

Tesis Doctoral
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POSTMODERNISM, OR, THE CHANGED LOGIC OF LATE
ARTHUR MILLER

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Introduction: Arthur Miller, Postmodernism, and the American Century

In terms of length, the writing career of Arthur Miller is unmatched in American drama. With his first professionally produced play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), appearing while the Second World War was ongoing, and his last, *Finishing the Picture* (2004), performed the year after the American invasion of Iraq, an examination of his plays, and other works, allows for an unrivalled view of the social, cultural, and political developments of his age. Miller's reputation was forged, and, in many ways, sealed, with his early works. *All My Sons* (1947) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949) were both originally directed by the mid-century's most important director, Elia Kazan, and were critical and popular successes. With the Broadway stage still lacking a voice as powerful as Eugene O'Neill was in the 1920s and 1930s, Miller, along with Tennessee Williams, appeared to be his successor. Subsequent works *The Crucible* (1953) and *A View from the Bridge* (1956), despite being less popular on initial release, have since gone on to be regarded as classics, and are still regularly performed across the world. *All My Sons* and *Salesman*, as well as later plays *The Price* (1968) and *The American Clock* (1980), have both had well-received revivals this year in London, while 2014's Ivo van Hove-directed *A View from the Bridge* earned the director a Tony Award, and has been the subject of consistently high critical appraisal.

It is ironic, and perhaps not coincidental, that the last of this legendary quartet was first performed in 1956 (with a one-act version of *A View from the Bridge* premiering in 1955), the year in which Miller hit the peak of his fame, when he married movie star Marilyn Monroe. His writing career then stalled, and he did not have a play produced again until 1964 – four years after his divorce from Monroe, and less than two years after her death. In that time, though, he did write his first screenplay, *The Misfits* (1961), based on a short story of

his, and starring Monroe. In another indication of the enduring popularity of Miller, *The Misfits* was adapted for the stage for the first time in Dublin in 2018, under the direction of The Corn Exchange's Annie Ryan. For numerous reasons, Miller never again reached the kind of acclaim he achieved with his early works, though he continued to write, having his last play produced at the age of 88. The only work still produced with any regularity from this period, though, remains *The Price*. Miller also wrote short stories, screenplays (including an Oscar-nominated adaptation of *The Crucible* in 1996), a well-received autobiography, *Timebends: A Life* (1987), and many essays, articles, and reviews. He retained a decent degree of fame, and travelled extensively, initially as the president of writers' association PEN (Poets, Essayists, and Novelists) International, a post which he held from 1965 to 1969. On the political level, he met with iconic leaders such as Fidel Castro, Mickail Gorbachev, and Nelson Mandela, and was also a delegate at the 1968 and 1972 Democratic Party conventions. He appeared regularly in the media in the America and the UK, and was a strong public voice against the imprisonment of writers across the world.

The topic of this dissertation is a selection of plays that Miller wrote in this period when his plays began to receive less and less attention. The plays under discussion here are from after 1968, which, despite being referred to as the "latter" period of his career, in fact consists of more than half of it. The works he produced in this time are rich, varied, complex, and ambiguous, and such is the paucity of work on them that it is necessary to provide a comprehensive examination of a selection of them with specific reference to ideas of postmodernism, in order to better understand, and indeed explain, them. This dissertation, the culmination of four years research, including four conference papers and one peer-reviewed article, is an attempt to provide this examination. My contention is that, in the plays under discussion, Arthur Miller became heavily influenced by postmodernist styles of thought and writing. In many ways, this should be expected of a writer and intellectual in the United

States in the late 20th century. The popular image of Miller, however, remains that of a playwright who belonged to a previous age, whose stringent commitment to a moralistic view of the world did not suit the irony, playfulness, and violence of contemporary writing. Undoubtedly, he contributed to this conception of himself as a throwback; as Ramón Espejo notes of his 2000 essay collection, *Echoes Down the Corridor*, he “keeps returning to his usual topics: the Depression, McCarthyism, the Vietnam era, thus contributing to the view of someone whose eyes are not upon the present” (7). Indeed, a look at the index of his *Collected Essays* (2015) or even *Timebends* serves to suggest that Miller was not especially concerned with the contemporary theatre. While both books contain multiple references to O’Neill, Williams, Thornton Wilder, Clifford Odets, and Lillian Hellmann, there are no mentions of Edward Albee, Jack Gelber, LeRoi Jones, David Rabe, Sam Shepard, Marsha Norman, Wendy Wasserstein, David Mamet, Paula Vogel, Tony Kushner, and many more of the post-1950s radical and avant garde playwrights.

In this dissertation, I will construct a narrative of American drama from Albee and Gelber through Shepard and Rabe to, ultimately, a selection of Miller’s works, through the prism of postmodernism. This requires both a theoretical basis for defining postmodernism, in general and in terms of drama, and also an explanation of how the works of these writers, in particular, are relevant for how I understand Miller’s conception of the postmodern. I should note now that I do not claim this to be an entirely original endeavour. The writing of critics like Espejo, Andrew Sofer, Susan C.W. Abbotson, and Ashis Sengupta, among others, have been crucial for examining Miller in relation to the postmodern. What is original about this dissertation is that it will be a comprehensive study of these plays, and some of Miller’s key non-dramatic writing, that explicitly and conclusively contends that Miller was heavily influenced by postmodernism, and repeatedly wrote in a postmodernist vein. I do not contend that he surrendered entirely to either a postmodernist viewpoint or aesthetics (partly because

this is a level of “purity” that is little more than fantasy), but that much of what he wrote in this period is best understood through the lens of postmodernism. I contend that this would be a much easier conclusion to reach if we do not view Miller, primarily, as the man who wrote *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*, stood up to McCarthyism, and married Marilyn Monroe. By removing those shackles from his later works, I will show that it is clear that they should be regarded as complex, contemporary works that merit not only greater academic attention, but also well-funded theatrical revivals.

One possible reason for the hesitation to label Miller’s work as postmodernist is his own refusal to engage with the term – to return once again to his *Collected Essays*, not once does he use it in those works that span more than 50 years. It is difficult, though, to know how else to describe his worldview when he wrote in *Timebends* that

even unconsciously we had foregone the notion of a person totally free of deteriorating inner obeisances to power or shibboleth. It was more and more difficult to imagine in the last quarter of the century the naked selfness of a free human being speaking with no unacknowledged interest except his own truth. (573)

Whether this conception of Miller is the result of a refusal to engage with these writings, or in some cases to even read them, is impossible to know, but either way, I will show that Miller’s non-dramatic works, in multiple places, provide key indicators of his moving towards a postmodernist sensibility.

The issue of how exactly to define postmodernism, and postmodernist writing, will of course be crucial, and so will be targeted in the opening chapter. My understanding of postmodernism rests largely on two main writers, Jean Baudrillard and Linda Hutcheon. Baudrillard, especially in *Simulations* (1983), represents possibly the most extreme view of

the postmodernist world. In Baudrillard's view, the power of the media had, by the 1970s, become so strong that it had the ability to define reality for the population, and so no idea of reality was capable without their overwhelming influence. His language is often extreme, but the best way to understand Baudrillard is to not take him as seriously as the likes of Christopher Norris did. Baudrillard should be regarded as a media critic, and, crucially, someone who often spoke in metaphors. He, in some ways, acknowledges this latter point himself, when he writes that, even though he regarded the Vietnam War to be merely a simulacrum, "war is not any the less heinous for being a mere simulacrum – the flesh suffers the same and the dead ex-combatants hurt as much there as in other wars" (*Simulations*, 70). This is a point Norris does not note in his critique of Baudrillard, *Uncritical Theory: Intellectuals, Postmodernism, and the Gulf War* (1992). So, when Baudrillard writes that the real had been replaced by the "hyperreal", or "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (*Simulations*, 2), we should regard this as a metaphorical statement that points towards the ability of certain powerful bodies to control public thought and action to such grotesque extents. Baudrillard's idea of the postmodern is especially relevant to this dissertation because he focuses heavily on the popular media's role in shaping post-war society.

Lind Hutcheon's view on postmodernism, meanwhile, provides the core theoretical, political, and aesthetic underpinning of how I will employ the term. Hutcheon, writing in a tone that was not as exaggerated as Baudrillard or as sharply critical and moralistic as Norris and Fredric Jameson, identified the contradictions that are inherent in postmodernism, and so did not purport to have easy answers to the problems posed by postmodernist society. Hutcheon's version of postmodernism most readily aligns with that of Miller because it is one that acknowledges the constructed nature of so much of what had come to be regarded as natural, and so creates a context for questioning as many of these assumptions as possible.

For Miller, these questions related, ultimately, to the issue of how to define morality.

Whereas in *All My Sons* or *Salesman* we know what is moral, because, as Neil Carson writes, Miller seems to have a judicial view of life in his early works, and “tends to see all issues in terms of right and wrong, guilt or innocence” (80). This then becomes highly problematised by the time of *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* (1984), and in his penultimate play, *Resurrection Blues* (2002), we are left in a situation where there is most likely no moral action available.

I would like to now provide a rough guide to how this study will proceed. In the first chapter, I trace what I see as the core arguments in the debate around postmodernism, drawing on writing of both theory and literary criticism. I then narrow my discussion to two of the key novelists of the postmodern, Thomas Pynchon and Kurt Vonnegut. Although I am mostly concerned with Miller’s dramatic writing, these novelists are important for several reasons. The first of them is that the novel is probably the most notable medium by which postmodernism came to prominence, and few are better representatives of this than Pynchon and Vonnegut. The second is that postmodernist drama is less strictly defined as a concept, so novels are a good place to start my literary analysis. As Steven Connor writes, “the lack of an agreed and coherent version of the modernist history of drama has meant that theories of postmodern drama have to draw upon postmodern theory in other cultural fields” (*Postmodernist Culture*, 142), and that is precisely what I do here to move my discussion into literary matters. We should also remember that Miller, as has been mentioned, was not solely, or even mainly, influenced by dramatic developments – as Carson writes, after his marriage to Inge Morath in the 1960s, “[g]radually Miller lost touch with his theatre acquaintances of the 1950s and began to mingle instead with painters and writers” (93). Writing on postmodernism often shifts from architecture and music to film and literature, so I do not regard it as controversial to alternate between discussions of plays and novels in this way.

In the second chapter, I provide a comprehensive review of the critical literature on the plays with which I am concerned. While there will almost inevitably prove to be omissions, I will address the most relevant arguments made about the plays in question. I have already mentioned that there has been some excellent work written in relation to Miller and postmodernism, and I spend some time pulling these strands together in an effort to form a more coherent narrative. This chapter will help to show why my dissertation is an important contribution to Miller studies. Many critics have equivocated, and appeared reluctant to label Miller's work as postmodernist, instead describing it in that way before stopping themselves. I have no such hesitation in going further with my conclusions, and this chapter will highlight many of the key texts that have helped my argument develop.

The following four chapters will address each play in turn, with the exception of Chapter 4, which will discuss two plays. This will be explained below, but first I would like to propose an overall frame for how these chapters should be regarded. The chapters are placed chronologically, from when the plays were written, but, more importantly, they begin and conclude with a similar theme, that of the power of technology and the media to problematise, and potentially eliminate, morality, and therefore ethical actions. In *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, the subject of Chapter 3, Miller asks what happens to morality when one is constantly censoring oneself, due to fear of the influence of an absolutist power structure, represented here by state surveillance. In his first post-Watergate play, Miller wonders how surveillance affects consciousness, in a time when surveillance was increasingly becoming a fact of American life. This is of course linked to technological developments; in this play the listening bug, whose presence is never confirmed, stands in for an omnipotent deity.

In *Resurrection Blues*, meanwhile, we are provided with a vision of what nearly 30 years of this worldview produces. Like *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, this play is set outside, yet

is deeply concerned with, America. Many of the questions posed by Miller in the earlier play are now redundant – concepts of reality and morality only exist in this world to the extent that they further the immediate needs of the characters who invoke them. Crucially, there is no concept of an independent self, unaffected by technological developments, because technology and surveillance have become assumed parts of existence, and there are no longer viable political actions because they are all tainted with the negative impacts they will also have. It is in this last point that Miller’s title reveals its true meaning – there truly are blues, it seems to him, attached even if there also proved to be a miraculous resurrection. The journey from *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* to *Resurrection Blues* is the journey of this dissertation, and Miller’s changing conception of the world. From questioning the impact of technology to displaying an only slightly extreme vision of it, Miller, in these plays, comes to answer some of his own earlier questions – technological developments and domination, we see, do inhibit one’s ability to make moral decisions, and then act upon them.

With regards to the specific chapters, each one uses slightly differing methods of analysis. In the chapter on *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, I situate the play in relation to contemporary cinema, especially the narrative of paranoia and cultural pessimism that characterised some of the key films of the 1970s. In works like Alan J Pakula’s “paranoia trilogy” of *Klute* (1971), *The Parallax View* (1974), and *All the President’s Men* (1976), *Chinatown* (1974), *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975), *Taxi Driver* (1976), and *Network* (1976), there is continuous unease with the ability of powerful institutions to adequately perform in the public interest (with the exception of *All the President’s Men*, which, despite its mood of paranoia, eventually showcases a liberal faith in institutions to correct their own flaws). Miller’s play, preoccupied as it is by Cold War-era surveillance tactics, should be regarded alongside these works. I also consider a selection of Miller’s essays, as they show an increasing interest in life behind the Iron Curtain, as opposed

to the idealised view he had held as a younger man. Without explicitly stating it, his conception of Eastern Europe at this period in his life in some ways echoes that of George Orwell in the 1930s, as he came to understand the serious offences against human liberty and consciousness that characterised Soviet rule. This does not, however, show that Miller became a reactionary Cold Warrior, as instead he relates the gross nature of Soviet surveillance to American state power to suggest that the ways power operates in the two countries is perhaps not as different as one would assume. Both were surveillance states where morality was determined by power, in Miller's view. His engagement with the ideas of postmodernism is clear in the self-conscious, self-aware nature of the writing, the preoccupation with the power of representations, and the way in which the coherent individual disappears in favour of a human subject who is often shown to be little more than the sum of the influences placed upon them.

The following chapter deals with Miller's two detective plays of the 1980s, *Some Kind of Love Story* (1982) and *Clara* (1987). These are considered together because they are short, one-act plays, and deal with a roughly similar writing style – the postmodernist detective story. In this chapter, I provide a brief sketch of the postmodernist detective story, and then examine three of its most important examples – *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) by Pynchon, *The Name of the Rose* (1980) by Umberto Eco, and *The New York Trilogy* (1987) by Paul Auster. By discussing these novels, along with some of the most important critical and theoretical texts, we can see the importance of the detective story to postmodernism – because postmodernism is characterised by a lack of closure, the detective story, being a quest for a conclusive solution, is a perfect genre for postmodernism to disrupt the conventional narrative methods and assumptions. The postmodernist detective story, really, is not about the case at hand, and this is what we see in these two plays of Miller's. While the two plays operate differently, they contain some core elements, like a complication of a

relatively simple narrative, and a refusal to provide clear answers. That Miller wrote these two plays, which explicitly point towards the need for a resolution, but then fail to offer it, shows his increasing desire to not have his plays end with climactic deaths, or similarly dramatic denouements, as we see in his earlier work.

This dissertation's fifth chapter concerns *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* (1991), a play that gives clear indications as to Miller's thought processes, contested though it is by critics. I do not give much credence to the idea that Miller naming his protagonist "Lyman Felt" is a reference to Willy Loman, for the reason that there are far more interesting things to say about the play. That said, it certainly appears that this is an ironic, humorous move on Miller's part, and as such should be acknowledged, to that extent, as part of his developing postmodernist style. More important, in any case, is Miller's disrupting of memory and objective reality in this play. Returning to the theme of innocence, instead of allowing memory to clarify decisions and actions, Miller ensures that it instead complicates moral issues – because the wives of the protagonist remember certain events in a particular way, they become harder to judge objectively. While always keeping Lyman's guilt front and centre of the piece, Miller also shows the guilt that his wives, and best friend, share for their disaster. Another crucial aspect of the postmodernist style of this play is that the characters' moral values are not easily defined – even though there is no doubt that Lyman has done wrong, we can see his attractive, humorous side. This is, again, in contrast to the early plays, where the protagonist's death confirms, to some extent, their moral worth – in this play, everyone lives, and as such, everyone is guilty.

The final play under discussion is *Resurrection Blues*, Miller's first play of the 21st century, and I contend that this represents the culmination of Miller's view of the world that the postmodernist media had created. The presence, and influence, of television is all pervasive in this play, to the extent that it can only be understood by examining the impact of

television on American culture. Drawing on works by Cecelia Tichi, Neil Postman, and Joyce Nelson, I show that television culture became popular culture; indeed, television became America, in many ways. People's understanding of the country, and the world, came largely via television, and this can be seen in novels like Chris Krauss's *Torpor* (2006) and films like *Network*. In this chapter, I show that postmodernism and television were related in crucial ways, and that without the ability of television to create a true mass society, postmodernism would not have appeared as an idea. *Resurrection Blues*, perhaps the most timely of his plays since *Salesman*, is an attempt to address this world that television had helped to create. I again return to Miller's essays in this chapter, as they reveal his ear for satire, as well as his media analysis, both of which are crucial elements of this play.

This quick guide to my dissertation indicates how I conceive of the work as a whole, but, before I properly begin my discussion, I would first like to address a play that will recur numerous times throughout, but which I did not view as meriting full inclusion in my study. *After the Fall* was Miller's first play to be performed after an eight-year absence from the theatre that was partly caused by his marriage to Monroe. The play is heavily autobiographical, and while the most interesting studies of it minimise this aspect, it is necessary to address for background information. The play's protagonist is Quentin, a middle-aged lawyer who is coming to make a major life decision. Essentially, he wonders whether it is moral for him to continue with a new relationship, given the damage he has caused in two failed marriages thus far. The looming concentration camp tower, the only real piece of setting required, is a reminder that, after such a horrifying event, innocence is no longer an option for people. As his new girlfriend, Holga, says, "no one they didn't kill can be innocent again" (*Collected Plays: Volume II*, 148). The character, and the situations described, strongly echo Miller and his life, most strikingly in his second wife, Maggie – a singer and entertainer who eventually dies from a drug overdose, just as Monroe did. While I

do not wish to place much emphasis on this fact, it is relevant in at least one key way. The play is, unavoidably, extremely personal to Miller, and so there is no ironic distance between himself and the characters and their situations. This irony, that is so crucial to postmodernist writing, is entirely absent, and so we should not regard *After the Fall* as showcasing Miller's postmodernist sensibility. This evident depiction of Monroe and their marriage aroused controversy when the play was first released, but, placing that initial controversy aside, we can see the roots of much of what was to follow in Miller's work.

After the Fall showcases not only Miller's growing philosophical position, but also his aesthetic developments. As he writes, "[t]he action takes place in the mind, thought, and memory of Quentin. Except for one chair there is no furniture in the conventional sense; there are no walls or substantial boundaries" (127). This is a departure even from the Expressionism of *Salesman*, where Willy's memories and real life collided at will; here, as Carson writes, "the objective world virtually disappears, to be replaced by a fluid, timeless consciousness into which memories come and go at the prompting of will or passion" (73). This removal of an objective, knowable existence in which the play is "actually" happening is the first key indicator that Miller was moving away from a stable drama anchored in social issues and common struggles, and towards inner, psychological turmoil. As Terry Otten writes, the play "essentially shifts focus from the devastating forces of society to the dark passages of the human psyche" (106). That is not to say Miller continued to evade social issues in his later plays, as he did not, but he did often return to this concern with how individuals react to events, as opposed to how those events impacted the individual.

The core idea of *After the Fall* in relation to my study is that, in the words of the 1978 Sex Pistols single, "no-one is innocent". This is an idea to which I will return throughout, and so I feel the need to address it here first. Quentin, early on, relates the death of a progressive

ideal, and how he struggled with the realisation that, if he is not finally judged, then he cannot finally declare himself to be innocent, and so good:

Underlying it all, I see now, was a presumption that one moved not in a dry circle but an upward path toward some elevation, where... God knows what... I would be justified, or even condemned. A verdict, anyway. I think that my disaster really began when I looked up one day... and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. (129)

This is a concept that multiple protagonists in these plays have to deal with. For Adrian in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, it is not enough to make a futile, empty gesture – power's tentacles have rendered any easy answers impossible, and it might be best to comply with a regime that denies many basic freedoms. In the detective plays, no answer to the cases is found, and so innocence, ostensibly the goal of the work, is as absent as guilt is all-pervasive. In *The Ride Down Mount Morgan*, Lyman Felt might be right - keeping his two wives in blissful ignorance of each other, while he keeps the money rolling in and has to deal with his secret, the fact of his committing bigamy, could be way to make everyone happy – but then what does that mean for morality if such obscene deception might be the best way to live one's life? And, finally, in *Resurrection Blues*, we are presented with a world that is so full of violence, evil, and disregard for human beings, that it is generally agreed upon that it's not worth saving. No judgement is forthcoming, as it seems it has already been passed - the blinding flash of light who may be a messiah is implored to leave, and perhaps return if and when humanity is worth saving.

The plays discussed here all show a development in the writing and thought of Arthur Miller that suggests a radically different view of his dramatic work is needed. Instead of a

strict moralist, he should be seen as a writer who, while retaining the need for moral standards, was aware of how malleable those standards could prove to be. Instead of being an anachronistic throwback to Ibsenite drama, we should regard Miller as a theatrical innovator who utilised aspects of Epic, Absurdism, and many different methods, always with his own particular stylistic flair. More than anything, and on a very basic level, we should view Miller as a writer who was alive in the world, and not in his own detached fantasy. Miller lived in the world of Marshall McLuhan and the George W Bush; the Vietnam War and the internet; television and the Cold War; the Civil Rights Movement and Bill Clinton's sex scandals. Only by considering his work in this full context can we fully appreciate his dramatic and philosophical range.

1. Postmodernism: Theory, Politics, Texts

1.1: Contexts and Definitions

Arthur Miller, as has been mentioned, has rarely been considered a postmodernist writer. Often, this is due to a reluctance to engage with his works on those terms, but it can also be due to a refusal to define postmodernism in a way that makes sense in relation to his work. In this chapter, I will set out a clear, comprehensive definition of postmodernism that makes use of a large number of critical and theoretical views, which, as I will show, will align with my conception of Miller's plays. Postmodernism need not be defined by its most extreme theoretical or textual manifestations, and so I do not propose that there is one definitive way in which the term should be used. Rather, I concur with Linda Hutcheon, who consistently foregrounded the contradictory nature of postmodernism.

Postmodernism and postmodernity remain acutely slippery terms, still impossible to define in a way that satisfies every critic. In 1980, John Barth wrote that "a principal activity of postmodernist critics, writing in postmodernist journals or speaking at postmodernist symposia, consists of disagreeing about what postmodernism is or ought to be" ("The Literature of Replenishment", 194), and indeed there are as many postmodernisms as there are theorists of the postmodern. David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavrakis reject the notion that "it is clear what postmodernism means [and that] its meaning is stable and unitary" (xix), which reflects the general ambiguity that surrounds the term, even forty plus years after "the mid 1970s [when] the term gained a much wider currency" (11), according to Andreas Huyssen. Hans Bertens writes of numerous conceptions of the term:

If there is a common denominator to all these postmodernisms, it is that of a crisis of representation: a deeply felt loss of faith in

our ability to represent the real, in the widest sense. No matter whether they are aesthetic, epistemological, social, moral, or political in nature, the representations that we used to rely on can no longer be taken for granted. (11)

This is a good starting point, as it foregrounds the general air of uncertainty and ambiguity that is reflected in the postmodernist text. Most famously, Jean Francois Lyotard defined postmodernism as “an incredulity towards metanarratives” (“Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*”, xxiv), but although this gives an indication of the intellectual mood of the period of the postmodern, it is not as helpful when attempting to identify the features of a postmodernist text. One of the most common characteristics that is noticed by critics is the self-awareness of the postmodernist text; the expressed knowledge that it is a text and has been written, and is also being read. Craig Owens posits that “the allegorical impulse that characterizes [sic] postmodernism is a direct consequence of its preoccupation with reading” (7), and it is certainly the case that the postmodernist text was markedly occupied, or even preoccupied, with the subject of reading, both with regards to its relationship with and references to other authors and texts, but also the way in which the text itself is to be read. This consciousness of itself as a text to be read, and indeed is being read, is even vital to the metatheatrical nature of some of the most important dramatic works of the period. Hutcheon also comments on the self-awareness of the postmodernist text, writing: “In general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement” (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 1). Patricia Waugh writes that the term “postmodern”

shifted from a description of a range of aesthetic practices including playful irony, parody, parataxis, self-consciousness, fragmentation, to a use which encompasses a more general shift in thought and seems to register a pervasive loss of faith in the

progressivist and speculative discourses of modernity.

(“Introduction” to *Postmodernism: A Reader*, 3)

This loss of faith in progressive values and institutions, linked with the Enlightenment and modernity, has been one of the biggest sources of contention for critics of postmodernism, such as Christopher Norris, whose work in relation to Jean Baudrillard will be discussed below.

To understand what postmodernism had become by the time Miller shows its influence in his work, it is necessary to explore its origins and development. While I cannot discuss every crucial text or author, I shall discuss a selection of writers whose conception of the postmodern best aligns with what I identify in Miller’s work. In 1959, Irving Howe, in his essay “Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction”, presented a version of postmodernism that would lay out much of what was to be discussed by later critics. He insisted that a selection of writers, including Bernard Malamud, J.D. Salinger and Saul Bellow, whose work he termed “post-modernist fiction”, projected “moral criticisms of [American life’s] essential quality” (433). He also contrasted this with what he saw as a general symptom of “mass society”; that “the era of ‘causes’, good or bad, comes to an end; strong belief systems seem anachronistic” (427). John Osborne expressed something similar in 1956, with Jimmy Porter, the protagonist of *Look Back in Anger*, despairing “I suppose people of our generation aren’t able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us in the thirties and forties, when we were kids. There aren’t any good, brave causes left” (84). Although *Look Back in Anger* is not a postmodernist text, Stevick links this line of argument with postmodernism, writing that postmodernist writers are “[I]legates of an absurdist [sic] tradition, members of a generation more sensitive than any before it to dead causes, empty gestures, and hollow rhetoric”; hence they “can hardly surprise us by their reluctance to stake out the territory ahead” (137). We will see this starkly in Miller’s work, where moral world foundations

disappear to a large extent, and characters are left paralysed, not knowing how to act in a world where morality has become so problematised.

Howe suggests that American writers had begun to alter their way of writing due to “the something new which they notice or stumble against [which is] the mass society” (426). In his description of mass society (Howe’s use of the definite article in relation to “mass society” is unnecessarily and regrettably clumsy, so I will not continue to use it), Howe not only pre-empts Lyotard’s insistence on the demise of metanarratives – “certain assumptions concerning modern society, which have long provided novelists with symbolic economies and dramatic conveniences, are no longer quite so available as they were a few decades ago” (426) - but also Baudrillard’s insistence on the essential hyperreality of modern life, writing that in mass society, “as perhaps never before, opinion is manufactured systematically and scientifically [and] opinion tends to flow unilaterally, from the top down, in measured quantities: it becomes a market commodity” (427). Howe’s early writing greatly contributed to the idea that the postmodern was certainly, if also undefinably, a new period of human society. He asserted that after the Second World War “our society no longer lent itself to an assured definition” (428), and this came to be reflected in writers who became less able to directly confront society. Instead, he wrote, they relied on “fable, picaresque, prophecy and nostalgia” (430). All of these concepts will appear, occasionally in slightly different guises, throughout my discussion of the postmodern. Howe’s essay had a far-reaching effect on debates around postmodernist literature and culture, and his descriptions of mass culture often appear more prescient today than when they were first written. For example, another of his symptoms of mass society is that “[d]irect and first-hand experience seems to evade human beings” (427), an idea which forms the central theme of Ben Lerner’s 2011 novel *Leaving the Atocha Station*. Its protagonist, Adam Gordon, leaves the protests in Madrid following the 2004 terrorist attack to “read about the unfolding events of which I had failed to

take part” (131), in an outright rejection of real life experience, the kind of action of which Howe despaired.

Defining the terms postmodernism and postmodernity hands me an almost infinite number of strands at which to pull, so the scope must be narrowed before any discussion can begin. With regards to periodising the term, it is appropriate to begin at the end of the Second World War. That is not to say features we have labelled postmodernist do not appear in pre-1945 texts¹ (this, in the words of Ihab Hassan, “is true of any single trait in any cultural movement” (xv)) or that the surrender of Japan to the United States immediately altered the way in which writers approached their craft. But it acknowledges that the Second World War was such a cataclysmic event that it caused an irreversible change in human behaviour and consciousness. David Cowart asserts that “most of those who read across the long twentieth century concur that some kind of epistemic rupture took place after World War II” (“Prolonged Periodisation”, 43). The Second World War did not represent the “failure” of modernity, but it did call into question some of its core principals. Zygmunt Bauman was one for whom the Holocaust did not signal the defeat of modernity, but rather brought some of its problems to the surface. Docherty writes of his point of view,

[i]t is not that modernity leads inexorably to the Holocaust.

Rather, the civilised face of modernity is attended constantly by a barbarism which is its other side [...] The horror of the evil of the Holocaust, is for Baumann, actually a horror of the rationality of the Holocaust. The Enlightenment project, which was to some extent conditioned by humanity’s desire to master nature in the

¹ There are countless examples to mention here, the most notable including Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605) and Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851).

process of disenchantment, enabled the development of an extremely ordered self-sustaining social process. (12)

Bauman therefore acknowledges the danger of the ultra-rational viewpoint of modernity, which, blended with “a high romantic vision of national community” (Docherty, 12), culminated, in his view, in the Holocaust. Matei Calinescu equivocates somehow on this issue, writing that

World War II, with its unprecedented savageness and destruction, with its revelation of the brutality at the core of high technological civilization, could appear as the culmination of a demonic modernity, a modernity that had finally been overcome. (267)

Hutcheon recognises the necessity of historical context for this line of arguing, as she points out, “[w]hatever modernism’s historical and social ideals at its inception, by the end of the Second World War its innovatory promises had become symbols – and causes – of alienation and dehumanization [sic]” (*Poetics of Postmodernism*, 25). It is Andreas Huyssen, however, who provides as stern a defence as is required for the charge that “too much” modernity resulted in the Second World War and the Holocaust, writing that Auschwitz “was organized [sic] as a perfectly rationalized [sic] death factory, but from a violent anti-Enlightenment and anti-modernity affect [sic], which exploited modernity ruthlessly for its own purposes” (33). This is not to conflate entirely the Holocaust with the Second World War, but they were both results of a mindset that privileged one race above all others, which was allied with the height of technological achievements. However, the unparalleled death and destruction wrought by the detonation of nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 can absolutely be attributed to a twisted, single-minded dedication to technological advance. Vonnegut, for instance, wrote that he “learned how vile that religion of mine [enthusiasm for technology]

could be when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima” (*Palm Sunday*, 69). Hutcheon asserts that “postmodernism called into question the messianic faith of modernism, the faith that technological innovation and purity of form can assure social order” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 11), and it is the case that certain ideas and aesthetic styles of the modernist period were rejected in the post-war world.

1945 is not the sole important year to my understanding of the postmodern, though. Towards the mid-1970s, with the America having left behind the relative optimism and economic growth of the 1960s for a declining economy, increased urban violence, and political turmoil, it is generally accepted that postmodernism came to be a more important fixture on the intellectual and artistic scene. Hans Bertens writes that

[i]t is hard to deny that Mandel’s break of 1974-5, or David Harvey’s division of postwar capitalism into two periods, with 1973 as the dividing moment, seems more productive with respect to periodization [sic] of the postmodern than a post-1945 late capitalism. (11)

As I have said above, 1945 did not mark the immediate onset of postmodernism, but it is necessary to think of postmodernism as a post-Second World War development, so I do not concur entirely with the latter section of this quote. However, there is some agreement that this period of the mid-1970s was a moment of cultural shift in America. Brian McHale, referring to the Oil Crisis, the Paris Peace Accords, the Yom Kippur War, Watergate, and the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision to legalise abortion writes that “Americans around 1973 [...] began to suffer from that inability to think historically that Fredric Jameson would later identify as a key characteristic of the postmodernist sensibility” (176). McHale links this lack of ability to conceive of matters in historical terms, which was a subject in many Miller

plays, from every period, not to postmodernism itself, but to postmodernism's *awareness* of itself. He writes that 1973 was the onset of "postmodernism's *branding*. On or about 1972-3, the postmodern culture that had been 'lurking in the wings' since at least the mid-60s acquired its brand name" (176, author's italics). While we should not take McHale entirely literally here, as he seems to be echoing Virginia Woolf's comment regarding Modernism that "on or about December 1910 human character changed" (421), his assertion is still eminently useful.

Bertens, meanwhile, writes that

the commercialised postmodernism that began to flood the market in the course of the 1970s [...] promotes the consumer capitalism that has enabled its existence in the first place. It was the left's early (and totally creditable) aversion to this consumer postmodernism that made it reluctant to enter the debate that for a long time conditioned its reaction. (29)

As self-consciousness is so crucial to the aesthetic of postmodernist writing, this alteration (regardless of how specific one wants to be about the date), when postmodernism became more aware of itself as a set of ideas, marked a meaningful change in how people conceived of postmodernism.

