* and the materialistic approach to the social dimension of human beings that were at the base of Piscator and Brecht's Epic Theatre. According to the author of *The Threepenny Opera*, for whom the characters' psychological dimension was secondary in modern dramaturgies, man should be analyzed in the theatre mainly as a social being that is constantly transformed by historic and economic processes (Brecht 1957: 37) and, therefore, "[t]oday, when the human being has to be seen as 'the sum of all social circumstances' the epic form is the only one that can embrace those processes which serve the drama as matter for a comprehensive picture of the world" (*idem*: 46).[157]

In both versions of *The American Clock* Miller endeavours precisely to balance a dramatic universe centered on a familial, private and psychological dynamic – which was a constant feature of his plays from the 1940s and 50s – against a more objective, socially and economically-oriented analysis of the American society's predicament after the Wall Street

[156] During a 1980 interview with Studs Terkel (the author of *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, the major influence for *The American Clock*), Miller claimed: "My interest in the play is formal as well as reflexive. I was fascinated by the idea of having an objective view of society and running through it, as a counter-motif, the story of a family"(Roudané 1987: 309).

[157] Brecht aired similar views in several other essays. For instance, in a 1926 interview for *Die Literarische Welt*, he claimed: "I'm for the epic theatre! The production has got to bring out the material incidents in a perfectly sober and matter-of-fact way" (Brecht 1957: 15). In another interview during his exile in Copenhagen (1934), the playwright addressed the trailblazers of modern drama – Strindberg and Ibsen – only to say that their plays were slightly outdated, since "[i]n modern society the motions of the individual psyche are utterly uninteresting" (*idem*: 66). For Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, the Epic Theatre, with its paradigmatic *street scene*, conveys an opening movement, a deprivatization of the familial dramatic spaces, such as the living room. In this *Theatrum Mundi*, "la scène la plus privée est traitée en 'scène de rue'" (Sarrazac 1989: 93). For Jean-Paul Sartre, this almost exclusive focus on Man's social dimension is precisely one of the major weak points of the epic form. As he wrote, in *Un Théâtre de Situations*: "Il y a […] une insuffisance très nette de l'épique: jamais Brecht […] n'a résolu dans le cadre du marxisme le problème de la subjectivité et de l'objectivité et, par conséquent, il n'a jamais su faire une place réelle à la subjectivité chez lui, telle qu'elle droit être" (Sartre, qtd. in Sarrazac 1989: 95).

Crash of 1929. If, in the previous chapter, the study of *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall* kept evoking the theme of the past – and its dramatic treatment – it is no different with *The American Clock* and *A View from the Bridge*. In spite of being blatantly different in several aspects, both plays are, first of all, a narrative or epic analysis of past situations (whether recent or distant) that are presented as a warning message to Miller's coeval America. As the playwright said, during an interview with Christopher Bigsby, "I think the job of an artist is to remind people of what they have chosen to forget" (Bigsby 2005a: 130).

The American Clock is an exercise on the act of remembering, unfolding between a personal (and autobiographic) memory – centred on the Baums' strife during the Depression[158] – and a national memory which became engraved with an almost mythological quality in the American collective mind. This social dimension is addressed in the play through characters that appear as representatives of the social groups responsible and/or struck by the financial crisis. Amongst the first characters to appear in Act I there are the reckless, somehow idealist, Wall Street investors (Jesse Livermore, William Durant and Arthur Clayton), who still believed in a positive outcome based on John D. Rockefeller's promise to massively buy stocks and prevent the financial system from crashing.[159] Ironically described by Lee – in one of his choral interventions – as "[t]he fabled High Princes of the neverending Boom" (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 426) – these financiers, who end up bankrupt or committing suicide, are the social symbol of an escalating capitalist system of which they were the creators, but also the victims.

Still in Act I, there is a scene, set in Iowa, that could perfectly have been taken out from a typical agitprop play and that definitely bears some similarities with several Brechtian *tableaux* in plays such as *The Mother* or *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*. Representing the predicament of American farmers who, for not being able to pay the banks for their loans, saw

[158] The portrayal of family life in some of Arthur Miller's plays and short stories can be quite enticing for his readers, mainly for the repetition of some autobiographic allusions. Obsessed by the downfall of his upper-class Jewish family after the Crash, which he refers to multiple times in *Timebends*, interviews and a particularly candid essay entitled "A boy grew in Brooklyn" (Miller 2000: 1-13), the playwright projected the dynamics of the Millers' household onto the Baums', in *The American Clock*, Quentin's family, in *After the Fall*, or even little Martin's family, in the short story "I don't need you any more", featured in the collection *Presence* (Miller 2009: 3-49). The profusion of autobiographic references that come up in *The American Clock* – some of them are repeated in the other two texts – attest to Miller's obsession with his family's intricate past: the well-read mother (Rose, in *AC*) who marries an all but illiterate businessman (Moe); the collapse of the family's enterprise and the sweeping transition from a wealthy life in "an eleven-room apartment" (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 420) in Manhattan to a crowded house in Brooklyn where the money collector is a constant threat; Lee's (Miller's alter-ego) college experience, his first contact with Marxist politics and the struggle to become a man of letters through the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

[159] "TONY: I mean, there's a *man* – to come out like that with the whole market falling to pieces and say, 'I and my sons are buying six million dollars in common stocks.' I mean, that's a bullfighter.
LIVERMORE: He'll turn it all around, too […] With Rockefeller's announcement this morning the climb has probably begun already" (*idem*: 424, 427).

their properties and equipment forfeited, this scene is a crowd *tableau*, in which many of the characters appear as the personification of a social function, as representatives of a class, therefore being identified only by their job and a number (e.g. Farmer 1, Farmer 2, Bidder 1, Bidder 2, Deputies, etc.). The scene re-enacts a situation that is deeply engraved in the American collective memory as a symbol of the Great Depression: the revolts of the farmers against capitalist exploitation. In the play, Mr. Taylor – the farmer who later in Act I shows up at the threshold of the Baums' in Brooklyn begging for food – is about to lose all his equipment in a public auction when the other farmers "*grab the DEPUTIES and disarm them*" while Brewster – the riot's leader – "*has pinned the Judge's arms behind him, and another man lowers a noose around his neck*" (*idem*: 438), boycotting the auction and returning the ownership of the machines to Henry Taylor.

The play comprises other very similar scenes that create a kind of mural of American society – Christopher Bigsby called it "a tapestry of social decline" (Bigsby 2005a: 342) – living under the harsh conditions brought about by the 1929 Crash.[160] In Act II, Miller redirects the spotlight to portray the urban squalor, triggering in the readers/spectators' minds some intertextual connections with the iconic black-and-white pictures of unemployed people standing in long queues, with their trades on display, waiting for their turn at the welfare office. Framed by the particular case of Lee Baum, who, in order to receive relief and be allowed into the WPA programme, must have his father swear to the welfare officer – Mr. Ryan – that he will not let his own son live in his house,[161] the scene features a group of characters that appear almost as stock figures of the American society in the 1930s: Kapush, a

[160] At the end, all the different voices and testimonies that are heard throughout the play come together in Rose, Lee's mother, who is described by her own son as the personification of the American nation during its harshest decade of the 20th century. In Act II, Lee (as narrator) remembers his mother's affliction during the Depression by saying: "After all these years I still can't settle with myself about my mother. In her own crazy way she was so much like the country […] There was nothing she believed that she didn't also believe the opposite […] I'd come home and give her a real bath of radicalism, and she was ready to storm the barricades; by evening she'd fallen in love again with the Prince of Wales. She was so like the country; money obsessed her, but what she really longed for was some kind of height where she could stand and see out and around and breathe in the air of her own free life" (Miller 2006, *AC*: 493-494).

