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Arthur Miller and the Rhetoric of Ethnic Self-Expression

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This paper uses some key scholarship on ethnicity, including work by Glazer, Moynihan, Sollors, and Hollinger, as a backdrop for re-examining specific plays by Arthur Miller, especially *The Crucible* and *After the Fall*. While looking closely at distinctive expressions of ethnicity related to Miller's Jewish-American status, the paper argues that the playwright should not be thought of as a "pluralist" or "cosmopolitanist" but rather as a "universalist." Miller deserves distinctive credit for his ability to invoke situations where rhetoric transcends the particularities of ethnicity and sheds light not just on American, or Jewish, or Jewish-American history, but also, for example, on the current situation in the Middle East. The playwright also demonstrates how rigid identification with one side of a conflict can blind us to the omnipresence of evil.

In spite of Arthur Miller's frank declaration in 1995 when accepting a Jewish Cultural Achievement Award – "I don't write characters that have a sign on them saying 'Jew'" – it has become more and more fashionable to insist that understanding of the playwright's work has to take into account his Jewish origins.[1] Thus in a recent sourcebook devoted to Jewish-American dramatists and poets Benjamin Nelson examines "the Jew in Miller [that] has continued to inform his work," and in a major new collection of essays devoted to American drama Murray Biggs entitles his contribution "The Jewishness of Arthur Miller."[2] Now even Miller's fellow Jewish-American playwright, David Mamet, has jumped on this bandwagon by putting Miller

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[1] The quotation from Miller's acceptance speech is from Ellen Schiff, Introduction to Joel Shatzky and Michael Taub, eds., *Contemporary Jewish-American Dramatists and Poets: A Bio-critical Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 4.

[2] Benjamin Nelson, "Arthur Miller," in Shatzky and Taub, 141–58; and Murray Biggs, "The American Jewishness of Arthur Miller," in David Krasner, ed., *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 209–28.

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in a group with other second-generation Jewish-American writers like Clifford Odets and Sidney Kingsley and by insisting that *Death of a Salesman* in particular is "most definitely a Jewish play."[3]

Here I intend to read some of Miller's best-known plays in relation to recent literary scholarship that problematizes attempts to link works of literature, including dramatic literature, to specific ethnic origins. This approach questions the purity of ethnically specific literature and maintains that American literature in particular should be thought of not as a product of mononationalism, but as containing "many 'other-national' strands," for it is saturated in what Homi Bhabha calls "cultural hybridity."[4]

Richard A. Siegel, the executive director of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, likens the position of a Jewish-American to that of someone standing on a hyphen. If this person happens to be a Jewish-American playwright, then, his or her plays will inevitably be shaped by what lies on both sides of the hyphen, bearing traces of both that which is distinctively Jewish and that which is distinctively American. Siegel argues that "not every play written by an American Jew is Jewish." The litmus test is the answer to the question, "Did the [American] playwright intend, either unconsciously or consciously, to draw from the wealth of the Jewish experience in order to reveal a contemporary truth?" If the answer is "yes" then Siegel has "no problem calling it a Jewish-American play."[5] Similarly, Schiff defines Jewish-American theatre as consisting of plays that "bring to the stage some aspect of the Jewish experience and are written in English, usually by Jews, for the general theater-going public."[6] Plays are Jewish or non-Jewish, then, according to subject matter rather than the author's ethnicity. It is possible both for non-Jews to write "Jewish" plays (Schiff) and for Jews to write non-Jewish plays (Siegel). For both Schiff and Siegel, to be labeled "Jewish" plays have to embody "Jewish experience."

[3] David Mamet, "The Human Stain," *Guardian*, 7 May 2005: Review Sec., 13. Mamet's comments were made at the time of a new fresh and invigorating production of *Death of a Salesman* in London following a long run at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago. Produced by Robert Falls, the production stars Brian Dennehy and Clare Higgins.

[4] On the movement away from thinking of literature in terms of mononationalism toward seeing within one nation's literature "'other-national' strands" see Marjorie Perloff, "'Living in the Same Place': The Old Mononationalism and the New Comparative Literature," *World Literature Today*, 69, 2 (Spring 1995), 249–56.

[5] Richard A Siegel, "American-Jewish Theater: Standing on the Hyphen," Jewish Spaces in European Theatre, European Performing Arts Forum, Prague, 14–16 June 2003, Section IV: The Politics of Representation and Theatre. Available on line at http://www.jewishcultureineurope.org/theatre_papers_session_4_hyphen.htm.

[6] Schiff, 3.

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First as a catalyst for (re)reading some of Miller's most esteemed plays – *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), and *After the Fall* (1964), I will consult scholars of ethnicity. Their insights may help me to see how Miller may or may not adopt a position in relation to what I am calling "the rhetoric of ethnic self-expression."