It is important not to allow this to assume the character of a full-blown rejection of rational debate, humanism and intellectualism on the part of postmodernism. This is the version that postmodernism's harshest critics, such as Norris, portray, when the reality is much more complex, and much has been written, to be discussed later, on the political aspects of the postmodern, for instance the work of Waugh and Hutcheon. Still, the discovery of the full extent of the Holocaust revealed a savagery that alone would have prompted a

rupture in the global psyche. Robert Eaglestone writes that Christopher Browning's claim that the Holocaust was a "watershed" "is much wider and all-pervasive: it suggests a profound sense of change in 'who we are' and 'how the world is for us'" (40), and he explicitly links the postmodern with the Holocaust, writing that "the constellation of ideas, approaches, and aesthetic practices broadly described as "postmodern" have their origins in response to the Holocaust" (39). While I do not fully concur with Eaglestone's final claim, I do concur that the Holocaust was the defining "rupture", to use a word common to this discussion, brought about by the Second World War, insofar as it became the most pervasive image of Nazi cruelty and horror in the post-War years. To briefly touch on Miller and the Holocaust, Susan C.W. Abbotson wrote that "Miller reacted strongly and sensitively to the Holocaust, a uniquely Jewish event which he felt reintroduced moral ambiguity into everyone's lives" ("Miller and the Postmodern Impulse", 314). We can see this preoccupation in much of his dramatic and non-fiction writing, but it is curious that when he addresses the topic on stage, it was in a decidedly un-postmodernist style, in plays like *Incident at Vichy* and *Broken Glass* (1994), which relied on more traditional, casual drama than the self-conscious, ironic works I will discuss here.

The second main historical context in which I intend to place postmodernism is that of the Cold War, specifically in relation to the United States. The Cold War provoked a frenzied paranoia in the United States, which was largely fabricated by successive governments in order to justify large spending on the military, allegedly to contain communism, and prevent an expanded welfare state, as happened in Britain after the war. Thomas Hill Schaub, for instance, writes that during the presidency of Harry Truman (1945-1953), "the fear of communist influence exerted such pressure on political and intellectual life in the United States that many liberal programs for social reform were attacked as being subversive" (8). The Red Scare was a vital element to the propaganda system of the American government

during the Cold War, as it helped to demonise anyone with an opinion that diverted from the political mainstream. This of course affected Miller in the early- and mid-1950s, when he was denied a passport for travelling to Belgium to attend the premiere of *The Crucible* and summoned (largely as a propaganda exercise following his marriage to Monroe) before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. John Bell makes the point that this repression had considerable influence in the arts, writing that

in the developing Cold War climate which dominated all forms of American culture from 1945 through the 1970s, a certain amount of repression was in order: homosexuality and leftist political sentiments were not just uncomfortable lifestyles or beliefs, but dangerous to the United States' sense of its very existence as the leader of the 'Free World'. (119)

This idea that any dissent from a narrow position and identity could have apocalyptic outcomes was but one indicator of the paranoia that underpinned so much of postmodernist thought. Cold War paranoia came to be reflected in the thought and art of the period, including *The Crucible*, Norman Mailer's *Barbary Shore* (1951), Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, and a host of crucial films in the 1970s. I will show below that Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* is best understood as a paranoia text of the era. Barry Lewis writes on such paranoia that "the total engulfment by somebody else's system is keenly felt by many of the dramatis personae of postmodernist fiction. It is tempting to speculate that this is an indirect mimetic representation of the climate of fear and suspicion that prevailed throughout the Cold War" (129). Tony Jackson also made this case, writing, "it is, I would argue, neither simply coincidence nor historical development that finds these ideas [postmodernism and its narrative style] appearing to the world as they do during the Cold War" (324). The paranoia of the Cold War was not simply political in its nature, however. With the Cold War came the

very real threat of the destruction of civilisation by nuclear war, and so the paranoia of the era took on another, existential, form. Leslie Fiedler linked this to the growth in popularity of science fiction in the post-war period, writing that “the end of Man, by annihilation or mutation, was a real, even an immediate possibility” (356). This fear of destruction by technological means was a heightened version of the unease at the rapid development in technology in the post-war world, from television to the nuclear bomb itself.

In this chapter, I will sketch some of the general arguments around postmodernism and postmodernity, examine the work of some of the most important theorists of the postmodern, discuss the political argument around postmodernism, and then conclude by discussing postmodernist culture and aesthetics, building a firm basis for my subsequent discussion of Miller’s late work. Some of the most important aspects of this discussion will be paranoia, representation, and the role the media plays in the formulation of ideas and actions in a postmodernist world. I do not intend here to take a firm position on the validity or political influence of postmodernism, but to present my own interpretation of these ideas, how they developed, and how they subsequently influenced Miller’s writing.

1.2: Technology, Democracy, and Art

I have already mentioned that the idea of postmodernism came about in an age of unprecedented change in human society. One of the main changes was in the realm of technology, which Marshall McLuhan, writing in 1964, was one of the first to grasp, in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. He realised that, with the rapid advancement of technological change in the post-war world, a radically different society was being formed. Much of what McLuhan wrote was later repeated and developed by other theorists, but it is intriguing to consider this crucial text, given that he does not use the word “postmodern” once. It is notable, for instance, that he wrote “under electric technology the entire business of

man becomes learning and knowing. In terms of what we still call an ‘economy’ [...] all forms of wealth result from the movement of information” (69), while in 1994 David Lyons surmised that “the modern industrial order seems to give way to new organizing [sic] principles structured around knowledge, not Marx’s labour and capital, and based on machines to augment mental rather than muscle power” (2). Here, Lyons effectively confirms McLuhan’s prediction that the dominance of electronic technology would result in a radically different economy.

Eagleton conflated this change in the economic model with the cultural shift, writing, “investment shifted away from industrial manufacture to the service, finance and communication sectors. As big business became cultural, ever more reliant on image, packing and display, the culture industry became big business” (41). Stevick noted that by 1985 “[e]conomists have long since begun to call our period ‘postindustrial’, observing that many of our basic industries are moribund and that our energies are increasingly given to service and high technology” (135). Jameson is sceptical of this argument, asking:

Is this moment of advanced industrial society a structural variant of classical capitalism or a mutation and the dawning of a wholly new social structure in which, as Daniel Bell and other theoreticians of the concept of a properly ‘postindustrial’ society have argued, it is now science, knowledge, technological research, rather than industrial production and the extraction of surplus value, that is the ultimately determining instance?

(“Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition*”, xiii)

But it is difficult to answer this question in the terms he lays out. To say that this is either a variant of capitalism or a wholly new social structure does not leave a lot of room for nuance

or detail. Lyotard was confident that knowledge, or information, was to become the equivalent of capital, writing:

The relationships of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume – that is, the form of value. Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use-value’. (4-5)

As I have said, this economic alteration is indicative of the technological change, and also played a part in fostering the alienation that postmodernist literature and thought attempted to redress in its essentially democratic nature. John McGowan states that in postmodernist politics, in any form, “an underlying commitment to democracy reveals itself” (28), while Bertens quotes Heller and Feher writing that the postmodernist political condition “is premised on the acceptance of the plurality of other cultures and discourses” (187). Harvey, meanwhile, writes that “the most liberative and therefore most appealing aspect of postmodern thought [is] its concern with ‘otherness’” (47). These conceptions can both be understood as attempts to bring control, or agency, back to people from whom the economic system has removed it.

The economic change can be conceived spatially, too. Steven Connor writes that by the 1980s “the rise of an economy driven from its peripheries by patterns of consumption rather than from its centre by the needs of production produced much more unstable

economic conditions” (Postmodernism Grown Old”, 35). This foregrounding of consumption, as people moved further away from labour and its products, was another crucial aspect to the postmodern, and was reflected in the relative democratisation of culture in the post-war world. Gerhard Hoffmann, Alfred Hornung and Rüdiger Kunow write that Ihab Hassan, an early user of the term, “finds that the ‘anti-elitism’ of postmodern literature can be understood as a reaction against the fundamentally elitist attitude of modernism” (27), and this began to become abundantly clear in the ways in which postmodernist texts blended high and low culture. Jameson writes that

the Postmodernisms have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole ‘degraded’ landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader’s Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and grade-B Hollywood films, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer ‘quote’, as a Joyce or Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance. (*Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 2-3)

Here, Jameson highlights a key factor in postmodernist art. He laments that contemporary artists are so engaged with and versed in popular culture, but this was often used audience familiarity with the style to create a new style of storytelling. This can be seen in Shepard’s *True West* (1980), with its postmodernist twist on the traditional Western story, Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace* (1989), which uses the themes and language of the old West as part of a broader narrative, and in *The Crying of Lot 49*, with its radical distortion of the traditional

detective narrative. The detective narrative is one of the most common and useful ones in the postmodernist canon, with Barry Lewis suggesting that “the detective genre is another candidate for the post of true companion of postmodernism. The pursuit of clues appeals to the postmodernist writer because it so closely parallels the hunt for textual meaning by the reader” (126). This idea will be expanded upon later, as I discuss Arthur Miller’s forays into the detective genre in two of his one-act plays from the 1980s.

Leslie Fiedler brought together several strands of the postmodern in his 1972 essay “Cross the Border – Close the Gap”, including the importance of the Western genre and the blending of high and mass culture. He also discusses the political implications of postmodernism, and is generally optimistic, despite writing that “we have, however, entered quite another time, apocalyptic, antirational, blatantly romantic and sentimental; an age dedicated to joyous misogyny and prophetic irresponsibility” (345). He concludes, however, that “to turn High Art into vaudeville and burlesque at the same moment that Mass Art is being irreverently introduced into museums and libraries is to perform an act which has political as well as aesthetic implications: an act which closes a class, as well as a generation gap” (359). Fiedler is especially concerned with the Western, science fiction and pornography as the styles which bridge the cultural gap, with the Western the “most congenial [...] precisely because it has [...] been experienced purely as myth and entertainment rather than ‘literature’ at all” (352). He did not regard the detective story as such, even though due to the works of Pynchon, Auster, Eco, Jorge Luis Borges, and Italo Calvino, it would subsequently become a core genre on which to play out postmodernist concerns. Fiedler wrote that the detective story had “become hopelessly compromised by middlebrow condescension” (351). He saw the Western as being the most important because it represented the most notable closure of the “gap” of the essay’s title, being the easiest genre to link the generations.

The Western, in Fiedler's view, harked back to juvenile literature, which he saw as having dominated American literary history – “our classic books are boy's books – our greatest novels at home in the Children's Section of libraries; in short, they are all in some sense ‘Westerns’” (354). This meant the Western not only closed the cultural gap, with its reliance on old formulas and tropes, but also the generational gap, as it was explicitly acknowledged that books intended for adults were written in a juvenile guise. It was pornography, however, that Fiedler saw as “the *essential* form of Pop Art, which is to say the most unredeemable of all kinds of subliterature” (357, author's italics). He remarks that Mailer's *An American Dream* (1965) went to “the place where in darkness and filth all men are alike – the Harvard graduate and the reader of the *Daily News*” (358), but the paradox the novel presents, he maintains, is that to critique it correctly, that is, in terms of James Bond novels (his example), in Fiedler's view “would be to confess that the old distinctions are no longer valid, and that critics will have to find another claim to authority more appropriate to our times than the outmoded ability to determine between High and Low” (358). For this essentially democratic nature, Fiedler was broadly optimistic about postmodernism in 1972, and this essay remains a key example of the cautious optimism around the subject. With writers like Howe bemoaning mass society, and, later, Baudrillard expressing something close to pure nihilism, Fiedler's writing shows the liberatory potential in postmodernist thought.

1.3: Paranoia, the Mass Media, and the “Crisis of Representation”

I would like now to dwell on the idea of paranoia, because this gets to the root of my conception of postmodernism. Paranoia can be defined in multiple ways, but I would like to apply a fairly loose definition to it. I define it as not only being unsure as to whether something's nature is really the one it appears to have, but being entirely unsure of how you would know whether the thing's nature is a certain way. This can refer to anything from an

event (“Did the Gulf of Tonkin incident occur as it was reported?”) to an emotion (“Is that really how I feel?”). Jerry Aline Flieger writes that Lacan “argues that the paranoid is actually characterized [sic] by just such a *dis* belief, an incredulity concerning the guarantability of the Symbolic order” (90, author’s italics), and I am content to consider this part of my definition. I am not suggesting that the ability to evaluate incidents and emotions disappeared, or even came close to it. That is following the argument to its furthest possible point, which not even Baudrillard does with his questioning of the Gulf War – as I will discuss below, Baudrillard and others are best understood if we read them metaphorically. Paranoia was heightened by the rapid growth and expansion of new media forms, particularly television, as events came to be filtered through the particular lens that television constructed. Ideas were being disseminated quicker than ever before, but they were also being controlled more than ever before. As McLuhan writes, “to say that ‘the camera cannot lie’ is merely to underline the multiple deceits that are now practiced in its name” (205-206). This quote is an excellent way to begin thinking about the ability of technology to distort an event or image into something far removed from its actual or original meaning, despite appearing to be doing the opposite.

Peter Knight is perhaps hasty in declaring that John F. Kennedy’s assassination was “the defining event responsible for a widespread and ongoing sense of suspicion that the official version of things is a lie” (229), but it was certainly a seminal moment, and one that continues to evoke suspicion as to what actually happened². That Kennedy’s murder was far less cataclysmic and violent than to many other events of the decade is not especially relevant; what is relevant is how this played on the American psyche. Mailer wrote in *Vanity Fair* as late as 1992 that “[s]ince the assassination of John F. Kennedy we have been marooned in one of two equally intolerable spiritual states, apathy or paranoia” (qtd. Knight

² Stephen King released his book on the assassination, *11/22/63*, in 2011, showing that the topic retains the ability to captivate a mass audience.

235). This highlights the strength of the effect of the murder. It was not only the random nature of Kennedy's murder, or even the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald's subsequent assassination made the attainment of closure impossible, that provoked such a paranoid feeling, but more the notion that there had been a vast cover up by the highest-ranking officials in the country. Knight reports that "according to an annual opinion poll, three quarters of Americans trusted their government in the early 1960s; by the early 1990s, three quarters of Americans *distrusted* their government" (229, author's italics). Knight goes on to mention the publication of the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate hearings, and the Church Committee investigations into the behaviour of the CIA as things that also contributed to this loss of faith. Undoubtedly, the Vietnam War played a role in this, but, in a sense, the individual reasons are not especially relevant to my discussion; what is evident is that people began to lose faith in institutions, and this began to assume more metaphysical overtones in literature and thought.

Knight's theory is not dominated by the assassination, however, and he writes that "[t]he notion of a vast, secret organization [sic] controlling an individual's body or even his or her mind continued to resonate through a wide range of American cultural and political expression both before and after the assassination" (234). I do not intend to discuss further the Kennedy assassination, as I only consider it relevant as a symbol, hardly even a catalyst, of postmodernist paranoia. Knight himself says that it "has come to play a key role in theoretical discussions of postmodernism and paranoia" (246), which is slightly overblown, again, but he does broaden his argument into the cultural realm, listing several films that balance "subliminal glimpses into a vast and potentially limitless conspiracy against the possibility that the conspiracy is all in the mind of the obsessive amateur detective haunted by the case in which he has become embroiled" (237). He goes on to write of "the desire for and distrust of knowledge that is at the heart of postmodernism" (238), and with this evocative

and useful phrase, which I intend to keep in mind, I am going to turn to the issue of paranoia and the media, the rapid growth of which helped foster this sense of paranoia.

The media expanded its scope and influence hugely in the aftermath of the Second World War, becoming known as the “mass media”, which in turn leads to the concept of “mass society”. I do not wish to suggest that there was no idea of mass society pre-1945, but such were the rapidly expanding capabilities of the media, spearheaded by television, to create a conception of mass society, that it is an appropriate demarcation of difference. Woodward asks of this concept, “[t]he mass media may have created mass culture, as Raymond Williams believes, but does it follow that the mass media have created the masses – by which we generally mean the *unthinking* public – as well?” (xxiii, my italics). As uncomfortable as I am with Woodward’s language and tone, I would broadly answer her question in the affirmative. If we allow television to represent the mass media, it then must be acknowledged that in the post-war years its influence was almost beyond comprehension. Never before had there been such an all-pervasive purveyor of ideology in the world, and its rapid growth in popularity indicated its power – the more people watched television, the more they wanted to watch it, and so its influence became even greater. John Johnston writes “with the advent of television and the increasing saturation of the social space with a range of electronic media in the 1960s, a new threshold for pervasiveness and speed seems to have been crossed” (95), which is phrased in a more measured tone than that of Woodward. But they both strike at the same point - that the expansion of the media altered society as well as political consciousness. Johnston says that the difference in new mass media products is their intended audience. He writes, “the contents of mass-media images, following their specific form of technical production and transmission, are not intended for individual reception, but are made to appeal to and even produce a new form of consciousness” (97). This production of images for a mass consciousness fosters a decline in the critical abilities of the populace as

the message being relayed has no need for subtlety, and can rely on slogans, catchphrases, blind assertions, and so on, which are necessarily designed to simplify most issues, and exclude others from the debate entirely.

Flieger foregrounded technology and the media in his discussion of postmodernist paranoia, writing,

the transparency of our information-saturated global monad in the age of instantaneous ‘contact’ and access doubtless confers a paranoid modality to ‘postmodern’ life, giving us the feeling that we are being watched everywhere, monitored and transcribed by a ubiquitous information book. (87)

Flieger evidently sees surveillance and paranoia as being essential to postmodernist society. This is not only because people became aware of the possibility of their lives being tracked (he provides the example of credit ratings, for instance), but also because of the awareness of what people did not know, a feeling that was heightened by rapid technological change as the end of the 1990s approached. In the period before full integration of our lives with modern technology such as laptops, tablets and smart phones, technological change began to accelerate at such a rate that people were unable to understand the breadth of the changes.

Flieger says that

postmodern paranoia may be considered a special case of the spectacular imaginary – which Jean Baudrillard has called ‘hypervisibility’ – the pre-eminence of the virtual in the millennial era, accompanied by an increasing blindness to the real material conditions that ground us. (88)

Be that as it may, paranoia is not always an unfounded belief; the population generally have very good reasons to believe that their government is lying to them, or spying on them, for example. Richard Wasson viewed the media without considering the paranoid lens, writing, in 1974, “[t]he new cultural optimism says *yes* to all the chaotic elements of life, to the world of the mass media, of technology, of all the ‘new and threatening ways that man is finding to handle the world in which he lives’” (1,191, author’s italics), wherein he quotes William Hamilton. This is a good example of how the mass media and developments in technology did not always prompt paranoid analyses, but arguably a more simplistic optimism, if not naivety, that technology will inherently lead to human liberation and happiness.

Postmodern paranoia took many forms, whether it be fear of surveillance, fear of control, fear of being deceived, or, at its highest level, as I have suggested above, the fear that one won’t discover whether one’s fears are justified or not. Mark Poster writes of Baudrillard’s position:

For him the media are strange phenomena, ones that cannot simply fit within modern distinctions of real and the imaginary. The media produce only simulations and remain in that register. They create both intensifications of reality and substitutes for reality without ever attaining it. When popular enough as they are today, they incite a thirst for reality. Hence all the television shows which bring reality into a functional setting, shows about ‘real’ murders, ‘real’ bloopers, ‘infomercials’, and so forth”. (17)

To that list one could now add reality television, constructed reality television, docu-dramas, and -comedies, and myriad other online developments. That strays from the main point, however. I quote Poster here because he perfectly expresses the paranoid postmodernist fear

surrounding reality. This is not to say that there is literally no way of divining what is real or otherwise – Baudrillard, speaking metaphorically but solely serving to provide ammunition for his critics, refers to “the spectre raised by simulation – namely that truth, reference and objective causes have ceased to exist” (*Simulations*, 6) - but that the standards people had maintained have been revealed to be far less trustworthy than previously considered.

The methods of spreading information had proved unreliable, as I will discuss when analysing Baudrillard’s work, and new questions had started to be asked. As Trachtenberg writes, “[t]he postmodern imagination questions the value of any universalizing [sic] formulation; questions even the validity of language as a means of approaching one” (6). Poster also cites opinion polls as creating a “false” reality, writing: “Opinion polls construct knowledge on the basis of rules of statistics and questionnaire strategies. This knowledge would not otherwise exist in the social” (17). This is a good example of how the media managed to frame opinion in order to create it. The realisation of this strategy does not lead, then, to a questioning of what is real, but to a consideration of how much verisimilitude one should attribute to the media’s handling of events. To return briefly to Kennedy, Knight writes that Fredric Jameson “sees the assassination as the inaugural event of the 1960s, and postmodernism, ushering in a world in which experience is never direct and unmediated but always channelled through media representation” (246-247). The crucial fact here is that the media provided incessant coverage of the aftermath of Kennedy’s death (depicted in Auster’s recent novel *4 3 2 1* (2017)), rendering it almost entirely mediated, and so effectively created in the minds of the population by media companies.

This leads to my next topic, which is representation, or, more specifically, the “crisis of representation” as Jameson labels it (“Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition*”, viii). This is at the core of the issue of postmodernist writing, which, in one way or another, expresses the perceived inability to depict reality in any objective way. Lodge writes that

a lot of postmodernist writing implies [...] that whatever meaningful patterns we discern in [experience] are wholly illusory, comforting fictions. The difficulty, for the reader, of postmodernist writing, is not so much a matter of obscurity which might be cleared up, as of uncertainty, which is endemic. (10)

This uncertainty is not simply an aesthetic one, but fundamentally a political one, as Lodge sees postmodernism continuing “the modernist critique of traditional realism” (10), but without promising to discern a solution – as I will explore below when discussing the writing of Linda Hutcheon, postmodernism is not a method of thought with a clear programme of action, but one that serves to question prior structures and thought.

Bertens writes that the attitude towards representations has changed with the alteration in the conception of the real. He moves this argument to the political sphere, writing, “[s]ince the awareness that representations create rather than reflect reality has taken hold of contemporary criticism, representations have been endowed with an almost material status” (11). This is another way of suggesting that the realms of culture and politics have become increasingly intermingled, to arguably a damaging extent. He goes on to say that “[r]efocusing on the politics of representation, postmodernism had become thoroughly politicized [sic]” (14). In Bertens’s view, representations, i.e. depictions in media, had become so powerful and influential, that they defined what was real for so many people. This, in turn, meant that representations themselves became utterly political – and so culture and politics came to be spheres which blended seamlessly into one another. Postmodernism, then, was an idea that consistently had political implications, though it does not necessarily follow that there was any kind of actionable political agenda. The “crisis of representation” was not necessarily viewed as such by all, however. To Philip Stevick, it was a welcome trend, as it created new and enjoyable styles of writing. He wrote in 1985,

[i]n no previous time have so many writers of consequence entertained the idea, at least provisionally and intermittently, that fiction does not exist to imitate the “real world”, does not even exist to abstract from or superimpose upon the world a thematic organisation, but that fiction exists as a non-mimetic object, made of words, for its own sake. (142)

So, for Stevick, there was no crisis, but a celebration that new methods of writing have been developed. It is difficult not to imagine the following excerpt as a rebuke to the critics who were disturbed by the combining of high and low culture that postmodernism practiced with such abandon:

When Pynchon describes a Vivaldi concerto played by a band of kazoos, we are jolted by the shift, invited to retain our veneration for Vivaldi while opening ourselves to the noncanonical possibilities of the kazoo, both held in some strange equipoise, and get on with a life rather more diverse and inclusive than the modernist classics would have had us believe possible. (144)

This aligns perfectly with Fiedler’s concept of “gap-closing”, as it strikes cleanly at the consistently democratic impulse of postmodernism. Whether it is viewed as a crisis or not, then, what is apparent is that representation has become less grounded in reality during this period.

Much of what has been said so far on paranoia and the media came to a head with the writings of Jean Baudrillard. So extreme, and anti-rational were his points of view, and such a response did they provoke, that his ideas merit serious consideration here. He arguably pushed the idea of the postmodern further than anyone, and caused much criticism to be

brought to the concept. I do not attempt here to re-evaluate some of Baudrillard's most notable ideas, but more to look beyond the instant meaning they have, and consider them from a more abstract point of view. If I were solely evaluating the ideas of Baudrillard, I would most likely stick to his analysis of the media, and its practices and methods. His vital critiques of media institutions should not be obscured by his more esoteric views. For instance, he writes that the real had been replaced by the "hyperreal", or "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (*Simulations*, 2), and while this of course is literally untrue, he is pointing towards the effect that media saturation can and does have on people. Despite this, even Norris, who opens *Uncritical Theory* by describing Baudrillard as the "purveyor of some of the silliest ideas yet to gain a hearing among disciples of French intellectual fashion" (11), admits that "it can scarcely be denied that Baudrillard's theses have a certain diagnostic value" (26). This diagnostic value will be shown below, as his description of the media's control mechanisms are extremely useful for my discussion.

Baudrillard's crucial text was *Simulations*, published in 1983, which contained *The Precession of the Simulacra* (1976) and *The Orders of Simulacra* (1981). I wish here to discuss the relationship between the postmodern and the political, which Baudrillard mixed with considerable skill and insight. Norris was especially moved to write his critique of postmodernism after Baudrillard claimed, in a succession of articles for the *Guardian*, that the Gulf War would not happen, was not happening, and then had not happened. He wrote that the war "was unreal, war without the symptoms of war, a form of war which means never needing to face up to the war" (qtd. Norris, 13), and while of course Baudrillard is literally incorrect here, Norris's response is altogether too po-faced, and refuses to go beyond the immediate meaning of Baudrillard's writings. It is also worth noting that in *Simulations*, Baudrillard made a similar claim about the Vietnam War, describing it as a "simulacrum of a struggle to the death and of ruthless global stakes" (68), but then, as I have already

mentioned, then instantly qualifies that this is a metaphorical statement. It is Jameson who provides the best definition of the simulacrum; quoting Plato, he calls it “the identical copy of which no original has ever existed” (*Postmodernism*, 18), and the importance of this idea to Miller’s work will be shown most significantly in *Resurrection Blues*, wherein there are debates concerning how much a crucifixion must be shown to be faithful to representations of “the original”.

Baudrillard is important to my discussion for two reasons: as has been mentioned above, his analysis of the media, and its distorting effect on the ability of people to know what is occurring in the world, is extremely prescient to *Resurrection Blues*. The second reason is that Baudrillard provides a cue to the discussion of politics and the postmodern. Norris’s riposte to Baudrillard, as well as a host of other postmodernist theorists, is a damning indictment of postmodernism, as he sees it, but his view must also be contrasted with those of Waugh and especially Hutcheon. For while Norris wrote that “there are few things more depressing on the current intellectual scene than this collapse of moral and political nerve brought about – or at any rate deeply influenced by – various forms of postmodernist-pragmatist thought” (68), Hutcheon viewed postmodernism as being “unavoidably political” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 1). Hutcheon’s viewpoint, then, is much more generous to the concepts surrounding the postmodern, but, as shall be discussed below, she does recognise some of the contradictions and complexities surrounding the term. For now, however, I am going to briefly describe what I view to be the most compelling and worthwhile strand of Baudrillard’s work, which is centred around the idea of the hyperreality, a rather inappropriate term, as it provides far too much ammunition to his critics.

I do not feel the need to add to the critique of Baudrillard by Bertens, Connor, and Norris, but instead wish to discuss his perception of the media, and its relevance to this discussion. The burden of Baudrillard’s theses on the media is a relatively straightforward

one; that by virtue not only of its structure, but also its nature, the contemporary media cannot represent a truthful version of the world. The very process of being in the mass media causes a potentially subversive or radical idea to be framed in a way that blunts its edges; as he writes, “transgression and subversion never get ‘on the air’ without being subtly negated as they are: transformed into models, neutralized [sic] into signs, they are eviscerated of their meaning” (“Requiem for the Media”, 173).

This idea of models is one that he returns to repeatedly. For him, reality no longer had any concrete reference point; it has been re-invented according to “models” and repackaged to us as real. Baudrillard therefore conceives of every aspect of the media to be loaded with a dominating ideology. The very process of recording, or reporting, moves anything, for example, “tabloid trivia to natural disaster” into “the political sphere” (“Requiem”, 175). This is not in and of itself a bad thing, but it must then be considered what the political point is, and in whose interests it is being made. If a media outlet is forcing every issue into the political sphere, one can be certain that this is in order to benefit the political interests of the owners of said organisation. This is a somewhat straightforward critique of the media, and shows that when Baudrillard drops the hyperbolic nihilism – “[a]ll vague impulses to democratize [sic] content, subvert it, restore the transparency of the code, control the information process, continue a reversibility of circuits, or take power over media are hopeless” (“Requiem”, 170) – he is a useful critic. He sees this type of media portrayal as being bound up with the contemporary, that is to say postmodernist, period.

He is unsure of what precisely caused this change, but he gives several examples in *Simulations* that point to the “hyperreality” he describes, and from these we can begin to see the changes in the postmodernist world. By using the word “hyperreality”, he means to show that he is not simply referring to straightforward lies or deception. Poster writes that Baudrillard “discerns only a hyper-reality, a world of self-referential signs” (111), which

takes the idea far past falsehood, into a new version of reality, wherein everything is comprised solely of signs that constantly interplay with one another. One of the key simulations, he contends, is the Watergate scandal, which, as he writes, “above all succeeded in imposing the idea that Watergate *was* a scandal – in this sense it was an extraordinary operation of intoxication” (*Simulations*, 27, author’s italics). Baudrillard saw Watergate as the mere falsifying of a scandal, to preserve the essential power structure, by pretending that it has the ability to find and condemn true criminals. Watergate was required to convince people that there remains an essential difference between right and wrong, and that the latter will be punished, whereas in fact it proved the opposite, because it was a relatively minor offence, compared to the war crimes Richard Nixon had committed in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Of the bombing of the latter in the early days of the Nixon administration, Noam Chomsky wrote in his 1973 article, “Watergate: A Skeptical [sic] View”, “[i]t would be difficult to imagine more persuasive ground for impeachment were this a feasible political project”.

As Baudrillard writes, the Watergate scandal was dictated by “capital, which is immoral and unscrupulous, [and] can only function behind a moral superstructure and whoever regenerates this public morality (by indignation, denunciation, etc.) spontaneously furthers the order of capital, as did the *Washington Post* journalists” (*Simulations*, 27). Curiously, Chomsky would almost certainly agree with his diagnosis of Watergate as a fabricated scandal, if not with the methodology, or conclusions that Baudrillard draws from it. In said article, written the year before Nixon resigned, Chomsky agrees that “[i]t is plain that Nixon’s pleasant crew succeeded in stealing the 1972 election”. However, because Watergate was unlikely to prompt any change in who held power in society, he remained doubtful of its importance – “[t]he likely result will therefore be a continuation of the process of centralization [sic] of power in the executive, which will continue to be staffed by

representatives of those who rule the economy and which will be responsive to their conception of domestic and global order”. For Chomsky, Watergate became such a large story because of who the victims were – instead of members of Communist, Socialist, or Black Power movements, the victims of Watergate were also members of entrenched power. He wrote,

Watergate is [...] a deviation from past practice, not so much in scale or principle, as in choice of targets. The targets now included the rich and respectable, spokesmen for official ideology, men who are expected to share power, to design social policy, and to mold [sic] public opinion. Such people are not fair game for persecution at the hands of the state.

We see then that both men had a broadly similar conception of Watergate, despite approaching the issue from vastly different standpoints.

Another key example Baudrillard gives in *Simulations* is the 1971 documentary series, *An American Family*, which followed a “normal” (white, suburban, middle-class) family, the Louds, but in which “things are complicated by the fact that the family came apart during the shooting: a crisis flared up, the Louds went their separate ways, etc. Whence that insoluble controversy: was TV responsible? What would have happened *if TV hadn't been there?*” (49, author's italics). The conclusion Baudrillard draws here is that reality is unrepresentable through the media, because, again, the process of being recorded alters that reality. It is impossible to know whether the Louds would have broken up had they not been recorded, but then it is also false to say that the recording had no impact on the family. Baudrillard writes, “the producer's trump card was to say: ‘They lived as if we weren't there.’ An absurd, paradoxical formula – neither true, nor false: but utopian” (50). This in a

sense points to Baudrillard's overarching thesis. It is neither true nor false to say that the family continued as if they were not being recorded, as it cannot be known what would have occurred otherwise. Baudrillard saw this as being so cataclysmic because it showed that the media had the power to frame, or even create, events, and then act as if they were absolved of responsibility. This is the point at which it becomes impossible to have any referent for a certain type of reality, because reality can now be created at will by the media, a point that he overextends into his Gulf War comments. Baudrillard continues his analysis into the political sphere, writing that "the electoral system, in which the representatives no longer represent anything because they control so well the responses of the electoral body" (*Simulations*, 131), which remains relevant as a diagnosis of the postmodern period and modern politics. I will be returning to Baudrillard when discussing *Resurrection Blues*, as much of it hinges on the question of whether a certain event would be happening if the media was not there to record it. However, at this juncture, I wish to turn to the political analysis of postmodernism, and discuss its potential in that realm.

1.4: Apolitical Postmodernism, or A Politics of the Postmodern?

It would be churlish not to acknowledge that there has been an alteration in the way in which the art of the postmodernist period deals with political issues. It is almost inconceivable, for example, that someone could find great fame and acclaim with a play in the style of Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) on the postmodernist stage. Miller's early theatre, such as his university plays, *No Villain* (1936), *Honours at Dawn* (1936), and *They Too Arise* (1937) were certainly in this mould, but even his early commercial successes were not as blatantly and clumsily political as these pieces. It is of course true that the openly political texts of Eugene O'Neill, John Steinbeck, and George Orwell are different to those of Shepard, Stephen Adly Guirgis, and Pynchon, for myriad reasons, but most blatantly in the frank way the earlier writers addresses political issues, but that does not necessarily render the latter

apolitical. It is merely an acknowledgement that politics, and therefore the modes of expression around politics, have changed greatly in this time. Jameson writes that “every position on postmodernism in culture – whether apologia or stigmatization [sic] – is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today” (*Postmodernism*, 3, author’s italics), which is such a grand, totalising claim that I cannot but reject it. For, while there is a constant debate about how political or otherwise postmodernist texts are, it should not be denied that some are more concerned with language, form, and style than political issues. By this I mean that texts can employ postmodernist characteristics, but still seek only the most cheap or entertaining thrills. Jameson writes entirely from a Marxist point of view, so for him *everything* is an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today. I would sooner concur with Linda Hutcheon’s more nuanced view of postmodernism, that it is “a strange kind of critique, one bound up, too, with its own *complicity* with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless wants to analyse and maybe even undermine” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 4, author’s italics). This gets, in a way, to the heart of the contradiction in postmodernism: that writers undoubtedly feel the need to critique society, but avoid doing it in traditional, political terms. After all, their criticism must acknowledge that their very writing could be part of the problem it is intended to address.

