

THE ART OF THEATER NO. 2

ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller's white farmhouse is set high on the border of the roller-coaster hills of Roxbury and Woodbury, in Connecticut's Litchfield County. The author, brought up in Brooklyn and Harlem, is now a county man. His house is surrounded by the trees he has raised—native dogwood, exotic katsura, Chinese scholar, tulip, and locust. Most of them were flowering as we approached his house for our interview in spring 1966. The only sound was a rhythmic hammering echoing from the other side of the hill. We walked to its source, a stately red barn, and there found the playwright, hammer in hand, standing in dim light, amid lumber, tools, and plumbing equipment. He welcomed us, a tall, rangy, good-looking man with a weathered face and sudden smile, a scholar-farmer in horn-rimmed glasses and high work shoes. He invited us in to judge his prowess: he was turning the barn into a guesthouse (partitions here, cedar closets there, shower over there . . .). Carpentry, he said, was his oldest hobby—he had started at the age of five.

We walked back past the banked iris, past the hammock, and entered the house by way of the terrace, which was guarded by a suspicious basset named Hugo. Mr. Miller explained as we went in

that the house was silent because his wife, photographer Inge Morath, had driven to Vermont to do a portrait of Bernard Malamud, and that their three-year-old daughter Rebecca was napping. The living room, glassed-in from the terrace, was eclectic, charming: white walls patterned with a Steinberg sketch, a splashy painting by neighbor Alexander Calder, posters of early Miller plays, photographs by Ms. Morath. It held colorful modern rugs and sofas; an antique rocker; oversized black Eames chair; a glass coffee table supporting a bright mobile; small peasant figurines—souvenirs of a recent trip to Russia—unique Mexican candlesticks, and strange pottery animals atop a very old carved Spanish table, these last from their Paris apartment; and plants, plants everywhere.

The author's study was in total contrast. We walked up a green knoll to a spare single-roomed structure with small louvered windows. The electric light was on—he could not work by daylight, he confided. The room harbors a plain slab desk fashioned by the playwright, his chair, a rumpled gray day bed, another webbed chair from the thirties, and a bookshelf with half a dozen jacketless books. This is all, except for a snapshot of Inge and Rebecca, thumbtacked to the wall. Mr. Miller adjusted a microphone he had hung crookedly from the arm of his desk lamp. Then, quite casually, he picked up a rifle from the daybed and took a shot through the open louvers at a woodchuck that, scared but reprieved, scurried across the far slope. We were startled—he smiled at our lack of composure. He said that his study was also an excellent duck blind.

The interview began. His tone and expression were serious, interested. Often a secret grin surfaced, as he reminisced. He is a storyteller, a man with a marvelous memory, a simple man with a capacity for wonder, concerned with people and ideas. We listened at our ease as he responded to questions.

—*Olga Carlisle & Rose Styron, 1966*

INTERVIEWER

Voznesensky, the Russian poet, said when he was here that the landscape in this part of the country reminded him of his Sigulda*—that it was a “good microclimate” for writing. Do you agree?

ARTHUR MILLER

Well, I enjoy it. It’s not such a vast landscape that you’re lost in it, and it’s not so suburban a place that you feel you might as well be in a city. The distances—internal and external—are exactly correct, I think. There’s a *foreground* here, no matter which way you look.

INTERVIEWER

After reading your short stories, especially “The Prophecy” and “I Don’t Need You Any More,” which have not only the dramatic power of your plays but also the description of place, the *foreground*, the intimacy of thought hard to achieve in a play, I wonder: is the stage much more compelling for you?

MILLER

It is only very rarely that I can feel in a short story that I’m right on top of something, as I feel when I write for the stage. I am then in the ultimate place of vision—you can’t back me up any further. Everything is inevitable, down to the last comma. In a short story, or any kind of prose, I still can’t escape the feeling of a certain arbitrary quality. Mistakes go by—people consent to them more—more than mistakes do on the stage. This may be my illusion. But there’s another matter: the whole business of my own role in my own mind. To me the great thing is to write a good play, and when I’m writing a short story it’s as though I’m saying to myself, Well, I’m only doing this because I’m not writing a play at the moment. There’s guilt connected with it. Naturally I do enjoy writing a short story; it is a form that has a certain strictness.

*A resort town in Latvia

I think I reserve for plays those things that take a kind of excruciating effort. What comes easier goes into a short story.

INTERVIEWER

Would you tell us a little about the beginning of your writing career?

MILLER

The first play I wrote was in Michigan in 1935. It was written on a spring vacation in six days. I was so young that I dared do such things, begin it and finish it in a week. I'd seen about two plays in my life, so I didn't know how long an act was supposed to be, but across the hall there was a fellow who did the costumes for the University theater and he said, "Well, it's roughly forty minutes." I had written an enormous amount of material and I got an alarm clock. It was all a lark to me, and not to be taken too seriously . . . that's what I told myself. As it turned out, the acts were longer than that, but the sense of the timing was in me even from the beginning, and the play had a form right from the start.

Being a playwright was always the maximum idea. I'd always felt that the theater was the most exciting and the most demanding form one could try to master. When I began to write, one assumed inevitably that one was in the mainstream that began with Aeschylus and went through about twenty-five hundred years of playwriting. There are so few masterpieces in the theater, as opposed to the other arts, that one can pretty well encompass all of them by the age of nineteen. Today, I don't think playwrights care about history. I think they feel that it has no relevance.

INTERVIEWER

Is it just the young playwrights who feel this?

MILLER

I think the young playwrights I've had any chance to talk to are either ignorant of the past or they feel the old forms are too

square, or too cohesive. I may be wrong, but I don't see that the whole tragic arc of the drama has had any effect on them.

INTERVIEWER

Which playwrights did you most admire when you were young?

MILLER

Well, first the Greeks, for their magnificent form, the symmetry. Half the time I couldn't really repeat the story because the characters in the mythology were completely blank to me. I had no background at that time to know really what was involved in these plays, but the architecture was clear. One looks at some building of the past whose use one is ignorant of, and yet it has a modernity. It had its own specific gravity. That form has never left me; I suppose it just got burned in.

INTERVIEWER

You were particularly drawn to tragedy, then?

MILLER

It seemed to me the only form there was. The rest of it was all either attempts at it, or escapes from it. But tragedy was the basic pillar.

INTERVIEWER

When *Death of a Salesman* opened, you said to *The New York Times* in an interview that the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we're in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity. Do you consider your plays modern tragedies?