The principle thesis of Glazer and Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963) is simple and idealistic: one day, rather than encouraging inflexible boundaries, all the various ethnicities in American society would fuse and blend together and embrace their "new" identity as Americans. Of course this prediction has proved itself to be far from accurate, and it has often been suggested that the "melting pot" turned out to be a salad bowl. Indeed in the years that followed Glazer and Moynihan's classic work, rather than seeing more mixing of the national and ethnic ingredients, Americans have probably seen an increase in celebrations of ethnic particularity for by far the majority of immigrants have not shown themselves willing to shed their ethnic or nationalist origins and become fully "American."[7] Indeed, as early as 1975 Glazer and Moynihan seemed resigned to accepting the view that "full assimilation, in the sense that ethnic identification has virtually disappeared and become absorbed within the single category of 'American,' is very little the case."[8]

In *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (1986), Werner Sollors cites nineteenth-century definitions of "ethnic" as "peculiar to a race or nation," and he points out that in America the word "ethnic" has come to mean "other … non-standard … not fully American." According to Sollors,

> The very assertion of the ethnic dimensions of American culture can be understood as part of the rites and rituals of the land, as an expression of a persistent conflict between consent and descent in America. Whether they know it or not, writers and literary historians participate in the delineation of this conflict.[9]

Thus, in an effort to avoid the often dire consequences that result from racial and ethnic groups embracing their uniqueness at the expense of reaching out to members of other ethnic groups, Sollors argues against thinking of ethnicity purely in terms of "descent" (blood-tie, ancestral lineage) and advocates thinking of it in terms of "consent" (which is "contractual,"

[7] Nathan G. Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot Reconsidered: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1970), was followed by *idem*, eds., *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[8] This is the view of Talcott Parsons. See Glazer and Moynihan, *Ethnicity*, 64.

[9] Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25, 15.

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"self-willed.") Thus, for Sollors, an individual becomes free to choose the extent to which he or she wants to embody his or her ethnic particularity.[10]

Embracing Sollors's notion of "consent," in *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995), David Hollinger insists that an individual does not have to accept affiliation with an ethnic group on the basis of shared descent because such affiliation is "voluntary" rather than "prescribed in every context." Indeed, Hollinger takes the notion of being free to choose and shape one's ethnicity a step further when he claims that "individuals should be allowed to affiliate or disaffiliate with their own communities of descent to an extent that they choose, while affiliating with whatever non-descent communities are available and appealing to them."[11] Thus, as an alternative, or in addition, to embracing the culture or ethnicity of their birth, individuals can embrace a "new" culture/ethnicity – its language, music, religion, and so on.

Hollinger also makes important distinctions between three types of perspective: pluralist, cosmopolitanist, and universalist. Sollors had already pinpointed the essential problem with the pluralist perspective, claiming that if emphasizing "particularist tendencies" is "taken to its radical conclusion, such a position really assumes that there is no shared history and no human empathy, that you have your history and I have mine."[12] According to Hollinger, whereas a "pluralist" wants to preserve the boundaries between ethnic groups so their distinctive features are preserved, a "cosmopolitanist" is not concerned with preserving such boundaries. He or she is driven by a desire to explore and try to understand other cultures – in short, the culture of "the other."

Miller is completely at odds with the pluralist position. He is a cosmopolitanist in the sense that as an American he tries to understand his Jewish experience, but also as a Jew he tries to come to terms with American experience – in both cases he looks from one side of the hyphen to the culture of the other side. As I have already suggested, recent scholarly work on Miller seems to take it for granted that in creating his characters Miller draws from his Jewish background. Rarely, however, are his characters specifically labeled Jewish.[13] Thus rather than labeling Miller a "cosmopolitanist"

[10] Sollors cites Michael Novak's remark in *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* that "given a grandparent or two, one chooses to shape one's consciousness by one history rather than another." Ibid., 33.

[11] David A Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 129, 116.

[12] Sollors, 13.

[13] Plays where characters are definitely Jewish include *Incident at Vichy* (1964) and *Broken Glass* (1994).

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for his insights into the culture of Jews or Americans or Jewish-Americans, it may be more fruitful or accurate to call him a "universalist."

A "universalist," according to Hollinger, focusses on the characteristics that various ethnic groups seem to share and endeavors to find out what is true for all cultures. As Miller grew older he became more and more adept at reaching out to "other" groups, non-descent communities, as became evident, for example, in his sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians as expressed in his Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech in 2003, to which we will return later. Although the playwright is certainly interested in understanding the culture of "the other," he is even more interested in identifying "shared history" and in the "humanity" which transcends the boundaries between ethnic groups.

Thus ultimately I want to argue that the key to understanding Miller and his work does not involve focussing on one side of the hyphen or the other, the Jewish side or the American side, or even on the tension between the two. The key is rather the author's striking ability to empathize. It is largely through the strength of Miller's empathy that the plays are able to transcend specific ethnic boundaries and lead audiences to contemplate positions "beyond ethnicity."

