

The Arthur Miller Society

Newsletter

In Association with The Arthur Miller Centre, University of East Anglia

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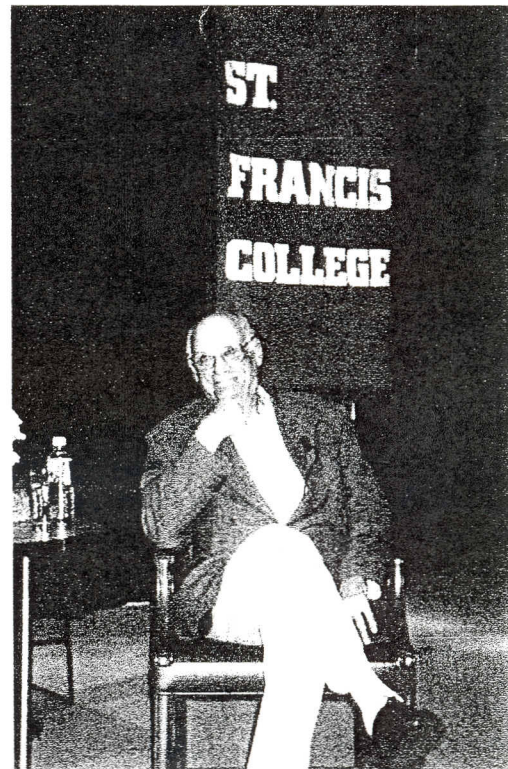
Volume 10

December 2004

Words from the Society's President

Like Miller's plays, The Arthur Miller Society has always been about special people. At this time, we need to cast a light on two of those special people. I would like to begin my service to all of the members of the Miller Society by thanking Steve and Katie Marino for all that they have done for us over the last two years. During the Marino tenure, the organization has continued to be alive and prospering. We may not be growing quite like Microsoft, but in this millennial time when our society seems to focus so little on developing forums in which we can exchange ideas about artworks, we have to be rigorous about safeguarding the few outlets that we have managed to sustain. A recent study from the NEA underscores just how bleak the future presently appears. Here are a few lines about that report: "Literary reading is in dramatic decline with fewer than half of American adults now reading literature, according to a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) survey released today. *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* reports drops in all groups studied, with the steepest rate of decline – 28 percent – occurring in the youngest age group (<http://www.nea.gov/news/news04/ReadingAtRisk.html>).

At the Miller Society, we do important work in promoting the reading and understanding of dramatic works. We are trying to extend to others the ideas and the forms that come from a playwright who matters to all of us. It is through the plays, the fiction, and the essays of Arthur Miller that we come together to develop ourselves as thinkers and teachers, while also forming deep friendships that enliven us as people. We need this Society so that we can go on talking about Miller's contribution not just to American culture, but to people everywhere who care about real theatre. The Marinos have encouraged and guided our efforts over the last two years. They have done much to promote the reading of Miller's works. Arthur Miller once wrote: "The real theatre — as opposed to the sequestered academic one — is always straining at the inbuilt inertia of a society that always wants to deny change and the pain it necessarily involves" (181). During his time as President of the Miller Society, Steve Marino brought great vitality to our organization. Steve has kept busy teaching both at St.



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- Vice President, 2004-2006.....Jane Dominik
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- Secretary/Treasurer.....George Castellitto
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2004 has been an exciting year for Miller scholars, with not only another new Miller play, *Finishing the Picture*, but also a major new revival of his 1964 play, *After the Fall*, on Broadway. So as not to limit our response to these productions, I elicited two reviews on each production to give you a broader view of what was on offer. Paula Langteau and Kate Egerton write two closely detailed visions of Miller's new play, full of nuance and insight, while Stefani Koorey and Steve Marino give us well-researched backgrounds on the old, and thoughtful descriptions of its new rendition.

I also include a review (and beyond) of a recent revival of *The Price* in Dublin from our new President, Lew Livesay, and an excellent reading of the gardening imagery within *Death of a Salesman* from Carlos Campo. I have noticed that there have been a number of revivals of *The Price* this past year, suggesting that people are evidently rediscovering the depths of this excellent play, as Lew aptly reveals.

I think you will find the articles in this issue both interesting and highly informative--and I personally thank all who contributed (with apologies for any hounding I did to get the final copy). I think the quality of this writing bodes well for our plans to develop this newsletter into a journal at some future date. I look forward to receiving your submissions in the future. And please, if anyone has answers to any of the questions in last issue's **Notes and Queries** section, please send them along, let's try and keep this column running.

--Sue (Editor)

Subscription Information

Membership and Subscription are available for \$20 per year for individuals in the U.S. and Canada; \$10 for students; \$25/year for joint memberships; \$25/year for overseas members; \$30/year for libraries, and \$45/year for institutions. Membership and subscription address: The Arthur Miller Society, c/o George Castellitto, 28 Elizabeth St., Dover, NJ 07801.

Arthur Miller Society Website

www.biblio.org/miller/

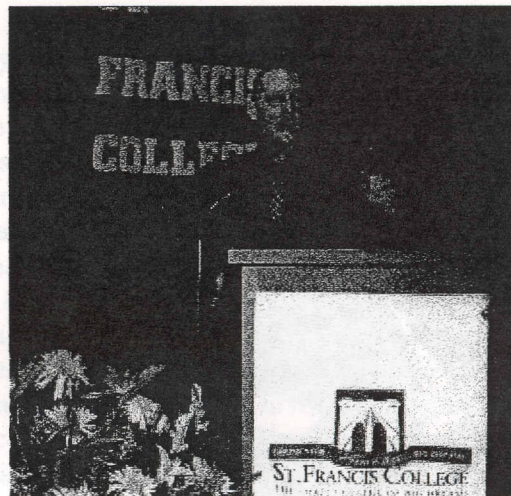
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Francis College and St. Francis Prep. For one thing, Steve's position as English Chair at the largest Catholic high school in the country, has made us more attentive to high school students and to our need to reach at to those teachers and their students in keeping alive the works and interests connected with the name of Arthur Miller. We now proudly recognize a growing number of high school teachers who actively contribute to our society and who regularly produce scholarly contributions of the highest level at our conferences. We have also developed a tradition of trying to incorporate local students into conferences whenever possible.

Steve Marino has been a guiding light in extending our sphere of influence and how we involve others in our activities. During his tenure as president, Steve also somehow found time to publish his first full-length study of Miller: *A Language Study of Arthur Miller's Plays: The Poetic in the Colloquial*. Miller himself has said, "Poetry in the theatre is not, or at least ought not be, a cause but a consequence, . . ." (*Timebends* 244). Marino's important study makes us more aware of the meaning of those words. Many of us remember Miller's remark last fall at St. Francis College, when he said, "If I can hear it, I can write it." Marino's study helps us to hear better the poetic impulse in how Miller has composed his best known plays. We also want to thank Steve Marino for his diplomacy in helping make it comfortable for Mr. Miller to appear at a Miller Conference for the first time in five years. Our entire membership was inspired by the feeling of taking part in the discussion between Miller and Chris Bigsby. We all have a sense of Arthur Miller as a person who respects the work of others, and to see him take time to recognize our interest in his work was a great moment for everyone there. When Steve Centola started the Miller Society ten years ago, he did it believing that others would step up and keep the dream of a family that reads Miller works alive and prospering. The Marinos have been everything that Centola had hoped for and more. Steve and Katie — Your colleagues in the Society acknowledge your contributions on our behalf and look forward to your ongoing vitality and friendship during the Society's second decade. Thank you from all of us.

—Lew Livesay



Steve Marino at his landmark conference

NOTES AND QUERIES

(A column through which we hope to share ideas, opinions, and ask questions--please send in anything you feel might be of interest to include in future editions)

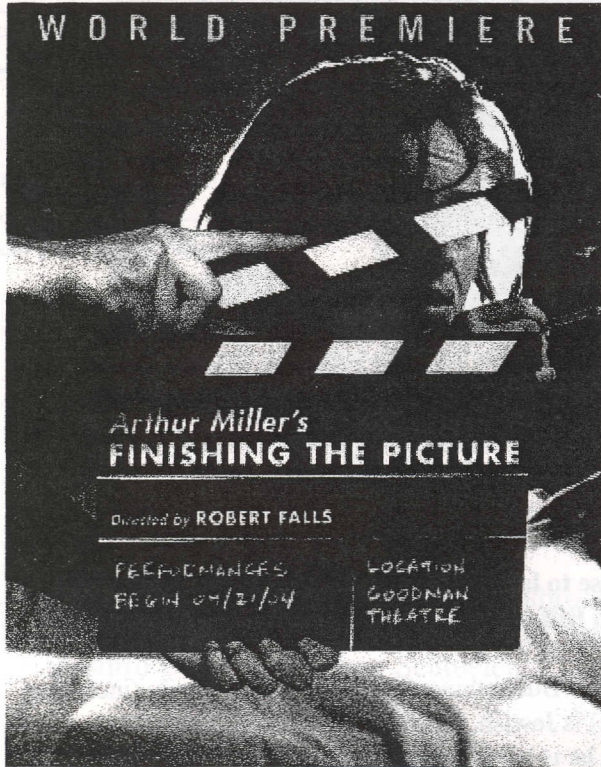
In response to last issue's suggestion of the Fountain Pen relating to Biff passage into maturity:

From JHK: But nothing about the Loman family (including their name) is Jewish, and Biff is 33, not 13, and what is more important, he is horrified that he has taken the pen. I don't see it as grasping for success, or a realization of maturity—indeed, it's quite the opposite. Biff has been stealing for years, as his father never taught him proper moral values. Biff is struggling to escape his youth and the tyranny of his father's ridiculous worldview—taking the pen is more a symbol of his inability to do that—he has been tricked once more into behaving like his father—going to Bill Oliver with the ridiculous idea the man will lend him money and he can start a successful business—but he is to Bill Oliver only what he proves himself to be by taking the pen—a little sneak thief (just like he took the crate of balls all those years back). It is not until he faces his father and tells him the truth that we see him beginning to grow.