[161] "MOE: I don't understand this. I distinctly read in the paper that anybody wants to work can go direct to WPA and they fix you up with a job.
LEE: They changed it. You can only get a WPA job now if you get on relief first.
MOE (*pointing toward the line*): So this is not the WPA.
LEE: I told you, Pa, this is the relief office.
MOE: Like… welfare.
LEE: Look, if it embarrasses you–
MOE: Listen, if it has to be done it has to be done. Now let me go over it again – what do I say?
LEE: You refuse to let me live in the house. We don't get along.
MOE: Why can't you live at home?
LEE: If I can live at home, I don't need relief. That's the rule.
MOE: Okay. So I can't stand the sight of you" (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 470).

Slavonic immigrant outraged with the American political system, who challenges "anybody to find the word democracy in the Constitution" (*idem*: 474);[162] Dungan, a rather uncritical Irishman; Arthur Clayton, one of the investors that received the news of their bankruptcy at Tony's speakeasy in Act I and that now shows up at the relief office desperately looking for a job;[163] Grace, a presumably single mother who hands her baby's milk bottle to Bush, a starving man; and Irene, a black woman who clearly assumes the role of social activist, standing for Communism, which was utterly popular amongst the American working class during the 1930s. Almost at the beginning of the scene, Irene is indirectly introduced during her dialogue to Mr. Ryan:

> RYAN: I've got no more appropriations for you till the first of the month, and that's it, Irene.
> IRENE: Mr. Ryan, you ain't talking to me, you talkin' to Local Forty-Five of the Workers Alliance, and you know what that mean.
> DUGAN (*laughs*): Communist Party.
> IRENE: That's right, mister, and they don't mess. So why don't you get on your phone and call Washington. And while you're at it, you can remind Mr. Roosevelt that I done swang One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Street for him in the last election, and if he want it swung again he better get crackin'! (*idem*: 473).

Although the main goal of this chapter is to prove that there are, as far as the epic/narrative formal devices are concerned, some similarities and common aspects between *The American Clock* and *A View from the Bridge*, I am well aware that both plays, which were written at two very distinct moments in Miller's career, present many blatant differences. For instance, *The American Clock* is clearly a historical piece, almost a documentary play very much confined to the 1930s American situation, which affects its popularity and appeal amongst contemporary audiences (even in the United States). Miller's

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[162] Kapush's feelings of revolt toward the American political and financial system represent a collective state of mind amidst most people of the middle and lower classes who, without having any clue of how the market and the stock speculation really functioned, lost all their savings overnight. In the scene, Kapush voices a lament that was certainly uttered countless times during the Great Depression: "Here's my bankbook, see that? Bank of the United States. See that? Four thousand six hundred and ten dollars and thirty-one cents, right? Who's got that money? Savin' thirteen years, by the week. *Who's got my money?* (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 474).

[163] Through the dialogue between Clayton and Mr. Ryan we understand the paradoxal situation in which many investors found themselves after the Crash – because they still had valuables (most of which did not bring any kind of revenue) they could not apply for relief, in spite of living in poverty:
"RYAN (*Clayton's form in his hand*): You're not eligible for relief; you've got furniture and valuables, don't you?
CLAYTON: But nothing I could realize anything on.
RYAN: […] Is this your address? Gramercy Park South?
CLAYTON (*embarrassed*): That doesn't mean a thing. I haven't really eaten in a few days, actually…
RYAN: Where do you get that kind of rent?
CLAYTON: I haven't paid my rent in over eight months…
RYAN (*starting away*): Forget it, mister, you got valuables and furniture" (*idem*: 475).

intention, however, was to project the period of the Great Depression – which he considered an exemplary event in American and Western history – onto the 1980s, as a warning against the neoliberal Capitalism that got its first boost during Reagan and Thatcher's terms of office. The playwright claimed, in a 1999 interview with Christopher Bigsby:

> America had been on some kind of obscene trip, looking to get rich at any cost right through the Twenties, at any cost to the spirit, and had elevate to power the men who would most easily lead that kind of a quest. And that aggrandizement is what led to the disaster of '29 and the Crash [...] And there's a bit of that today, not only here but all over the world. There's never been a more materialistic moment since I've been around (Bigsby 2005a: 340).

A View from the Bridge, on the other hand, is a play that, especially in its first version, is not much attached to the historical moment in which it is set. Although its dramatic plot unfolds in Red Hook, Brooklyn, somewhere between the 1940s and the early 1950s, the play is, as Bigsby put it, "a contemporary equivalent to Greek drama" (*idem*: 179), arguably Miller's work that stands the closest to classical tragedy. Therefore, it operates on the basis of mythical archetypes that necessarily suffuse the play with a symbolic timelessness and a sense of ancientness that the playwright, nevertheless, tries to counterbalance with rather indirect references to McCarthyism and its institutionalized practices of denunciation.[164] Standing between the parable and the exemplary myth, the play presents Eddie Carbone's spiral of desperation during the last weeks of his life, caused by his sexual obsession toward Catherine, a niece whom he and Beatrice, his wife, adopted as a child. Enacting a male modern version of Phaedra,[165] who fell madly in love with her stepson Hippolytus, Eddie lives guilt-ridden by incestuous feelings that he nevertheless tries to repress, until Catherine, in a symbolic act of rejection and emancipation, decides to marry Rodolpho, Beatrice's cousin who, alongside his brother Marco, lives in the United States as an illegal immigrant.[166]

In the essay "The family in modern drama", which was written in April 1956, Miller claimed that the characters of what he calls the "expressionist"/"poetic" trend of Western

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[164] The first version of *A View from the Bridge* was written in 1955, when the McCarthyist persecutory process was well under way. The following year, Miller was directly affected by the anti-Communist hysteria, being subpoenaed by the HUAC in June to testify and "name names". Less than four months later, the revised and expanded version of *Bridge* opened in London.

[165] About the interweaving of ancient and modern elements, Miller wrote in the opening stage direction of the one-act version: "*The intention is to make concrete the ancient element of this tale through the unmitigated forms of the commonest life of the big-city present, the one playing against the other to form a new world on the stage*" (Miller 2006, *VFB*: 509).

[166] In an interview with Ronald Hayman, Miller admitted that there was something in the story that inspired *Bridge* (which was told to him by Vinny Longhi, during the playwright's research for the initial screenplay of *On the Waterfront* [Miller 2012b: 152]) that "had myth-like resonance for me. I didn't feel I was making anything up, but rather recording something old and marvelous" (Roudané 1987: 192).

drama[167] are usually developed "not primarily as personalities, as individuals [as in the realistic trend], but as forces" (Miller 1978: 79). If in *The American Clock* many characters personify social forces and the convergence of political and economic factors, in the first version of *A View from the Bridge* the *dramatis personae* are abstract forces – like the ones Miller describes in his essay – whose actions are merely at the service of plot development.[168] In the opening stage direction, the playwright uncovers the structural frugality of the one-act play, by plainly stating that "*[l]ike the play, the set is stripped of everything but its essential*" (Miller 2006, *VFB*: 509). After rewriting *Bridge* and seeing it performed on the London stage, Miller wrote an introductory note to the 1956 edition,[169] explaining the transition from a "a hard, telegraphic, unadorned drama" (Miller 1978: 219), mostly written in dense, disciplined verse and where "the characters were not permitted to talk about this or that before getting down to their functions in the tale" (*idem*: 220), to a much more realistic drama, in which the characters appear as complex personalities framed by a palpable social context. [170] As Miller wrote,

> In other words, 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 […] In a word, the nature of the British actor and the production there made it possible to concentrate more upon realistic characterization while the universality of Eddie's type was strengthened at the same time (*idem*: 222).

