

PERSONALITIES

A Man Whose Passion Is Truth

By Richard Leberer

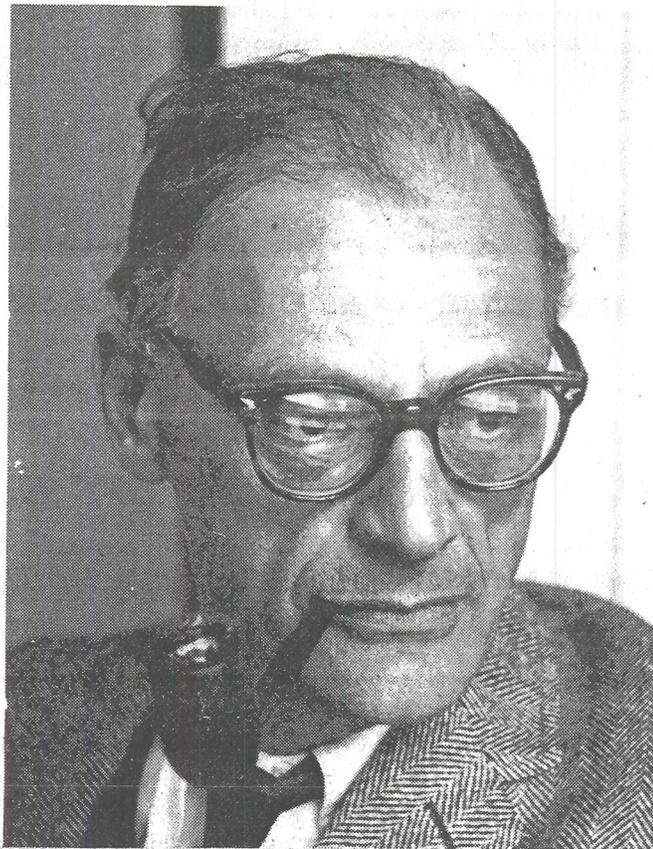
... WASHINGTON, D.C. —LAST THURSDAY AT THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, PLAYWRIGHT ARTHUR MILLER SAT SMOKING HIS PIPE. His brown tweed jacket looked both comfortable and well worn. He sported a blue button-down shirt with purple stripes, and a blood red tie. He also wore a grey sweater underneath his jacket, as if he might be easily chilled against the winds of time. But the winds of time have been good to this playwright. He has emerged today, through various tragedies and triumphs, as America's most outstanding and durable playwright. In fact, there is no other American writing plays today who engenders as much interest as this man does, nor the respect.

His first play, "The Man Who Had All The Luck" appeared on Broadway in 1941, lasting for only four performances. His second play had better luck. "All My Sons," in 1947, won the New York Drama Critics Award, along with the "Tony" and Donaldson Awards. His "Death of a Salesman" in 1949 won him the Pulitzer Prize among others. "The Crucible" came along next in 1953, again winning him another "Tony".

This week, he is in the throes of rewriting his newest play, "The Creation of the World and Other Business," which will open at the Eisenhower Theatre on Monday, Oct. 23. Oftentimes, a play of his that ends up covering 120 pages will have been as much as 3,000 pages long.

What hallmarks the dramas of Arthur Miller is a certain pronounced affinity with Greek tragedy. There is usually a direct confrontation of wills between characters, a hope that is dashed to smithereens by fate, or lack of character, and that greatest of all assets as far as any great drama needs, the certain belief that things could have indeed been different.

Sitting at the main table, Arthur Miller looked tired, but ate heartily. He had just flown



Playwright Arthur Miller

Conventon. Like most writers I am always looking for America. And I end up, inevitably, finding her in myself when I'm lucky, or not finding her at all."

He sees the role of the delegates to these conventions as being a lot like actors who are so busy playing their own parts that they can't see what the whole thing looks like.

"But this last time in Miami," he says, "I was struck by something which of course has been observed since politics began—that an election campaign is not only like theatre, it IS theatre."

Comparing Nixon and McGovern's approach on an issue, Miller says, "Now McGovern, by all signs, has no more sympathy for criminals than Nixon, but he doesn't talk about being strict, so people evidently feel safe with Nixon. Having taken the gamble of appealing to our much celebrated open-heartedness, optimism, and hopefulness rather than our fears, McGovern comes on as a bit too naive and trusting, compared to Nixon, who has made his political career out of issuing warnings. So it may be understandable that the issues mean so little. Perhaps we are not voting for or against anything but a tone of voice, a spiritual attitude. In theatrical terms, the actors have taken over and the script is no longer important.—they

down from New York to attend this press luncheon. When he addressed the packed room, he did so with a certain gentleness, and with a certain humor. However, his message was grim.

"I don't really have a proper speech," he began, "because I've been nurturing a new play through production the last few months; so I am down to a few random shots at the big pre-occupation most of us have these days—the election.

"Masquerading as a journalist last August, I attended the Democratic

it is standard procedure to infiltrate whatever opposition begins to organize itself with agents and provocateurs and spies."

"A democratic system," he warns, "unlike an authoritarian one, is based on mutual agreement to abide by the rules. It is not merely a question of the President being obliged to defend his part in all this, if any; it is a question of his sensitivity to the fragile nature of democracy. For the first axiom of any democratic system is that the opposition party be absolutely free to oppose whether its program be wise or unwise. In the final analysis, the people have no other protection from the abuse of power over them. The time has come, in short, for the end of theatre and the beginning of a real contest as to what men and what ideas, rather than what sentiments and what actors, are needed to assure the ongoing life of popular government in this country."

It is Arthur Miller's belief that one of the reasons we do not have any new great playwrights today is because great plays come from a clash of wills, that individual man has been debased and made to feel impotent by events that he no longer has control over. The human will withers in face of this avalanche of indifference to its future. This accounts for the apathy that many Americans feel about the upcoming election.

are simply improvising around their own personalities and sometimes even say the same things, but in one case with emphasis on fearfulness and in the other on trust.

"The whole business of appealing to the people to believe you are what you are impersonating is of course the basis of theatre; and I think sometimes that it is all that is left of our politics."

The bugging of the Watergate to Arthur Miller is indeed a dangerous situation for the political future of the United States.

"The Watergate bugging is at bottom an expression of contempt for the democratic process; if the main opposition party is not to be secure against the formidable power of government and a wealthy party in power in their attempts to stifle its organizing attempts to espionage; if the democratic debate of the issues is to be crippled by police-state methods, and above all if this is not enough to rouse the people, the press, and honest men in both parties to demand an accounting by the President, then we have given consent to the gutting of democracy's content and are left with the empty form. I am not using the police-state analogy lightly," he stated. "In Russia, in Greece, in Spain, in any country where political freedom exists only at the pleasure of the regime,

"The light has gone out," says Arthur Miller, "in the American people. There is an impotency." In discussing theatre in America he said, "We haven't got theatre in this country, we've got shows. That is why we do not have a great many new playwrights because they no longer have any motive to write. They don't have faith that there is a theatre that would accept their new plays."

Time has carved deep ridges in Arthur Miller's face. His eyes, however, are hawk-like. He stands firm but comfortable in his convictions and in his achievements. Like a prophet, he stands in the midst of his time and offers warnings of coming disasters.

"If the United States Government should declare itself bankrupt, we would all be nervous, but we'd wait to see how it would all out. But if General Motors or General Electric should show signs of failure, it would be an ice cube shoved under our armpits."

Apparently, many ice cubes may be on their way.

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