

**Political Power: A Study of Arthur Miller's
*The Archbishop's Ceiling***

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Abstract

This Study makes an attempt to analyse the political issues in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Arthur Miller, stand out amongst the most critical current American playwrights after Eugene O'Neill. Miller's dialogue regularly takes what appears to be the colloquialisms, clichés, and idioms of the common man's language and reveals the theme. In this play Miller expresses the power, that this surveillance gives to the state and the way citizens handle this power in metaphors of angels and alcohol. Miller extends political power throughout the text in both the language and the setting of the play. Moreover, what distinguishes this play is how the metaphors literally appear on the stage in the plaster figures of cherubs sculpted on the ceiling of the former archbishop's residence and the alcohol consumed by the characters. Certainly, the political power of the state operates in this fashion in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, especially for the threat of violence which this power presumes. Moreover, Sigmund deliberately points to the angels as symbols of power.

Keywords: Arthur Miller, *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, colloquialisms, surveillance, political power, angels.

This play is especially concerned with political issues. *The Archbishop's Ceiling* is about nonconformist writers behind the Iron Curtain and Arthur Miller utilizes comparable metaphorical dialect in his works. In this play, food and drink move toward becoming representations for political power.

The Archbishop's Ceiling happens in an unnamed Eastern European nation in a former archbishop's house where the ceiling may have been electronically irritated. Each character fights with the political power that reconnaissance provides to the state, Maya and Marcus have surrendered to the power and influence of visitors to deceive themselves to the microphones; Sigmund challenges power by declining to sell out his art and depart the nation; Adrian trusts his power as an American writer can vanquish political power. The play outlines how the characters utilize their power as writers and the power of their feelings in battling with the power of the state. Descriptions of drinking and angels vivify these political, artistic, and emotional clashes. Drinking shows the absent-mindedness and oblivion into which the characters get away the totalitarian regime; angels symbolize art, spirituality, and political power.

The play happens in the Iron Curtain country where, God's power, is represented by the angels, has been restored by political power. The plot centres on the authorities' taking away of the manuscript of Sigmund, the country's greatest writer, who is faced with imprisonment or ejection. Adrian, an American novelist, has come to investigate the information that Marcus, another writer who is working together with the government and Maya, a woman who has had associations with all the three writers, has conciliation other with the writers in the bugged room where the play takes place,

the former residence of the archbishop. Adrian expresses the connection between political and religious power when he tells Maya as he looks around the room.

Adrian's perception represents the difficulty of the angel symbol, particularly in making the strain among exact and rhetorical meanings so typical of Miller's work. The literal angels on the ceiling purpose as art, yet they likewise symbolize the powers that have ruled throughout the hundreds of years in the room: the power of art, the power of religion, and the power of the state. Miller frequently utilizes the representational power of the angels ironically, as he does with symbols in other plays.

Angels become the same with political power and not just in nations with exploitive regimes. For Adrian is an American, and all through the play he discusses the way the United States government in the same way uses political power. Miller also points out in the "Introduction" to *The Archbishop's Ceiling* how he was moved to write the play not only by his experiences visiting Eastern Europe, but also by similar intelligence work in the United States in the 1970's: "the microphones in the White House, the Watergate break-in, and domestic espionage." (viii) As a social dramatist, Miller finally implies in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* that the misrepresentation of power as a human phenomenon.

All the more imperatively is Adrian's comment, that Maya appears more prepared hints at a past absence of control that her drinking may have caused in the past. This feeling of control is what exactly connects alcohol as allegorical solution to all the kinds of power in the play. Adrian first uses the image of power to describe the positive effect of the pills that psychiatrists prescribed for the severe depression his common law wife, Ruth, had suffered.

Adrian thinks about whether it is probable to pick up power without anguish, yet in the play at points of interest, how political power inflicts a lot of suffering above all for Maya, Marcus, and Sigmund. Miller establishes the representative connection among drinking and power when Adrian draws a vital difference between how Eastern Europeans handle power.

From this instant on, an important figure of drinking begins in the play, and obviously, alcohol turn into the rhetorical pill which each character draw on to competed with the several figures of power, the political power of the state, the power of struggling affairs, and the power of writers. Both Maya and Adrian are contending with the political power and he as an American writer announcing the reality about life behind the Iron Curtain, she as a probable associate with the regime. But as former lovers, they equally argue with the power of their emotional hold on each other, their bond faces difficulties further by Adrian's controlling power as a writer because he has used Maya as a character in his latest work.