MILLER

I changed my mind about it several times. I think that to make a direct or arithmetical comparison between any contemporary work and the classic tragedies is impossible because of the question

of religion and power, which was taken for granted and is an a priori consideration in any classic tragedy. Like a religious ceremony, where they finally reached the objective by the sacrifice. It has to do with the community sacrificing some man whom they both adore and despise in order to reach its basic and fundamental laws and, therefore, justify its existence and feel safe.

INTERVIEWER

In *After the Fall*, although Maggie was “sacrificed,” the central character, Quentin, survives. Did you see him as tragic or in any degree potentially tragic?

MILLER

I can't answer that, because I can't, quite frankly, separate in my mind tragedy from death. In some people's minds I know there's no reason to put them together. I can't break it—for one reason, and that is, to coin a phrase: there's nothing like death. Dying isn't like it, you know. There's no substitute for the impact on the mind of the spectacle of death. And there is no possibility, it seems to me, of speaking of tragedy without it. Because if the total demise of the person we watch for two or three hours doesn't occur, if he just walks away, no matter how damaged, no matter how much he suffers—

INTERVIEWER

What were those two plays you had seen before you began to write?

MILLER

When I was about twelve, I think it was, my mother took me to a theater one afternoon. We lived in Harlem and in Harlem there were two or three theaters that ran all the time, and many women would drop in for all or part of the afternoon performances. All I remember was that there were people in the hold of a ship, the stage was rocking—they actually rocked the stage—and some

cannibal on the ship had a time bomb. And they were all looking for the cannibal: It was thrilling. The other one was a morality play about taking dope. Evidently there was much excitement in New York then about the Chinese and dope. The Chinese were kidnapping beautiful blond, blue-eyed girls who, people thought, had lost their bearings morally; they were flappers who drank gin and ran around with boys. And they inevitably ended up in some basement in Chinatown, where they were irretrievably lost by virtue of eating opium or smoking some pot. Those were the two masterpieces I had seen. I'd read some others, of course, by the time I started writing. I'd read Shakespeare and Ibsen, a little, not much. I never connected playwriting with our theater, even from the beginning.

INTERVIEWER

Did your first play have any bearing on *All My Sons*, or *Death of a Salesman*?

MILLER

It did. It was a play about a father owning a business in 1935, a business that was being struck, and a son being torn between his father's interests and his sense of justice. But it turned into a near-comic play. At that stage of my life I was removed somewhat. I was not Clifford Odets; he took it head-on.

INTERVIEWER

Many of your plays have that father-son relationship as the dominant theme. Were you very close to your father?

MILLER

I was. I still am, but I think, actually, that my plays don't reflect directly my relationship to him. It's a very primitive thing in my plays. That is, the father was really a figure who incorporated both power and some kind of a moral law which he had either broken himself or had fallen prey to. He figures as an immense

shadow I didn't expect that of my own father, literally, but of his position, apparently I did. The reason that I was able to write about the relationship, I think now, was because it had a mythical quality to me. If I had ever thought that I was writing about my father, I suppose I never could have done it. My father is, literally, a much more realistic guy than Willy Loman, and much more successful as a personality. And he'd be the last man in the world to ever commit suicide. Willy is based on an individual whom I knew very little, who was a salesman; it was years later that I realized I had only seen that man about a total of four hours in twenty years. He gave one of those impressions that is basic, evidently. When I thought of him, he would simply be a mute man: he said no more than two hundred words to me. I was a kid. Later on, I had another of that kind of a contact, with a man whose fantasy was always overreaching his real outline. I've always been aware of that kind of an agony, of someone who has some driving, implacable wish in him which never goes away, which he can never block out. And it broods over him, it makes him happy sometimes or it makes him suicidal, but it never leaves him. Any hero whom we even begin to think of as tragic is obsessed, whether it's Lear or Hamlet or the women in the Greek plays.

INTERVIEWER

Do any of the younger playwrights create heroes—in your opinion?

MILLER

I tell you, I may be working on a different wavelength, but I don't think they are looking at character any more, at the documentation of facts about people. All experience is looked at now from a schematic point of view. These playwrights won't let the characters escape for a moment from their preconceived scheme of how dreadful the world is. It is very much like the old strike plays. The scheme then was that someone began a play with a bourgeois ideology and got involved in some area of experience

I

Solomon's Antiques. Solomon, buried in his junk, is reading the paper, drinking coffee from a container, smoking. Enter Martin.

Martin
Excuse me.

Solomon
Yes, sir.

Martin
I'm looking for a Christmas present.

Solomon
Well that depends which Christmas.

Martin
(Smiles) Well, let's say this Christmas.

Solomon *(Lighting a half-torned cigarette)*
For this Christmas is very difficult. What're you got in mind?

Martin
(Looking around)
I don't know. I went to all the department stores, walked down all the streets. Everything is either junk or unnecessary.

Solomon *(He cracks, leans his head back) How do you do me*
My boy, you're not in the swim. Sit down, take it easy. There.. there's a nice Louis ~~14~~ *fourteen* chair, sit down.

Martin
I'm exhausted.

Solomon
So is everybody. ~~am~~ The first step to wisdom is to stop. Whatever it is, stop it. Then maybe you'll find out. For who is the present?

Martin
My wife.

Solomon
For a wife is difficult.
I got here a nice harp. *(Looks around) fine Christmas. nice harp.*

Martin
What the hell would she do with a harp?

Solomon
She'll have it. What do you mean?--what does she do with anything?

Martin
No, you got me wrong. I love her.

which had a connection to the labor movement—either it was actually a strike or, in a larger sense, it was the collapse of capitalism—and he ended the play with some new positioning vis-à-vis that collapse. He started without an enlightenment and he ended with some kind of enlightenment. And you could predict that in the first five minutes. Very few of those plays could be done any more, because they're absurd now. I've found over the years that a similar thing has happened with the so-called absurd theater. Predictable.

INTERVIEWER

In other words, the notion of tragedy about which you were talking earlier is absent from this preconceived view of the world.

MILLER

Absolutely. The tragic hero was supposed to join the scheme of things by his sacrifice. It's a religious thing, I've always thought. He threw some sharp light upon the hidden scheme of existence, either by breaking one of its profoundest laws, as Oedipus breaks a taboo (and therefore proves the existence of the taboo), or by proving a moral world at the cost of his own life. And that's the victory. We need him, as the vanguard of the race. We need his crime. That crime is a civilizing crime. Well, *now* the view is that it's an insoluble universe. Nothing is proved by a crime excepting that some people are freer to produce crime than others, and usually they are more honest than the others. There is no final reassertion of a community at all. There isn't the kind of communication that a child demands. The best you could say is that it is intelligent.