To which the original NY teacher responded:

I think that most English teachers who do not know about the significance of the fountain pen to that era's Jews all say similar things in a struggle to grasp the meaning of what is obviously a symbol of some type. As for the Lomans not being Jewish, does it really matter? It is the author who is Jewish and would embed his own experience into his work. Biff is a late bloomer, sure, but again, he takes the pen at the point he has his epiphany. He runs down 11 flights of stairs and sees the sky aka. seeing the light. His eyes are now open. His mission henceforth is to make everyone else see reality and lift the veil of fantasy. JHK, I appreciate your insight - it matches the opinions of many English teachers. I encourage you to re-read the section with the pen and the rest of the Act and you'll maybe come to a middle ground with me.

The programme cover for the world premier of *Finishing the Picture* at the Goodman Theater, Chicago.



Finishing the Picture at the Goodman

By Paula Langteau, University of Wisconsin-Marinette

In the same month as the playwright celebrated his 89th birthday—October 2004—Arthur Miller’s newest play, *Finishing the Picture*, had its world premiere at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. And it goes to show that even at age 89, Miller is still at the top of his game.

Finishing the Picture is about the making of a film—or perhaps, more specifically, about attempts to finish making it, given that the lead actress, Kitty, spends virtually the entire play in bed, debilitated by depression and drug abuse. Through the course of the play, the rest of the cast work to coax her out of bed, to get her to finish the picture. Artfully directed by Robert Falls, the play features Stephen Lang and Linda Lavin as acting coaches Jerome and Flora Fassinger; Frances Fisher as Kitty’s personal assistant, Edna Meyers; Stacy Keach as film producer Phillip Ochsner; Harris Yulin as film director Derek Clemson; Matthew Modine as Kitty’s husband, Paul; Heather Prete as Kitty; and Scott Glenn as cinematographer Terry Case.

Not so loosely based on Miller’s relationship with Marilyn Monroe and the finishing of the screenplay, *The Misfits*, the (auto)biographical connections can be identified readily in Miller’s memoirs, *Timebends*. Yet, despite the obvious biographical links, Miller wants the audience to

get beyond the notion of Kitty as Marilyn, insisting, as Modine described in the talk-back session following the October 7 performance, that Kitty *not* speak and that she *not* have blonde hair. In fact, in the Goodman’s production, the audience catches a glimpse of Kitty’s face only briefly in the course of the entire play and she speaks lucidly only once, in the opening scene, and then only to call out for Flora, her acting coach.

Quite frankly, the technique works. While so much of the play can be seen as clearly biographical, the potency of the play comes in its much larger message, provided first by the script and then given powerful visual dimension by its skillful direction in the hands of Robert Falls. What becomes evidently more important than Kitty, her identity or her appearance is the impact these have on others around her. So, while the actors focus on Kitty, the play ultimately is more about them and their reaction to her than about her, and, thus, serves as a critique of the expectations and dependence of the creators and consumers of film and film culture.

Through the use of superimposed film and landscape images—as well as character close-ups—onto three stage scrim, Miller and/or Falls (without the script it becomes difficult to determine which choices originated with whom), reflect the filmmaking process through the projection of images onto a two-dimensional surface. As the play opens, the scrim reflect filmmaking images, such as the trademark motion picture number countdown to a film’s beginning, the typing of a typewriter, and the closure of a clapperboard signifying “takes.” The audience also sees film images of Kitty at a window, pairs of feet dancing on the beach, a speedometer racing to 100 miles per hour, a leopard, and a sandscape. These images set the stage for a story of the two-dimensionalizing of experience through the creation of film, the distancing of the actress from reality, its effect on personal relationships, the out-of-control acceleration of the damage, the predatory nature of the business and the ultimate integration of the experience into the landscape of our culture. Following intermission, the scrim are again employed, this time to reflect a mountain scene that slowly metamorphosizes into Kitty’s body and finally into an inferno, reflecting simultaneously the California forest fires gaining ground just outside the window of the penthouse where most of the play’s action takes place and the metaphorical fire threatening to overtake Kitty. Thus, the actress is subsumed into the landscape and, ultimately, consumed by it. These images simultaneously forecast and summarize the story played out on the stage boards.

The scrim serve their most powerful function, however, when they effectively cast the audience in Kitty’s role by reflecting her vision, presenting the view from her physical perspective. This happens in a confessional-like scene in Act Two, when the audience sees simultaneously both the full scene on the stage and a close-up image of each respective character in the play, through Kitty’s eyes

(in live video on the semi-transparent scrims), as they take turns coming to her room to sit by her bedside to share their stories. These scenes reveal more about each of the characters—their desires, fears and needs—than about Kitty. Kitty becomes their mirror, the screen projecting each of their deepest issues, needs and longings. As the characters come to confess, in the process they come to their own revelations. Edna credits Kitty for this, saying, “You see through everything.” Thus, like a silent priest hearing the confessions, she becomes almost Godot-esque, a savior-like figure, not unlike Ralph/Charlie in Miller’s *Resurrection Blues*. Like Ralph/Charlie, who she is less important than who she is to others. As Modine says in the talk-back, “She doesn’t have to exist in the bed. She represents our salvation.”

Of course, Kitty’s own burden is heavy, what Derek refers to as “100 pound weights on her ankles” and “the ghosts sitting on her chest.” And her destruction is inevitable. This is reflected most vividly in her unhealthy dependence upon her acting coaches, Jerome and Flora Fassinger (the Lee and Paula Strasberg figures). From her bed, Kitty demands to see Jerome Fassinger, presumably to help her return to the set. Clearly neither psychologist nor psychiatrist, and quite visibly eccentric on stage, the character Jerome (as played by Stephen Lang) and his wife Flora (played by Linda Lavin) are redeemably endearing to the audience with their ridiculous attire, quirky mannerisms and laughable self-importance. (At one point, Jerome credit himself with having “forged the link between who [Kitty is] and the entire cultural history of art.”) Yet, while in the play his ludicrous pronouncements are hysterical and his costuming, humorously absurd (and, incidently, directly out of the pages of Miller’s autobiographical recollection of Lee Strasberg’s appearance), Miller’s recounting of the dangers of the Strasbergs’ Method Acting training in *Timebends* is anything but funny:

Applied to Marilyn, Paula’s ‘method’—and Lee’s—was beginning to seem sinister, a dangerously closed circle of reasoning; if you had not studied with Strasberg and were not one of his adepts, you were not in a position to criticize.... I was in this category, ...barred from applying experience and common sense to a steadily degenerating situation whose arcane depths were by definition beyond us. If Paula could not help her, no one must be allowed to. To add another complication, Marilyn’s trust in Paula was by no means complete: she regarded her merely as Lee’s stand-in who was indeed capable, however unintentionally, of misleading her. (*Timebends* 420)

In the play, Miller further explores the continuum of Kitty’s loss of identity and the seeming co-existence of her simultaneous powerlessness and sense of power. On the one hand, Kitty’s identity has been swallowed up in the image she portrays in film. Or, as Miller describes it for Marilyn in *Timebends*, “The simple fact, terrible and lethal, was that no space whatever existed between herself and this star. She was “Marilyn Monroe,” and that was what was killing her. And it could not be otherwise for her; she lived on film and with that glory foresworn would in some real sense vanish. ... Since her teens she had been creating a relationship with the public, first imaginary and then real, and it could not be torn from her without tearing flesh. ... One thing only was sure; she must finish the picture. To fail would confirm her worst terror of losing control of her life...” (483).



John Houston, Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller on the set of *The Misfits*, from the production program for *Finishing the Picture*.

Ironically, however, with the progression of her loss of identity came an increasing power over others. Miller describes in *Timebends*, “It was strange how each week she seemed to be gaining power all over the world while the swamp of doubt within her showed no sign of drying up. ...[G]iven a power over others by some mysterious common consent, no one is sure exactly why, [she] [came] to half believe and half mistrust it as an expression of [her] authentic nature” (448). This is evidenced in the play when Kitty, unable to get out of bed without Jerome’s help, nonetheless wields power by her ability to manipulate the people who wait on her. Terry, the cinematographer, claims to be able to trace back to the moment the manipulation started. He says, “Kitty was great until she read in the paper that she’s a fragile little girl.” He believes she then picked up that cue and began deliberately manipulating the process. He describes how one day, Kitty, looking alert and calculating, purposely blew her lines to destroy a take. In *Timebends*, Miller recounts how “Marilyn had taken to paraphrasing speeches and omitting words and sentences”

Calls for Papers

The Tenth International Arthur Miller Conference Miller at 90: The Voice of Moral Authority

At St. Peter's College, Jersey City, NJ

Confirmed dates: Thurs June 9th-Saturday June 11th, 2005

Program Chair: Lew Livesay

Saint Peter's College, 2641 John F. Kennedy Boulevard, Jersey City, NJ 07306

Phone: 201 915 9325

e-mail material/questions to LLivesay@spc.edu

The college is located approx. one mile inland, heading west, from the Statue of Liberty. It is 45 minutes by public transportation to the Theatre District in Manhattan.

Abstracts will be due—hard copy or e-mail in Word—by February 1st, 2005.

Final papers should be designed for delivery in a twenty minute format.