There is, of course, a very long tradition of seeing Jews as victims – in interviews Miller has frequently commented on this association – but it may be more difficult for Jews to put themselves in the place of the aggressor.[14] It is as a "universalist," however, that Miller is able to put himself in the shoes of the other. Miller recognizes, as in the case of evil, for example, that it is not just out there in other people but resides in all of us. It is through focussing on this coalescence of empathy and recognition of shared capacity for evil that I will locate Miller's most important and enduring legacy.

Both Miller's parents were Jewish. Miller's father, Isidore (Izzie) came to America from Poland at the age of six. His Jewish grandfathers both came from the same hamlet in Poland. Miller also had some German ancestry. Yet in spite of these origins, Miller has often been labeled "the most American of playwrights," prompting me to ask, is it possible for a second-generation American to turn out to be more American than an American, for

[14] Speaking of a character in *The Price* (1968), Miller says that he had to be a Jew as "the theme of survival … seemed to point directly to the Jewish experience through centuries of oppression." See Mathew C. Roudané, ed., *Conversations with Arthur Miller* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 183.

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example, whose family has been "American" for several generations or who can trace his or her ancestry as far back as the pilgrims who sailed from Plymouth in 1620?[15] How do we measure, as it were, degrees of Americanness?

With *Death of a Salesman*, the playwright may be regarded as privileging the American side of the Jewish-American hyphen, especially through the play's clear references to "the American dream." Discussion of *Death of a Salesman* in relation to the American dream is a well-worn path. In the 1950s, for example, the playwright Lorraine Hansberry wrote,

> Something has indeed gone wrong with at least part of the American dream, and Willy Loman is the victim of the detour … in a New World where there just aren't any more forests to clear or virgin railroads to lay or native American empires to first steal and build upon … [16]

Critic James Martine suggests that even as "Miller points out the places where America and its dream have gone wrong … it is the constructive criticism of the dream that keeps the faith in the dream alive."[17]

Leslie Fiedler credits Jewish-American writers like Mailer, Bellow, and Salinger for being part of "the great take-over by Jewish-American writers" of the role of "dreaming aloud the dreams of the whole American people."[18] Surely, though, these dreams cannot be "American" if America is supposed to be "the land of the free"; for, as many have pointed out, America is a radically stratified system where some people – a lot of young inner-city blacks, for example – are firmly anchored at the bottom, absolutely excluded from realizing the dream.[19]

Siegel says, "Lots of folks would swear that *Death of a Salesman* is an American-Jewish play. Willy Loman is the quintessential second generation mid-century American Jew, no longer on the margins, but now caught in the middle," but Siegel also admits that "Miller never identifies him as such." I wonder if Miller was deliberately not identifying his character, Willy Loman, as Jewish; for by avoiding the imprint of Jewishness, the character may be played as a non-Jewish victim. In fact, as Willy is never explicitly identified as Jewish, we could theoretically identify him with any of

[15] The quotation is from James J. Martine, *The Crucible: Politics, Property, and Pretense* (New York: Twayne, 1993), 88.
[16] Quoted in Harold Bloom, ed., *Arthur Miller* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 31.
[17] Martine, 88.
[18] The quotation is from David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 28.
[19] See, for example, the work of Elijah Anderson.

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America's multifarious ethnic groups – he could even be a Palestinian-American. Indeed, as no one can prove for sure that Willy Loman is a Jew, why not say that he is "beyond ethnicity"?

In *The Crucible* the notion that Miller is trying to represent specifically American history is even more obvious than it was in *Death of a Salesman*. Thus the playwright says of *The Crucible*, "If I hadn't written [it] that period would be unregistered in *our* literature on any popular level."[20] By "that period" he is referring to the seventeenth-century colonial period. By "*our* literature" he means American literature. He could talk about "*our* literature" as Jewish literature, but, to my knowledge, he never does.

When *The Crucible* first appeared in 1953 everyone recognized that it was about American history, in particular the period of Puritan fervor as expressed in the Salem witch trials. The tendency to see the play as a great embodiment of American experience was reinforced by the play's later reception in England. When there was a revival of *The Crucible* at the National Theatre in London, for example, Sheridan Morley described it as "perhaps [Miller's] greatest attempt and claim to be the keeper of the American conscience in this century."[21]

The title, *The Crucible*, is traditionally taken to be a reference to the judging and subsequent putting to death by burning of the so-called witches. It could also refer to one character's effort to melt down the barriers created by Puritanism. It is, therefore, easy to miss the connection between "crucible" and "melting pot" which opens up the ethnic associations in the title. Just from the title, some students of American theater will immediately grasp a linkage between Miller's *The Crucible* and an earlier Jewish-American playwright's *The Melting Pot* (1909). Isreal Zangwill's most famous play was in fact originally entitled *The Crucible*, and for Zangwill, according to Sollors, the image of a melting pot includes the idea of "an ethnic extension of the religious drama of redemption and rebirth … portrayed in the imagery of melting, and especially in contrast to the stubborn hardness of boundaries."[22] *The Melting Pot* also contains the line "America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming."[23]

In *The Crucible*, then, the playwright as a shrewd recorder of American history may well be attempting to lay bare the American conscience or consciousness; but, less obviously, at the same time, he smuggles in his ethnic

[20] *Conversations*, 179; my emphasis. [21] Martine, 20. [22] Sollors, 84.
[23] Quoted in Israel Zangwill, *The Melting-Pot* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 66.

