THE REBEL AS TRAGIC HERO

a study of

The Plague by Albert Camus

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

by

Betsy Greenleaf Culbertson

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Approved by

Ruth C. Hege

Director

Examining Committee

Elisabeth Bowles

Donald G. Darnell

Eugene Decker

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PATTERN OF TRAGEDY

One of the most riddling of all literary genres is that which is called tragedy. The term "tragedy" has been used to describe all sorts of serious literature, of varying degrees of excellence, throughout the artistic history of Western man. However, to the ancient Greeks, who invented the genre, tragedy had distinct and highly refined characteristics of composition. It was a particular art after a recognizable pattern. The pattern of tragedy was analyzed by Aristotle in his Poetics, in which the Greek philosopher based his discussion on the works of the three masters of Greek tragedy, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The essential principles of the Aristotelian definition, crucial of a development of any understanding of the art of tragedy, are adequately summarized by a modern tragic theorist, Oscar Mandel, in his A Definition of Tragedy: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, concerning the fall of a man whose character is good, appropriate, believable, and consistent, whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play, with incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of these emotions."[1]

The Greeks, according to the axioms of Aristotle and the examples presented in the extant works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, envisioned tragedy as re-creating pulsating action which moves a hero through conflict from static existence to his destiny. This conflict appears to be realized in the confrontation between aspiring, flawed

[1] A Definition of Tragedy (New York, 1961) pp. 214-5.

man and a fathomless, omnipotent universe. Greek tragedy began in religious ceremony; in its development as literature, its configuration continued to reflect the thought of the Greeks on the relationship between man and the universe. The tragic universe might be benevolent, as that of Aeschylus, inscrutable, as that of Sophocles, or hostile, as that of Euripides, but it had to be more powerful than the hero and unknown to him. Tragedies, for the Greeks, were the histories of men who confront their universe and who fail to conquer or understand it, but who do endow themselves with honor by the supremacy of their effort. These men are exceptionally subject to hybris, extreme pride, which makes them extraordinary men, yet which is unforgivable for its effrontery. The concept of hybris is central to Greek tragedy, which explores the conflict between the aspirations of the human will and their frustration by God or Fate.

The plot proposed by Aristotle as the most appropriate metaphor for the confrontation between man and destiny is the story of a great change of fortune, preferably a change from good to bad fortune.[2] Thus, by definition, the the action of a tragedy is linear, never circular. A tragedy traces the cause, nature, and universal significance of a fall which is symbolic of the ultimate failing of every human being to comprehend or alter his destiny. Tragedy, for the Greeks, was therefore the finest art form, since it explored artistically their beliefs about the nature of man and his relationship to his cosmos.

Since the fall of the Greek tragic hero served as a metaphor for human limitations, it was the inevitable outcome of any tragedy. Greek tragedies such as the <u>Oresteia</u> and <u>Oedipus Rex</u> march with horrifying

[2]Aristotle, <u>Poetics</u>, trans. Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor, 1967) p. 38.

certainty from the hero's confrontation of his destiny to the resolution of the drama. Given the hero and the implacable universe as they are, the final reversal of the hero is implicit in his actions from the moment of his first choice to do battle with Fate. Fate is the ruler of the Greek universe, and in Greek literature of man versus the universe its judgments are final. Inevitability of the defeat of man is central to Greek tragedy; it prevents the resolution from being ironic. As far as the Greek tragedians were concerned, the whole of a tragic play might be ironic except the conclusion, whose absoluteness was one of the defining characteristics of its tragic quality.

However, Greek tragedy does far more than trace the course of an inevitable fall. It studies the cause and universal meaning of that fall and finally judges the justice of it. It expresses its judgment by placing against irreversible destiny an indomitable hero. Oedipus, Antigone, Orestes, and Iphegenia cannot accept the situations in which they find themselves at the openings of their dramas, so they choose to struggle to put those situations right, constantly questioning each obstacle they encounter in the course of their effort and defeat. The value of the hero as a human being acts as a countervalue in Greek tragedy to the inevitability of the fall. Aristotle emphasized this fact by demanding that the hero be a man of honor and idealism.[3] He must be a sympathetic and noble soul who falls not as retribution for deliberate wrongdoing, but from failure in his conscientious attempt to act rightly. The specific sort of failure to which the Greek tragic hero must succumb in summed up by Aristotle in the use of the term <u>hamartia</u>,

[3]<u>Ibid.</u>

error or frailty.[4] Hamartia is a structural necessity for tragedy; wrong choice is a means for the hero to advance the action and force a resolution for the drama. It is also an aesthetic necessity, since it is the capacity for error on tha part of the tragic hero which distinguishes him from the saint, another heroic figure. The tragic flaw in Aristotelian tragedy is then a dramatic symbol of universal human frailty.

In any Greek tragedy the dramatic conflict represents the tension between the inevitability of Fate, representing the incomprehensible justice of the cosmos, and the eminent goodness of the hero, representing the human race. These two values are put into conflict in an attempt to resolve them into justice. The tension between inevitability and free, conscious, heroic effort is described by Aristotle in his concept of catharsis.[5] He pinpoints the result of the tension in the parallel emotions of pity and terror aroused in the audience by fine tragedy. Terror in Greek tragedy is allied structurally to the inevitability of the fall; pity is allied to the admirable nature of the hero's character and the illusory hope that he might be victorious.[6] At the end of an Aristotelian tragedy these emotions are purged by a resolution of the conflict which is both necessary and just. It was an artistic principle for the Greeks that tragedy end in final tranquillity. It is through catharsis that tragedy continues to be meaningful to an audience beyond the end of the play.

The pattern of Greek tragedy, exemplified by Aeschylus, Sophocles,

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid. p. 40ff.

[6] Judah Bierman, James Hart, and Stanley Johnson, The Dramatic Experience (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1958) p. 367.

and Euripides and defined by Aristotle, is that of the contingent, questioning power of the hero, pitted against the permanent, oppressive power of the omnipotent, incomprehensible universe, and resolved in justice.

The nature of the tragic hero, as established by Aristotle's rules, and the nature of the tragic universe, as mirrored in the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, are clear enough. In general, modern tragic theorists, whose views of the cosmos and of man are similar to those of the Greeks, agree with them. However, modern tragic theorists have greatly amplified the bare Aristotelian sketch of the necessary emotional content of tragedy without altering the artistic principles of Aristotelian tragedy itself. Modern tragic theory has, in particular, disengaged the basic, general Aristotelian principles from the mass of exclusive rules imposed on them by critics since the Renaissance. It has adopted Aristotelian concepts of hamartia and catharsis with clarifications, but without changes, and has introduced the neo-Aristotelian demand for tragic exaltation.

The best modern articulation of the concept of hamartia is that of Arthur Miller, expressed in his controversial essay, "Tragedy and the Common Man." In his defense of the common man as tragic hero, Miller reduces the idea of hamartia to its essence: "The flaw--or crack in the character--is nothing, or need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status."[7] With this conception, Miller goes against centuries of criticism demanding a recognizable "sin" or "flaw" in the hero, but he does

[7] Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," New York Times, Feb. 27, 1949, Sec. II, p. 1.

not contradict the Aristotelian concept.

In the same essay, Miller also treats the subject of catharsis, returning its source to the search for justice, despite the long-standing belief of Christian critics that catharsis occurs in the revelation of a system of cosmic justice which pre-exists. Miller sees pity and terror aroused by the fierce onrush of any feeble, but determined individual against the massive, adamant cosmos.[8] He roots the catharsis of these two emotions in the intensity of the struggle,[9] as did Aristotle himself in expecting the catharsis to come from the "incidents" of the action.

Furthermore, modern tragic theory has extended the role of catharsis in tragedy along Aristotle's own lines. Catharsis is now considered to produce not only a sense of tranquillity for the spectator, but also to leave him exultant, if the defeat of the hero is to be adequately compensated for. It is this tragic exaltation, according to the neo-Aristotelians, which makes clear the distinction between tragedy and irony. Tragedy asserts, paradoxically, that the tragic fall is the most splendid of all human efforts; it finds spiritual consolation in the greatness of man at the nadir of his desapir. The most vocal of the advocates of tragic exaltation, Joseph Wood Krutch, maintains that the essence of tragedy is exaltation of the human mind and spirit, and that tragedy cannot exist in a society which does not primarily affirm the value of the individual.[10] For Krutch, catastrophe provides man

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid. p. 3.

[10] Joseph Wood Krutch, "The Tragic Fallacy," in The Modern Temper (New York, 1929) p. 122.

his greatest occasion for grandeur.[11]

The concept of tragic exaltation is seen by neo-Aristotelain Krutch as having its roots in the granduer of the herois figure. Mr. Krutch takes Aristotle's use of the term "magnitude" to mean that the hero must have extraordinary social status. He feels that such status is a prerequisite for the exaltation which tragedy is supposed to evoke, and that social greatness of the hero is the necessary objective correlative for his greatness of soul. He maintains, in "The Tragic Fallacy," that the loss of social status along with the death of the gods has dealt tragedy a mortal wound,[12] This argument has been reinforced repeatedly by suggestions that the convincing drama of kings cannot be reproduced in a democracy.[13] However, the questionable assumption behind these arguments is that without the objective correlative of kingship there can be no creation of a sense of human greatness. Mr. Krutch feels that although great-souled men must still exist in potential, their human majesty cannot be adequately comprehended without the extreme freedom and fearful power of kingship.[14]

Other neo-Aristotelian contemporary critics feel that exaltation is not rooted in wonder at the hero's superiority, but in personal involvement with his intense struggle.[15] For them, the fact that any man can resist the impersonal determination of his destiny is implicit in

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid. pp. 115-143.

[13] "Untragic America," Life
Orrin E. Klapp, "Tragedy and the American Climate of Opinion," in Two Modern American Tragedies, ed. John D. Hurrell (New York, 1969) pp. 29-30.

[14] Krutch, p. 133.

[15] These critics include John Gassner, Judah Bierman, Stanley Johnson, James Hart, Henry A. Myers, George Boas, Oscar Mandel.

Aristotle's theory of tragedy, and they feel that this very resistance produces exaltation. They admit the need for an objective correlative for nobility of soul, but they stoutly maintain that if exaltation is a cardinal principle for tragedy, its source must be literary rather than social. They insist that there are other realities than kingship in modern life which are capable of producing, if not awe, then at least respect mingled with sympathetic pride. John Gassner, for example, states that "man's scientific mastery over nature [and his] confidence in being able to order the universe according to scientific hypotheses and mathematical formulas" provide him with dignity.[16] Others have suggested that tragic dignity stems from the intensity of living or insistent purposefulness rather than from social power.[17] Arthur Miller, in "Tragedy and the Common Man," offers the following explanation of the achievement of stature by the modern hero: "But for a moment everything is in suspension, nothing is accepted, and in the stretching and tearing apart of the cosmos the character gains 'size,' the tragic stature which is spuriously attached to the royal or highborn in our minds."[18]

Certainly tragedy produces a spirit of exaltation is presenting a struggle in which a hero is able to ward off disaster even for a moment. The form by definition grants the hero ennobling power and makes his heroism extraordinary--his defeat, then, tragic. It is clear, then,

[16] John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads (New York, 1963) p. 56.

[17] Bierman et al., p. 493.
Henry A. Myers, "Heroes and the Way of Compromise," in Tragedy: Vision and Form, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (San Francisco, 1965) pp. 135, 136.
Oscar Mandel, A Definition of Tragedy (New York, 1961) p. 103.

[18] "Tragedy and the Common Man," p. 3.

that implicit in the Aristotelian definition of tragedy is its capacity to exalt. Neo-Aristotelians have clarified and enriched the Greek philosophers's analysis with this contribution to the effort to understand the art of tragedy.

In the effort to develop a system of tragic principles, modern writers of tragedy have a far greater task than reinterpreting Aristotle in the context of modern civilization. The elements which compose Aristotelian tragedy, the great silent cosmos and the single struggling soul, still exist in modern literature. However, the demanding complexity of modern society has separated man from his universe, and the vast accumulation of knowledge since the Attic Greek period has fragmented that universe and debilitated the hero. It is up to modern trageduans to determine which of Aristotle's values are archetypal for tragedy and to find the manifestations of them in the modern world. In addition, it is up to them to discover which in the welter of contemporary values are valid new contributions to tragic art.

The twentieth century is at this time just beginning to qualify for tragedy, as individualism and humanism are asserting themselves against the weight of nineteenth-century determinism. The theme of frustration of the individual is still prevalent in modern literature; few writers have gone beyond it to tragedy. Rootlessness, fragmentation, weakness, and sterility are obsessively present, debilitating courage to foolhardiness and scorning hope as escapism. Contempt for a bourgeois culture and the cult of the superman have elevated out of reality most of the recent French literature which might be termed heroic. Socialism, naturalism, and Freud have tended to confine the American tragic impulse to propaganda drama and case history litera-

ture. Even a poet with the tragic potential of Eugene O'Neill has decorated his heroes with complexes or obsessive physiological drives rather than making them truly tragic.