The theme for the conference allows considerable latitude in looking at Mr. Miller's extensive career and artistry. The society has always considered a wide range of papers, with the one essential being that a paper must illuminate some aspect of Miller's writing. In 2005, we hope to develop a panel that will consider Miller and Film, and at least one other panel that will feature papers comparing Miller works to comparable plays in Irish Drama. Anyone interested in organizing a panel around another theme should contact the Program Chair.

Please spread the word around so we can get hopefully some new faces joining in, and make this another great conference. We do welcome student papers at all levels, and this is a good, friendly conference for them to experience delivering a paper.

Also, another reminder for:

16th Annual American Literature Association Conference

at Westin Copley Place Hotel, in Boston, MA; May 25-29th 2004

Still time to send ideas, abstracts, or papers in Word, to:

Carlos Campo <carlos_campo@ccsn.nevada.edu>

by January 20th, 2005.

We are open to papers on any topic or area of study on the work of Arthur Miller. We plan to run two panels and have a small cheese and wine reception this year: all welcome.

(476). In *Finishing the Picture*, Paul (Kitty's husband) claims that Kitty wields this power in an attempt to define her elusive sense of self, saying that knowing 40 people are waiting in the lobby for her proves she exists. Her identity comes to be defined by her ability to manipulate those who must wait on her—and the thousands whose lives are impacted through the ripple effect. As Modine described in the talk-back, "Kitty is an industry that hundreds of thousands are living off of." Thus, Kitty is empowered by her ability to hold up the conclusion of the film.

A fascinating approach to the question of identity and power, the play toys, in typical Miller fashion, with the issue of responsibility. In comments dispersed throughout the play, the director-character, Derek Clemson (played by Harris Yulin)—perhaps reflecting the voice of an aged Miller—defends Kitty: "She's had a terrible life. She's been stepping on broken glass since she could walk. / She's chinning a bar with 100 pound weights on her ankles. / Deep inside, she's a woman of honor. / She has ghosts sitting on her chest—ghosts of things she's done and things done to her." And Paul, the young Miller character, explains, "Everyone wants something from her; we're no exceptions." Using the analogy of a forest fire—started by a single match—Miller suggests that a single match led also to the metaphorical inferno that consumes Kitty. Did a careless casting aside of that single match accidentally cause that blaze? Or was it the work of a lone arsonist? Certainly, the responsibility for its gaining momentum is shared by all. Like the California forest fire approaching the penthouse, the fiery consumption simultaneously both threatens and represents Kitty's identity and power. To finish the picture is to move toward self-annihilation, toward consumption by the flames. In an eerie foreshadowing of the future for Kitty—or a reflection of the past by the voice of the aged Miller now finding meaning in his own experience—Derek pronounces, "The artist dies in his work; the business man carries his work into the world. . . ." By the play's end, the producer has called off filming for a week, and reports, "The fire is going out. The sky's bluing up." He likens the process to childbirth: the baby's out and all cleaned up. The mother is bathed, and the sheets are cleaned. The screaming is all forgotten. It has to be, or they'd never make another.

Typical, again, of Miller, the darkness of uncertainty that shrouds the play's ending is brightened by a hopefulness in Edna's final lines: "The fire makes the seeds germinate. The fire. The heat. It opens up the seeds." Like the seeds planted in Willy's garden in *Death of a Salesman*, the potential germination of the seeds following the fire just outside their window leaves the characters and the audience with a sense of hope for the future, a hope *not despite*—but *because of*—the intensity of the blaze.

Work Cited

Miller, Arthur. *Timebends: A Life*. New York: Grove Press, 1987.

Review of Arthur Miller's *Finishing the Picture* at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, IL.

10 October 2004

By Kate Egerton, Indiana University South Bend

The Goodman Theatre's production of Arthur Miller's new play, *Finishing the Picture*, begins with overlapping silver screens in front of an opaque curtain. After an old black and white countdown sequence, the screens show a film montage of a dreamland desert and fragments of a woman's body. The camera lingers over slices of her face, her back, her shapely derriere, her legs, and eventually she is shown meandering through the desert with a man. Both are filmed only from the waist down, the woman taking off her shoes the better to walk in the sand.

While Miller clearly based *Finishing the Picture* on the filming of *The Misfits*, focusing exclusively on the Marilyn Monroe character, and her ability—or inability—to work, he has taken occasional pains to distance the audience from that specific event. The film's story is never mentioned, and there are no indications that any other cast members remain on the set. While the Goodman Theatre's publicity materials show fragments of Heather Prete's blonde head, on stage, Kitty wears dark brown hair.

The performances of this very accomplished cast are all quite distinct, so much so that they don't all quite seem to belong in the same play. The Fassingers—Kitty's acting coaches, played by Linda Lavin and Stephen Lang—are of a piece and wickedly sharp caricatures of Lee and Paula Strasberg. After Flora Fassinger has set the pattern by moaning on endlessly about her shoddy and penurious treatment on the set while lounging around the producer's balcony in a voluminous black caftan that frequently threatens to engulf the petite Lavin, Jerome Fassinger comes on the scene in act two in a bizarre red and black cowboy suit, which he eventually completes with both hat and boots. The duds, combined with his glasses and chin beard, make Lang look like Lenin after a trip to a flashy western outfitter. Matthew Modine's Paul, the screenwriter who is also Kitty's husband, comes off an earnest nerd who tries and fails to talk about love. Derek (Harris Yulin) and Terry (Scott Glenn), the filmmakers, are shown calmly plying their trade, trying to keep the film up and running despite the perpetual absence—literal or metaphorical—of Kitty (Heather Prete), the leading lady. She, in turn, is propped up—both literally and metaphorically—by Edna (Frances Fisher), her mousy but resourceful secretary and handler. Phillip Oschner (Stacy Keach), the trucking magnate turned neophyte producer, fills the role of the outsider to whom all must be explained. While Modine is clearly an idealized stand-in for the young Miller, Robert Falls has spoken about Oschner as "sort of the romantic hero of the play, which I think is kind of wonderful—and perverse. But within him, we're also seeing a portrait of Arthur now" (Kuchwara). The only character who does not map onto the story of *The Misfits*, Oschner plays a central role in the play's tenuous resolution of Kitty's story, becoming the

vehicle through which Miller can craft what new perspective *Finishing the Picture* offers.

We learn about the film's troubled history when Oschner arrives at the hotel to figure out why production has stalled and to determine whether to shut the film down. In addition to the short-term losses, the characters all make clear that this decision would destroy Kitty's career. He has begun his efforts by seducing Edna, who seems pleased if enormously self-conscious to find herself the focus of any man's attention. In the early morning, as the play opens, he looks out from the hotel balcony and sees the signs of a wildfire approaching from the west. He soon finds that there's a wildfire in the hotel, which soon appears in the form of a starlet, both nude and stoned, practically falling into his room.

Kitty, for all that she has absolutely no dialogue and practically no costume, holds all of the power in this play in the rawest fashion imaginable. Usually nude, mute but for mewling, kittenish cries that recall Charlie Brown's teachers on helium, her internal life is as withheld from the audience as her body is exposed. Kitty is oddly desexualized despite appearing naked. Flora may lie on her bed, and Edna constantly rubs her head and her back, but the men—especially Paul—keep their distance except for a chaste peck or the offer of a supportive arm. Following the pattern established in the opening montage, the audience never gets an unobstructed view of her face for all that we see of the rest of her. When the play opens, the film crew is waiting, as they wait every day, to see if Kitty is fit to work. Terry, the cinematographer, measures this fitness by examining her eyes and deciding whether or not the camera will pick up her drugged state. The audience never has a chance to check; in the only scene where Kitty stands face forward, she hides behind an enormous pair of sunglasses. Paul, Kitty's husband, is obviously disgusted by her condition and her behavior. Although he tries to look out for Kitty in a particularly perfunctory fashion, it is clear that he feels thoroughly rejected and he knows that in every way that matters, Kitty is utterly lost.

After the interval, the screens from the prologue display a similar film, but now Kitty's prone and naked body morphs into and out of the mountains themselves. She is the desert, the body of the land, larger than any human presence and as impervious to human desire. The last image before the third act is the horizon filling with flame – reflections of the wildfire, coming her way.

During the third act, the largest translucent movie screen from the opening montages moves back over the set. As the cast parades in one by one to talk to Kitty, by now huddling under a sheet in Phillip Oschner's bedroom, each face and voice is projected in closeup as the actor mimes the scene beyond the screen. The giant close-ups, filmed from below, attempt to put the audience in Kitty's position, but they also makes the rest of the cast look better; in this format, even the ridiculous Jerome Fassinger is allowed to be moving.

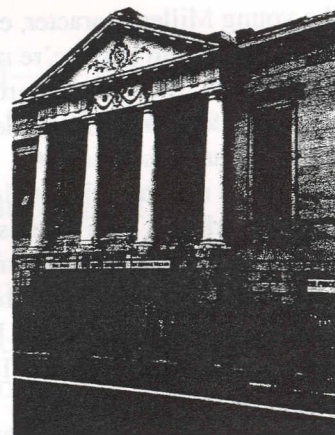
All of the movie people have other interests, more real and pressing interests, than this picture: Derek seems to

be smuggling drugs on the side, Terry spends the film waiting to hear about an oil fortune that may be coming his way, the Fassingers obsess over their studio and the cash flow that keeps them afloat, and Oschner clearly considers this whole project, no matter how emotionally engrossing, a small diversion from the serious business of interstate commerce. While the audience believes that he genuinely feels for Kitty—he ends up with a better attempt to communicate with her in the third act than anyone else manages—given a choice between Kitty and Edna, Oschner has already chosen Edna. We have no idea what Paul will do next, but he'll be doing it alone.

As for Kitty? Well, everyone already knows what happened to her.

Work Cited

Kuchwara, Michael. "The Joy of working with Arthur Miller in the Creation of a New Work." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire* 20 Oct. 2004.



