

at play

LOOKING BACK ON 80 YEARS FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

The summer of 1936 was the hottest ever on record, and during those sweltering days and nights a small group of playwrights and dramatic literary agents worked secretly to form a new company, intended to inject much-needed competition into the monopolized world of theatrical licensing.

This unique coalition of playwrights and literary agents hammered out an agreement which was intended to be the basis for a new company; a company which would, at its core, be in service to the playwright. Thus, Dramatists Play Service was born.

Nearly every prominent playwright of the era entrusted the Play Service with his or her plays, handing their plays over to the fledgling organization for no advance payments. George Abbott, Maxwell Anderson, Rachel Crothers, Russel Crouse, Edna Ferber, Moss Hart, Lillian Hellman, DuBose Heyward, George S. Kaufman, Clifford Odets, and Eugene O'Neill are just some of the legendary names who helped set DPS on its way.

Throughout its history the Play Service continued to be uniquely positioned as a company that, foremost, served playwrights and bolstered the industry's agents — and the agents, of course, are driven by their clients, the playwrights. Today, DPS's Board of Directors consists of four writers (Donald Margulies, Lynn Nottage, Polly Pen, and John Patrick Shanley) and four agents (Joyce Ketay, Mary Harden, Jonathan Lomma, and Patrick Herold).



The cooperation which was demonstrated by those visionaries back in 1936 — yes, I think it's appropriate to call them that — is something which I think all of us in the theatrical community can aspire to today. Theatre has always been a cooperative venture, on both the creative side and the business side. If the playwright, director, designers, and actors don't see eye to eye, you're going to have a disaster on opening night. If the agent can't make a deal with the producer, the show's not going to go on.

As the Play Service enters its ninth decade, I believe it's important that the company founded to nurture and protect playwrights upholds its original goals. I believe that there are areas where DPS can work in a productive, creative way to locate gaps in the needs of the nation's dramatists and to fill those gaps.

One role that DPS has taken seriously for many years is to foster younger playwrights, as well as those from diverse backgrounds. We are as extraordinarily proud to publish emerging playwrights as we are to publish the great icons of the American theatre. In these first years of my presidency, we have acquired incredible plays by writers such as Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Stefanie Zdravec, Yussef El Guindi, Melissa James Gibson, Alena Smith, Lucas Hnath, Rajiv Joseph, Quiara Alegria Hudes, Jeff Augustin, and Melissa Ross, as well as continuing to publish plays by indomitable dramatists in our catalogue like Terrence McNally, A.R. Gurney, Douglas Carter Beane, Lynn Nottage, Richard Greenberg, Stephen Adly Guirgis, and Anna Deavere Smith.

When I was a high school student in Alexandria, Virginia, and dreaming of a life in the theatre in New York, I had a teacher who took pity on me and got me plays that I couldn't find in the library. He ordered the plays from DPS. I remember the excitement of receiving those distinctive Acting Editions. That excitement of receiving a new Acting Edition is something I know still happens all over the country, and the world. People will always be hungry to see and read plays, and to write them, direct them, and perform them. It's humbling and thrilling to me to know that I'm now part of an organization which exists to serve that need — and that was indeed created specifically to nurture the art of playwriting.

Peter Hagan, President



THE POLITICS OF ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller

by Haleh Roshan Stilwell

'Tis the season of Arthur Miller.

Fall of 2015 marked the hundredth-year anniversary of his birth (and is the decade anniversary of his death); January 22nd, 2016 was the 60th anniversary of the premiere of *The Crucible*; the 2015–2016 Broadway season mounts two of his plays, *A View from the Bridge* and *The Crucible*, both directed by Belgian director-auteur Ivo van Hove; Signature Theatre revived Miller's *Incident at Vichy*; and articles expounding the playwright's place in the canon have appeared in the arts journal mainstays.

The contemporary consensus on Arthur Miller (with a few notable exceptions from a few notable dramatists) is that his plays are good despite his overt politics, or that his politics are interesting as an examination of historical forces in America but irrelevant in today's globalized socioeconomics. When Mike Nichols' revelatory revival of *Death of a Salesman* opened on Broadway in 2012, Lee Siegel wrote in an op-ed for *The New York Times* that, "... I wondered why the play was revived at all. While [the play] has consolidated its prestige as an exposure of middle-class delusions, the American middle class — as a social reality and a set of admirable values — has nearly ceased to exist. ... Mr. Miller's outrage at a capitalist system he wanted to humanize has become our cynical adaptation to a capitalist system we pride ourselves on knowing how to manipulate." *The Crucible* is studied in AP English classes as a commentary on McCarthyism (a term that Miller himself often qualified by reminding interviewers that "there were many McCarthys"). While it's indisputable that polemicizing the Second Red Scare was foremost on Miller's agenda in writing *The Crucible*, approaching the play from the perspective of a single historical moment calcifies the play's meaning in the past, distancing it from the very thing that makes Miller an unparalleled American dramatist: his insight into the relationships between American citizens and American societal structures.