INTERVIEWER

Then it's aware—

MILLER

It's aware, but it will not admit into itself any moral universe at all. Another thing that's missing is the positioning of the author in relation to power. I always assumed that underlying any story is

the question of who should wield power. See, in *Death of a Salesman* you have two viewpoints. They show what would happen if we all took Willy's viewpoint toward the world, or if we all took Biff's. And took it seriously, as almost a political fact. I'm debating really which way the world ought to be run; I'm speaking of psychology and the spirit, too. For example, a play that isn't usually linked with this kind of problem is Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. It struck me sharply that what is at stake there is the father's great power. He's the owner, literally, of an empire of land and farms. And he wants to immortalize that power, he wants to hand it on, because he's dying. The son has a much finer appreciation of justice and human relations than the father. The father is rougher, more Philistine; he's cruder; and when we speak of the fineness of emotions, we would probably say the son has them and the father lacks them. When I saw the play I thought, This is going to be simply marvelous because the person with the sensitivity will be presented with power and what is he going to do about it? But it never gets to that. It gets deflected onto a question of personal neurosis. It comes to a dead end. If we're talking about tragedy, the Greeks would have done something miraculous with that idea. They would have stuck the son with the power, and faced him with the racking conflicts of the sensitive man having to rule. And then you would throw light on what the tragedy of power is.

INTERVIEWER

Which is what you were getting at in *Incident at Vichy*.

MILLER

That's exactly what I was after. But I feel today's stage turns away from any consideration of power, which always lies at the heart of tragedy. I use Williams's play as an example because he's that excellent that his problems are symptomatic of the time—*Cat* ultimately came down to the mendacity of human relations. It was a most accurate personalization but it bypasses the issue that the play seems to me to raise, namely the mendacity in social relations.

I still believe that when a play questions, even threatens, our social arrangement, that is when it really shakes us profoundly and dangerously, and that is when you've got to be great; good isn't enough.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that people in general now rationalize so, and have so many euphemisms for death, that they can't face tragedy?

MILLER

I wonder whether there isn't a certain—I'm speaking now of all classes of people—you could call it a softness, or else a genuine inability to face the tough decisions and the dreadful results of error. I say that only because when *Death of a Salesman* went on again recently, I sensed in some of the reaction that it was simply too threatening. Now there were probably a lot of people in the forties, when it first opened, who felt the same way. Maybe I just didn't hear those people as much as I heard other people—maybe it has to do with my own reaction. You need a certain amount of confidence to watch tragedy. If you yourself are about to die, you're not going to see that play. I've always thought that the Americans had, almost inborn, a primordial fear of falling, being declassed—you get it with your driver's license, if not earlier.

INTERVIEWER

What about Europeans?

MILLER

Well, the play opened in Paris again only last September; it opened in Paris ten years earlier, too, with very little effect. It wasn't a very good production, I understand. But now suddenly they discovered this play. And I sensed that their reaction was quite an American reaction. Maybe it comes with having . . . having the guilt of wealth; it would be interesting if the Russians ever got to feel that way!

INTERVIEWER

Death of a Salesman has been done in Russia, hasn't it?

MILLER

Oh, many times.

INTERVIEWER

When you were in Russia recently did you form any opinion about the Russian theater public?

MILLER

First of all, there's a wonderful naïveté that they have; they're not bored to death. They're not coming in out of the rain, so to speak, with nothing better to do. When they go to the theater, it has great weight with them. They come to see something that'll change their lives. Ninety percent of the time, of course, there's nothing there, but they're open to a grand experience. This is not the way we go to the theater.

INTERVIEWER

What about the plays themselves?

MILLER

I think they do things on the stage that are exciting and deft and they have marvelous actors, but the drama itself is not adventurous. The plays are basically a species of naturalism; it's not even realism. They're violently opposed to the theater of the absurd because they see it as a fragmenting of the community into perverse individuals who will no longer be under any mutual obligation at all, and I can see some point in their fear. Of course, these things should be done if only so one can rebut them. I know that I was very moved in many ways by German Expressionism when I was in school: yet there too something was perverse in it to me. It was the end of man, there are no people in it any more; that was especially true of the real German stuff: it's the bitter end of

the world where man is a voice of his class function, and that's it. Brecht has a lot of that in him, but he's too much of a poet to be enslaved by it. And yet, at the same time, I learned a great deal from it. I used elements of it that were fused into *Death of a Salesman*. For instance, I purposefully would not give Ben any character, because for Willy he *has* no character—which is, psychologically, expressionist, because so many memories come back with a simple tag on them: somebody represents a threat to you, or a promise.

INTERVIEWER

Speaking of different cultures, what is your feeling about the French Théâtre National Populaire?

MILLER

I thought a play I saw by Corneille, *L'Allusion Comique*, one of the most exciting things I've ever seen. We saw something I never thought I could enjoy—my French is not all that good. But I had just gotten over being sick, and we were about to leave France, and I wanted to see what they did with it. It was just superb. It is one of Corneille's lesser works, about a magician who takes people into the nether regions. What a marvelous mixture of satire, and broad comedy, and characterizations! And the acting was simply out of this world. Of course, one of the best parts about the whole thing was the audience. Because they're mostly under thirty, it looked to me; they pay very little to get in; and I would guess there are between twenty-five hundred and three thousand seats in that place. And the vitality of the audience is breathtaking. Of course the actors' ability to speak that language so beautifully is just in itself a joy. From that vast stage, to talk quietly, and make you *feel* the voice just wafting all over the house . . .

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think we haven't been able to do such a thing here? Why has Whitehead's Lincoln Center Repertory Theater failed as such?