The Gate Theater, Dublin. Photograph by Lew Livesay

A Dark and Riven World: Review of *The Price* at Dublin's Gate Theatre, June 8, 2004

By Lew Livesay, Saint Peter's College

Dublin's Gate Theatre provided the ideal venue for this version of *The Price* that dramatized a fierce refusal to allow intimacy to take hold. This controlled performance, at the outset, very quiet with low voices and moments of silence, made the mounting revelations of the second act all the more potent. The theatre itself, and the audience, helped in capturing so much of the nuance in this play. The classic Gate building, located a kilometer north of the Liffey, atop O'Connell Street, has been home to theatre for over two centuries. The main hall only seats 371 people. Every seat is close to the stage, and the acoustics carry precisely to each corner. So intimacy is built into the theatre's setting, as it is into the attention span of the people in the seats. Last year, I remember distinctly the laser precision of realizing that a Gate crowd is unparalleled after I had sat through Declan Conlon's one man performance of John Banville's *The Book of*

Evidence, adapted by Alan Gilson. The play ran over two hours without intermission, and not once during the entire piece did one cough or distraction issue from the assembled mass. It was a stunning immersion in concentration, virtually matching the tour de force upon the stage. In *Timebends*, Miller observes that “the English were probably the best audience in the world” (430). I’ll only add that they have apt competition across the Irish Sea.

Directed by Mark Brokaw whose credits take in all periods and many major theatres throughout the states, this Dublin production foregrounded the revelations in the marriage of Victor and Esther. Ger Ryan played Esther with intensity reminiscent of Elizabeth Franz in the O’Neill Theater production of *Salesman* back in 1999. Once again, Ryan, like Franz, revealed the depth of another female character in the Miller oeuvre. This Esther was every bit as neurotic as her husband, but she also had moments that broke through her habituated tedium to envision a world of possibilities undreamt of in her husband’s self-imposed imprisonment as self-convicted family martyr. Her pain became all the more vivid for her moments of seeing that what could be, will never be.

The acting throughout was superb. Lorcan Cranitch played Victor as a man, especially in the second act, who is searching deep within himself to find and get out the next word, much like Malkovich played Biff in the 1984 production of *Salesman*. Nick Dunning came on stage as Walter, looking very much like a charming Jay Gatsby, with the slicked back blond hair, the effortlessly wide smile, and the elegant camel hair coat. This Walter’s confidence gained throughout Act 2, as his brother’s confidence waned. In this production, the “two seemingly *different* roads out of the *same* trap” emphasize the differences over the original sameness (*The Price* 110; emphasis mine). What made sense to me during this viewing was the line from Schleuter and Flanagan that “neither of the two brothers changes his commitment” (109). This family stands riven with no hope of crossing the chasm, much as Esther hopes to do. Her despair has two roots: one is economic and the other is emotional. She is willing to trust Walter just to better her economic plight, but in the end, she is as paralyzed as the two brothers. She has settled into her drinking and substitution of the dog for a human mate. And yet Ger Ryan played Esther with such awakened ferocity that, at two moments in the second act, it felt as if she had already left her husband. It left me wondering for a moment if the play had actually been revised.

In this staging, Esther stands alone as the one who can see what neither of the brothers have any hope of ever seeing. A.C. Bradley once wrote that if Hamlet had been in Othello’s shoes, he would have readily unveiled the conniving of Iago quite promptly, and if Othello had been in Hamlet’s shoes, he would have taken action without such paralyzing delay. If either of the brothers in Brokaw’s rendering of *The Price* would have listened to the words or cared about the suffering of Esther, their worlds might have evolved toward

happiness. With Ryan’s performance, the character of Esther provides a momentary glimpse at hopeful solutions to the stalemate between the brothers. In many readings of the play, this function is attributed to Solomon. In one of our foremost readings to date, Chris Bigsby centers the play in the relationship of the two brothers and reads their conflict as a “tension between determinism and freedom” (20/165/225). Both Alice Griffin and Terry Otten, as does the interpretation from Schleuter and Flanagan, also develop readings out of foregrounding the brothers.

The Dublin production of *The Price* was starkly darker than any of the others that I have seen or read about. In fact, in looking over the interpretations of the best Miller critics, I was surprised to see how inclined Bigsby, Schleuter and Flanagan, and Roudané are to urge optimistic readings of the conclusion. Their readings generally find Gregory Solomon’s final laughter to be a redemptive note suggesting that missed connections need not be the norm if one adopts a philosophy of flexibility and continues to fare forward in life as Solomon has always done, ready to remake oneself as changing conditions demand. This roll-with-the-punches outlook has tremendous appeal, and no doubt a production can even foreground Solomon, presenting his vitality as a variation to characters trapped in their own solipsism.

Miller actually avoided a question one time from Bigsby who was suggesting that Solomon has a stereotypical nature by insisting simply, “I enjoy that character more than anybody I ever wrote” (*Arthur Miller and Company* 148). Roudané runs with this idea as far as anyone: “Solomon, the most humorously and humanely drawn character in Miller’s repertoire, functions as a kind of modified *raisonneur*, his benevolent wisdom offering a healthy counterbalance to the animosities within the Franz family” (200). The Dublin production, however, did not go that route; it emphasized corrosion, rather than salvation. In “*The Salesman Has a Birthday*,” Miller talks about how he has witnessed “a terribly lonely people, cut off from each other by such massive pretense of self-sufficiency, machined down so fine we hardly touch any more. We are trying to save ourselves separately, and that is immoral, that is the corrosive among us” (13). This passage conveys the felt experience of Brokaw’s *The Price*. The brothers each exist apart in his own “self-sufficiency,” never giving an inch to the other in stubbornly refusing to see the world from the other’s perspective. Only the woman sees how hopelessly divided they are. Even Solomon remains ensnared in his own revitalized attempts at survival so that the laughter at the end of this production comes across with a slightly sinister sense that he has come out on top in this financial give-and-take in trying to get the long end of the stick, with the laughing record thrown in as absurd surplus to his unexpected financial windfall. Here he is, reborn at his age, in having bested a cop and a surgeon. Solomon is always coming out of retirement, whether it is Her Majesty’s navy or the appraiser’s industry, which he made “ethical” (61) — a line that elicits the strongest laughs from the other three. In

this play, laughter, like claims to ethics, usually occurs at someone else's expense. In this cynical laughter, the verbalization which came to mind was George Bernard Shaw's question in *Major Barbara* — "What price salvation now?"

My feeling from viewing this play in Dublin was that "The two brothers participate in a moral fencing match that scores no palpable hits and ends where it began" (Schleuter and Flanagan 110). If the play is intended, as Miller tells us in "Behind *The Price*," to mirror the irreconcilable splits in America during the Vietnam War, then the stasis at the end of the Dublin production was an objective correlative of America at the time the play was first produced in 1968 (60/297). At this point I am reminded of Raymond Williams' reading of *After the Fall*, a play which he did not get; nevertheless, he shrewdly perceives that the play "has the weight and disturbance of a culture behind it" (276/16). In this same essay, Williams perceives how the culture has moved beyond the moral position of Ibsen in that "the social reality is more than a mechanism of honesty and right dealing" (269/9). This thinking is supported by Miller's own claim in his conversation with Bigsby that both brothers are needed in the current world (*Arthur Miller and Company* 148) — a point that is reinforced with the observation in the Stage Notes to the play: "As the world now operates, the qualities of both brothers are necessary to it" (117). The direction in which Williams points us involves reading Miller in relation to the culture and the ideologies that are prevalent at the times of the play. One of the important tasks that faces all of us in the Miller Society is to be thinking more and more about how Miller's plays can help us to understand the significance of the twentieth century, with its sequence of nightmares that must be interpreted.

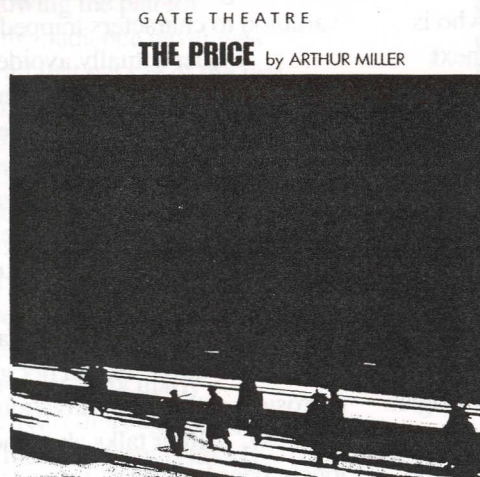
Shortly after returning from Ireland, a colleague of mine in the English department at Saint Peter's College, Bill Luhr, alerted me to an interesting book on cultural history by Lary May. Luhr said that a few passing references to Miller in May's book had made an impression on him about how painful the HUAC experience must have been.

With that prompt, I picked up a copy of *The Big Tomorrow*, a work that basically examines how the American film industry has been a shaping force depression, the studios all ideology that would present America disparate people readily. Similarly, in *Timebends*, Miller during the war years, people individual identity to become part sense of "transcendence." Miller became the new style of the hour" century Hollywood can be conservative impetus toward temperament of stoic manhood as

The telling point in May's behind the Republican party, of Lincoln, with its aversion to hurrah in the Will Rogers persona

vision in favor of an economic vision of monopoly masquerading as capitalism. The argument maintains that the Depression, World War II, and the Cold War created conditions that suppressed class consciousness in favor of rallying the nation around a leadership that could establish its elitist superiority at the center of American life. National submission to conservatism, in order to survive three staggering traumas, is what ultimately empowered Republican hegemony. Questioning this norm at a time when the nation was at risk could easily be depicted as an act of unpatriotic malice. Through such a filter the American dream of freedom and open space coalesces into the image of the rich and powerful leader cloaked in the red, white, and blue. What allows for unheard of accumulations of wealth to accrue to a select few is an underlying belief in social Darwinism. From Teddy Roosevelt's rugged individualist to John Foster Dulles's discovery of Edmund Burke, the Republican party came to promote the conqueror as an aristocratic heir apparent — rising above the herd of average, unmotivated masses — thereby creating an entitlement platform built on the notion that "To the victor go the spoils."