The rise of science has had a drastic effect on metaphysics, pushing man from the center of the cosmos and reducing him to a mass of physico-chemical urges with no cosmological dignity. This fact, above all, has led a number of contemporary critics to deny tragedy any present or future.[19] They argue that the death of the gods, who appear in tragedy in the form of an active universe which is a worthy opponent for man, has reduced the tragic battle to a quibble. This is the thesis of Joseph Wood Krutch's "The Tragic Fallacy," already referred to, whose salient points are as follows: 1. The tragic fallacy is the assumption that the cosmos is aware of man's actions and is affected by them. Because this has been put into grave doubt by science, and because belief in it is necessary for tragic exaltation, tragedy no longer exists. 2. The proper objective correlative for nobility of the human soul is kingship. Since this is no longer a reality, tragedy may be admired as a lost art, but not produced. Its thrill must now be vicarious because it depends on a stable monarchy which has become an impossibility. 3. The literature of the little man has arisen because man now feels himself important and his feelings animalistic. Exaltation no longer exists in life and thus cannot be approximated in tragedy. 4. Attempts to suggest new forces against which man is defenseless have produced nothing more important than disease (as in Ibsen's Ghosts) and disease is too commonplace to be tragic.[20]

[19] Mr. Krutch, George Steiner, Louis Bredvold, and others.

[20] Krutch, pp. 115-43.

Despite the substantial accuracy of Mr. Krutch's appraisal, his case is flawed. As John Gassner observes, he begins with the questionable assumptions that man's importance was so thoroughly believed in in the past and that without cosmic relevance man is without human dignity.[21] Whether or not man is at the center of the universe, it would seem, has really nothing to do with man's concept of personal dignity, for even in the age of belief he never received acknowledgement that his deeds echoed through the universe. The assurance that human action is <u>in itself</u> the only thing in the universe of real, knowledgeable value carries no less dignity and much more responsibility than hopeful conjectures about man's cosmic importance. Whether or not a great fall affects the universe, it certainly affects the whole of the human world and will continue to do so. Science may have proved man commonplace and mean, but, after all, man is the scientist.

Critical response to the pessimism of Mr. Krutch has been the impassioned urge of a new humanism. Man's frail, but earnest effort to impose an ethical order on his world, since such an order can no longer be inferred from the cosmos, seems to many to be genuinely tragic. So does his courage in the face of crushed beliefs and the necessity of placing all the value in himself. Though tragedy has lost magnificence for the reasons Mr. Krutch justly cites, it has not lost its essence if its roots are in the human condition. Tragedy cannot exalt the grandeur of man if the grandeur of man does not exist except in high tragedy. Therefore, if there is grandeur in the act of living, the art of tragedy will continue to reassert itself as an expression of that grandeur.

[21]Gassner, p. 56.

According to the new humanist critics,[22] that reassertion has already begun. Many would say that Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea is a tragedy of inevitable overthrow and the indomitability of man, and its hero is a starving Cuban fisherman. The tendency of the moderns is to what Mr. Gassner aptly labels "low tragedy."[23] This variant of the genre contains a tragic metaphysics and exhibits a tragic action, but lacks the literary richness of Greek or Shakespearean tragic expression. The degree and quality of exaltation are less in, for example, Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman than in King Lear, which has somewhat the same pattern of plot and theme. The Miller play is not necessarily less tragic than that of Shakespeare, but it is tragic in a different way and clearly less fine a tragedy.[24] Ambiguity of the tragic conflict, the diminished importance of awareness, the abasement of language, and the insignificance of formal stature, all of which are apparent in the Miller play, are characteristics of low tragedy.

Traditionalists maintain that such a form as low tragedy is artistically impossible, that the term "low tragedy" is self-contradictory. For them, tragedy is a calue, a pinnacle of artistic achievement striven after by serious poets.[25] This sort of criticism giving the term "tragedy" honorific overtones is dangerous. The tragic impulse may be implicit in the human condition, but that does not make it sacred. Tragedy is not a static art; its plot metaphor must evolve

[22]John Gassner, Brooks Atkinson, Eric Bentley, William G. McCollom, Oscar Mandel, Herbert J. Muller, C. I. Glicksberg and others.

[23]Gassner, p. 64.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Krutch, p. 139.
Mandel, p. 6.
William G. McCollom, Tragedy (New York, 1957) p. 3.

reflecting the changing reality of human life, if tragedy is to remain a meaningful genre for artistic expression. The pattern of hero, universe, catharsis does not change, but the dramatic correlatives of those abstract concepts vary with age, country, and particular poet. As a fluid literary genre, tragedy flourishes or declines according to how insistently the times demand a definitions of the relationship of man to his cosmos.

The new twentieth-century humanism of the rebel is clearly an attempt to endow microscopic, mechanistic modern man with the ability to combat a universe which remains omnipotent and has become, with the death of the gods, inscrutable. The demand that man force an ethical order on the silent cosmos is identical to the Greek demand that man argue against the Fates. The cycle is complete; the insistence on the nobility of any human soul in a life-or-death struggle is the same despite the gap of 2500 years. This nobility is maintained by both societies as a countervalue to cosmic silence, and the conflict of these two opposed values is recognized as fact. An inscrutable universe and a brave, noble man seem, then, to be the archetypal antagonists in a tragedy. The catharsis produced by a resolution of their conflict is an artistic demand. Tragedy must resolve the conflict as life does not resolve it, with justice. Final exaltation, the tragic vision,[26] the tragic spirit,[27] is a psychological demand of the spectator. The purpose of any art is affirmation;[28] art must fulfill a human need for expression of some positive value. The art of tragedy is that it turns

[26]Richmond Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven, 1959).

[27]Herbert J. Muller, The Spirit of Tragedy (New York, 1956).

[28]Krutch, p. 123.

physical defeat into psychological triumph.

For modern men, as for the Greeks, tragedy attempts to fulfill a need to express the metaphysical values of a culture. It is a symbolic dramatization of the human condition, of man's irremediable suspension between the animals and the angels, of the discrepancy between man's possession of a destiny and his inability to control it. As Albert Camus expressed it, "The work of art is situated at the point where the desire for transcendence and the impossibility of transcendence conflict."[29]

In the face of this horrifying discrepancy, tragedy is assertive. Its beginning is in the repudiation of passive acceptance. Again, it is Camus who is the spokesman for the modern tragic hero. "I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something within it does have meaning, and that is man, because he is the only being who insists on having it."[30]

The rhythm of tragic action is the linear movement from abstract assertion to concrete commitment, then through the course of a purposeful, agonized, questioning struggle which ends in a predestined defeat, but which also produces understanding. Kenneth Burke's rhythm of "purpose, passion, perception" is the pattern revealed.[31] If, then, tragedy requires purpose and passion, it cannot be written in either a period of complacency or in one of despair. It is the product of man's troubled intelligence when his society is neither complacent nor des-

[29]Albert Camus, quoted in Germaine Brée, Albert Camus (New York, 1964) p. 48.

[30]Albert Camus, Lettres à un ami allémand (Lausanne, 1946) pp. 72, 73. Translation by this author.

[31]John Gassner, "Tragic Perspectives: A Sequence of Queries," in Hurrell, p. 18.

perate, but is basically good and conscientious, although plagued by injustices. The tragic poet condenses such a sympathetic, but fallible society into one man, the tragic hero, whose drama follows the pattern just described. Through the battles of the hero, the drama reveals the nature of the universe against which he struggles. The final choice of the hero and his last beliefs at the moment of destruction purge terror and pity. The magnitude of his struggle and the sincerity of his motives exalt and inspire the spectator. Hero, universe, catharsis, and exaltation are, then, we may assume, the qualities in tragedy which are archetypal. Their presence determines the tragic power of any serious literature. Expressed and explored in conjunction, they form the pattern of tragedy.

CHAPTER TWO

HERO, UNIVERSE, CATHARSIS

Tragedy is, first and foremost, a heroic literature. It is the drama of an indiviual in his struggles with an obdurate universe. The use of a hero concentrates the dramatic action of tragedy within a single, symbolic soul. The hero serves as a mediator between the audience and the cosmic forces against which he is set, and he is also spokesman for man, since his values are meant to be believed in and since his faults bring to his situation his own human fallibility. It is through his coming to an understanding of this fallibility that catharsis is engendered.

The tragic hero is well defined in character, both by structural necessity and by tradition. He is the initiator of the tragic conflict, a man who forces static Fate into imbalance in order to judge it.[32] He remains in all respects an enlargement of the ordinary man,[33] but for him moral values are extraordinarily significant, self-knowldge is the primary consideration, and honorable commitment is the justification for existence. He is great in soul, though eminently fallible, highly individualistic, exceptionally subject to pride (hybris) and rigid in his idealism. His tragedy is that his pursuit of his highest values will lead inevitably to his suffering and death. He always finds an answer and pays terribly for it. It is mistakes and wrong choices, or self-sacrificing right choices, in the grim pursuit of self and identity in the cosmos which make tragic heroes.

The tragedian makes drama from the hero's confrontation with self in the face of death and from his struggle for self-mastery. However, the heroic effort is twofold--first the hero must realize a self,

[32] Bierman et al., p. 548.

[33] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J., 1957) p. 209.

second he must undertake a tragic mission to establish an identity for that self in his surroundings. The plot follows the hero's searches for self and purpose intellectually; the poetry and emotional rhythm of the conflict plumb his soul. The hero is both a thinking and a feeling being; thought helps him to define the suffering he feels and feeling makes his intellectual struggle meaningful.

The hero's search for self may be undertaken actively or contemplatively. The active hero, according to a modern theorist, William G. McCollom, is "precipitate, headstrong, hot-blooded and heedless, as Coriolanus, King Lear, Brand, Oedipus."[34] His unregenerate pride and courage make him heroic. He comes to a slow awareness out of stubborn blindness and meets doom with defiant revolt. The contemplative hero, as McCollom describes him, is "grave, reflective, analytical, brooding and self-tormented as Hamlet, Brutus, Richard II, Michael Ransom, and Euripides' Orestes."[35] The contemplative hero is the saint who hesitates in doubt, for whom the choice is withdrawal or commitment.

It is commitment, precisely, which unites thought and feeling in the hero and helps him to extend his personal search for self into a representative search for identity. The same insistent purposefulness which drives the hero to seek self-knowledge drives him to his fatal tragic choice. It is Oedipus' desire for the truth, Macbeth's need for secure power, Phèdre's passion for Hippolyte, the very characteristics which involve them vitally in living, which make their heroism tragic.

Critics who claim that the art of tragedy is dead base their argument principally on the claim that such men as these no longer exist.

[34]McCollom, p. 43.

[35]*Ibid*.

These critics feel that extremity of action and rigorous adherence to virtue are contrary to the modern temperament, in particular that the decline of an outwardly imposed system of absolute morality has made virtue too personal to carry heroic weight. Science, for them, is the villain. Advances in the study of psychological motivation and behavior, which have tended to nagate the belief that the intellect controls behavior, have shrunk the individual, as far as these critics are concerned, to a cog in a machine, so that he is totally incapable of making a quest in the grand style. They point, with justice, to the literature since the scientific revolution. Modern writers, unable to believe in the old heroes, have offered bloodless protagonists who are either literary supermen, removed from the flow of their times, or semi-perceptive animals, so realistically socially motivated that they inhibit the imaginations of their creators.

A few modern writers, however, unable to make heroes of flawless supermen or insensitive brutes, have introduces a new sort of hero, the little man raised to representative status. The little man as hero is a result of the attempt to find heroism, which is based on superiority, in a social system in which inequality of rank is a negative value, and where, therefore, he must manifest greatness of soul without the helpful objective correlative of greatness of rank, which is what Mr. Krutch says cannot be done. Defenders of the little hero deny Mr. Krutch's judgment that, because he is not of the caliber of the old hero, the little man is totally unheroic.[36] They point out that he is susceptible to the same passion, suffering, and coming to self-awareness as a king, maintaining that since the characteristics which make heroes are present

[36] Krutch, p. 138f.

in smaller measure in the ordinary man, the ordinary man can be dramatized convincingly as a hero within his limited universe.[37] The little hero stands as a symbol, and a justification, of the way things are. Little men are the heroes of Maxwell Anderson's Winterset, Arthur Miller's A View from the Bridge and Albert Camus's The Plague. Camus, in fact, defends one of his secondary characters, a harmless, uninteresting civil servant named Joseph Grand, as the real hero of his novel. "Yes, if it is true that men persist in proposing examples and models of what they call heroes, and if it is absolutely necessary that this narrative should contain one, the narrator offers, as is just, this insignificant and overlooked hero who had to recommend him only a little goodness of heart and an ideal which seemed ridiculous."[38] Such a hero as Grand is inarticulate and small, but he is capable of reason and passion, and when he commits himself to something, that is at least a beginning of tragedy for him.

