

135 QUOTATIONS



Arthur Miller

(1915-2005)

Arthur Miller wrote two major plays, the contemporary *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *The Crucible* (1953), about the witchcraft trials in 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts. Although it promotes the most successful literary hoax of the century, *The Crucible* transcends politics as a work of art and is one of the most powerful American dramas after Eugene O'Neill. Miller is also known for mediocre screenplays, for an incongruous marriage to the blonde movie sex goddess Marilyn Monroe and for having been the most prominent literary dupe of the Communist Party. *Salesman* is the tragedy of a common man, whereas *The Crucible* is a political allegory in which by parallelism Miller glorifies Communists as noble for refusing to cooperate with a U.S. Congressional committee investigating the international Communist Party. By that time Communist spies in the U.S. government had stolen atomic secrets and passed them to the Soviet Union, leading to the arms race beginning in 1948. For the next 40 years Americans were subjected to the terror of being annihilated at any time. Americans died fighting Communists in Korea during the 1950s. In 1963 a Communist assassinated the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy. More Americans died fighting Communists in Vietnam during the 1960s-70s. By the end of the century Communists had murdered over 100 million people worldwide. During the 1990s, translation of many secret Soviet cables confirmed that during the 1930s-40s there were hundreds of Communist spies in the U.S. government and Congressmen exposed over 320 confessed Communist Party activists propagandizing and raising large sums of money in Hollywood that was being funneled to Moscow.

Arthur Miller chose to stand with the Communists against the United States. Although a Jew, he continued to support the Communists after Stalin signed a pact with Hitler--*despite the Holocaust!* In *The Crucible* he implies by parallelism that all Communists were unfairly accused, supposedly like everyone accused of witchcraft in Salem. He plays to the common secular prejudice that witches never even existed really, implying that Communists didn't either. Miller knew that during the 1930s the Communists ran the only screenwriting school in Hollywood and that by the 1940s they had gained control of some unions at the studios. According to his parallel the Communists are Good Guys and the Congressmen defending the country are Bad Guys. Though more an artist than a propagandist, Miller is Marxist in using "art as a weapon." He was forced by his parallel in 1953 to commit treason in 1956. Had he cooperated with the U.S. Congressmen he would have contradicted the defiant moral position he took in his major play,

becoming a hypocrite. As it was, he identified himself with his hero John Proctor in *The Crucible*, taking the position of a noble martyr who gets executed—*crucified!*

His parallel implies that those questioned about Communists by the U.S. Congressmen during the 1940s-50s suffered terribly as a consequence. On the contrary, most of them were treated as heroes in show business, just as Miller treats Proctor. And just as Miller got treated in Hollywood, where he won the trophy sex goddess. *The Crucible* has successfully hoaxed people for over half a century by shifting blame for treason from the guilty to those exposing them.

ORDER OF TOPICS: outlook, life is a jungle, society, concentration camps, education in drama, motivation, tragedy, *Death of a Salesman*, Marxism, false analogy, *The Crucible*, Communism, member of the Communist Party?, disillusionment, U.S House Committee hearing, disloyalty, indictment, double standard, treason, America, rejects Socialism, Postmodern drama, popular culture, elitist art, decadent literature, Political Correctness, spirituality, Marilyn Monroe, the writer, Eugene O'Neill, Modernists, Postmodern fiction, moral basis of his plays, social reform, writing plays, writing a hit, creative peak, death of the theater, aesthetics, critics, immortality, death:

OUTLOOK

All we are is a lot of talking nitrogen. [Naturalism]

The two most common elements in the world are hydrogen and stupidity.

I think it's a mistake to ever look for hope outside one's self. [Postmodernism]

Self-realization and self-fulfillment are the *sine qua non* for human existence.

If you believe that life is worth living then your belief will create the fact. [Existentialism]

Success, instead of giving freedom of choice, becomes a way of life.

LIFE IS A JUNGLE

The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy. [Naturalism]

Never fight with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way.

