

Bridging and Building American Dream through *A View from the Bridge*

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Published in 1955, *A View from the Bridge* is Arthur Miller's masterpiece which beautifully depicts the tension between human relationships and kinship responsibilities in the background of human psychology. In this play, Eddie's failure to recognise himself leads him to his tragic end. He intermingles his possessive desires between his wife and his niece. Despite being advised by Alfieri, he is not ready to leave his possession over his niece, Catherine. In this way, he refuses to the law of "individuation," the psychological growing up. From start to the finish of the play, the readers confront his immutable and obstinate behavior regarding his possession of Catherine.

The persona of Eddie, like Browne's (in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"), is both false and inflexible. Brown considers himself both the good Christian and the good husband, who, in reality, he is not. Likewise Eddie too considers himself as the actual well-wisher of Catherine, however, on the contrary, creates more problem for her. He is incestuously obsessed with her. He abominates for her getting job, not because he is worried about her study, but because of the thought of her going away. He says, "I want you to be in a nice office. May be a lawyer's office some place in New York in one of them nice office" (385). His incapability to disguise his possessive emotions corroborates his rigid persona. Beatrice, his wife, knows his true self, hence, clears to Catherine in this way:

"Look, he'll say anything, what does he care what he says? If it was a prince came here for you it would be no different. You know that, don't you?" (404).

Since its publication, *A View from the Bridge* responded to a wide range of multidimensional critical readings. The play "embodies Eddie's sense of guilt and also his feelings of dignity in the content of his social milieu. He is a man possessed by sexual jealousy, a man who vehemently refuses to 'settle for half.' And because he does so under the impact of passion he has a strange type of Greek ferocity which Miller's other heroes lack" (Ram 6). Robert w. Corrigan regards this play as "a conflict between the uncomprehending self and solid social or economic structure – the family, the community, the system" (Corrigan 3). The acres of diamond and the immigration traffic, the dream of raking in a rich haul of success and the shift in responses to the immigrants are central to the design and the dénouement in *A View from the Bridge* (Sharma 26). It is a "grim tragedy." At times, it assumes mythical dimensions, chokes the reader of insecurity, imbalance and fear, and ultimately calls for a kind of order, reformation or metamorphosis (Chander 26). But, contrary to this view, Alan A. Stambusky argues that "the play lacks the universality of high tragedy because its hero Eddie, although a good man basically, is living under the influence of a sick and troubled mind....Urgent, intense, and hard-breathing, *A View from the Bridge* aspires to tragedy without the equipment to achieve it" (Stambusky 109). From these contrasting erudite exegeses, it becomes crystal clear that the play, since its publication, aroused a great deal of literary criticism. Although a number of critics have already been concentrated on its tragic elements based upon Greek pattern, yet its particular underlying response to mythic and archetypal elements is yet to be explored. The purpose of the present paper is to foreground its underlying cultural "motifs" and "primordial images", and, in this way, it can be regarded as an attempt to untie the knots that are left snubbed by the earlier critical readings.

In this play the concept of myth of “American Dream” has been put forward by different archetypes. Myths are the means by which archetypes, essentially unconscious forms, become manifest and articulate to the conscious mind. According to the ideas of Jung, archetypes reveal themselves in the dreams of individuals, so that we might say that dreams are “personalised myths” and myths are “depersonalised dreams.” There is an intimate relationship between dreams, myths, and art in that all three serve as media through which archetypes become accessible to consciousness (Guerin 179). In this way, the Mythical and Archetypal approaches act as a supplement to each other, therefore, the separate study of the one from the other will end up in inadequate understanding of the theory.

In *A View from the Bridge*, Eddie, the protagonist, is incestuously obsessed with his wife’s niece, Catherine. In Aristotelian terminology, Eddie’s “error of judgment” about the object of his possession paves the way for his tragic end. Man is possessive; if not only by his culture then certainly by his nature. This possessiveness transpires from “pre-conscious” ego. Throughout ages, several combat zones were outshined to satiate this ego; which, now, get to be a well-known archetypal motif or pattern. Recurring from the origin of mankind to the present day, possessiveness played a dual role in society, that is, construction at the one side of the pendulum and destruction at the other end of the pendulum. On the one hand, it contributed to unite the families and helped to sustain male-female relations in a civilised manner. Unlike animals, possessiveness made it possible for a male-female pair to live in a neurosis free environment in society. On the other hand, the destructive effects of possessiveness on the society can be seen as the result of two archetypal behavior of human beings – first, the struggle for the object of possession; second, the pain felt in leaving the object free, earlier possessed. Eddie, in the whole play, fails to recognise his object of possession. He does not want to leave the possession of his niece, Catherine, and this situation takes him to

the state of melancholy. He is more concerned with his niece than with his wife. His wife, Beatrice, is conscious of this possession and wants to break it by advocating Catherine to go to her job. She says to Eddie,

"I don't understand you; she's seventeen years old, you gonna keep her in the house all her life?" (386)

This remark hurts Eddie's pre-conscious ego and a conflict arises between external social necessities and his egoistic possessive self. Eddie struggles, on the one hand, "with the archaic images of omnipotent selfhood, on the other hand with the demands made by social norms" (Wright 70).