Most iconic American dramas are almost all in some way political. By "political" I mean that the actual politics of their days infused the creation of the dramas with messages that, even if lost on a 2016 audience or erased over decades of directorial "concepts" (or, more invasively, film adaptations supplanting the cultural conception of what a play is about), contributed to the initial and/or enduring success of the play. *The Iceman Cometh*, perhaps the most touted "psychological" (as opposed to political) play, germinates in the Great Depression and the subsequent New Deal policies of O'Neill's time. Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, the quintessential interior-life play, opens his memory-world to us against the backdrop of "In Spain there was revolution ... there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labor, sometimes pretty violent ..." The astonishing lyricism of Tom's speech is in part so dazzling because it recalls the horrific, very real events occurring in the world at the moment of the evening's ethereal dinner.

Each of these canonical dramas and their dramatists questions what it is to be alive and to be American in their work, but Miller is arguably the only one who wrote to not merely question but to take the answers, as he found them, and to demand more from America. Miller writes towards a utopia. Miller's America, as profoundly unjust as he finds it in daily life, and in the daily lives of his characters, is not a lost cause. America retains its potential for becoming the inclusive democracy it was founded to be, yet never has been. More than any other American

AN ENEMY OF
THE PEOPLE

THE PRICE
BY ARTHUR MILLER

AFTER
THE FALL
BY ARTHUR MILLER

ALL MY SONS
A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS
BY ARTHUR MILLER

THE
CRUCIBLE
BY ARTHUR MILLER

BY ARTHUR MILLER

dramatist, Arthur Miller mines individual velleity for its root in social forces. He directs light into the shadowed cave of the economic ideologies, the jurisprudence, and the classist/racial hierarchies that affect each of us on a daily basis, and whose destructive effects have shaped modernity. For Miller, examining these forces was not a political position but the most *human* perspective possible.

His protagonists are conflicted men, to be sure; often from these men and their internal turmoil springs the chaos that drives the drama, that wrecks their worlds. John Proctor sets Abigail's terrorizing in motion by promising her something he knows he will not give. Joe Keller in *All My Sons* had several opportunities to preempt tragedy and in each moment chose to remain silent for his own (financial) protection. Internal struggle against external circumstance is the basic construction of great tragedy; unlike in Greek drama, however, or Shakespeare, these characters' internal struggle is not Miller's interest. For Miller, the conflict is utterly false: These characters have allowed a corrupted society to shape their worldview, and therefore their deontology, however emotionally and materially damaging, is merely the corruption being resisted by their conscience — or, by their humanity. Society's casual disregard for the individual has created complacent, and complicit, men, who appear to function properly in their communities, and indeed believe in their own rightness of abilities and social standing. But such functioning, Miller shows us, does not mean they are successful. To function well

in a fundamentally unjust social order is to be blind to injustice. The great tragedy of Willy Loman is that he will not and cannot see the dissolution of his own functioning, put upon him by the socioeconomic structure to which he is no longer a productive (money-earning) laborer.

Positioned against the protagonist's ambivalence is another character, a secondary player, who observes brutality unleashed and cuts the righteous swath through it. This character bears witness in the background, watching his comrades or loved ones stagger under the socio-political forces. These characters, too, are trapped by the dehumanizing system, but they recognize such a system is created by men. They understand the damage is not divine but mortal, oppression of men by other men. It is not, in other words, out of anyone's hands. It has been made by human hands and must be resisted by human hands, if only by their own. And when, for the protagonist and the audience alike, there is no more time for conflicted reflection, no more space for attempts at individual

maneuvering or mobility, when what has been done can't be undone and has, in its doing, destroyed lives, this character ascends to mete out whatever justice is left to be salvaged from the maelstrom. One thinks of Marco in *A View from the Bridge*, himself and his family the victims of Eddie's last desperate ploy to keep Catherine from marrying Rodolpho: "All the law is not in



a book." Or Leduc in *Incident at Vichy*, responding to the Austrian prince's protest that he harbors no secret hatred for Jews: "Jew is only the name we give to that stranger ... you must see that you have yours — the man whose death leaves you relieved that you are not him, despite your decency. And that

is why there is nothing and will be nothing — until you face your own complicity with this ...". Or Giles Corey's final refusal to participate in the witch hunt that has claimed so many lives already: As the kangaroo court crushes his body with heavy

stones — punishment that stops if he will only comply and testify to the charges of witchcraft — Corey cries only, "More weight!" Or Linda Loman's inimitable speech, "He's a human being and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid."