Hutcheon suggests the political element of the postmodern is bound up with a distrust of power and its concurrent ideologies. We have already seen that Baudrillard takes this idea to the extreme, but Hutcheon’s more moderate view is worthy of consideration. She sees in postmodernist writing debates around who has, or should have, the right to attempt to speak truth to power. She writes, “postmodernism paradoxically manages to legitimize [sic] culture (high and mass) even as it subverts it. It is this doubleness that avoids the danger Jameson

sees in the subverting or deconstructing impulse operating alone: that is, the danger (for the critic) of the illusion of critical distance” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 15). For Hutcheon, then, the postmodernist blending of high and mass art is not a form of “‘degraded’ landscape”, as it is for Jameson, but rather a way of including social or political critique within seemingly low-brow styles of artistic practice. She says that “only on a very abstract level of theoretical analysis – one which ignores actual works of art – can [postmodernism] be dismissed as a trivial and depthless mode” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 206), and this acts as a stern rebuttal to Jameson’s high modernist attitude to popular culture. The postmodern legitimises mass art, while appearing to simultaneously undermine high art, but in reality its critique is on the process, more than either of the forms: “[p]ostmodern photography and fiction both foreground the productive constructing aspects of their acts of representation. Nevertheless, their political complicity is as evident as their denaturalizing [sic]critique” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 22), Hutcheon writes, echoing what Patricia Waugh had said about metafiction, that “writing itself rather than consciousness becomes the main object of attention” (*Metafiction*, 24) – an idea that comes up repeatedly in discussions of postmodernism.

In a sense, then, the postmodern is a movement away from an attempt to enforce actual political change, and towards an attempt to understand the unseen forces that obstruct so much political change. Hutcheon sees the politics of the postmodern as being purely in the form of critique, and not action. For her, critique, which must of course come before any action, is where postmodernism’s strength lies. She writes that “postmodernism’s initial concern is to de-naturalize [sic] some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as natural are in fact cultural; made by us, not given to us” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 12). Waugh connected this “de-naturalizing” [sic] to feminism, which she believes “can be seen as an intrinsically ‘postmodern’

discourse”, because in “articulating issues of sexual difference, the very existence of feminist discourses weakens the rootedness of Enlightenment thought in the principle of sameness” (*Metafiction*, 189), and this remains an excellent example where postmodernism provides a viable route to useful political action.

Jameson, on the other hand, does not see the political potential in, for example, Andy Warhol’s images of “the Coca-Cola bottle or the Campbell’s soup can, which explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital”, and so

ought to be powerful and critical statements. If they are not, then one would surely want to know why, and one would want to begin to wonder a little more seriously about the possibilities of political or critical art in the postmodern period of late capital.

(*Postmodernism*, 9, author’s italics)

Alongside Jameson’s Marxian belief that art “ought” to be any one particular thing, what we see here is a single-minded view of what critique can look like. The “de-naturalising” process described by Hutcheon and implied by Waugh is an equally valid, if slightly more abstract, method of criticism as the one seemingly more favoured by Jameson. That is not to say that Hutcheon denies that there are any problems inherent in postmodernism, however. She recognises its lack of explicit political agenda, but notices its potential: “While the postmodern has no effective theory of agency that enables a move into political *action*, it does work to turn its inevitable ideological grounding into a site of de-naturalizing [sic] critique” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 3, author’s italics). While Norris is, admittedly, criticising the radical end of the postmodernist spectrum, I believe this can still act as a rebuttal to his claim that postmodernism is an idea of “uncritical adherence to a theory of language and representation whose extreme anti-realist or sceptical bias in the end gives rise

to an outlook of thoroughgoing nihilism” (191) – what we see in Hutcheon’s writing is not a blind determination to go as far down the road of postmodern disintegration as possible, but a questioning as to what the valid critiques within the ideas of the postmodern are.

Hutcheon’s contention is that postmodernist writing reflects a “general suspicion of the power of ideology” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 10), which began in the 1960s. She writes, “in very general terms, the postmodern questioning of this totality impulse may well have its roots in some sort of 1960s or late romantic need to privilege free, unconditioned space” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 60). So, for her, the postmodern is bound up with the need for freedom, which may not be an actionable, political idea, but which is most certainly a political desire. It should also be said that this is not necessarily any one particular type of freedom: it may be personal, political, artistic, or a blend of any other kind. She occasionally strays close to suspecting the will-to-power in any form of knowledge, writing that the postmodern is “part of what some see as the unfinished project of the 1960s, for, at the very least, those years left in their wake a specific and historically determined distrust of ideologies of power” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 10). However, she does not allow herself to go any further towards Baudrillard’s nihilism. In fact, Hutcheon contradicts Baudrillard when she writes, “the postmodern, as I have been defining it, is not a degeneration into hyperreality but a questioning of what reality can mean and how we can come to know it” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 32).

This seems to be a more sensible way of attempting to make sense of the postmodernist world, as to reject reality out right is to cease any form of reasonable discussion. But Hutcheon’s scepticism does run deep. Her advocacy of postmodernism is rooted in her belief that it acts as pure critique, that it “may at least show us what needs undoing” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 23), and also that it is constantly questioning power. She writes that postmodernism

does not advocate the ‘restoration of faith in institutions’ as [Charles] Newman desires, but it refuses to do so because it must ask important questions instead: In whose institutions will faith be restored? In whose interests will such a restoration be? Do the institutions deserve our faith? Can they be changed? Should they be? (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 15)

So Hutcheon’s idea of the postmodern is not one of a complete loss of hope or critique, but one of constant critique, in the hope of generating new ideas - and also sourcing ideas from outside the mainstream. It is here that we can see the version of postmodernism with which Miller’s work best aligns. The plays I discuss here are not aestheticised derelictions of criticism, but rather works whose moral and technical underpinnings reflected the reality of the postmodernist world. By creating several characters that resemble himself, and are by no means flattering self-portraits, we see a greater irony, humour, and awareness of Miller’s own guilt at work in his writing. His writing embodies much of what Hutcheon describes as being crucial to the postmodernist awareness, and this contradiction of being both within and critical of a system, or person, is one of the starkest examples of a postmodernist sensibility within these later plays.

Hutcheon’s views not only contrast with those of Baudrillard and Norris, but also Jameson. She is not bound, as Jameson is, by an overriding ideology, and so appears to be more open in her cultural diagnosis and criticism. I discussed above the value Hutcheon sees in the blending of high and mass culture, and how this contrasts with Jameson’s views, and now I will briefly describe the differences in the attitude toward parody and pastiche. Jameson sees the intertextuality that is such a critical element of the postmodern to be pastiche, rather than parody. He contends that there is a crucial difference between the two; parody is critical, while pastiche is merely repetition without comment: “pastiche is thus

blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs” (*Postmodernism*, 17), he writes. But Hutcheon sees the opposite in postmodernism. She sees parody as a crucial part of the “de-naturalising” project of postmodernism. She writes,

we seem to be losing faith in the inexhaustibility and the power of those existing representations. And parody is often the postmodern form this particular paradox takes. By both using and ironically abusing general conventions and specific forms of representation, postmodern art works to de-naturalize [sic] them (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 8),

and this brings us back to Fiedler’s “gap-closing”. He saw that the mixing of high and mass culture was not only a symbol of a more open and democratic system of cultural production, but also brought generations together. This was a symptom and a cause of the postmodernist idea in the West, as McLuhan noted as early as 1964, with regards to “the Negro, the teenager, and some other groups”: “they can no longer be *contained*, in their political sense of limited association. They are now *involved* in ours, as we in theirs” (13, author’s italics). Hutcheon saw something similar in postmodernism, and while she was not critical, she did observe the cultural clashes that resulted from having a greater number of voices in the public sphere, writing of “the impossibility of finding any totalizing [sic] model to resolve the resulting postmodern contradictions” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 91). These contradictions, she says, stem from the irony of postmodernist intertextual references, which makes them “into something more than academic play or some infinite regress into textuality: what is called to our attention is the entire representational process – in a wide range of forms and modes of production” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 90). Whereas Jameson sees the blind, meaningless evocation of previous texts, then, Hutcheon views intertextuality as an attempt to question representation as a whole. This is in a sense a Brechtian perspective on

representation, as it is designed to be so false and blatant in its borrowing from other writers that it jars the reader out of passivity.

Jameson seems to see these changes in cultural production as being not simply negative from a political or aesthetic point of view, but as something of an affront to a measure of objective good taste. He writes that “with the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of style [...] the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitations of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture” (*Postmodernism*, 17-18), and it is necessary to point out several problems in this argument. For one thing, this hinted at an extraordinary blindness on Jameson’s part, unaware as he appeared to be of many developments in contemporary art. He had an ally in Lyotard in this regard, however, who wrote in 1979, “[f]rom every direction we are being urged to put an end to experimentation, in the arts and elsewhere” (71). I can also only disagree with the finality of these statements. The tone of Lyotard and Jameson suggests that all artistic innovation is dead, a statement that cannot be made with any seriousness. While it is undoubtedly true that an essential element of postmodernism is reference to previous texts and artists, both acknowledged and unacknowledged, and that technology had by that point allowed a greater deal of knowledge of previous works to be available, Jameson’s conclusion that artists had “nowhere to turn to” looks as premature as John Barth’s “Literature of Exhaustion” (1967), which he had the sense to revisit in “The Literature of Replenishment” (1982).

For Hutcheon, the recurrence of parody is not something that lazily seeks to echo an old form for one’s own benefit, but a core part of the challenge of postmodernist art. She writes that

with parody – as with any other kind of reproduction – the notion of the original as rare, single and valuable (in aesthetic and commercial terms) is called into question. This does not mean that art has lost its purpose but that it will inevitably have a new and different significance. In other words, parody works to foreground the *politics* of representation. (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 89-90, author's italics)

It is this final phrase in particular that most concerns me, and Hutcheon. For her, the politics of the postmodern is the politics of representation. She begins her book on the subject by writing “all cultural forms of representation – literary, visual, aural – in high art or the mass media are ideologically grounded, [in] that they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 3), and it is here that I should like to end my discussion of the politics of the postmodern.

It should be clear that my vision of the postmodern is far closer to that of Hutcheon than that of Baudrillard or Jameson. Baudrillard is quite often a dangerously lazy writer, who regularly reaches for the most extreme, hopeless scenario, despite his valuable media analysis. Jameson's standpoint on postmodernism is too closely bound up with Marxism. In effect, he sees postmodernism as a result of late capitalism, and disregards its value for that reason. Hutcheon sees the value of the disruptive nature of postmodernist thought and art, and this is the primary form that I will show Arthur Miller's late drama takes.

1.5: The Writing of the Postmodern

I have dealt with some of the theoretical and political arguments around postmodernism, particularly the ones which will be most relevant to my discussion of Miller's late plays, and now I shall move onto the discussion of the literature and drama of the period. This shall

generally take the form of answering the question, what is postmodernist writing? As was the case for the broader question I have already attempted to answer, this question inevitably produces broad conclusions, so in this section I will present an overview of some conspicuous characteristics of postmodernist writing, discuss some relevant novels and plays of the time, and then narrow my discussion in order to prepare for my specific analysis of Miller's works.

The difficulty of discussing Miller's work in relation to the postmodern is that much of the study of drama and postmodernism focuses on performance and performativity. This is not my interest here, however, as I am attempting to show that the way in which these plays were written betrays a postmodernist sensibility at work; that is to say, I am concerned with drama more than theatre. Throughout this study, I will be applying literary theory to plays written to be performed, and while this is potentially an issue for some theatre scholars, following Mark Fortier, I do not see a problem. He writes, "[a]s a written form, drama is easily appropriated by literary theory; it is understandable in the same general terms as fiction, poetry, or any other form of writing" (4), and I have already mentioned that Steven Connor reference the need for anyone discussing postmodernism in drama to use the writings of other cultural areas. Fortier also writes that literary "theory comes from a broad range of disciplines: philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis, political economy, history, anthropology, and so forth. To call these theories literary theory is in large part a misrecognition" (3), showing that the theoretical discussions of postmodernism are as fluid as one would expect from an idea that at all times encourages the questioning of practices and institutions.

In general, I define postmodernist writing as writing influenced greatly by paranoia, informed by an ambiguity around objective reality, aware of the increased doubt surrounding expressions of morality, conscious of itself both as a written and read text, and conscious of the distorting effect of the media. It is writing that is less likely to make explicit political or

social points, but remains ideological. To be more specific, postmodernist drama moved away from a (very broadly) straightforward cause-and-effect scenario to a more occasionally Absurdist one, in which it became more difficult to discern a character's intentions, or explain their actions. In postmodernist drama, language in particular changed from being a clear representation of a character's views or desires, towards something more constructed, self-conscious, and parodic – there is the television commercial patter of Harriet and Ozzie in Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* (1971), the constant performance of Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* (1972), and the extravagant games, rooted entirely in linguistic play, of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), for example. In the particular writers I will discuss, social critique remains at the forefront of their work, despite highly aestheticised linguistic play.

I have already discussed the political argument surrounding postmodernism, but it is worth dwelling on the work of Waugh, as it helps to move us along from the political to the aesthetic. She writes that

postmodernism can be seen as the latest version of a long-standing attempt to address social and political issues through an aestheticized [sic] understanding of the world, though it may be more thoroughly and pervasively aestheticizing [sic] than any previous body of thought. (“Introduction to *Postmodernism: A Reader*”, 7)

This reveals much about the way society changed in this period. The desire to address political issues certainly became more aestheticised during the age of Andy Warhol and rock and roll, but this reflects the greater material wealth available to people. It also highlights “late capitalism's colonization [sic] of culture's simplifying patterns” (McGowan, 17), as politics began to use culture to its own end; to aestheticise itself. It is also true that people had

more money to spend on consumer goods in this period, a greater volume of pop culture to consume, and, of course, there was also an expansion of who could participate in making art and thus influence culture. One of the ways this reflected itself was the blending of high and mass art. Now the question turns to what form this aestheticisation took. We have already seen Waugh's list of some of the key aesthetic terms for postmodernism, and Todd Gitlin's list, from 1989, is similar:

[p]astiche; blankness; a sense of exhaustion; a mixture of levels, forms, styles; a relish for copies and repetition; a knowingness that dissolves commitment into irony; acute self-consciousness about the formal, constructed nature of the work; pleasure in the play of surfaces; a rejection of history. (347)

With the exception of this final element, which he does not adequately explain, I am once again happy to use his definition. The inclusion of "a rejection of history" is particularly jarring in reference to Miller, as one of his most common thematic concerns was with the need for Americans to be aware of their national history. Shepard, as I shall discuss below, deals with this most notably in *Buried Child* (1979). However, that Miller's writing does not entirely match these lists does not alter my argument in any significant way; there has never been a set manifesto defining postmodernism, or an agreed-upon collection of values and viewpoints on the subject. I have also mentioned above how I am not contending that the definition of postmodernism can be applied to everything Miller wrote in the latter stage of his career.

Writing in 1977, David Lodge recognised one of the most important characteristics of postmodernist writing. He writes that it

implies that whatever meaningful patterns we discern in [experience] are wholly illusory, comforting fictions. The difficulty, for the reader, of postmodernist writing is not so much a matter of obscurity which might be cleared up as of uncertainty, which is endemic. (10)

This uncertainty takes various forms, whether it is the uncertainty of a character's motive, of what is genuinely occurring in the universe depicted, or even which character's personality is to be regarded as the genuine reflection of their own psyche. But the uncertainty goes much deeper than this, to the point that it is clear that Miller is not even attempting to portray certainty. Like more widely acknowledged postmodernist writers, Miller, in these late works, does not desire to make clear socio-political statements; he either wishes to present unclear ones that reflect his own lack of uncertainty, or to display the difficulty of asserting a firm statement. Lodge's definition is slightly more focused than the previous two, but it is important to recall that he is writing relatively early in the period after postmodernism was "branded" as such, to use McHale's word.

But uncertainty is a crucial word, as it sums up so much of the postmodernist text. Rudrum and Stavris also acknowledge this, writing that "postmodernism rejected the thought of closure more than almost any other [...] In postmodernist terms, the *sense* of an ending is all we ever have – the end itself is another matter" (xv, author's italics). Linda Hutcheon says almost the same thing, writing that "postmodernism's irony is one that rejects the resolving urge of modernism towards closure, or at least distance" (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 99). This can be seen clearly in the writing of Miller, whose early hallmark was ending his plays with the death of the protagonist. Even by the time of *After the Fall* or *The Price*, he no longer felt compelled to offer a climactic, melodramatic ending. This lack of a clean, clear ending is evident in numerous texts of the period, and betrays a deep mistrust in the ability of

a narrative to satisfy a reader or viewer's fears – see, for instance, Pynchon's *V.* (1963) or films such as *Three Days of the Condor* and *Chinatown*.

Another important element of postmodernist writing, although by no means as crucial as the ones mentioned above, is that of duality. This is at work in much of the writing of the period, in authors such as Auster, Shepard, and Barth, but the concept will form an important element of my exploration of *The Ride Down Mount Morgan*, which is possibly the least understood, of the plays of Miller's later period. Gordon Slethaug writes that the postmodern double “signals double purposes, fragmented understanding, and self-parody in all life and literature” (2), so, once again, we come across the same concepts. Slethaug goes on to write, “the postmodern double raises questions about fixed categories and constructs, especially about the notion that any being has a unified identity” (5). So we see the familiar idea recurring; postmodernist writing is essentially unsettling, and ambiguous. It is disruptive of people's assumptions and occasionally identities. As we saw with Hutcheon's political analysis, it may not necessarily provide a plan for people to cure themselves of their respective neuroses, but it allows the cultural space for writers and artists to attempt to proclaim and identify these neuroses, be they personal, political, social, or cultural.

I would like now to dwell on some significant novelists of the postmodernist period. Given that the main focus of this dissertation is drama, I will only touch briefly on two writers and their texts, namely Thomas Pynchon and Kurt Vonnegut. I have selected these writers because Pynchon is, arguably, the foremost postmodernist in American writing, and Vonnegut because of the self-conscious use of so many features of postmodernist writing. The two texts I will discuss combine paranoia, narrative disruption, authorial “frame-breaking”, meta- and intertextuality, a refusal to provide closure, and a considerable range of pop cultural references, while also showing an awareness of and engaging with so-called

“low” cultural forms. For this reason, they represent much of the wider trend of postmodernist writing in America.

The Crying of Lot 49, Pynchon’s second novel, is probably his most accessible, but no less complex for being so. Alan Wilde has written “that despite the fact that Pynchon’s reputation as the American postmodernist *par excellence* depends primarily on other novels, *The Crying of Lot 49* is actually his most postmodernist work” (qtd. Grausam, 223). This contradiction is a perfect cue into the novel, because so much of it is a contradiction of itself. It concerns Oedipa Maas, a Californian housewife who is named as the executrix of the estate of her former lover, Pierce Inverarity. This leads to a quest that is surprisingly epic for such a slim novel. Oedipa is drawn into a shady world of secret societies (the “Peter Pinguid Society” is evidently a satire of the far-right John Birch Society, the paranoid, rabidly anti-Communist group that gained significant attention in the late-1950s and 1960s), underground postal systems, and mysterious signs. However, the gathering of data and information does little to aid Oedipa’s quest to uncover the meaning of the muted post horn symbol that she begins to see everywhere. Frederick R. Karl writes that “Oedipa’s search for information, like Oedipus’s, is strewn with riddles; in her pursuit, the divulgence of additional information only adds to her confusion. Knowledge does not clarify what she is seeking” (362). This later becomes a common postmodernist trope, to be discussed below, wherein the more information a “detective” (who is often not really a detective) accrues, the more difficult it becomes to solve the crime. The novel climaxes without the mystery of Trystero, a secret postal service that has been underground since the eighteenth century, being solved satisfactorily. Oedipa comes to an auction of Inverarity’s belongings and expects to find out the truth about Trystero based on who purchases a collection of stamps, given the lot number 49. However, as “the crying of lot 49” (127) begins, the novel ends, and we realise there are no satisfactory answers to be found.

The plot is too dense and convoluted to go into considerable detail here, but the novel touches on many key postmodernist ideas. Adams writes,

[t]he formal and thematic concerns expressed by this work – the preoccupation with paranoia and conspiracy, radical scepticism about foundational truth and authority of all kinds, deft mixing of genres, distrust of received historical knowledge, and confrontations with the sublime and apocalyptic – have come to define the study and teaching of postmodern fiction. (252)

This is a fair summation of the ideas within the novel, and of course refers to many of the ideas of the postmodern that have already been discussed. The idea of paranoia, as ever, is of vital importance here. Pynchon makes this explicit, as he includes a band called the Paranoids, whose members model themselves on the Beatles. At one point, he writes of the band, “‘Hey, blokes,’ yelled Dean or perhaps Serge” (37), indicating that the paranoia permeates every level of the novel – if the narrator does not know who is speaking, how can we the reader be sure of anything? Brian Jarvis writes that “[e]verything in Pynchon’s fictional creations is connected by paranoia, conspiracies, and ‘master cabal[s]’ at every level” but acknowledges that “in Pynchon, paranoia is almost always justified – there *are* huge conspiracies and people *are* being controlled and duped and surveilled” (both 223, author’s italics) – an acknowledgement of which can lead us, again, to a more sympathetic view of Baudrillard’s extreme view of society.

While Pynchon does not literally place himself in the text, as Vonnegut does, everyone, including the reader, is drawn into the plot Oedipa is trying to uncover – our experience mirrors hers, as we are as lost and paranoid as she is, desperately seeking to make sense of the overabundance of clues. Rachel Adams asks, “[i]s the reader, whose progress so

closely parallels Oedipa's own, trapped within a similarly confining network of signs?" (253)

The answer, in general, is yes; the reader is no more able to make sense of the story than Oedipa is. This leads to Jarvis' conclusion that "the novel leaves open the key question of whether this cabal [the Tristero] is real, a hoax, or merely Oedipa's fantasy" (220). Raymond M. Olderman places *The Crying of Lot 49* within the wider context of postmodernist literature, echoing Hutcheon by noting that its conclusion is typical of the period: "[t]he novel of the 1960s finds reconciliation almost irrelevant and certainly impossible" (7). All of these elements of the novel combine to make it one of the most important postmodernist works, as it is relentlessly dense yet gratifying to a more casual reader. Without being bound up in the hyperconscious postmodernism of later works, *The Crying of Lot 49* displays an almost pure paranoia, before it became a topic to be endlessly debated and parodied.

Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) arrives at a crucial stage in the development of postmodernism. Connor writes that

the concept of postmodernism cannot be said to have been
crystalized [sic] until about the mid-1970s, when claims for the
existence of this diversely social and cultural phenomenon began
to harden within and across a number of different cultural areas
and academic disciplines, in philosophy, architecture, film studies
and literary subjects, (*Postmodernist Culture*, 5-6)

while Cowart writes that "Pynchon's greatest novel (*Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)) came out, in fact, in a year characterised by Andreas Killen as 'a cultural watershed, a moment of major realignments in American politics, culture, and society'" ("Pynchon in Literary History", 92). I'm not suggesting that this was down to Vonnegut's novel, his first after the success of

Slaughterhouse-Five (1969), but it is striking how evidently aware of itself as a postmodernist text it is. We see this immediately from the preface, which opens:

The expression 'Breakfast of Champions' is a registered trademark of General Mills, Inc., for use on a breakfast cereal product. The use of the identical expression for the title of this book is not intended to indicate an association with or sponsorship by General Mills, nor is it intended to disparage their fine products. (1)

Vonnegut is being ironic and amusing here, using a completely "straight" version of corporate and commercial language to undermine the text before it has begun – Rabe does something similar in *Sticks and Bones*, albeit not at the start. Vonnegut sets the tone for the novel with his ironic, self-conscious, and satirical view of American commercial life and language. Robert W. Uphaus says of this last aspect that "the question Vonnegut continually asks himself in this book is whether he can create art out of his American experience or whether America has replaced art – his art – with advertising" (173). Vonnegut tells us about the final of the novel before the end, so the pleasure becomes more textual than narrative, as we enjoy the way in which Vonnegut tells a story whose ending we already know.

Breakfast of Champions concerns Kilgore Trout, a writer of dreadful and ludicrous science fiction, who is thrust to great fame after the occurrences described in the novel, including his journey to Midland City, Indiana, for an arts festival. There, he meets Dwayne Hoover, who is going increasingly insane, and is tipped over the edge by reading Trout's fiction at the denouement. Trout, like numerous other Vonnegut creations, appears in several of his books. Vonnegut writes, "Dwayne's incipient insanity was mainly a matter of chemicals, of course. Dwayne Hoover's body was manufacturing certain chemicals which

unbalanced his mind” (13-14). This points to one of Vonnegut’s key ideas in the book, that humanity is becoming increasingly machine-like and dominated by technology. Pynchon, in *V.*, did something similar, albeit in a more disturbing style, focusing relentlessly on body modifications that distance people from their own humanity. Later, Vonnegut begins to describe the penis length, as well as the bust, hip, and waist measurements of his characters, leading them to be conceived of more as robots or machines, further distancing them from the idea of humanity. Robert F. Kiernan, writing of the general trend in post-war fiction, says:

[a] troubling sense that science and technology are cancerous growths in the human society also took hold, not only because developments in physics, cybernetics, and technology outstripped the culture’s ability to deal with their moral and social implications, but because some of the developments seemed to threaten Armageddon, particularly the risks of nuclear warfare and irreversible damage to the ecosystem. (6)

Vonnegut places considerable focus on the latter issue Kiernan mentions, with several ecological disasters forming key elements of the plot.

Donald E. Morse situates the novel firmly in the self-aware postmodernist bracket, writing that it “successfully laughs at several postmodern fictional devices, especially that of the self-reflexive author who trespasses the boundaries of his own work” (100). Morse highlights two important issues here, the first of which is humour. The novel is extremely funny, flippant, and grotesque, bringing to mind the picaresque nature of John Kennedy Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980). This makes it another example of Fiedler’s “gap closing”, as the serious issues of ecology, race, commercialism, among others, are contrasted with Vonnegut’s evident comedic sensibility. When we consider that *Trout* is a science

fiction writer, we see further evidence of Fiedler's ideas at work. The second of the important issues raised by Morse is Vonnegut's inclusion of himself in the novel. He does this not only with a character named "Kurt Vonnegut", as Paul Auster does, with a character named "Paul Auster" in *The New York Trilogy*, but by having this character discuss his writing of the novel in which he finds himself. Lodge says that this device

throws the reader completely off balance by bringing the real, historic author on to the same plane as his own fictitious characters and at the very same time drawing attention to their fictitiousness. It thus calls into question the whole business of reading and writing literary fiction. (12)

For Olderman, this technique reflects the way in which "fact and fiction have blurred" and it suggests that "fact and fiction can only be distinguished through the radical use of the fictional form" (25). Vonnegut then goes as far as to alter the basic facts of the novel during the narrative, as he needs Dwayne to read Kilgore's novel rapidly: "I gave Dwayne Hoover credit for having taken a course in speed-reading at night at the Young Men's Christian Association" (248). This is not just the author entering the text as a character, but altering the logic of the novel-writing process itself – Vonnegut has explicitly given himself the power to change whatever element of the novel he so desires to suit his narrative.

We see from this brief analysis of these two works many of the features of postmodernist theory coming into play. The result of these theories being put into practice by novelists is ambiguity, narrative experimentation, and a lack of closure and certainty. This is not to suggest that these novels were merely artistic interpretations of social theory, but to indicate the intellectual and artistic basis of much of postmodernist thought. These features

will appear repeatedly during my discussion of American theatre, so it is important to note the overlap between the two mediums.

Moving onto the drama of the period, I need to begin by noting that the general perception of Miller is that he was a realistic playwright working firmly in the Ibsen tradition, but in reality this has never been the case. His first produced play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* was written as a fable, and although *All My Sons* clearly owes a debt to Ibsen, Miller continued to experiment with writing, staging, lighting, subject matter, and other elements of stagecraft. The rapid change of scenes in *Salesman*, *After the Fall*, and *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* are only the most obvious examples of his move from realism. However, despite his experimentation, particularly in the 1960s, Miller began to be overshadowed both by new playwrights, and developments in the theatre world.

The theatre world in which Miller had achieved so much fame and success early in his career was by the 1960s changing rapidly, partly due to financial restraints. Broadway became even less concerned with performing experimental and challenging playwrights, such as the capital needed to find new plays, so many moved to Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway. Christopher Bigsby notes that “[i]n the 1959-60 season for the first time more than one million dollars were invested in Off-Broadway and there were twice as many productions Off-Broadway as on” (“Why American Drama is Literature”, 3). The most notable early success of Off-Broadway was Jack Gelber’s *The Connection* (1959), produced by the Living Theatre, one of the most noteworthy theatre groups to emerge in the period. *The Connection* was a metatheatrical experience calling to mind *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), *Waiting for Godot* (1953), and *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), amongst others, with its metatheatricality and early focus on waiting for an individual saviour. Kiernan stresses the importance of *The Connection*, writing that “it is historically significant for enlarging the theatrical sensibilities of the period” (83). It features a group of heroin addicts

waiting for a fix from their drug dealer, Cowboy, who arrives in the second act, along with a nun, Sister Salvation. They are filmed throughout by a documentary team, whose members claim that what is happening onstage is real and being recorded for a movie, to document what the life of drug addicts is really like. One of the camera crew takes his place in the audience, and occasionally exclaims, “[t]hat’s the way it really is!” By the end, it has descended into chaos, with one character nearly overdosing, and the “writer”, Jaybird, having joined the addicts, saying, “I didn’t learn anything. I knew it” (62) – which is of course exactly what one would expect to feel at the end of a postmodernist text, which typically denies any kind of closure.

This play is important to my discussion not only because of the rapid fame it accrued (although Gelber never wrote another success, and gathered most, if not all, of his notoriety on the basis of the play), but because of what it signified. It was judged to be the closest thing America had to the Absurdism of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Jean Genet, although it was, at best, Absurdism with a distinctly American flavour. Bigsby writes that

[i]f the theatre of the absurd [sic] entered the bloodstream of the American theatre through Gelber’s *The Connection* and Albee’s *The American Dream* (1961) and *The Zoo Story* (1959) it seems equally clear that the rigour of its vision is there subverted to another impulse. For it not only comes up against a persistent optimism but equally a resilient existentialism, and, beyond that, a communitarian impulse which relates individual to group.

(*Beyond Broadway*, 78)

In this statement Bigsby notes the essentially American take on Absurdism, and he highlights the optimistic streak of the plays discussed. In his early book on Albee, he writes of *The Zoo*

Story, “in the face of indifference and complacency, Albee does not lapse into despair. He stresses the need for man to break out of his self-imposed isolation to make contact with his fellow man. What he is calling for, in other words, is a revival of love” (*Albee*, 9). Kiernan sees the play as also being important for how it influenced contemporary audiences, writing that “Albee’s *The Zoo Story* [first performed in Berlin in 1959, and in New York in 1960] would conceivably have failed Off-Broadway had *The Connection* not prepared the audience a year earlier” (83). I shall return to Albee below, but will now stay with *The Connection*, which, crucially, features considerable humour, often down to its self-consciousness. Early on, Jaybird advises the audience, “[r]emember: This might be provocative for one night, but as life it’s a damn bore” (15), which is as blackly comic as anything in *The Iceman Cometh*. Bigsby also noted the relationship between Gelber’s play and contemporary novelists, writing that it “drew attention to its own theatricality much as the postmodern fiction writer (Coover, Barth, Federman) drew attention to his own fiction-making” (*Modern American Drama*, 231), and Gelber himself would go on to write a stage version of Mailer’s *Barbary Shore*, suggesting that novelists and playwrights of this period should not be assumed to exist in entirely separate universes.

The Connection is also relevant because it was the first success of the Living Theatre, a radical theatre group formed and led by Judith Malina and Julian Beck. I am not going to discuss the history and work of the Living Theatre here, but their relevance is in the way they marked a change in the production of plays, away from a writer-centric form to a more collaborative, fluid method. Allan Lewis writes of them, “[c]lose to the theatre of [Antonin] Artaud, of imagery, magic, and cruelty, the Becks [sic] issued high-sounding manifestos, talked of revelation and ‘universal experience’, and defied all existing rules of production” (234). They are one of the groups to whom Gerald M. Berkowitz refers when noting the

many theatre companies that sprang up in the 1950s, as Off- and Off-Off-Broadway came to be more influential. He wrote that they

shared an impulse to move away from author- and text-dominated drama to develop new forms. Along with other companies and directors, they treated a script as only a starting point for theatrical invention, relying extensively on improvisation and borrowing freely from such other arts as mime, dance and religious ritual. (122)

Not only did the prestige of the position of the playwright begin to wane in the 1960s, then, but so too did the relevance of the playwright within the overarching creative process. Off-Broadway started to become in the 1970s, in the words of Lewis, “a minor Broadway” (*American Plays and Playwrights*, 231), and Off-Off-Broadway assumed its former place, although stepping up its radicalism. It is here that Shepard first gained notoriety.