The very fact that modern writers are able to find little men heroic is the strongest argument that the ideal of heroism is not dead, and modern writers such as Albert Camus and Arthur Miller maintain both in their theoretical essays and in their works that modern man is as heroic as ever, if not more so. They admit that modern tragic heroes have lost traditional grandeur because of the pressure of science upon the modern poetic imagination, but they cannot feel that that imagination has been destroyed, because for them the tragic vision is at the core of human understanding of existence and because, as Camus explains in

[37]The most concise argument for the little man as hero may be found in Arthur Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man."

[38]Albert Camus, La Peste (Paris, 1947) p. 111. Translation by this author.

The Myth of Sisyphus, life is preferable to suicide.[39]

Miller and Camus feel that though modern tragic heroism may be absurd, since it can hope for no recognition from the cosmos, it has continued to exist, having changed its aim from eternal meaning to temporal. It has deliberately limited itself to the existential. This sort of tragic heroism is difficult and demanding and offers no compensation but the personal satisfaction of having done one's job. It is immediate, making no demands on the eternal, or even the temporal, future. It takes its values from the moment and its movement is from act to act. It does not admit reconciliation and is resolved only in death. Its necessity, its ultimate value, is revolt. Because the value of revolt is in itself, the result of the tragic action is insignificant. It may lead to lucidity and ordering of values for the hero, as Camus has it do for Bernard Rieux in The Plague; it may end in blind collapse, as for Willy Loman in Miller's Death of a Salesman. The commitment of revolt is not far-reaching, but it is total in its intensity because revolt is in itself the only value undeniably known. Since the scope and depth of revolt, and of any other human action, are the measures of value, the modern tragic hero gives himself worth by the creativity of his living.

The modern tragic hero, as Camus and Miller very similarly envision him, faces the hostile or indifferent cosmos and faces it in defiant revolt against that very hostility or indifference. Yet his revolt must be positive and have as a resolution the establishment of some value, even if that value is only the inherent worth of the revolt

[39] Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York, 1955).

itself.[40] The pattern of the literature of revolt, then, seems to be hero, universe, catharsis. The configuration of the drama of the rebel is the same as that of the drama of the traditional tragic hero; therefore analysis of the configuration as it appears in the literature of revolt is the necessary first step to discover whether or not this new kind of literature is in reality a new kind of tragedy.

Albert Camus's The Plague and Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman are both dramas of rebels at the deepest points in their struggles with the absurd modern world. The Plague treats the sudden, violent attack of bubonic and pneumonic plague on the Algerian city of Oran and traces the course of the citizens' organized resistance against the disease. Although the reader is not aware of the fact until near the end of the novel, the story is told by Dr. Bernard Rieux, a quiet, thoughtful, serious-minded medical man who takes on the plague as a personal antagonist. His struggle with it provides the basic dramatic conflict. Dr. Rieux's fierce commitment to the defeat of the disease is emotionally harrowing to him. He suffers mightily with the death of a young boy whose cure alone would have convinced him of his worth as a doctor and thus as a man. Later he loses to the plague his best friend, Tarrou, and, indirectly, his wife. In the course of his attempt to understand the nature of the plague and his own relationship to it, he realizes in the face of genuine suffering that fatalism cannot work for him, and he affirms the ultimate worth of his selfless dedication to healing.

Death of a Salesman is the story of an aging American traveling salesman, Willy Loman, a harmless and thoroughly likeable sort, who is

[40] Camus, quoted in Raymond Williams, Modern Tragedy (London, 1966) p. 181.

no longer physically capable of carrying out his demanding job and is slowly becoming senile. In the course of his discovery that he is a useless cog in a machine which must progress, Willy is forced to the realization that he has failed not only as a businessman, but also as a human being, specifically as a father. He pleads with his boss to be allowed to continue working, since he is making an honest effort to fulfill his ideal of the Salesman, only to discover that the ideal is shabby and is based on the false god of Success, to which he has already sacrificed his sons Biff and Happy by forcing them into the world of his dream. In a frantic struggle to discover whether or not the dream actually has been false, Willy learns that Biff's early disillusionment with his father has prevented the dream from possessing him as it has possessed Happy. Ecstatic that Biff still has a chance to be a success and overflowing with paternal tenderness, Willy makes the generous decision to smash up his car, so that his son can collect on his twenty thousand dollar insurance policy and so that he himself, in dying, will be given a shred of dignity by having left behind something worthwhile in his son.

It is apparent that the action of both The Plague and Death of a Salesman is that of a conflict which is serious and complete. The prime mover in the conflict in both novel and play is a hero, a rebel, who is introduced to the reader at the point at which he must make a critical decision whether or not to engage in warfare with his fate. The two works trace progressively the courses of the lives of these heroes as assertive decision leads them to conflict, from conflict through intense suffering to a final resolution--for Rieux, rededication, for Willy, suicide.

Camus and Miller have both developed their heroes in detail, since both works are experiments in the possibility of modern tragic heroism. They have shown these men in their relationships with their worlds; they have described the problems they must face and the questions they must ask; they have endowed them with personal human frailties and also with exceptional virtues. By analyzing the worlds, problems, and characteristics of Bernard Rieux and Willy Loman it is possible to discern what constitutes the heroism of these men for Camus and Miller and to discover in what measure that heroism belongs to the tradition of tragedy.

In all tragedy there is an interplay between the hero and his world. The search for self is simultaneous with the search for an identity, a function in a given surroundings. As a dramatic character, the hero is an unstable force in a world whose processes of change he can only partially understand and little control. He plays the dangerous game of living fully under the unceasing threat of annihilation. Thus he lives at peak intensity, enjoying the instant.[41] The action of his drama is the confrontation with the universe, about which he knows nothing except that it is about to crush him. The universe confronts him with a dilemma, forcing him to make a critical choice whether or not to enter into direct warfare with it, and he chooses to fight. It is the course of the resulting battle, ending in the defeat of the hero, which provides the pattern of action for any tragedy.

The morality of tragedy lies in the extent of the hero's responsibility to the larger order. The universe of traditional tragedy represented the will of the gods or of destiny, so that the hero was

[41]McCollom, pp. 9-10.

defying higher powers in resisting that will and earned in some measure his defeat. The modern universe, as Camus and Miller envision it, is still as powerful an oppressor as the ancient universe, but it is no longer cognizant of man. Their heroes, therefore, have a new and terrifying responsibility toward it. They are no longer required to obey the universe, as was the Aristotelian hero, but rather to do everything in their power to thwart it. Thus they make their own tragic morality in the face of universal indifference.

Since no battle can be waged against an indifferent opponent, the universe enters tragedy in the form of oppressive evil which negates and destroys human aspiration. As Camus explained in Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, absurdity and death are not ends, but they must be beginnings for the modern generation, since they are at the core of the post-World War II world view.[42] Because they are what we know, they alone will serve as a source of new positive values, the first of which is Camus's own revolt.

The world of the modern tragic hero is one of present evil. That evil must be dealt with on its own ground; the modern tragic view does not depend on an afterlife justice. The evil must be arbitrary, but never malicious, since maleficence is personal and the universal antagonist is impersonal. It must play no favorites, mete out no justice, and leave unmerited suffering in its wake. For this sort of evil, an ideal objective correlative is plague.

The disease itself in The Plague is not corrupt or sordid; it is cruel and inexorable. "The grim days of plague do not stand out like vivid flames, ravenous and inextinguishable, beaconing a troubled

[42] Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, trans. Justin O'Brien,(New York, 1961) p. 59.

sky, but rather like the slow, deliberate progress of some monstrous thing crushing out all upon its path."[43] The plague is death and destruction, the brutal presence of human mortality, and by extension, the symbol of man's arbitrary existence and transience. It contrasts tormentingly with human conscious frailty and gratuitously devastates will power without even providing very much wisdom to its survivors. However, what vision it does provide is the basis for the new tragedy of the twentieth century. Of course, as Camus points out, the suffering induced by the plague far outweighs any insights it may bring, but if it must be endured, at least it forces self-knowledge.[44] Also, it does produce heroes, if not victors, in the handful of men who maintain the impossible battle against it.

Willy Loman confronts an unsympathetic fate in his slow loss of strength, vitality, and intellectual control. The clutch of old age which figuratively paralyzes him is made more cruel by the abundant capacity of society to function without Willy Loman. His abilities, though they were minor at best, are not missed by his company, and his dream of the Salesman is mocked by all as a pitiable delusion. Willy is not attacked directly by a symbolic universal force, as is Rieux by the plague, but his personal failures are laid bare by the world's ignorance of his values. Willy fails as a man because of his pride and his blindness, but he fails as a businessman because the image he has created of what a businessman should be is ignored by the higher powers in the business world and because mortality actually intrudes on his life by depleting him of his physical powers. In part, at

[43] The Plague, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1948) p. 163.

[44] La Peste, p. 101.

least, Miller presents Willy Loman as angered combatant of an unjust fate.

Universal evil is an old aspect of tragedy which both The Plague and Death of a Salesman present, The Plague much more directly and significantly. However, to universal evil, Camus and Miller have added a new modern oppressive force, universal indifference. The universe is not always hostile; it is often merely irrational in its lack of regard for good and evil. Man, in a struggle to comprehend divine justice, discovers that his existence is of no importance to the movement of the spheres or to his social milieu. This is what Willy Loman is sentenced to discover, which affects him far more deeply than the uselessness which old age brings upon him. Willy's world is not even cognizant enough of him to engage him in battle, as does the universe of Rieux in the form of the plague. When Willy becomes irrelevant to his world with age, he discovers that he never was important to it. Willy's failure in itself is tragic, but the play is an artistic conundrum, because as a totality it is ironic. Willy has been asked to forsake his natural talents for gardening and carpentry to succeed in an unsympathetic career. He revolts with a dream of how that career could still make a man a champion, but even Willy's leisurely, velvet-slippered Dave Singleman is sacrificed to mechanistic efficiency. A greater power than any individual ideal rules the world of the discontented salesman, the giant of Success and Progress, which arbitrarily tramples both valuable and invaluable souls in its march to an unknown end. Willy's war to make himself count is as useless as Rieux's war on disease, and both are revolts against the hostility or indifference by which the universe reflects its dis-

regard for man.

To revolt against universal hostility or indifference is a necessity for the tragic hero. He must impose the order he needs, even on a world which takes no heed of him. He must continue to martyr himself for higher values, although no God gives any indication of caring for what he chooses to die. This revolt may be absurd, to use Camus's own term, but if one is to consider the word in its original sense, the sense in which eminent scholar Henri Peyre feels that Camus uses it, absurdity is a discord, a note out of place, a slip in a steady progression.[45] To create this sort of absurdity is the very role of the tragic hero; it is up to him to throw universal equilibrium into imbalance for re-evaluation. This makes nobility of absurdity. It is why suicide is not preferable to life, why "one must imagine Sisyphus happy"[46] even as he gazes into the void.

Absurd heroism, then, copes with a world which cannot be changed, by forcing action upon it as if change were feasible. The ability actually to change the universe would surely substantiate the dignity of man, but to accomplish such a change is impossible. Rieux and Tarrou cannot cure the plague because they are saddled with human limits, but in joining to do their best to cure it they have at least accomplished unification and stimulation of others. Camus understands and glorifies this accomplishment. "I maintain my human contradiction in the face of the underlying contradiction of existence. I set up my lucidity in the midst of that which denies it. I exalt man in the face of that which crushes him, and my free, necessary revolt, my passion,

[45]Henri Peyre, French Novelists of Today (New York, 1967) p. 318.

[46]Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 91.

are reunited in this tension, this lucid, this boundless repetition."[47]

Both Dr. Rieux and Willy Loman react against their new, arbitrary, senseless, fallible worlds by working their hardest as cross purposes with those worlds. Through the effort, which is worth only itself, the protagonist makes the progress which the universe does not, evaluating both his world and himself while calmly tracing his way down a blind alley. Camus and Miller both begin their works assuming an intrinsic meaning in the action of living. The ethic proposed by them is self-definition, an effort to prevent despair by refusing stagnation. Camus scorns the spectator and honors the actor, demanding that his heroes reach toward involvement.[48] The amount of effort is the measure of man. Rieux knows nothing more about the nature and cure of plague after its departure than he did at its outbreak, but he has acted, and that is all that is asked of him.

Counteraction to universal hostility or indifference by the hero may take many forms. Those reflected in these two works are revolt, responsibility, and reaffirmation. These three movements represent the spiritual growth of the protagonist and the journey of every tragic hero from terrible choice to comprehenstion and from comprehension to final peace.

The first reaction of the modern hero to a hostile or indifferent universe is revolt, which is a peculiarly modern element in tragedy. Rather than by the old transgression against a just natural order, the modern tragic hero brings on his defeat by challenging an unjust or indifferent order on its own terms. He loses, not because he is at

[47] Ibid. p. 65.