Lary May aptly describes the polarization that resulted in obeisance to this Republican ideal of American might: "The rise of a structured corporate order [during the war years] . . . generated severe class and racial conflict. Because the populace failed to unite across racial and cultural barriers, the corporate order gained power. Both in films and in reality, the rise of the new economy undercut control over work and public life, creating a deep sense of anxiety" (127). During the war years, the State Department effectively supervised film production so that stars like Cagney, Bogart, and Wayne were all part of the propaganda machine aimed at forging a unity to win WW II. After



in defining our culture. Following the contributed to reinforcing an implicit images and plot lines implying that in blended into one homogenous accord. describes how, after the depression and simply relinquished their sense of of something larger, but lacking in any goes on to say that ". . . conformity (262). For May, much of twentieth understood as operating with a promoting an Anglo-Saxon the quintessential American character. story is how the original philosophy projected most fervently in the thinking racial and class intolerance, has one last before ultimately sacrificing a social

the war, according to May, the void left by the loss of individual freedom was filled by a drive toward conspicuous consumption, which subsumed the Lincoln ideal of equality for people who should be controlling their own work. Certainly, in Miller's *The Price*, we have a depiction of two brothers who do not enjoy their work. Class consciousness is a large part of the reason why. The one brother simply wants to rise above others, and the other brother is married to a woman who does not want to go out with him while he is in his uniform. Each one is oppressed in a different way by a hierarchy that dictates values to them.

The story that May recounts about politics in forties' Hollywood represents a microcosm of the nation in the decades after the war. May identifies one Eric Johnston as the strategic planner for how Hollywood helped to establish American ideals committed to class harmony, private property, centralization of corporate power with an eye toward globalization, and control over film imagery as the future of communication. Johnston saw the attack on Pearl Harbor as the definitive opportunity to assert his leading idea demanding "class consensus." Johnston then continued this rhetoric after the war: "His anticommunism was different from earlier varieties in that it was not a negative but a positive doctrine. It helped explain labor discord as the act of foreign agents and promised that a campaign to end discord and defend the free world from communism would provide a new purpose and identity for the nation — that is, Johnston identified anticommunism with a renewal of the nation's manifest destiny" (191).

A sense of divinely bestowed "manifest destiny" has always been the positive spin put on blind allegiance to Darwinian competition. The then president of the Screen Actors Guild absorbed how this vision of American empire depended on advancing a mythology built on positive symbols of family values, private homes, and religious fundamentalism, standing in staunch opposition to impending evil projected outward onto communism. The threatening other becomes the ultimate scapegoat that justifies the paranoia of isolation politics. This singular villain is constantly metamorphosing from Hitler, to Stalin, to Castro, to Ho Chi Minh, to Gorbachev, and more recently to the likes of Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, and even Jacques Chirac. This list suggests a sense of the arbitrary nature of the actual scapegoat. The understanding that identity formation other. In many ideologies, the scapegoat can be constructed in reactionary opposition to the people connected to him by length and excluded. Miller points out, "all organization is and must be prohibition" (6).

In a hierarchical society, in downplayed, the privileged group inherent ideal of goodness, but rather substantive unit in opposition to a the scapegoat function is removed, the its imbalances and injustices. The powerful to maintain power Freud explained with his main insight Thanatos is far more powerful in mobilizing the human psyche than Eros. The prime impulse that supports elitist philosophy needs to instill fear in the social group. As Walter says, "the whole thing comes down to fear" (82). The dominant ideology behind elitism has always been committed to the notion, in May's words, that "class unity against an external enemy provided the bonds for a new consensus" (192). The postwar president of the Guild who became the enduring disciple of Eric Johnston's legacy was a former B-film actor who had been thoroughly indoctrinated into plot lines in which conflicts take a simplistically manichean form of pure good against a diabolically fearful evil. This actor, turned political convert to Johnston's *weltanschauung*, was none other than Ronald Reagan.

May identifies Miller as one of the artists who did not see the economic solution advanced by Johnston and Reagan as the solution to anxiety over identity in the period following "the atomic bomb, fascist genocide, and a bloody war" (217). Nevertheless, in Johnston's rhetoric, we can discern the seeds of the eventual theory that leads the Reagan administration into unprecedented spending in the defense industry, supply side economic theory to encourage unlimited production on the premise that a global market would emulate America's insatiable drive toward consumption, and the binding of traditional family values to the sacrosanct image of the private home. This homogenous elitism, with its inherently patriarchal and puritanical ideology, relentlessly secures its strength by seeing freedom as perpetually threatened by cultural difference. Such developments should remind us of Benjamin Franklin's warning that "Those who are willing to sacrifice essential freedom for security deserve neither."

Miller's *The Price* can be read as the *entr'acte* between the Cold War of the fifties and the Reagan obsession



THE PRICE
by ARTHUR MILLER

Directed by MARK BROKAW
Designed by JOE VANEK
Lighting by MARK MCCULLOUGH

GATE THEATRE TUESDAY 11 MAY 2004

critical point, however, depends on demands the demonization of some function is central so that identity can to a symbolic outcast who, along with association, must be kept at arm's in the stage notes to *The Crucible*, that grounded on the idea of exclusion and

which echelon must be disguised and defines itself not in terms of an by unifying the hierarchy as one pollution that it collectively detests. If hierarchy would be dis-covered in all scapegoat function works for the unchallenged internally, because as in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,

with bringing down the Berlin Wall. This play is an attempt, on Miller's part, to resist what he calls "respectable conformity" (*Timebends* 313). We can see social Darwinism built into an unwitting Walter Franz and blind commitment to remembered family values built into Victor Franz. In the end, never the twain shall meet. That is much of what I now see coming out of this play, and the Dublin production gave me a very strong sense of how hopelessly steeped the two brothers are in their opposing points of view built on a will to resist the other. Given his money and his mobility after his divorce, Walter will of course come to dominate on the social landscape. Being what Miller calls "an idealist of sorts," Victor will have to simply live out his choice within his marriage (*Arthur Miller and Company* 148). There is little hope of reconciling the two brothers. For theatregoers who expect resolution, the play can remain frustrating. But a cultural reading can argue that the play, as a reflection of its time, offers a somber portrait of an America divided against itself.

In 1968, Richard Nixon, with his corporate vision of a future America, defeated Hubert Humphrey, who was forever committed to small companies spread across an American landscape comprised of Mom and Pop stores from sea to sea. Republican economic determinism must be acknowledged as having won out at the millennial turn. If indeed, as Bigsby has alerted us in a number of places, Miller was undergoing uncertainties from the mid-fifties into the sixties about his art and his connection to theatre, then we need to take more seriously the sense of stasis in *After the Fall* and *The Price* and read this condition as a mirror of the moral paralysis of the time. In this regard, Miller's plays from the sixties have gotten exactly right the condition of a culture whose idealism had no chance of offering a viable alternative to the economic machinery that has come to dominate the latter decades of American history in the twentieth century. Perhaps we really do need to be thinking more and more about exploring historical and cultural dimensions in Arthur Miller's work.

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Above picture of the Gate Theater's marquee by Lew Livesay. Images on pages 10 and 11 were taken from the Gate production's programme. Page 10 features the programme cover with a photograph by Paul Strand called 'Wall Street.' Page 11 features the graphics from page 1 of the programme, clearly a Depression setting.

After the Fall Revived on Broadway After Forty Years

By Stephen Marino, St. Francis College

In the summer 2004, New York's Roundabout Theatre Company staged the first Broadway revival of Arthur Miller's controversial 1964 play, *After the Fall*, at the company's American Airlines Theatre on 42nd St. This long-awaited production completed a string of New York revivals since the mid-1990's of most major Miller plays. *After the Fall* had not been performed in a Broadway house since the original Lincoln Center Repertory production starring Barbara Loden and Jason Robards, a production for which many critics excoriated Miller in taking unfair advantage of the death of Marilyn Monroe on whom the character Maggie is based. A 1984 revival, with Frank Langella and Diane Wiest, ran off-Broadway. The 2004 production was widely anticipated because its two stars, Peter Krause and Carla Gugino, are better known as television performers: Krause as funeral director Nate Fisher in HBO's *Six Feet Under* and Gugino as the title character of the cancelled ABC dramatic series, *Karen Sisco*. Also, Michael Mayer brought stellar directorial credits to this production having previously directed the Tony award winning revival of Miller's *A View From the Bridge*.