SOCIETY

Society is inside of man and man is inside society, and you cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not. The fish is in the water and the water is in the fish.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS

I have always felt that concentration camps, though they're a phenomenon of totalitarian states, are also the logical conclusion of contemporary life.... The concentration camp is the final expression of human separateness and its ultimate consequence.

EDUCATION IN DRAMA

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.

I'd read Shakespeare and Ibsen, a little, not much. I never connected playwriting with our [American] theater, even from the beginning.

MOTIVATION

The theater is so endlessly fascinating because it's so accidental. It's so much like life.

The very impulse to write springs from an inner chaos crying for order—for meaning.

One had the right to write because other people needed news of the inner world, and if they went too long without such news they would go mad with the chaos of their lives.

TRAGEDY

I believe the mission of writing is tragedy. I think that in the works in which man is most human, in addition to being the works that last, and reflect most deeply and most truthfully the situation of man on this earth, tragedy must confront the work itself, the artist himself, and the country itself. I believe at bottom, that the word has not yet entered the blood stream of America because it is a country which as yet has no tragic sense of itself.

I am not going to launch into what tragedy is or what I think it is beyond saying that when Christ hung on the cross it was not tragic until He spoke and asked why God had forsaken Him, and having spoken that shattering doubt, nevertheless did not ask to be taken down...

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.

I think the tragic feeling is invoked in us when we are 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.

Death of a Salesman (1949)

The Chinese reaction to my Beijing production of *Salesman* would confirm what had become more and more obvious over the decades in the play's hundreds of productions throughout the world: Willy Loman was representative everywhere, in every kind of system, of ourselves in this time....because of what he wanted. Which was to excel, to win out over anonymity and meaninglessness, to love and be loved, and above all, perhaps, to *count*.

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.

I don't say he's a great man. Willie Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid.

I found it discouraging to observe the confidence with which some commentators on *Death of a Salesman* smirked at the heavy-handed symbolism of "Low-man." What the name really meant to me was a terror-stricken man calling into the void for help that will never come.

I purposely would not give Ben any character because for Willy he *has* no character—which is, psychologically, expressionist.

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 it 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.

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.

I had realized long ago what lay behind the Communists' disapproval of *Salesman* and *All My Sons*: their success and critical acceptance had thrown doubt on the shibboleth that American theatre could not, and theoretically should not be able to, support socially truthful plays. A work that really told how it was could not succeed. The left had been living in the Last Days before the Coming, a pleasing mental environment for the passive moralist who need only know Truth to experience Salvation.

I always drew a lot of inspiration from politics.

MARXISM

Without alienation, there can be no politics.

The wedding of Christianity or Judaism with nationalism is lethal.

Like most abrupt turnings in the path of life, my introduction to Marx...has frozen in my memory to the stillness of a painting.

I was first asked by Columbia's publicity department to issue an anti-Communist statement to appease the American Legion, which warned that my failure to take an ad in *Variety* castigating the Reds, a ritual of the period, would bring on a picketing campaign against the film [*Death of a Salesman*] nationwide. I declined the request.

ITS INTERESTING HOW THE MINUTE WE TRY TO MAKE THE SCRIPT PRO-AMERICAN YOU PULL OUT. HARRY COHN [Head, Columbia Pictures]

I had already had a taste of the Legion's power, for they had not only threatened the movie version of *Salesman* but had managed in two or three towns to close down the road company production.

I had indeed at times believed with passionate moral certainty that in Marxism was the hope of mankind and of the survival of reason itself, only to come up against nagging demonstrations of human perversity, not least my own.

It is still impossible for man to organize his social life without repressions, and the balance has yet to be struck between order and freedom.

FALSE ANALOGY

I was half inside the car when Molly [Kazan] came out and asked, unforgettably, if I realized that the United Electrical Workers union was entirely in the hands of Communists.... Then she pointed toward the road and told me that I no longer understood the country, that everybody who lived on that road approved of the [U.S. House] Committee and what had been done.... "You're not going to equate witches with this!"