[48] John Cruickshank, Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt (New York, 1960) p. 128.

fault, but because he is not strong enough to win. Rieux cannot prevent the deaths of children; Willy cannot make his boss Howard Wagner accept his dream.

Tragic revolt springs from the comprehension of human suffering and condemns the powers which permit that suffering. It challenges the right or wrong of the powers that be. It may or may not produce a result; it cannot if it challenges the universe directly, as does the revolt of Rieux. But what revolt does accomplish is to make man's voice heard beyond the passive acceptance of the animal world. Camus calls revolt the defining principle of humanity. "I revolt, therefore we are."[49] The tragic hero must vigilantly defend his freedom by refusing to be crushed mindlessly. This refusal is what makes half-conscious Willy Loman a hero; he may not be fully aware of all the nuances of his situation, but he is cognizant of a terrible wrong, and he fights against that wrong with all the forces of his half-mad mind. The effort to change man's plight is source enough for tragic exaltation despite the inevitable defeat. Man's insistence that he ought not to die is a new shade to the comprehension of the human condition which fits s godless tragic universe, just as the idea of redemption fitted the universe of believers. Revolt attempts to impose justice on a world which is presupposed to be without it, and it has calm confidence in its ability to do so. Tarrou must fight for the plague victims if he can do no more. For the moralist, revolt is a duty, and Camus is a moralist. Willy must kill himself to give his son the opportunity to realize the Loman ideal of success. Miller proposed the necessity for

[49]Albert Camus, L'Homme Révolté (Paris, 1951) p. 36.

man to ask, "Why?" as axiomatic for tragedy.[50] "Why?" in itself presupposes dissatisfaction with the given order. It is revolt.

The particular tragedy of existential revolt is that it is hopeless, as his intelligence warns the hero. Revolt is without compensation except that it fulfills a need to prove the greatness of man. It imbues life with an intensity which consummates the heroic mission. This positive belief, the illusion that the effort will have some effect, is the source of catharsis and final peace which overrides the climax of frustration in existential tragedy. The tragic fallacy of Krutch is still, in spirit, operating in the concept of the intrinsic value of useless revolt.

Camus maintains that there is a harmony between revolt and love.[51] It is the presence of a love for humanity which differentiates the struggle of Rieux from the sterile struggle of Oreste in Jean-Paul Sartre's The Flies. Love is what brings into being stage two of the heroic act, personal responsibility. The heroic urge of the existential tragic hero to assume responsibility for diminishing the world's suffering is what exalts his revolt. After all, Rieux and Tarrou return willingly to Oran after their swim. To persistent queries as to his motive in feeling personally guilty for each plague death, Rieux has sure responses. He has learned humanism from suffering;[52] his code of morals is comprehension;[53] the only means at his command as an indivi-

[50] Arthur Miller, letter to Sheila Huftel, quoted in Sheila Huftel, Arthur Miller: The Burning Glass (New York, 1965) p. 114.

[51] Camus, quoted in Michael Mohrt, "Ethics and Poetry in the Work of Albert Camus," Yale French Studies, no. 1, p. 117.

[52] Camus, The Plague, p. 118.

[53] Ibid., p. 120.

dual is battle;[54] the road to peace for him, the true healer, is the path of sympathy.[55] An astute contemporary critic, C. I. Glicksberg, maintains that affirmation through responsibility in the face of despair is in fact the tragic vision,[56] and Antoine de St.-Exupéry echoes this conception of responsibility producing tragedy, "To be a man is precisely to be responsible."[57]

It is apparent that part of the tragic decision is the conscious acceptance of the burden of others' suffering, and three methods for the hero's doing this are advanced by Miller and Camus--sainthood, healing, and sacrifice.

The responsibility of sainthood is represented in The Plague by the character of Tarrou, an enigmatic soul on a search for justice which we learn he undertook after seeing his attorney father argue a defendant to a death sentence. Tarrou desires only to carry his personal figurative plague bacillus without transmitting it to others, though he does learn in the course of the novel that he also owes it to the oppressed to fight for them. However, sainthood such as this is not vigorous enough for tragedy and Tarrou is not the kind of hero that Rieux is. Tarrou seeks an ideal state for man where injustice and impurity of action do not exist. He has chosen withdrawal from reality and cannot accept man's inhumanity to man as existing and natural to the animal. While his motives are sterling and his values of great worth, Tarrou himself realizes that he has set his sights

[54] Ibid., p.122.

[55] Ibid., p. 230.

[56] C. I. Glicksberg, The Tragic Vision in Twentieth-Century Literature (Carbondale, 1963) p. 51.

[57] Terre des Hommes (Paris, 1939) p. 59.

lower than Rieux, who has asked of himself the capacity to defeat the tragic reality of the human condition as he understands it all too well. Between the ideal of sainthood and the ideal of compassion, the tragic hero of Camus is to choose compassion.

The healer, idealized in The Plague in the person of Rieux, is thus a more compelling leader for the world's sufferers than the saint. Rather than seeking idealistic answers, he remains in active revolt against evil throughout the course of the tragedy, committed at all times to the alleviation of the tragic reality of suffering and to the denial of the tragic necessity of death. Rieux has chosen to ignore the problem of salvation and concentrate on the healing of the ill, a task about which he can, at least, be sure. Instead of living in estrangement for the sake of his ideals, as Tarrou does, Rieux the healer has chosen to live within society's constrictions without giving up those ideals, in the hope that by the example of his living they will be integrated into the world to guide it forward. It is a humble, unassuming heroism, but it is not to be budged from its commitment and it cannot understand men who can walk away from evil. Rieux gives medicine and understanding to the people of Oran at the cost of his wife's love and his best friend's life, and the only motive he claims is "common decency."[58] His only compensations are the occasional exhilaration of szving a life and the meager satisfaction of having done his job, even if the effort was not successful. Although Camus admires the ethic of the healer, he has not made the road an easy one for Rieux. The doctor, the committed rebel who bears the responsibility for saving the world from human mortality, is the great tragic hero who must

[58]Camus, The Plague, p. 150.

strive so that others may be happy, as Rieux comes to understand in a conversation with the discontented and restless journalist, Raymond Rambert.

> "Man is an idea, and a precious small idea, once he turns his back on love. And that's my point; we--mankind--have lost the capacity for love. We must face that fact, doctor. Let's wait to acquire that capacity, or, if it's really beyond us, wait for the deliverance that will come to each of us anyway, without his playing the hero. Personally, I look no farther."
>
> Rieux rose. He suddenly appearred very tired. "You're right, Rambert, quite right, and for nothing in the world would I try to dissuade you from what you're going to do; it seems to me absolutely right and proper. However, there's one thing I must tell you; there's no question of heroism in all this. It's a matter of common decency. That's an idea which may make some people smile, but the only means of fighting the plague is--common decency."
>
> "What do you mean by common decency?" Rambert's voice was grave.
>
> "I don't know what it means for other people, but in my case I know it consists of doing my job."
>
> "Your job! I only wish I were sure what my job is!" There was a mordant edge to Rambert's voice. "Maybe I'm all wrong in putting love first."
>
> Rieux looked him in the eyes. "No!" he said vehemently, "No, you are not wrong."[59]

The responsibility which Rieux assumes for Rambert's happiness is heroic in the most exalting measure, and in fact it bears a close resemblance to the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement.

The third means of assuming responsibility is that proposed and chosen by Willy Loman, sacrifice. The hero of tragedy is archetypally sacrificed; in fact, he wields the knife himself, consciously and not without hesitation, so that his decision becomes heroic. Purposeful and useful self-sacrifice, in the tradition of Oedipus, is the ultimate taking of responsibility. Sacrifice ends the battle before defeat; it takes the universal law into its own hands and exalts the hero's manipulation of his own fate. In addition, sacrifice is the only respon-

[59] Ibid., pp. 149-50.

sibility which permits transcendence; the tragic sacrifice leaves a legacy of enlightenment, freedom, or power, or of all three. Willy Loman's death has the recognizable result of producing wealth and therefore liberty for Biff. The fact that Willy is worth more dead than alive is indisputable. Whether or not Willy actually realizes the fact, he purchases Biff security for the dream. He does not kill himself to escape. It has been made clear from the beginning of the play by Linda Loman that he had tried non-sacrificial suicide on several occasions with no success. Willy does not exhibit the intellectual dignity of Miller's John Proctor in The Crucible, but nevertheless both men martyr themselves for ideals in a corrupt world--Proctor in stony silence, Loman in vocal revolt--and the fact of Willy's self-sacrifice in itself is certainly tragic. Miller began Death of a Salesman with the intent that Willy should sacrifice himself, not be sacrificed by higher powers.[60] His struggle is resolved in the final confrontation with his rich adventurer brother Ben, the incarnation of Willy's dream, a scene in which Ben brings up the subject of the insurance. Money has meant the realization of the dream in Ben, although it is a value belonging to the world against which he is fighting, so Willy accepts that value and destroys himself for it in the hope that Biff can transcend it to attain the magnificence that Willy envisions in him. It is, to be sure, a glad sacrifice without a doubtful falter, a fact which detracts somewhat from its tragedy, but it is a positive resolution to a period of terrible suffering and questioning for Willy.

Although Tarrou represents the responsibility of sainthood, Rieux the responsibility of healing, and Willy Loman the responsibility of

[60] Arthur Miller, Introduction to Collected Plays (New York, 1957) p. 25.

sacrifice, each of the three accepts both of the other forms of responsibility as well in lesser proportions. Rieux is as virtuous and innocent a plague carrier as is Tarrou, and Willy is an unshakeable martyr to the value of self, the value of likeability over the ability to achieve material gains. Tarrou is a kind of healer, as is Rieux, and he is the driving force behind the sanitation squads, though healing is not his first concern, and Willy's life is one long conscientious effort to realize his dream in job and sons, miserable, misdirected failure though that effort may be. Both Rieux and Tarrou sacrifice the inner peace of tranquil acceptance; Rieux denies himself a full relationship with his wife and a deep friendship with Tarrou, preferring to both a commitment to mankind. All three find a final value in their taking of responsibility by espousing an affirmative value to which their efforts can contribute.

The compensation for revolt and for the assumption of crushing responsibility is belief. The pilgrimage of the tragic hero, which is the action of tragedy, moves from his first act of commitment to comprehension attained in struggle and from comprehension to exaltation. The turn to exaltation in the character of a tragic hero is in his assumption of positive values--outer, as Willy's dream, or inner, as Rieux's existential doctrine that human effort is always worth itself. Tragedy, though it may be motiveless, is always moral in this regard. Willy Loman goes to his death thoroughly convinced that his dream of success was the right one. This is what gives him the strength to kill himself, what makes his death a final rebellious affirmation rather than a confession of failure. He has learned in the course of his tragedy that his method was wrong and that *he* failed, but he refuses

to believe Biff's protestations that the whole dream was wrong.

In The Plague reaffirmation takes the form of humanism; the heroes are "those for whom man and his poor and terrible love suffice."[61] The particular ethic which is espoused is the fact that all men are engaged in the losing battle. Sharing in friendship the sorrow of lost battles, as the one for the Othon child's life, and the exultation of victories, as in the cure of Grand, is what gives the struggle meaning. Complete understanding and the vehement refusal to become passive victims of the plague or permit others to become such victims are positive achievements which remain in the wake of annihilating plague and cannot be undone by its power. Fervent belief in these or any other affirmatives lifts a hopeless, pathetic, absurd battle to the status of tragedy.

A capacity for reaffirmation is born in the hero through the trial he undergoes in the play. He is tried as the universe places him face to face with a particular enigma which he must come to understand, whether or not he is able to solve it. Tragic literature is a problem literature whose particular focus is on the nature of the problem and all of its implications, its trial of the hero, and his reaction to that trial. It is not concerned with the problems whose solutions lie only in the reordering of social values, but those which must be resolved by understanding and reaffirmation on the part of the hero. There are three traditional tragic problems which present themselves to Rieux and Willy Loman in particular, those of alienation, suffering, and guilt. Actually, they are three variant formulations of the tragic "Why?" as it appears in the lives of these two men.

[61]Camus, La Peste, p. 241. Translation by this author.

The tragic hero, because of his idealism, is separated from the current configuration of his society. Dissatisfaction with that configuration is what is presupposed by his revolt. He is alone in his crucial decision, tormented by the tension between his representative and his personal desires. The basis of Death of a Salesman is Willy's isolation from his family as well as from his society. Homeless on a battlefield, he is surrounded by strangers, whose relationship to him consists of evaluation.[62] Willy and Biff are unnaturally estranged from each other, and therefore each is tragically isolated. Their ideals are in conflict, their failures hurt each other, and their total lack of mutual understanding forms the core of each of their tragedies. It is an irrational alienation, the injustice of which sets Willy on his quest, and it is never entirely resolved. They are at last about to communicate in their final scene together, but Willy's decision to commit suicide for Biff places the barrier of the dream once again between them.