MILLER

Well, that is a phenomenon worthy of a sociological study. When I got into it, *After the Fall* was about two-thirds written. Whitehead came to me and said, "I hear you're writing a play. Can we use it to start the Lincoln Center Repertory Company?" For one reason or another I said I would do it. I expected to take a financial beating; I could hope to earn maybe twenty percent of what I normally earn with a play, but I assumed that people would say, Well, it's a stupid but not idiotic action. What developed, before any play opened at all, was a hostility that completely dumbfounded me. I don't think it was directed against anybody in particular. For actors who want to develop their art, there's no better place to do it than in a permanent repertory company, where you play different parts and you have opportunities you've never had in a lifetime on Broadway. But the actors seemed to be affronted by the whole thing. I couldn't dig it! I could understand the enmity of commercial producers who, after all, thought they were threatened by it. But the professional people of every kind greeted it as though it were some kind of an insult. The only conclusion I can come to is that an actor was now threatened with having to put up or shut up. He had always been able to walk around on Broadway, where conditions were dreadful, and say, "I'm a great actor but I'm unappreciated," but in the back of his mind he could figure, "Well, one of these days I'll get a starring role and I'll go to Hollywood and get rich." This he couldn't do in a repertory theater where he signed up for several years. So the whole idea of that kind of quick success was renounced. He didn't want to face an opportunity that threatened him in this way. It makes me wonder whether there is

such a profound alienation among artists that any organized attempt to create something that is not based upon commerce, that has sponsorship, automatically sets people against it. I think that's an interesting facet. I also spoke to a group of young playwrights. Now, if it had been me, I would have been knocking at the door, demanding that they read my play, as I did unsuccessfully when The Group Theatre was around. Then every playwright was banging on the door and furious and wanted the art theater to do what he thought they should do. We could do that because it belonged to us all—you know—we thought of The Group Theatre as a public enterprise. Well, that wasn't true at all here. Everyone thought the Lincoln Theater was the property of the directors, of Miller and Whitehead and Kazan and one or two other people. Of course, what also made it fail was, as Laurence Olivier suggested, that it takes years to do anything. But he also made the point that with his English repertory theater he got encouragement from the beginning. There were people who pooh-poohed the whole thing, and said it was ridiculous, but basically the artistic community was in favor of it.

INTERVIEWER

How about the actors themselves? Did Lee Strasberg influence them?

MILLER

I think Strasberg is a symptom, really. He's a great force, and (in my unique opinion, evidently) a force that is not for the good in the theater. He makes actors secret people and he makes acting secret, and it's the most communicative art known to man; I mean, that's what the actor's *supposed* to be doing. But I wouldn't blame the Repertory Theater failures on him, because the people in there were not Actors Studio people at all; so he is not responsible for that. But the Method is in the air: the actor is defending himself from the Philistine, vulgar public. I had a girl in my play I couldn't

hear, and the acoustics in that little theater we were using were simply magnificent. I said to her, “I can’t hear you,” and I kept on saying, “I can’t hear you.” She finally got furious and said to me, in effect, that she was acting the truth, and that she was not going to prostitute herself to the audience. That was the living end! It reminded me of Walter Hampden’s comment—because we had a similar problem in *The Crucible* with some actors—he said they play a cello with the most perfect bowing and the fingering is magnificent but there are no strings on the instrument. The problem is that the actor is now working out his private fate through his role, and the idea of communicating the meaning of the play is the last thing that occurs to him. In the Actors Studio, despite denials, the actor is told that the text is really the framework for his emotions; I’ve heard actors change the order of lines in my work and tell me that the lines are only, so to speak, the libretto for the music—that the actor is the main force that the audience is watching and that the playwright is his servant. They are told that the analysis of the text, and the rhythm of the text, the verbal texture, is of no importance whatever. This is Method, as they are teaching it, which is, of course, a perversion of it, if you go back to the beginning. But there was always a tendency in that direction. Chekhov, himself, said that Stanislavsky had perverted *The Seagull*.

INTERVIEWER

What about Method acting in the movies?

MILLER

Well, in the movies, curiously enough, the Method works better. Because the camera can come right up to an actor’s nostrils and suck out of him a communicative gesture; a look in the eye, a wrinkle of his grin, and so on, which registers nothing on the stage. The stage is, after all, a verbal medium. You’ve got to make large gestures if they’re going to be seen at all. In other words, you’ve got to be unnatural. You’ve got to say, I am out to move into that

audience; that's my job. In a movie you don't do that; as a matter of fact, that's bad movie acting, it's overacting. Movies are wonderful for private acting.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the movies helped bring about this private acting in the theater?

MILLER

Well, it's a perversion of the Chekhovian play and of the Stanislavsky technique. What Chekhov was doing was eliminating the histrionics of his actors by incorporating them in the writing; the internal life was what he was writing about. And Stanislavsky's direction was also internal: for the first time he was trying to motivate every move from within instead of imitating an action; which is what acting should be. When you eliminate the vital element of the actor in the community and simply make a psychiatric figure on the stage who is thinking profound thoughts which he doesn't let anyone know about, then it's a perversion.

INTERVIEWER

How does the success of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* play fit into this?

MILLER

Well, I would emphasize its production and direction. Peter Brook has been trying for years, especially through productions of Shakespeare, to make the bridge between psychological acting and theater, between the private personality, perhaps, and its public demonstration. *Marat/Sade* is more an oratorio than a play; the characters are basically thematic relationships rather than human entities, so the action exemplified rather than characterized.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the popularity of the movies has had any influence on playwriting itself?

MILLER

Yes. Its form has been changed by the movies. I think certain techniques, such as the jumping from place to place, although it's as old as Shakespeare, came to us not through Shakespeare, but through the movies, a telegraphic, dream-constructed way of seeing life.

INTERVIEWER

How important is the screenwriter in motion pictures?

MILLER

Well, you'd be hard put to remember the dialogue in some of the great pictures that you've seen. That's why pictures are so international. You don't have to hear the style of the dialogue in an Italian movie or a French movie. We're watching the film, so that the vehicle is not the ear or the word, it's the eye. The director of a play is nailed to words. He can interpret them a little differently, but he has limits: you can only inflect a sentence in two or three different ways, but you can inflect an image on the screen in an infinite number of ways. You can make one character practically fall out of the frame; you can shoot it where you don't even see his face. Two people can be talking, and the man talking cannot be seen, so the emphasis is on the reaction to the speech rather than on the speech itself.

INTERVIEWER

What about television as a medium for drama?

MILLER

I don't think there is anything that approaches the theater. The sheer presence of a living person is always stronger than his image.

But there's no reason why TV shouldn't be a terrific medium. The problem is that the audience watching TV shows is always separated. My feeling is that people in a group, en masse, watching something, react differently, and perhaps more profoundly, than they do when they're alone in their living rooms. Yet it's not a hurdle that couldn't be jumped by the right kind of material. Simply, it's hard to get good movies, it's hard to get good novels, it's hard to get good poetry—it's *impossible* to get good television because in addition to the indigenous difficulties there's the whole question of it being a medium that's controlled by big business. It took TV seventeen years to do *Death of a Salesman* here. It's been done on TV in every country in the world at least once, but it's critical of the business world and the content is downbeat.

INTERVIEWER

A long time ago, you used to write radio scripts. Did you learn much about technique from that experience?

