

ANALYSIS

A View from the Bridge (1955)

Arthur Miller

(1915-2005)

“In *A View from the Bridge*, Miller takes a character who never becomes fully articulate. The crisis which suddenly unveils Eddie’s incestuous and homosexual desires, is never within the framework of the story, fully understood by Eddie himself. He knows only that he has lost something, his ‘name’—and for this he finally sacrifices himself. To present this character, Miller uses a device ‘to separate openly, and without concealment, the action of the...play from its generalized significance.’ He introduces the ‘engaged narrator’ in the person of Eddie’s lawyer. ‘Something perversely pure calls me from his memory,’ says Alfieri in his closing speech, ‘not purely good, but himself purely, for he allowed himself to be wholly known.’ But it is Miller’s fear that Eddie has not ‘allowed himself to be wholly known,’ which leads him to set a commentator between the audience and the action. In this play, Miller faces the central problem of modern realism—the difficulty of giving meaning to a fragment of modern life without violating the unique quality of that life.”

Albert Hunt

“Realism and Intelligence: Some Notes on Arthur Miller”

Encore VII

(May-June 1960) 12-17, 41

“Eddie Carbone in *A View from the Bridge* (1955) also dies crying out for his name, but when he asks Marco to ‘gimme my name’ he is asking for a lie that will let him live and, failing that, for death. Eddie is unusual among the Miller heroes in that he accepts the rules and prejudices of his society, an Italian neighborhood in Brooklyn, and dies because he violates them. Early in the play, Eddie warns Catherine to be closemouthed about the illegal immigrants (the ‘submarines’) who are coming to live with them; he tells her with approbation about the brutal punishment meted out to an informer.

By the end of the play, the ‘passion that had moved into his body, like a stranger,’ as Alfieri calls it, so possesses Eddie that to rid himself of the presence of Rodolpho he is willing to commit an act that he abhors as much as his society does. Miller’s own comments on the play and the lines that he gives to Alfieri, a cross between the Greek chorus and Mary Worth, indicate that he sees Eddie in the grip of a force that is almost impersonal in its inevitability, its terribleness, ‘the awesomeness of a passion which...despite even its destruction of the moral beliefs of the individual proceeds to magnify its power over him until it destroys him.’

The action in *View* seems to me somewhat more complicated than the clean line Miller suggests; its hero is more than a leaf blown along on winds out of ancient Calabria. Eddie chooses to become an informer; his choice is so hedged with rationalization—his convincing himself that Rodolpho is homosexual, that he is marrying Catherine for citizenship papers—that he is never conscious of his motivation. He comes closer and closer to putting a label on his incestuous love for Catherine (although technically she is his niece, functionally she is his daughter) and his homosexual attraction to Rodolpho (how pathetically he goes round and round to keep from saying *queer*). By comparison, informing is a simpler breach of code, one that has justification in the world outside the neighborhood. It is almost as though he takes on the name informer to keep from wearing some name that is still more terrible to him, only to discover that he cannot live under the lesser label either.”

Gerald Weales

“Arthur Miller: The Man and His Image”

American Drama Since World War II

(Harcourt 1962) 3-17

“Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman of Italian descent, lives on the Brooklyn waterfront with his wife, Beatrice, and his orphaned niece, Catherine. He treats the 18-year-old girl like a child and loves her, so he thinks, like a daughter. When two of his wife’s cousins, still poorer than he, are smuggled in from Sicily to work illegally on the docks, he gives them shelter in his home. Marco, the older Sicilian, is quiet, sturdy, and a hard worker. His strikingly handsome brother, Rodolpho, is easygoing, always ready for a joke and a song.

When Catherine and Rodolpho fall in love and want to marry, Eddie refuses to let the girl go. Driven near insanity by his repressed desire for his ward, he accuses Rodolpho of homosexuality and of wanting to marry only in order to obtain the American citizenship. When Eddie fails to convince the girl, he reports the Sicilian to the immigration authorities. Before being deported, Marco kills Eddie. All this is told in flashbacks by an elderly, compassionate lawyer who serves as the chorus and, in the end, draws a parallel between the brutal deeds on the stage and the violent myths of antiquity.”

Theodore J. Shank, ed.

A Digest of 500 Plays: Plot Outlines and Production Notes
(Crowell-Collier 1988) 338-39

Michael Hollister (2015)