In *After the Fall* Miller wanted to dramatize how individuals and nations confront guilt, denial, and responsibility. He has said that the dramatic structure of the play is based on psychoanalysis. The main character, the lawyer, Quentin speaks to an unidentified Listener—a friend, perhaps, or an analyst—someone he is going to tell about a decision he must make, which is the plot of the play. In this fashion he examines his entire life: his guilt and responsibility in his relationship with his parents, his two failed marriages to Louise and Maggie, and his doubts about marrying a third time to Holga. But Miller moves the play beyond Quentin's personal story and shows how guilt and responsibility also operate in history, particularly in the Holocaust and McCarthyism. Similarly, Quentin confronts the guilt of betrayal when one of his friends, Mickey, modeled after the director Elia Kazan, is subpoenaed to testify before HUAC and tempted to betray his friends and colleagues. Many critics of the original production focused on the personal elements and mostly ignored the larger theme and implications of the play—the reason why it is so infrequently revived thus obscuring its place as a major drama in Miller's canon,

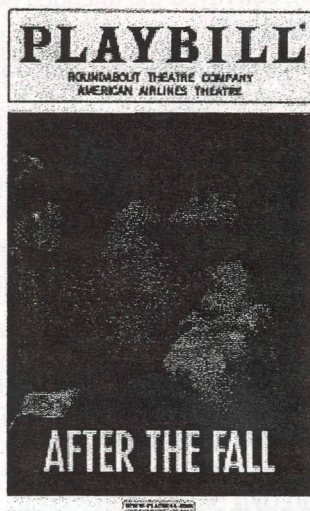
In *After the Fall* Miller returned to the expressionistic dramatic structure he had used in *Death of a Salesman*. He writes in the liner notes that the action occurs entirely in the "mind, thought, and memory" of the protagonist, Quentin. He, therefore, structured the scenes and the characters, who remain on the stage, to appear as almost free associations popping into Quentin's head. The original Lincoln Center set, designed by Jo Mileziner (who had also created the

famous *Salesman* stage), conveyed the intended non-realistic psychological effect with a series of grayish platforms, steps, and ramps. The tower of a concentration camp dominated the back of the stage—a crucial metaphor which indicates the guilt of the survivor. Other notable productions of the play have offered successful variations of the non-realistic set. Franco Zeffirelli's 1966 Rome production employed a stage of steel frames so actors could appear and disappear at any place on the stage; a 1990 British production used a flight of steps descending into a cave-like vortex.

Unfortunately, the 2004 Roundabout Theatre Company version did little to rescue the play's production reputation. Although most critics focused on what they saw as a seriously miscast Peter Krause and uneven acting by Carla Gugino, their performances were not the cause for the failure of this production. (In fact, at the evening performance I attended, Gugino gave a powerful depiction of Maggie's descent into psychological despair and Krause seemed to grow into his role. In the final confrontation scene between Maggie and Quentin in Act 2, both actors fed off each other's performances.) Rather, their depictions of Maggie and Quentin are the result of a seriously misconceived production from the outset. Michael Mayer has done some "creative editing" of Miller's original play by eliminating characters and reshuffling scenes to make the play more "accessible." The effect of this editing created for me a mere "version" of *After the Fall*. The sophistication and strength of the play is that the seemingly random appearances of characters and scenes are actually highly structured and carefully choreographed by Miller in order to build to Quentin's acceptance of Holga's love at the climax of the play. This production ineffectively removed some of Maggie's crucial dialogue with Quentin and moved the appearances of Quentin's mother, his first wife Louise, and Holga.

Another major misconception was in Richard Hoover's set. Designed to resemble the famous TWA terminal at New York's JFK airport, this set countered Miller's notion of the play taking place in the "mind, thought, and memory" of Quentin. Rather than reinforce the non-realistic, psychological space vital to Quentin's monologues, the set rather blatantly enforced a defined place and time. The sounds of planes flying overhead and the announcements of arrivals and departure had the effect of creating a too-obvious and unnecessary metaphor for the arrival and departures of characters. The occasional image of the concentration camp tower—a dominant symbol in the original set—seemed out of place.

After forty years, *After the Fall* remains an enigmatic Miller play. This disappointing production did little to contribute to our understanding.



After the Fall: Is the Knowing All?

By Dr. Stefani Koorey, Valencia Community College

Just over a year following Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe's divorce in 1961, and less than seven months before Marilyn's death, Arthur Miller, 46, married Ingeborg Morath, 38, on February 17, 1962.

Arthur Miller's marriage to Marilyn Monroe had not been easy. What had begun as the hopeful union of two wounded lovers ended unhappily after a series of betrayals and regret-filled attempts to balance their private marriage with their public careers. Instead of providing Monroe with some much-needed confidence and emotional stability, her third and final marriage proved to be a contributing factor to her undoing.

Monroe was terribly upset over the news of Clark Gable's death, before the birth of his only child, and later devastated by gossip and innuendo that she was in some way responsible for his heart attack through her erratic behavior and shooting delays during the filming of *The Misfits*. Famous now for her unprofessional work ethic, her uncooperative attitude, and her self-involved personality, whatever little reputation Marilyn had built for herself as a serious actress disappeared forever. On her thirty-sixth birthday, she was fired from her next film, *Something's Got to Give*, for numerous production delays caused by her severe emotional illness. No longer able to complete a film project, and already teetering on the brink of a complete psychological collapse, Marilyn Monroe's mental state rapidly declined.

Marilyn Monroe died alone at the age of 36, sometime in the early morning hours of Sunday, August 5, 1962, in her new home in the Brentwood section of Los Angeles. The official coroner's report listed her cause of death as "acute barbiturate poisoning—ingestion of overdose," and a "probable suicide."

According to W.J. Weatherby and others, it was his new wife Inge who had persuaded Miller to write the semi-confessional *After the Fall* to lay the ghost of Marilyn to rest, work through his deep guilt, and allow their own marriage a chance to grow. In fact, Miller dedicated the play to her: "*For My Wife, Ingeborg Morath.*" As a playwright primarily concerned with the

conflict between personal and public responsibility, *After the Fall* reads as Miller's attempt to dramatically explore various issues regarding his disillusion with marriage ("the death of love"), Monroe's suicide, and his own culpability in their breakup. *After the Fall* is mainly concerned with Quentin's suffering, not Maggie's, during and after their marriage.

After the Fall premiered on January 24, 1964, at the new Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre in New York City. Construction of the theatre at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts was not completed in time for Miller's opening so the play was produced in the repertory's temporary home at the ANTA Washington Square Theatre. It had been nine years since Miller had "faced the monster" and presented a new full-length play on the New York stage. The anticipation surrounding the play's arrival was significant enough to sell out the entire run well in advance of its opening. Reported Nathan Cohen in the *National Review*, "Very few plays have been awaited with as much expectation as Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*."¹

By almost all accounts, *After the Fall* became known as Arthur Miller's public confession, an exploitive exposé of his marriage to Marilyn Monroe, and a kind of summation of his life thus far. Critics and scholars alike seemed to agree that Miller's new play was a serious breach of good taste: Richard Corliss of *Time* called it "a 2 1/2 hour act of flagellation in which Arthur Miller's whips sear his own flesh and that of anyone he touched or who touched him"; John O'Connor, in 1974 in the *New York Times*, angrily wrote that "the play for all its painful sincerity, is an egotistical abomination"; Susan Sontag commented that "Miller's self-exposure is mere self-indulgence"; Richard Gilman noted that the play was "an endless sophomoric revelry without meaning"; Nathan Cohen jabbed, "Seldom has there been such a chasm between conception and execution, between arrogance of aim and pettiness and insufficiency of achievement"; Leslie Hanscome called the play, "undoubtedly the most nakedly autobiographical drama ever put on public view"; and Robert Brustein, in a review entitled, "Arthur Miller's Mea Culpa," decried: "*After the Fall* is a three-and-one-half-hour breach of taste, a confessional autobiography of embarrassing explicitness, during which the author does not stop talking about himself for an instant while making only the most perfunctory gestures toward concealing his identity."²

Two weeks after the play opened, Miller answered his critics with an article in *Life* magazine entitled, "With Respect For Her Agony—But With Love." In this essay, written as a rebuttal to a review in the same issue by Tom Prideaux entitled "Marilyn's Ghost Takes the Stage," Miller wrote, "The character of Maggie . . . is not in fact Marilyn Monroe." He continued his counter-attack by lambasting those who would dare to see his play as anything other than a work of art: "Certainly one of the more diverting, if minor, pastimes of literary life is the game of Find the Author . . . Once the author's identity is 'discovered' a certain counterfeit of knowingness spreads through the reader's soul, quite as though he had managed to see through an attempt to trick him into believing that the work at hand was art rather than a disguised biography."³

Later in the year, Miller insisted that the public outcry against *After the Fall* came as a complete surprise. "It honestly

never occurred to me,” Miller wrote, “that anyone was trying for a literal resemblance, or that the audience would see one, because I didn’t see one.” In October of 1965, Miller reiterated his innocence: “As for the obsession on the part of the public that the character of Maggie in *After the Fall* is Marilyn Monroe, I insist it is not. What the character *did* portray was a kind of suffering which Marilyn had. . . . If it *were* Marilyn in *After the Fall*, it would be a tribute to the depth and reality of her suffering. And that,” said Miller, “is the last I have to say about it.”⁴

The genesis of this play in Miller’s literary timeline appears to date from the mid 1950s, before his marriage to Monroe. In July 1959, in an interview with Kenneth Allsop for *Encounter*, Miller spoke of being immersed in a project, begun several years previously, which sounds similar in theme and form to *After the Fall*. “It is about the present day,” Miller revealed, “about people who lived through the events of the ‘thirties and ‘forties, and are now face to face with their lives in a world they never made. I am trying to define what a human being should be, how he can survive in today’s society without having to appear to be a different person from what he basically is.”⁵ It is likewise apparent that three climactic events in the playwright’s life heavily influenced the final script of *After the Fall*: the death of his mother, Augusta; his marriage to Inge Morath; and the death of Marilyn Monroe—for all three persons figure prominently in the narrative.