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[167] *Vd*. "Prologue – the quest for an original form" (pp. 55-68).
[168] The "The family in modern drama" and *A View from the Bridge* were written almost at the same time, which attests to the fact, in my opinion, that the "expressionist" model-play described in the essay coincides in many aspects with the formal principles of the one-act version of *Bridge*.
[169] "Introduction to *A View from the Bridge*" (Miller 1978: 218-222).
[170] In the second version, Miller evidently developed Beatrice's character, granting more prominence to her frustrations and discontents toward Eddie's "misdirected" libido. In the one-act version, the couple has children (Miller 2006, *VFB*: 514) and Beatrice never confronts her husband with their dysfunctional sexuality. Her only complain is "What's eating you? You're gonna bust your teeth, you grind them so much in bed, you know that? (*idem*: 525). In the extended version, however, she directly asks Eddie: "When am I gonna be a wife again, Eddie? […] It's three months, Eddie" (Miller 1958, *VFB*: 399). Moreover, Beatrice appears, in the second version, as a much more clairvoyant woman, who is perfectly aware of her husband's obsession. In a conversation with Catherine, whom she astutely advises, Beatrice shows how far she is aware of Eddie's incestuous feelings:
"BEATRICE: Because *you* think you're a baby. I told you fifty times already, you can't act the way you act. You still walk around in front of him in your slip–
CATHERINE: Well, I forgot.
BEATRICE: Well you can't do it. Or like you sit on the edge of the bathtub talkin' to him when he's shaving in his underwear […] It's wonderful for a whole family to love each other, but you're a grown woman and you're in the same house with a grown man. So you'll act different now, heh?" (*idem*: 405).
Eddie's course through the play is also slightly more ambiguous in the second version of the play, in which the protagonist, presumably displaying some regret, dies saying "My B.!" (*idem*: 439). In the one-act version, however, Eddie's obsession seems to persist as his last words are "Catherine – why –?" (Miller 2006, *VFB*: 566).

Addressing the clash between one man's obsession – which leads him to turn his cousins in to the Immigration Office – and the social and moral codes of his community, which, being formed by Italian immigrants, is ruled by almost primitive principles of honor and loyalty,[171] *A View from the Bridge* is, above all, a family play (like most dramas written by Miller in early stage of his career), which makes it tremendously different from *The American Clock*, where the Baums are just one element of a big dramatic mural. However, both plays are similar in their overt use of epic devices which enable the readers or spectators to approach the dramatic situation from a critical distance. Unlike *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*, in which there surely is an objectification of the past and a somehow distanced (epic, according to Peter Szondi) relationship between the present-day protagonists and their memories (Quentin even explains in detail some past episodes to his unseen Listener), *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock* do not "camouflage" their narrative passages as part of the dramatic fiction. On the contrary, both plays boast narration and commentary as moments when the fourth wall is blatantly breached and a dialogue with the audience becomes established.

In their entry "Point de vue/focalization/perspective/", written for Sarrazac's *Lexique du Drame Moderne et Contemporain*, Kerstin Hausbei and Geneviève Jolly set "internal focalization" or subjective point of view apart from epic perspective and commentary. Grounding their argument on the fictional or non-fictional ontology of the characters, they claim: "À l'inverse de l'instance épique qui, en vertu de son statut non fictionnel, ne peut se confondre avec une voix individuelle de personnage, la «focalisation interne» soumet

[171] In *Arthur Miller. A critical study*, Christopher Bigsby describes the play's conflict between the protagonist and his community thus: "Eddie Carbone's tragedy is born out of the misalignment of his deep personal needs and an implacable code to which he is committed but which he is drawn to deny" (Bigsby 2005a: 195). Indeed, it is the dialectical relationship between individual and society/community (which proves to be impossible) that, according to Miller, lies at the heart of tragedy, since he defines the genre as "the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly" (Miller 1978: 5), according to the social and political codes which he is supposed to abide by. The playwright's main views on tragedy are very close to what Hegel and Lukács wrote about the genre. In his *Aesthetics*, the German philosopher, for whom *Antigone* is the most complete tragedy of the Western dramatic tradition, described the tragic as a conflict between two parts, both standing up for their moral codes: "Le côté tragique consiste en ce que, au sein de ce conflit, les deux parties en présence ont également raison en principe, alors qu'en réalité chacune conçoit le vrai contenu positif de son but et de son caractère comme une négation de celui du but et du caractère adverses et les combat en conséquence, ce qui les rend tous deux également coupables" (Hegel 1965: 376). In "The sociology of modern drama", Lukács, for whom "[a]ll reflection on drama comes to this: how does a man achieve a tragic action?" (Lukács 1965: 150), also sustains that the dramatic form is grounded on a conflict between man and exterior circumstances, which in classical drama were identified as Fate: "We have said of the drama that, in general, destiny is what confronts man from without. In Greek and Shakespearean drama we can still easily distinguish between man and his environment, or, speaking from the viewpoint of drama, between the hero and his destiny […] Destiny is what comes to the hero from without. If we are to continue composing dramas, we must hold to this definition regardless of whether it is true in life; otherwise we would find it impossible to maintain the contending parties in equilibrium" (*idem*: 149).

l'ensemble d'une pièce à la perspective d'un personnage et la donne à voir comme une «dramaturgie subjective»" (Sarrazac 2010: 162-163). In Miller's two plays, the designated epic selves (Alfieri, in *A View from the Bridge*) and most of the characters of *The American Clock*[172] alternate between their role as *dramatis personae*, whose actions affect the course of the plot, and the function of narrator/commentator that, according to Sarrazac, are "[u]n personnage prétexte, un personnage-enquêteur, une sorte de délégué de l'auteur dans l'univers scénique" (Sarrazac 2004: 46).

The two versions of *A View from the Bridge* begin and end with the intervention of Alfieri, a Red Hook dweller who, as a lawyer, has tried for decades to civilize the instinctive Italian immigrants and who perseveres in his defence of the American law, even if Eddie and Marco's primitive impulses for sex and violence fascinate him. In the first version of the play, Alfieri's opening lines definitely hark back to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, whose Stage Manager introduces the whole dramatic situation as nothing more than a theatrical construction. In the Introduction to the *Collected Plays* Miller actually calls the lawyer the "engaged narrator."[173] As soon as he enters we are told that "*he crosses the stage to his desk and removes his hat and coat, hangs them, then turns to the audience*" (Miller 2006, *VFB*: 509). The simple gesture of turning toward the audience will foster a direct communication with the spectators that, depending of course on the director's own vision, can develop into an active dialogue beyond the stage.[174] After nodding to two longshoremen, Alfieri breaks the fourth wall in order to warn the audience that the dramatic situation about to begin is nothing but a fictional reality that should be perceived in all its theatricality: "Good evening. Welcome to the theater. My name is Alfieri. I'll come directly to the point, even though I am

[172] In the first published version of the play (Miller 2009a), the role of epic commentators is mostly assigned to Lee Baum and Arthur A. Robertson, an entrepreneur and investor that predicted the 1929 Crash and, after cashing all his stocks and bonds, became a kind of discredited prophet of doom.
[173] According to the playwright, the idea of creating a narrator for *A View from the Bridge* came up after the interpretative failure of *The Crucible*: "I believe that on the night of its opening, a time when the gale from the Right was blowing at its fullest fury, it inspired a part of its audience with an unsettling fear and partisanship which deflected the sight of the real and inner theme, which, again, was the handing over of conscience to another, be it woman, the state, or a terror, and the realization that with conscience goes the person, the soul immortal, and the 'name.' That there was not one mention of this process in any review, favorable or not, was the measure of my sense of defeat, and the impulse to separate, openly and without concealment, the action of the next play, *A View from the Bridge*, from its generalized significance. The engaged narrator, in short, appeared" (Miller 1958: 47).
[174] According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, the dialogue between the stage and the audience is one of the distinctive features of contemporary drama since Brecht. In the article "From Logos to Landscape: text in contemporary dramaturgy", Lehmann wrote: "while the dialogue *on* the stage is fading, dialogue returns with a new emphasis *between* stage and audience. Theatre rediscovers its unique chance of direct communication because – contrary to all other art forms – here the moment of producing the art is also the moment of its reception" (Lehmann 1997: 58).

a lawyer" (*idem*: 510).[175] In the end, after coming to the edge of the stage for the epilogue, with its final comments on the moral of the plot, he breaks once again the theatrical illusion by saying "This is the end of the play" (*idem*: 567), which may sound like a much too simplistic estrangement technique to the contemporary theatergoer.