The most influential exponent of mythic and Archetypal theory is Carl Gustav Jung. Jung, the disciple of Freud, breaks with his master on the matter of "individual unconscious" and puts forward the notion of "collective unconscious." Unlike Freud, he argues, "Mind is not born as a 'tabula rasa.' Like the body, it has its pre-established individual definiteness; namely, forms of behaviour. They become manifest in the ever-recurring patterns of psychic functioning" (Jung, *Psyche and Symbol* 15) Jung calls these "myth forming" elements as "motifs," "primordial images" or "archetypes." The major contribution of Jung in Mythological and Archetypal criticism is his influential theory of "individuation." Individuation, in Jungian sense, is a "psychological growing up" of a person. It is a process of discovering those aspects of one's self that make one an individual different from other members of the species. It is essentially a process of recognition-that is, as one matures, the individual must consciously recognise the various aspects, unfavorable as well as favorable, of one's total self. This self-recognition requires extraordinary courage and honesty but is absolutely essential if one is to become a well-balanced individual. Jung observes that neuroses are the results of the person's failure to confront and accept some archetypal component of the unconscious. Instead of assimilating this

unconscious element into their consciousness, neurotic individuals persist in projection it upon some other person or object. In projection, we project our own unconscious faults and weaknesses on others much more easily than we can accept them as part of our own nature (Guerin 180-81).

Jung, by stepping aside from Freud, further goes on to describe the complex relation between the universality of human “collective unconscious,” and the conscious of an individual. He regards the “shadow,” the “persona” and the “anima” as the structural components of human psyche. These structural components are shared by all individuals in all cultures, which, he regards as the repository of “racial memories”, primordial images and patterns of experience, that he calls “archetypes” (Abrams 251). The “shadow” is the darker side of our unconscious self, the inferior and less pleasing aspect of the personality, which we wish to suppress. In Jung’s words, “The shadow is the invisible suarian tail that man still drags behind him” (Jung, *psychological Reflections*, 217) The symbolic representation of this archetype can, basically, be seen in the role of a villain. Shakespeare’s Iago, Milton’s Satan, Goethe’s Mephistopheles, and Conrad’s Kurtz are some classical examples of the archetypal images of the “shadow.” The “persona” is the mask that one shoes to the world. It can simply be regarded as one’s social personality, a personality that, sometimes, may be quite different from one’s true self. To achieve psychological maturity or individuation, one must have a flexible persona that can be brought into harmonious relationship with the other components of his or her psychic make up. A too critical or rigid persona may result in such symptoms of neurotic disturbance as irritability and melancholy. Eddie, for instance, in this play, suffers from neurotic behaviour due to his rigid and obstinate persona. He oscillates between external social exigencies and his possessive pre-consciousness. The “anima”, according to Jung is:

...a social image and should designate something very wonderful and immortal.... The anima is not the sole in the dogmatic sense,

not an 'anima relations,' which is a philosophical conception, but a natural archetype that satisfactorily, sums up all the statements of the unconscious, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion. It is a 'factor' in the proper sense of the word. Man cannot make it; on the contrary, it is always a priori element in his moods, reactions, impulses and whatever else is spontaneous in psychic life.... What is not-I, not masculine, is most probably feminine, and because the not-I is felt as not belonging to me and therefore as outside me, the anima-image is usually projected upon women. Either sex is inhabited by the opposite sex up to a point, for, biologically speaking, it is simply the greater number of masculine genes that tips the scales in favor of masculinity. The smaller number of feminine character, which usually remains unconscious because of its subordinate position. (Jung, "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious" 222-23)

In simple words, it is a feminine designation in the male psyche (in the female psyche this archetype is called the "animus"). The "anima" is the contrasexual part of a man's psyche, the image of the opposite sex that he carries in both his personal and his collective unconscious. Helen of Troy, Dante's Beatrice and Milton's Eve are the examples of the personifications of "anima."