The plot of *After the Fall* is unquestionably autobiographical. It involves the working out of the psychic dilemma of Quentin, a successful New York lawyer racked by self-doubt—after two broken marriages, he wonders whether he has the right to take on the burden of a third. In trying to make his decision, Quentin recalls memories of family, friends, women, and former wives, who expressionistically appear and disappear as Quentin’s stream of consciousness unfolds. His first marriage to Louise turned sour because, she says, he treated her as if she “didn’t exist.” His second wife, Maggie, a famous pop singer, turns shrewish and self-destructive. His current love, Holga, an intelligent European girl who is a survivor of Nazi Germany, represents the possibility of survival and hope in a cruel and violent world. The play ends on a complex and inexact note, with its hero, Quentin, still questioning his existence as he begins his life anew with Holga.

The similarities between events and circumstances in Miller’s personal and professional life, including the lives of those in his immediate circle of family and friends, and in those of his characters, are almost too numerous to list. The most outstanding warrant our attention—not only for their sheer inescapable presence, but also for their striking and conspicuous nature as referents to events and persons that exist outside the text of the play.

Both the play’s author and his main character were born around the same time—Quentin and Miller were in their forties in 1964. During the Depression, each had a foreign-born father who lost a sizable business. Miller and Quentin’s fathers both were illiterate, a fact only known by their wives after they married and a source of great shame to them both. Both Quentin and Miller left home, against the wishes of their fathers, to make their own way.

Both have older brothers who stayed behind to help their fathers in business. Like Miller, Quentin found in socialism a “brotherhood opposed to all the world’s injustice,” became disillusioned with leftist causes, appeared before HUAC, and parted company with a close friend who named names. Additionally, both Rose and Augusta died before their husbands.

Miller’s marital history also parallels Quentin’s. Quentin and Miller met their first wives when they were college students. Both also told their first wives about their interest in other women, and both women reacted similarly to the news. Both Mary Grace Slattery (Miller’s first wife) and Louise entered psychoanalysis towards the end of their marriages. Both marriages ended in divorce after each husband found solace with another woman who would end up as wife number two.

The similarities between Maggie and Marilyn Monroe are even more profound. Both Monroe and Maggie experienced the same unpleasant childhoods: they were illegitimate; their fathers deserted their families; and their mothers were unstable. Both tried unsuccessfully to locate their fathers and both of their mothers had tried to smother them as toddlers. Neither Maggie nor Marilyn graduated from high school, but each somehow incredibly rose to the highest rank in popular entertainment. Each had an arresting combination of sexual attractiveness and girlish charm and were idolized and desired by millions of fans worldwide. Both had loveless affairs with their older male mentors, and were forbidden by these men’s families to visit them on their deathbeds. Both were in psychoanalysis, and worked on their chosen craft with a renowned teacher. Impressed upon meeting Quentin-Miller, Maggie-Marilyn likewise kept his picture in her bedroom. Both found a journal, soon after their weddings, in which their husbands detailed their dissatisfaction with the marriage. Both divorced after several years of marriage. Each woman was vain, neurotic, infantile, difficult to work with, brooded about people taking her as a joke, broke contracts, and finally ended her life with an overdose of sleeping pills.

Act One consists of a series of vignettes that episodically provides us with important background information on Quentin. This, in turn, enables the audience to understand the significance of the failure of his second marriage to Maggie, presented in Act Two. The second act mostly abandons the expressionistic structure set up in Act One. It operates, almost completely, as a straight cause and effect narrative. Only in a few instances does the past interject itself, mainly to juxtapose emotionally similar moments from Quentin’s past. Act Two’s plot is almost entirely devoted to Quentin’s marriage to Maggie, including her emotional disintegration and attempted suicide, ending with Quentin reuniting with Holga.

Quentin’s recollections predominantly revolve around the women in his life—past, present, and future. More like motifs than representations of actual persons, Quentin’s women appear and disappear around and above him as he remembers his life and decides his future. Time also moves in different directions, forward and backward, colliding and overlapping, as Quentin exposes his pain. Like an advanced version of the expressionistic movement in *Death of a Salesman*, Miller situates past events and

immediate thoughts as concurrent to show the complex inner workings of Quentin's mind. From Quentin's very first speech we learn that, in the present time of the drama, Quentin's second wife, Maggie, committed suicide fourteen months ago; a few weeks following her death Quentin quit his lucrative law practice because "It just got to where I couldn't concentrate on a case any more; not the way I used to. I felt I was merely in the service of my own success. It all lost any point"; his mother, Rose, had died some four to five months ago of a heart attack; and Quentin had most recently, while in Germany, met a woman named Holga who is an archaeologist. Miller then builds on this information by showing us scenes enacting each event.

Peter Krause's performance as Quentin in the recent NY revival was deeply introspective. He exuded a boyish charm that was outgunned by his continuously morose demeanor. While an excellent choice for the role, considering he brings to the part the audience's preconceived notion of him as troubled and thoughtful from his years on *Six Feet Under*, Krause's inability to shake the sorrow that engulfed him made for a long evening. The ups and downs that Quentin experiences in this play were played by Krause as only slight shifts of mood.

The casting of a blonde Holga and a redhead Maggie was deliberate, I think, in order to distance us from the autobiographical nature of the play. However, this effect was obliterated when Quentin meets Maggie for the first time and we see her costumed in an exact copy of Marilyn's cherished dress from *The Misfits*.

Miller is trying to do something very sophisticated with this drama. He is attempting to literally, and literarily, bend time and space by presenting a character who is realizing himself *as he reveals himself*. While the events he remembers are from all manner of time frames, Quentin is himself telling his story in real time—it takes as long as it takes to come to his conclusions regarding his choice of future action. Miller remarked in an interview "the play is a continuous stream of meaning. It's not built on what happens next in terms of the usual continuity of a tale—but upon what naked meaning grows out of the one before. And the movement expands from meaning to meaning, openly, without any bulling around. The way a mind would go in quest of a meaning, the way a new river cuts its bed, seeking the path to contain its force."⁶

Contrary to critical opinion, I do not find the drama overtly confessional, but, rather, explorative. While the answer to his initial dilemma seems obvious to us as audience members, Quentin seems innocently uncertain at the beginning of his quest as to where or when it will end or how he will find his way. The audience is thus being asked to serve as witness, not jury or judge, to Quentin's revelations, as he determines, for the first time, the meaning of his life. Opposing those critics who assert that there is an uncomfortable imbalance *within* Miller's dramatization of his first person structure, I find a consistent balance evident, existing *between* Miller's dramatic form and his content. Miller's central character repeatedly steps out of the action of the play to address the audience directly on matters relating to his memories. Likewise, Miller himself, as the play's progenitor, purposely steps out of his fictional frame and moves into the realm of his real-life

private world. In doing so, he succeeds in drawing his thickest lines yet connecting himself to his art.

For all his psychic suffering, it is very hard to like Quentin or appreciate his pain. His incessant blaming of the women in his life for his turmoil is thematically uninteresting and reeks of self-aggrandizement. Quentin's messianic questioning of guilt throughout the play reflects his deep desire to return to a time when he was innocent and without blame. Miller wishes us to understand that beyond the personal guilt that Quentin finds in his life and in the lives of those about him, there exists a larger universal guilt of mankind's culpability in the atrocities of Nazi Germany. Quentin's "wish to kill" Maggie, and his Mother, is made analogous to the violence that led to the horrors of Nazism. In Quentin's final speech of the play, he attempts to make sense of himself and establish a reason to continue his life after the Fall.

Notes

¹ Nathan Cohen, "Hollow Heart of a Hollow Drama," *National Review* 7 April 1964: 289.

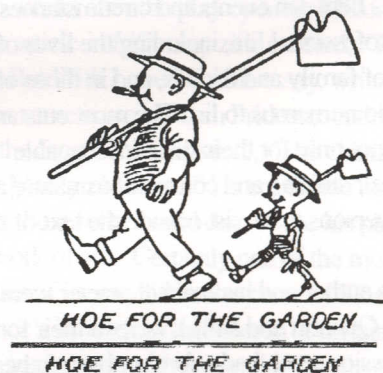
² Corliss, "Wounds That Will Not Heal," 113; John O'Connor, "TV: Miller's *After the Fall* on NBC," *New York Times* 10 Dec. 1974: 91; Susan Sontag, "Going to Theatre, Etc.," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Dell, 1966) 147; Richard Gilman, "Still Falling," *Commonweal* 14 Feb. 1964: 601; Nathan Cohen, "Hollow Heart of a Hollow Drama" 289; Leslie Hanscome, "*After the Fall*: Arthur Miller's Return," *Newsweek* 3 Feb. 1964: 50; Robert Brustein, "Arthur Miller's Mea Culpa," *New Republic* 8 Feb. 1964: 26.

³ Arthur Miller, "With Respect For Her Agony—But With Love," *Life* 7 Feb. 1964: 66.

⁴ Barbara Gelb, "Question: 'Am I My Brother's Keeper?'" *New York Times* 29 Nov. 1964, rpt. in Roudane, ed., *Conversations With Arthur Miller* 79.

⁵ Kenneth Allsop, "A Conversation With Arthur Miller," *Encounter* 13 (1959): 58-60, rpt. in Roudane, ed., *Conversations With Arthur Miller* 52-55.

⁶ "Arthur Miller Ad-Libs on Elia Kazan," *Show* Jan. 1964: 55-56, 97-98, rpt. in Roudane, ed., *Conversations With Arthur Miller* 69.



All graphics for the following article can be found at:
 "Earthly Pursuits," 2001.
 <<http://www.earthlypursuits.com>

Will you have a part
in
Victory?



