

A view from the bridge by arthur miller | analysis



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A View from the Bridge is a play set in Brooklyn in the 1950s and was written by Arthur Miller. He wrote this play based on different aspects in his life as he lived in Brooklyn as a child and worked in the Brooklyn shipyards like Eddie and befriended the Italians he worked with. Miller heard a story of some men coming over to work illegally and being betrayed which inspired him to write A View from a Bridge. It was originally a one act play, but he changed it into a two-act play later on. The play includes ideas from Greek tragedies, which is where the character of Eddie links into. Alfieri, another main character acts as a Greek chorus, a vital role in a Greek tragedy and he watches the action, comments on it and talks to the audience directly, like a narrator. We see him in many different roles throughout the play and each role adding to the dramatic impact of the play.

The first role Alfieri takes on is as a narrator, which is at the start of the play. " You wouldn't have known it, but something amusing has just happened. You see how uneasily they nod to me?" Alfieri uses the word ' you' to include the audience and to make them feel involved. Also, as the narrator he highlights the importance of certain scenes and actions, as after the scene when Marco and Rodolpho arrive, Alfieri starts to talk again saying " Eddie Carbone had never expected to have a destiny" implying that because Beatrice's cousins have come to stay, something will change. Alfieri also mentions that " we settle for half" and uses repetition as in the first speech and the very last speech after Eddie has died he says that " it is better to settle for half, it must be." By using the word ' we' Alfieri is again involving the audience and making them think that they should settle for half as well as Eddie, and is therefore offering moral guidance to the audience.

Furthermore by saying “ it must be” better to settle for half, and using an imperative, Alfieri is trying to convince the audience and even himself that appreciating what you’ve got must be better than dying like Eddie did. When Alfieri is narrating the play, Arthur Miller uses dramatic devices for example using stage lights to focus on Alfieri, so the audience know what he is saying is very important.

The title of the play ‘ A View from a Bridge’ has many different meanings, as it could be seen as Alfieri’s ‘ view from the bridge,’ as he is the one narrating the events and telling his view on the events that unfold. Furthermore the title is literally the play, which is set in Brooklyn Bridge and is about the community around the area and the actions that happen which Alfieri tells as a narrator. Also the bridge could be a metaphor for the differences between Alfieri’s view on justice and Eddie’s differing opinions and can also incorporate Alfieri’s view that we should ‘ settle for half’ as to do this you may need to compromise and meet in the middle, like the middle of the bridge. Another interpretation on the title is that the ‘ bridge’ is like a bridge between Eddie’s community in Brooklyn and Marco and Rodolpho’s community in Italy and they both have to understand each other’s way of life by using this bridge to help them.

Another role Alfieri takes on is a character in the play as a lawyer. He gives Eddie advice on how to deal with Rodolpho and Catherine: “ Let her go. That’s my advice. You did your job, now it’s her life; wish her luck and let her go.” The audience trust Alfieri, because of his character as a lawyer as more often than not they are seen to be trustworthy and reliable. As well as advising Eddie, he also warns him when he feels Eddie is going too far.

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Because of Alfieri's narration running through the play, the audience can see that there is a theme of law and justice running through the play. He explains these themes by giving more information about the different communities telling the audience that "the law has not been a friendly idea since the Greeks were beaten," implying that the Americans of Red Hook do not really believe in the law. Alfieri attempts to explain the law to Eddie and Marco, telling them that "the law is nature. The law is only a word for what has a right to happen." So when Eddie chooses to find justice by his own means, Alfieri feels that he cannot get involved and he can't do anything to stop Eddie.

In the first scene when Alfieri meets with Eddie as a lawyer he describes Eddie's eyes "like tunnels." This simile gives the impression of a dark journey ahead of Eddie and gives the audience an image that Eddie cannot escape his fate that has been predicted by Alfieri as the audience already know it's going to happen. It could also suggest that Eddie was thinking deeply or that he had many dark feelings rushing around his head. In this scene Alfieri is powerless to prevent what is going to happen and this creates tension and suspense because the audience want to know what is going to happen next. "I could see every step coming, step after step." Alfieri also acts as a warning sign, by preparing the audience for events that are about to happen. "You won't have a friend in the world, Eddie!" By using the phrase 'you won't' Alfieri is warning Eddie that something is definitely going to happen and that he should be careful. "As the weeks passed, there was a future; there was a trouble that would not go away." By using repetition, Alfieri is emphasizing the point that something is going to happen and is