In the second version of the play, however, Alfieri's metatheatrical remarks are significantly played down. In spite of still addressing the spectators – "*speaks to the audience*" (Miller 1958, *VFB*: 378) – the lawyer never refers explicitly to the theatrical conditions that envelop the dramatic plot. Instead, his role as the story's narrator and interpreter becomes more prominent and his comments on the action slightly more copious. Right in his first line, Alfieri indirectly adverts the audience (or the readers) that he is going to be their guide through Eddie Carbone's tragic course and the only one able to crack the ethic and social codes of the Red Hook community. After the two longshoremen nod at him, the lawyer states: "You wouldn't know it, but something amusing has just happened. You see how uneasily they nod to me? That's because I am a lawyer. In this neighborhood to meet a lawyer or a priest on the street is unlucky" (*idem*: 378-379).

In both versions, it is also Alfieri, during his opening monologue, that announces the thematic frame of the play, through which the whole family drama should be understood. Thanks to a temporarily distanced perspective, the lawyer perceives Eddie Carbone's unfortunate conflict with his family and community as an exemplary parable, on the one hand, of the clash between individual instincts and communal codes, and, on the other hand, of the conflict between ancient ethic rules and the "civilized" (American) law.[176] As Alfieri explains:

[175] In the essay "*The Mother Courage* model" (1949), Bertolt Brecht claimed that modern theatre was in need of a process of retheatricalization, against the yoke of illusionism: "Restoring the theatre's reality as theatre is now a precondition for any possibility of arriving at realistic images of human social life. Too much heightening of the illusion in the setting, together with a 'magnetic' way of acting that gives the spectator the illusion of being present at a fleeting, accidental, 'real' event, create such an impression of naturalness that one can no longer interpose one's judgment, imagination or reactions, and must simply conform by sharing in the experience and becoming one of 'nature's' objects" (Brecht 1957: 219). In yet another famous text, "The street scene" (1950), the German playwright announces that "the theatre will stop pretending not to be theatre" (*idem*: 122), which clearly represents Arthur Miller's frame of mind while planning and writing both *A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock*.

[176] Alfieri's way to express his own temporal distance regarding the plot resembles the interventions of a third-person narrator who puts all the bits and pieces of the novel's plot together. At the beginning of Act II, the lawyer turns to the audience from his desk and says: "On the twenty-third of that December a case of Scotch whisky slipped from a net while being unloaded – as a case of Scotch whisky is inclined to do on the twenty-third of December on Pier Forty-one. There was no snow, but it was cold, his wife was out shopping [...] Catherine told me later that this was the first time they had been alone together in the house" (Miller 1958, *VFB*: 418).

I often think that behind that suspicious little nod of theirs lie three thousand years of distrust. A lawyer means the law, and in Sicily, from where their fathers came, the law has not been a friendly idea since the Greeks were beaten.

I am inclined to notice the ruins in things, perhaps because I was born in Italy…. I only came here when I was twenty-five. In those days, Al Capone, the greatest Carthaginian of all, was learning his trade on these pavements, and Frankie Yale himself was cut precisely in half by a machine gun on the corner of Union Street, two blocks away. Oh, there were many here who were justly shot by unjust men. Justice is very important here.

But this is Red Hook, not Sicily […] And now we are quite civilized, quite American. Now we settle for half, and I like it better. I no longer keep a pistol in my filing cabinet.

And my practice is entirely unromantic […] and yet… every once few years there is still a case, and as the parties tell me what the trouble is, the flat air in my office suddenly washes in with the green scent of the sea, the dust in this air is blown away and the thought comes that in some Caesar's year, in Calabria perhaps or on the cliff at Syracuse, another lawyer, quite differently dressed, heard the same complaint and sat there as powerless as I, and watched it run its bloody course (*idem*: 379).

Throughout the play, Alfieri's interventions point precisely towards the clash between the law and more primitive codes of honour and justice, while making reference to the encroaching power of civilization over natural, untamed instincts. If it is true, as Brenda Murphy wrote in "The tradition of social drama: Miller and his forebears",[177] that "[i]n the person of Alfieri, civilization wages a constant battle throughout the play to defeat nature" (Bigsby 1997: 18), it cannot be denied that, by the end of the dramatic plot (after Eddie's tragic demise), the lawyer is oddly fascinated by the unrelenting passion that moved the protagonist, as well as Marco's violent thirst for justice.[178] As "*Alfieri, who is in the crowd, turns out to the audience*" (Miller 1958, *VFB*: 439), he professes his final judgment on Eddie Carbone's case, coming full circle with the opening lines of the play:

ALFIERI: Most of the time now we settle for half and I like it better. But the truth is holy, and even as I know how wrong he was, and his death useless, I tremble, for I confess that something perversely pure calls to me from his memory – not purely good, but himself purely, for he allowed himself to be wholly known and for that I think I will love him more than all my sensible clients. And yet, it is better to settle for half, it must be! And so I mourn him – I admit it – with a certain… alarm (*ibidem*).[179]

[177] Bigsby 1997: 13-23.

[178] Murphy proceeds with her argument that Alfieri is an unconditional supporter of the American law by stating: "By allying the audience with Alfieri through the plays structure, Miller places us on the side of civilization and against the forces of nature which, the events of the play suggest, are ultimately destructive. Imperfect though it may be, Miller implies, civilization is what keeps us from the fate of an Eddie Carbone" (*idem*: 18).

[179] In the first version of the play, Alfieri's monologue is a vague and intriguing passage in verse in which Eddie's case is never directly addressed. However, the lawyer refers to the protagonist's most instinctive drive that, as the epic commentator seems to suggest, is still deeply rooted in human nature:
"ALFIERI: Most of the time now we settle for half,/ And I like it better./ And yet, when the tide is right/ And the green smell of the sea/ Floats in through my window,/ The waves of this bay/ Are the waves against Siracusa,/ And I see a face that suddenly seems carved;/ The eyes look like tunnels/ Leading back toward some ancestral beach/ Where all of us once lived.// And I wonder at those times/ How much of all of us/ Really lives there yet,/ And when we will truly have moved on,/ On and away from that dark place,/ That world that has fallen to stones?" (Miller 2006, *VFB*: 566-567).

During an interview with Mel Gussow in 1986, Miller credited Alfieri with the rational, critically distanced voice within *A View from the Bridge*. He stated: “That lawyer is, you might even say, the rational principle, the principle of rationalizing one’s life, and how limited it is once the emotions start to go. He’s giving him [Eddie] all the reasons why he shouldn’t be doing this” (Gussow 2002: 94).[180] At first sight, Alfieri might seem a simple narrator of the calamity that assails the Carbones’ household, an epic self that imprints in the play’s structure the author’s viewpoint on the dramatic plot, following Brecht’s precept in the “Appendices to the Short Organum”: “The story does not just correspond to an incident from men’s life together as it might actually have taken place, but is composed of episodes rearranged so as to allow the story-teller’s ideas about men’s life to find expression” (section 64; Brecht 1957: 278).[181]

Nevertheless, Alfieri’s particular dramatic existence as both character and observer raises a complex issue: on the one hand, as an epic narrator and commentator of the plot, he seems the most sensible voice, always directing the audience’s attention towards Eddie’s fatal mistake of setting his own needs and personal obsessions above the law. On the other hand, it was Alfieri’s actions, as a character, that ironically triggered the fall of Eddie Carbone. Desperate about the romantic relationship between Catherine and Rodolpho, the longshoreman visits the Alfieri’s office twice in order to seek a legal way to prevent their wedding. Just as the lawyer admits, in his final remark, to love Eddie more than any other of his “sensible clients”, the speech he delivers to the audience before the characters’ first appointment unveils Alfieri’s fascination with Carbone and his intuitive knowledge of the protagonist’s predicament: “I remember him now as he walked through the doorway […] His eyes were like tunnels; my first thought was that he had committed a crime […] but soon I saw it was only a passion that had moved into his body, like a stranger” (Miller 1958, *VFB*:

[180] In the course of the same interview, Mel Gussow actually suggests that all the lawyer characters in Miller’s plays (Bernard, in *Death of a Salesman*, and Quentin, in *After the Fall*) are somehow projections of the playwright: “Here’s a theory: all the lawyers in your plays are closer to you than the other characters” (Gussow 2002: 152).