"Every Garden a Muniton Plant"
THIS POSTER, USED IN 1916, AND WITH DIFFERENT SLOGANS IN 1918, WAS POPULAR WHEREVER IT APPEARED AND DID MUCH TO EXTEND THE WAR GARDEN MOVEMENT

"He's Planting the Garden!": The garden as unifying symbol in *Death of a Salesman*

By Carlos Campo,

Community College of Southern Nevada

Critics have carefully traced symbolic elements in *Death of a Salesman* since its publication over fifty years ago. From Bill Oliver's pen as phallic symbol to Howard Wagner's wire recorder as emblem of Willy's technophobia, these studies have both illuminated and obscured Miller's drama. While many writers have noted Willy's desire to "get something in the ground" as an antidote for his "temporary" feelings about himself, few have explored the complexity of the garden as a symbol in the play. The garden is such a dynamic motif, that it emerges as perhaps the most unifying symbolic element in *Death of a Salesman*.

Miller's opening stage directions begin with the flute "telling of grass and trees and the horizon" (5). These natural images, Willy's "green" world, are immediately contrasted with the "towering angular shapes" of Willy's "grey" world. Willy's failing garden cannot overcome the apartment houses, which blot out life-giving light: "There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow anymore, you can't raise a carrot in the backyard" (11). Miller deftly develops this green vs. grey dichotomy throughout the drama. The grey world is the ruthless "cut and dried" business world that fires a desperate Willy; it is found in Ben's brutal treatment of his nephew Biff, who is cautioned to "never fight fair with a stranger" (43). The green world is Willy's remembrances of "lilac and wisteria...the peonies would come out, and the daffodils" (11). During the Requiem, Charley argues that Willy was part of the grey world, where "there's no rock bottom to life," while

Biff sees his father in the green world, "making the stoop, finishing the cellar" (132).

Miller emphasizes the difference between the grey and green worlds in his autobiography, *Timebends*, when he writes of Manny Newman and Lee Balsam, prototypes for Willy Loman. He marvels at "their little wooden homes surrounded by open flatland where tall elms grew" where the grass was "crisscrossed with footpaths that people used instead of the unpaved streets without sidewalks." They had prolific gardens, and "canned the tomatoes they grew, and their basements smelled hauntingly of earth, unlike Manhattan basements with their taint of cat and rat and urine" (121). Miller's description sounds much like Willy's backyard in bygone days, with their "two beautiful elm trees" between which they hung their swing. Those trees were "massacred" by a builder who cut them down, an instrument of the grey world. It is from this grey world that Willy dreams of escaping one day, to a green world: "a little place out in the country, and I'll raise some vegetables" (65).

Willy's inability to raise vegetables is mirrored by his failure to raise his sons effectively. Biff and Hap's moral turpitude has been well chronicled, and it is clear that Willy is paralyzed by the fear that he has not equipped his boys for the future. He tells Ben, "Sometimes I'm afraid I'm not teaching them the right kind of—Ben, how should I teach them" (46)? Just as nothing grows in the yard, the Lomans are stunted, impotent men. Willy laments that Biff never grew up, while Charley twice asks Willy when he is going to grow up. We are not surprised that the word "boy" is referenced some 82 times in the play; it is part of what Willy mutters in his opening lines, and it is his final

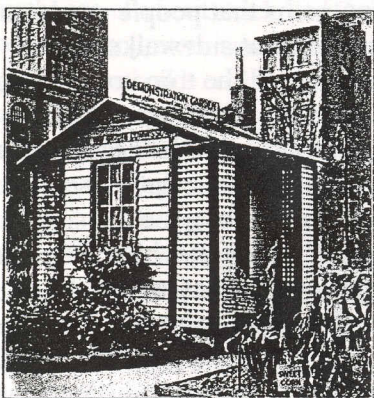


Draw on your back-yard type of bank

reference to Biff.

Perhaps the least examined aspect of the garden in the play is the relationship between Willy's garden and the Victory Gardens that became so popular in America during both world wars. While many of us know the popular PBS series *The Victory Garden*, now in its 29th year, we may be unfamiliar with

America's war gardens. The war gardens of World War I emerged from food shortages and consumers' fears regarding escalating food prices. War garden efforts were so successful that the "National War Garden Community estimated that the people of this country in 1917 produced a crop valued at \$350



MIDST TOWERING SKYSCRAPERS
In Bryant Park, New York, in the heart of the nation's office metropolis, there was planted a demonstration war garden, with a little garden house, which served as a distributing center for literature of the National War Garden Community. Several community gardens are based on the lines of this structure in the Nation.

million in back yards, vacant lots, and the like" (Free). So when Biff is a toddler in Brooklyn, can we safely assume that the Lomans joined the national fervor and planted a Victory Garden? Only Biff makes a passing reference to the war when he speaks of the jobs he's had since he left "before the war" (16). Biff, of course is speaking of WWII, during which the Victory Garden played an even more significant role.

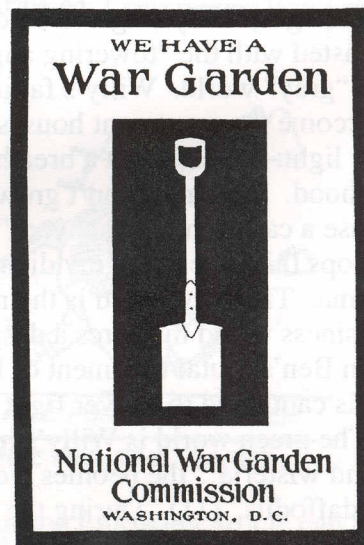
Once canned foods joined the list of rationed items in March of 1943—just a few years before Biff returns home—the Secretary of Agriculture called for a national effort to create 18 million Victory Gardens. Four million new gardeners answered the call, leading to a buyer's panic in the seed market (Platenius). Is Willy's fixation and frustration regarding growing and gardening a reflection of his sense of thwarted duty to his country? Surely audiences in 1949 would have seen the Victory Garden as an ironic backdrop for Willy's gardening failures. Willy Loman, the forlorn drummer who keeps "ringing up zeros" will find no victory in his life, not with his sons, his wife, his job, or his gardening.

Willy's garden could certainly have been planted during the Depression as well. Community gardens have been cultivated on vacant lots in New York City since the government initiated Depression era relief gardens ("Community"). The thirties were clearly difficult days for the Lomans, who must have relied on their garden at some point in the past. When Linda says in Act II, "Not enough sun gets back there. Nothing'll grow there any more," she implies that the garden, like so many things in their lives, was once fruitful but is now barren.

It is fitting that Willy returns to his garden as the play builds to its climax. Willy is desperate to get something in the ground, and is plotting his suicide as he tries to plant in the dark. It's just like Willy to plant in dark; he's been lost ever since his father abandoned him as a child. It is in the garden that the family fully realizes the extent of Will's fall; his bizarre actions prepare us for his inevitable self-destruction. Willy's garden is a burial mound for his hopes and dreams, and by having him dig about in the dark earth just minutes before his death Miller shocks both readers and viewers with the power of the garden as symbol. The garden is a shadow of a lost Eden, an ironic "garden of defeat," a victim of the grey world, as fragile and hopeless as Willy Loman himself.

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THE WAR GARDENERS' MANT
This war garden emblem, the symbol of the National War Garden Commission, is the "War Gardeners' Mant" and is the symbol of the war gardeners. It was first used in 1917 and is now the symbol of the war gardeners.

Notes on Contributors

Sue Abbotson is the editor of this newsletter and is finishing up work on *Masterpieces of Twentieth Century American Drama* for Greenwood Press, before she begins her next book project, *The Critical Companion to Arthur Miller* for Facts on File. Sue has published a number of essays and books on Miller, and is a past president of the Arthur Miller Society. She is an adjunct teacher at Rhode Island College.

Carlos Campo lives in Las Vegas, and teaches English at the Community College of Southern Nevada, focusing on drama. A former vice president of the Arthur Miller Society, Carlos is helping organize the Miller panels for the ALA conference in May.

Kate Egerton is a Lecturer in English at Indiana University South Bend. A member of the Arthur Miller Society, she has delivered papers on Miller at a variety of conferences. She is currently working on a book about Arthur Miller's recent plays including *Finishing the Picture*.

Stefani Koorey is a professor of theatre, film, and humanities at Valencia Community College in Orlando, FL. She is the author of *Arthur Miller's Life and Literature: An Annotated and Comprehensive Guide* (Scarecrow Press, 2000). She is also the editor and publisher of *The Hatchet: Journal of Lizzie Borden Studies* <<http://LizzieAndrewBorden.com>>.

Paula Langteau serves as the Campus Dean/CEO of the University of Wisconsin-Marinette and as a tenured member of the UW Colleges English Department. A past-President and the founding Vice President of the Arthur Miller Society, Paula serves on the Executive Board. In 2003, she hosted the 8th International Arthur Miller Conference in Northern Wisconsin. She has contributed several reviews to the newsletter and published the essay, "The Absurdity of

Miller's *Salesman*" in *The Achievement of Arthur Miller: New Essays*, edited by Steven R. Centola. Currently, she is editing the volume, *Miller and Middle America: New Essays on Arthur Miller and the American Experience*, pending publication with the University Press of America.

Lew Livesay has taught composition, literature, and MBA communications at Saint Peter's College, NJ, since the early eighties. He has also been a Vice-President at Smith-Barney, specializing in equity research. He is also the current President of the Arthur Miller Society.

Stephen Marino teaches at Saint Francis College in Brooklyn and at Saint Francis Preparatory School in Fresh Meadows in New York, where he is chairperson of the English Department. His work has appeared in *Modern Drama* and *The Journal of Imagism*. He edited "*The Salesman Has a Birthday*": *Essays Celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman* (UP America 2000), and recently published *A Language Study of Arthur Miller's Plays: The Poetic in the Colloquial* (Mellen 2002).

Contributing Information Instructions

Information and requests to submit articles are encouraged, including those regarding book, film, and production reviews, as well as announcements of upcoming productions, events, and conferences, and brief notes and queries regarding Mr. Miller's work. MLA style with files in Word please. Submission address:

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