MILLER

I did. We had twenty-eight and a half minutes to tell a whole story in a radio play, and you had to concentrate on the words because you couldn't see anything. You were playing in a dark closet, in fact. So the economy of words in a good radio play was everything. It drove you more and more to realize what the power of a good sentence was, and the right phrase could save you a page you would otherwise be wasting. I was always sorry radio didn't last long enough for contemporary poetic movements to take advantage of it, because it's a natural medium for poets. It's pure voice, pure words. Words and silence; a marvelous medium. I've often thought, even recently, that I would like to write another radio play, and just give it to someone and let them do it on WBAL. The English do radio plays still, very good ones.

INTERVIEWER

You used to write verse drama too, didn't you?

MILLER

Oh yes, I was up to my neck in it.

INTERVIEWER

Would you ever do it again?

MILLER

I might. I often write speeches in verse, and then break them down. Much of *Death of a Salesman* was originally written in verse, and *The Crucible* was all written in verse, but I broke it up. I was frightened that the actors would take an attitude toward the material that would destroy its vitality. I didn't want anyone standing up there making speeches. You see, we have no tradition of verse, and as soon as an American actor sees something printed like verse, he immediately puts one foot in front of the other—or else he mutters. Then you can't hear it at all.

INTERVIEWER

Which of your own plays do you feel closest to now?

MILLER

I don't know if I feel closer to one than another. I suppose *The Crucible* in some ways. I think there's a lot of myself in it. There are a lot of layers in there that I know about that nobody else does.

INTERVIEWER

More so than in *After the Fall*?

MILLER

Yes, because although *After the Fall* is more psychological it's less developed as an artifice. You see, in *The Crucible* I was completely freed by the period I was writing about—over three centuries ago. It was a different diction, a different age. I had great joy writing that, more than with almost any other play I've written. I learned about how writers felt in the past when they were dealing almost constantly with historical material. A dramatist

writing history could finish a play Monday and start another Wednesday, and go right on. Because the *stories* are all prepared for him. Inventing the story is what takes all the time. It takes a year to invent the story. The historical dramatist doesn't have to invent anything, except his language, and his characterizations. Oh, of course, there's the terrific problem of condensing history, a lot of reshuffling and bringing in characters who never lived, or who died a hundred years apart—but basically if you've got the story, you're a year ahead.

INTERVIEWER

It must also be tempting to use a historical figure whose epoch was one of faith.

MILLER

It is. With all the modern psychology and psychiatry and the level of literacy higher than it ever was, we get less perspective on ourselves than at almost any time I know about. I have never been so aware of clique ideas overtaking people—fashions, for example—and sweeping them away, as though the last day of the world had come. One can sometimes point to a week or month in which things changed abruptly. It's like women's clothing in a certain issue of *Vogue* magazine. There is such a wish to be part of that enormous minority that likes to create new minorities. Yet people are desperately afraid of being alone.

INTERVIEWER

Has our insight into psychology affected this?

MILLER

It has simply helped people rationalize their situation, rather than get out of it, or break through it. In other words—you've heard it a hundred times—"Well, I am this type of person, and this type doesn't do anything but what I'm doing."

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the push toward personal success dominates American life now more than it used to?

MILLER

I think it's far more powerful today than when I wrote *Death of a Salesman*. I think it's closer to a madness today than it was then. Now there's no perspective on it at all.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say that the girl in *After the Fall* is a symbol of that obsession?

MILLER

Yes, she is consumed by what she does, and instead of it being a means of release, it's a jail. A prison which defines her, finally. She can't break through. In other words, success, instead of giving freedom of choice, becomes a way of life. There's no country I've been to where people, when you come into a room and sit down with them, so often ask you, "What do you do?" And, being American, many's the time I've almost asked that question, then realized it's good for my soul not to know. For a while! Just to let the evening wear on and see what I think of this person without knowing what he does and how successful he is, or what a failure. We're *ranking* everybody every minute of the day.

INTERVIEWER

Will you write about American success again?

MILLER

I might, but you see, as a thing in itself, success is self-satirizing; it's self-elucidating, in a way. That's why it's so difficult to write about. Because the very people who are being swallowed up by this ethos nod in agreement when you tell them, "You are being

swallowed up by this thing.” To really wrench them and find them another feasible perspective is therefore extremely difficult.

INTERVIEWER

In your story “The Prophecy,” the protagonist says this is a time of the supremacy of personal relations, that there are no larger aims in our lives. Is this your view too?

MILLER

Well, that story was written under the pall of the fifties, but I think there’s been a terrific politicalization of the people these past four or five years. Not in the old sense, but in the sense that it is no longer gauche or stupid to be interested in the fate of society and in injustice and in race problems and the rest of it. It now becomes aesthetic material once again. In the fifties it was *out* to mention this. It meant you were really not an artist. That prejudice seems to have gone. The Negroes broke it up, thank God! But it has been an era of personal relations—and now it’s being synthesized in a good way. That is, the closer you get to any kind of political action among young people, the more they demand that the action have a certain fidelity to human nature, and that pomposity, and posing, and role-taking not be allowed to strip the movement of its veracity. What they suspect most is gesturing, you know, just making gestures, which are either futile, or self-serving, or merely conscientious. The intense personal-relations concentration of the fifties seems now to have been joined to a political consciousness, which is terrific.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel politics in any way to be an invasion of your privacy?

MILLER

No, I always drew a lot of inspiration from politics, from one or another kind of national struggle. You live in the world even though you only vote once in a while. It determines the extensions

of your personality. I lived through the McCarthy time, when one saw personalities shifting and changing before one's eyes, as a direct, obvious result of a political situation. And had it gone on, we would have gotten a whole new American personality—which in part we have. It's ten years since McCarthy died, and it's only now that powerful senators dare to suggest that it might be wise to learn a little Chinese, to talk to some Chinese. I mean, it took ten years, and even those guys who are thought to be quite brave and courageous just now dare to make these suggestions. Such a pall of fright was laid upon us that it truly deflected the American mind. It's part of a paranoia which we haven't escaped yet. Good God, people still give their lives for it; look what we're doing in the Pacific.

INTERVIEWER

Yet so much of the theater these last few years has had nothing to do with public life.

MILLER

Yes, it's got so we've lost the technique of grappling with the world that Homer had, that Aeschylus had, that Euripides had. And Shakespeare. How amazing it is that people who adore the Greek drama fail to see that these great works are works of a man confronting his society, the illusions of the society, the faiths of the society. They're social documents, not little piddling private conversations. We just got educated into thinking this is all "a story," a myth for its own sake.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there'll be a return to social drama now?