Molly's instant reaction against the Salem analogy would be, as I already sense, the strongest objection to such a play [as *The Crucible*]. "There are Communists," it would be repeatedly said, "but there never were any witches".... It was...not true that "there were never any witches".... When several hundred thousand people had been executed in Europe for witchcraft, it was hardly wisdom to say that the cause was merely imaginary.

The political question, therefore, of whether witches and Communists could be equated was no longer to the point. What was manifestly parallel was the guilt, two centuries apart, of holding illicit, suppressed feelings of alienation and hostility toward standard, daylight society as defined by its most orthodox

proponents. Without guilt the 1950s Red-hunt could never have generated such power. Once it was conceded that absolutely any idea remotely similar to a Marxist position was not only politically but morally illicit, the liberal, with his customary adaptations of Marxist theory and attitudes, was effectively paralyzed.

The Crucible (1954)

The Crucible opened in New York in 1954, at the height of the [Senator Joseph] McCarthy hysteria. It got respectful notices, the kind that you bury decently. It ran a few months and closed. In 1960, I believe it was, an off-Broadway production of the play was put on. The same critics reviewed it again, this time with what are called hit notices, which is to say they were fairly swept away, the drama was as real to them as it had seemed cold and undramatic before....when McCarthy was around the critics, reflecting the feeling in the audience, were quite simply in fear of the theme of the play, which was witch hunting. In 1960 they were not afraid of it and they began to look at the play.

In time, *The Crucible* became by far my most frequently produced play, both abroad and at home. Its meaning is somewhat different in different places and moments. I can almost tell what the political situation in a country is when the play is suddenly a hit there—it is either a warning of tyranny on the way or a reminder of tyranny just past.

Only after *The Crucible* did the town begin exploiting it with a tourist attraction, the Witch Trail, a set of street signs indicating where so-and-so had been arrested or interrogated or condemned to hang.... The same misplaced pride that had for so long prevented the original Salem court from admitting the truth before its eyes was still alive here. And that was good for the play too, it was in the mood.

For good purposes, even high purposes, the people of Salem developed a theocracy, a combine of state and religious power whose function was to keep the community together, and to prevent any kind of disunity that might open it to destruction by material or ideological enemies.

COMMUNISM

This predilection for minding other people's business was time-honored among the people of Salem, and it undoubtedly created many of the suspicions which were to feed the coming madness.

The Communist Party was legal, as were its fronts, which most often espoused liberal positions that did not so much as hint of socialist aims.

The writer Nien Cheng, who spent six and a half years in solitary confinement and whose daughter was murdered by the Red Guards, told me that after her release she saw the Shanghai production [of *The Crucible*] and could not believe that a non-Chinese had written the play. "Some of the interrogations," she said, "were precisely the same ones used on us in the Cultural Revolution."

All organisation is and must be grounded on the idea of exclusion and prohibition just as two objects cannot occupy the same space.

We have not many wills, but only one—it cannot be continuously compromised without atrophy.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY?

I attended a few meetings of Communist writers in living rooms, but I felt as unreal there as I had as a loner.

I had attended meetings of Party writers years ago and had made a speech at one of them.

How to explain that even if [the U.S. House Committee] had produced a Party card with my signature on it, I could only have said yes, I had probably felt that way then.

The Devil is precise; the marks of his presence are as definite as stone.

DISILLUSIONMENT

My real view of American Communists was of a sect that might as well be praying somewhere in the Himalayas for all the relevance they had to any motion in the American world.

Lee Cobb, as political as my foot, was simply one more dust speck swept up in the thirties idealization of the Soviets, which the Depression's disillusionment had brought on all over the West.

I learned in future years that while it was fairly common practice in the Soviet Union to laud and publish writers like Twain and Hemingway, the translations excluded politically or "morally" inconvenient passages and even added more convenient new ones, especially such as would underline criticism of American society. I was glad to know that *Death of a Salesman* had been produced, but my pleasure was greatly diminished by the news that it had been severely changed: Willy had been caricatured as a total fool, and Charley, who offers him financial help, was rewritten and acted as a clownish idiot, since as a businessman he could not possibly be even slightly altruistic or have a shred of sincerity.