Camus, because he was personally haunted by a desire for silence, by loneliness, and by an inability to communicate with those he most loved,[63] was deeply troubled by alienation, and it appears centrally in The Plague. Rieux has a relationship with his mother of a quiet, solid mutual comprehension, but he is vaguely uncomfortable with his wife in her illness and he remains incapable of fully understanding the values of Tarrou, Grand, and Rambert. His mission is solitary because he is the only true healer among them, and he pays for his commitment the price of total loneliness. Camus also carries the concept of isolation

[62] Miller, Introduction, p. 29.

[63] Professor Claude Treil, Lecture (March 12, 1968).

to a metaphysical level. Oran itself is alienated in its plague situation from the complacent world and from the silent cosmos. Camus's hero as well as Miller's must face the fact of his tragic solitude. Both of them make the heroic choice between conventional acceptance and lone revolt, and the road of revolt carries with is the agony of alienation.

The central moral problem in which the tragedy in both play and novel centers is the question of the justice of terrible human suffering. In The Plague this suffering is widespread and is induced by the universe; in Death of a Salesman it is personal and is socially brought about in a single representative soul, but the passion of the hero in the face of either sort of suffering is the same. Human suffering is the dramatic configuration of mortality. In the modern view, that suffering is unmerited and is without assuagement. Suffering, because it is a life rhythm, has always played a role in tragedy, but in the modern expression of the genre it has changed from a manifestation of divine justice to an act of war by the universe perpetrated upon man. At the very least, its cruelty is a step beyond universal indifference, and this cruelty evokes from Camus and Miller a positive reassertion of man.

Suffering provides a measure of the manhood of the hero. It tests the sincerity of his commitment to revolt and the depth of his sense of personal responsibility. An understanding of and a protest against suffering are necessary in tragedy, which is not a drama of unhesitant marytrdom, but one of trial and reaffirmation. The commonality of man, for Camus, begins in his mutual suffering, for which the vicious plague is such an appropriate objectification. Rieux takes the suffering of

the people of Oran with high seriousness and reacts to it with revolt and personal acceptance of the fault for the plague's success in killing even one man. The ethic of healing which he espouses comes directly from his medical contact with agony and death.

The fact that Willy Loman's growth through suffering to heroism is wholly personal is the reason why the necessity of his anguish is so difficult for many to comprehend. In Death of a Salesman there is not the separation between victim and hero which exists in The Plague; they are both contained in one man, and to the extent that he portrays the victim, Willy's heroism is pathetic. This is how Linda regards him when she begs for understanding for him. "He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person...A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man."[64] In the tradition of tragedy it is Willy himself who answers her, making his suffering meaningful. He is far from passive or broken under the blows dealt to him; he continues the attempt to impose his ideal on his unreceptive, mechanistic surroundings. He induces suffering in himself by his refusal to accept failure and bears that suffering with dignity. His search for a place for humanness in a world of money and merchandise is a noble, if painful, striving. Willy Loman's suffering only begins in the im personal blow dealt to him by the company in stopping his salary. It takes form in his attempt to realign his values and distinguish the right from the wrong

[64] Miller, Death of a Salesman, in Collected Plays, p. 162. All subsequent references to the play are to this version.

ones, and it makes a tragic hero of him. As Miller points out in the Introduction to his Collected Plays, if Willy had not realized his failure he would have continued to function cheerfully in his false world until death, but he is crushed by his failings, drained by his aloneness, and haunted by guilt,[65] so much so that he goes mad in the attempt to restructure his values.

Suffering is the most precise means of describing the hero's conflict and his resolution of that conflict which is available to the tragic poet of any age. Both Rieux and Willy Loman, like Oedipus, Macbeth, and King Lear before them, make tragic pilgrimages through suffering, in order to come to understand themselves and to define their identities. They move through anguish to awareness.

Neither Death of a Salesman nor The Plague is principally a tragedy of human guilt, but Rieux's and Willy's suffering is to a certain extent justified by their human errors, which also keep them from being intellectual abstracts. Rieux is committed to medicine, but in the course of his relentless search for a means of defeating the absurd he has ignored his wife, as Willy has been unfaithful to his and warped his sons. Both are, then, guilty to a degree. Rieux is not perfect, but plague-stricken, as Tarrou maintains; the plague is a part of him. At the beginning he shared the complacency of all the citizens of Oran, all habituated to a stale routine. His is not a guilt of error, but one of apathy, because he allowed the plague to enter his city and soul uncontested. Willy's guilt is concrete; his life is a long series of errors and suffering for them. He has, in the first place, raised the importance of being well-liked to ideal

[65] Miller, Introduction, pp. 34-5.

status and then permitted Biff's petty thievery, since it seems harmless and even helpful to such an ideal. He has deified ephemeral success. He has lied to himself about his sons' abilities and his own, and it is tragic necessity that that lie, represented by his brief liaison with the woman in Boston, should be discovered by Biff, his conscience and judge. Willy, like the most traditional tragic heroes, falls because of error in his search for a higher value. Miller has provided Willy with a behavioral norm in the person of Charley, and it is the hero's own tragic error if he prefers to follow his own standards of behavior. Because Willy's decision to make his own rules is based on pride, it is in the tradition of the tragic guilt of hybris. But Willy's courage, his sincere effort to understand, and his unfailing belief that the higher value he seeks actually does exist redeem him from condemnation, just as his guilt redeems him from pathos.

Each hero reacts to the particular problems he must face with both archetypal and personal virtues and failings. Rieux and Willy feel alienated, suffer, and are found guilty as they are required to do as tragic heroes, but they also discover the roots of those problems in their unique selves. The characters of tragic heroes vary as profoundly as the characters of human beings, but each hero does possess certain distinguishable characteristics, the presence of which defines his heroism. These serve as focal points around which his individual personality is developed. These characteristics are a sensitive, well-developed consciousness, an awareness of freedom and of the necessity of choice, a sense of obligation balanced with an ability to appraise failure to that obligation, and indomitable will with which to serve

that obligation, and a certain amount of representative stature. The particular manifestations of these characteristics in Bernard Rieux and Willy Loman define them as tragic heroes in their values and needs.

Consciousness takes two forms in the mind of the hero. He begins his struggle with a certain amount of self-awareness and sensitivity to his surroundings. In this is rooted his proclivity to heroism. In addition, in the course of his trial and suffering, he undergoes a spiritual awakening which makes his awareness total. This awakening is that which occasions the catharsis of the pity and fear that have accompanied his battle.

It is a matter of great critical debate how much understanding of the total situation this spiritual awakening should bring. A number of critics demand that the hero arrive at total lucidity, insisting that the final tragic resolution must take account of every part of the complete configuration.[66] Others maintain that full and accurate self-awareness on the hero's part is not necessary to the tragic effect.[67] While a sudden recognition of the nature of his plight by the hero is doubtless an excellent dramatic device in a tragedy, it seems probable that such recognition need not be complete revelation. In the first place, complete lucidity is superhuman. In the second place, what is necessary is that the hero arrive at some sort of intellectual comprehension which satisfies him in his battle to know. It is irrelevant if that comprehension is inaccurate, as long as it is clear and sure. Nevertheless, some degree of self-awareness is undoubtedly needed. The hero must be able to think, and think clearly, since tragedy is an in-

[66]A thorough rationale for complete consciousness may be found in McCollom, pp. 50-1.

[67]The firmest advocate of variable consciousness is Mandel, p. 148.

tellectual struggle. It is the capacity for thought which makes the tragic exist. A tragic hero cannot by martyred in dumb ignorance and must not act from urges, but from thought, if he is to make value judgments. He must be aware of the nature of the destiny against which he revolts and of the fact that he shares with all men the experience of suffering. Tragedy is a thematic literature, and what gives theme to human life is knowledge. As Miller puts it, the battle to know is the peculiarly human effort to press order upon universal chaos.[68] Once knowledge is acquired it is useless for the furtherance of tragedy; it is the end of a tragic configuration.

Rieux is traditional in his consciousness. He begins in complacency, is forced into suffering, slowly evaluates himself at the sickbed, and articulates his conclusions in the long discussions with Tarrou. His point of spiritual awakening comes at the death of the Othon child, when he realizes that the amount of his effort must be inversely proportionate to its success. He realizes that Tarrou's death is the culmination of his friend's sainthood and that Grand's cure is the sign of the value of Rieux's own responsible revolt. His tragedy ends in peace, as he prepares to do battle again with the plague, knowing fully that that battle is the value of his existence.

In <u>Death of a Salesman</u> the amount of consciousness becomes the measure of the success of the work as tragedy. Miller has presented an unconventional, but not unprecedented tragedy of a search for knowledge which fails. This is the tragedy of King Lear, who is reconciled, but never sanely lucid, or of Aeschylus' Orestes, who depends on the intervention of Apollo to justify the necessity of his matricide.

[68] Letter to Sheila Huftel, quoted in Huftel, p. 111.

Willy Loman, in the Oedipus tradition, struggles with a slow movement toward awareness, but his progress from blindness to clarity is interrupted by his sudden self-sacrifice in loyalty to a value revealed by that awareness. The problem is that Willy never learns his dream was false before he kills himself for it. This partial comprehension, partial failure is perfectly in character for a hero like Willy, who is terribly and honestly imperfect. He is not as aware of himself as is an Oedipus or an Othello, but then he is not meant to have a great mind. Willy's hazy, half-mad consciousness is often compared to that of King Lear, although most critics maintain that Lear came to a fuller self-awareness than Willy.[69] It must be observed, however, that Lear's self-comprehension is accomplished poetically, through the metaphor of wisdom in madness, while Willy's intellectual struggle goes deeper and lasts longer before he too collapses into insanity. In addition, his intellectual struggle is rooted in bewilderment. A clarity of mind is contrary to the character of Willy Loman, although this limited consciousness probably detracts from the exaltation of his tragedy. Therefore, Miller settles for a play which is less tragic than it might be, but which does approximate the tragic spirit. Thus *Death of a Salesman* is a kind of low tragedy. The particular limits of Willy's consciousness are the source and measure of his heroism. The play is a study in a failing attempt at self-knowledge. It begins like *King Lear* in total misconception, follows the growing awareness of past error through suffering, and ends abruptly at the point where hope is

[69]The *King Lear* parallel is mentioned by Edward Murray, *Arthur Miller; Dramatist* (New York, 1967) p. 50; Laurence Kitchin, *Mid-Century Drama* (London, 1960) p. 61; Harold Clurman, *Lies Like Truth* (New York, 1958) p. 72; and Paul N. Siegal, "Willy Loman and King Lear," *College English*, XVII, (March, 1956) 341-5.

discovered by Willy that the dream is not false because Biff has not been paralyzed by its shortcomings. Willy kills himself without ever finding his own best values. He does not exploit his new-found role as a real father. He does not consider his cosmic value, as does Rieux. He does not resolve his own inconsistencies of belief and the contradictions in his values. First he condemns superficial heartiness to Biff, then he praises the aggressive sort of salesmanship. He does not admit that he has lived two lives, one actual, one imagined, and he persists in confounding them.[70] Moreover, there is the matter of his insanity. The play is a chronicle of the increasing pressures on Willy's mind, which force him to disintegrate before the viewer. Structurally, Willy's schizophrenia summarizes his intellectual failing and the totality of his suffering; it does not nullify his heroism, since he battles furiously against going mad throughout the course of the play and apparently does not lose control completely until after his decision to commit suicide. His conversation with Ben, though imaginary, seems entirely lucid, and his final disconcerted dash about his world before plunging toward his car is no more ludicrous than Lear's wanderings about the heath decorated with wild flowers. Yet madness is not tragic, and the problem remains: Is Willy <u>tragic</u> because his drama approximates the Lear story, or is Lear's madness actually pathetic?

It is possible to say that Miller's hero is aborted half-grown because a life which is not examined is not tragic,[71] and it is true that Biff should be believed when he insists that Willy "never knew

[70] Huftel, p. 108.

[71] Bierman, et al., p. 493.

who he was."[72] Willy is clearly inarticulate, and inability to verbalize the tragic conflict is highly unconventional for a tragic hero. Miller, however, maintans that inarticulateness does not detract from Willy's tragedy. He feels that intensity of emotion forces Willy's stale language into a resonance which compensates for its lack of clarity.[73] Willy is aware of the formlessness and failure of his life, and, for Miller, this awareness and the sincerity of his desperate search for his error and the values to rectify it are the qualities which produce exaltation in Death of a Salesman. Miller places great emphasis on Willy's refusal, however irrational, to compromise his dream, and he asserts that his hero drives himself to death by choice and does not fall into catastrophe by aimless wandering.[74] Willy seems clear of mind at the point of final decision, though he cracks an instant later. Freedom to choose does not depend necessarily on complete cognizance of all possibilities and their ramifications, for such cognizance is superhuman. Miller does not exclude enlightenment from his tragedy; it is merely given to the survivors rather than to the hero, as is the case with King Lear and Romeo and Juliet. The interesting fact in Death of a Salesman is that the survivors' insights are all limited. Charley doubts the ultimacy of Willy's dream; Linda cannot understand the necessity of the sacrifice; Happy reaffirms the false dream; Biff denies his father's dream its just value because of his disillusionment with Willy. However, it is to Biff that the most understanding and the new responsibility are given. Biff does gain

[72] Death of a Salesman, p. 221.