[181] In *L’Avenir du Drame*, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac describes the modern playwright, whom he calls the *dramaturge-rhapsode*, as an omnipresent entity that intervenes in the dramatic situation mostly through his characters: “L’auteur dramatique traditionnel est contraint à la fausse modestie: il s’efface systématiquement devant ses personnages; il s’absente de son texte. Du dramaturge-rhapsode nous pouvons au contraire subodorer qu’à l’exemple de ses ancêtres homériques il «est toujours au premier plan pour raconter les événements» [Goethe] et que «nul ne peut ouvrir la bouche qu’il ne lui ait préalablement donné la parole» [Gérard Genette]” (Sarrazac 1981: 47).

406).[182] Although he tells Eddie more than once that there is nothing he can do to keep his niece away from Rodolpho – "[m]orally and legally you have no rights, you cannot stop it; she is a free agent" (*idem*: 424) – Alfieri seems to be inextricably drawn to Eddie and, whether intentionally or not, spurs him to turn Catherine's fiancé and his brother in to the Immigration Office:

> ALFIERI: There's only one legal question here.
> EDDIE: What?
> ALFIERI: The manner in which they entered the country. But I don't think you want to do anything about it, do you?
> EDDIE: You mean –?
> ALFIERI: Well, they entered illegally.
> EDDIE: Oh, Jesus, no, I wouldn't do nothing about it, I mean – (*idem*: 409).

Driven by the most virulent desperation, Eddie soon gives up on his refusal to break the loyalty code of the Red Hook community and makes an anonymous denunciation to the Immigration Services, which will result in Marco's deportation and, ultimately, the protagonist's own murder. Ironically, in standing for the American "civilized" law, Alfieri incites Eddie to violate his community principles. Brenda Murphy was absolutely right in her analysis of the play when stating that

> "[i]n turning Marco and Rodolpho to the immigration authorities, Eddie obeys the laws of the United States, but, Miller implies, violates the more fundamental law of kinship, the preservation of the family. Obeying another fundamental law, Marco now feels he must avenge Eddie's wrong to him and his family" (Bigsby 1997: 17).[183]

Enjoying the privileged status of a dramatic character that is simultaneously an epic narrator, Alfieri is yet another of Miller's *dramatis personae* that thoroughly peruse the past, looking for an answer or a greater lesson that serves their present. However, the lawyer of *A*

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[182] During their first appointment, Alfieri proves his uncanny ability to guess Eddie's most private dilemmas and emotions. Even if the protagonist tries to justify his disapproval of Catherine and Rodolpho's relationship by evoking the young man's dubious sexual orientation, the lawyer fathoms Eddie's incestuous feeling and goes straight to the point: "every man's got somebody he loves, heh? But sometimes… there's too much. You know? There's too much, and it goes where it mustn't. A man works hard, he brings up a child, sometimes it's a niece, sometimes even a daughter, and he never realizes it, but through the years – there is too much love for the daughter, there is too much love for the niece. Do you understand what I'm saying to you? […] She wants to get married, Eddie. She can't marry you, can she?" (Miller 1958, *VFB*: 409-410).

[183] In *Arthur Miller. A critical study*, Christopher Bigsby paraphrases Brenda Murphy's argument when he states: "His [Eddie's] action is entirely legal, indeed, in one sense no more than his civic duty. But though Alfieri remarks that 'the law is nature. The law is only a word for what has a right to happen', he adds that, 'when the law is wrong it's because it's unnatural.' Informing, in this context, is legal but breaches more fundamental codes. And here, of course, is the connection with the political environment in which this play was written" (Bigsby 2005a: 193).

View from the Bridge, just as most of the characters of *The American Clock*, projects his memories, narrations and comments outside the dramatic situation and onto the audience or readership, presenting a distanced and critical viewpoint of the plot and, therefore, carrying out a process of dramatic epicization. As Laurence Barbolosi and Muriel Plana wrote in the *Lexique du Drame Moderne et Contemporain*: "le «sujet épique» renvoie à la présence de l'auteur au sein de la narration; il indique un déplacement de l'action au profit de la narration, dans la quelle le point de vue de l'auteur s'avère central" (Sarrazac 2010: 74).

In the case of the first version of *The American Clock* Lee Baum, already an accomplished journalist, and Arthur Robertson, a corporate leader in his seventies, are the main epic narrators of this American fable. At the opening speeches of the play, the two characters-commentators immediately air opposite views. Lee, paraphrasing Miller's own opinions on the history of the United States, conveys a rather pessimistic perspective:

> LEE. There have been only two American disasters that were truly national. Not the first or second World Wars, Vietnam or even the Revolution. Only the Civil War and the Great Depression touched nearly everyone wherever they lived and whatever their social class was. (*Slight pause.*) Personally, I believe that deep down we are still afraid that suddenly, without warning, it may all fall apart again (Miller 2009a, *AC*: 5).

Robertson, on the other hand, shows a growing optimism that, by the end of the play, sounds surprisingly naïve. If, at the beginning, he claims, with some critical distance, "I don't think that kind of collapse is really possible again. And I don't mean only the stock market. I mean the emotional collapse […] People are a lot more sophisticated now, they expect ups and downs, they are much more sceptical…" (*idem*: 5-6), his closing remarks border on the pathetic:

> The second question is whether it was really Roosevelt who saved the country. (*Pause.*) In truth, he was a conservative, traditional man who was driven to the Left by one emergency after another […] But willy-nilly, the net result of all his floundering, his experimentation, his truth-telling and his dire prevarications – was that the people came to believe that the country actually belonged to them. I'm not at all sure this was his intentions; I'm not even certain exactly how it came to be, but in my opinion – that belief saved the United States (*idem*: 85-86).

However, in the revised version of the play, Miller rewrote the last scene and managed to purge it of the confining simplism that made it a sample of easy pedagogy. While another character, Theodore K. Quinn, makes the eulogy of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Robertson introduces a note of criticism which plants in the spectators or readers some criticism:

> QUINN: Roosevelt saved them; came up at the right minute and pulled the miracle.
> ROBERTSON: Up to a point; but what really got us out of it was the war.
> QUINN: Roosevelt gave them back their belief in the country. The government belonged to them again!
> ROBERTSON: Well, I'll give you that.
> QUINN: Of course you will, you're not a damned fool. The return of that belief is what saved the United States, no more, no less!
> ROBERTSON: I think that's putting it a little too…
> QUINN (*cutting him off and throwing up his hands*): That's it!... God, how I love that music! (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 494-495).

While in the first version, the epic entity is essentially projected on the two narrators – Lee and Robertson – in the second playscript the social mural of America in the 1930s is presented and explained to the audience by a multitude of distinct voices that weave a polyphonic web of comments over the different dramatic scenes. In his essays "From logos to landscape: text in contemporary dramaturgy" and "Some notes on postdramatic theatre, a decade later", Hans-Thies Lehmann brings to our attention the reintroduction in contemporary drama of the chorus, which he defined as "a theatrical reality which opens and breaks up the fictional cosmos of the myth or the dramatic narration and brings into play the presence of the audience" (Lehmann 2011: 336). Furthermore, Lehmann associates the concept of "chorus" to the term *chora*, used by Plato in *Timaeus* to designate "a logical or pre-logical 'space' that gives room to the play of being and becoming of all reality" (Lehmann 1997: 56). According to the German scholar, in contemporary dramaturgies, "Our formula 'the rediscovery of theatre as *chora*' implies a status of language defined by a multiplicity of voices, a 'polylogue'" (*idem*: 57).