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origins and wrestles with his Jewish heritage. Thus in his autobiography, *Timebends: A Life*, the playwright describes a feeling that he had when he was doing his research for *The Crucible*:

> I suddenly felt a familiar inner connection with witchcraft and the Puritan cult, its illusions, its stupidities, and its sublimity … I felt strangely at home with these New Englanders, moved in the darkest part of my mind by some instinct that they were putative ur-Hebrews, with the same fierce idealism, devotion to God, tendency to legalistic reductiveness, the same longings for the pure and intellectually elegant argument.[24]

Later he returns to this flash of recognition: "I knew instantly what the connection was: the moral intensity of the Jews and the clan's defensiveness against pollution from outside ranks. Yes, I understood in that flash, it was suddenly my own inheritance."[25] In other words, the research on America's Puritan past triggers what contemporary scholars of ethnicity might call Miller's ethno-racial memory. He feels at home with the Puritans, not because he too is an American but because historically the Puritans' ways of thinking and behaving have been so similar to those of his Jewish ancestors. Miller asserts in the "Overture" to Act 1 of *The Crucible* that "organizations [like those of the Puritans] are grounded on the idea of exclusion and prohibition."[26] Americans and Jews or "Ur-Hebrews," then, come together with the feeling of being the "chosen people" and of being "wary of pollution from outside ranks."[27]

Here Miller's instinctive feel for "shared history" makes him very much a "universalist" and distances him from the kind of pluralism that fosters the idea that different groups should endeavor to retain their distinctiveness, and it implies that members of these groups should resist integration with other groups.

Hans Kohn argues that "for the Puritans membership may be decided not by blood, but by faith."[28] In *The Crucible*, then, John Proctor may be regarded as choosing the extent to which he wants to embrace Puritanism on the basis of how far he is willing to follow the rules concerning how an individual is supposed to behave or not to behave as laid down by the theocracy. I use the word "theocracy" deliberately, partly because Miller himself uses it in the

[24] Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (London: Methuen, 1987), 42.
[25] Ibid., 338.
[26] Miller, *The Crucible* (New York: Viking, 1953), 7.
[27] Sollors quotes Herman Melville's *White Jacket*: "And we Americans are the peculiar chosen people – the Israel of our time." *Beyond Ethnicity*, 40. The phrase about "pollution from outside ranks" is from Miller, *Timebends*, 338.
[28] See Hans Khon, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1945) 166–68, quoted in Sollors, 56.

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commentary running through the play, but also partly because of the word's contemporary global relevance.

Not only is the word "theocracy" frequently invoked today to describe political systems like that of Iran in the Middle East, but it may also be used to describe the current Bush administration. The time of the specifically Puritan fervor expressed in Miller's play may have passed, and the playwright may have been right in interviews in the 1950s and 1960s to see in post-World War II America the evanescence of religion, but religion is not on the decline in today's America and it is constantly invoked in current Presidential rhetoric. President George W. Bush's speeches certainly embody the rhetoric of ethnic (especially national) self-expression, but this rhetoric is becoming almost inseparable from a rhetoric that prioritizes religious identification.

Dept. Governor Danforth in *The Crucible* says, "a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between."[29] On 4 April 2004, contrasting the American people with those who participate in recent insurgency movements in Iraq, President George W. Bush insisted: "We love freedom and they hate freedom – that's where the clash occurs. Freedom is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to the world."[30] In both Danforth and Bush's rhetoric the two sides are absolutely distinct: you are either with us or against us. Both Bush and the officials who wielded power during the Salem witch trials claim to be acting in accordance with the will of God. President Bush frequently couples the supposed virtues of military intervention in Iraq with an insistence that "God is on our side," and invariably ends such speeches with the phrase "God bless America." He uses religious rhetoric not only to justify the use of massive military force but also to counter what he claims is his enemies' delusion. In doing so, however, Bush may be just as fanatical and deluded as, say, the insurgents or resistance fighters in Iraq or the austere Puritans who administered their unflinching laws back in seventeenth-century New England.

Reverend John Hale in Act 4 of *The Crucible* says,

> I came into this village like a bridegroom to his beloved, bearing gifts of high religion; the very crowns of holy law I brought, and what I touched with my bright confidence, it died; and where I turned the eye of my great faith, blood flowed up.[31]

If we think of Miller as a universalist, we may think of Reverend Hale's Puritan "holy law" here as the equivalent of what Muslims call "shariah." Miller expressed his desire for his play, *The Crucible*, to show people "the

[29] *The Crucible*, 94.
[30] Quoted in Richard A. Shweder, "George W. Bush and the Missionary Position," *Daedalus*, Summer 2004, 26.
[31] *The Crucible*, 132.