Lewis wrote of Off-Off-Broadway, “[a]lthough no single style dominates, most (plays) are anti-illusionistic, consciously theatrical plays employing comic overtones and bizarre imagery” (*American Plays and Playwrights*, 211). These features, as well as the ones mentioned by Berkowitz, are observable in the works of Albee and Shepard, though I would like to dwell on what Lewis regarded as the most significant changes in American theatre in the 1960s: “[t]he rise of black theatre, the growth of regional repertory theatres, the breakdown of psychological realism, and the growing revolt of the irrational and reliance on instinct and experience” (*American Plays and Playwrights*, 243). While the first two are unrelated socio-cultural trends, the latter features help explain why Miller’s writing was not as popular from the 1960s onwards. Until this point Miller had relied on psychological realism to portray his characters, and there was a well-thought-out logic to his plays. His

characters did not blurt out non-sequiturs as Ionesco's did, and remained anchored in a broadly realistic social and psychological world. In the plays I am discussing, however, these psychological certainties begin to break down, and characters become less anchored in a recognisable pattern of behaviour.

Edward Albee became the most prominent new playwright in the 1960s, winning numerous awards, and radically challenging assumptions about the nature of American drama. He presented bizarre characters in seemingly normal situations, and pushed the boundaries of the middle-class living room setting which is so common in American theatre. June Schlueter wrote that he "may well be credited with establishing a postmodern American drama" ("Theatre", 214), a claim that Matthew C. Roudané would later lay at the feet of Shepard. Irrespective of where one lies on that issue, both were extremely significant in the development of postmodernist drama, and Albee can certainly be considered a forerunner of Shepard. While he was initially grouped by Martin Esslin with the rest of the Absurdist, this idea has long since been debunked, most impressively by Bigsby in his 1969 work – as he writes, "[c]ommunication is not impossible in Albee's world. It is simply avoided as being a threat to complacency and comfortable isolation" (*Albee*, 19). Thomas P. Adler notes how the confusion originated, writing that Albee "recurrently employs many of the theatrical techniques – incomplete exposition; breakdown of causal connections; ambiguous closure; language games – that have come to be associated with one or other of the major Continental absurdist [sic] playwrights" (205). However, much in the same way that Miller used the postmodernist style of writing in his later work, Adler writes that Albee "generally does not adhere to or advance an uncompromisingly absurdist [sic] philosophy. Ideologically, he remains a liberal humanist" (206). Albee, with his extremely unsettling portraits of middle-class families, was indebted to Miller as a writer, but so considerable was his stylistic break with Miller, and Tennessee Williams, that he helped to contribute to the new perspective that

held Miller to be anachronistic, and something of a throwback. Albee's plays featured all-out familial strife, excessive drinking, and verbal and physical violence, whereas Miller's family tragedies had been relatively restrained and quiet, albeit breaking into a climatic denouement. While Miller's plays had featured repressed women and lying men, Albee created the boorish loudmouth and sexual libertine Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and the oddly haunted couple, Harry and Edna, from *A Delicate Balance* (1966), who cannot quite name the fear that drives them from their home. These unnameable fears, and the games Martha and George play in *Virginia Woolf* to conceal that they have no children, would have been directly opposed to what Miller saw as being "precious in the Ibsen method [:] its insistence on valid causation" ("Introduction to the *Collected Plays*", 119).

Sam Shepard is the next playwright I wish to briefly explore, as, like Albee, he uses the living room setting to devastating effect. Shepard, as was noted above, sprang from Off-Off-Broadway, and his obsessions with rock music and the American West come across repeatedly in his work. These are just some of the features that make his writing so wonderfully postmodernist; the blending of high and low culture, serious drama with Western B-movie dialogue, is perfectly used in so many of Shepard's plays. Roudané has stated unequivocally that "Sam Shepard conferred upon American theatre its postmodernity in the 1960s" ("Introduction to *Cambridge Companion to Sam Shepard*", 1), and the peak of this style, which came before his family living room plays, was *The Tooth of Crime*. Characters break into song several times throughout, and it is set in the living room of Hoss, with only "an evil-looking black chair with silver studs and a very high back" (*Plays*: 2, 203). Hoss's position is never quite defined, but the play takes place in an alternate world where Hoss is the top Marker in a game overseen by a group of mysterious Keepers. The game appears to be a strange blend of rock 'n' roll, violence, and race car driving. Hoss is challenged in a duel by a young pretender, Crow, and loses. At first, he wishes to learn how to fight like Crow, but

decides to kill himself, as he knows this is not how he wishes to play the game. Shepard's dialogue is here drenched in rock 'n' roll and Western sentiments, as when Hoss exclaims, "[w]e ain't Markers no more. We ain't even Rockers. We're punk chumps cowering under the Keepers and the Refs and the critics and the public eye. We ain't free no more! Goddamit! We ain't flyin' in the eye of contempt" (214-215). The climactic scene is the duel in which Hoss and Crow attack each other in verse. Michael J. Hayes writes that "[t]he duel is a war of styles, victory going to Crow who is literally a scavenger of all styles" (137), in the same way that so much postmodernist art borrowed from other styles. Ruby Cohn notes that Shepard's idiomatic range, along with Western colloquialisms and rock slang, is "the vernacular of sports; drugs, the underworld, science fiction and the mass media" (161). Schlueter, meanwhile, writes that Shepard's "subject is contemporary America, created through a mixture of the plastic artifacts [sic] of popular culture and the hallowed remnants of the legendary West" ("Theatre", 215). This, as we shall see below, is exactly what one would expect from a postmodernist playwright, as his writing engages with, and blends, high and low culture, appears to be happening in some bizarre world that is not quite known reality, and yet remains indebted to previous cultural markers for his work to be intelligible.

Shepard's plays changed somewhat towards the late-1970s, as he wrote several family-focused plays, the most impressive of which were *Buried Child* and *True West*. I have already highlighted some of the differences between Miller and Albee's family plays, and Shepard's plays are again a step beyond the traditional living room scene. They contain continuous violence and threats, with the rage and hopelessness of the families barely contained. While Miller touched on the topic of incest, with a look backwards at Greek drama, in *A View from the Bridge*, Shepard makes the topic one of the central focuses of *Buried Child*, as the child of the title was, it is revealed, conceived by Tilden and his mother, and killed and buried by his father, Dodge. Cohn writes, "[r]ealistically, Dodge has evidently

murdered his wife's illegitimate infant, but symbolically youth has been buried by an American family that is idiotic, sadistic, moribund" (170). Berkowitz writes that this is symbolic of Americans denying the historical crimes of the nation:

Dozens of examples will come to mind of the American cultural compulsion to bury our sins and to rewrite history so that we are always the good guys: slavery, the Indians, Vietnam. To preserve the family's sense of itself as pure, the family does the most unfamily thing possible, killing a child, and thus destroys its capacity to be a family. (187)

Buried Child, then, instead of betraying an inability to think historically on Shepard's part, dramatises the results of a family, and therefore society, that cannot confront its own past. Despite the title, the child is only symbolically buried; its conception and birth have haunted the family ever since, in the same way that extreme violence and terror, from the native population to the Vietnamese, have, in Shepard's view, poisoned the American experience.

In *True West*, the tension between a pair of brothers simmers consistently, ending in a car chase through the desert, an idea which had previously been pitched by Lee, a chronic loser, to his script-writing brother, Austin. It is Austin who speaks the prophetic line, "[t]here's no such thing as the West anymore! It's a dead issue!" (*Plays*: 3, 35), which is both an ironic comment on the play, as the idea of Lee's that he is dismissing later comes true, and also a lament of Shepard's, as he constantly invokes the imagery and language of a lost West. Brian Richardson sees in this chase scene Baudrillard's hyperreality, writing, "[t]he simulation displaces the real, the representation consumes and negates its referent" (14). Berkowitz writes, albeit of another play, "[s]ince this is a Sam Shepard play, it is not surprising that the one faint and ultimately chimerical hope lies in a reintegration with

tradition and the land” (186), and this gets to the root of Shepard’s core belief. Shepard’s work is so varied and voluminous that it should be, and of course has been, discussed at much greater length, but I have here highlighted the aspects of his writing I consider to be most relevant to my discussion.

Miller had been known early on for being a social playwright and critic, and so it is perhaps odd that he never wrote a play that explicitly dealt with the Vietnam War, especially considering that he was a prominent anti-war activist, and even met the North Vietnamese in Paris in 1968, in a futile, and rather odd, attempt to broker peace. Instead, the main playwright of the Vietnam War, notwithstanding Arthur Kopit’s haunting *Indians* (1968), remains David Rabe, with his trilogy of *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (1971), *Sticks and Bones*, and *Streamers* (1976). All three dealt with the topic of Vietnam in a frank and visceral way, and again, like Albee and Shepard, when compared with Miller’s work of the time, one cannot help but lament the relative lack of edge in the latter’s work. Rabe’s living room play, *Sticks and Bones*, contains a character, Rick, who is rarely seen without his guitar, and could easily have just drifted off the stage at Woodstock. This gives a contemporary feel to the play, in which David returns from the war traumatised, but his family refuse to allow him to disturb their seemingly peaceful, suburban existence. Even the names of the characters are crucial – Harriet, Ozzie, Ricky, and Dave are the main characters from the sitcom *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966). This shows that Rabe was explicitly working to subvert assumptions around representations of harmonious American families, by using, as would expected of a postmodernist writer, both high and low cultural influences.

In an act of violence that, again, would not seem out of place in the work of Albee or Shepard, the family encourage David to kill himself at the end, partly due to their revulsion at his having had sex with a Vietnamese woman, Zung, who appears repeatedly in a spectral fashion throughout. Rabe writes that “[t]he simple, real event is hidden by each character in

the language he uses” (xx), and this perfectly describes the moment when Harriet almost seems to quote a TV ad: “Meyer Spot Remover, do you know it? It gives just a sprinkling... like snow, which, brushed away, leaves the fabrics clean and fresh like spring” (201). This is also a perfect example of the influence of the media on familiar speech patterns, a recurrent topic in postmodernist writing. Of course, we also see here the suburban desire to “brush away” the experiences of the war. David’s death allows the family to return to a peaceful existence, and Hertzbach’s comment echoes Berkowitz on *Buried Child*, above: “With this ritualistic self-sacrifice, the reality of David and Zung is defeated. They are exorcised from the mainstream of the middle-class consciousness, and the self-deluded American way of life prevails” (178). Regrettably, Rabe’s talent seems to have largely been exhausted by the Vietnam War, as little of what he has written since has been received with as much acclaim. However, on this topic, these plays remain crucial reading.

I have provided these brief sketches to give a sense of the direction American theatre went after Miller and Williams passed their peak of popularity into the late-1950s and 1960s. They cast a large shadow over American theatre, alongside O’Neill, and that they never found the same acclaim again is not entirely due to the waning of their abilities. The way theatres were run, and how plays were written, changed considerably from the late-1950s, though they each retained considerable interest and appeal to academic critics and directors. Gelber, Albee, Shepard, and Rabe all used various devices of postmodernist writing, and in each one we can see a move away from the social drama of Miller of the 1940s and 1950s. This is not to suggest that all of these playwrights truly garnered much popularity or notoriety, but they remain indispensable in discussing the development of postmodernist drama in this period. I have provided this sketch in order to show how drama had changed from Miller’s most popular period to the one with which I am concerned, and to provide context for the development of his ideas and style throughout this period. However, it must

be taken into consideration that theatre became a more collaborative effort during this period, and so the focus was placed less on the playwright and script.

Rodney Simard acknowledged the limitations of Absurdism as a form in 1984, writing that it “theoretically carried the seeds of its own destruction, represented in its logical culmination in Beckett. Therefore, a distinctly postmodern dramatic aesthetic has developed in response to this need for a postmodern form of dramatic expression” (x). He viewed theatre to be in a bind in the early-1970s - not wanting to return to a realism that seemed stodgy in comparison with the energy of Absurdism, but then unable to propel Absurdism, because it was an essentially self-defeating ideological standpoint. Simard’s view, to be discussed later in relation to *The Ride Down Mount Morgan*, was that the postmodernist playwrights offered a new form of realism that, while evidently occurring in a recognisable world, was not bound by realistic or conventional devices, and so he termed it “synthetic theatre” (x). David K. Sauer also wrote, of David Mamet, that his drama is “half realistic, half fragmentary, almost expressionistic. The combination is postmodern synthetic realism” (2). It is notable that neither of these authors, in the works referenced here, mention Miller as being a postmodernist playwright, despite the evidence within his work. Simard goes on to write about a clutch of contemporary playwrights in the kind of terms that could easily have been used by Miller for his slightly later plays. This suggests that while Miller was no longer in the mainstream of American theatre, he was still absorbing ideas from younger playwrights, or also that both he and these younger writers were being influenced by non-dramatic sources. Sauer, echoing Simard, writes that “[p]revious realistic plays empowered the audience through the illusion of detached objectivity. Absurdist plays did the opposite. Postmodern plays, by contrast, both give the audience certainty with a seemingly realistic setting, but then take it away” (13). Here, Sauer evokes the contradiction Hutcheon saw in postmodernist texts and thought, and also identifies clear trends in the work of Gelber, Albee, Rabe, and Shepard

– most of their works that I have discussed appear to occur in something like the real world, before those certainties begin to fray. In contrast, the plays of Beckett and Ionesco happen in a world that is radically distinct from our own.

Simard's writing here gets to the heart of the change in Miller's writing. He most certainly became less concerned with the "philosophical limitations frequently seen as attended upon" (xi) him, and not only because he was no longer a Marxist (and had not been since the mid- to late-1940s). This change was even noticed, but in the most critical fashion, by Frank Rich when reviewing *Danger: Memory!* (1987), which included *Clara*. Rich wrote of the plays, "the answers they find are at best ambiguous - a moral gray [sic] area where once the author of 'The Crucible' and 'All My Sons' would have found clear-cut blacks and whites." Simard's conception of postmodernist theatre, then, is a blend of two differing styles, Absurdism and realism, much in the same way that postmodernist literature often blended high and mass culture. He continues in this vein, writing, "postmodern drama is essentially tragi-comedic, and as such, formalistic concepts of structure and purpose must be superseded by a concept such as the French *drame*, which, as defined by John Gassner, is 'serious drama without the tragic pretensions'" (xiii). Once again, Simard has unknowingly produced an exceedingly well-suited phrase to describe Miller's later plays.

Having held for so long the image of being entirely serious and straight-laced, Miller surprised audiences with the sex farce of *Morgan*, or the occasionally Absurdist political satire *Resurrection Blues*. For these two plays both embody that mixing of serious issues (bigamy, suicide, near-death experiences, crucifixion, and familial destruction) with a slightly surreal comedic twist. Steven Connor also writes about the idea of the blending of two different forms in postmodernism, saying that "postmodernist work attempts to draw experience and meaning, shock and analysis into synchrony" ("Postmodernism Grown Old", 42). This is an especially apt choice of words, as it signifies the different approaches of Albee

and Miller. If Albee's early plays can be placed under the heading of "excessive shock", with the violence of Jerry's death in *The Zoo Story*, and depictions of child mutilation in *The American Dream*, then *After the Fall*, which acts as one man's psychoanalysis session, most certainly is in the "excessive analysis" column. Connor also refers to the proliferation of sex as a topic in the postmodern period. He writes, "perhaps the most extraordinary example of the generalization [sic] of postmodernist thinking in the rich culture of the North is in the area of sexuality [...] It is now the most manifest, ubiquitous and compulsory truth" ("Postmodernism Grown Old, 43). While I do not entirely agree that this should be considered a specifically postmodernist phenomenon, it is something I wish to return to when discussing *Resurrection Blues*, *The Ride Down Mount Morgan*, and *Some Kind of Love Story* (1982), as it is a curious fact that Miller was much more comfortable writing about sex in these later plays, in comparison with *The Crucible* and *A View from the Bridge*.

The developments I have been discussing bore considerable significance on the way people wrote, and criticised, fiction and drama. The term most often used to describe this environment was postmodernism, and it is this general intellectual atmosphere that by the mid-1970s was influencing the way Miller wrote and thought. So, by postmodernism, I mean not only the way society developed, simultaneously in the shadow of the nuclear bomb and the glow of the television screen, but also the way in which people wrote about these societal changes. This was done in many ways, including Baudrillard's nihilism, Norris's world-weary frustration, and Marshall McLuhan's technology-focused optimism.

My conception of the postmodern in American literature is not bound to one particular medium. These writing styles flow and blend quite easily between one another, and so I am comfortable using as my definition of postmodernism a model that has been culled from people writing in different fields. What is at the core of the idea of the postmodern in writing is generally consistent, and that is ambiguity, paranoia, uncertainty as to how to act,

and a willingness to concede to irony. These are just some of the qualities that I shall be showing to be present in the later works of Arthur Miller.

2. What We Talk About When We Talk About Miller: Critical

Views on his Late Works

The late plays of Arthur Miller have not received anything like the same amount of critical acclaim or study as his classic early plays, and to an extent this probably represents a decline in the quality of his work. Of course, one should also consider shifting dramatic sensibilities and practices, as were discussed in the previous chapter. However, this perceived decline in the quality of Miller's work, signalled by poor reviews, declining ticket sales, and increasing difficulty with getting his work staged, is in no way as pronounced as it is generally assumed. It is also no indicator that Miller's dedication to exploring humanity, and morality, and the concerns of his country, lessened at any stage. He continued to write plays that addressed what he saw as the most important issues in the country. This often led to his questioning of reality, and, as necessarily follows from that, morality. As Christopher Bigsby writes, "he would also come to question the nature of the memory and reality itself in such plays as *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, *Two-Way Mirror*, and *Mr. Peters' Connections* (1998)" (1962-2005, 14).

But it also seemed to have become clear to Miller that he could not lay claim to a single reality in as certain a fashion as he previously did, and from this, he began to question morality, and its potential sources. What Miller shows in his late plays is an awareness of the constructed nature of so much of what had previously been taken for granted, and this invariably led to reality becoming a more problematised and conspicuous concept. This happens, in Miller's writing, at roughly the same time that postmodernism becomes a cultural dominant in American thought and writing. I contend that this is no coincidence. This is generally alluded to, in varying degrees, by critics, but many seem reluctant to use the phrase in relation to Miller's work, with the exception of specific plays. Even when his work is

discussed, explicitly or implicitly, as being in the realms of the postmodern, there is little attention paid to the specifics of postmodernist thought, and how Miller's work interacts with it. There seems to be a hesitancy to discuss a firm shift in Miller's writing towards a postmodernist sensibility, which I hope to correct.

In this chapter, I will provide a comprehensive discussion of the critical works that focus on the plays I examine in this dissertation. Alongside this there will be brief introductions to the plays, in order to provide context for this critical review. I will show here that there is a significant deficit in how critics have discussed Miller's late work, as they largely fail to analyse, or even mention, the postmodernist elements of the works. They are often keen to relate them back to Miller's more famous plays, or the more well-known facts of his personal life, and this does the plays a disservice. I include my review of these critical works here, before the main analytical chapters, because I do not rely too heavily on them in those core chapters, so by presenting this review of the critical literature here, I will provide the context that shows the departure my analysis represents.

2.1: *The Archbishop's Ceiling*: Early and Ambiguous Signs of a Changed Miller

The most agreed-upon assertion surrounding *The Archbishop's Ceiling* is that it initiated a new phase in Miller's writing. Most scholars assert that it signified a change in Miller's style, and several linked this to a development of postmodernist, or potentially Absurdist, thought in Miller's work. For instance, Christiane Desafy-Grignard says that the play "marked a decisive step in Miller's quest. His tackling of the ambivalent, suspect nature of reality, in the appropriate political context of the Cold War, heralded the four plays of the 80s [...] in which this time, in private contexts, reality is dubious and multiple" (20). Terry Otten, meanwhile, writes that in comparison "to the earlier plays, [*The Archbishop's Ceiling*] signals a major

shift in Miller's evolving dramatic vision" (168), while Bigsby asserted that Miller "confessed to becoming more interested in the nature of reality and how it is constituted as his career [...] developed, and in that sense, perhaps, *The Archbishop's Ceiling* does stand as a pivotal play" (*Critical Study*, 309). To understand the change it represented, it is important to recognise the context in which it was created. First performed in Washington in 1977, it received poor reviews. The text was never printed, and lay dormant for several years, until it was rediscovered, and re-printed. This version, however, was different to the one which had been presented in 1977. The version that was printed was Miller's original, which had been altered in production. The 1984 differs in several respects from the 1977 text (stored in Texas, which I have not seen), the most important being that it omits one character, Maya's husband.

Despite the difficulty the play had in first being produced, it is becoming increasingly recognised as a crucial point in Miller's canon. As well it may, because with the exception of *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972) [and the musical it was based on, *Up From Paradise* (1974)], no other original Miller plays were performed in the decade - and even *Creation* was a theatrical retelling of several key moments of the Book of Genesis. Concerning *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, Abbotson writes that "[t]he 1977 production met fierce disapproval from William Glover (of Associated Press) and David Richardson", while "R.H. Gardner described it as 'less a play than a polemic, though what its argument is remains unclear'" (*Critical Companion*, 71). Andrew Sofer, however, with the benefit of distance, writes that the "realistic production style obscured the fact that the play's true subject is not political repression, as most critics of the play suggest, but dramatic form itself" (94). Sofer's comment, and his analysis is possibly the most incisive and conclusive on the play, is a good point from which to begin the discussion, but it is first necessary to provide a brief sketch of the play and its aesthetics.

I very deliberately did not write “the play and its plot”, as there is no one particular plot to *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. It, as will be discussed, is an examination of the response of a number of characters to their surroundings. The play is set in Prague, although it is never specified within the play - Miller went on to say, “I didn’t identify Prague, but it was quite obvious to anybody” (Biggsby, *Remembering*, 286-7), and referred to it as “a play about Czechoslovakia” (qtd. Biggsby, *Arthur Miller and Company*, 164). What is also never specified is the date in which the play is set. It is described as taking place “[s]ome time ago” (*Plays: Three*, 89), but makes references to the Nixon presidency and the Vietnam War that imply both are in the past, so it must be after 1975. This, to the best of my knowledge, has never been investigated or explained, and while it is not crucial to our understanding of the text, it is an interestingly ambiguous introduction to the play.

The play begins by scanning the room, almost in a cinematic fashion: “The room has weight and power, its contents chaotic and sensuous” (89). This is the first indication that the room is to take on human characteristics and importance. The description is reminiscent of *The Price*, with its “few lamps [...] grand piano [...] unhung paintings [...] objects of dull brass [...] two or three long dark, carved chests [...] a vaguely decrepit brown leather couch [...] a pink velour settee [...] a Bauhaus chair [and] a wide ornate rolltop desk” (89-90), only more abstract and stark. But the crucial fact is that “[t]he ceiling is first seen” (89), which indicates where the attention of the characters will be placed throughout. The first action of the play is Adrian, a visiting American writer, searching the room, before being joined by Maya. We learn that Adrian and Maya have had a sexual relationship, which may be ongoing, and also that Adrian is in a long-term relationship another woman. Adrian has come because he is writing a novel about the country which he cannot get right, and also harbours hopes of seducing Maya. It is implied that Maya has made a deal with the totalitarian government to allow her to keep her radio show, and some small luxuries. This is along with her former

lover, Marcus, and in contrast to their common friend, Sigmund, the great dissident writer. It also becomes clear that we are to assume the presence of government listening bugs in the ceiling. This is never confirmed, and that Miller does not confirm it is but one indicator of his developed style. They are soon joined by Marcus and Sigmund, and the latter reveals that his latest manuscript has been confiscated. Marcus, who is assumed (but again, never confirmed) to be working for the government, reveals that he has been instructed to relay a threat to Sigmund, from an agent in London, if he does not leave the country.

The play progresses to its unclear ending with previous certainties breaking down. The warmth between the characters is not as genuine as had been assumed, and neither are motives so pure and simple. Marcus and Maya have traded some of their morality for comforts they feel it is their right to enjoy, and Sigmund refuses to leave the country, partly because he can only survive as a dissident artist, not simply “another lousy refugee ordering chicken soup in broken English” (175), as Maya says. Adrian is depicted throughout as the simple-minded American who understands nothing of the reality of life in this country, or indeed in this room. For it is not the fact that they are being spied upon which he cannot grasp, but more the uncertainty of not knowing whether or not they are being spied upon – “[i]s it always like a performance?”, he asks. “Like we’re quoting ourselves?” (108). As the relationships continue to fray, an agent from the government arrives to return Sigmund’s manuscript, but also possibly to arrest him to stand trial. The play finishes just as she arrives, and Maya and Sigmund reconcile to a degree; they embrace, and while they do not seem to fully understand each other, they manage to forgive – Sigmund forgives Maya for her likely complicity with the regime, and she in turn forgives him for the fact that his protests will increase repression within the country.

At first glance this can be seen as a relatively straightforward political play, about repression of free speech behind the Iron Curtain. This surface view of the play, attaching it

entirely to a specific time and place, is likely to be the reason for the lack of reaction the play prompted for many years. Taken as a political drama, it is not a very interesting play, but when it is discussed on a metaphysical, metatheatrical level, as a debate about reality, morality, and power, it assumes a new meaning. Robert A. Martin, for instance, wrote

[b]eyond the political and public issues of freedom of speech, thought, and action (which the critics took to be the central issue of the play) resides Miller's unstated but nevertheless underlying assumption that the nature of political reality is, in fact, the unreal, a world in which not only anything can probably happen, but probably will. ("Arthur Miller: Public Issues, Private Tensions, 286)

We see in this quote so much of what is crucial to understanding the play: the multiple layers of meaning, the uncertainty around reality, and then the critics' lack of understanding.

When viewed in the context of Miller's later work, its importance is crucial. Dennis Welland, writing in 1985, the same year as the first, successful, London production, writes that "the central issue is not political corruption, and, although it is obviously a police state, liberalism is not unequivocally presented as the necessary and best antidote" (157). He refers to "Miller's patent refusal to provide neat answers" (163), another form of which will return as a scathing critique in relation to later plays. Welland also notes the less-than-sympathetic portrayal of Adrian - the only American, it should not be forgotten, in the play. Welland writes that he is "more naïve than the others in the formulation of his political sense of outrage at authoritarianism, more reluctant to accept its full implications, and more simplistically confident in the efficacy of some form of protest" (158). Berkowitz is another relatively early writer on the play, writing in 1992 that it "is fully in the tradition of *The*

Crucible in condemning an evil society for its crimes against individuals” (169). While this is a view that is rarely subsequently expressed, it should be noted that Berkowitz is working from the 1977 text, as opposed to the definitive 1984 one. He does, though, note that “when everyone must constantly play a role, no one can be himself” (170), a point which will feed into the common views on the play.

Andrew Sofer’s essay, however, is the most important piece of work on the play, and, as it touches on all the issues other writers address, I intend to make it the centrepiece of this discussion. Entitled “From Technology to Trope: *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* and Miller’s Prismatic Drama”, Sofer addresses issues relating to technology, postmodernism, metatheatre, power, and reality, all of which infuse the play with meaning. He acknowledges straight off that it “marks a significant departure in Arthur Miller’s drama” (94), and refers to it as “prismatic drama”, as opposed to Miller’s previous linear drama. Sofer writes, “prismatic drama presents variations on a single theme” (99) - the theme, in this case, being power. For power is the only certainty of the play; it is discussed throughout, and the concept of power impacts upon the reaction of each character to every line or action. Power is decided, in one way, through technology, i.e. the bug, and Sofer sees the centrality of technology, writing, “if Miller’s thematic quarry is what it means to be a responsible, morally accountable human being, modern electronic technology challenges the very existence of such a bedrock through its uncanny ability to double, fragment and disperse the subject” (95). Indeed, the technology does degrade the moral world of the play; as he writes, “[n]o character is held responsible for his or her actions; there is no punishment or reward, as in melodrama, nor are we asked to judge who is behaving correctly or incorrectly” (99). This is not to suggest that Miller lacks a moral ideal or vision, but that the ability to decide what is moral is no longer as clear as in his earlier work. This stems from the inability to decide what is real or

not under the “bugged ceiling of the mind” (96). This is surely the first Miller play to be even linked with Absurdism, which Sofer does, writing

only in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* does the very self that underpins Miller’s drama of moral accountability threaten to dissolve into an absurdist [sic] fiction. The existential threat posed by the bug unleashes a new dramaturgy based on a principle different to that of ‘valid causation’: that of power. (99)

He ties this to the departure from more psychologically realistic characters and settings.

Again, he links this to power: “in the drama of power, [*The Archbishop’s Ceiling*] is a wry acknowledgement of the impossibility of judging those whose actions no longer spring from coherent psychological motivation” (100).

Sofer is also keen to link Adrian to both Miller and America (Adrian’s surname is Wallach, making his name an obvious echo of Miller’s), writing that “he stands in for Miller the playwright, a man whose once firm faith in the moral accountability of the self has been shaken” (101), and that “the inscrutable Marcus represents everything Adrian, the naïve and insulated American, is unequipped to grasp” (102). Abbotson, though, disagrees with the first of Sofer’s contentions – she writes, “Adrian [...] does not speak for Miller; indeed, he is the type of uncommitted American writer that Miller most despises” (“A Lesson in Responsibility”, 269). In contrast, I assert that we view Adrian as a sign of Miller’s growing ironic sensibility, far removed from the tense and guilt-ridden self-portrait in *After the Fall*.

Miller’s writing is also strongly metatheatrical here, signified in particular by the moment at which Sigmund steals Marcus’ gun; not to fire it, but to use it deliberately for show. Sofer writes, “Miller’s point here is metatheatrical: Sigmund steals the gun explicitly *as a prop*” (103, author’s italics), and links this aspect of the play to its wider point:

In a sense, the play's metatheatrical engagements are a response to its political ones, for *The Archbishop's Ceiling* reflects Miller's realization that causal dramaturgy embodied in plays like *All My Sons* or *A View from the Bridge* is no longer adequate to the sociopolitical situation. Thus the play stages an outmoded dramaturgy that is criticised theatrically by means of a trope.

(105-106)

Whilst I would not agree that this play depicts a complete refusal of causal dramaturgy on Miller's part, it is clear that the metatheatrical elements point to a critique of dramatic form, and signal a new style for Miller. Sofer is, however, rightly critical of the denouement, writing, "by setting up Sigmund as a martyr to the cause of art – albeit a flawed, narcissistic one – Miller buys a redemptive ending at the risk of replicating the very artifice he critiques" (103), a fair comment on the abrupt, and flat, finale. Sofer not only sees the play as being metatheatrical because it is evidently so self-conscious, but he sees it as a comment on the dramatic form. He writes that it "is a play about how drama *itself* confronts the challenge posed by the postmodern disintegration of the self to a traditional dramaturgy built on the link between psychological motivation and individual behaviour" (96, author's italics). Sofer's analysis is particularly engaging and relevant for my work here, laying the basis for much of what follows in relation not only to this play, but my thesis in general.

Nobody, surely, has written more on Miller than Christopher Bigsby, and when discussing his work I will attempt to condense his writing from numerous sources. Naturally, his biography of Miller looks at the biographical roots of the play, citing visits to the USSR in 1967 and 1969. Of the former, he writes that "Russia offered conundrums. Reality was never quite what it appeared" (*1962-2005*, 145). In his afterword to the play, Bigsby repeatedly discusses reality as an idea, both in relation to the apparent theme of the play – "[w]hat

appears to be a purely political play slowly reveals itself as a study of metaphysics, a debate around the nature of reality, and the problematic status of morality in a world whose certainties dissolve so easily into performance” (“Afterword to *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*”, 177-178), and as a general condition of the world depicted – “in the Archbishop’s palace, there are no certainties; there is no touchstone of veracity, proof of sincerity or authenticity. Indeed that is the essence of the play” (181). Bigsby situates the play within its historical context well, writing

[b]eneath the apparent certainties of the Cold War [...] was a deepening sense of unreality, as politics became melodrama and private lives were invaded by uncertainty. In the play that he wrote to capture something of this mood the word ‘reality’ becomes deeply suspect. (*Critical Study*, 299)

He also points out that, while it is set in a foreign country with only one American character, the play addresses itself to America. He writes that it is “set in Eastern Europe but bearing on American reality and unreality” (1962-2005, 234). Referring again to political events as a source for the mood of the play, he writes, “[t]he conclusion he drew from the rationalization [sic] of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia [in 1968] was that power constructs its own realities, as the United States had done in Vietnam” (1962-2005, 259). However, for all of the influence of political events on the play, Bigsby still maintains that it is not a political play in a traditional sense: “For Miller *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* was less concerned with the politics of the situation than the ambiguities to which the very idea of covert surveillance gave birth, the impact on the sense of self, on relations with other people, on the very notion of the real” (1962-2005, 264). Echoing Sofer’s idea of prismatic drama, then, for Bigsby the play is about the reactions of people to their surroundings. Bigsby also makes a similar point to Sofer by claiming that it is not a new style Miller was reaching for so

much as a way to represent a new problem: “he was concerned less with reaching for a non-realistic style than with posing the problem of how the real can be identified when language and even thought itself have been infiltrated by power” (1962-2005, 262). Bigsby’s work in this play is especially useful because not only does he identify many of the key aspects of the play, and touch on points that other critics go on to develop, but we can also see in his writing the limitations around so much work on *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. His work has laid the foundations for much of my own conception of Miller’s late work, but in that he, along with other critics, generally refuses to firmly situate Miller within the postmodern. Nods are given to Miller’s engagement with postmodernist ideas or practices, but they never coalesce into a coherent vision of a postmodernist sensibility within Miller’s writing.

Bigsby puts a considerable degree of emphasis on the metatheatrical elements of the play, noting that it “is an account of the degree to which performance has replaced being and the real has become problematic” (1962-2005, 269), linking this performative nature of the play to the lack of reality in life. Alice Griffin makes a similar point, noting the significance of the fact that each character is a writer, as this allows them to create the roles they play: “all the main characters are writers, so they are in a sense creating their dialogue for the listening device” (170). Abbotson makes a similar point, writing that the “play’s characters are double actors. They play the parts that Miller has written, but the characters themselves are all actors of a kind, playing parts they are constantly devising for themselves or being coerced to play by unforeseen forces” (A Lesson in Responsibility”, 261).