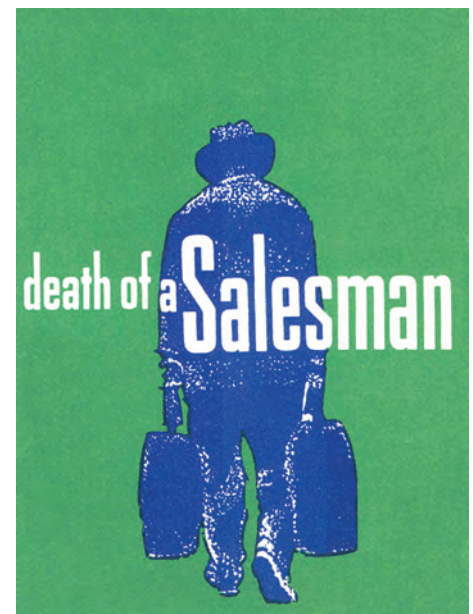
A feminine aside: While they rarely receive the critical attention bestowed on the disintegrating patriarchs or belligerent brothers, Miller's women are that rare female specimen onstage — real people. With the men positioned by the author as dramaturgical polemic, the women are free to be their own selves. They are astonishingly astute — think of Linda Loman's profound empathy for her husband, while remaining the sole character who sees the socioeconomic mechanisms at play in his plight. Catherine and Bea in *A View from the Bridge* are independent sexual agents, the one newly awakening to her erotic power and the other expecting sexual fulfillment from her husband. Their agency flagellates Eddie Carbone's machismo

demand to be revered; sexual attraction is his perversity, not Catherine's. Abigail is desiring, loving, curious, rebellious, cunning; Goody Proctor is both pious and jealous. Maggie is flighty and silly, yet knows precisely what the world, and Quentin, is trying to beat her into being. In short, these women are real women, trapped in a world not of their making that they nonetheless bear the emotional brunt of, a world of men-children playing out their inchoate desires and living by convoluted ideas of truth, success, happiness, justice.

In a later-life interview, Arthur Miller recounts attending the unveiling ceremony of a monument to those hanged as witches in Salem. Miller recalls that at the event's press conference, "[there] were all the big newspapers and wire services, and I realized in talking to them, they kept

referring to [the deceased] as 'witches.' The idea being that you shouldn't hang witches, you shouldn't kill witches ... And I said, 'Hey, wait a minute. These people weren't witches.' There was a dead silence came. I said, 'These were innocent political victims of a manufactured holocaust ...'

HE DIRECTS LIGHT into the shadowed cave of the economic ideologies, the jurisprudence, and the classist / racial hierarchies that affect each of us on a daily basis.



So you see, this is not a phenomenon from 1692, or 1952 ... It is *right now*."

As across America the discourse of what kind of society we are and how to best continue our own becoming escalates beyond cacophonous chaos into calamity (and, perhaps, insanity), the incisiveness of Miller's political, moral compass is an imperative antidote. His plays inform us all how to best be an American citizen: to demand, even as our own bodies are crushed with the pressure of resisting injustice, more weight.



DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE

**440 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016**

**Phone 212-683-8960
Fax 212-213-1539**

**www.dramatists.com
postmaster@dramatists.com**



The Anniversary Collection

This year, Dramatists Play Service celebrates its 80th Anniversary!

To mark the occasion, we'll be offering a special Anniversary Collection:
A limited edition of definitive titles from each decade in our company's history, with
introductions by prominent theater professionals written just for this collection!

1936–1946 ★ **YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU** by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman

1946–1956 ★ **THE CRUCIBLE** by Arthur Miller

1956–1966 ★ **CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF** by Tennessee Williams

1966–1976 ★ **THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARIGOLDS** by Paul Zindel

1976–1986 ★ **CRIMES OF THE HEART** by Beth Henley

1986–1996 ★ **SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION** by John Guare

1996–2006 ★ **INTIMATE APPAREL** by Lynn Nottage

2006–2016 ★ **ALMOST, MAINE** by John Cariani



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