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continuity through time of human delusion, and the only safeguard, fragile though it may be, against it – namely, the law, and the courageous few whose sacrifice illuminates delusion."[32] Miller clearly sees the New Englanders who carry out the terrible atrocities against supposed heretics and non-believers as deluded. There is no reason, however, why the delusion that afflicted the Puritan administrators of "holy law" should be restricted to their place and time. The view that fanatical interpretation or misinterpretation of sacred texts can lead to enormous bloodshed is as apropos regarding the supposed witches in seventeenth-century Massachusetts as it is regarding the theocracies of our own day.

I am not alone in suggesting that today's America may be a theocracy. Jacques Derrida claims that despite America's constitutional separation of church and state, America may still be one of the "disguised … theocracies of the West," for the secularity of America's constitution does not stop Christian domination from asserting itself."[33] President Bush's ubiquitous religious rhetoric, and his harped-on-about born-again Christian status, and his obvious reliance on the neoconservative Christian right (especially Christian fundamentalist voters) to get elected and re-elected, all suggest some affinity between the administration running America today and the administration in Massachusetts during the 1692 Salem witch trials.[34]

[32] Miller, "Again They Drink from the Cup of Suspicion," *New York Times*, 26 Nov. 1989, Sec. 2, 36, quoted in Martine, *The Crucible*, 66.

[33] Jacques Derrida, "For a Justice to Come: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," trans. Ortwin de Graef. Available online at http://www.brusselstribunal.org/pdf/Derrida_EN.htm.

[34] Kevin Phillips claims that for the Bush administration "religious belief is the basis of policy, not just a tactic for selling it to the public." See *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (New York: Viking, 2006). See also Christopher Shays, "This Republican Party of Lincoln has become a Theocracy," available online at http://www.theocracywatch.org; Maureen Farrell, "On a Mission from God: The Religious Right and the Emerging American Theocracy," available online at http://www.buzzflash.com; and Rich Perlstein, "'The Divine Calm of George Bush': The US as the New Israel, as God's Most Favored Nation," *Village Voice*, 3 May 2004, available online at http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0418,perlstein,53195,1.html. Not everyone would describe the American administration today as a theocracy. In his review of *American Theocracy*, Alan Brinkley, in "Clear and Present Dangers," *New York Times*, 19 March 2006, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/103/19/books/review/19brink.html?_r=1&oref=slogin, describes Phillips's claim as "significant but not conclusive." Some claim that the power of the courts to insist that "intelligent design" be taught in schools as non-science but Darwinian evolution as fact reinforces the traditional separation in America of church and state. See "Victors hail US Evolution Ruling," *BBC News*, 21 Dec. 2005. Available online at news.bbc.co.uk/2hi/americas/4547734. Actions were also taken by the courts recently against Christian evangelicals who were found guilty of persecuting non-evangelicals at the US Air Force Academy.

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Unlike President George W. Bush, or characters from *The Crucible* like Danforth and Hale, Miller in interviews or speeches never espouses a particular religion's dogma. Indeed, with his extreme wariness concerning religion, Miller may be fleeing both from his Puritan inheritance as an American and his Judaic inheritance as a Jew, from the theology of both the Bible and the Talmud, especially if in both cases alleged "devotion to God" can lead to theocracy and persecution and execution of the innocent, whether that be in seventeenth-century New England or in the twenty-first-century Middle East.[35]

Many critics have regarded *After the Fall* as autobiographical, even "disconcertingly autobiographical."[36] When near the beginning, for example, Quentin talks about divorces and being injured by "these goddamned women," it is not difficult to imagine Miller's own failed marriages, and much has been made, for example, of resemblances between the character Maggie and Marilyn Monroe.

After the Fall is similar to *The Crucible* in that like the earlier play it attempts to bring a key moment in American history to the stage. This time it is the period involving the activities of Senator McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee. In some respects the activities of the Puritan judges and McCarthy's cohorts were similar. E. Miller Budick argues quite rightly that "the fundamental flaw in the natures of the Puritan elders and by extension of the McCarthyites … is precisely their extreme tendency toward moral absolutism."[37] Clearly this tendency leads both groups into their different witch-hunts. Whereas the Puritans were trying to find and punish those perceived to be out of step with their dogma, the members of McCarthy's commission were attempting to track down those suspected of being out-of-step with capitalism – in other words, Communists and Communist-sympathizers. Both the old Puritan law enforcers and McCarthy and the other members of the HUAC were in the business of finding suspects and endeavoring to extract confessions of one sort or another.

[35] I suspect that Miller would be much more comfortable with the take on religion of a pragmatist like William James than he would be with either a Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish one. This could be the subject of another paper.

[36] The quotation is from Neil Carson, *Arthur Miller* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 121.