It is arguably in his afterword to the play that Bigsby gets down to the core of what this metatheatricality means for the play. He writes that the characters

are turned into actors and their lives into theatre; but there is,
finally, no evidence for the existence of the audience before

whom they take themselves to be performing. There is no stable reality [...] just as they inhabit the fictions of the state so they, as writers, counter with their own fictions. But in an existence in which performance becomes a personal and political necessity how can morality be constructed? (178)

He appears to be venturing towards postmodernist grounds when he writes that “[h]ow [making a moral stand] is to be achieved in a world of fictions, in which action is turned into theatre and ethics into aesthetics, is only one of the questions posed by this complex but moving play” (181). However, he pulls back from claiming the play to be entirely postmodernist, later writing:

Miller’s purpose is not that everything is relative, that there are no values worth embracing, that the world is no more than a series of distorting mirrors. Rather, he is concerned to identify the degree of difficulty, the genuine effort required to elaborate meaning out of mere event. (*Critical Study*, 309)

Bigsby’s middle ground is a good compromise here, and it is difficult to argue with, but his analysis falters somewhat because he fails to address frankly the idea of the postmodern in relation to Miller. As will be a common theme throughout this chapter, critics come very close to describing a postmodernist vein in Miller’s work, yet what I hope to show here is the value of explicitly linking Miller and the postmodern. William M. Demastes, as we shall see below, writes, in a similar vein to Bigsby, “Miller’s omnipresent microphones are not ideological constants as Beckett’s *Godot* (or *no-Godot*) is; their existence relies on human conditions” (“Miller’s 1970s ‘power plays’”, 151).

Demastes' article, "Miller's 1970s "power plays"" makes the welcome connection with the religious side of the building, writing that the bug in the ceiling is "the manifestation of the thing that has come to replace the moral world that the archbishop's ceiling once represented" (146). He writes about power and the totalitarian butchering of the concept of truth, but his summation of the play, "[e]thics/morality have been replaced by a metatheatrical utilitarianism" (147) is most apt; rarely, in the play, is the idea of an objective moral good seen, with the exception of the naivety of Adrian's self-righteous perspective. Demastes recognises one of the contradictions in the play's world: that power is to be both loved and feared. Arguably, in this sense, it also resembles religion. He writes, "[t]he ostensible enemy becomes the protector; lines of resistance between good and evil become almost inseparably blurred" (148). Like Sofer and Bigsby, he sees how the play concerns itself with the US: "Miller's play lowers us into this seemingly alien world only to have us realize [sic] that in many ways it is *our* world, a world our naïve idealism leaves us ill equipped to cope with" (148, author's italics). He is also critical of Sigmund's role in the drama, writing of his refusal to emigrate: "Though this refusal to flee could be perceived as a selfless act, Miller nevertheless presents enough ambiguity to call into question even the reality and authenticity of the play's key dissident" (150), which is another indicator of Miller's refusal to offer simple solutions or conclusions. He has a different take on the ending to Sofer, however, saying it ends on "a note of despair [...] We can't even determine where right is, where truth lies, or where reality is grounded" (150).

June Schlueter, similarly, identifies the importance of the issue of power to the play in her article, "Power Play: Arthur Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling*". She identifies how Miller's dramatic concerns had notably changed, writing that none of his previous works "play with the complexities of truth and fiction with more urgency or finesse than [...] *The Archbishop's Ceiling*" (271). She also notices how, while the characters from the unnamed

country have adapted to its conditions, Adrian's naivety, most definitely linked to his being American, leaves him lost: "the American visitor is most disturbed by his growing knowledge that he can never have full access to anything he can satisfactorily call the truth" (271), she writes, and "he sees fragments of the truth, but he is unable to see anything whole" (271). She gestures towards the plays metatheatricality, but in this brief article does little to expand on it, writing that the "Archbishop's ceiling becomes a powerful world-stage metaphor, transforming all human action into performance and endorsing the false even as it precludes the possibility that anything but the false can exist" (273). To Schlueter, the paradox is that the fake is claimed as reality here, even though there is no real against which to judge it.

Carson's chapter on the play is brief, but he hits several key issues. Like Bigsby, he highlights Miller's engagement with dissident writers in the 1960s and 1970s: "a few [Czech writers] found something within them that did not allow them to conform. What, Miller wonders, was the source of such defiance? Was it ideology? Pride? Egoism?" (101). It is interesting that pride and egoism, and, arguably, ideology, are three forces that influence each character, to varying degrees, in the play. Carson also writes of the staging of the play, with "its copious bar, the curious intruder, an unsolved crime, all these might suggest an Agatha Christie mystery" (102). He goes on to say that "the realistic surface hides depths of psychological and metaphysical ambiguities" (102). For Carson, "the play is about the unconscious, the ultimate grounds for moral choice" (103), which is not something that other writers have expressed in such a way, though his foregrounding of morality is the crucial point. Like Demastes, he relates this to religion, writing that the listening device "becomes an ambiguous symbol of the possibility of communicating with a higher power" (103). Carson also relates the end to Miller's previous plays, writing that the dilemma is a common one: "how can an individual weigh the claims of others against those of self?" (103) This in a sense concurs with Sofer's judgement that he "bought" an easy ending.

Abbotson's survey of the play is broad, but not especially deep, and she echoes many of the ideas that have already been discussed. She writes that Miller "presents us with a play in which reality is ever in question, partly to explain what place morality might have in such a world" (*Critical Companion*, 69). Like the above writers, she notes that *The Archbishop's Ceiling* is not a political play, but uses a political situation to make a point: "Miller uses the political metaphor to address deeper concerns regarding the function and nature of reality, truth, compromise, and art" (*Critical Companion*, 69). She also remarks upon the staging of the play, taking the emphasis off dialogue: "The difficulty of trust between these characters is conveyed effectively by more than their consistently cautious speech" (*Critical Companion*, 69), perhaps pointing to a subtlety not always noticed in Miller's work. Her writing on the metaphysical issues of the bug also echoes Bigsby's, who wrote:

[t]he very concept of privacy has been eroded, as individuals project themselves into the world, performing their lives as if performance were indeed a form of truth. 'Reality' TV proposes nothing less than that we derive our significance from being observed. The real fear is that nobody is listening or watching. (1962-2005, 270).

Abbotson writes, in a similar vein, but with specific reference to the play and its characters: "It becomes more comforting to believe that the microphones exist, for that allows them to play. Disbelief would strip their lives of significance, while belief offers a sense of importance" (*Critical Companion*, 70). She highlights the ambiguities of the play, claiming that it "constantly provokes questions rather than answer them, showing the indeterminacy of life" (*Critical Companion*, 70). One such question relates to the subject of Sigmund's manuscript: "We never learn what the topic of Sigmund's novel is, which emphasizes [sic] that it is not the content that is important but the existence of the work itself" (*Critical*

Companion, 70). With this comment, Abbotson is pointing to a key postmodernist feature of the play; that is, “preoccupation with reading” (40), as Craig Owens puts it.

Lew Livesay situates the play in the Existentialist arena, writing that *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, as well as *Salesman*, is “capable of being read in a postmodernist and Existential vein” (“Arthur Miller’s ‘Dream Tissue’”, 22), and one of the first similarities he notes is that “a libidinous lust for power drives many of the characters in Miller’s oeuvre, who display absolutist tendencies” (26). This can be seen in Willy Loman and Joe Keller, of course, but arguably even more clearly in each character in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* – desperate for some level of reality upon which to ground their conversation, each character struggles for the power to be the one to do it. Livesay grounds the paranoiac tone in the play not only in the ambiguity surrounding the bug, but also in the characters’ relationships – he writes, “with all these people trying to steal reputation, identity, and sexuality from each other in a paranoid world where no one ever knows for sure who is listening to whom” (36). For Livesay, the key to Miller’s play is an urging for responsibility – “[t]he only freedom, this play urges, comes through responsibility, which reveals how we exist, neurotically, inside each other” (39). However, the ability to define what responsibility is, or would look like, is not resolved in the play, or in Livesay’s article. He sums up the central issue of the play, the impossibility of knowing who or what to believe, writing, “[i]n this play about dissimulation, no one knows whom to believe or how truth can be reflected” (39). If, as is perfectly possible, we substitute “represented” for “reflected”, Livesay provides us here with an ideal description of the great postmodernist anxiety. He summarises several of Miller’s plays of the time as exploring “how each mind distorts an experience and the memories connected to that experience so that intersubjectivity holds little in common, as each one needs to remember differently in order to protect his or her justifications for what happened

and what it meant” (40), and this is an idea which will reoccur numerous times throughout this study.

Brenda Murphy notes the importance of metaphors in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, writing “the image patterns and metaphoric implications are more clearly determined [in his later plays], as with the angels in the ceiling and the use of alcohol and pills in *Archbishop's Ceiling*” (7), and the subject of medication through legal, and illegal, drugs will come up repeatedly in Miller's later works, most powerfully in *The Last Yankee* (1993). Jeffrey D. Mason highlights the importance of the political in the play, though I am not fully in accord with his assertion that in this play “Miller questioned the integrity, not of a specific government, but of the very idea of government” (“Arthur Miller's Ironic Resurrection”, 666). Like many of the critics mentioned above, I see Miller's commentary here as being more abstract, related to questions of reality and morality. Ashish Sengupta's review of Gregory Mosher's 2006 direction of the play is possibly the finest, as it is evident that he, as well as Mosher, has a keen understanding of the play's concerns. He notes the timeless quality of the play, partly brought about by its ambiguities: “the question that endures, irrespective of time and the form of government, is, as Miller asks, “[h]ow does the individual react when faced with ‘seemingly limitless power’?” (Review of *The Archbishop's Ceiling* by Gregory Mosher, 92). He also observes the metatheatrical aspect, writing that “the very hypothesis is enough to turn the writers, who assemble under the ceiling, into compulsive actors” (92). He concludes that “in such a world, not only freedom is compromised but writing becomes problematic as truth is elusive, often changing places with fiction” (93), and this is a fair summation of the play's central ideal.

I have presented above a general overview of the common themes in critique of *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. As is clear, the most regularly discussed threads are the discussions of

power, reality, and morality, and these are often brought about by metatheatrical devices. While the play is certainly rooted in real life events, such as Miller's trips to the USSR, and the revelations surrounding Richard Nixon's incriminating taped conversations, the play is not only addressed to one time or place. More, it is a general musing, which firmly refuses to provide an answer, on what happens to the human condition when under constant surveillance, or even pressure from power. Miller came to see these forces as inescapable, and so began to regard the idea of an independent individual who operates beyond these constraints as something that has been relegated to history. Several critics have linked the play to the Absurdism of Beckett and Pinter, the latter of whom is the most plausible, as there are stylistic links to be drawn with *The Dumb Waiter* (1960), not to mention the friendship the two playwrights developed in the 1980s and beyond. It is generally agreed that the play is hugely significant in marking a change in Miller's writing towards a postmodernist sensibility. However, most critics stop short of thoroughly investigating the link between the play and the ones that follow, which is what I hope to achieve in this study.

2.2: Some Kind of Love Story & Clara: Evident Crimes, Unclear

Punishments, and Elusive Villains

Many of the themes that have been discussed in the previous section also apply to these short plays of the 1980s. Miller continued to explore ideas surrounding reality and morality in them, although he never quite so blatantly returned to the concept of power as he did in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Although these plays were not included on the same bill (*Some Kind of Love Story* was partnered with *Elegy for a Lady* in *Two-Way Mirror*, and *Clara* with *I Can't Remember Anything* in *Danger: Memory!*), they shall be discussed together here because they explore similar topics, in a similar style. Both are notable for being the most obvious genre pieces Miller ever wrote, being situated clearly in the classic detective style. *Love Story*

conforms to a more classical noir aesthetic, with its language, sex, and recognisable character archetypes, but *Clara* also features a classically hard-nosed cop, with hints at a past he'd like to leave behind.

As they are both one-act plays, they are relatively short, and focus mainly on two characters. *Love Story* concerns Tom O'Toole, a private detective who has been working to free an innocent man, Felix Epstein, for nearly five years. His sole lead is Angela, a schizophrenic prostitute whose links to the case become apparent in the course of the play. She and Tom have, at various times, had a sexual relationship, which feeds into the portrayal of Tom as a stereotypical detective, aligned with his heavy smoking and drinking - "I had to give up the booze twenty years ago, and then the cigarettes because the doctor told me I have the make-up of an addict. If I went into you again I'd never come out the rest of my life" (*Plays: Three*, 215), he tells her. Tom, however, is unsure that Angela can ever lead him to solve the case, which is complicated by the fact that she had been sleeping with the victim, Abe Kaplan, and also the chief prosecutor, Charley Callaghan. Disclosure of the case's details would cause a national scandal in the police and legal institutions, but Angela's genuine concern is that if the case were solved, she would no longer be of interest to Tom, and her beloved Callaghan would be sent to jail. So, for Angela, justice is not her motive, but gaining, and maintaining, the interest of men. Angela's inability to decide on a moral position is symbolised by her schizophrenia, which causes her to change in three more distinct personalities. This contributes to Tom's doubting her evidence, but eventually he sees that, as she claimed, there is a police car monitoring her home. This causes him to once again get roped in by Angela, and renders it more difficult to assume that she is merely being deceitful or delusional. The play ends with Angela insisting on Tom meeting her for lunch the following day, when she claims she'll be able to lay out the entire case, which is wider than

he assumed. Whilst we have little doubt that Tom has heard such promises before, we can also safely assume he will meet her, which will only prolong the case further.

Clara is less brash and loud in its language, but probes related questions about reality and memory. Albert Kroll is being questioned by Detective Lew Fine about his daughter, Clara. They are in her apartment, with her murdered body in the next room. Kroll is disoriented, finding it difficult to answer Fine's questions at first. However, he becomes more lucid as the play progresses, and he is able, with some prompting, to utter the name of Clara's boyfriend, who is the assumed killer. We learn that he is a Puerto Rican ex-convict, who had been in jail for murdering his girlfriend. Fine probes Kroll by delving into his past, and it becomes clear that Kroll is suppressing something. We learn that he is reluctant to name the name, because he feels this will be an acceptance of his own waning liberal sentiments. Having seen himself as a progressive man all his life, and passed on such an image of himself to Clara, Kroll now finds himself working for a corrupt construction company, whose bosses attend sex and drugs parties. This, as we see by his anxiety around the subject, has caused a disruption in his moral framework and how he conceives of himself. He knows that Clara has gone into a dangerous area of work, being a social worker who helped prisoners and ex-convicts, at least in part due to his influence, and so if he names the ex-boyfriend, he feels he will inadvertently be condemning himself to not only being responsible for her death, but also to not being as moral a person as he had previously thought. This is expressed through Kroll's re-telling of two war stories, during which Clara appears onstage, and Fine is cast into darkness. The ending has Kroll name the name, but is visited by Clara once more, in a gesture that some see as redemptive, but others as problematic. However, Kroll finishes the play "standing erect and calm now" (*Plays: Four*, 250), which suggests a kind of inner peace has been reached.

Partly because of their length, and also because of the relative lack of critical acclaim they received, these short plays have not attracted much scholarship. This may also be down to their ambiguity; it is not easy to explore them, especially when one bears Miller's canon in mind, or indeed fails to acknowledge the development already discussed in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Bigsby explicitly makes the link when he says of *Two-Way Mirror*, "[t]aken together with [...] *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, these plays mark in the new phase in the career of America's leading dramatist" (*Plays: Three*, 253). Berkowitz, however, does not agree, and writes that, following *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and *The American Clock*, "Miller's next plays are as different as can be" (170). Welland, in his somewhat limited study, focusing as it does mostly on the early plays, writes of *Love Story* that "the element of sensationalism, the rawness of emotion, and the matching crudity of the language combine into something quite unlike Miller's other plays" (166), and this is certainly the case; never before had Miller employed characters from the "underworld". Several critics link this to Miller's own involvement with the Peter Reilly case of the mid-1970s. Reilly was a young man wrongly charged with his mother's brutal murder, and had a confession forced out of him by the police. Miller, who lived near Reilly, threw considerable money and public influence behind the case, and Reilly was eventually acquitted. Carson writes that in "its general outline, the plot of *Love Story* resembles a similar case of wrongful conviction that Miller himself had been drawn into ten years earlier" (117), and while this is stretching the facts of the Reilly case, it is fair to suggest that Miller's interest in the form, and language, of the genre could have been piqued by his involvement in the case.

I shall approach these plays first through the broadest writing on them, and then will narrow down to discuss each individually. For most critics, regardless of where they put the starting line, this period of the late-1970s and early-1980s is considered to be an important moment in Miller's thematic and stylistic development. Berkowitz rightly point out these

plays reflect a “new intimate style Miller was exploring in the 1980s” (172), even if he fails to see the connection to previous works. Robert Scanlan writes that “Miller’s one-acts all seem to be daydreams, protracted fantasies, exploratory five-finger exercises. They probe a theme by indulging (or giving form to) a provisional ‘what if?’ scenario” (183). Lew Livesay writes, concurring with Sacvan Bercovitch, “that Miller reached a point in the eighties when he recognised that the quotidian everyday, taken-for-granted reality that we share is based on a highly suspect contract that assumes we all share similar perceptions and realities” (“Dream Tissue”, 40). This heightened awareness of differing subjectivities is therefore a clear follow up to the expression of the same idea in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. Bigsby reaches back to compare *Love Story* to his previous works, in order to highlight the change in his writing: “The fascination, however, lies in the extent to which what, earlier in his career, might have been recast as a social drama is now forged into a metaphysical work of great subtlety” (*Plays: Three*, 255).

One of the curious aspects of the study of these plays is the reluctance of critics to examine them in relation to detective fiction in general. Bigsby compares *Love Story* to John Fowles’ *The Enigma* (1987) – “itself a parody of the genre” (“Afterword to *Two-Way Mirror*”, 253), but goes little further with the analysis of it as conscious genre writing. He goes on to say, “[t]he model of a concealed truth slowly exposed by rational processes defers to an account of the problematic nature of reality and the complex motives of those who imagine themselves to be concerned to recover it” (253). This is an extremely valuable comment, as it highlights the need to consider *Love Story* – and, indeed, *Clara* – as postmodernist detective works. The detective story, as has been mentioned, is one of the prime genres of postmodernist writing, because not only does it complicate the concept of finding an objective truth, but it draws the reader into the story, occupying the same space, that of the detective, as the protagonist. Carson acknowledges that the plays have a similar

style – “[t]wo or three years after the completion of *Love Story*, Miller returned to the murder mystery genre” (118), but, in a pattern that we shall see repeated, is entirely disinterested in pursuing the similarities. Bigsby, similarly, writes, “[o]nce again, as with *Two-Way Mirror*, the companion piece to this elegiac play [*I Can’t Remember Anything*] is a detective story” (*Critical Study*, 362). Sengupta writes that *Clara* “is another detective story by Miller, in which reality is no less elusive than in *Love Story*” (“The Late Plays of Arthur Miller”, 114). Schlueter, in “Miller in the eighties”, briefly notes that “*Clara* is also about memory, though on its surface it is a detective play” (165), but she does not take this aspect of the play further. The failure to explore this link, both thematically and aesthetically, will be a key feature of my own study, but for now I shall discuss the themes and ideas which scholars have explored in each play thus far.

Both plays, it is widely agreed, are explorations of reality. With regards to *Love Story*, a crucial point is to ask how reality can be known when the person seemingly best able to solve the case, and therefore make the play conform to a rational dramaturgy, is a schizophrenic with multiple personalities. Tom at one point asks a psychiatrist friend on the phone, “could a person have delusions, but like inside the delusion is the facts?” (221), and this is one of the multiple cues he presents us with on how to read the play. As Bigsby writes, Tom “has begun to wonder [...] whether within her madness there may be truth” (*1962-2005*, 317). Bigsby picks up on this, noting that the play sets up, only to subvert, the detective genre:

A crime has been committed. A private detective seeks to solve it.

A rational process will work itself out. A witness is at hand,

ready, it seems, to collaborate, a model of social cohesion in the face of anarchy. And yet slowly this assurance begins to dissolve

[...] The law is exposed as no more than a series of propositions

without substance [...] There are, it seems, stories within stories.

(1962-2005, 316)

It is worth staying with that final sentence for a moment, as Irving Wardle wrote something similar in his *Sunday Times* review, that it “is a play about finding out whether there is a play or not” (qtd. Bigsby, *Company*, 191), reflecting a metatheatrical sensibility, as in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. It is a shame that Bigsby does not broaden this into an examination of the detective narrative, and Sengupta, similarly, fails to probe deeply enough, writing, “*Love Story* seems to ask: what if rational inquiry dissolves in a world of criminal conspiracy and possible paranoia? What if the motives of those responsible to investigate are suspect?” (“The Late Plays of Arthur Miller”, 112), though he relates the play well to social concerns, writing that as “a ‘detective’ story, the play is an ironic comment on rational inquiry in a world devoid of any criteria of veracity” (113). The play is largely held to represent, therefore, a breakdown of trust in institutions, represented by Tom, who is no longer a regular policeman, and various corrupt public figures.

June Schlueter, in her essay for *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*, makes scant reference to *Love Story*, but acknowledges some of the key points in relation to reality and the play’s ambiguity: that *Two-Way Mirror* “extended Miller’s preoccupation with the real” (“Miller in the eighties”, 162), and that Tom “is never sure when he is seeing the naked self (i.e., the real Angela), never certain whether to trust what Angela says” (164). This ambiguity is even more evident in the play’s central point of discussion. While it appears to be about whether Tom and Angela can work together to get Felix out of prison, it is widely agreed that this is not the case. Bigsby writes that it “is not in fact genre fiction. It is a debate about the nature of the real and how that reality is perceived, constructed, used” (*Critical Study*, 357). Abbotson, meanwhile, writes “[h]ow these individuals struggle with the problem of reality that needs to be simultaneously embraced and rejected for each to survive, and how

they do survive, is the play's real plot" (*Critical Companion*, 319). She highlights the ending as being crucial for its lack of clarity: "They manage to close without a full resolution, and so the game continues for both. This seems to be, ultimately, what the play is about – how we sustain our lives through a complex mix of reality and fiction" (*Critical Companion*, 321). Abbotson writes well on Angela, considering that more emphasis is often placed on Tom. She writes that Angela's "multiple-personality disorder is less a medical condition than a symbol of the modern condition by which it is hard for us all to maintain a sense of balance among divided loyalties and identities" (*Critical Companion*, 319), which places her not only as a product of society, but also moves her away from being, in Tom's words, "just a crazy, fantasizing [sic] whore" (223). She sees her transformations into various different characters as an attempt "to remould herself into a more worthless person who would deserve such a life or into a better person who she can become" (*Critical Companion*, 319). I have mentioned above that Miller returns to mental health problems later, in *The Last Yankee*, but Abbotson sees something in Angela as representing clarity, not confusion:

Angela knows more than Tom because she has a wider perspective. She is not restricted to a single, limited self in the way that Tom is. Unfortunately, Angela is unable to use what she may or may not know efficiently because she is in constant danger of losing her balance. Tom, on the other hand, is initially unprepared to walk the tightrope between reality and illusion because he is striving too much to grasp, completely and solely, the real. (*Critical Companion*, 319)

Although she does not go on to say it, this creates a contrast between Tom as the rational actor, seeking truth and reality through logical means, and Angela as the irrational actor,

having almost given up on the very notion of truth, working to find some way forward by different, unreliable means.

Abbotson and Bigsby both point towards elements that can be compared to the hyperreality of Sigmund's stealing of a gun, in order *not* to be used, in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Abbotson writes that "[i]t does not matter whether Callaghan's [incriminating] letters exist, so long as Tom will believe that they exist when Angela tells him they do" (*Critical Companion*, 320). Bigsby sees this as the general condition of their relationship, noting that they play "a game in which truth is pursued on the understanding that it must never be recovered" ("Afterword to *Two-Way Mirror*", 254). Both represent hyperreality because they are present in order to negate themselves; if Callaghan's letters were revealed, Angela's role in the drama of Tom's life would cease, and their game itself is a hyperreality because it is undertaken with the intention of not completing it. These final points are instructive, because they point to both strengths and weaknesses in the analysis just discussed. They are of course strengths because they point to the contradictory nature of the plays. However, there is a slight weakness in that they both refuse to follow the argument to its end point, that Miller was writing very much in a tradition of postmodernist detectives.

Many of the points of contention around *Clara* are centred on whether Kroll is to be blamed or acclaimed for his role in Clara's death. Paula T. Langteau falls firmly in the former camp, seeing his lapsed liberal ideology as little more than shallow, faux-PC bigotry. Other critics, such as Abbotson and Bigsby, take the latter view. The points of consensus, however, will be discussed first. These are, generally, that, as above, the story of the play is not the one of exposing a criminal. Many see the play as being a process for Kroll to absolve himself of his guilt for his lapsed ideology – if Clara's murder, along with Detective Fine's racism and aggression, cannot force him to confess that his viewpoints were merely "ten, twenty, thirty years of shit you told your daughter to the point that she sacrificed her life, for what? To

uphold what you don't believe in yourself?" (245), then he concludes that there is an intrinsic good to those ideas. So, the play is about his working out of his own mental processes, and not the solving of the crime. Abbotson writes that it "is not a realistic work [...] Kroll must recall this name from his own resources, symbolically, for his own salvation" (*Critical Companion*, 98). Similarly, Bigsby concludes that "[t]he crime at its heart is not the one that has left a young woman dead" (*Critical Study*, 362). Miller's conception of the play, meanwhile, as he wrote in *Timebends*, was that it was about "bringing onto the stage a slice of our historical experience over the past decades since World War II" (591). It is still to be considered a social play, then, as Bigsby writes in the second volume of his biography; "what is exposed is a sense of society itself adrift, detached from its own idealism" (*1962-2005*, 362). Centola identifies that "[a]t first glance, *Clara* seems to follow the conventional pattern of a murder mystery" ("Temporality, Consciousness, and Transcendence", 139), but, as is so common, he refuses to read the play through this detective prism.

Berkowitz takes a sympathetic view of Kroll as well, writing that Fine's "questioning revives the man's faith in his daughter's essential goodness and his own" (172), and that "he is gradually reintegrated with that younger self; and it is when he can embrace his younger self with joy that he can declare his love for his daughter and, incidentally, remember the name of the probable murderer" (172). Carson, meanwhile, sees the play through the prism of denial and guilt, writing that Miller "deals much more explicitly with the process of denial which he seems to think lies at the root of our faulty perception of reality" (118). By this reading, our refusal to see reality is bound up with our guilt at not being moral. Sengupta is probably the writer who most readily identifies a postmodernist strain in the play, noting that "the ambiguity instead reflects the contemporary mood – doubts about the grandly moral" ("The Late Plays of Arthur Miller", 115), which sounds like an echo of "the incredulity

towards metanarratives” as seen by Lyotard as defining the postmodernist period – albeit, once again, while skirting the idea.

Langteau’s analysis of the play is the most noteworthy, as it provides the most detailed, and unique, perspective. Unlike other critics, she does not praise the apparent heroism of Kroll, who is seen to uphold liberal values in the face of his greatest trauma. She sees it as an attack on flimsy political correctness, writing,

[i]n this play we are challenged to consider how adopting a posture of political correctness with respect to a group, particularly a posture that does not penetrate underlying values, causes people to confront the “Other” as representation rather than individual. (*Miller and Middle America*, ix)

Langteau’s analysis focuses considerably on Kroll’s language with regards to ethnic minorities. She notes that he refers to both African-American and Hispanic people as “them”, and, in a story about being ambushed by Japanese soldiers during World War II, says, “they were all over me like roaches” (239). A charitable interpretation of these would note that “them” is most likely an accurate way of speaking for a man of Kroll’s age in the mid-1980s, and that one would understandably have a negative, yet not necessarily dehumanising, view of a specific group who ambushes one during a war. Langteau writes that Kroll’s ideas are dangerous because “they are, and seem always to have been, superficial, based upon assumptions and stereotypes of people rather than distinct individuals” (“Arthur Miller’s *Clara*”, 32), and that his

values indict him in his daughter’s death not because they’re liberal but because they’re a façade: while they exhibit a surface political correctness they are based upon assumptions and

stereotypes about categories of people rather than on behaviours of, and experience with distinct individuals. (“Arthur Miller’s *Clara*”, 38)

Langteau’s work is very instructive here, as the play has rarely received such rigorous analysis, and she goes against the grain of most other critics, who do not engage with the play to the extent she does. She sees the play as questioning what liberal values are in contemporary America, rather than it acting as a lament for their demise, writing that it “is not so much about the detective’s interrogation technique as it is about what it is Kroll must confess to and the question of his guilt. What are the values that he passed on to his daughter? and [sic] do they indict him in Clara’s death?” (“Arthur Miller’s *Clara*”, 31)

A final, brief point I wish to focus on relates to the suspect’s guilt. This is extremely instructive from an aesthetic and moral point of view, as Miller flat out refuses to identify the killer, thereby making it evident that solving the murder is not the point. While Kroll names Clara’s boyfriend, Luiz Hernandez, and much circumstantial evidence points to his committing the murder, nothing in the play confirms this. However, critics dismiss this point, with most not allowing any room for nuance. For instance, Bigsby writes that “it soon becomes apparent that one of them [the ex-prisoners with whom Clara worked] has committed the murder” (1962-2005, 362), while Abbotson asserts that “Fine makes us realize [sic] that Clara knew her murderer” (*Critical Companion*, 98). Schlueter, on the other hand, writes that one of the criminals Clara worked with “is Fine’s prime suspect” (“Miller in the eighties”, 165). Sengupta notes that although “there is no prima facie evidence against the suspect, the likelihood is that the killer is one of those men, particularly one with whom she is in love” (“The Late Plays of Arthur Miller”, 115). Langteau takes the most even-handed view, writing, “despite circumstantial evidence, he still has the right to a fair trial for Clara’s

murder” (“Arthur Miller’s *Clara*”, 37). What none of these relatively fair perspectives take into account, however, is the aesthetic device this lack of clarity offers to the play.

These plays are by no means the greatest or most substantial in Miller’s oeuvre, but they are his key plays of the 1980s, given that the 1984 version of *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* was in fact the earlier, mid-1970s text. These short plays form an even more coherent narrative when considered with their companion pieces, but my intention henceforth is to open a new area of study, by examining them through the prism of postmodernist detective writing, a crucial subgenre in late-twentieth century writing. In any case, they represent Miller’s growing interest in ambiguous drama that shies away from straight answers, narrative coherence, and fully developed characters. By choosing to write in a shorter, more dreamlike fashion, he opened his narrative voice to the more diverse group of plays he would write from the late-1980s to the end of his life.

2.3: *The Ride Down Mount Morgan: Faulty Memory and Faulty*

Judgements

The Ride Down Mount Morgan (1991) is somewhat difficult to pin down, beginning with its very title – some scholars capitalise the “D” in “Down”, and some write “Mt” for “Mount”. This ambiguity is also shown in the fact that there are numerous versions of the script. For the purposes of this study, I am using the 1991 text, but other scholars use the 1998 one. This difference should not impact my research to a significant degree, however. *Morgan* is a crucial work in the oeuvre of Arthur Miller for numerous reasons, one of which is that it was the first major Miller play to be performed in Britain before the United States, opening in London in 1991. But while this was symbolic of his greater appreciation among British audiences than American ones, the text itself marks a big development in Miller’s writing.

For the first time in a full-length play, Miller writes very comfortably about sex, for instance. This is noticeable even straight away, as the protagonist, Lyman Felt, mumbles in a dream, “I want you to look at the whole entire economic system as one enormous tit” (1). This continues throughout the play, and when highlighted with the tension and guilt around sex in *The Crucible*, or *After the Fall*, the change is striking. It is also curious to note that the premise of the play, that of a bigamist’s two wives meeting each other when he is hospitalised, is the same as Ray Cooney’s 1983 sex farce, *Run for Your Wife*. There is no suggestion that Miller was influenced by the play, or had even seen or heard of it, but the similarity is notable, suggesting as it does another “gap closing” between popular and less popular forms of entertainment. Scanlan makes this link, writing that the “play is uncharacteristic in Miller’s work for its essentially comic form, but there is every justification for a dramatic exploration of infidelity to engage the long tradition of theatrical sex farces” (184).

Morgan continues, to an extent, with the style of theatre Miller had developed many years earlier, in *Salesman* and *After the Fall*. That is, the stage setting is relatively sparse, and characters move seamlessly from one scene to another. Carson writes of this that “he combined objective reality with the subjective experiences of various individual characters” (122). Contained within this is a crucial distinction that needs to be made in differentiating this from the earlier plays, and that will be discussed below. The focus, as Carson says, is again on reality, and how it is constructed, and who has the ability to define it. In that sense, it is very much a continuation from the plays discussed previously.

The play begins at what should be its climax - the meeting of Lyman’s two wives. I say this because the logic of the narrative leads to Lyman’s great secret being revealed, it being the key concern of the characters. Lyman awakes in his hospital bed, at first visited by the ghost of his father, who berates him. As he becomes conscious, Lyman realises what

happened, and that his wives – the older Theo, with whom he has an adult daughter, Bessie; and the younger Leah – will indeed meet, a scene that is played out as if Lyman is imagining it. The play moves forwards and backwards from this point, and we get the story of how Lyman ended up in the situation where he could have lost his life, or at least both families. Sengupta refers to the “far from objective reconstruction as the past is presented to us through the wild fantasies of Lyman” (“Plays as Political Allegories”, 15). Stultified by his marriage to Theo, he pursues the youthful Leah, an intelligent and sexually attractive woman he meets through work. He carries out an affair with her, eventually pretending to get a divorce from Theo, and leading a double life – he even fathers a son, Benjamin, with Leah. This second marriage lasts nine years before Lyman’s crash. We get insights into Lyman’s family history, his past, and his psychological state: “Why do I think you’re depressed?” (16), his friend and lawyer, Tom, asks him, while it is evident how Lyman’s mind makes connections early on: “That red river of tail-lights gliding down Park Avenue on a winter’s night – and all those silky white thighs crossing inside those heated limousines... Christ, can there be a sexier image?” (18-19). Toby Zinman referred to this as “not only puerile in its view of female allure, but its sleazy linking of money and sexiness is a TV commercials cliché” (166). This conflating of sexuality and money, however, is obviously a core part of Lyman’s being. Lyman is an avaricious character, revealing himself to have a hunger for life, and experiences, so great that to him it is the highest calling one can achieve. “Only the truth is sacred, Leah! – To hold back nothing!” (76), he declares, but to Lyman truth means only satisfying his own desire, not carrying out honest relationships with other human beings.