[73] Leonard Moss, Arthur Miller (New York, 1967) pp. 46-7, 116.

[74] Miller, Introduction, p. 34.

thorough self-awareness. He is determined to find the Loman identity, which Willy could not find, although not through the dream of "being number-one man"[75] to which Happy will remain dedicated and in which he will stagnate. Order is restored in Biff's real self-evaluation and new commitment. He takes over Willy's kingdom in new wisdom, as Albany and Edgar do Lear's,[76] Willy's failure is summed up in the close of his life. His success is embodied in Biff's commitment, which does not fall prey to the illusory dream and has its own tragic reality.

The point at which the hero's consciousness begins to matter to his tragedy is when he realizes that his universe is driving him and that he must make a critical choice whether or not to accept the destiny that it is forcing upon him. Being a hero, he chooses not to accept a determined fate; both Rieux and Willy Loman insist on making their own destiny. Rieux manifests Camus's belief that freedom is realized in lucidity and exercised in revolt. It is the actual exercise of freedom which is Camus's countervalue to human transience, and Rieux's effort to heal the sick is an act of free choice. Miller emphasizes continual choices as the steps in his heroes' movement to "self-justification."[77] It is Willy's own choice not to be Charley and to raise a Biff rather than a Bernard. His choice to commit suicide is the final step in the progress, when he realizes that his self-justification must be accomplished through his son. The final suicide attempt is a literary success because it is an act of courageous choice.

[75] Death of a Salesman, p. 222.

[76] Siegal, p. 344.

[77] Moss, p. 108.

The need to choose to be active rather than passive in the face of destiny is what makes men heroes. The heroes of tragedy, then, contain within their characters a particular need to act, in the form of some sense of obligation, such as those which drive Rieux and Willy Loman. Obligation to act, as Miller observes, is certainly not limited to kings and provides common men like Rieux and Willy with a propensity for tragedy. The obligation to act purposefully results in the willingness to sacrifice even life for human dignity.[78] The measure of the dignity is the measure of commitment, of acceptance of the challenge offered by universal hostility or indifference. For Miller the refusal to withdraw from a hopeless conflict constitutes tragic heroism; the ferocity of the struggle determines the amount of tragic exaltation.[79] The obligation to revolt proposed by Camus stems from the same cardinal principle. Rieux is driven by a refusal to allow the cruel universe to persecute and destroy innocents. He protests this by his untiring attempts to save children from the plague; he bears their agony with them, and he finds in sharing the victims' suffering the strength to continue. He is obliged, like Sisyphus, to roll his rock up the hill because it is a human accomplishment.[80] Like Sisyphus, he fails to produce any recognizable result by his effort, but he does not fail the obligation, which asks only that he create an intrinsic value in action itself.

Willy Loman's obligation is to the realization of what he thinks is a higher value, which happens to be phony. It is an obligation to

[78] Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," p. 1.

[79] Miller, Introduction, p. 7.

[80] Camus, _The Myth of Sisyphus_.

which he is partly true and which he partly fails, as he is hot as pure a tragic hero as Rieux. By espousing the dream he has broken the law of the order which bans its realization; thus his failure is predetermined, although the order, as Miller adds ironically, is highly suspect.[81] Willy cannot duplicate the success of his brother Ben or their father the enterprising flute maker. The day of the dream is gone. Willy is true to the dream in reasserting it over the corruption of the society which has destroyed it. However, Willy also fails the dream personally, because of his ignorance of his, and his own, falsehood. Inseparable from the dream in the play is Willy's conception of himself as an incarnation of it. He describes to anyone who will or will not listen his exaggerated exploits and phenomenal sales on the New England route. His disproportionate conception of his own importance reveals a pride which is the modern dramatic correlative for the hybris of kings. With the realization of the falsity of this conception comes Willy's madness, because it is beyond his capacity to cope with so mammoth a failure. To a certain extent, Willy's weak decline to insanity, his failure, is compensated for by his monomaniacal reassertion of the value of the individual: "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman!"[82] By refusing to surrender the dream Willy becomes tragic, forcing the conflict to resolution in his own martyrdom. The dream may be vague, trite, stock, and shallow, but it is his, and worth his life. Willy makes the tragic choice to defend the belief he maintains tirelessly as real and right in the face of its perpetual frustration. But Willy's obligation is twofold. In addition

[81]Miller, Introduction, p. 36.

[82]<u>Death of a Salesman</u>, p. 217.

to defending the truth of his ideal, he is also driven to compensate on the moral plane for his personal failure of love. The ethic of love, represented in Biff Loman,[83] is the final positive value in Willy's life, which counteracts the falsity of the ideal of success. The failure of the dream resulted from the irrelevance of Willy's value of being well-liked. Willy's failure as a father resulted from his substitution of the desire to be well-liked for real love. The whole incident of his marital infidelity is another example of the unsatisfying substitution. Biff, discovering Willy, also confuses the two ideals and rejects them both categorically. When Willy finally comprehends the inadequacy of likeability he enters his moments of deepest suffering, and it is not until Biff confronts him with the reality of his love that Willy is able to recognize that he was not a total failure as a man. In his passion to compensate for the failure of his dream by making love a success, Willy again confuses the two in his madness and, instead of love, bequeaths Biff money. He returns to the ultimacy of the ideal, hoping that love may make it work. His sacrifice is to Success, the ideal he cannot truly understand, to which he has devoted his life and to which he should, with tragic consistency, dedicate his death. He realizes true value too late, but denies it, and chooses to remain true to the old principle. It is Biff who receives transforming insight to use his love as the basis for a new ideal. Willy chooses to sell himself for twenty thousand dollars, believing to the end that the psychological necessity which drove him was an ultimate value. Willy's false necessity and his refusal to give up his blindness are new aspects of tragedy wxplored by Miller, aspects which reflect the prevalent

[83] Miller, Introduction, p. 36.

modern attitude that all of tragedy is ironic because it is absurd. Biff, who vows only to make a concerted effort to do his best, is of the new breed of tragic heroes like Rieux, who answer the irony by denying that there is another way things could be. Their obligation is self-limited; they cannot be concerned with ultimates, only with the immediate value of doing one's job. Both sorts of obligation, inner and outer, are tragic, as Rieux and Willy are two sorts of heroes in their reactions to their obligations as they see them.

What makes Rieux's and Willy Loman's efforts to fulfill their obligations climactic and exciting, what gives those efforts intrinsic value, are these two men's powerful forces of will. Will is one power which social pressure does not neutralize. Miller feels that the art of tragedy is the effort of man to achieve full humanity,[84] coupled with the additional personal desire to leave a memento of what he has achieved.[85] Camus exemplifies this effort in his transcendence of the absurd by affirmation. He calls upon man to deny his own perishability to the last moment and never to act as if the fate imposed upon him were just.[86] He confirms his own final belief by the assertion, "In the midst of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer."[87] This is the attitude of Rieux and Willy in the teeth of all the indignities forced upon them. Willy is free to protest to the skies his dull insignificance. He is permitted to feel joy and pride in Biff's acknowledgement of his love for his father, even at

[84]"Tragedy and the Common Man," p. 3.

[85]Miller, Introduction, p. 29.

[86]Camus, Lettres, p. 65.

[87]Camus, L'Été, quoted in Albert Maquet, Albert Camus; ou, l'invincible été (Paris, 1955).

the low ebb of his sense of the dream's value. Willy senses the awful dichotomy between what he is and what he ought to be, and endeavors his utmost to resolve it. He dogs the dream until he can reaffirm it. He is on a quest for truth--if weakly, at least arduously. He is determined to surpass the evil that surrounds him, although his confusion paralyzes his intensity. His inability to act decisively is part of his befuddlement of mind. It is part of his particular tragedy that his capabilities cannot match the power of his will.

Rieux is as positive as Willy, though he is in a struggle to realize others' worth rather than his own. "What's natural is the microbe. All the rest--health, integrity, purity (if you like)--is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter."[88] Rieux is conscious at all times and knows exactly how to act; his tragedy is that he knows the limits of what sheer will can accomplish. Primarily, it cannot cure the plague-striken. Yet Rieux drives himself in spite of his knowledge, and it is for this reason that Camus exalts him. Camus's source for an intrinsic value in human action is the invincible and admirable human will. "There is more to admire in men than to despise."[89]

The intensity of Rieux's and Willy's struggles with conscious choice and obligation and their will power make them extraordinary men, representatives of the human race fulfilling its greatest capacities. To represent the race in such a manner is their principal function as tragic heroes. Tragedy does not write of every man, but of Everyman. Its hero, in his insistent asking of questions, should carry the weight

[88] Camus, The Plague, p. 229.

[89] Camus, La Peste, p. 247. Translation by this author.

of all people and his answers must serve them. The question becomes, how does a tragic writer compose a representative of man? Miller says a hero should be a whole man, not a monomaniac, with recognizable universal characteristics which make his tragedy valid for all. However, he finds it difficult to distinguish universal, ennobling characteristics in a democratic society.[90] Without an aristocracy, it is difficult to envision greater than average men. The concept of aristocracy sustained heroic literature, since princes had not only power and importance, but also royalty of soul. A prince's actions represented the extremeties to which the greatest human spirit could rise or sink. Royalty is such a workable basis for tragedy that many modern critics have, as we have seen, avowed that it is a necessity. Yet is not tragedy a painting with larger-than-life lines and bright colors of the same dilemmas undergone by every man? If not, then tragedy is not truly concerned with the human condition.

Yet some sort of stature for the hero is necessary to distinguish tragedy from ordinary life. This becomes a real problem when the hero, like Willy Loman, is in fact an ordinary man. However, Willy's stature is symbolic. His problem is so close to present reality that it is terrifying. In a real sense, if Willy caves in under the pressure of Success, so do all men.[91] Furthermore, Miller's play suggests that even a man as small as Willy is susceptible to the same torments as those of a great spirit. Each member of the audience in part becomes Willy. Miller emphasizes this identification is his response to the welter of criticism which states that Willy's ordinariness precludes real heroism

[90] Miller, "On Social Plays," in A View from the Bridge (New York, 1955) pp. 8-9.

[91] Eric Bentley, In Search of Theatre (New York, 1954) p. 81.

for him. He condemns the confusion of stature, which is emotionally achieved by the hero, and rank, which is gratuitously handed him.

> The question of rank is significant only as it reflects questions of the social applicability of a hero's career. There is no doubt that if a character is shown on stage who goes through the most ordinary actions and is suddenly revealed to be President, his actions immediately assume a much greater magnitude and pose the possibility of much greater meaning than if he is the corner grocer. But at the same time, his stature as a hero is not so utterly dependent upon his rank that the corner grocer cannot outdistance him as a tragic figure--providing, of course, that the grocer's career engages the issues of, for instance, the survival of the race, the realtionship of man to God--in short, the questions whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home instead of a battle-ground or a fog in which disembodied spirits pass each other in an endless twilight.[92]

Camus is in full accord with this view of the irrelevance of formal stature: "In an absurd world the rebel has still one certainty; it is...the fact that the grocer and he are both oppressed."[93] Miller fully intended Willy to be heroic; he placed the judgment in Biff's mouth when he had him call his father a "prince" to Miss Forsythe, and with conviction.[94] In addition, he has endowed Willy with a number of characteristics which critics have found to evoke profound respect--the fierceness of his desire to understand what is beyond him,[95] his courage to make any sacrifice for his dream,[96] the sincerity of the dream itself,[97] his power of imagination and his energy in pursuit of

[92]Miller, Introduction, p. 32.

[93]Camus, quoted in Philip Thody, Albert Camus; A Study of his Works (London, 1957) p. 116.

[94]Death of a Salesman, p. 204.

[95]Siegal, p. 342.

[96]Miller, Introductinn, p. 34.

[97]Siegal, p. 345.

values,[98] the depth of his agony and the height of his love,[99] his pride in the face of slights,[100] and his demand for respect.[101] Ben considers him of significant dignity to be called William. It is appropriate for Miller's plot that Willy be without social rank, but that does not mean he is without inner nobility. He is simply the product of an age which does not recognize social rank. The question of rank is never raised concerning Rieux, although he is the son of a simple workman and one of a number of doctors in Oran. His role as leader of the plague resistance gives him a psychological extraordinariness which Willy Loman lacks, but the two men manifest equal nobility of soul.