MILLER

I think there will be, if theater is to survive. Look at Molière. You can't conceive of him except as a social playwright. He's a social critic. Bathes up to his neck in what's going on around him.

INTERVIEWER

Could the strict forms utilized by Molière appear again?

MILLER

I don't think one can repeat old forms as such, because they express most densely a moment of time. For example, I couldn't write a play like *Death of a Salesman* anymore. I couldn't really write any of my plays now. Each is different, spaced sometimes two years apart, because each moment called for a different vocabulary and a different organization of the material. However, when you speak of a strict form, I believe in it for the theater. Otherwise you end up with anecdotes, not with plays. We're in an era of anecdotes, in my opinion, which is going to pass any minute. The audience has been trained to eschew the organized climax because it's corny, or because it violates the chaos which we all revere. But I think that's going to disappear with the first play of a new kind which will once again pound the boards and shake people out of their seats with a deeply, intensely organized climax. It can only come from a strict form: you can't get it except as the culmination of two hours of development. You can't get it by raising your voice and yelling, suddenly—because it's getting time to get on the train for Yonkers.

INTERVIEWER

Have you any conception of what your own evolution has been? In terms of form and themes?

MILLER

I keep going. Both forward and backward. Hopefully, more forward than backward. That is to say, before I wrote my first *successful* play, I wrote, oh, I don't know, maybe fourteen or fifteen other full-length plays and maybe thirty radio plays. The majority of them were nonrealistic plays. They were metaphorical plays, or symbolic plays; some of them were in verse, or in one case—writing

about Montezuma—I turned out a grand historical tragedy, partly in verse, rather Elizabethan in form. Then I began to be known really by virtue of the single play I had ever tried to do in completely realistic Ibsen-like form, which was *All My Sons*. The fortunes of a writer! The others, like *Salesman*, which are a compound of expressionism and realism, or even *A View from the Bridge*, which is realism of a sort (though it's broken up severely), are more typical of the bulk of the work I've done. *After the Fall* is really down the middle, it's more like most of the work I've done than any other play—excepting that what has *surfaced* has been more realistic than in the others. It's really an impressionistic kind of a work. I was trying to create a total by throwing many small pieces at the spectator.

INTERVIEWER

What production of *After the Fall* do you think did it the most justice?

MILLER

I saw one production which I thought was quite marvelous. That was the one Zeffirelli did in Italy. He understood that this was a play which reflected the world as one man saw it. Through the play the mounting awareness of this man was the issue, and as it approached agony the audience was to be enlarged in its consciousness of what was happening. The other productions that I've seen have all been really *realistic* in the worst sense. That is to say, they simply played the scenes without any attempt to allow the main character to develop this widened awareness. He has different reactions on page ten than he does on page one, but it takes an actor with a certain amount of brains to see that evolution. It isn't enough to feel them. And as a director, Zeffirelli had an absolutely organic viewpoint toward it. The play is about someone desperately striving to obtain a viewpoint.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel in the New York production that the girl allegedly based on Marilyn Monroe was out of proportion, entirely separate from Quentin?

MILLER

Yes, although I failed to foresee it myself. In the Italian production this never happened; it was always in proportion. I suppose, too, that by the time Zeffirelli did the play, the publicity shock had been absorbed, so that one could watch Quentin's evolution without being distracted.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think happened in New York?

MILLER

Something I never thought could happen. The play was never judged as a play at all. Good or bad, I would never know what it was from what I read about it, only what it was supposed to have been.

INTERVIEWER

Because they all reacted as if it were simply a segment of your personal life?

MILLER

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think contemporary American critics tend to regard the theater in terms of literature rather than theater?

MILLER

Yes, for years theatrical criticism was carried on mainly by reporters. Reporters who, by and large, had no references in the

aesthetic theories of the drama, except in the most rudimentary way. And off in a corner, somewhere, the professors, with no relation whatsoever to the newspaper critics, were regarding the drama from a so-called academic viewpoint—with its relentless standards of tragedy, and so forth. What the reporters had very often was a simple, primitive love of a good show. And if nothing else, you could tell whether that level of mind was genuinely interested or not. There was a certain naïveté in the reportage. They could destroy plays which dealt on a level of sensibility that was beyond them. But by and large, you got a playback on what you put in. They knew how to laugh, cry, at least a native kind of reaction, stamp their feet—they loved the theater. Since then, the reporter-critics have been largely displaced by academic critics or graduates of that school. Quite frankly, two-thirds of the time I don't know what they really feel about the play. They seem to feel that the theater is an intrusion on literature. The theater as theater—as a place where people go to be swept up in some new experience—seems to antagonize them. I don't think we can really do away with *joy*: the joy of being distracted altogether in the service of some aesthetic. That seems to be the general drift, but it won't work: sooner or later the theater outwits everybody. Someone comes in who just loves to write, or to act, and who'll sweep the audience, and the critics, with him.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think these critics influence playwrights?

MILLER

Everything influences playwrights. A playwright who isn't influenced is never of any use. He's the litmus paper of the arts. He's got to be, because if he isn't working on the same wavelength as the audience, no one would know what in hell he was talking about. He is a kind of psychic journalist, even when he's great; consequently, for him the total atmosphere is more important in this art than it is probably in any other.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of certain critics' statement that the success of a really contemporary play, like *Marat/Sade*, makes Tennessee Williams and his genre obsolete?

MILLER

Ridiculous. No more than that Tennessee's remarkable success made obsolete the past before him. There are some biological laws in the theater which can't be violated. It should not be made into an activated chess game. You can't have a theater based upon anything other than a mass audience if it's going to succeed. The larger the better. It's the law of the theater. In the Greek audience fourteen thousand people sat down at the same time, to see a play. Fourteen thousand people! And nobody can tell me that those people were all readers of the *New York Review of Books*! Even Shakespeare was smashed around in his time by university people. I think for much the same reasons—because he was reaching for those parts of man's makeup which respond to melodrama, broad comedy, violence, dirty words, and blood. Plenty of blood, murder—and not very well-motivated at that.

INTERVIEWER

What is your feeling about Eugene O'Neill as a playwright?

MILLER

O'Neill never meant much to me when I was starting. In the thirties, and for the most part in the forties, you would have said that he was a finished figure. He was not a force any more. *The Iceman Cometh* and *The Long Day's Journey into Night*, so popular a few years ago, would not have been successful when they were written. Which is another example of the psychic journalism of the stage. A great deal depends upon when a play is produced. That's why playwriting is such a fatal profession to take up. You can have everything, but if you don't have that sense of timing, nothing happens. One thing I always respected about O'Neill was his insistence on his vision. That is, even when he was

twisting materials to distortion and really ruining his work, there was an image behind it of a possessed individual, who, for good or ill, was himself.