The play progresses with various blackouts signifying the end of scenes, and it is generally not instantly clear where, or when, the new scene begins – similar to the style used in *After the Fall* and *The American Clock*. The first blackout concludes with Lyman’s father, again, berating him, saying, “very bad for business the way you fucking all these girls up

there” (24), which not only shows Miller’s growing comfort with four-letter words, but hints at another element of Lyman’s personality – his guilt at pursuing sex to such an extent, even from a young age. The play proceeds with both women visiting Lyman, occasionally abusing him, and occasionally simply expressing their sadness, regret, and disbelief. At one point, in what appears to be Lyman’s great fantasy, Theo and Leah “instantly de-animate as though suddenly falling under the urgency of his control” (28) and join Lyman on his hospital bed. Something similar happens later, with the two women “appearing on elevated platforms, like two stone deities” (44). They compete over who gets to cook for Lyman, a sequence which evidently brings a sleeping Lyman joy, until he is disrupted, once again, by his admonishing father.

The play is not only limited to scenes viewed through Lyman’s lens, though, as we are witness to various discussions, which further prompt memories, between the other characters, especially between the wives and Tom, who acts as counsel for each one. Carson writes,

[u]sing techniques he had worked out in *Salesman* and *Fall*, he combined objective ‘reality’ with the subjective experiences of various individual characters. Whereas previously Miller had focused on the inner world of a single person, however, here he dramatizes [sic] the thoughts and recollections of four. (122)

The fact that it is, indeed, four people and not one is crucial, because it shows that everyone’s memory is faulty, memory renders everyone guilty, and also that no-one’s discourse has primacy over the other’s – while Lyman is of course the key character, he does not have control over what we see; in fact what we see is not only a product of his memory, as it was in *Salesman* and *After the Fall*. This means Lyman has a distinct lack of control in

the drama. Carson continues, “[w]hile these contradictory recollections illustrate the difficulty of reconstructing the past, the problem for the audience is that there is no ‘objective’ truth against which to test the reliability of any particular vision” (123), which is of course a core philosophical and aesthetic point to the play. Schlueter, in a similar way to Carson, makes the point that “Miller’s strategy is to provide multiple perspectives on the marital partners, including each wives’ retrospective of events” (“Scripting the Closing Scene”, 148), and she continues to highlight the play’s ambiguity, writing, the “question is whether these are the women’s perceptions or Lyman’s, whether the boundaries separating each memorial event are merely the transitions of his mind in various states of awakening and drug-induced dream” (“Scripting the Closing Scene”, 148). This of course is in a sense impossible to answer, but it serves to highlight the play’s ambiguities.

Indeed, relatively little is learned about the wives, though, but we learn that Lyman was a frustrated poet who moved into insurance, and went on to make a great fortune. He has had multiple affairs, even fathering a child whom he then abandoned. Despite these unattractive features of his personality, though, Lyman sometimes comes across as an attractive, charming man. He has a lust for life that excites those around him, and he clearly gains interest from many women, despite his age – he is 54 at the time of his crash, while Leah is only 30. We learn that he has justified his bigamy by deciding that this is the only way he can be happy, and in turn make others around him happy. He lavishes gifts on the son he has with Leah, and maintains his interest in Theo, knowing that he can be somewhere else when he wants to. The most important scene in the development of Lyman’s life, and arguably the play, is when he is on safari with Bessie and Theo and faces a lion, roaring. At this point, he decides that he is bored with feeling guilty about having a mistress, and decides to marry Leah, while vocally dedicating himself to Theo. In this way, to Lyman, he can be as dedicated as it is possible for him to be to a person, to both women. That is, the most anyone

can get from Lyman is half of him. From that point, the play progresses to its end, as the main characters gather in Lyman's room and he is rejected by them, one by one. Near the end, Lyman confesses, "in some miserable dark corner of my soul I'm still not sure why I'm condemned" (86). This proves that he has not understood Bessie's lesson, which was, simply, "[t]here are other people" (85). The play concludes with Lyman alone in his room, marvelling that his nurse, and her family, have such simple conversations as discussing shoes while ice fishing. He begins to weep, and the play closes with a black out.

There is a certain tendency in some Miller scholars, mentioned above, to consider him largely in connection with his early, most successful plays. This is what Robert Scanlan meant when he referred to "the critics' fame-struck tendency to stand Miller in his own shadow" (181). However, it must be conceded that Miller occasionally contributed to this himself. In *Morgan*, for instance, Lyman says, "[p]eople still think I turned in my partner to save myself" (16), an obvious echo of the plot of *All My Sons*. The most glaring case of such a commonality, however, is the similarity between the names Lyman and (Willy) Loman. Taking her cue from here, Abbotson heavily reinforces the contrast between the men in her *Critical Companion*. She writes:

There are many similarities between Willy Loman and Lyman Felt beyond the echo in their names. Both are salesmen, selling the materialistic U.S. dream of wealth and success by denying certain aspects of reality. But there is an intrinsic difference; Lyman Felt is what Willy Loman wanted to be: handsome, well liked, and successful. Lyman possesses a self-confidence that Loman cannot attain, partly because he has never faced the ignominy of impending failure. (300)

It seems bizarre to say that there are many similarities between the men, and then state that one was handsome, well liked, successful and confident, whereas the other was not.

Excluding those features, there seems little left to link the characters, other than their names.

This is typical of much criticism ostensibly focusing on Miller's later work. Ramón Espejo writes, contrary to this kind of scholarship, that none of Miller's late plays are "a sequel or rehash of either *Death of a Salesman*, or any of his other best-known works" (1), while he correctly asserts that "critics go on to discuss Miller's classics while allegedly concerning themselves with his late plays [signalling] a neglect of the latter, which has become sadly habitual" (3). Abbotson also writes:

Foremost in Miller's work has always been the needs, desires and responsibilities of the U.S. family, and even more specifically the U.S. male, who is dealt with in *Death of a Salesman* in 1949 and reconsidered 40 years later through the social climate of the 1980s in the evolving story of Lyman Felt, (299-300)

which again feels like the play has been deliberately filtered through *Salesman*, as Miller had written plays between 1949 and 1991 that also dealt with the American male.

There are, however, some notable links to Miller's past in this play. Bigsby is keen to assert the playwright, at least in the early stages, based Lyman on Elia Kazan, who had been Miller's closest friend until he provided the names of people he had met at Communist organisations to the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the early-1950s. Bigsby writes that in 1987 he was writing a play "in which the central character was based squarely on Kazan" (1962-2005, 377). Lyman shares many personality traits with Kazan, who bedded numerous women, including Marilyn Monroe, at his popular peak. Bigsby writes that "Kazan – sexually voracious, manipulative, but with liberal principles – came to represent forces that

(Miller) saw more widely in America as the self became a primary concern” (1962-2005, 408). However, Bigsby implies that the work diverted from squarely being a portrait of Kazan, writing that “[i]t had *begun* as a portrait of Elia Kazan [...] Miller had been fascinated by Kazan’s shift from social commitment to self-concern” (1962-2005, 408, my italics). This is a good cue into the discussion of the social criticism of the play, as *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* is undoubtedly a social, and even political, work.

While it is generally assumed to be a play solely reflecting on the greed of the 1980s, a decade dominated by the self-interested ethos of the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, it stems from far more than that. Bigsby records that it “had been in the making for more than a decade” (*Critical Study*, 365), which suggests that while some of the ideas were especially relevant to the period, many others had been brewing in Miller’s mind for many years. Miller stated that Lyman was “the epitome of a kind of culture – the culture of appetite – which is what I think we have” (*Arthur Miller in Conversation*, 11), while in 1991 he also called it “a completely political play” (qtd. Németh, 82). Abbotson writes that *Morgan* “depicts a society which can be seen as representing our contemporary, disordered postmodern world” (“Miller and the Postmodern Impulse”, 308), and while her essay is occasionally useful, she does not provide a clear enough definition of postmodernism, or a rigorous discussion of the relevant plays.

Much of the contrasting views on the play come down to how scholars believe Lyman is to be perceived. Some feel that he has been rightly punished for his crimes, and that his loneliness at the end of the play is deserved. Others, however, express sympathy for Lyman, recognising his social good, given that he has built a successful and ethical insurance company that has provided job opportunities to many people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Patrick Stewart, who played Lyman in 1998 and 2000, has said, “Lyman is a very dangerous individual. He has had a devastating effect on at least three lives” (qtd.

Bigsby, *1962-2005*, 373), while Abbotson writes, “[d]espite the wrongs that he commits, it is hard not to like Lyman, and our attraction to Lyman is an integral aspect to his characterization, without which we are truly in danger of missing the point” (*Critical Companion*, 308), and Otten calls him “a character difficult to judge” (212). A good deal of the overall view of Lyman can be put down to the differences between the two texts. Bigsby records that “[w]hereas the original text ends with Lyman weeping, the 1998 version has him check his tears and insist that he has found himself at last, instructing himself to cheer up” (*1962-2005*, 413). The difference hinges on whether or not he attains self-knowledge. In the earlier version, he is reduced entirely to self-pity, whereas in the later one he has clearly begun to understand his life and his mistakes. Abbotson notes that the later text “slightly alters the play to make Lyman appear closer to understanding, although the play continues to refuse to give easy solutions” (*Critical Companion*, 309).

As we have seen with *Clara*, in particular, it was not generally expected for Miller to refuse to provide easy answers at the ending of his plays, and this may well have counted against him with the critics, given that the 1998 version of *Morgan* was more commercially and critically successful. But this ambiguity is a crucial part of *Morgan*. While Miller created a character in Lyman who had done evidently immoral things, that he can be left at the end with many critics having a sympathetic view of him shows how intriguing the play is, how it is designed to trip people up, and how it utterly refuses to pass judgement on the morality of the character. It is clear that Lyman is a man who will hurt happily others, and this is obviously a dreadful trait, but the play does not condemn, or even judge. He is a test, to see how such a character will be treated in contemporary America. Miller said of it:

[t]he play does not condemn him. It simply leaves him to one side of himself, trying to find himself [...] The question of values could intercede in the normal course, but he manages to convince

himself and, I suspect, some of the audience, that there is a higher value, and that is the psychic survival of the individual. The play has no solution. (qtd. Bigsby, *1962-2005*, 412-413)

Thomas E. Porter applauds this ending, writing that “this lack of resolution is also the result of Miller’s valiant effort to tell the whole truth” (362) – for Miller, the whole truth, now, is the difficulty of ascertaining truth. As we have seen, the lack of a clear resolution is another key property to the postmodernist text.

With *Morgan* being a more high-profile play than any of the others so far discussed, it is perhaps not surprising that it has been the subject of more scholarship, particularly with regards to postmodernism, albeit, once again, in a generally oblique fashion. Otten writes that “[w]ithout abandoning his essential themes, [Miller] has attempted to accommodate but not surrender to the prevailing intellectual currents of the last few decades” (x), and it is evident that he is referring to, among others, postmodernism; as he writes, “into the nineties [Miller’s] drama seems much more aligned with the issues of postmodernism than with the tenets of tragedy” (xi). Abbotson, meanwhile, recognises that it is “a play which addresses the extreme difficulties of living in an amoral, chaotic postmodern society” (“From Loman to Lyman”, 441). This postmodernism is not only found in the play’s testing of morality, but also of reality. However, these two concepts are not as explicitly linked as they were in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, where morality is shown only to be able to follow from reality. Abbotson says that “Miller makes it [hard] to recognise any reality” (“From Loman to Lyman”, 443) in the play, stemming, as so much of it does, from Lyman’s subjectivity. Schlueter, meanwhile, writes, “[p]erhaps more than any of Miller’s plays, *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* insists upon the elusiveness of the real, presenting an unfinished portrait of a life needing verification but trapped within the shifting boundaries and orthodox marital morality of Miller’s play” (“Scripting the Closing Scene”, 149), and while this analysis is

useful, it is another good example of a critic coming close to describing Miller's work as postmodernist, but then refusing to do so. Steven R. Centola writes on the subject, "[a]s is the case with so much of his later drama, *Ride* explores questions pertaining to the nature of reality and the complexity of moral valuation" ("How to Contain the Impulse of Betrayal", 335). In Centola's view, Lyman fills the gap that postmodernism leaves in reality with his own subjectivity: "In a world where no certitude exists about the nature of reality, each individual is faced with the challenge of attempting to define the real and confirm the truth of one's personal identity [...] In Lyman's mind, everyone has the right to define his or her reality" ("How to Contain", 338-339). I find Centola's argument to be extremely useful, as it addresses head-on the influence of the postmodern on Miller's writing of this period.

Mason recognises the wider sociological results of Lyman's attitudes, however, which are undeniable in their potential damages. He writes, "women are there to imagine, admire, and create according to his fancy" (*Stone Tower*, 249), which is certainly true of the scenes where Lyman appears to have physical control over his wives. He continues, "[t]o accept his assertion that monogamy is hypocritical is merely to allow him to assume that the rest of society shares his egoism, which is so extreme that he is a man without a community, a man with neither concern nor compassion for anybody else" (*Stone Tower*, 252). This is a crucial point to the drama, as it suggests that Lyman is too great an individual to be capable of human relationships, let alone being part of a wider community. Toby Zinman takes a somewhat po-faced view of Lyman and Miller, failing to see the evident irony and criticism within the character. She writes of Lyman's confrontation with a lion, the moment at which he sheds his guilt,

[t]his hilarious faux-Hemingway posturing is not just Lyman's; it is one thing to create a character with delusions of grandeur, but it is unclear whether the playwright shares them, whether Miller

mocks Lyman's memory as he revels in it. The play presents a central problem of tone: does it laugh *at* Lyman or with him?

(166, author's italics)

This line of critique is another example of a scholar falling into Miller's trap of assuming the playwright is on Lyman's side and so "forgives" him. Zinman is correct, though, in asserting that "Miller seems to be arguing the question out of both sides of his mouth, creating a far more intense portrait of male sensuality than he ever has before" (167), but does not seem to recognise this as a deliberate ploy on Miller's part.

I am going to pause briefly on one subject, noted solely by Bigsby, before concluding with a final discussion of two more recent articles on the play. Bigsby notes that there is a metatheatrical element to the play, as Lyman "writes", and indeed "directs", the action occasionally. He says that *Morgan* "is a play in which we see the characters in part through Lyman's eyes, while Lyman himself is prone to fantasize [sic]. He becomes the playwright" (1962-2005, 409), which is another postmodernist indicator. He also writes of the first meeting of Theo and Leah that "it is never clear that this confrontation may not be precisely what he wished to precipitate, that he stages it in more ways than one" (1962-2005, 409). Of the scene in which Theo and Leah argue about cooking, he writes, "in a sense, they are merely rehearsing the roles conventionally ascribed to women, recalling the extent to which character is a projection of other people's fantasies and presumptions. They are what Lyman wishes to make them, minor characters in the drama of his life" (*Critical Study*, 375).

Lenke Németh analyses the play through the prism of family drama, possibly the most widely-used form in America's dramatic tradition. Németh believes that

in spite of the affinities *Ride* has with previous works in Miller's dramatic oeuvre, it markedly differs from them in subverting

certain patterns well-established in the family-play sub-genre, which were largely laid down by Miller himself in his paradigmatic *All My Sons* and in his subsequent plays” (78),

which may make too grandiose a claim on behalf of his earlier play, but she is right to assert that *Morgan* is a break from past works (especially when considering that his most recent family play was 1968’s *The Price*). She writes that by “[b]eginning the play with the climactic scene [...] Miller *reverses* the pattern of the well-made play [...] thus here the climax precedes the careful preparation, the cause-and-effect arrangement of incidents, a means whereby the scenes are built to a climax” (82). This contrasts with Carson’s view that Miller “dramatizes [sic] the thoughts and recollections [...] in a conventional plot of ‘ripe circumstance’” (122). Németh also feels the play has a relatively positive portrayal of women for the Miller canon, writing, “[u]nlike in earlier plays by Miller, the women are granted agency in *Ride*” (86). She claims that

they have their own voices both in their own memories and in the dialogues in the temporal present. The women’s self-revelatory reminiscences aiming at (re)interpreting their past focus on their experiences and explain from their own vantage point their marriages. This unique and unprecedented treatment of women entails a multiplicity of visions, a technique which enables Miller to leave judgement open. (84-85)

It is true that the depiction of women is more rounded than in many of his previous plays. For, despite appearances, Lyman’s wives are not the stereotypical “Madonna or whore” opposites. Leah, along with being very sensual and attractive, has run a successful business in her own right, and is capable of dealing brusquely with Lyman when required. Nor is Theo as

stuffy as some writers suggest; Lyman himself declares, “[i]s that a new bathing suit? It’s sexy as hell!” (40), and “I keep forgetting what a sweet piece of ass my wife is!” (74), showing that his lack of attraction to her is not the sole problem of their marriage. Németh, while not discussing postmodernism in the play, concludes: “Miller creates a drama with multiple perspectives that leaves judgement open. Miller’s concern here lies in confronting us with the present in thoughtful questioning rather than formulating answers” (87). This, as we have seen, is a key aspect to the idea of the postmodern text and thought, and indeed echoes Hutcheon’s view of the political possibilities of postmodernism.

Lew Livesay, in his more recent article, takes a very different angle to Németh. He begins by asserting, “[t]o understand Arthur Miller’s plays of the nineties, I propose that we see these plays as excavations looking backward to explore Miller’s emotional turbulence experienced in the fifties” (“*The Ride Down Mount Morgan: Arthur Miller’s Critique of Libido through Ibsen’s Method of Causation*”, 110-111). It is unfair to present a full critique of this point of view, as I am only discussing one nineties play, but there does appear to be a desire to discuss Miller in terms of his past, especially in relation to the best-known elements of his personal life, rather than the texts themselves. Livesay writes, “Miller never leaves anything up in the air, so to speak, as he is not a playwright who would be inclined to resolve issues in a playful spirit of deconstructive, fantastical, open-ended undecidability” (“*Arthur Miller’s Critique of Libido*”, 111), which is a claim that discusses what Miller “would” be inclined to do, as opposed to what he actually did do. This also brings to mind David Rabe’s comment that critics “have maligned him for not growing when in fact what has happened is that they have refused to admit that he has grown” (qtd. Bigsby, *Company*, 145). Livesay hangs much of his argument on the idea that Miller firmly judges Lyman. He writes, “I am of the viewpoint that Miller can be seen as very decisive in judging Lyman’s choices and behaviours as transgressive” (“*Arthur Miller’s Critique of Libido*”, 126). I believe this to be

true, in a way, as Miller no doubt considers Lyman's actions to be immoral. But were he writing a play based around Ibsenite valid causation, as Livesay insists, Lyman's character would not be so otherwise attractive. Miller is not refusing to judge, but he is refusing to resolutely hammer home his point; this is not a moralistic work, even though it deals with morality. I do, however, agree with Livesay that "[i]n *Ride* we can see Miller imagining what transpires when a man immerses himself in protean passion, trying to have it all" ("Arthur Miller's Critique of Libido", 114), and "Lyman is no god, he is the self-absorbed hedonist. The entire play dramatizes [sic] how the return of repressed guilt exposes Lyman's illusions – his 'life-lie' – that he is connected to others" ("Arthur Miller's Critique of Libido", 122). My conception of the character is not that Miller is advocating this way of life, or condoning it, but making the point that such a way of life, in his view, was now tolerated, accepted, and quite possibly encouraged in contemporary America.

Livesay also views Lyman as Miller's version of the Nietzschean Superman. He writes, "[t]he compromised man denies his own being in order to advance the well-being of another. According to Nietzsche, a divided self can exist only in 'bad faith'. Therefore, Lyman declares, '[a] loser has lived somebody else's life, I've lived my own; crappy as it may seem, it's mine'" ("Arthur Miller's Critique of Libido", 119). He ties this side of Lyman's character to his libido, saying, "Lyman intends never to deny his libidinous desire. Lyman equates self-delusion with deception and betrayal of self" ("Arthur Miller's Critique of Libido", 122), which is where Lyman gets the idea that he is being honest by keeping both families. Livesay's analysis is persuasive, and well-argued, but I believe he seems to want to hug too tightly to Miller's past, and previous works, and not allow the play to stand by itself, or even in the context of its time and Miller's other contemporary works.

The Ride Down Mount Morgan is arguably the masterpiece of Miller's late career. It contains several wonderfully written segments, and is a sweeping drama, innovative in style,

with nuance and subtlety in almost every line. It is also the most written-about play of my study, and arguably the most opaque. For these reasons, it has garnered the widest range of critical literature of the texts under discussion. However, we again see that questions of reality and morality have a huge impact on the play and its perception. *Morgan* is a prime example of the postmodernist nature of Miller's writing that I'm seeking to identify and discuss here. Miller does not refuse to take a moral stance on the issues, but he most certainly presents morality as more fluid than before in his writing.

While the scholarship on *Morgan* is relatively wide, there are certain key aspects of it that have received scant attention. In my dissertation, I seek to situate the play as a postmodernist memory play, wherein memory functions not to solve a narrative or moral dilemma, but instead complicate it. Characters in *Morgan* do not return to the past to find what happened that led them to the current situation – instead, by revisiting the past, they find only their own guilt. In their various ways, Theo, Leah, and Tom all reveal themselves to be complicit in Lyman's deception, and so by complicating memory, so is judgement – who can be judged when everyone is in some way guilty? This problematising of guilt and judgement is a core postmodernist element of the play. Like we see in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, where the erosion of reality results in the complication of morality, faulty memories necessarily complicate judgements. A crucial scene, which is rarely discussed by critics, involves Theo “replaying” a moment where Lyman has either tried to kill her, or save her life. However, because this only exists in Theo's unreliable memory, we have no standard against which to judge it. Abbotson makes a brief allusion to the scene in her *Critical Companion*, and later writes, “Theo seems to stand for a certain honesty, and Lyman is drawn to her strong sense of reality; yet with the shark episode, this becomes questionable” (*Critical Companion*, 308). This scene, and its implications, will receive a thorough examination in my chapter concerning *Morgan*.

2.4: Resurrection Blues: The (Res)erection that Never Was

Resurrection Blues is probably the least Miller-esque play Arthur Miller ever wrote. This is not to say that it is an outlier in his career, or that it deals with issues he does not discuss elsewhere, however. We have already seen how the idea of Miller as straight-up realist is not accurate, so it should be clear that this idea of a play is not what I mean by “Miller-esque”. The play features an impotent military dictator, a self-regarding intellectual, a and a washed-up 1960s hippy. It is a parody of media, politics, and meaningless belief systems. It discusses erectile dysfunction in the same breath as crucifixion and cat-feeding, while the most important character appears only as a blinding light from offstage. These are all extremely noteworthy elements in a Miller play, highlighting the fact that, although he was in his mid-80s by the time the play was first produced, he was constantly seeking a different form of expression. Arguably, *Resurrection Blues* was Miller’s most postmodernist play, showcasing what appeared to be a complete lack of faith in anything, from national government to religion, which could positively affect the lives of people. It seems to show a Miller that, in his later years, has given up his faith in ideology, and so has turned to satirising everything in sight, particularly the media. It is perhaps odd, when one considers Miller’s life as one of the most public writers of the 20th century, that he had not written anything in his dramatic works explicitly critical of the media before this play, but so biting is the wit and anger of the script that it appears he poured all the frustration he had bottled up into it. Much of the scholarly work on the play contends that *Resurrection Blues* is about America, even though it is set in an unnamed Latin American country; other areas of interest include the self-mocking character of Henri Schulz; the ironic and caustic nature of the play’s satire; and Miller’s continuing ease with blue humour. However, with this play, critics appeared to become more comfortable labelling the text postmodernist than was the case with previous Miller plays.

Resurrection Blues is, in this sense, the most blatant example of Miller's shifting mode of expression.

The exact location of the play is not clear, though Bigsby notes that Miller travelled to Venezuela in July 1981, "finding there that mixture of wealth and poverty that would later be reflected in *Resurrection Blues*" (1962-2005, 306). It is known, though, that it is set in a Latin American country, with a 38-year civil war finally winding down. The country's leader, General Felix Barriaux, is an almost comical figure, his potential ability to intimidate diminished somewhat by his erectile dysfunction, and a general sense of buffoonery. With this character, Miller is very much working in the tradition of comical tyrants that ranges from Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940) to the *Austin Powers* franchise (1997-2002). The fact that he is not as fearsome a character as a military dictator should be is a sign that the play is not intended as a sermon on the evils of autocratic regimes. In this sense, the play resembles *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, which, as we have seen, is not a play directed at criticising the Soviet bloc in particular, despite its setting. The play begins with Felix's niece, Jeanine, delivering a prologue from a wheelchair. She has just attempted suicide, unable to live with the guilt of being the sole survivor of a captured band of rebels, who have gathered around a mysterious character who may or may not be a new messiah. She reveals, of her new friend, that "[u]p in the mountains the people think he is the son of God. Neither of us is entirely sure of that. I suppose we'll have to wait and see" (*Plays: Six*, 131), and this sets the tone for the play's ambiguity; it is never known whether or not this person is indeed the son of God.

The play progresses rapidly, and the dialogue is sharp, with Miller's love of having fun with language clear. The scene switches to Felix meeting his cousin Henri, Jeanine's father. Henri is a revolutionary turned-industrialist turned-philosopher. He appears to be constantly on the verge of making a stand, but never quite sacrificing anything. He is, as

Felix reminds him, a member of the 2% of the population that owns 96% of the country's land. During their conversation Felix reveals that the potential son of God (who has various names, the most common of which is Ralph) has been arrested for committing acts of terrorism, and is due to be executed. The shocking part, for Henri, is that this execution will in fact be a crucifixion, and also broadcast on television for profit. Felix claims that with the \$75 million dollars the country receives for the shoot, he will be able to begin to build the country's infrastructure – he discusses sending prostitutes to the dentist, and providing proper clothing for policemen, dismissing Henri's dismay at seeing a dead baby in the gutter of the city's busiest shopping street. Henri expresses weariness at life, sighing, "at times nothing seems to follow from anything else" (133), which can be read in numerous ways, including in relation to a demise of metanarratives, or as a comment on Absurdist drama itself. The following scene introduces the group of Americans who are there to record the crucifixion; director Emily Shapiro and producer Skip L. Cheeseboro. Skip's name alone shows that Miller is having more fun in this play than in many others. Along with the frequent sex jokes, and the subplot of Felix's erectile dysfunction ("My dog just won't hunt" (136)), this is a continuation of Miller's ease in writing about sex that we saw in *Morgan*. It is only now that Emily learns that she is to direct a crucifixion, which she attempts to protest while on the phone to her mother, giving her instructions to feed her cat, and telling her that she is pregnant, and does not know who the father is. Joseph Kane, in "Arthur Miller: Comedian comedy that draws blood in *Resurrection Blues*", writes, "[i]rony piles on irony in *Resurrection Blues*, as Miller conjoins broad comedy one moment with stark and disturbing reality the next" (403), and this scene in particular is a perfect example of Miller's wry sense of humour.

Henri attempts to get Felix to call off the crucifixion, referring to the fact that Ralph is an extraordinary being because "*he still really feels everything*" (175). This scene captures

the mood of the play perfectly, as Miller laments a society that finds it so difficult to comprehend the things Ralph, we are told, represents; love, compassion, and empathy – in reality, he is only ever seen as a flash of blinding light, so it seems that much of what he stands for is projected onto him. Skip’s only retort to Henri is that he has “twins registered at Andover” (175), and so needs to be shallow and self-interested to get by. The men cannot agree, representing, as they do, different sides of life: the advertising producer and the philosopher. And even this is complicated by Henri’s status as a businessman and landowner within the country, so it is not as pure a contrast as perhaps it could have been in an earlier work. Henri is never depicted as being brave enough to take a courageous stand to halt what he sees as an egregious crime in the crucifixion. In the meantime, Felix has arranged a dinner with Emily, so beguiled is he by her, and her haircut. At this point we see that Felix is not really a tyrant to be feared; his need to prove himself sexually, something he feels he will be able to achieve with Emily, is such that he agrees to stop the crucifixion, as she desires. The play concludes with the main characters addressing Ralph, who, as ever, only appears as a beam of light from offstage. Along with the above-mentioned characters is Stanley, an ageing hippy who has been into every spiritual fad, but is one of the most sympathetic, and harmless, characters. Each one makes a case for Ralph to either leave, or come to Earth and be crucified. Skip wants the crucifixion for his company, and Felix changes his mind, deciding that the country needs the money. Ralph’s supporters eventually agree that, whatever he is, he should not come to Earth; that they do not deserve him or his sacrifice. The light slowly fades, and Stanley is left alone onstage, giving Ralph a standing invitation for “a cup of tea, or a glass of dry white” (197), before he salutes and leaves.

As is clear from the above precis, the plot of *Resurrection Blues* is somewhat convoluted, and the scenes should run together more smoothly. However, the content of each scene showcases Miller’s ironic, yet not cynical, take on contemporary society. Skip implores

Emily to film the crucifixion, as that is the common practice in the country, and he “will not superimpose American mores on a dignified foreign people” (156) by criticising or rejecting it. This self-justifying language is common throughout the play, but particularly in Skip. It is here that is instructive to begin this review, as it serves as a cue to discuss what most critics agree on: that the play is, in fact, about the United States. Bigsby writes of it, “[i]n part a satire, it is also a comment on post-revolutionary societies (of which America is one), on the caustic effects of ideologies, on social inequity, as well as the degradation of language, the casuistry of commerce and politics alike, and the need to construct a redemptive religion” (1962-2005, 489). While it is hard to build the case for Miller as one who believed in the value of religion, the rest of Bigsby’s comment is a good summary of many of the themes of the play. He claims that Miller wrote the play from “a sense of moral indignation and metaphysical irony” (1962-2005, 489), and these two concepts are key to the play. The moral indignation is evident, as Miller blatantly condemns most of the characters and the forces they represent (media, government, academia, law enforcement, military) for allowing society to become so vacuous and brutal, but the irony is a harsh one, critical as well as playful. Much of this irony comes over clearly in Miller’s language. Bigsby writes of the second scene, where Skip and Emily appear at the site of the crucifixion,

[p]art of Miller’s skill in this scene lies precisely in his ability to capture the vapid language of not only Madison Avenue, parodied here to be sure, but of a society in fear of giving linguistic offence even while happy to disregard the reality of suffering and injustice. Virtually every character in this play inhabits a language that validates actions which are indefensible, except at a corrupted, linguistic level. Words are not designed to express truth but deny it. (*Cambridge Study*, 192)

This loss of meaning in language not only points to a loss of meaning in politics, but reflects it; once politics has lost meaning, that is to say the ability to represent people and their needs, language is further distorted and devalued in order to conceal the truth. Carson, though he is quick to recognise the “mixture of scriptural illusions, scathing political satire, philosophical speculation and almost scatological humour” (139), writes that in this world “[c]hange can no longer be affected by heroes or by grand political gestures. Politics no longer exists, and it would seem that nothing remains in which to believe” (141). Bigsby writes that “language is now more determinedly satiric, more drawn to parody, perhaps an apt form from a postmodern age in which the real is seen as problematic and performance stands in place of being” (*Critical Study*, 421). This seems to be pointing, yet again, in the direction of the demise of metanarratives, one of the core ideas behind postmodernism. Bigsby also notes this idea in the play, writing

[b]y the time Miller came to write *Resurrection Blues* in 2002, something had changed. The old master stories that once offered to give a spine to existence could no longer be told [...] The American century had ended [...] What idea, what value, what purpose drove us now? What could be said to justify life to itself? (*Critical Study*, 421)

This is arguably Bigsby at his most hyperbolic, though his analysis is more reasonable when he writes that it is “a play about a world not only with no sense of values but in which there is no sense of the real” (*Critical Study*, 424). As has come up in each discussion of these plays, Bigsby here notes Miller’s continuing challenge of reality. He links much of this to the media, noting that, throughout the nineties and onwards, reality TV began to broadcast “those in psychological pain, exhibitionists, betrayed wives, the sexually confused, to provide entertainment for the masses” (*Critical Study*, 423). Kane also situates the play in the

contemporary world, writing “what is, at best, more than a little disconcerting is that the parodic fictional television programming depicted in [Paddy Chayefsky’s film] *Network* and *Resurrection Blues* is not all that far removed from the reality they intend to mock” (399). While I will not belabour the similarities between *Network* and *Resurrection Blues* here, I believe this should prove to be a fertile ground for analysis in the future. Returning to the same ground which was covered in my discussion of *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, Bigsby writes that “[i]t began to seem that events lacked reality until processed by the camera, which now became the ultimate proof of authenticity” (*Critical Study*, 423). Enoch Brater writes that “*Resurrection Blues* reflects the ease with which, under this regime, every human interaction is embedded with lies and deception. The play therefore aims to offer its audience something more sinister than a mere cultural critique” (“Introduction”, xviii), highlighting the difference in approach Miller takes in these two plays set in authoritarian states.