The relevance of Jung's theory of "individuation" and archetypes designated as the "shadow," the "persona" and "anima" is quite influential in Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*. The "soul image" of Eddie is projected upon Catherine through the image of Madonna. The symbolic representation of an ideal image of a female is represented through the character of Catherine. Eddie romanticises his fantasy by assimilating the "soul image" of Catherine to Madonna. He says, "With your hair that way you look like a Medonna, you know that? You are the madonna type...heh, Medonna?" (386) Eddie's "pre-consciously ego" gets dejected because the projection of the "anima" or the "soul image" on his own niece is not admissible in society. Therefore, his "anima" fails in relating his inner world to the external world. Jung, here, is quite justified in saying that

projection is an unconscious, automatic process whereby a content that is unconscious to the subject transfers itself to an object, so that it seems to belong to that object. Eddie symbolises the neurotic individual who projects his unconscious failure on Rodolpho, regarding him a monster between him and Catherine. Catherine also tries to escape from being an object of possession of Eddie by blaming Beatrice, who according to Catherine is unable to feel her husband's needs. By making Beatrice the culprit, Catherine justifies herself to Rodolpho as:

Then why don't she be a woman? If I was a wife I would make a man happy instead of goin' at him all the time. I can tell a block away when he's blue in his mind and just want to talk to somebody quite and nice I can tell when he's hungry or wants a beer before he even says anything. I know when his feet hurt him...." (421)

In addition to the Jungian psychology, the myth of the "American Dream" is very prominent in *A View from the Bridge*. "The central facet of this myth cluster is the myth of Edenic Possibilities, which reflects the hope of creating a second paradise, not in the next world and not outside time, but in the bright new world of the American Continent. From the time of its settlement by Europeans, America was seen as the land of boundless opportunity, a place where human beings, after centuries of poverty, misery, and corruption, could have a second chance to actually fulfill their mythic yearnings for a return to paradise" (Guerin 186). This "vision of paradise" is inherited by almost all the characters of the play, *A View from the Bridge*. First, Eddie, engrossed with the American Dream, came to America from Italy in the hope of "creating the second paradise;" and then, Marco and Rodolpho come with the thought of "Edenic possibilities" in America. Alfieri says, "And now we are quite civilised, quite American" (379). Italy, though they all belong to Italy, on the other hand, is compared to hell where there is no "possibilities" at all. Rodolpho describes Italy as: "It's feature in our town. The horses in our town are skinnier than goats. So if

there are too many passengers we help to push the carriages up to the hotel. In our town the horses are only for show.... Everything in our town, you gotta push!" (393). In the words of Marco, "The older one is sick in his chest. My wife – she feeds them from her own mouth. I tell you the truth, if a stay there they will never grow up. They eat the sunshine" (393). The dream land of America, on the contrary, becomes the source land for Marco's family. When Catherine asks Rodolpho to live in Italy – by breaking up his American Dream – after marriage, his reaction is no less than a person who would have been reacted the same, when asked to move from heaven to hell. Rodolpho says, "There's nothing! Nothing, nothing, nothing.... In two years you would have an old, hungry face. When my brother's babies cry, they give them water, water that boiled a bone" (419). Marco is so much engrossed with the "American Dream" that he first spits on Eddie's face and then, in the end of the play, kills him because he has shaken his "Dream" by telling the Immigration Bureau about their illegal immigration.

A View from the Bridge also corresponds to Northrop Frye's interpretation of literature in terms of season cycles. Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, argues that myth is a "structural organising principle of literary experience" and that an archetype is essentially an element of "one's literary experience" (365). He develops "the archetypal approach – which he combined with the 'typological interpretation' of the Bible and the conception of the imagination in the writings of the poet and painter William Blake(1757-1827) – into a radical and comprehensive revision of traditional both of the theory of literature and the practice of literary criticism. Frye proposes that the totality of literary works constitute a 'self-contained literary universe' which has been created over the ages by human imagination so as to incorporate the alien and different world of nature into archetypal forms that serve to satisfy enduring human desires and needs. In this literary universe, four radical *mythoi* (that is, plot forms, or organising structural principles), correspond to the four major

genres of comedy (spring), romance (summer), tragedy (autumn) and satire (winter)" (Abrams 13). The intensive study of the plot of *A View from the Bridge* shoes its reflection to death-resurrection archetype.

The play begins with the happy mood of almost all the characters. Beatrice and Catherine are happy for the new hopes and the better future promised by the job of Catherine. Although, at the beginning, Eddie feels dejected on hearing about Catherine's job, but after some rational arguments, he also participates in the juvenile atmosphere of the house. He is happy to see Catherine in the role of his "Madonna," the ideal image of a female in his mind. Identifying this situation to Frye's interpretation, it can easily be compared to the "spring" season. "Spring" turns to "summer" (with the boarding to Marco and the Rodolpho in the house) which, according to Frye, is corollary to romance. Catherine falls in love with Rodolpho, who, for Eddie, is a "hit-and-run guy." (403) However, Beatrice gives approval to their love. When object Rodolpho for his physical traits, Beatrice takes his side by saying: "He's a nice fella, hard workin', he's a good – lookin' fella" (398). Afterwards, the "spring" gives way to the "autumn" and next to the "winter." All leaves of faith tree fall with Eddie's phone call to Immigration Bureau. Beatrice also is suffering from sexual ignorance of her husband, Eddie:

Beatrice: When am I gonna be a wife again, Eddie?