[37] E. Miller Budick also quotes the playwright's description of McCarthyism as "a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right [that] was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance." See Introduction to *Collected Plays* quoted in E. Miller Budick, "History and Other Specters in *The Crucible*," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Views: Arthur Miller* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 127–44, 128–29.

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For my purposes here Miller's invocation of Jewish history in the form of the Holocaust in *After the Fall* is more important than the attack on McCarthyism. Indeed, Miller has labeled "the Nazi experience" as "the key one of this century," and following *After the Fall* he continues to dwell on the Holocaust in *Incident at Vichy* (1965) and *Broken Glass* (1994), and also in his television film adaptation of Fania Fenelon's Auschwitz memoirs, *Playing for Time* (1981).[38]

In *After the Fall* Quentin visits a concentration camp years after the war, and he identifies quite naturally with the victims: "I can see the convoys grinding up this hill; and inside; no one knows my name and yet they'll smash my head on a concrete floor! And no appeal." He also tries to put himself in the position of a Nazi as he asks himself, "Could I kill Jews? Throw ice water on prisoners of war and let them freeze to death? Why does something in this place touch my shoulder like an accomplice?" Similarly, at the end of the play Quentin admits, "My brothers died here," but he also asks, "Who can be innocent again on this mountain of skulls?", as if guilt should not necessarily be restricted to the Nazis, but we are all to some extent to blame for the genocide.[39]

Albert H. Friedlander claims that "in writing about the Holocaust, the Jewish writer inevitably confronted his or her own identity in a way which was not ancillary but central to the text."[40] It is clear, however, that Holocaust guilt is not confined to one race or nation. It is not just about a Jewish feeling – why not me? It is not a question of ethnicity. Our humanity or inhumanity makes us all partially responsible – potential oppressors as well as potential victims.[41]

Thus in the Holocaust sequence running through the play, in addition to identifying with Quentin, the playwright endeavors to see events from a Nazi perspective. Quentin had asked Holga, "Why do you keep coming back to this place?", and she had replied, "I don't know. Perhaps … because I didn't die here."[42] Here Miller may be regarded as standing with Holga, a character who is a German (but not a Nazi) and like a Jew (feeling guilty perhaps or

[38] The remark about the importance of the Nazi experience is in C. W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama. Vol. 2: Williams/Miller/Albee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 229.

[39] Quotations from *After the Fall* are from Miller, *Plays: Two* (London: Methuen, 1994), 142, 157, 241.

[40] Albert H. Friedlander, *Riders Towards the Dawn: From Ultimate Suffering to Tempered Hope* (London: Constable, 1993), 162.

[41] Thus, in a private interview with Bigsby, Miller emphasizes in relation to the Holocaust that "the race, the human race, cannot face its culpability, its responsibility." See Bigsby, 216.

[42] *Plays: Two*, 140.

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just lucky that her life was not snuffed out in the camps), who thus stands in between the persecutors and the victims.

During the war, Holga, then seventeen, comes out of school one day and on the sidewalk she finds a photograph of a concentration camp – the emaciated victims and so on. She takes it to her grandfather, a military commander, and he says, "Of course. … Why does it excite you?" She shouts, "You're swine. You're all swine," and she throws her briefcase at him. Although she later becomes a courier for officers plotting to kill Hitler, her feelings about the unsuccessful act of resistance toward the Nazi regime are overshadowed by her anger concerning her apparent ignorance about what was going on. Thus she says, "It was my country … longer perhaps than it should have been. But I didn't know. And now I don't know how I could not have known. I can't imagine not knowing, now."[43] This raises the issue of the extent to which non-combatant Germans knew what was going on. Did people like the young Holga really have no knowledge of what was happening in concentration camps or did they know on some level and just choose not to think about it? One of my arguments in the next section will be that this lack of knowledge or unconscious suppression of knowledge of a catastrophe is also relevant to Miller's shifting perceptions of what was happening in Israel during and after 1948.

In 1945, in writing a novel about anti-Semitism, *Focus*, Miller had spoken essentially for one side, his own Jewish side. In 1986, however, when he came to write an introduction for the same novel, he tended to speak less as a Jew and more as an American, as in this passage about casualties in the war in Europe: "Not until allied troops had broken into the German concentration camps and the newspapers published photos of the mounds of emaciated and sometimes partially burned bodies was Nazism really disgraced among decent people and *our* own casualties justified."[44] The issue here is not so much what happened to the Jews, but whether America was right to get involved in the war in Europe. As the fate of the Jews, according to Miller, only became apparent to most Americans after the war, he is implying that America did not get into the war in order to save the Jews (and homosexuals, the disabled, and others) who were being destroyed en masse during the Holocaust. It is more likely that the main cause of America's involvement in the fight against Hitler was that President Roosevelt and

[43] Ibid., 140–41.
[44] Arhur Miller, Introduction, *Focus* (London: Penguin, 1986); my emphasis.