Bernard Rieux and Willy Loman face cold, powerful universes with revolt, responsibility, and reaffirmation. They struggle manfully with the problems of living. They exhibit the grand virtues of tragic heroism and qualify them with particular, personal, human failings. They quite match the standards for tragic heroism set for them by Aristotle, Sophocles, and Shakespeare.

It is apparent, then, that both Albert Camus and Arthur Miller have fulfilled the first requirement for tragedy, the presentation of a particular sort of hero. They have produced in Bernard Rieux and Willy Loman unique, compelling figures who are both characteristically modern and yet universal in their needs and values, men who share worlds, problems, and characteristics with the traditional heroes of tragedy. They have made dramas of the lives of these men by putting

[98]Richard J. Foster, "Confusion and Tragedy: The Failure of Miller's Salesman," in Hurrell, p. 83.

[99]Gassner, p. 63.

[100]*Ibid.*

[101]*Ibid.*

them into conflict with particularly defined universes which also may be seen to share many characteristics with the universes of Antigone and King Lear. The bare cosmologies which both Death of a Salesman and The Plague present, the hostile or indifferent worlds of their tragic heroes which are distant, omnipotent, and unfathomable as to purpose, give them a kinship with the Greek tragiedies. The Plague presents a naked man-universe confrontation, as does Oedipus Rex. Death of a Salesman presents universal oppression in the attack of old age on Willy Loman, complicating it with oppression from the social world, as does Antigone in juxtaposing universal right and social expediency. The Greek view of human fate as "arbitrary, uncertain, and irrational"[102] is the same as Miller's that it is "mutable, accidental, and consequently of a profoundly arbitrary nature to us"[103] and Camus's that it is absurd.

The modern tragic hero, like the Greek hero, is simultaneously isolated from and involved in a world which he knows too well. Science has given him a little understanding of and a limited mastery over the universe. But science has steadfastly refused to reveal purpose in the cosmic order. The more modern man learns about his cosmos, the more he realizes that it is up to him to provide the order with motive. Whatever motive he suggests determines the particular morality of his tragedy. Rieux, the scientist, assumes no motive and makes his morality from the action of the moment. Willy, the child of scientific nihilism, attempts to supply a motive and a commendable morality. It works for him even though it is wrong, but when it is stripped away it nearly

[102]Ibid., p. 56.

[103]Arthur Miller, "The Family in Modern Drama," Atlantic Monthly, CXCVII (April, 1956) 40.

destroys him to create another motive and he ultimately returns to the old one.

Modern tragedy cannot even offer the positive, if arbitrary, God force of the Greeks, but only strange, inexplicable, blundering forces. The universe for the modern poet, especially since Sartre, is as irreducible as the square root of minus one and exactly as irrational. Despite the fact that man will give it a name (i) and use it in his actions, he cannot comprehend it. In addition, the modern universe's relentless perpetual cycle of destruction and reconstitution of matter is hostile to all human aspiration; yet man is too feeble to alter this and too sensitive to tolerate it. He is doomed to make his own law, but it is without sway. Furthermore, he lives under the constant menace of that universe which punishes too insistent a quest or too deep an understanding with annihilation.[104]

It is comprehension of such a relationship as this with a fathomless universe that provides both the Greek and the modern hero with a means of moving toward a vision which is tragic. The hero recognizes the utter indifference of the universe to exceptional merit among men, the arbitrariness of divine justice, and the cosmic irrelevance of the individual. Comprehension of the nature of ~~the nature of~~ the universe provides him with a challenge, a need to force a relationship with such a universe, and his free choice to accept that challenge is the beginning of his tragedy. Willy Loman refuses to believe that his value means nothing to his impersonal boss, Howard Wagner, whose obdurate indifference infuriates Willy as he demands recognition. "There were promises made across this desk. You mustn't tell me you've got people

[104] Miller, letter to Huftel, quoted in Huftel, pp. 112-3.

to see--I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance. You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away--a man is not a piece of fruit!"[105] Like Willy, Rieux meets the challenge of universal indifference with revolt, as he explains to Tarrou in his grim defense of medicine. "Since the order of the world is regulated by death, perhaps it would be worth more for God that one not believe in him, and that one fight with all one's strength against death without raising one's eyes to the skies where he sits in silence."[106] Both Willy Loman and Bernard Rieux assert themselves fiercely against universal silence. Like Oedipus, Rieux refuses to let his city of Oran suffer further under plague. Willy, by committing suicide, tries to free Biff and supply him with insight and cash, so that he may impose order on the chaos with which Willy himself cannot cope. Both modern heroes, like the Theban king, are seen by Camus to be driven by "a blind impetus which clamors for order in the midst of chaos."[107]

Artistically, Camus and Miller use two totally different dramatic configurations as experimental expressions of the hero-universe relationship. _The Plague_ is a tragedy of external evil, of irrational, impersonal universal oppression, as is, for example, _Romeo and Juliet_. The suffering of Rieux is mostly unmerited, for the most part self-induced, and he defines himself as a hero by his positive revolt against that suffering. Rieux is a contemplative hero; like those of seventeenth-century French tragedy he is totally lucid at the onset of his hopeless situation and remains so throughout its development. Rieux

[105] _Death of a Salesman_, p. 181.

[106] _La Peste_, p. 103. Translation by this author.

[107] Camus, _L'Homme Révolté_, p. 21.

cannot be reconciled to his fate, but he does recognize from the beginning its unalterable injustice. Then he makes the choice to try to defeat disease, whose power and impersonality make defeat for him a foregone conclusion. He battles to withstand that defeat, however, with the greatest intellectual and personal dignity. The hostile universe in The Plague is directly challenged by aspiring man.

Death of a Salesman, on the other hand, is in part a tragedy of hamartia; Willy belongs to the class of rash, precipitate heroes who begin their tragedies by error and find self-awareness in the suffering that that error brings upon them. It is also, in part, a tragedy of impersonal evil. Willy faces, in his search for self, a universe which condemns him to inferiority and then to loss of all ability. He cannot help aging or going senile despite his passionate protest. Willy faces a second universe in his search for identity, his social universe, the machine of Progress, which makes the play a third kind of tragedy, problematic tragedy, in which universe and hero are equally adamant and equally at fault. The justice of Willy's defeat as a businessman in seriously questioned, since the universe is little better than Willy himself. The universe of Progress is capable of being immoral, where the universe of Rieux is simply amoral. The Plague is a myth of direct conflict between hero and universe on a metaphysical level. Death of a Salesman, because it is a social tragedy in its configuration, does not present a single, clear, universal antagonist, but a series of indestructible obstacles which frustrate, in differing ways, each of Willy Loman's efforts at self-assertion. Miller has not given Willy a definable Universe; perhaps the play lacks artistic clarity as a tragedy because of this. However, Miller is concerned with the effect of various

absolutes on his striving hero, none of which absolutes is entirely just. Death of a Salesman is a tragedy similar to those of Euripides, whose gods are hardly paragons of virtue. Miller is concerned with the discrepancy between Willy's self and the various things he is asked to be. The inevitability of his fall is psychologically determined. Given Willy, who will not sacrifice his fierce idealism to the rigid machine of Progess, defeat for him is unavoidable. He contains within his stubborn soul the beginning and end of his dream.

The universes of Camus and Miller, are, then, seen to be impersonal, omnipotent, and incomprehensible, though in different ways. They oppress Rieux and Willy Loman relentlessly and their ultimate victory over the heroes is never in question. They follow, therefore, the Greek pattern of a universe which is tragic. Camus and Miller have fulfilled the second of the archetypal requirements for tragedy, the universe, and they have realised the traditional tragic conflict of hero and universe in their works, even though one is not entirely sure with Death of a Salesman which of Willy'c conflicts is the ultimate one. The question becomes, have they also fulfilled the third, the emotional requirement, by arousing pity and terror with those conflicts and resolving them in such a way that those emotions are purged and transformed into exaltation?

In The Plague terror is aroused by the inexorable cruelty of the plague, which hangs over Rieux's existence as a dry mockery of the futility of his efforts as he loses patient after patient, child, friend, and wife. However, the reader also reacts to Rieux's conscientiousness, sincerity, humility, and dedication to healing with a profound pity. At the moment of the illness of the Othon child, these two emotions

reach their point of sharpest tension. Rieux concentrates all his medical ability and personal strength on the attempt to cure the boy, the first recipient of the anti-plague serum. After a long, strenuous battle, he loses the child. It is at this time that his accusations of divine injustice are most reproachful, his revolt most passionate.

> Only the child went on fighting with all his little might. Now and then Rieux took his pulse--less because this served any purpose than as an escape from his utter helplessness--and when he closed his eyes, he could feel its tumult mingling with the fever of his own blood. And then, as one with the tortured child, he struggled to sustain him with all the remaining strength of his own body. But, linked for a few moments, the rhythm of their heartbeats soon fell apart, the child escaped him, and again he knew his impotence...He felt like shouting imprecations--anything to loosen the stranglehold lashing his heart with steel.
>
> "There are times when the only feeling I have is one of mad revolt...And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scene of things in which children are put to torture."[108]

From this time on, Rieux, and the reader with him, slowly comes to the understanding that despite the death of the Othon child, Rieux had done all that was humanly possible to save him, and that was something, even though it was not enough. Rieux decides that simply because he continues to fail he must not cease to fight. At the point of Tarrou's death, which comes after the plague begins its retreat, the catharsis is complete. Rieux's revolt is not lessened, but it is resolved at the point of its final failure into a tranquil comprehension.

> This human form, his friend's, lacerated by the spear-thrusts of the plague, consumed by searing, superhuman fires, buffeted by all the raging winds of heaven, was foundering under his eyes in the dark flood of the pestilence, and he could do nothing to avert the wreck. He could only stand, unavailing, on the shore, empty-handed and sick at heart, unarmed and helpless yet again under the onset of calamity. And thus, when the end came, the

[108] The Plague, pp. 194, 196, 197.

> tears that blinded Rieux's eyes were tears of impotence....
> The next night was not one of struggle, but of silence.[109]

Catharsis for Rieux is accomplished at Tarrou's bedside. As he turns away to face his next obstacle, tranquillity swells to reaffirmation, which, in its grim sincerity, exalts. "Thus, too, he had lived at Tarrou's side, and Tarrou had died this evening without their friendship's ever having had time to enter fully into the life of either. Tarrou had 'lost the match' as he put it. But what had he, Rieux won? No more than the experience of having known plague and remembering it, of having known friendship and remembering it, of knowing affection and being destined one day to remember it. So all a man could win in the conflict between plague and life was knowledge and memories. But Tarrou, perhaps, would have called that winning the match."[110]

The drama of the salesman also awakens pity and terror. The terror arises in part from the refusal of the system to tolerate insufficiency and in part from the knowledge that Willy's dream is his betrayal, that his blindness is catastrophic. Pity for Willy is aroused by his sincerity, his refusal to accept a role as cipher, his capacity for love. The two act on each other through the course of the play, as the audience alternates between anger at Willy and compassion for him. Pity and terror are purged in the final scene between Willy and his family, in which Willy is at last able to act meaningfully and rightly. He revels in the reality of Biff's love and the audience finds release in the humble eagerness with which he destroys himself for his son. Willy, at the point of his decision to commit suicide, is at peace with himself and knows exactly what he wants, whether or not what he wants is the

[109] Ibid., p. 260.

[110] Ibid., p. 262.

best goal he could have achieved for himself. As far as Willy is concerned, society has not triumphed over him and he has redeemed himself for his failure of love. His obligation is fulfilled, and that fact is a source for catharsis and then for exaltation. It is to be ignored that Willy wrongs his family in his final decision because that decision is psychologically right for him at the point where he arrests his drama. When Willy cries, "That boy--the boy is going to be magnificent!"[111] he is quite magnificent himself.

Careful examination of The Plague and Death of a Salesman reveals that they are intense dramas of the lives of two compelling modern men. Bernard Rieux and Willy Loman, wholly committed in their actions, sterling in their virtues, pitiable for their frailties, clash heroically with universes which are similar to that of the Greeks in their silence, their hostile indifference. The rebel heroes of both play and novel face those universes with revolt, burden themselves with crushing responsibility, come through suffering to an understanding of themselves and their universes (although in the case of Willy Loman this understanding happens to be false), and reaffirm with conviction the great value of the individual human soul, thus producing catharsis in the reader and creating from that catharsis a sense of exaltation. They fulfill the metaphysical, dramatic, and emotional requirements for tragedy and fulfill them with great power and imagination. The Plague and Death of a Salesman are landmarks in the effort to create a twentieth-century tragic literature.

[111] Death of a Salesman, p. 218.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MEASURE OF ARTISTIC SUCCESS

Both The Plague and Death of a Salesman can be defended as tragedies in their configurations of hero, universe, catharsis. However, as works of tragic art, a genre to which many of the finest literary artists of the Western world have turned their talents, they must be examined for their degree of artistic success. The details of the dramatic presentation of these two works--their realism, their ideologies, their verbal content, and their ovverriding tones--all must be evaluated to see how these elements contribute to or detract from their tragic quality.

