

A View from the Bridge

How does Miller present conflict in '*A View from the Bridge*'?

Throughout Miller's 'A View from the Bridge', conflict is present, not only in the form of physical violence, but also within a character and also verbally between two characters. The play opens with a monologue given by Alfieri, a lawyer who has a close relationship with many in Red Hook, despite the fact that in Red Hook lawyers are "connected with disasters". Towards the end of the monologue, he links the events that are about to unfold to Greek tragedies, and states that another lawyer who was "just as powerless" watched the events run their "bloody course". From these opening words, the audience knows exactly how the play is going to end, as is always the case in the tragedy genre - with violence, and ultimately blood. This shows Miller's intention with 'A View from the Bridge' - he does not intend the conflict and violence in it to be shocking, it is an integral part of a tragedy, although admittedly there are some shocking scenes, but rather he uses it to show what would happen to those who choose to make the same choices as Eddie - a warning to those who are inclined to betray their neighbours and friends. This was particularly relevant at the time, as in the 1950s, McCarthyism (essentially anti-Communism) was rife throughout America. The play is also very much about how conflict is resolved and the differences between how men and women deal with it.

The first, and most obvious display of physical conflict is Eddie's response to Rodolfo dancing with Catherine. As soon as the two brothers, Marco and Rodolfo, arrive at the Carbone household, Eddie takes an instant disliking to Rodolfo declaring • "that guy ain't right". Much to Eddie's distaste, Catherine, to whom Eddie has been acting in loco parentis, starts to fall in love with Rodolfo, and Eddie goes far in trying to dissuade her lust for Rodolfo ("He's only bowin' to your passport" and "that's a hit-and-run kinda guy"). As a result, when Rodolfo and Catherine start intimately dancing in front of him, to 'Paper Doll', a song that includes a line lamenting the difficulty of loving what's not yours, Eddie steps in. Of course Eddie, being "husky and slightly over-weight", does not try and 'out-dance' Rodolfo. Instead, he chooses to do what he knows best, and invites Rodolfo to box with him. This is key, as previously Eddie has been of the opinion that Rodolfo is feminine and even goes as far as to believe that Rodolfo is homosexual. He points out that "he cooks, he sings, he could make dresses", and throughout Act One, Rodolfo is shown by Miller doing tasks traditionally carried out by women, such as helping with the dishes. So in this scene, the conflict is initially latent and the emotional changes that are occurring in the household are enacted as a subtext.

Miller also highlights the differences between the two men in their style of speech and relative eloquence. Eddie, finds it difficult to put his feelings into words and his utterances are typically short and terse. The difficulties in his marriage are referred to euphemistically. He offers that he 'don't feel good' by way of explanation of the lack of sex in his marriage. In contrast, Rodolfo, despite being newly arrived in America and therefore not having a great deal of English, portrays Sicily with detailed descriptions and even makes use of similes, portraying how back home "We stand around all day in the piazza listening to the fountain like birds". By forcing Rodolfo into taking part in boxing, a highly masculine sport, Eddie attempts to expose Rodolfo for what he is. He goes so far as to actually strike Rodolfo. Eddie, unable to formulate his feeling in words, communicates with his fists. Of course, whilst this all happens under the guise of Eddie teaching Rodolfo how to box, the subtext behind this 'lesson' is immense- Eddie is challenging Rodolfo's right to be a man to Catherine. Previously, Catherine has been portrayed as being extremely intimate with Eddie, bordering inappropriacy. The audience learns that Catherine sits on the rim of the bathtub whilst Eddie shaves, and walks around in her slip. To the 1950s audience, possibly the most intimate moment would have been when Catherine lights Eddie's cigar. This was

an image used in hundreds of movies to symbolise intimacy and lust between two characters. In many ways, in the time before the story of 'A View from the Bridge' unfolded, Catherine has taken up the role of Eddie's wife, and Eddie the role of Catherine's man, and this is further accentuated when the audience finds out about the marital problems that exist between Beatrice and Eddie, demonstrated when Beatrice asks Eddie "When am I going to be a wife again ... it's almost three months you don't feel so good ... It's three months". Eddie senses, when Rodolfo and Catherine are dancing, that his role as Catherine's 'man' is being challenged by Rodolfo, and uses this boxing lesson to undermine Rodolfo's masculinity. Beatrice attempts to resolve the conflict caused by Eddie's wrongful attention on Catherine through dialogue with both Catherine (when she alerts her to the inappropriacy of her behaviour in Eddie's presence) and with Eddie. Miller, through his characters, demonstrates that in this community 'talking through conflict' does not work. Catherine is astonished at Beatrice's veiled comments on why her behaviour around Eddie is wrong and Eddie is unable to vocalise his feelings towards Beatrice or Catherine.

What happens following Catherine & Rodolfo's dance is a prime example of where there clearly is much conflict and tension, but no physical violence actually takes place. Marco, fearing for the safety of his brother, chooses to challenge Eddie to a contest of sorts- lifting a chair by its leg. Eddie's main strength over his antithesis, Rodolfo, is that he is a much more masculine figure. So when Marco undermines that, and takes even that away from him by embarrassing him in front of his entire household, the tension between Eddie and the two brothers is intense. In addition to undermining Eddie, this challenge has another purpose- to threaten Eddie. This is clear when Marco raises the chair "like a weapon" above Eddie's head. Whilst Eddie may not initially realise the magnitude of this event, he soon does, as shown by the stage direction: "Eddie's grin vanishes as he absorbs Marco's look". Here Marco is essentially warning Eddie against doing anything he might later regret, such as threatening Rodolfo again. The image of Marco raising the chair above Eddie's head "like a weapon", perhaps is proleptic of the events that are about to occur. In addition to this, whilst in Act One, it seems that Rodolfo is Eddie's antagonist, this episode shows that it is in fact Marco, who is the antagonist in this play.

All the tension in the play culminates in one final stand-off between Eddie and Marco. Earlier, in an example of dramatic irony, we see Marco's reaction to finding out that Eddie called the Immigration Bureau in a last ditch attempt to win Catherine back. This backfires horribly, resulting in Marco coming to find and kill Eddie after he has been released on bail. In these episodes, the theme of justice is overarching, with many of the concepts in Alfieri's opening speech ("many men were justly shot by unjust men" and "all the law is not in a book") being touched on. Just before the final episode, we see Marco talking with Alfieri, eventually resulting in the statement that "Only God makes justice", from Alfieri. Despite Marco's promise not to harm Eddie, everything comes to a head when the two players stand off in front of the entire neighbourhood. Eddie is driven by the desire to get his "name back", whereas Marco is driven by a lust for revenge due to the belief that Eddie has "killed [Marco's] family". The resulting conflict eventually ends up with Eddie on his knees in front of Marco, having had his own blade "driven home" by Marco. This is massively symbolic, as it makes Miller's message very clear: Eddie's downfall has been brought about by his own actions, and that is why he has died using the weapon he unjustly raised against another.

In conclusion, Miller uses conflict as a means to express his ideas to the audience, and also uses it to further the plot of the play. Having said this, as shown by the fact that Alfieri essentially spoils the ending before the story actually begins, Miller is not using conflict as the main source of

interest in the plot. Rather, he is using it as a tool to send across his own messages. Perhaps the title 'A View from the Bridge' is also part of this, as when one is standing on a bridge, one gets a panoramic view of everything below, and perhaps Miller wants the audience to understand this, and to connect the events of Red Hook to the events happening around the world, particularly in America.