The dialogue obviously shows that exact drinking possesses figurative consequence. Maya becomes distress that Adrian has discussed Sigmund's document in the room under the microphones and she suggests that Adrian recant. After he wrote some story for the microphones about the copy being sent to Paris, he asks Maya if can have another brandy: "I'll be going in a minute (He sits in his coat on the edge of the chair with his glass) Just let me digest this. This drink, I mean." (22)

Along these lines, as political power raises its force, we witness an increasing ingestion of alcohol and come to understand, through the alcohol metaphor, how each character suffers. Even Marcus, the possible collaborator with political power, has suffered because he spent six years in prison as a result of his art. The language implies that he has used power in his own way. Sigmund uses alcohol not so much to dull himself from the effect of political power, but rather to dull the

threat of other's power, especially Adrian. Perhaps Marcus sees Adrian as the most threatening to the political power of the state, since he is an American come to discover the truth about the suppression of writers in the Eastern bloc, an example of how, according to May, competitive power operates between states. Adrian's drunken oblivion would best reduce that threat. The metaphor implies that Marcus's intentions may be to make Adrian spin the wheels so he can feel like he is on top of a mountain instead of the room where political power is in control.

Incidentally, those united to the power of the authorities also utilize alcohol. The most charming use happens when Maya is coming back from purchasing the food and drink and drunken men cause an uproar outside the apartment because, ironically these drunken men need alcohol to empower them to confront Sigmund who in reality wants to release them from the stupor induced by power of the motherland. Even Alexandra, the daughter of the Minister of the Interior, and a powerful political operative, may join the party for a drink, officially sanctioning its power.

As the play moves towards its end in the arrival of Sigmund's document, Maya's revelation that the ceiling is bugged, and Sigmund's decision not to leave his country in exile, all the metaphors of power drinking, lighting, converge of angels, and their use significantly recurs as each character is forced to confront the suffering and knowledge gained in snuggling up to political power. Marcus, who has his own political motives in assuring Sigmund leave the country, says: "I am interested in seeing that this country does not fall back into darkness. And if he must sacrifice something for that, I think he should." (82)

This dialogue once again brings the angel metaphor into significance, which shows the complexity of figurative language in the play. The beginning of the play establishes angels as the same with governmental power, and the end of the text reinforces it. Here Marcus rejects the religious power symbolized by the angels as just art. Maya continues to drink, apparently to escape the coming clash of political, emotional, and moral conflicts, and Marcus once again attempts to stop her drinking, telling her she has had enough. Maya insists, "I've not had enough, dear," and the alcohol, in reality, forces her to face Adrian with the truth of how he has hurt her in their previous emotional relationship. Her puzzlement at a grown man bringing her milk, drinking it after their lovemaking, and smelling like a baby all night signifies their incompatibility, something which Maya has just realized. In contrast, Adrian's drinking makes him aware of the political situation, but not of his emotional one.

Maya and Sigmund are the characters in due course in touch with power in the play. Maya's drunkenness forces her to reveal the truth about the presence of the microphones in the ceiling. The most striking aspect of the language at this point is the religious imagery blatantly connecting to the political power of the state. The reference to Job is crucial because he is a figure of suffering and survival to whom Sigmund's trials are compared. When Sigmund struggles to recognize Maya's part in the political surveillance, Marcus contemptuously points that Sigmund wants: "her humiliation; she's not yet on her knees to him. We are now to take our places, you see, at the foot of the cross, as he floats upward through the plaster on the wings of his immortal contempt." (99)

Sigmund is the most critical character at the end because he achieves anguish in attainment of knowledge of all the levels of power in the play, the political power of the state, the power of Maya's struggles, and the power of the writer. Most significantly, Sigmund turn into being gifted with the power that is away from the politics and religion. Here Sigmund's mention of get away crucially connects to the metaphor of alcohol, which has been used for get away during the play. Sigmund and

Maya know they cannot escape political power, cannot plug into unequal power, because their interiors are lit by knowledge and suffering which gives them the superiority of moral power.

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