I don't think there is anything in it for a young man to learn technically; that was probably why I wasn't interested in it. He had one virtue which is not technical, it's what I call "drumming"; he repeats something up to and past the point where you say, "I know this, I've heard this ninety-three different ways," and suddenly you realize you are being swept up in something that you thought you understood and he has drummed you over the horizon into a new perception. He doesn't care if he's repeating. It's part of his insensitivity. He's a very insensitive writer. There's no finesse at all: he's the Dreiser of the stage. He writes with heavy pencils. His virtue is that he insists on his climax, and not the one you would want to put there. His failing is that so many of his plays are so distorted that one no longer knows on what level to receive them. His people are not symbolic; his lines are certainly not verse; the prose is not realistic—his is the never-never land of a quasi-Strindberg writer. But where he's wonderful, it's superb. The last play is really a masterpiece.

But, to give you an example of timing: *The Iceman Cometh* opened, it happened, the same year that *All My Sons* opened. It's an interesting sociological phenomenon. That was in '47, soon after the war. There was still in the air a certain hopefulness about the organization of the world. There was no depression in the United States. McCarthyism had not yet started. There was a kind of . . . one could almost speak of it as an atmosphere of goodwill, if such a term can be used in the twentieth century. Then a play comes along which posits a world *really* filled with disasters of one kind or another. A cul-de-sac is described, a bag with no way out. At that time it didn't corroborate what people had experienced. It corroborated what they were *going* to experience, and pretty soon after, it became very timely. We moved into the bag that he had gotten into first!

But at the time it opened, nobody went to see *Iceman*. In a big way, nobody went. Even after it was cut, the thing took four or five hours to play. The production was simply dreadful. But nobody made any note that it was dreadful. Nobody perceived what this play was. It was described simply as the work of a sick old man of whom everybody said, “Isn’t it wonderful that he can still spell?” When I went to see that play not long after it opened, there must have been thirty people in the audience. I think there were a dozen people left by the end of the play. It was quite obviously a great piece of work which was being mangled on the stage. It was obvious to me. And to a certain number of directors who saw it. Not all of them. Not all directors can tell the difference between the production and the play. I can’t do it all the time, either, though *Iceman* was one where I could. But as for the critics I don’t think there is anybody alive today, with the possible exception of Harold Clurman, whom I would trust to know the difference between production and play. Harold can do it—not always, but a lot of the time—because he has directed a good deal.

INTERVIEWER

Could this question of timing have affected the reaction here to *After the Fall*?

MILLER

Look, *After the Fall* would have been altogether different if by some means the hero was killed, or shot himself. Then we would have been in business. I knew it at the time. As I was saying before, there’s nothing like death. Still, I just wasn’t going to do it. The ironic thing to me was that I heard cries of indignation from various people who had in the lifetime of Marilyn Monroe either exploited her unmercifully, in a way that would have subjected them to peonage laws, or mocked her viciously, or refused to take any of her pretensions seriously. So consequently, it was impossible to credit their sincerity.

INTERVIEWER

They were letting you get them off the hook.

MILLER

That's right. That's exactly right.

INTERVIEWER

And they didn't want Quentin to compromise.

MILLER

I think Günter Grass recently has said that art is uncompromising and life is full of compromises. To bring them together is a near impossibility, and that is what I was trying to do. I was trying to make it as much like life as it could possibly be and as excruciating—so the relief that we want would not be there: I denied the audience the relief. And of course all these hard realists betrayed their basic romanticism by their reaction.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think if you had done it in poetry that would have removed the threat more?

MILLER

Yes, I suppose so. But I didn't want to remove it. It would have seduced people in a way I didn't want to. Look, I know how to make 'em go with me—it's the first instinct of a writer who succeeds in the theater at all. I mean by the time you've written your third play or so you know which buttons to push; if you want an easy success there's no problem that way once you've gotten a story. People are pretty primitive—they really want the thing to turn out all right. After all, for a century and a half *King Lear* was played in England with a happy ending. I wrote a radio play about the boy who wrote that version—William Ireland—who forged Shakespeare's plays, and edited *King Lear* so that it conformed to a middle-class view of life. They thought, including all but Malone,

who was the first good critic, that this was the real Shakespeare. He was an expert forger. He fixed up several of the other plays, but this one he really rewrote. He was seventeen years old. And they produced it—it was a big success—and Boswell thought it was the greatest thing he'd ever seen, and so did all the others. The only one was Malone, who on the basis of textual impossibilities—aside from the fact that he sensed it was a bowdlerization—proved that it couldn't have been Shakespeare. It's what I was talking about before: the litmus paper of the playwright: you see, Ireland sensed quite correctly what these people really wanted from *King Lear*, and he gave it to them. He sentimentalized it; took out any noxious references.

INTERVIEWER

And did it end with a happy family reunion?

MILLER

Yes, kind of like a Jewish melodrama. A family play.

INTERVIEWER

To go back to *After the Fall*, did the style in which this play was presented in New York affect its reception?

MILLER

Well, you've hit it right on the head. You see, what happened in Italy with Zeffirelli was—I can describe it very simply: there was a stage made up of steel frames; it is as though one were looking into the back of a bellows camera—you know, concentric oblong steel frames receding toward a center. The sides of these steel frames were covered, just like a camera is, but the actors could enter through openings in these covers. They could appear or disappear on the stage at any depth. Furthermore, pneumatic lifts silently and invisibly raised the actors up, so that they could appear for ten seconds—then disappear. Or a table would be raised or a whole group of furniture, which the actors would then use. So that

the whole image of all this happening inside a man's head was there from the first second, and remained right through the play. In New York the difficulty was partly due to the stage which was open, rounded. Such a stage has virtues for certain kinds of plays, but it is stiff—there is no place to hide at all. If an actor has to *appear* stage center, he makes his appearance twenty feet off the left or right. The laborious nature of these entrances and exits is insuperable. What is supposed to “appear” doesn't appear, but lumbers onstage toward you.

INTERVIEWER

Did that Italian production have a concentration camp in the background? I remember a piece by Jonathan Miller complaining of your use of the concentration camp in New York.

MILLER

Oh yes. You see in Italy the steel frame itself *became* the concentration camp, so that the whole play in effect was taking place in the *ambiance* of that enclosure. This steel turned into a jail, into a prison, into a camp, into a constricted mechanical environment. You could light those girders in such a way that they were forbidding—it was a great scenic idea.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you choose to use a concentration camp in the first place?