Eddie: I ain't been feelin' good. They bother me
since they come.

Beatrice: It's almost three months you don't feel
good; they're only here a couple of weeks.
It's three months, Eddie. (398)

Hence, unassuaged husband-wife relationship paves the way for the tragic end of the play. Eddie is concerned with his lost ego.

Eddie: I want my respect, Beatrice, and you know
what I'm talking about.

Beatrice: what?

Eddie : What I feel like doin' in the bed and what
I don't feel like doin'. I don't want no-. (426)

It is not the respect that Eddie is demanding for, but it is the approval of his possession of Catherine that he is demanding from Beatrice. This "tragic flaw" leads him to tragedy. The "autumn" is all prevailed over the families. All the leaves and fruits of hope (the economic help that Marco's family is seeking from him) are shattered down from the "American" tree by the cool wind of Eddie's possessiveness. The play ends with a satirical note of Alfieri on human existence, who, like the "wise old man" suggests the human limitations and advocates half-a-life. The play ends with his words as, "And yet, it is better to settle for half, it must be! And so I mourn him – I admit it – with a certain... alarm" (439). The play, thus, completes the season cycle in a symbolic way and corresponds to "death – rebirth" archetype.

The play's noteworthy response to mythic and archetypal study is entwined by the archetypal images and patterns, which it contains in abundance. The play is full of archetypal images, but the "sea", the "fish" and the "wise old man" are some dominant images, which persist throughout the play. The sea, as an archetypal image, symbolises the mother of all life, spiritual mystery and infinity, death-rebirth cycle and the unconscious. Here, in this play, the sea plays the role of "the mother of all life." Eddie, as a "longshoreman" earns his livelihood from the sea. The sea serves as the life-giving source to all the characters of the play. Marco and Rodolpho, before coming to America, used to go to the sea to get their livings. Catherine says, "Yeah, they follow them [sardines] all over the ocean, Africa, Yugoslavia..." (411). Unlike *Moby-Dick*, the fish represented in this play is not a whale, but "sardines;" not a symbol of "divine

creation" but a symbol of preservation of existence. The most assertive image in *A View from the Bridge*, is of the "wise old man." The wise old man, in Jungian terminology, represents:

Knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness and intuition on the one hand, and on the other, moral qualities such as goodwill and readiness to help, which make his 'spiritual' character.... Apart from his cleverness, wisdom, and insight, the old man...is also notable for his moral qualities; what is more he even tests the moral qualities of others.... The old man always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation from which only profound reflection or a luck idea...can extricate him. But since, for internal and external reasons, the hero cannot accomplish this himself, the knowledge needed to compensate the deficiency comes in the form of a personified thought, i.e., in the shape of his sagacious and helpful old man (Jung, *A Handful of Critical Approaches*, 179).

In this play, Alfieri plays the role of "wise old man". He becomes the source of wisdom and a moral enlightener when Eddie comes to him in hopeless and desperate situation. Alfieri advises him in this way:

Yes, but these things have to end, Eddie, that's all. The child has to grow up and go away, and the man has to learn to forget. Because after all, Eddie – what other way can it end? Let her go. That's my advice. You did your job, now it's her life; wish her luck, and let her go.... Because there's no law, Eddie; make up your mind to it; the law is not interested in this. (409)

Throughout the play, he plays the role of an instructor and commentator. Eddie neglects his advice and follows the path of his "possessive-self," that leads him to his tragic end. At another occasion, Alfieri says:

This is my last word, take it or not, that's your business, morally and legally you have no rights, you cannot stop it; she is a free agent.... I'm not telling you now, I'm warning you – the law is nature. The law is only a word for what has a right to happen. When he is wrong it's because it's unnatural, but in this case it is

natural and a river will down you if you buck it now. Let her go. And bless her.... Somebody had to come for her, Eddie sooner or later. You won't have a friend in the world, Eddie! Even those who understand will turn against you, even the ones who feel the same will despise you! Put it out of your mind! (424)

In short, it may justifiably be concluded that Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* embodies a number of mythical and archetypal features which eventually lead to the myth of the "American Dream." Myth as an American Dream, in this play, can be regarded as the symbolic projections of its character's hopes, values, fears, and aspirations. The play completes the cycle of life – the death-and-rebirth archetype – just as, according to the idea of Northrop Frye, the cycle of seasons. All the characters, in one way or the other, are connected to and projected through the bigger American Dream. Eddie is dialectically concerned with his image in the modern urban society and his unrealistic love for his niece. The play ends with a tragic death of its protagonist and the American Dream of happy and successful life is altogether shattered.

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