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others saw participation in the war in Europe as in America's own self-interest.

By "*our* own casualties," then, Miller clearly means American casualties, and these casualties may be justified in relation to the extent of the contemporary or subsequent benefits to the Americans for whom he speaks. He invokes the harrowing photos of the concentrations camps, then, not to stress the plight of his fellow Jews but to show that for most Americans the full horror of what actually happened in the camps only became apparent after the war was over, and this showed in retrospect why America was right to to side with the other allies and stand up against Nazism.

In 2003 Miller was awarded the Jerusalem Prize and in his acceptance speech he looked back to the aftermath of World War II and in particular the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. He explained that at that time in America the commonly held view of the creation of the state of Israel was that it was simply "a refuge for a people that had barely escaped a total genocide wipeout in Europe only a few years earlier" and that "having passed out of the control and domination of others, the time had come for the Jews to act normal."[45] This was the commonly held view of those with whom Miller attended a Waldorf dinner in 1948 to celebrate the Soviet Union's recognition of the state of Israel. Miller continued,

> In that ebullient Waldorf moment one heard little or nothing of the dark side of the history of new states, especially their sharp collisions with other people's in the same or contiguous areas. For some years, especially in the United States, a certain idyllic Israel existed in the public imagination, and for some it probably still does. The Israel of … the rescued land, the pioneers and the pioneering cooperative spirit reminiscent of summer camp. There was inevitably a lot of psychological denial in this picture, just as there always is in the nationalist picture of any nation.

It seems that Miller, like many others in 1948, was not aware of the darker side of what the Israelis were doing. If part of Willy Loman's problem in *Death of a Salesman* was not having an outlet for his pioneering spirit, the same could not be said for many Zionists who reveled in their movement into, and "occupation" of, Palestine.

The idea that many Americans found it easy to identify with the Zionist pioneering spirit has also been suggested by Edward Said, who gives a sense of the post-1948 climate in the US regarding "the cause of Israel" which was

[45] Arthur Miller, "Why Israel Must Choose Justice," speech delivered 25 June 2003 on receiving the Jerusalem Prize. Available online at http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2005/02/310565.shtml.

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adopted by the Democratic Party and members of the American left, including Roger Baldwin, Reinhold Niebuhr, Norman Thomas, and, later, Martin Luther King. "In time," explains Said, "the way discourse works through accumulation of information and sheer density of material, it was possible for the case to be built in such a way as to completely obscure the existence of a Palestinian presence."[46]

By 1986, as the newly written preface to *Focus* makes clear, Miller had started to pay very serious attention to Israel's actions. He writes about the transformation of the Jew in many people's eyes from "victim" to "one of the world's most dangerous peoples – dangerous in the conventional military and characterological sense," and he states quite unequivocally that there was some factual basis to the view of Israel as transformed "from a land settled by pastoral socialists and internationalist soldier-farmers, into a bellicose armed camp whose adamant tribal defensiveness has inevitably hardened against neighboring peoples to the point of fanaticism."[47]

In a similar vein, in one of his late interviews Edward Said describes how he has often spoken to Jewish Israelis as follows:

> Look what happened to you: You as Jews are the victims of all time, really. The history of anti-Semitism is a millennial fact. And we are your victims now. How can you, having suffered victimization, in what seems to be heedless consciences, inflict similar punishments on other people? People who in the great scale of things, have done you very little harm – except that they were there?"[48]

By the time he came to write the Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech in 2003, Miller was asking almost the same questions and showing clear awareness of the widespread view of Jewish Israelis in terms of a change of label from that of "victim" to that of "oppressor." In 1945 in *Focus* Miller was doubtless siding with the persecuted victims of anti-Semitism, but by 1949 and *Death of a Salesman* he was creating a protagonist whose status as victim had nothing to do with anti-Semitism because he was not even Jewish. Miller was well aware that no nation or race has an exclusive right to the status of victim.

Miller's views, however, are not as extreme as those of Said. When addressing political issues in interviews or speeches Miller never uses the

[46] Edward W. Said, "American Intellectuals and Middle East Politics," in Gauri Viswanathan, ed., *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said* (New York: Pantheon, 2001), 327. On the Zionist pioneering sprit see also Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 21.

[47] Miller, *Focus*, 3–4.

[48] Said, "An Exile's Exile," in *Power, Politics*, 318.