It is precisely this choral polyphony that lies at the basis of the second version of *The American Clock*. Just like Alfieri, most of the characters in the play are constantly alternating between their role of dramatic agents and narrators that convey distinct and contradictory points of view on the plot. In fact, as Peter W. Ferran suggests, in "*The American Clock*. 'Epic vaudeville'",[184] the distance between character and narrator is such a marked feature of the play that, most times, the comments and narrating parts seem to be performed by the actors themselves, witnessing from afar their characters' predicaments and dilemmas. As Ferran wrote: "What makes this work forceful in the theater is the concrete fact that the actors, presenting the 'past' lives of fictional characters, visibly occupy the theatrical here-and-now –

[184] Ferran's article, included in Enoch Brater's collection of essays *Arthur Miller's America* (2005), is one of the few texts on *The American Clock* – which, as a less popular play, gets little critical attention – that actually addresses its epic elements from a Brechtian point of view. Other very important scholars, such as Christopher Bigsby, William W. Demastes and June Schlueter, refer to the *epic* tone of the play very vaguely, therefore never explaining what dramatic epicization really means.

waiting onstage to play their scenes, witnessing other scenes being played, occasionally commenting on them" (Brater 2005: 157).[185]

It is exactly from an undefined position somewhere between character-narrator and actor-narrator that the *dramatis personae* voice their comments on the scenes. Unlike the first version, there is in the revised text of *The American Clock* a specific device that makes it easier for the audience to discern the dramatic from the epic dimensions of the play. In the opening stage direction there is a specific indication regarding the actors' disposition: "*The actors are seated in a choral area onstage and return to it when their scenes are over*" (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 417). Right from the beginning, Miller creates a space for the narrative or choral interventions of the characters/actors. For instance, during the speakeasy scene in which some prominent Wall Street investors are discussing the catastrophic financial situation, some of the other characters are poignantly commenting their conversation:

> ROSE (*from choral area*): And they were nothing but pickpockets in a crowd of innocent pilgrims.
> LIVERMORE: With Rockefeller's announcement this morning the climb has probably begun already.
> ROBERTSON (*from choral area*): Yes, but they also believed.
> TAYLOR (*from choral area*): *What* did they believe?
> IRENE and BANKS (*from choral area, echoing* TAYLOR): Yeah, what did they believe? (*idem*: 427).

The American Clock is, in fact, a play in which comment and narration, which serve as distancing devices, are practically on the same level as the dramatic plot.[186] However, the epic point of view over the fable is not merely conveyed by the recitation of the characters when they play the role of present-time narrators, but also through the use of several other epic devices usually found in Brecht and Piscator's works. For instance, the set, in which "*the few pieces of furniture required should be openly carried on by the actors*" (*idem*: 417), is conceived as an ample, non-realistic space that should have in the background some kind of projection that sets the spectators guessing that America is the ultimate theme of the play: "*An impression of a surrounding vastness should be given, as though the whole country were really the setting [...] The background can be sky, clouds, space itself, or an impression of the*

[185] Peter Ferran's perspective on *The American Clock* is quite similar to what Bertolt Brecht wrote about the acting style required by *The Mother*. In the text "Indirect impact of the Epic Theatre" (1933), the German playwright explained: "the actress […] spoke the sentences as if they were in the third person; and so she not only refrained from pretending in fact to be or to claim to be Vlassova (the Mother), and in fact to be speaking those sentences, but actually prevented the spectator from transferring himself to a particular room […] Instead what she did was openly to introduce the spectator to the person whom he would be watching acting and being acted upon for some hours" (Brecht 1957: 59).

[186] About the characters' role as narrators/commentators, Peter Ferran wrote: "These narrative performances […] constitute an aggregate 'distancing' device for the audience's overall experience of the play. We are not invited with any consistency into a 'real world' inhabited by these personae; instead, we are kept aware of the story's fabricated nature by these figures' presentational activity" (Brater 2005: 157).

geography of the United States" (*ibidem*). The symbolism of the set is complemented, in the revised version, by the appearance of a baseball pitcher – an important figure of the American national mythology – that stands "*tossing a ball from hand to glove*" (*ibidem*).

The evocation of popular American culture as a way to comment on the scenes of everyday life during the Depression is developed in the play especially through the many references to American standards and songs from musical comedies that entered the national repertoire and that, in the context of the play, engage in a dialogue with the *vaudeville* tradition. During an informal conversation with Studs Terkel in 1980, Arthur Miller justified the use of this musical universe in the second version of *The American Clock*: "There was a cheerfulness I've tried to capture in the play. Some of the gayest songs in our popular repertoire came out of the Depression. I've called upon quite a few. And the humor, which was fundamentally positive. It had a bitter edge to it naturally, but it was not black humor. It was healthy" (Roudané 1987: 314).[187] Accompanied by a jazz band that remains on stage throughout the play, the actors interweave the scenes with songs whose gaiety casts an ironic, almost cynic, perspective on the tragic events lived by the characters. On the other hand, as Miller seems to suggest, the use of these songs – some of which have, in their titles, references to money and business[188] – serves to prove that, amidst all the squalor and dismay that marked America in the 1930s, there was still a streak of hope, cheerfulness and normality.[189]

If the musical references bring American popular culture to the heart of the play, the nation's history is also very much alive in *The American Clock*, which is a dramatic work with an indisputable documentary value. One could actually say that history invades the plot of the play and fosters a dialogue between the fictional characters, the present-day audiences and the most emblematic figure of the American resistance to the crisis:[190] Franklin D. Roosevelt. In Act II, during his incursion through the South, Lee stops at an open-air café

[187] As Miller suggests, humour – in the form of musical comedies and comic films, cheery popular songs and a general optimistic attitude – was one of the most effective ways the American people found to cope with the Depression and its social and financial consequences.

[188] "Million-Dollar Baby", "'Tain't Nobody's Bizness", etc.

[189] Perhaps the most exemplary case of the hope in the redeeming power of genuine human relationships that Miller wanted to portray is the marriage of Sydney (Lee's cousin) and Doris, the landlady's daughter. Although their wedding was set up, due to financial issues, by their mothers, they end up having a long and happy relationship. In Act I, Sydney and Doris realize they are a good match while they are precisely singing the 1937 hit "Once in a While":

"SIDNEY *begins to sing 'Once in a While'*; DORIS *echoes him timorously. They trade a few lines, SIDNEY hesitant and surprised. Then:*

DORIS (*fully confident, ending the song*): '… nearest your heart.'

SIDNEY (*sits on his heels beside her as she weaves the string*): Gee, you're really terrific at that, Doris.

He stands, she stands, and they shyly walk off together as he slips his hand into hers" (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 454).

[190] A crisis that for many was personified by the former president Herbert Hoover.

owned by Isaac, a black man, when suddenly the President's voice erupts from the radio and real history invades the fictional scene. Uttering some passages of the famous speech at the 1936 Democratic Convention, Roosevelt's voice appears as a warning not only to the characters in the play but also the spectators and readers:

> ROOSEVELT: […] We seek not merely to make government a mechanical implement, but to give it the vibrant personal character that is the embodiment of human charity. We are poor indeed if this nation cannot afford to lift from every recess of American life the dark fear of the unemployed that they are not needed in the world. We cannot afford to accumulate a deficit in the books of human fortitude (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 467).

Having written what Peter W. Ferran describes as "a disjunctive experience of large-and-small, serious-and-light, dynamic-and-contemplative scenes, arranged not in a logical sequence but in an episodes, time-leaping concatenation" (Brater 2005: 159), Miller proposes, in his most Brechtian work, a critical reflection on a theme that concerned him ever since *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*: the perversion of the true American values and its consequences for the common, usually confused and overwhelmed, citizen. The much diffused idea that Miller wrote most of his plays as invectives against the notion of the American Dream is, I believe, somehow erroneous. Instead, he attacked the corruption of its original meaning by the capitalist values that led to the Great Depression and that periodically assail the United States (and the Western world, so far). As Christopher Bigsby wrote, "Miller has always written out of a commitment to American values. It is the distortion of those values, their betrayal, that has concerned him" (Bigsby 2005a: 349).