making the audience think through what will happen and why and therefore keeps them hooked. Arthur Miller uses dramatic irony as the audience and Alfieri know something is going to happen, however the characters in the play are oblivious to this. Alfieri informs the audience that his customers are prepared to “settle for half,” however in the final paragraph he tells the audience that something else is going to happen by using the phrase “and yet.” Alfieri uses the quote ‘bloody course’ to paint an image in the audience’s head of blood and violence and the images that are left in the audience’s mind leaves them curious about the rest of the play which creates dramatic tension. It also shows Alfieri’s importance in the rest of the play, as it shows he is predicting the play and Eddie’s fate. In the last sentence of Alfieri’s first speech, he links to his past saying “every few years there is still a case” to tell the audience that this story will definitely be tragic. He then introduces Eddie: “This one’s name was Eddie Carbone,” and the fact that Alfieri immediately mentions Eddie after talking about that culture of Red Hook and also speaks about him in the past tense shows that his fate has already come to an end and gives another indication that Eddie will die at the end of the play so the audience are left wondering not what will happen to him but how it will happen. The way in which this quote is presented shows that Eddie is one of many of Alfieri’s clients whose tragic story is like many others in Italy that die of unfair causes.

The setting of Red Hook is a poor community and Alfieri creates the atmosphere of Red Hook by describing it as “the slum that faces the bay seaward side of Brooklyn Bridge.” There is a lot of cultural context linked into the story as Alfieri comes from the same Italian background as Eddie;

therefore he understands both American and Italian lifestyles and he helps the audience to understand the 1950's Brooklyn society in which the characters live. Alfieri also explains how the rich and the poor are divided in their community by their jobs and states that Eddie has a hard job as " a longshoreman working on the docks."

" I often think that behind that suspicious little nod of theirs lie three thousand years of distrust." This is a quote that Alfieri says at the beginning of the play which gives the audience an insight into what Red Hook is like and suggests that there is a lot of dishonesty in the area. He mentions the characters Al Capone and Frankie Yale who were former Italians that had a history of crime and violence, " In those days, Al Capone the greatest Carthaginian of all was learning his trade on these pavements, and Frankie Yale himself was cut precisely in half by a machine gun", he uses this quote to emphasise the case that he is about to handle which shows that it will be of violent nature and he also uses this quote to show that the play will end tragically.

The audience sees Alfieri as a character in the play when Eddie goes to see him for advice. However Alfieri feels that he cannot help Eddie as he knows about the disaster that is going to happen at the end of the play so he feels powerless over Eddie as his friend and his lawyer and cannot prevent the decisions Eddie is choosing to make. Another role Alfieri takes on which is a very important part in the play is as a moral commentator. Alfieri gives his own views and opinions on the characters and their actions and this guides the audience rather than allowing them to make their own minds up. The audience has the same opinion of the narrator because Alfieri talks directly

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to them affecting their view on the situation and characters and they believe everything he says. Alfieri comments on Eddie's moral character saying " he was as good a man as he had to be in life that was hard and even," and he explains that Eddie is neither entirely good nor entirely bad. Alfieri only guides the audience influencing their opinion, but sometimes gives two differing opinions on Eddie allowing the audience to make up their own minds.

In the play there are only two acts, which is unusual for a play; however there is many different things that happen in these two acts. As an audience we see that Alfieri is very important to the structure of A View From A Bridge as he is the character that opens the play and ends the play with his two dramatic speeches therefore adding to Alfieri's dramatic impact to the play.

Finally Alfieri acts as the Greek chorus in the play, explaining the events on stage to the audience without actually participating in them. He has to know a lot about each of the main characters and actions to be an effective chorus; however he communicates with the audience more thoroughly than with the characters, to inform them of the actions and thoughts of the characters. The idea of the narrator was developed in the Greek tragedies of the 5th century called the chorus who commented on the actions of characters in the play which is like Alfieri. A Greek Tragedy was originally a play that consisted of tragic events with a main character (like Eddie) who's fate would soon come to an end and usually die at the end. A View from a Bridge uses the conventions of a Greek Tragedy, as Arthur Miller used a final climax in the play where Eddie Carbone (one of the main characters)

tragically dies, which suggests his play is based on a traditional Greek tragedy.

In conclusion Alfieri helps contribute to the dramatic impact of the play in many different ways, because of his different roles but also because as an audience we know that what is going to happen as Alfieri predicted the events to come which adds tension and suspense. Throughout the play Alfieri keeps emphasizing that we should 'settle for half,' which shows that Arthur Millar was trying to give a moral message to the audience and also society saying that they should 'settle for half,' and always bring justice to the world as otherwise we might end up with Eddie's fate.

Bibliography

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