I have come to see an altogether different reality after traveling in the Soviet Union, particularly, and in Eastern Europe and China. Deep within Marxism, ironically enough, lies a despairing passivity before History, and indeed power is forbidden to the individual and rightfully belongs only to the collective.

By the early 1950s there were few, and even fewer in the arts, who had not left behind their illusions about the Soviets.

Cling to no faith when faith brings blood.

U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE HEARING (1956)

The House Un-American Activities Committee had been in existence since 1938 [established by Democrats], but the tinder of guilt was not so available when the New Deal and Roosevelt were openly espousing a policy of vast social engineering often reminiscent of socialist methods.

By this time, the early fifties, the woods were filling up with ex-radicals disillusioned not only with the Soviets but with liberalism...socialists were joining the Communist witch-hunt.

If the left was telling its beads, repeating its ritual prayers to the always receding future of a classless and just society, the new orthodoxy of the right was demanding a confirmation of American society that I could hardly give.

In defense of honor I must confound the Committee, a stand that would inevitably force me not only to seem pro-Soviet when I had long since lost the last shred of faith in the Soviet system but also—more privately and painfully—to pose as one...of the literary left from whose ranks I had forever been separating myself.

But even had I known or been able to acknowledge the truth of the left's brutalities at the time, it would not have changed what I saw as the issue in 1956, and that was the manifestly anti-democratic contempt for the basic American rights on the part of the Committee, something impossible to support.

The FBI had long since infiltrated the Party, and informers had long ago identified the participants in various meetings.

DISLOYALTY

I would never give the Committee the names of people, all of them writers, whom I had known to be Communists.

INDICTMENT

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 to 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.

In some places under other flags, I would have been facing a death sentence.

DOUBLE STANDARD

I had said that [Ezra Pound] had clearly committed treason by broadcasting and writing for Mussolini in an attempt to demoralize American troops fighting in Germany and Italy, and that he should be treated like anybody else who had committed the same crime. [Congressman] Arens brought this up as a curious contradiction of my claim to believe in freedom of speech. [Miller was the only major American writer who opposed the release of Ezra Pound from incarceration.]

TREASON

[I felt] a remoteness from the long-ago years of the thirties and forties when I had still connected the Soviets with socialism, and socialism with man's redemption...the Committee in order to win had to show I was dominated by the Party, and I had to show the opposite to prove that I had never skirted what now was treason. [No, treason was not domination by the Communist Party in the past, since the Party was not illegal, treason was his refusal to cooperate with Congress in the present.]

Proctor, able at last to set aside his guilty feelings of unworthiness to "mount the gibbet like a saint," as I had him say, defies the court by tearing up his confession and brings on his own conviction.

I knew that my own life was speaking here in many disguises, not merely my time.

We are only what we always were, but naked now.

One woman, looking distraught and undernourished and literally wearing tennis shoes, shrieked that Arthur Miller had killed our boys in Korea and kept fingering a four-inch-thick folder filled, she said, with the government's record of my treason.

Betrayal is the only truth that sticks.

AMERICA

I have made more friends for American culture than the State Department. Certainly I have made fewer enemies, but that isn't difficult.

I was conscious of time fleeing and my waste of it, unable as I was to embrace the greatness of the American story that I knew was all around me on this haunting continent.

The simple truth is that a terribly small number of Americans read books or see plays; I will not even speak of poetry. If fifty thousand copies of a new book are sold it is regarded as a triumph in a country of over a hundred and eighty million.

The American people do not play a part in the art works of our time. The working class is all but illiterate, the middle class is mostly sheep frightened of not liking what it should and liking what it shouldn't. As a

consequence, I think, of the narrowness of the audience, there is no body of peers worthy of your creative respect.

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.