Whereas *A View from the Bridge* is undeniably a more cohesive work and its production history has proved it one of Miller's most appreciated plays, *The American Clock*, despite some effective dramatic moments, strikes the spectators as a slightly moralist and historically confined play. Nevertheless, both texts stand out from the rest of Miller's dramaturgy for their concern with their own theatricality and their acknowledgement of the emancipated position and critical power of their audiences towards the dramatic situations presented. The second version of *The American Clock* ends precisely with the redeemed capitalist Theodore K. Quinn breaching the fourth wall and inviting the spectators to actively join the theatrical performance – "*He gestures for the audience to join in, and the company does so as well as the chorus swells*" (Miller 2012a, *AC*: 495). As Miller put it during an interview in 1960:

The American play is pre-eminently active, relatively unreflective as such. It deals with nothing it cannot act out. It rarely comments on itself; like the people, it always pretends it does not know what it is doing. It must *be* something rather than be *about* something. But when a play does both at once it is most highly prized. It is a hard school to go, but in my opinion the best one at the present time (Roudané 1987: 57).

Conclusion

In a poll conducted over a decade ago by the British National Theatre amongst actors and creatives, Arthur Miller was considered the most "outstanding playwright" alive (Bigsby 2005b: 2). However, if this fact attests to Miller's popularity amidst the English theatre practitioners and audiences,[191] his reputation as an aesthetic renovator in the United States started declining in the 1960s with the advent of the Theatre of the Absurd and the growing influence of the postdramatic and performative movements. As Janet N. Balakian wrote in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* ("Miller in the sixties"):

> Not only did his obsession with the Depression, Fascism, and McCarthyism seem, to many, to be anachronistic in a decade so full of its own turbulence, but, to some extent, so did his dramaturgy. Beckett and Pinter were powerful presences, and for some critics the absurd seemed to have superseded other forms both theatrically and philosophically. It was not a path that Miller could take (Bigsby 1997: 119).

Throughout the later stage of his career, the playwright remained in a kind of middle-ground position: whereas he refused the conventional dramatic Realism of Broadway family dramas and comedies, his plays and theoretical perspectives on the theatre were very far from those upheld by the most experimental groups and playwrights. During an interview in May 1987, Robert Brustein, one of the most prominent names of the renovated and alternative American theatre of the 60s and 70s, claimed that the plays written by already "classic" playwrights, such as Clifford Odets, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller were too Aristotelian, in the sense that they always followed a consequential logic: they were "all pre-planned, therefore predictable. Cause A inevitably led to Effect B […] I think we've been more and more discovering that that's not the way the universe happens" (Bigsby 1989: 130). Miller – who publicly disagreed with Brustein on many issues – responded by dismissing some of the experimental trends of the Off-Off-Broadway (mainly based on the importation

[191] In the chapter "Miller in the eighties", included in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*, June Schlueter analyzed the opposing reactions of the American and British critics toward Miller's plays of the 1970s and 1980s: "even as the American critics were complaining that Miller's recent work did not match his earlier achievement, British critics were developing a deep appreciation for Miller's plays and a growing respect for their sophistication" (Bigsby 1997: 162). Further on, Schlueter evokes Gerald Weales and Michael Billington's reviews of *The Archbishop's Ceiling* as examples of these completely contrary views on Miller's later dramatic works (*idem*: 167).

of European trends and concepts) as vacuous,[192] and by overtly disagreeing with the fundaments of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Although he admired Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco as literary figures, Miller argued in the essay "Notes on Realism" that "[t]he Absurdist approach at first seemed to me to be celebrating the impotence of human hopes, even the futility of action itself" (Miller 2000: 310) and admitted that his dramatic project was diametrically opposed to theirs: "I set myself an entirely different task. I felt that, as far as I was concerned, it would not be sufficient for me or desirable even to draw parodies of life. For the plays of Ionesco and Beckett are parodistic in nature. They parody tragedy, they parody feelings, they parody plots" (Roudané 1987: 340). Moreover, the axiological nihilism and the spiritual void that, within the dramatic panorama, were introduced by the absurdist dramaturgies represented, for Miller, an impossible route. As he stated in "*After the Fall* in Lincoln Center", "I couldn't ever write a totally nihilistic work" (Miller 1978: 292). As someone who deeply believed in moral responsibility and in the inexorable relationship between one's acts and their consequences, the author of *Salesman* deemed every kind of moral nihilism as potentially dangerous: "My feeling is that when you sell nihilism, so to speak, you are creating the grounds for nihilistic destruction" (Roudané 1987: 185).

While overtly claiming to be an atheist, Arthur Miller always sustained the need for moral values to prevail over modern-day relativisms. In 1947 the playwright made a statement that would definitely guide his career as an artist (and social activist): "I don't see how you can write anything decent without using the question of right and wrong" (Miller, qtd. in Bloom 2005: 116). This claim for clear ethical values and moral responsibility is, I believe, what led Miller to nurture a particular interest, especially throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s, in the tragic form.[193] In an interview with Robert A. Martin (1970), the author associated the incomprehensibility of tragedy in the modern era with the decline of religious belief and established moral codes. Miller argued: "In short, the reason we can't, I don't think, any longer really get a grasp on tragedy is because of the absence of a religion, and that what we've got is the human half of the old Greek and the old Elizabethan process" (Roudané

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[192] In a 1967 interview for the *Michigan Quarterly Review* Miller said: "He wants – this is Brustein – the old theater is not joy. His theater is joy. It's a slogan – it's like advertising […] The thing has no substance whatsoever. To one guy it's a Theater of Joy, and to another guy, it's – there's another slogan that's going around, the Theater of Cruelty" (Roudané 1987: 134).

[193] During a 1990 interview with Janet Balakian, Miller admitted that "these last plays [form the late 60s onwards], with the big exception of the short play *Clara*, have a different view of life which is not an overtly tragic view" (Miller 1978: 484).

1987: 202).[194] The playwright's association between the tragic frame of mind and religious certainty was also articulated by other writers and scholars, namely Lionel Abel in *Tragedy and Metatheatre*: "Even looking back at the Greek works, I think we can see that what is required for tragedy is the operation of what I would call implacable values, and it is such values that modern feeling tells us are false" (Abel 2003: 41).[195]

Always concerned with the social dimension of man, Miller trusted that true drama — inspired by the Greek and Elizabethan tragic models – should depict the conflict between individual needs or convictions and social practices. This thematic frame – which was most evident in Miller's early classics, from *All My Sons* to *A View from the Bridge* – would ultimately be the basis of Miller's dramatic project. It is the conflict between man and society, between two sets of values, two wills that, according to the playwright, should compose the dramatic action. And, even in tragedy – where the protagonist is confronted and defeated by a superior entity (whether the Gods, Destiny, social norms or economic forces) – the conflict should be vital element of the dramatic arch. As Miller told Christopher Bigsby about Eddie Carbone, "from the beginning of the play we are to know that this man can't make it, yet might reveal himself somehow in his struggle" (Miller 1978: 426).[196] Bearing in mind the social relevance of the themes of his plays – even if some texts (such as *Salesman* and *After the Fall*) are clearly more focused on the protagonist's intimate turmoil – Arthur Miller always highlighted the dialectical relationship between individuals and their society. As he famously said,

[194] Throughout his theatre career, Miller always looked up to Greek theatre as the most perfect theatrical ritual of the Western tradition, where social and religious concerns, along with an emotional cleansing, were communally experienced on the stage and within the audience. According to the playwright, the only American theatre ensemble able to recreate this classical practice was The Group: "The sole sense of connection with theater came when I saw the production of the Group Theatre. It was not only the brilliance of ensemble acting, which in my opinion has never been equalled since in America, but the air of union created between actors and the audience. Here was the promise of prophetic theater which suggested to my mind the Greek situation when religion and belief were the heart of drama" (Miller 1958: 16).