MILLER

Well, I have always felt that concentration camps, though they're a phenomenon of totalitarian states, are also the logical conclusion of contemporary life. If you complain of people being shot down in the streets, of the absence of communication or social responsibility, of the rise of everyday violence which people have become accustomed to, and the dehumanization of feelings, then the ultimate development on an organized social level is the

concentration camp. Camps didn't happen in Africa where people had no connection with the basic development of Western civilization. They happened in the heart of Europe, in a country, for example, which was probably less anti-Semitic than other countries, like France. The Dreyfus case did not happen in Germany. In this play the question is, what is there between people that is indestructible? The concentration camp is the final expression of human separateness and its ultimate consequence. It is organized abandonment . . . one of the prime themes of *After the Fall*.

Even in *Salesman* what's driving Willy nuts is that he's trying to establish a connection, in his case, with the world of power; he is trying to say that if you behave in a certain way, you'll end up in the catbird seat. That's your connection; then life is no longer dangerous, you see. You are safe from abandonment.

INTERVIEWER

What is the genesis of *The Crucible*?

MILLER

I thought of it first when I was at Michigan. I read a lot about the Salem witch trials at that time. Then when the McCarthy era came along, I remembered these stories and I used to tell them to people when it started. I had no idea that it was going to go as far as it went. I used to say, you know, McCarthy is actually saying certain lines that I recall the witch-hunters saying in Salem. So I started to go back, not with the idea of writing a play, but to refresh my own mind because it was getting eerie. For example, his holding up his hand with cards in it, saying, "I have in my hand the names of so-and-so." Well, this was a standard tactic of seventeenth-century prosecutors confronting a witness who was reluctant or confused, or an audience in a church which was not quite convinced that this particular individual might be guilty. He wouldn't say, "I have in my hand a list"; he'd say, "We possess the names of all these people who are guilty. But the time has not come yet to release them." He had nothing at all—he simply wanted to

secure in the town's mind the idea that he saw everything, that everyone was transparent to him. It was a way of inflicting guilt on everybody, and many people responded genuinely out of guilt; some would come and tell him some fantasy, or something that they had done or thought that was evil in their minds. I had in my play, for example, the old man who comes and reports that when his wife reads certain books, *he* can't pray. He figures that the prosecutors would know the reason, that they can see through what to him was an opaque glass. Of course he ends up in a disaster because they prosecuted his wife. Many times completely naive testimony resulted in somebody being hanged. And it was because they originally said, "We really know what's going on."

INTERVIEWER

Was it the play, *The Crucible* itself, do you think, or was it perhaps that piece you did in the *Nation*—"A Modest Proposal"—that focused the Un-American Activities Committee on you?

MILLER

Well, I had made a lot of statements and I had signed a great many petitions. I'd been involved in organizations, you know, putting my name down for fifteen years before that. But I don't think they ever would have bothered me if I hadn't married Marilyn. Had they been interested, they would have called me earlier. And, in fact, I was told on good authority that the then chairman, Francis Walter, said that if Marilyn would take a photograph with him, shaking his hand, he would call off the whole thing. It's as simple as that. Marilyn would get them on the front pages right away. They had been on the front page for years, but the issue was starting to lose its punch. They ended up in the back of the paper or on the inside pages, and here they would get right up front again. These men would time hearings to meet a certain day's newspaper. In other words, if they figured the astronauts were going up, let's say, they wouldn't have a hearing that week; they'd wait until they'd returned and things had quieted down.

INTERVIEWER

What happened at the committee hearing?

MILLER

Well, I was indicted for contempt for having refused to give or confirm the name of a writer, whether I had seen him in a meeting of communist writers I had attended some eight or ten years earlier. My legal defense was not on any of the Constitutional amendments but on the contention that Congress couldn't drag people in and question them about anything on the Congressman's mind; they had to show that the witness was likely to have information relevant to some legislation then at issue. The committee had put on a show of interest in passport legislation. I had been denied a passport a couple of years earlier. Ergo, I fitted into their vise. A year later I was convicted after a week's trial. Then about a year after that the Court of Appeals threw out the whole thing. A short while later the committee's chief counsel, who had been my interrogator, was shown to be on the payroll of a racist foundation and was retired to private life. It was all a dreadful waste of time and money and anger, but I suffered very little, really, compared to others who were driven out of their professions and never got back, or who did get back after eight and ten years of blacklisting. I wasn't in TV or movies, so I could still function.

INTERVIEWER

Have your political views changed much since then?

MILLER

Nowadays I'm certainly not ready to advocate a tightly organized planned economy. I think it has its virtues, but I'm in deadly fear of people with too much power. I don't trust people that much any more. I used to think that if people had the right idea they could make things move accordingly. Now it's a day-to-day fight to stop dreadful things from happening. In the thirties it was, for me, inconceivable that a socialist government could be really

anti-Semitic. It just could not happen, because their whole protest in the beginning was against anti-Semitism, against racism, against this kind of inhumanity; that's why I was drawn to it. It was accounted to Hitler; it was accounted to blind capitalism. I'm much more pragmatic about such things now, and I want to know those I'm against and who it is that I'm backing and what he is like.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel whatever Jewish tradition you were brought up in has influenced you at all?

MILLER

I never used to, but I think now that, while I hadn't taken over an ideology, I did absorb a certain viewpoint. That there is tragedy in the world but that the world must continue: one is a condition for the other. Jews can't afford to revel too much in the tragic because it might overwhelm them. Consequently, in most Jewish writing there's always the caution, "Don't push it too far toward the abyss, because you're liable to fall in." I think it's part of that psychology and it's part of me, too. I have, so to speak, a psychic investment in the continuity of life. I couldn't ever write a totally nihilistic work.

INTERVIEWER

Would you care to say anything about what you're working on now?

MILLER

I'd better not. I do have about five things started—short stories, a screenplay, et cetera. I'm in the process of collecting my short stories. But I tell myself, What am I doing. I should be doing a play. I have a calendar in my head. You see, the theater season starts in September, and I have always written plays in the summertime. Almost always—I did write *View from the Bridge* in the winter. So, quite frankly, I can't say. I have some interesting

beginnings, but I can't see the end of any of them. It's usually that way: I plan something for weeks or months and suddenly begin writing dialogue which begins in relation to what I had planned and veers off into something I hadn't even thought about. I'm drawing down the lightning, I suppose. Somewhere in the blood you have a play, and you wait until it passes behind the eyes. I'm further along than that, but I'd rather leave it at that for now.