Whether it be our educational system, our Puritan tradition suspicious of art, or simply the mechanization of man and his dehumanized nervous system, it cannot be said that a dialogue exists today between the American people and the American artist, excepting the kind who decorate packages. Nor is this news, of course. Everybody knows about the lonely Melville trudging back and forth to his customs house, unrecognized by anyone around him, even he the author of America's great epic. Everybody knows about Hart Crane, and Sherwood Anderson and God knows how many others who tried to speak to America and got no answer.

REJECTS SOCIALISM

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.

...American anarchism, for which, over the past few years, I had developed a lot of respect as our last stand against fascist decorum.

POSTMODERN DRAMA

The shape of realism has been shattered; like all the fixed social ideas of the past our art lies in pieces.

We've lost the technique of grappling with the world that Homer had, that Aeschylus had, that Euripides had. And Shakespeare.... We just got educated into thinking this is all "a story," a myth for its own sake.

Today, I don't think playwrights care about history. I think they feel it has no relevance. 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 arch of the drama has had any effect on them.

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 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.

The tragic hero was supposed to join the scheme of things by his sacrifice. It's a religious thing, I've always thought... Well, *now* the view is that it's an inconsolable 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....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.

POPULAR CULTURE

The pressures of exploitation of literature, the photographic reporter, the television interview, the newspaper and magazine columnists—all these forces tend to press the writer closer to the position of performer. What comes to matter is less his work than the cult which comes to surround his personality.

A National Book Award has about the same importance among us as the Grand Prize for the Best Table Setting.

ELITIST ART

It seems to me that possibly because most of America does not hear us we have ceased to try to engage a vast attention and have been backed up into the invisible salon of art.

DECADENT LITERATURE

It lacks human meaning...when a people, and a literature, seizes only on doubt and will not accept the torture of trying to believe in the midst of doubt. It lacks human meaning if a literature merely exemplifies what dies and what shows the signs of death.

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...it's the bitter end of the world where man is a voice of his class function, and that's it.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

I wrote an essay arguing that if Marxism was indeed a science of society, a Marxist writer could not warp social probability and his own honest observations to prove an a priori point of political propaganda.

I do not believe that any work of art can help but be diminished by its adherence at any cost to a political program...and not for any other reason than that there is no political program—any more than there is a theory of tragedy—which can encompass the complexities of life.

New York, that riverbed through which so many subterranean cultures are always flowing, was swollen with rivulets of dispossessed liberals and leftists in chaotic flight from the bombarded old castle of self-denial, with its infinite confidence in social progress and its authentication-through-political-correctness of their position at the leading edge of history.

To a very important degree the theatre we have is the theatre the critics have permitted us to have, since they filter out what they consider we ought not see, enforcing laws that have never been written, laws, among others, of taste and even ideological content.

For all intents and purposes the contemporary American repertoire comes out of New York and represents the taste of whoever is writing the *New York Times* review, only slightly mitigated by other reviews...a dictatorship as effective as any cultural control mechanism in the world. Indeed, when the Soviets close down a show, it is a committee that makes the decision, rather than one man—at least since Stalin died.

SPIRITUALITY

If a person measures his spiritual fulfillment in terms of cosmic visions, surpassing peace of mind, or ecstasy, then he is not likely to know much spiritual fulfillment. If, however, he measures it in terms of enjoying a sunrise, being warmed by a child's smile, or being able to help someone have a better day, then he is likely to know much spiritual fulfillment.

MARILYN MONROE

I love her too, but our neuroses just don't match.

I had begun analysis with Rudolph Loewenstein, a Freudian of great skill.

I knew that somewhere behind my sexual anxieties lay incestuous stains that spread toward sister and mother.

Can anyone remember love? It's like trying to summon up the smell of roses in a cellar. You might see a rose, but never the perfume.

The world is an oyster but you don't crack it open on a mattress.

THE WRITER

The trouble is that the writer has to win recognition almost before he is recognizable. Before, that is, he is distinct. He needs recognition in order to win it. He therefore has to invent it first in the hope that his invention will be pronounced a fact by the outside world.