[195] Both Miller and Abel's perspectives mirror Lukács' viewpoint on tragedy. In "The sociology of modern drama", he wrote: "Tragedy itself has become problematic. There are, that is, no longer any absolute, overriding, external, easily discerned criteria by which one judges whether a given man and a given destiny are tragic. The tragic becomes strictly a matter of viewpoint" (Lukács 1965: 167).

[196] In his effort to write modern tragedies, Miller believed that the superhuman entities presented in Greek and Elizabethan tragic classics should be adapted to the modern age: "if we're going to talk about tragedy at all, it seems to me that we've got to find some equivalent to that superhuman schema that had its names in the past, whatever they were. Whether they went under the name of Zeus's laws, or, as in Shakespearean times, reflected a different ideology toward man, they also had lying in the background somewhere an order which was being violated and which the character was seeking to come to some arrangement with […] I wrote an essay once about the equivalents we have for gods. The closest thing we've got is the economic system" (Roudané 1987: 201; 312).

> the fish is in the water and the water is in the fish. Man is in society but the society is in man and every individual. To trace the lines of each as they wind around together is one of my preoccupations. In order to arrive at some leverage by the man on his own fate so that he can find a way to swim or he can find a way to control that part of his psyche which is already predetermined so to speak by his society. It happens in *Death of a Salesman* when Biff opts out (Roudané 1987: 254).

However, as Miller himself suggests by quoting Biff's example, he never gave in to determinist or pessimistic conceptions of Man. Although he agreed that we are influenced by external forces (social ones, above all), the playwright never believed in total victimization. For the author of *Salesman*, the concepts of will and choice[197] are absolutely mandatory – "His will is as much as his defeat" (Miller 1958: 54) – and the true drama should be the depiction of the dialectic between the individual's will and society's demands: "I don't think either that man is without will or that society is impotent to change his deepest, most private self-conception. I think that the work of art, the great work of art, is going to be that work which finds space for the two forces to operate" (Roudané 1987: 36).

Although Miller was committed to renovating the American dramaturgy of the 1940s and overcoming the conventional domestic Realism that had settled on the Broadway stages, he was a rather timid aesthetic innovator when compared to some of his European counterparts, such as Brecht, Beckett, Ionesco, Heiner Müller, and the American experimental movement of the 1960s (led by groups like The Living Theatre or the Performance Group). The fact is that Miller – in spite of experimenting with non-realistic devices – still had a rather classical perspective on drama and theatre. If one flicks through the playwright's interviews and essays, it does not take very long to realize that he still describes his ideal play in Aristotelian (or dramatic, according to Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory) terms. In the Introduction to the *Collected Plays*, Miller states that for him there is "no possibility of a drama without mimicry, conflict, tale, or speech" (Miller 1958: 3) and, paraphrasing Aristotle's description of the dramatic form as a *beautiful, living creature*, refers to the dramatic text as a living organism – "The underlying poem of a play I take to be the organic necessity of its parts" (*idem*: 8).

Again, during an interview for the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Miller insisted that for him, a play should follow a logic of cause and consequence – which demonstrates how far the past influences his characters' present actions and decisions – and present "an organic conflict of some sort, which has a beginning and a middle and an end" (Roudané 1987: 130). Much in tune with the recent critical distinction between drama and theatre, Miller admits in a

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[197] "There are lines of force – economic, political, mythic memories, genetic imprints – many more, and where they intersect in a human situation in which man must make choice – is drama" (Roudané 1987: 332).

conversation with Mel Gussow that his idea of a theatre play – which is, first of all, undoubtedly textocentric – is highly influenced by the Aristotelian-Hegelian model of a logically organized conflict that develops like an arch, linking the initial exposition to the climax and, finally, to the cathartic dénouement:

> Well, you know there's drama and there's theatre, and they're not necessarily the same thing […] My concept – I didn't invent it – the idea of a play being the story of birds coming home to roost, which is basically the classical theatre. That's gone by the boards. Plays today are incidents, not a long articulated arch where the past is being grappled with (Gussow 2002: 125).

In *The Postdramatic Theatre* – a seminal work on the main trends of contemporary theatre – Hans-Thies Lehmann defines the dramatic theatre as a textocentric practice, very much focused on the Aristotelian concepts of a logically organized plot, character and dialogue. As the German scholar wrote, about the theatre panorama at the beginning of the 20th century,

> despite all the individual entertaining effects of the staging, the textual elements of plot, character (or at least dramatis personae) and a moving story predominantly told in dialogue remained the structuring components. They were associated with the keyword 'drama' and informed not only its theory but also the expectations of theatre (Lehmann 1999: 31).[198]

Lehmann keeps on describing the dramatic theatre with an Aristotelian matrix in terms which are very similar to those used by Miller to characterize his own works:

> Aristotle's *Poetics* conceptualizes beauty and the order of tragedy according to an analogy with logic. Thus the rule that tragedy has to be a 'whole' with beginning, middle and end, coupled with the demand that the 'magnitude' […] should be just enough for the movement to a 'peripeteia' […] and from there to a conclusive catastrophe, is conceptualized according to the example of logic. For the *Poetics* drama is a structure that gives a logical (namely dramatic) order to the confusing chaos and plenitude of Being (*idem*: 40).

It is my opinion, therefore, that Miller's incursions through the intimate (*Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*) and the epic theatres (*A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock*) – as he sought to deconstruct the conventions of the domestic Realism – were never a daring experimental movement beyond the circle of dramatic theatre. For the author of

[198] Despite the experimentalism and deconstruction of the fundamentals of Aristotelian theatre conveyed in his plays and theory, Bertolt Brecht was, according to Lehmann, still an essentially dramatic playwright: "In the light of the newest developments, it becomes increasingly apparent that, in a sense, the theory of epic theatre constituted a renewal and completion of *classical dramaturgy*. Brecht's theory contained a highly traditional thesis: the *fable* (*story*) remained the *sine qua non* for him" (Lehmann 1999: 33).

Salesman, a consequential and organically organized plot acted out by fictional characters that interact through dialogue ultimately lay at the basis of his ideal text written for the theatre. Even though the plays addressed in this study and other later works (such as *I Can't Remember Anything*, *Clara*, or even *Mr. Peters' Connections*) appear as formally original and were, in all fairness, great contributions for the renovation of American theatre, they do not take the leap towards the postdramatic text.

Moreover, Miller never really broke with the American dramatic tradition (established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), which found its natural voice in Realism. Instead, Miller found a compromise between tradition and experimentalism, but always within the *American grain* – as the constant portrayal of familial environments in his plays (which nevertheless have social projection) demonstrates.[199] As a proponent of a socially and morally consequent theatre committed to proving that our past actions have consequences in the present, Miller chose to build a dramatic project in which the logical organization of the fable and its discernible meaning were a priority. He did not, however, give in to the fossilized and sentiment-driven Realism of the Broadway stages and was well aware of his *middle-ground* position with regard to the main currents of 20th-century theatre. As he admitted in a 1967 interview with Walter Wagner, a great part of his dramaturgy was a balancing exercise between the realistic trend and the "symbolic" or "expressionist" drive, which found its expression in the intimate or psychological play (*Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*) and the epic/narrative drama (*A View from the Bridge* and *The American Clock*):

> My aim is to deliver up the symbolic meaning of what I see, what I feel, and I've never been able to do it through a naturalistic technique. And yet I don't think that the solution is a completely symbolic drama. In other words, I am trying to account as best I can for the realistic surface of life as well as Man's intense need to symbolize the meaning of what he experiences (Roudané 1987: 141).

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[199] During a 1976 interview, Miller commented the recurrence of the family at the dramatic core of American theatre: "He [Warren Harding] never knew quite what to say […] but he did say that, 'Wherever I go in America, I look about and see people living together in families' […] I suppose I write about them because that's the way culture comes into us. It seems to me central to the human experience, it is home plate […] I haven't counted them, but there haven't been a lot of European plays about families. I have a feeling you are right, that maybe we deal with it more […] We relate, I would say, much less to the social and governmental system in our thinking and in our attempts to account for our fate, than a European does" (Roudané 1987: 271-272).

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