The Plague and Death of a Salesman both belong to the realistic tradition in literature, and they attempt to strike a balance between verisimilitude and and imaginative treatment. To what extent a realistic approach contributes to tragedy and in what measure it interferes with it are valid questions to consider in evaluating the success of the novel and play as tragedies.

In the first place, tragedy itself is essentially a realistic literature. It is a literary form glorifying in quasi-religious terms a man who serves as a realistic symbol for his civilisation. Tragedy may be abstract, but it may never be grounded in fantasy. Whatever metaphysical considerations it may treat, it must dramatize the reality of suffering in life, punishment of crime, and the sacrifices which must be made to enforce order upon chaos.[112] Since the art of tragedy attempts to explain the human condition, it must be based on human experience; it is, after all, experience of tragedy in life which first inspires the poet's vision. The action of tragedy must be a life rhythm. The presentation of the dramatic situation has ranged histori-

[112]Gassner, p. 60.

cally in technique from detailed verisimilitude to extreme illusionism; literary presentation is relative to the aesthetics of the given culture.[113] There is no style of presentation, however, which is necessarily _more_ tragic than another as long as theme is not lost in details.

Despite the skepticism of traditionalists, the merciless realism of _The Plague_ does not obscure its tragedy, since the configuration of of the salvation of a trouble-stricken people is a familiar tragic myth. Even the naturalistic overtones in _Death of a Salesman_ are not anti-tragic as long as society is not actually _blamed_ for Willy's catastrophe. The realistic trend in literature is, in fact, encouraging for tragedy. The best tragic poets find plots which are working metaphors for the life of their times, and close proximity of literature to life will gove the modern poet ample opportunity to recognize the very real presence of the tragic in the world and transform it into art.

Yet the conflict of a given tragedy must not be so familiar that it loses power. It must be universal in scope and fix the blame for the defeat on cosmological oppression and human failing, neither of which is contingent upon any specific milieu. The spectator must not be so involved in the action of the moment that he cannot see the hero's actions in their universal context. The audience's emotional involvement with the hero must be counterbalanced by intellectual distance which is provided by the clear symbolism, the archetypal configuration, of a good tragic plot. Insistence upon distance as a balance to realism is vital in order to keep tragedy from being temporary in outlook; the realistic plot should be transformed into a universal metaphor.

The Plague has attempted to establish a sense of distance and avoid

[113] _Ibid._, p. 23.

the appearance of temporality by treating an extraordinary situation. Plague, metaphorically speaking, and resistance to it make a drama to which any age is susceptible, but which is by no means commonplace. A semi-allegorical presentation in the Camus novel of a universal problem suggests to the reader that his intellectual reaction to the novel should override his emotional one in his judgment of it as a whole. _The Plague_, within its realistic framework, contains aesthetic distance because of the clearly metaphoric nature of the situation which it treats.

Miller, with _Death of a Salesman_, has failed in part to compensate for the familiarity of his tragedy by not imbuing it with a recognizable larger meaning than that afforded by the actual plot. He has failed to make it absolutely clear to the audience that the plot is a metaphor. _Death of a Salesman_ treats an ordinary situation which does not suggest to every reader that it is more than ordinary. There is nothing to deny tragedy to ordinary situations per se, but their tendency to destroy audience perspective is dangerous. _Death of a Salesman_ is so life-like a drama that its universal dilemma is often difficult to abstract from the contemporary problem with which it deals. What is lost on many critics is that the mechanized universe which destroys Willy Loman could as easily be any other universe; it is his reaction to annihilation which counts. The particular metaphoric combatants in a tragic battle should be familiar, but the duel they wage in the plot should be weighed primarily as symbolic, secondarily as realistic. Miller may have intended Willy to be a symbol, but he did not make that fact explicit in his play.

The fact that Willy is too familiar a figure from life to be pro-

perly distant from the reader is complicated by the fact that he is also a familiar figure from literature. Miller has encountered difficulty in his attempt to create a tragedy of the "little man" primarily because the "little man" has been so long and intimately associated with naturalistic drama. Miller has been unable to prevent his hero from behaving animalistically or mechanistically simply because he is not a great intellectual of the sort commonly found in tragedy, but is like the unperceptive heroes of the naturalistic drama. In addition, Willy's intelligence is always suspect as being unconscious, not entirely because of prejudice on the part of the audience, but because Miller himself strongly suggests it.

Death of a Salesman is, in short, nearly as schizophrenic as its hero. Willy is tragic, as has been indicated, but he is also exceedingly pathetic, victimized by Progress. It is possible to avoid blaming society for Willy's misfortune if one interprets the character of Howard sympathetically, but he is clearly written as a selfish, preoccupied, thoughtless individual with slightly under average intelligence and some measure of sales ability. Such a boss as this complicates the inevitability of Willy's defeat by the indirect accusation that the universe need not have let it happen. Willy begging Howard for even a token salary, progressively asking less and less, is vaguely like Lear wandering from Goneril to Regan for permission to keep his retinue of one hundred knights, one of the last vestiges of his kingship.[114] Neither Lear's daughters nor Willy's boss need be quite so unbending as they are; their cruelty only emphasizes the feebleness of the two heroes, displaying them in a light in which they reveal no human majesty what-

[114] Siegal, p. 343.

soever. In King Lear the pathetic elements remain enigmatic; in Death of a Salesman they are the irritating product of Miller's socialistic leanings at the time of the play's composition. Miller insists that the play is neither Marxist nor naturalistic,[115] and even Joseph Wood Krutch, in his critique of Death of a Salesman, feels that society is not accused of a crime in the destruction of Willy Loman,[116] but nevertheless these ideas are hinted at in the play and are unresolved. Miller is unable to cut the umbilical cord connecting him with the naturalists and he is also unable to recognize alien matter in the composition of Death of a Salesman and rake it mercilessly out. He has sincerely attempted to preserve a realistic form of presentation in the play without accompanying naturalistic prejudices, but he is not entirely willing to give up the parts of those prejudices which still appeal to him. As a result he sacrifices artistic clarity and weakens the total impact of the play.[117]

Not only does Miller bring his penchant for naturalism to the tragedy of the "little man," but he also has artistic problems with it. He is troubled by the tension between the need to create intellectual distance for the audience and the inarticulateness of his hero. He has made an effort to reconcile the two by external artistic details and by his use of language in the play. The artistic details by which Miller attempts to eliminate this tension are extensive, obvious symbolism, simultaneous past and present time, musical themes, and the imaginative setting and lighting of memory. He uses these effects to try to trans-

[115] Miller, Introduction, pp. 27-9.

[116] "Drama," Nation, CLXVIII (March 5, 1949) 283.

[117] Bentley, p. 82.

figure the realistic drama of the salesman into a parable. However, no number of technical devices compensates for the basic failure of Miller to write a tragic parable. He has undermined his own sincere effort to create distance by hammering away at the inhumanity of Willy's company and the hero's own senility, which are personal, not universal characteristics. It is unclear exactly what Willy does stand for, since he himself does not say. The result of Willy's silence is a mélange of values, none of which is clearly ultimate, and from this fact results a great division of critical opinion on the play. It is socialistic to a Marxist critic, deterministic to a naturalist, and Oedipal to a Freudian, ideologies none of which is particularly compatible with its tragedy.

In addition to using artistic techniques in an attempt to establish distance by showing an ultimate value in Willy's drama, Miller also seels aesthetic distance through the use of two kinds of language in the play. He has given Willy dialogue appropriate to the speech habits of the lower middle-class salesman, but he has also loaded the play with long poetic passages, attempting to provide Death of a Salesman with the richness of language critically considered appropriate for high tragedy. He uses trite expressions, hoping that the passion of their utterance will bathe their familiarity in a totally new light. Reinvigorated banality is the style of nearly all of Happy Loman's serious dialogue and of Biff's descriptions of the West: "There's nothing more inspiring or--beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt."[118] Miller also saddles Willy, Linda, Biff, and Charley with long speeches uncomfortably laden with images. For example, Willy's reminiscence about Biff's cham-

[118] Death of a Salesman, p. 138.

pionship football game begins: "Like a young god. Hercules, something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him."[119] His dreams of diamond mines in Africa are equally oratorical. Miller's intentions are good, but the truth is that Willy is far more vibrant a hero when he is crying out in his most simple prose, with throbbing verbs, than when he is mouthing clichés or waxing eloquent in a long series of banal, non-active adjectives. It is rhythm which counts in tragedy, and the rhythm of Willy's drama is in action, not in speech. Miller, whose strength is in the re-creation of profound emotion,[120] makes his own play somewhat artificial by phrasing it in language which is essentially divorced from that emotion.

Camus, in contrast, has kept the two kinds of language successfully apart in The Plague by using the novel form. He indulges his capacity for lyrical expression in descriptive passages which lend grandeur to the action, such as this picture of the night after the death of Tarrou: "Outside, it was the same cold night, frosty stars in a clear and icy sky. In the half-lit room, one could sense the cold pressing on the glass, the pale breath of a polar night."[121] However, Camus's dialogue itself is terse, idiomatic, and natural. Camus's dialogue, because he has created it as the spontaneous, non-literary expression of the intense feelings of articulate characters, carries those characters' passions to the audience without letting those passions seem predictable or artificial. Realism of language makes an ideal means for Camus to make a universal story personal. For Miller, however, neither conscious artistry

[119] Death of a Salesman, p. 171.

[120] Moss, p. 108.

[121] La Peste, p. 232. Translation by this author.

nor realism of language is completely appropriate for making a personal story universal.

It is clear, then, that the tragedy in both works is allied to a realistic presentation, although The Plague, moving from a universal problem to a realistic drama, appears to be the more effective presentation. Both novel and play affirm universal values. The Plague advances one value, revolt, which leads to responsibility and reaffirmation. Death of a Salesman also affirms the value of revolt, but it contains naturalistic, socialistic, and Freudian values as well. None of these three value systems overshadows the tragic pattern of hero, universe, catharsis, but they are noticeable enough in the play to blur that pattern. Both works seem to attempt to balance realistic with symbolic language, The Plague with more success than Death of a Salesman because of the freedom of the novel form, but without the verbal artistry of earlier writers of tragedy.

Although The Plague and Death of a Salesman exhibit formal characteristics of tragedy, the fact that they treat ordinary men and phrase the tragedies of those men in the non-lyrical idiom appropriate to them, as well as including non-tragic elements in their lives, causes them to belong to the form of low tragedy. But although they are inferior as literature to Sophoclean or Shakespearean tragic expression, their motivating spirits are as tragic as the visions which inspired greater poets.

Death of a Salesman is an attempt to rephrase the traditional art of tragedy in modern terms, as its seeming imitation of the Lear and even the Oedipus stories indicates. Where Miller attempts to impose traditional artistic forms or his own beliefs on the independent and vigorous story of Willy Loman, the play fails. When he lets Willy tell

his own story, in his own language, it is successful, because Miller has captured a modern man in a dilemma which is truly tragic. The monster of Progress in the play, as in life, is turning on its creator with its own sort of morality. Willy's struggle not to be crushed by that monster denies Miller's own suggestion that what happens to him is hopelessly determined by his low level of competence. It lends universality and realism both to Willy's other tragic struggles as a man who must die and as a man who has failed to live his life to its fullest advantage. Willy is small, but science has made man small. His determination and hope of better things are every bit as passionate as the determination and hope of kings. He cannot be tragic in the same words as a king, a fact which Miller lost sight of when he was writing the play, as can be clearly seen. However, the symbolic battle of Willy Loman outshines the unnatural dialogue of the play. Despite the limitations of Arthur Miller, _Death of a Salesman_ insists on being tragedy.

The Plague, too, is far from the majestic chants of the glory of man which Joseph Wood Krutch so admires, but it does not pretend, as does _Death of a Salesman_, to try to revive them. It is a saga of the fate of modern man, which, surprisingly enough, appears in retrospect to be a tragedy. It is a grim sort of tragedy, however, treating as it does a period of wholesale destruction and total despair. The brutality of the universe, which the Greeks refrained from staging, is explored by Camus in all its grotesque reality. And there is only one slim ray of hope in all the carnage, made available to two intelligent and likeable men, only one of whom survives, and that is the hope that because man exists, whatever he chooses to do is worth some-

thing because he has done it. This is the real tragedy of modern man, based on the tragic fallacy reframed to include science. Man, able because of his intelligence to conceive of his suspended existence as tragic and thus to write tragedy, is able in some measure with art to understand and fight the limits of his intelligence and his mortality. For centuries Man believed that he had a special role; today he rebels against the fact that he does not. The Plague and Death of a Salesman as works of art reveal that expressions of the power and passion of that revolt make new and meaningful tragedy.

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