One of the most notable aspects of irony in the play is the character of Henri, the self-regarding businessman and philosopher, who lectures in tragedy at the time of the play. Several critics have noted similarities between Henri and Miller, pointing to a greater level of self-awareness on the part of the author, as he is more willing than ever to poke fun at himself, something, as we have seen, that had been present in his drama at least since the writing of *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. For instance, Henri very quickly dismisses his former Marxism in his conversation with Felix, saying, “[o]h shit, Felix! – I haven’t been a Marxist for twenty-five years!” (137) This is quite possibly an ironic joke on the fact that Miller was arguably more well-known for his previous political stances (and his personal life) than he was for his writing at this point in his life. Abbotson writes that Henri “is prone, as his daughter complains, to be all talk and no action, overphilosophizing [sic] himself into stasis” (*Critical Companion*, 298). Bigsby also notes that Miller ascribes his own views to Henri, writing, “[t]he problem, it always seemed to Miller, and this is a view given here to Henri, is

that belief in God invites resignation even as it offers the consolation of purpose and order” (“The last plays”, 193). Richard Brucher broadens this point, writing, of the play’s language and themes, “Miller may be parodying Arthur Millerism as well as South American banana republic politics and North American corporate greed” (75). Ramón Espejo links this aspect of the play to postmodernism, writing that “it is not impossible that there is a certain postmodern yearning to make himself an overt part of his own creation instead of hiding himself behind it to suspend disbelief” (21). This quote is a useful starting point for a discussion of Espejo’s text on the postmodernist elements of the play.

Espejo firmly situated the play within a postmodern sphere, in his pamphlet, *Rethinking Critical Paradigms on Arthur Miller: Resurrection Blues and the Postmodern*. This work is both a deep and broad study, examining many of the features of Miller’s late drama that have so far been mentioned: questions relating to reality, the demise of metanarratives, the role of the media in contemporary life, the degradation of language and politics, and the ambiguity around the play’s ending. He rejects the idea of Miller as being purely a realist, writing that *Resurrection Blues* is “one of his late plays which is clearly informed by a postmodern sensibility” (1), but noted that this was not a new trait in Miller’s writing: “Miller has negotiated the postmodern arena in *Resurrection Blues*, something he had nevertheless been doing for some time” (1). Espejo links the play to *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, writing that it “stems, probably even more than *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* does, from Miller’s belief that existence is mere performing selves, under which no real core exists” (2). We see this in the play in the vacuous language each character deploys, and the lack of action stemming from a solid morality. This inability to speak in a genuine, humane fashion indicates that there is no heart to these characters; identities, opinions, and language will be adopted at a moment’s notice in order to serve their current purpose, and then discarded just as quickly.

A crucial aspect to Espejo's analysis is the role of the media in the play. The media, far from merely recording reality, is shown to create it, and present it as if real. As Emily says, "[m]y genius is to make everything look comfortably fake" (152), to which Skip responds, "what you do is make real things look fake, and that makes them emotionally real" (153). With these kinds of linguistic games, and the fact that Emily is primarily a director of advertisements, we see that the media is there to obscure, and create, reality, not simply report on it. Espejo writes that the "play invites us to consider whether the crucifixion would exist if the media were not there to televise it [...] thus calling into question their often alleged role as mere chroniclers of realities which would however not exist without their eagerness to represent them" (23). The play portrays reality and representations of it changing places, as Espejo writes:

[t]he producer goes on demanding that this crucifixion follows accepted patterns of representation, in other words, that the real suits the representations, turning the represented into the source and reality into its copy. The reality of non-represented material becomes threatened in the postmodern. (24)

This, as he says, brings the play very much into the postmodernist realm. By focusing on the lack of reality in representations, he echoes, especially, the writing of Baudrillard in *Simulations*. Indeed, the above quote is almost a definition of the simulacrum, or "the identical copy of which no original has ever existed" (qtd. Jameson, 18). Brucher comments on this that it "is the triumph of the media: not the revelation or analysis of reality but the creation of fake reality, a parody of reality that the play exuberantly exposes and burlesques" (77-78).

Espejo also discusses the political thrust of the play. He suggests that Miller had become somewhat jaded by the time he wrote the play and no longer held the same anger at society as he did previously. He writes, “this is no longer an embittered Miller, but a truly postmodern one, who looks at the demise of such metanarratives as worthy of no more than cursory disappointment. The dominant mood is one of playful contemplation of their pitiful remains” (15). This is certainly the language that is used, but it is arguable whether Miller is writing from such a cynical perspective; I contend that it is more likely that he is critiquing the cynicism he saw around him. Brucher links the linguistic with the political, writing that it “is all about the language, Miller has said, in contemporary politics and business, and so in *Resurrection Blues*” (80). He notes that “the play has been called cynical. It denies the people a sacrifice on their behalf; it refuses to commit explicitly to activist politics, a reversal of the moral position of the early plays; and it subverts the promised apocalyptic ending” (80). Mason is certainly one who believes the play to be cynical, as he writes that “*Resurrection Blues* closes with a renunciation of expectations of any belief that the future could constitute progress beyond the present” (*Stone Tower*, 267). The cynicism of the play is up for discussion, but what cannot be doubted is that there is no evidently honest, sympathetic figure. Katherine E. Egerton, in “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Cross: Arthur Miller’s *Resurrection Blues*” highlights Skip as the main villain of the piece: “The plan is spearheaded by Skip Cheeseboro, an American executive who does not believe in anything” (9). That is not to suggest that Miller no longer believes in anything, however. It is also striking that the villain is not Felix, who, as the dictator of the country, should be. But, as Egerton writes, “[i]n his objections to the crucifixion, Henri occupies all of the moral high ground, but he does it in such a vacuous and self-centered [sic] manner that the audience is left sympathizing [sic] with Felix, who is at least entertaining” (17).

Mason's analysis is sharp and harsh on the characters, acknowledging that "Felix understands that consolidating power involves managing what people know so that actuality becomes less significant than belief" (*Stone Tower*, 269). While the idea of power is not as closely related to morality as it is in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, it is still an important theme. He links the play to both *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, as well as *After the Fall*, saying that it "represents the extension of the uncertainty he explores in *After the Fall* and the alienation that characterizes [sic] *The Archbishop's Ceiling*" (*Stone Tower*, 277). He also focuses on reality, writing of Felix, Skip, and Emily that "the real is a matter of what they can present through image or rhetoric" (*Stone Tower*, 272). This is reflective of the fact that "politicians have given way to television producers and the exceptional status of the artist - the standing that supported Miller's 1956 contention for the freedom of the poet - has dissolved in the intersection of art with commerce" (*Stone Tower*, 271-271).

The conclusion of the play is crucial in that it refuses to provide the resurrection promised in the title - potentially an echo of *The Zoo Story*. As Egerton writes, "there is no resurrection, only the blues remain when the curtain comes down" (9). She writes that Miller "refuses to decide whether or not the lack of sacrifice is a good thing while leaving the audience to fend for themselves in the media-driven wasteland he portrays" (10). This is also a feature of *Morgan*, where he leaves the moral accountability of Lyman to be decided upon by the audience. Espejo writes that "[i]t is important not to lose sight of the fact that *Resurrection Blues* does not have a clear-cut message, nor offers a cut-and-dried solution to any problem" (31). Once again, we see the ambiguity of the ending of the play being crucial to the postmodernist mood it has fostered throughout.

Resurrection Blues is not necessarily Miller's best play, but for its daring language, themes, and ideas, as well as the evident postmodernist sensibility on display, it is a very worthwhile piece, and crucial for the study I am undertaking here. Although it features

several concerns that have been present in Miller's plays before, the style of the play is radically different to anything he had written before. Although scholarship has not been extensive on the play, there has been much good work on it, largely centring on the role of media in distorting language and creating new realities. We also see a new attitude to politics and society on Miller's part, and, for possibly the first time, he begins to be discussed as a cynic as opposed to a moralist. What I intend to do with my scholarship here is not only provide a thorough account of the interaction between the play and some of the core postmodernist texts and ideas, but also to consider the importance of television to the play. For many critics, this is a noted, but rarely examined, facet of the play, and I will show here not only the crucial partnership of television and the Cold War to crafting the postmodernist world Miller sees towards the end of the 20th century, but also sketch a narrative of television's impact and importance on American life in the post-war world.

While the scholarship on these plays is not as broad as it is for Miller's earlier classics, there is still contained in here a solid critical and theoretical basis for investigating the postmodernist elements of the plays. With nearly every scholar asserting that these plays, in some way, challenge reality and its nature, there is ample space and evidence to consider a wider narrative of a postmodernist turn in Miller's writing. The works of Christopher Bigsby, Andrew Sofer, and Ramón Espejo, in particular, lead the way in the formulation and discussion of this question, boldly acknowledging the alterations in Miller's writing.

3. “The Bugged Ceiling of the Mind”: Power, Paranoia, and Postmodernism in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*

3.1: Opening Remarks

The first play under consideration is *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, not only because it is the first of the plays I’m concerned with to be written, but also because it is a marked departure from Miller’s previous writing. As Otten writes, “[i]n relationship to the earlier plays, this play signals a shift in Miller’s evolving dramatic action” (168). Having largely set his plays within familial contexts, even in his re-telling of the Book of Genesis, *The Creation of the World and Other Business*, one of the most immediately notable aspects of *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* is that none of the characters are related – even two of the couples that are referred to are not married, with Maya and Marcus being divorced, and Adrian having never married Ruth. Moreover, only one of the characters are mentioned as having children, who is only referred to once, so two of the primary focuses of Miller’s early writing, the relationship between brothers, and between children and their parents, are largely absent. What we do see in this play, though, is a Miller that is more concerned with, in his words, “the ancient question of what’s real” (qtd. Bigsby, *Company*, 163).

Miller reorients his drama here to more metaphysical and existential questions, but it should be pointed out that he still maintains a relatively realistic dramatic style. That is not to say it should be regarded as realism, but that there are no surreal aspects to it – it is mostly four people in a room discussing writing, politics, and censorship. This explains some of the poor reviews it received when it first opened in Washington D.C. in 1977. Sofer, for instance, writes that the “realistic production style obscured the fact that the play’s true subject is not

political repression, as much of the critics of the play suggest, but dramatic form itself' (94). That the play is not simply a polemical musing on political repression becomes clear when several key features are analysed. The most important element of the play is a recording device that may or may not be present in the home of the writer where the play's characters have gathered, in an unidentified Eastern European city. Not only does this lead to questioning the motivation of everything that is said, but it also turns the characters into actors even within the drama. This is then commented on throughout the play, with a self-reflexive irony that is not only distinct from Miller's previous plays, but also displays an awareness of the aesthetic ideas of the postmodern. On a deeper level, this play also shows that Miller is placing the idea of morality under a different form of scrutiny. Whereas his plays generally dealt with moral issues, meaning there was little doubt that his characters' decisions necessarily had consequences, in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, that bedrock certainty disappears. Morality has become contingent on the presence, or otherwise, of the listening device in the ceiling. Reality, in the sense of being able to know what is happening in the room, has been rendered ambiguous, and with that, the ability to make a moral decision has come into question. While the play arguably fails to follow through to the end with these ideas, it is still a crucial play in Miller's career, signifying a change in his drama that would continue until his final works.

It is important that *The Archbishop's Ceiling* is placed not only in the context of Miller's writing career, but also in that of his life, as well as broader cultural and socio-political trends. From the mid-1960s onwards, for instance, Miller began to travel outside of America far more than he had previously done. This was partly due to his presidency of International PEN in the late-1960s, resulting in many foreign trips to advocate on behalf of free speech for writers. This brought him to the USSR and Czechoslovakia, which served as the model for the country in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, among other places. He continued to

do work for PEN after his presidency ended, travelling to protest on behalf of imprisoned writers around the world.

Despite his relative retreat from drama in the 1970s, with *Creation* the only play he had performed in New York during the decade, we can see from Miller's writing, both dramatic and non-fictional, that he was working with the grain of much 1970s cultural production. By this, I mean that in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* the focus is on possibly the strongest cultural idea of the decade – paranoia. In the wake of the release of the *Pentagon Papers*, which documented the extent of the deceptions carried out during the Vietnam War; the Watergate scandal and subsequent release of Richard Nixon's taped recordings of his expletive-laden conversations with his advisors; and the social and economic turmoil brought about by the murder of protestors at Kent State University and the global recession from the mid-1970s, the idea of powerful, unseen forces disrupting life for the general population came to be an extremely potent concept. We can see this most clearly in the films of the decade. In several crucial examples, large, secretive organisations operate in order to subvert justice and act against the interests of ordinary people. Martin Scorsese's fever dream of hate, paranoia, and violence, *Taxi Driver*, must also be considered, although, crucially, it did not rely on sinister institutions to cause paranoia, but in Travis Bickle, portrayed a violently paranoid individual instead, whose particular trauma is unspecified. Coming towards the end of a run of paranoia films, *Taxi Driver* in a way is the culmination of their ideas – what is left when media corporations, the political establishment, espionage agencies, the medical industry, and big businesses, the focus of many of the films of this period, have been allowed to have free reign. It is interesting to note that, like Miller, none of those movies deals directly with the Vietnam War, although Robert De Niro's Bickle is mentioned as being an army veteran.

I propose that the best way to interpret *The Archbishop's Ceiling* is to situate it within this cultural moment. Miller wrote in 1989 that “the seventies [...] seemed to resist any definition even at the time. *The Archbishop's Ceiling* in some part was a response to this indefinability I sensed around me” (“Conditions of Freedom”, 396), from which we can see that he was still evidently aware of the cultural tone of the period, despite not producing as much work as he had previously done. The defining aspect to this paranoia and indefinability, arguably, was the resignation of Nixon amidst the ruins of Watergate. While I have already discussed Watergate, and how it was an overblown, or almost fabricated, scandal, the cultural impact it had was very significant. Miller wrote numerous pieces about Nixon, which I will discuss in due course, but it is another remark he made in 1989 that concerns me now. In an introduction to *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and *The American Clock*, he writes that “[t]he seventies were the age of the listening device, government’s hidden bugs set in place to police the private conversations of its citizens – and not in Soviet areas alone” (“Conditions of Freedom”, 396). This surveillance goes hand-in-hand with the paranoia of the period, as the possibility of being spied upon became a far more acute idea than ever before. This is also allied with technological change, the preoccupation of so many contemporary writers, including Pynchon and Vonnegut. We will see this unease with technology in operation in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, as well as several of the films I have mentioned above.

Miller uses another device crucial to postmodernist writing here, and that is self-reflexive or metatheatrical commentary on the play. While this does not toy with reality in the same way as *The Connection*, for instance, it serves to consistently undermine any definitive sense of the real within the play. This chapter will show the development evident in Miller’s thought and writing by the mid-1970s, and show that we can see hints of the direction his work would go in this play. *The Archbishop's Ceiling* is a critical play in Miller’s oeuvre -

coming as it did after a long hiatus, and being such a change in style, it transitioned him into the next phase of his career.

3.2: The Background of the 1970s

I will now discuss the cultural and political scene of the 1970s, when Miller began writing this play. I will track the development of the awareness of postmodernism, and how its features ensure that it must be considered within the context of the Cold War. Other defining narratives of the 1970s include paranoia, the loss of faith in institutions, and increasing hopelessness and cynicism on the political left. I intend to show how these issues were reflected in the culture of the time, specifically in film, and that Miller expressed many of the same concerns in his writings. I propose, therefore, that we should view Miller as being aware of these dominant cultural narratives, and not necessarily detached or separate from the mainstream, despite the scarcity of theatrical work resulting from it. Miller had little in common stylistically with American playwrights post-Albee, despite his considerable fame, and so it is appropriate to look for different media and genres wherein to find his connections to contemporary culture. I will show how Miller's concerns were echoed in numerous high-profile Hollywood movies of the early- to mid-1970s, which suggests that the idea of cultural paranoia was in fact as powerful as it is often claimed to be.

The early- to mid-1970s were a period marked by political scandal, violence, paranoia, and a huge undermining of trust in institutions at all levels. This came to be represented in cultural productions that showed a hopelessness, confusion, and uncertainty about one's place in the world. There was also a large degree of paranoia stemming from the increased awareness of the power of unaccountable institutions. The various events that have so far been mentioned – the Kent State murders, the release of the *Pentagon Papers*, the Watergate scandal, and so forth – are well known, and so do not need great elaboration. What

concerns me here, though, is the reaction to these occurrences. The above-mentioned cultural narratives all feed into my conception of postmodernism, and therefore are also shown to be present in Miller's work of this period. For the sake of brevity, I will not mention Miller every time it is required, but ask instead that the reader keep these ideas in mind for my discussion of *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, and indeed Miller's other plays under consideration here.

Lester D. Friedman wrote that this "era witnessed a series of transformative events that reconceptualized [sic] the implicit compact between citizens and the government, that forced a new consciousness of personal and group rights, and that ushered in a new era of popular culture" (7), and though this sounds grandiose, he is not completely wrong. With the revelations of the time, people were forced to confront the deceits and corruption of their government, and no longer had the option to be unaware of them. The revelations that showed that the state had the overwhelming power to surveil, deceive, and coerce was reflected in the fear of institutions shown in so much cultural output. David Cook, for example, writes of 1974,

[a]s the Watergate scandal came to a head and the authority of the Nixon administration began to crumble, as our war effort in Vietnam became increasingly futile, and as book after book critical of the Warren Commission appeared, the American public lost faith in its institutions as never before. (116)

Friedman, meanwhile, records that opinion polls from 1975 showed that "nearly 70% [of people] agreed that 'over the last ten years the country's leaders have consistently lied to the people' (Berkowitz, 6) and confidence in government officials dropped from 61% in 1964 to 22% in 1976 (Slocum-Schaffer)" (9). Frank P. Tomasulo, writing about 1976, lists what he

calls the intractable problems: “stagflation, political paranoia, collective anxiety, widespread alienation, economic privation, inner-city decay, racism, and violence” (157), which of course all make for an unpleasant cultural cocktail.

One of the reasons these issues were felt to be so catastrophic was that they came after decades of post-war economic growth in the aftermath of the Second World War. While this period should not be romanticised, the relative economic and political stability of the 1950s and 1960s (for some portions of society, and certainly those dominating the narratives) collapsed in the late-1960s, as the idea of liberal, progressive values came to be undermined, to a decent degree by Nixon’s election in 1968, as discussed and predicted most astutely in Mailer’s *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968). Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner relate this political instability to representation, in a way that also serves as a useful description of postmodernism itself:

the sorts of economic and political crises that have occurred during this period (mid-1960s to mid-1980s) provoked psychological crises which were also crises of representation. Traditional ways of representing the world broke down; there was a tremendous loss of confidence in institutions. (14)

Of course, this loss of confidence in institutions is not necessarily a bad thing; as has been discussed, Linda Hutcheon writes that the constant critique in postmodernism is one of its most positive political outcomes. That being said, this process is still naturally linked to instability and unease, even if these institutions were to be ultimately reformed, replaced, or shown to be worthy of confidence after all.

The awareness of the large, faceless forces at play in everyday life also naturally came to express itself in paranoia and insecurity around institutions. In his chapter, “Bureaucracies at Work” in *Even Paranoids Have Enemies*, John Jackson writes:

Historical evidence also tends to emphasise that most powerful authorities are threatening because of what they can cause to happen and because of the remoteness from those they affect. This remoteness makes them mysterious: what their interests are and how they will be pursued are not obvious. The combination of power and uncertainty generates apprehension which lends potency to the bureaucracy using it, affects the way in which that bureaucracy it itself likely to be perceived and frequently reflects a subtle form of persecution not always clearly perceived as such by the persecuted. (127-128)

Jackson’s analysis, quoted at length here because it strikes upon so many concepts that will be relevant throughout, is a good description of the contradictions inherent in writing critically about bureaucratic or institutional control. The more powerful institutions are depicted as being all-pervasive, the more they are likely to be perceived as such. On the other hand, if one’s writing is not addressing the influence and power of these groups, it can then be construed as being complicit with their extreme power.

Ryan and Kellner continue their analysis, expanding it beyond cultural representations. Using their writing, I should like to move into the more specific socio-cultural dynamics of Cold War America, considering again the conceptions of paranoia in this period, and then referring to specific texts. They write:

The demolition of the western myth under a satiric and critical liberal gaze from the late sixties through the mid-seventies helps create a vacuum of ideology, the lack of a reasoning set of beliefs, ideals and values in a culture whose traditional institutions had been undermined. That vacuum gives rise to a sense of loss, pessimism, and despair. (86)

This brings to mind Miller's comment on the seventies that there "was a common awareness of exhaustion, to the point where politics and social thought themselves seemed ludicrously out of date and naively ineffectual" ("Conditions of Freedom", 396). I should like to look now at certain ideas as to how this vacuum of ideology came about, at what processes, besides those previously mentioned, led to this development into a world that, even when it is not labelled postmodernist, is described in very similar terms. Timothy Melley writes on the activities of what he terms the "covert sphere", and how these actions helped shape what became known as postmodernism. He uses the term to describe the nexus of security agencies, politicians, foreign policy experts, and cultural producers who operated in order to distort political and military activities, hoping to foster confusion and ignorance among the public. He considers the producers of television shows such as *24* (2001-2010, 2014), which glamourised and justified torture, to be as integral to this thesis as the foreign policy officials ordering real-life torture. He writes in his introduction to *The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State*, "[w]hat does it mean when a wartime government [referring to the US embassy in Kabul] chooses to spend valuable resources on a melodrama of covert operations? Among other things, it means that fiction has a powerful ability to shape the real world" (vii). This, of course, means that Melley enters the typically postmodernist argument about the text and reality supplanting, or becoming confused with, one another. He explicitly places his argument within the postmodern, writing that

the development of the National Security State, with its emphasis on secrecy and deception, helped transform the cultural status of fiction as it relates to discourses of ‘fact’, such as journalism and history. As state secrecy shifted the conditions of public knowledge, certain forms of fiction became crucial in helping Americans imagine, or fantasize [sic] about, U.S. foreign policy. This transformation had a powerful role in fostering the forms of suspicion, scepticism, and uncertainty that would eventually find their fullest expression in postmodernism. (viii)

Melley makes a strong argument for what is a fundamental aspect of this dissertation – that the Cold War and its paranoia are crucial to the definition of postmodernism. He focuses his argument particularly on the covert sphere, but what is crucial is the effect that this had on wider society and cultural production. For example, he writes:

I argue that [the covert sphere] has had major political and cultural consequences. It had inspired a large body of narrative and visual culture; generated cynicism about government; fostered scepticism about historical narrative; and contributed significantly to the rise of postmodernism. (6)

Melley’s argument continues in this vein, and broadens, appropriately, to the epistemological idea that is at the heart of postmodernism – the question of how anyone can be sure they know anything. As I have stated earlier, this is central to my definition of postmodernist paranoia. He writes that “the discourse of the covert sphere is marked by a general sense of epistemological uncertainty, a feeling that Cold War secrecy has made it difficult to know what is true or narrate events as history” (28). Melley consciously echoes

Lyotard's comment about the decline of metanarratives in postmodernism, but also hints at the very real, tangible facts of this period – that people began to become less trusting, with good reason, of their governments. Melley also makes the argument in technological terms, as many others, including Miller, and Pakula in *Klute*, would, saying that there emerged “a widespread suspicion of mass-mediated messages and uncertainty about what is real and true” (33). Alan Nadel underlines the importance and danger of technology in the Cold War era more explicitly, writing

[s]upported as it was by the technological mandate (often treated as a theological one) ascribed first to nuclear monopoly and subsequently to nuclear supremacy, cold war [sic] America asserted the claim to global authority in a narrative that permeated most aspects of American culture. (4)

With much of the writing on postmodernism focusing on this issue of power, Nadel strikes cleanly at an important point – that what is considered to be right is often dominated by power; in this case, technological power. Once again, Miller's works deal explicitly and extensively with this idea.

Melley also refers to the fact that this idea of the covert sphere became a topic of writing itself, as he says, “[f]or a number of influential literary figures, the covert sphere has become a central object of reflection and [...] a major stimulus of postmodern epistemological scepticism” (10). He includes writers such as Mailer and Don DeLillo here, but, as expected, not Miller – despite *The Archbishop's Ceiling* evidently dealing with this topic, as has been mentioned, his new work was rarely considered in relation to contemporary issues. I have mentioned Melley's work at such length here because it is crucial to my setting the scene for Miller's postmodernist work, especially *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. He observes

that this obscuring of fact and reality was a function of power, not a coincidence, and that it became extremely difficult for cultural producers to counteract. Making the identification of truth and reality even harder serves to benefit already powerful bodies, as the acquisition and presentation of the necessary facts to challenge them with becomes increasingly difficult. In despondency, many writers and artistic producers turned towards irony and cynicism, which for many are defining features of postmodernism; as Baudrillard said, “[p]laying with the pieces – that is postmodern” (“Game with Vestiges”, 95).

Ann Douglas situates postmodernism, or postmodernity, even more specifically within the realms of the Cold War, writing that postmodernity is “roughly coterminous with the cold war [sic], and even inexplicable outside the context it supplies” (75), and, based on much of what has so far been stated, it should be evident that this is how I characterise postmodernism. She continues, “the postmodern critique of power makes the most sense when taken as a straightforward description of the extremes of artificial dishonesty characteristic of the Cold War era” (76), and that strikes at the key aspect of the relationship between the Cold War and postmodernism – that the latter is a natural result from the former, that it is in fact a straightforward critique because the link between them is so clear. Tobin Siebers focuses on scepticism and the Cold War, once again, two concepts that can hardly be separated. He writes that “the story of the cold war [sic] is the story of our scepticism about endings, intentions, interpretations, and calculations concerning troop numbers, troop movements, weapons, negotiations, and claims to truth or falsehood” (29). Siebers makes the point here that has often been made about postmodernist texts – there is almost an endless number of endings, interpretations, and intentions on the behalf of the writer. This indicates not only that texts and political issues began to echo each other, but that so did criticism of texts and political issues. Siebers continues to make the link between postmodernism and

scepticism, writing that it “is a state that requires scepticism, and this scepticism in turn preserves the state. This is the cold war [sic] effect” (30).

3.3: Filmic Representations of Paranoia

I should like to move on now to briefly discussing some of the most important films of the early- to mid-seventies, which accompanied this growing paranoia, and increased awareness of postmodernism – bearing in mind Brian McHale’s comment that 1973 marked the onset of “postmodernism’s *branding*” (176, author’s italics). I do not necessarily contend here that these films should be considered postmodernist, but they engage in similar themes and ideas to the ones that cultural critics identify in postmodernist texts, and also to the ones Miller expresses at this time.

One of the most important features of the films that I am concerned with is the influence of an all-powerful, yet mysterious, group on the individual subject. Films such as *Chinatown*, *Three Days of the Condor*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, *Network*, and Alan J. Pakula’s “paranoia trilogy”, *Klute*, *The Parallax View*, and *All the President’s Men*, all contain this feature that was so crucial to postmodernism. *Chinatown* was part of the noir revival that Ryan and Kellner saw as being a result of the “loss, pessimism, and despair that appears cinematically in the mid-seventies [...] as a hopeless vision of the social universe” (86). *Chinatown* features Jack Nicholson as Jake Gittes, a detective who, no matter how much he delves into the case, cannot find any definitive answers. Like in *All the President’s Men*, the conspiracy Gittes uncovers keeps being tracked to higher and higher office. Eventually, his love interest is killed, the villain, Noah Cross (played by John Huston, director of *The Misfits*), gets away, and the case he was hired to solve has long been forgotten – the crimes that have been committed and revealed since the beginning of his investigation have superseded, in terms of plot if not seriousness, the one with which Gittes was originally

concerned. Like *The Crying of Lot 49*, the movie ends with its title, as Gittes, whose fear of Chinatown is frequently mentioned but never explained, ends up there at the climactic scene. His associate tells him, “[f]orget it, Jake. It’s Chinatown”, and the credits roll. *Chinatown* is a perfect encapsulation of mid-1970s cinema because it displays a profound hopelessness, and refuses to explain itself. Ryan and Kellner write, “*Chinatown* is a striking articulation of mid-century cultural pessimism, and it suggests the direction the liberal critique of traditional conservative economic interests was taking” (85) – that is to say, as conservative economic interests began to extend their power, and industries became deregulated under Nixon, the mainstream left acquiesced to a large degree, most notably during the presidency of Jimmy Carter (1977-1981). David Cook also highlights the despondency of *Chinatown*, writing that its final scene

is one of utter hopelessness, yet the fact that conspiracy and evil win the day seemed appropriate to a world living in the shadow of Watergate. As Peter Lew points out, “[t]he film’s key political insight is that the specific mechanisms of government do not matter; wealth and power matter [...] In a sense, Noah Cross still owns the Water Department because he can still manipulate it to his own ends’ (Lew 58). (120)

Other films of the period display similar levels of paranoia, albeit without the same despair. *All the President’s Men*, for instance, is consistently tense, even though one knows the outcome beforehand – based on the book by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein about their uncovering of the Watergate scandal, one already knows that the system will correct itself, that the guilty will be identified if not punished, and all will be right at the film’s close. However, it is the form, if not the politics, that is important to this paranoid atmosphere. Woodward and Bernstein consistently hunt for clues, in a search that often seems hopeless,

but its mood is summed up by one of the characters who knows something, but, it is assumed, is being intimidated into not speaking to the reporters – “[p]eople sure are worried”, she says. This feeling continues throughout Pakula’s trilogy, with *The Parallax View* both opening and closing with very conscious echoes of the Warren Commission. Here, although we are suspicious at the start, by the end we know full well that the courts are corrupt, and in league with the mysterious organisation, Parallax, who throughout commit the assassination of politicians from different political parties. This indicates that ideology is largely irrelevant – what these shady organisations desire is far more than ideological. The fact that the film closes with the framing of its hero, played by Warren Beatty, one of the greatest stars of the age, suggests little regard for status or audience expectation. After spending two hours on the trail of a secret organisation with such a well-known actor, it is jarring to the viewer to see him fail in his task. As is the case in so many paranoia texts, in *Parallax*, “[t]here is no recognizable [sic] enemy that the audience can identify as a nemesis or against whom negative emotion can be mobilized [sic]” (Ryan and Kellner, 99), which serves to heighten the tension and paranoia.

The first of Pakula’s trilogy, *Klute*, shares many of these themes and aesthetics, but is more personal in its nature, in that it focuses largely on a relationship between a man and woman. Here, as has been mentioned, the focus on technology is key. Consistently, technology is used to torture the main character, Jane Fonda’s Bree Daniels. The villain phones Bree and plays a recording of her in an attempt to blackmail her, eventually playing her a recording of him murdering her friend. One whole wall of his office is taken up by a depiction of the moon landing, and the skyline behind him is stuffed with cranes. His surname is even “Cable”, which has obvious echoes of technology. Bree, on the other hand, is constantly startled by her phone ringing and doorbell buzzing. Towards the end of the film, she seeks, and briefly finds, a haven in a coat-making factory that still utilises manual labour,

and whose secretary converses directly with her boss, as opposed to via electric buzzer. This use of modern technology, and its implied ceaseless forward momentum, again serves to foster genuine paranoia – if the processes depicted here as negative are seemingly unstoppable, then what can be done? This anxiety is even expressed in possibly the major commercial film of the decade – *Star Wars* (1977). Darth Vader, whose very survival is based on technology, warns his subordinate, in reference to a new weapon, “[d]on’t be too proud of this technological terror you’ve constructed”. The irony here is double, in that Vader could also be referring to himself, and even to the film, which broke considerable technological ground.

The final film I should like to mention is *Taxi Driver*. This differs from the above films in that it does not focus on institutional paranoia, but more on personal psychosis and mental degeneration. The ending, however, also indulges in the ironic awareness of the postmodernist that truth, if graspable, is largely irrelevant. Having been horrified throughout by the violence, anger, and self-harm of Travis Bickle, the film concludes with him being lauded in the newspapers as a hero for rescuing a teenage prostitute, when in fact he planned on murdering her pimp, and indeed contributed to a bloody firefight. We are left, then, with the impression that it’s the media who will create reality and truth in the world.

However, *Taxi Driver* makes an impression far before this ironic, almost amusing, denouement. Bickle does not come under severe pressure or scrutiny, aside from working long hours in an unpleasant job and city, contemporary New York. The smoke, red lights, and jazz soundtrack all contribute to another example of the noir revival mentioned above, and create an ambiguously menacing mood. It is course significant that Bickle is a Vietnam veteran, and it is highly implied, though never stated, that his experiences in Vietnam have caused him to be so profoundly deranged. Tomasulo remarks that Bickle serves as an inquisitor into the post-Vietnam American psyche itself, writing, “if Bickle is some sort of

representative of post-Vietnam U.S. society, then the fact that he glares at himself [through the mirror in his taxi] – and the audience [...] suggests that *America's* national psyche is likewise filled with suspicion and self-hatred” (166, author’s italics). *Taxi Driver* is one of the most extreme, yet deeply personal films of this genre, as so much time is spent alone with Bickle, often when he is self-harming, or planning extreme violence. Tomasulo writes that Bickle was a timely figure in American culture – “the film suggests that genuine heroism is no longer possible in the post-Vietnam, postmodern era; Travis can only be an ambiguous dark and dubious anti-hero” (166). This brings to mind Miller’s comment from 1978 that

[i]t is by no means a hero’s epoch now; we in the West as well as in the East understand perfectly well that the political and military spheres – where ‘heroics’ were called for in the past, are now merely expressions of the unmerciful industrial-technological base. (“The Sin of Power”, 290)

Because these two quotes match each other so neatly, I will cease my analysis of the cultural context at this point. I have shown some of the dominant cultural ideas within the 1970s in America, and how they were expressed through cinema. If we consider Miller’s work alongside these ideas and texts, we see that *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, and his later texts, are in fact worthy of being considered in the cultural and intellectual mainstream of postmodernist writing. I shall now move on to an examination of Miller’s non-dramatic writing of the period, before showing how much of these ideas appear in the first play of this study.