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kind of extremist rhetoric that Said employs in this passage about the Palestinian–Israeli conflict:

> there is no symmetry in this conflict … There is a guilty side and there are victims. The Palestinians are the victims … The original distortion in the lives of Palestinians was introduced by Zionist intervention, which to us – in our narrative – began with the Balfour Declaration and events thereafter that led to the replacement with one people by another. And it is continuing to this day. This is why Israel is not a state like any other … The laws of the state of Israel perpetuate injustice.[49]

Although by 2003 Miller's sympathy toward the Palestinians had grown to the extent that he maintained, for example, that the Palestinians should have their own state, he does not want to place guilt exclusively on either the Palestinian or the Israeli side. Furthermore, while Said's rhetoric here accentuates the negative word – "injustice," Miller, in his Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech, prefers the word "justice," a word sprinkled throughout the speech, even appearing in the title: "Why Israel Must Choose Justice." The playwright talks about "a kind of righting of the scales of justice," and he suggests that "the Bible means justice or it means nothing." Twice he invokes the long-held Jewish "obsession with justice," and he claims that "without justice at its center, no state can endure as a representation of the Jewish nature." Looking back to reactions to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, he describes how

> it never dawned on me or, I think, on most people, that the new Israel, as a state governed by human beings, would behave more or less the same as any state had acted down through history – defending its existence by all means thought necessary and even expanding its borders when possible.

In this extremely controversial speech Miller, then, even goes on to invoke Golda Meir's statement – "We are all Palestinians." The claim may not be absurd given, as I have argued in the context of *After the Fall*, that Miller himself was able to identify both with Jewish victims of the Holocaust and with the brutal members of the Third Reich – why, therefore, should he not also identify with the Palestinians?

I am sure that Miller would agree with Marc Ellis's contention that a "Holocaust liturgy of destruction must include the suffering of the Palestinians who would then see the significance of the Holocaust in their own lives."[50] Indeed, the Holocaust and its aftermath in terms of the creation and growth of the state of Israel and the events that ensued may become a substantially more important backdrop to understanding Miller

[49] Said, "My Right of Return," in *Power, Politics*, 447.
[50] The quotation is from Friedlander, *Riders*, 253.

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and his work than the more traditional focus on his critique of the American dream and his attempts to (re)write American history.

It is worth recalling that *Death of a Salesman* came to the stage one year after the founding in 1948 of the state of Israel – "the War of Independence" (Arabs call it *El-Nakbah* or "the Catastrophe") – when between five and eight hundred thousand Palestinians were forced to leave their homes. It may be the case that like most Americans at that time Miller had absolutely no knowledge of what was really happening in Palestine/Israel. As a Jew, Miller in 1948 may not have thought at all about criticizing the formation of the state of Israel in Palestine and may not have had any inkling of the consequences for both Israelis and Palestinians. It is also possible, however, that like his character Holga in a different context, Miller was suppressing possible knowledge or just choosing not to think about it.

I am not saying that what happened to the Palestinians – for example, the massacres in villages at Bahr al-Baqr in 1947, at Deir Yassin in 1948, and Quibya in 1953 – is on a comparable scale to the Holocaust.[51] Nevertheless, there is a similarity between the German character Holga's ignorance of, or decision not to think about, what the Nazis were doing (because it is too painful) and the ignorance or willed refusal to investigate what was happening to the Palestinians that Miller shared with many Americans, especially Jewish-Americans, at the joyful Waldorf dinner in 1948.

Ultimately, it may not be very important whether we label Arthur Miller an American or a Jewish-American – with a hyphen, without a hyphen, or whatever. It is far more important that we recognize and commend the playwright as a "universalist" with an extraordinary ability to transcend ethnic boundaries and with great compassion put himself with the people on both sides of a conflict and not insist that evil is on one side or the other. A similar phenomenon occurs in *Playing for Time*, where the Jewish piano player, Fania, is able to save herself by playing her music for the Nazis and for fellow prisoners on their way to the death chambers. The play raises questions about her position. Another inmate, Marianne, exclaims, "I mean to say, dearies, whose side do you think *you're* on? Because if anybody's not sure you're on the side of the executioners, you ought to go out and ask any

[51] In 1986, shortly after Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Peace Prize, Uri Avneri wrote him a letter saying that "nothing in the present approaches the monstrousness of the Holocaust. It is therefore almost a profanity to compare the Holocaust with any other crime of this century." Quoted in Friedlander, *Riders*, 242. More recently, Jacqueline Rose has compared the brutality of Nazism with modern Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. See Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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prisoner in the camp and they'll be happy to tell you!"[52] As Christopher Bigsby aptly explains, "to survive at all is to become aware of one's own capacity for betrayal."[53]

Miller's choice of the literary mode of drama and especially dramatic dialogue means that he does not have to be understood as speaking for one side – most obviously the side of his own ethnic origins. Indeed, I believe that as his career progressed, he became more and more capable of circumventing or transcending the rhetoric of one particular ethnic self-expression. Fittingly, toward the end of his life he became more and more active in the field of human rights, and as he did so he was able to identify more and more with *all* victims of injustice, including Palestinians. Not wanting to privilege any one particular nation's rights, he was able to recognize every nation's right to national self-expression. At the same time, transcending his own Jewish-American hyphen, as a "universalist" he makes it very clear that evil is never confined to one side of a conflict but is a part of our condition, and he implies that it is up to us, all of us, to do something about it.

[52] Arthur Miller, *Playing for Time* (New York: Nick Hern, 1981), 64.
[53] Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction*, 230.

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