You are writers because you have inherited the ageless tension between despair and faith, the two arms of the tragic cross. The situation never changes, but man does. How and why is what you have to say.

There are and have been writers who have done more through middle and old age and up to the end, and Faulkner is perhaps the most noteworthy, and I say this without being one of his fans.

As a class, especially in America, the writer is a great beginner and a very bad finisher.

EUGENE O'NEILL

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.

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... I don't think there is anything in it for a young man to learn technically... He's a very insensitive writer. There's no finesse at all: he's the Dreiser of the stage.

MODERNISTS

Hemingway's early stylistic discoveries spoke not only to the reader but to all the books that had been written before. Joyce spoke to all of literature, Pound to all of poetry.

POSTMODERN FICTION

The underlying scheme of *Lolita* is a painting of American adolescence as it appears in the middle-aged man; *Catch-22* is a frontal attack on the idiocies not only of modern warfare but of society itself; the work of Saul Bellow has reached out beyond the preoccupation with salable sexuality into the investigation of what man might become, which is what *Henderson the Rain King* is especially about.

MORAL BASIS OF HIS PLAYS

In all my plays and books I try to take settings and dramatic situations from life which involve real questions of right and wrong. Then I set out, rather implacably and in the most realistic situations I can find, the moral dilemma and try to point out a real, though hard, path out. I don't see how you can write anything decent without using the question of right and wrong as the basis.

SOCIAL REFORM

Great drama is great questions or it is nothing but technique. I could not imagine a theater worth my time that did not want to change the world.

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.

The job is to ask questions—it always was—and to ask them as inexorably as I can. And to face the absence of precise answers with a certain humility.

WRITING PLAYS

If I see an ending, I can work backward.

The structure of a play is always the story of how the birds came home to roost.

The problem was to sustain at any cost the feeling you had in the theater that you were watching a real person, yes, but an intense condensation of his experience, not simply a realistic series of episodes.

A character is defined by the kinds of challenges he cannot walk away from. And by those he has walked away from that cause him remorse.

All the plays that I was trying to write were plays that would grab an audience by the throat and not release them, rather than presenting an emotion which you could observe and walk away from.

In the theater, while you recognized that you were looking at a house, it was a house in quotation marks. On screen, the quotation marks tend to be blotted out by the camera.

WRITING A HIT

The number of elements that have to go into a hit would break a computer down: the right season for that play, the right historical moment, the right tonality.

There is a sense for the dramatic form or there is not, there is stageworthy dialogue and literary dialogue and no one quite knows why one is not the other, why a dramatic line *lands* in an audience and a literary one sails over its head.

CREATIVE PEAK

It is my art. I am better at it than I ever was. And I will do it as long as I can. When you reach a certain age you can slough off what is unnecessary and concentrate on what is.

The best work that anybody ever writes is the work that is on the verge of embarrassing him, always.

DEATH OF THE THEATER

I'm the end of the line; absurd and appalling as it may seem, serious New York theater has died in my lifetime.

AESTHETICS

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 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.

CRITICS

When I look back, it was obvious that aside from *Death of a Salesman* every one of my plays had originally met with a majority of bad, indifferent, or sneering notices.... It has been primarily actors and directors who have kept my work before the public... I have often rescued a sense of reality by recalling Chekhov's remark: "If I had listened to the critics I'd have died drunk in the gutter."

IMMORTALITY

When you've got to be great, good isn't enough.

Immortality is like trying to carve your initials in a block of ice in the middle of July.

I know that my works are a credit to this nation and I dare say they will endure.

DEATH

A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man.

I'm nothing but faults, failures and so on, but I have tried to make a good pair of shoes.

Maybe all one can do is hope to end up with the right regrets.

Let you look sometimes for the goodness in me, and judge me not.

Some of these quotations are excerpted from
"Arthur Miller" (1966)

Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, Third Series
(Viking Compass, 1968)