3.4: Changing Ideas in Miller’s Essays

I want to begin my discussion of Miller in this period by examining the potential sources for the ideas in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* in his personal life, and how he expressed similar ideas

in his essays of the period. This is important because *The Archbishop's Ceiling* has definite roots in Miller's own experiences, and we can see him reflecting on them in his essays. In these pieces we can see him presenting the ideas he would try to work out in his plays, and because the latter did not receive the acclaim of his earlier, more successful works, their ideas tended to get obscured by the unfavourable criticism they attracted. However, viewing them outside of the immediate context of the theatre reviewer, it is the ideas that come to the fore and are worthy of due consideration. The works I discuss here reflect Miller's feelings about surveillance and power, as they operated in the 1970s, and how the rapid advancement of technology began to impact perceptions of reality and morality.

I should like to begin, though, by discussing the events of Miller's own life that informed this play, and some of his essays of the period. As has been mentioned, he began travelling more widely from the mid-1960s onwards, and visited the USSR in 1967 and 1969, and also, most importantly, Prague. Miller, who had of course had experience of state intervention in the political behaviour and artistic production of individuals at home, was struck by the normality of state surveillance in these countries. In *Timebends*, he writes of having dinner at a writer's home in Prague in 1969, and being alerted to a police car parked across the street. He noted that this was a blatant expression of power, writing that it was "a manoeuvre to warn us that we were not alone" (572). He says he dealt with it by "numbing [his] fears and informing [his] brain" (572). We will see much of these ideas play out in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. It is important to note, also, the *overt* nature of the show of surveillance and power by the Czech police. Not only did one have to be careful because of the potential of hidden recording equipment, but the brute show of force that made no attempt to hide itself, something not as common in the US at this point, was also a constant reminder of a more immediate terror.

On his trip to the USSR itself, Bigsby writes, “Russia offered conundrums. Reality was never quite what it appeared. A lifetime of necessary dissembling, of practicing survival mechanisms, made it difficult to know the truth about anyone or anything” (1962-2005, 145). This is almost the perfect description of a paranoid culture, wherein nothing can be taken for granted. It is also one that deeply affected Miller, and it is for this reason that I date the onset of Miller’s postmodernist drama with this play. Miller had several similar experiences that introduced him to the mass surveillance that created such a paranoid society. He met the writer Ilya Ehrenburg, in his last months of life, and this affected him deeply. Bigsby writes that this meeting “was a reminder of how difficult it was to define the real in a world in which language and silence alike were so deeply compromised” (1962-2005, 146-147). This awareness of the complicity of silence, and the danger of speech, would evidently make its way into the contradictions on display in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, wherein no-one’s motivation should be taken as obvious.

Even though *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* was set in Eastern Europe, it is unlikely it would ever have been written were it not for events in the US. Watergate removed any potential for plausible deniability on the part of the highest authority in the nation, as power was revealed to be undoubtedly complicit in sleazy crimes, and their cover up. The release of the Nixon tapes, allowing the public to listen to hours of supposedly private conversations between the president and his advisors, also contributed to this feeling of surveillance and paranoia - as Miller wrote, “[t]he seventies was also the era of the listening device” (“Conditions of Freedom”, 396). Miller reflected later on the difficulty the play encountered when first performed, and it is easy to see how it could have been mistaken for a relatively straightforward piece of political theatre. As he wrote in *Timebends*,

by 1986 [when it had been successfully produced] people could see that the play was not just about “the East” alone; we were all

talking to the bugged ceiling of the mind, whether knowingly or not in the West; even unconsciously we had foregone the notion of a person totally free of deteriorating inner obeisances to power or shibboleth. It was more and more difficult to imagine in the last quarter of the century the naked selfness of a free human being speaking with no unacknowledged interest except his own truth.

(573)

I quote at length here because it is an extremely postmodernist view of the world. To imagine the individual subject as being difficult to conceive of is almost as extreme as the writings of Baudrillard, so it shows that Miller's views of the world had shifted considerably. He even moves beyond the idea of a lack of individual agency being brought about solely by the influence of surveillance or power by noting that this had become unconscious, and not just in "the East". Of course, as with Baudrillard, we cannot take this entirely at face value – if it is so hard to imagine the idea of the uncorrupted individual, does Miller believe that he, then, is this uncorrupted individual who can see the truth? Therefore, I propose not taking either writer completely literally, while also acknowledging the validity of the direction of their arguments.

Despite the undoubtedly political roots of the play under consideration, it should not be regarded as a "geopolitical melodrama", a genre of film, including to various degrees some of the ones already mentioned, that focused on the "clear-headed maverick with a penchant for breaking rules and an abiding disgust for the political infighting, inertia, and rule-bound strictures of the bureaucracy" (Melley, 2008). I have above quoted Bigsby as saying that for Miller the play was less about politics and more about the impact surveillance has on the very concept of the, and we can see how Miller considered such topics even in relation to Nixon in the mid-'70s. Miller wrote on the release of the Nixon tapes in 1974, and,

as was normal for him, found his way into the issue via language and performance. He writes with a weary, amused tone that was utterly suitable to go alongside the irony that postmodernism began to represent for people. Miller writes, “[r]eading the presidential transcripts, one is confronted with the decay of a language, of a legal system; in these pages what was possibly the world’s best hope is reduced to a vaudeville, a laugh riot” (“The Limited Hang-Out”, 270). He finds Nixon’s blatant criminality, his low-level lies and deceptions, and the resulting removal of gloss and grandeur of the office of president to be funny, not the tragedy that his younger self, we can imagine, would have viewed it as. Perhaps it was age, his traumatic personal and familial experiences, or just simply Nixon’s blatant guilt, but this reaction is notable from someone generally considered not to deal in humour – indeed, culminating in *Resurrection Blues*, we see a marked increase in humour in Miller’s writing from here on. This reaction of his can also be attributed to the general mood of the 1970s, which Miller grasped acutely. Looking back on the decade in the late-‘80s, he wrote that

[t]here was a common awareness of exhaustion, to the point where politics and social thought themselves seemed ludicrously out of date or naively ineffectual except as subjects of black comedy. Power everywhere seemed to have transformed itself from a forbidding line of troops into an ectoplasmic lump that simply swallowed up the righteous sword as it struck. Power was doing its own surprising thing. (“Conditions of Freedom”, 396)

After the failure of 1960s liberalism to prevail electorally, or of the more radical leftist groups to cohere politically, the emergent right-wing, spearheaded by Nixon, seized power in America, beginning this movement towards a more powerful, aggressive state that came to be

less overt after the Kent State murders of 1970, but which nonetheless extended its control over the country.

By the time Miller wrote “The Sin of Power” in 1978, he came to see little metaphysical difference between the American and Soviet governments. He was especially appalled at the Soviet invasion of August 1968, writing, “the occupation of Czechoslovakia was the physical proof that Marxism was but one more self-delusionary attempt to avoid facing the real nature of power, the primitive corruption by power of those who possess it” (288). Miller began to see, then, little ideological difference between the US and the USSR, as both had been corrupted by the extreme power accrued by the state. He wrote that the Marxist and the American politician “both believe at bottom that reality is quite simply the arena into which determined men can enter and reshape just about every kind of relationship in” (“The Sin of Power”, 289). The possession of power, then, has become all that is needed to shape reality to one’s own desires. It should be noted here that Miller, once again like Baudrillard, is speaking metaphorically to a decent degree. It is not that Miller did not believe in the possibility of objective reality, but that such was the extent of powerful institutions, and the technology they possessed, that perceptions of reality could be altered almost at will. As he writes, and it’s difficult to imagine he was not influenced by George Orwell, “[t]he sin of power is not only to distort reality but to convince people that the false is true, and that what is happening is only an invention of enemies” (“The Sin of Power”, 289). He draws a distinction between the two societies, though, by noting that “in the West, it is possible yet for witnesses to reality to come forth and testify to the truth. In Czechoslovakia the whole field is pre-empted by power itself” (“The Sin of Power”, 289). However, he judges the inherent danger in Western society to be technological change, an issue on which he would come to express considerable unease. He writes despairingly of intellectuals who do not seem to grasp this, saying that they “are apparently upholding values at a time when the first order

of business would seem to be the accretion of capital for technological investment” (“The Sin of Power”, 290). Like Paddy Chayefsky in *Network*, Miller’s critique of the power of technology was shrewd, and he sustained it through the final years of his writing.

On his reflective piece on the decade, written as an introduction to *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* and *The American Clock*, Miller discusses the movement of the play from the political to the metaphysical. He writes:

the more I reflected on my experiences under bugged ceilings, the more the real issue changed from a purely political one to the question of what effect this surveillance was having on the minds of the people who had to live under such ceilings, on whatever side of the Cold War they happened to be. (“Conditions of Freedom”, 397)

He saw that this could not solely be regarded as a political issue, that it would not be adequate to allow it to be dramatised as a polemical debate between intellectuals. The prospect, or likelihood, of constant surveillance would begin to undermine every statement or action made by a person. He asks, “[w]hat, for instance, becomes of the idea of sincerity, the unmitigated expression of one’s views, when one knows Power’s ear is most probably overhead?” (“Conditions of Freedom”, 397), and the point is of course that it is not just the literal or physical surveillance equipment that is present with an individual, especially in the “free” countries of Western Europe and North America. He also notes that it is not simply a case of portraying oneself as an obedient, docile subject; that rebellion, too, can be performed: “who can resist trying [...] to characterize [sic] himself for the benefit of the ceiling [...] even as resistant? And what, in that case, has it done to one’s very identity?” (“Conditions of Freedom”, 397-8). This constantly reshaping of one’s thoughts, expressions,

and even self is reminiscent of the postmodernist idea of there being no essential core to the individual, but a constantly changeable set of actions that are caused by the flow of messages, signals, and external pressures, generally brought about by contemporary media and technology. Miller, who in this play in a sense replaces God with the surveillance bug, compares the experience of constantly speaking to power to “accounting oneself to a god”, but makes the distinction that “the bug lacks only mercy and love to qualify, it is conscience shorn of moral distinctions” (“Conditions of Freedom”, 398).

We have seen, then, how experiences in Miller’s personal life led him to consider the world in more metaphysical and existential terms than, perhaps, he had previously. He writes about this explicitly in his non-fiction, and these ideas should be constantly considered in conjunction with *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. I intend to finish this section, though, with Miller’s early reflections on his Eastern travels. In “On the Theater in Russia”, from 1969, he provides a few clues that hint at future ideas, and they will also help us move into the discussion of the important stylistic elements of the play. He writes that conservative writers who have come to regard state surveillance and censorship as normal, who are “neither suborned nor corrupted by superior force [...] honestly regard what injustice they see as temporary error or at worst a lamentable necessity” (200). He does not explicitly make the point, but the implication is clear – these writers genuinely believe in the moral good of the Soviet system, in exactly the same way that conservative writers in America believe in their goodness, and so are willing to excuse any amount of war, poverty, racism, or violence, as at worst a regrettable by-product of their perfect ideals. He writes that for these writers “life can never be tragic because the individual who comes to a bad end has simply separated himself from the victorious path of society” (“On the Theater in Russia”, 200). He writes of the experience of seeing Russian theatre, with its conflicting, inconsistent messages a reflection of its culture, noting that “there is an absurdity about this alternation between repression and

freedom” (“On the Theater in Russia”, 208), and I cannot imagine that his use of the word “absurdity” was coincidental. We see Miller’s drama move towards a more Absurdist style after this period, and he also writes more warmly about Absurdism – which “at first seemed to [him] to be celebrating the impotence of human hopes, even the futility of action itself” (“Notes on Realism”, 310). Therefore, it is reasonable to draw links between Miller’s time behind the Iron Curtain, and the developing postmodernist approach he takes, which of course dovetails with the increased sense of paranoia and instability in American life.

3.5: *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*

The Archbishop’s Ceiling in many ways calls to mind a classic Borgesian labyrinth, and not only because it is set in an old palace, which proves inscrutable even to the characters – the building’s owner, Marcus, says of a confiscated manuscript, “they’d never have found it in this house in a hundred years. The cellar’s endless, the gallery upstairs is full of junk” (135). Almost every comment someone makes is later subverted or contradicted, either by themselves or somebody else, and very little is said that does not carry dual meanings. What is said in all sincerity in one scene may later be revoked in another moment of touching compassion later. This uncertainty is vital to the effect the play has, as we rarely, if ever, see the unvarnished individual behind the calculating, pressurised exteriors that are presented.

The play presents an evening at the house of a writer, Marcus, in Prague, most likely in the mid-‘70s. At first, we are introduced to Adrian Wallach, a naïve American novelist with a sizable public profile, who has returned to the city because he says he suddenly “got a yen to sit down again with writers who had actual troubles” (93). He is being hosted by Maya, whose ex-husband is Marcus, the owner of the palace. We quickly see tensions develop between the two, as Adrian reveals the real reasons for his visit – he is stuck trying to write a novel set in a totalitarian society, and hopes that spending a few days in the country

will inspire him. He also wants to seduce Maya, even though they discuss his partner, Ruth. From these opening exchanges, we see much of what will characterise the play, and these characters – tension, duplicity, and the suspicion that no-one is to be trusted. Adrian tells her that he has heard Marcus and Maya hold orgies in the apartment to blackmail visitors, but although she reacts furiously, she does not deny it. As they continue to talk, we become aware that there is most likely a listening device, or bug, in the room that is recording their conversation. When discussing their mutual friend and dissident writer, Sigmund, Adrian mentions that he keeps his manuscript behind the fireplace in his house. Maya, furious, confronts him in the hallway, and insists that he return inside to say, for the benefit of the bug, that he has arranged for the manuscript to be smuggled to Paris. This introduces one of the key early lines, which gets to the heart of the play – “[i]s it always like a performance?”, Adrian asks, “[I]ike we’re quoting ourselves?” (108) This metatheatrical sense of constant pretence is one of the main reasons we cannot trust these characters – even if they were not performing for each other, we would have no way of knowing it.

As Adrian is about to leave, Marcus arrives, with a young blonde woman, and, following behind, Sigmund. The presence of the other woman, Irina, is crucial, as it seems to confirm that Marcus and Maya do indeed hold orgies. We see Marcus give Maya a pair of expensive shoes, as she looks at him “with a faint smile, her longing and hatred” (112). This at once establishes the dynamics in their relationship, as Marcus is shown to be someone who can acquire material goods, but is not to be trusted. Marcus, like Maya, has appeared to forego criticising the government in order to be allowed certain privileges – he is allowed to travel and publish abroad, he can get things others cannot, and does not seem to be worried about state or security interference in his business. Maya, meanwhile, has a Saturday morning radio programme, and now denies having ever been especially political – “everybody was

[political] in those days. But it wasn't politics" (102), she tells Adrian, referring obliquely to their activity at the time of his first visit to the country.

They sit down, and Sigmund reveals that his manuscript has been confiscated. Adrian is anxious to know when, as he is afraid that he revealed its location to the bug. However, we find out that it was taken before Adrian said anything, so the power of the bug is then cast into doubt somewhat. The writers try to discuss what the best course of action is, and in time we see resentments, fears, and desires come to the surface. Marcus recounts that he has been threatened by an agent in London, ordering Sigmund to leave the country. Adrian is especially keen for this to happen, but Sigmund refuses. We do not initially know the reason for this refusal, but we later come to understand that he regards himself as a "provincial writer" who must "hear [his] language every day [and] walk in these particular streets" (170). Maya believes that he cannot function without the state's repression to rail against in his writing, while Marcus concludes that he is "a moral blackmailer" (173), and tells him he must leave the country, complete with his returned manuscript, in order to safeguard the small, liberatory advances that have been made in recent years. Adrian, meanwhile, is shown to understand almost nothing of the country, and is accused of being solely interested in his writing – Marcus says, "he's been writing this story for you all evening! *New York Times* feature on Socialist decadence!" (157), and then asks him, "[t]o whom am I talking, Adrian – the *New York Times*, or your novel, or you?" (157). Throughout the evening, personal motivations and rivalries are revealed, that undermine the idea that this is a group of intellectuals whose main concern is either freedom of expression, or the condition of the state. We learn that Marcus was supplanted by Sigmund as the country's finest writer while he was in a labour camp, and that he can no longer write properly. Maya is revealed to have slept with each man, which adds another layer of personal tension to the exchanges.

The play, which takes place in real time, concludes just as Alexandra, a poet and the daughter of the Minister for the Interior, is about to arrive. She has called Marcus to let him know she is coming to “collect” Sigmund, ahead of his deportation, or worse. Sigmund asserts that he “will never leave” (175), and begs Maya for forgiveness. There is a moment of tenderness between them, as they both realise the difficulty of the situation, and their respective complicity, before Alexandra is heard approaching the apartment with Marcus.

The assumptions that Adrian makes about the house, country, and scenario are consistently eroded, and so one is left stranded within the play, there being no centre of reality around which to focus, as everyone’s motivation is always in doubt. The play even ends on an ambiguous note, as in many ways the action that is its concern is just about to begin. There is no way of telling what will happen after Marcus and Alexandra enter the room. It is assumed that Sigmund will accept a jail sentence, and all that that entails for the rest of the country, but it is also conceivable that the conversation will drag on even longer, with more revelations altering the perspective of those in the room.

The bug is the key to this play, because it creates the ambiguity from which everything stems. Adrian’s fascination with the country is largely a result of this constant surveillance – “this is what I never got into my book”, he tells Maya, “this doubleness. This density with angels hovering overhead. Like power always with you in a room. Like God, in a way. Just tell me – do you ever get where you’ve forgotten it?” (107-108) He has returned to figure out a way to resurrect his novel, but realises that he is not able to – “whatever’s in the ceiling; or if nothing is; we still have to love, and talk, and the rest of it. I really thought I knew, but I saw that I didn’t; it’s been an education tonight” (152). As far as Marcus is concerned, he has his reputation to maintain, and so perversely relies on both the presence and absence of the bug – he consistently denies it, but also admits the possibility of it being there. The suspicion around him is breezily summed up by Sigmund – “Marcus is Marcus”

(131). Maya says of him, though, “I think it was only to make himself interesting – he can’t write anymore; it left him” (161). Maya seems to be desperate to avoid politics, despite the evident reality of their situation, and so must deny the bug’s presence even though she both confirms and denies it in the course of the evening – she takes Adrian into the hall to speak privately, and later tells Sigmund, “I really don’t think there is anything there. I would never do that to you, you know that” (161), before finally saying, “They have heard it all [...] God knows what will happen for what has been said here” (171). Sigmund’s need for the bug is similarly complicated. While he strives to write unburdened by censorship or repression, he is also aware that he needs the great power of the state to rebel against. Not only does this provide his subject, but it also allows him a degree of moral licensing, as his writing becomes an end that justifies almost anything. Marcus concludes by telling Sigmund:

You are a moral blackmailer. [...] We have taken all the responsibility and left you all the freedom to call us morally bankrupt. But now you’re free to go, so the responsibility moves to you. [...] We have done what was possible; now you will do what is necessary, or turn out our lights. (173)

This gets to the contradiction at the heart of Sigmund’s dilemma – whether to leave his country, which can then continue on its slow path to liberalisation, or stay and be a martyr, in which case his trial and imprisonment, it is made clear, will lead to the curtailing of civil liberties. He needs the bug to be present so that his work can have force – as Maya tells him, “you will not have them in America to hate! And if you cannot hate you cannot write and you will not be Sigmund anymore [...] They are your theme, your life, your partner in this dance that cannot stop or you will die of silence” (175).

There are several key features around which I intend to focus my discussion of this play, and these will also be highlighted by discussion of specific characters and interactions. Because the play does not contain much action, and rests almost entirely on the dialogue, the same ideas and themes recur throughout, but there is an extent to which this is deliberate. It ensnares one into the paranoid room the characters occupy, as speech is constantly checked. In one of the multiple self-referential comments on the play, Adrian says of the novel he's struggling to write, "I finally wondered if the idea of unfreedom can be sustained in the mind" (152). This self-referential, metatheatrical style is important to conceiving of the play in terms of postmodernism, and is one of the devices I intend to look at here. I will also consider Miller's use of ambiguity, the views expressed on the nature of power and belief, and also the way representations are discussed throughout the play. Much of what I say here will also be relevant for plays to be discussed below, especially *Resurrection Blues*. I will also show how Miller gradually embraced the postmodernist sensibility that was so prevalent in the 1970s.

3.5.1: Ambiguity and Paranoia

The first idea I wish to discuss is ambiguity, and how Miller consistently evokes and plays with it to create the paranoid atmosphere of the play. The first thing that needs to be noted is where and when he sets the play – "[s]ome time ago. The sitting-room in the former residence of the archbishop; a capital of Europe" (89). With regards to the location, he said in 1995, "I did not identify Prague but it was obvious to anyone" (1962-2005, 263), and there are numerous hints, such as references to Soviet tanks outside the city, and it being west of Vienna and only an hour from Paris. But this uncertainty is a deliberate move from Miller, and means one is suspicious in a vague, undefined way from the off. With regards to the time, this is a stranger direction, as there are references to the downfall of Nixon and the end of the Vietnam War, so it evidently takes place after 1975. But it was published in 1984, so while

“[s]ome time ago” sounds in the distant past, in reality it occurs a maximum of ten years prior to publication. The uncertainty created by these directions is not solely intended for aesthetic purposes, but helps contribute to the wider sense of unease that permeates the play. The stage directions also call for “[l]ayers of chaos” (90), which represents the mindset of the characters as well as the country, and before a word of dialogue has even been spoken, Adrian searches the room, looking under lamps, cushions, and in the grand piano. He also looks behind the drapes and “examines the ceiling” (90), which is directed to be “first seen” (89).

The ceiling itself of course takes on huge importance, as it is where the bug is assumed to be. This is one of Miller’s most descriptive set designs, as he writes of the ceiling, “in high relief the Four Winds, cheeks swelling, and cherubims, darkened unevenly by soot and age” (89). Martin Gottfried notes that Miller “does not explain how a balcony audience is supposed to see” (403) this decoration, and while this is admittedly a detail that would need to be figured out by any director, more complex things have surely been portrayed on stage before. Maya says of the space, “[i]t’s a hard room to light. Wherever you put a lamp it makes the rest seem darker. I think there are too many unrelated objects – the eye can’t rest here” (91). This recalls the room described in *The Price*, with its jumble of furniture and artworks that dominate the stage. But it also highlights the problem that Adrian, and to a lesser extent the other characters, struggles with throughout the play – emotions and speech are unrelated, and so when something becomes clear, something else has become obscured.

This uncertainty continues throughout the play, and comes to focus mainly on the presence, or otherwise, of the bug. Much of this depends on the character of Marcus. He is discussed by Maya and Adrian before he appears, so some details are provided, but the question of how he manages to live a privileged existence in an authoritarian state remains a mystery – when asked how he lives in such a place, Maya replies, “why not?” (99), and

continues to remain evasive. Maya denies holding orgies in order to blackmail writers, but again, it is never revealed whether she is being truthful or not. Later, Marcus cheerfully admits that “there was a good bit of screwing going on” (125) on the night their mutual friend told Adrian about. Adrian sums up his frustration when he comments that “[i]t’s hard for anyone to know what to believe in this country” (102). His use of the word ‘believe’ instead of ‘think’ is instructive here, because it serves to foreground his naivety. It also acts as advice, albeit of the unhelpful kind, to the audience. At the beginning, Adrian finds it difficult to know whether he should believe anyone or not, but towards the end, as his conception of life in this country and the value of truth and dissent is complicated for him, he moves towards a position where he finds it difficult to in fact know what to think. Maya, on the other hand, instantly identifies his confusion, telling him, “[y]ou are the only person I know who thinks everything in a Socialist country is rational” (100). Adrian, as the only American character in the play, comes to represent liberal America, with its myriad assertions based more on myth and assumption than real life or experiences. I will discuss later how Adrian is a clear stand-in for Miller himself, which is another sign of his self-critical irony, heightened even further in *Resurrection Blues*.

The ambiguity around the bug continues despite what seems like confirmations of its presence from Maya. She confronts Adrian in the hallway, saying that it’s safe to talk there, as the bug “is only in the apartment” (105). She insists that he come back into the room and correct the record – tell the bug that he sent the only copy of a new novel by Sigmund to Paris. This is despite the fact that she admits, “I don’t know when it was installed” (106), which still does not serve as a confirmation that it has in fact been installed – she might as well have said she did not know *that* it was installed. We are given further cause to doubt Maya’s statements when Adrian accuses her of being a government agent – her response is,

“[w]hat can I say? Will you believe anything?” (109). This, of course, is the dilemma at the heart of the play - will, or should, Adrian believe anything?

The complications only increase when the duo is joined by both Marcus and Sigmund, and conversation turns to the latter’s stolen manuscript. Adrian is affronted by the complicity Marcus and Maya show with the power of the state and secret police, and makes multiple melodramatic attempts to depart. He attempts to convince Marcus that he has given a cousin of his a copy of Sigmund’s manuscript, and it has been taken to Paris. Marcus instantly reacts, telling him that there is no flight to Paris on the day in question. He feels affronted by Adrian’s deceit, and refuses to help him, even though, as Maya says, “[h]e is a stupid man, he understands nothing!” (136). Marcus insists “[n]o one will ever manipulate me, I will not be put in that position” (136), which suggests that Marcus is not a government agent, or that he genuinely thinks he has taken all of his decisions, which include friendly relations with the state in exchange for certain privileges, by his own free will, and has not been forced into such positions by intimidation or fear of poverty or reprisal. This brings to mind Miller’s discussion of the conservative writers he met in the Soviet Union, who genuinely believed the state’s actions were necessary and just. Marcus defends himself to Adrian, although, crucially, it is when he is not in the potentially bugged room:

[t]here has never been any proof of an installation here. But when so many writers congregate here I’ve had to assume there might be something. The fact is, I have always warned people to be careful what they say in there – but only to be on the safe side.

(138)

This attempted explanation of course does not clarify the issue, and the fact that he will not repeat the statement inside the room serves to muddy his claim further, and suggests a guilty conscience.

In the second act, Adrian continues to press Marcus about the bug. Exasperated, he responds, “[h]ow can I know what is in this room? How ludicrous can you get?” (144), which makes the issue a more general one than it was before. Marcus is questioning the nature of how he can know about the presence of anything, not just the bug, in the room, throwing all ideas of knowledge into doubt. Adrian, in his typically innocent way, remarks that the American surveillance forces operate in a similar fashion, but “with us it’s illegal” (145). This shows a completely misdirected faith at the idea that because an act is illegal, it will be exposed, and justice will be done. Adrian still does not understand that it is an act’s relationship to power, not the law, that defines whether it will be permitted or not. Sigmund, though, knows the difference, dryly commenting, “[v]ive la difference” (145).

As the act progresses, Sigmund comes to doubt the presence of the bug. He has been told that his manuscript will be returned to him, but he must leave the country, which he refuses to do. This strikes at the dilemma at his core: he can exist solely as a writer, but his subject is always repression. Without this repression, without provoking a reaction from the power he so detests, he doubts he can even continue to be a writer. He stands front and centre and declares, “[w]ho is commanding me? Who is this voice? *Who is speaking to me?*” (171). Maya simply responds, “[t]hey”, and, pointing upwards, says, “[i]t is there” (171). Marcus insists she is incorrect, saying, “[i]t isn’t true, there’s nothing [...] There’s nothing... she can’t know” (171). At this point, Maya expresses something similar to Sigmund, the need to be surveilled in order to have value: “Who else have we been speaking to?” (191), she asks. As writers, or former writers, each of the character needs an audience to deem themselves worthwhile. They cannot live with the ambiguity of not being regarded, not being listened to.

While the play ends with Alexandra about to enter to “collect” Sigmund, this does not in and of itself prove the presence of the bug. There is in fact no more reason to believe Maya’s claim at the end of the play than at the start, especially when she has become quite drunk. There is also, then, the question of her own motivations. Like Marcus, she manages to live a comfortable life by not criticising the regime in public; she has given up writing and now works only on a Saturday morning radio show. She denies having ever been political, and says that her reason for not doing serious writing is that she “can’t work that hard anymore” (102). She describes her show as being comprised of “little anecdotes; amusing things I notice on the streets, the trams” (103). She later implores Sigmund to comply with the regime and leave the country “[f]or my sake... For this little life that I have made...” (175), which of course implicates her. We see with this comment that Maya has something to gain from Sigmund’s departure, that, like the others, she very much has a personal stake in Sigmund’s future. This moral conflict is the source of the play’s main ambiguity – no-one can be said to be speaking out of any sincere feeling; everyone has their own motivations for what they say, and to whom they say it. Marcus is afraid that he is speaking not to Adrian, but his novel or the *New York Times*; Maya and Marcus are keen to protect their own personal freedoms; Adrian is generally confused, chasing some ideal that does not exist; and Sigmund’s priority, over the condition of his friends or country, is that he can write – and of course, they are all concerned that they are speaking to whoever is on the other side of the bug. This ambiguity highlights the multiple meanings and intentions behind nearly every word spoken throughout.

The ambiguity Miller creates also relates to the more basic moral matters at play—namely, what should Sigmund do? And why should he do it? Although Marcus is probably the least attractive character, he undoubtedly has a very strong argument as to what Sigmund should do. Marcus consistently maintains that while the situation in the country is not ideal, it

is vastly superior to what has preceded it. His six years in a labour camp have hardened him, yet he does not resort to a simplistic pro-American stance – he tells Adrian that he had been imprisoned in New York and then deported, despite having been an interpreter in the US army during the Second World War. He says that this experience made the situation “terribly unambiguous, Adrian – you were a Fascist country, to me” (153-154). These experiences add a weight to Marcus that is not immediately evident – he’s generally considered to be “a bit of an operator” (100), in Adrian’s words, and his appearance with a married woman, along with his decision to change into a robe, does little to dispel this impression. However, we see another side to him – Maya describes the magazine he previously edited as “some sort of Bible, every week a new prophecy” (148), but also comments that he can no longer write as he once could. When speaking of the regime’s improvement in recent years, Marcus sounds almost like Miller himself – “one has to be of the generation that can remember. Otherwise, it’s as [Adrian says] – a sort of rumour that has no reality – excepting itself” (154). There is of course a very good argument that Marcus makes here, even though it is the least romantic option available – that Sigmund must leave the country, thus probably destroying his talent, in order that the slim liberal advances so far been made in the country are not reversed. It is the least romantic because it finally serves to undermine the power and importance of literature, and also because it requires so much co-operation with power, with the vast, unscrupulous police state. This point should also be read in an American context – Miller could be highlighting that at least this is an issue in the Eastern Bloc, but in America, so much of this co-operation with power is conceded voluntarily, unconsciously, or not even remarked upon.

The ambiguity at the heart of this play does not simply leave one guessing as to each character’s true feelings. It leaves the characters and the audience in the same position – neither is sure of anyone’s reasons for what they say, and so everything must be doubted, or

treated with suspicion. Characters act not out of moral or ethical causes, but out of fear, or ignorance, or out of a desire to protect what they have in the world. It is Marcus who makes the finest moral case for his argument – he offers to assume the guilt of compromising – despite never explicitly saying that he does compromise - in order that Sigmund can leave the country, and that “this country does not fall back into darkness” (158). Marcus appears willing to assume the mantle of government stooge, to help prevent further restrictions of civil liberties. Due, most likely, to his inability to write, it seems that he has sacrificed any previous radical ideas, in return for the minor reforms the government seems to be making. He relinquishes the role of rebel and critic, and instead becomes a compromiser and apologist for the state. We must also, of course, consider that Marcus could benefit from the removal of a rival writer from the country. He is by no means the liberal hero of old, though, a John Proctor of *The Crucible* who cannot live in the world - he sees the benefit of compromise and sacrifice. While Miller said later that the 1970s were not heroic times, he implies here that they were a time for compromise, a time for men like Marcus. By causing this incessant paranoia, Miller creates a world in which morality is largely irrelevant, and the only decision is how much one wants to collude with the powerful forces that have come to dominate every interaction.

3.5.2: Metatheatre and Representation

Miller’s use of metatheatrical devices and his focus on issues surrounding representation are two more important elements that add to the evidence of postmodernism in this play. Because the two issues feed into one another, I’ll discuss them alongside each other. They are important to my conception of the postmodern in Miller’s work because they highlight the increasingly self-conscious nature of his writing – that is, the awareness they express of the plays being pieces of written or created art. For instance, numerous references are made by the characters to the fact that the potential presence of the bug has turned them into

performers. Adrian asks Maya early on, “[i]s it always like a performance? Like we’re quoting ourselves?” (108), which also serves to highlight his discomfort with the situation. Comments like these are also accompanied by an explicit foregrounding of representation itself. For instance, Maya says, “[e]verything in *Vogue* magazine is true” (92), indicating a worldview in which representations have supplanted the real. This brings to mind Baudrillard and his four phases of the image. Maya’s determination to interpret *Vogue* magazine as true and real, even in this ironic manner in order to unsettle the pretentious Adrian, suggests that this is a society in which it is necessary and normal to be sceptical about what reality appears to be. Reality, for Maya, is as likely to be found in *Vogue* as it is anywhere else, such is the ability of power to distort the truth in her country.

I will first discuss the metatheatrical features, which show the play’s reflexivity, defined by Steven Connor as “that form of metatheatre in which a play reflects upon and represents its own procedures” (*Postmodernist Culture*, 145). We see this explicitly in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, as the characters refer to their situation being similar to a play, with the microphone acting as the audience – of course, an added touch of irony is that there is indeed a live audience. Otten, with regards to the early exchanges, makes the point that “[w]e as viewers, concealed like the microphones, cannot know whether it is Maya or Adrian who speaks the full truth or even why they say what they do” (171). Alice Griffin writes that “[a]s the main characters are writers, they are in a sense consciously creating their dialogue for the listening device” (170), identifying their roles as not only writers, but also actors. Sigmund says that they are “some sort of characters in a poem which [the authorities] are writing; is not my poem, is their poem” (143), removing another layer of agency from them, making them characters in a piece that has already been written. The state here has as much power over the characters as the writer does, and so these comments highlight the importance of the power dynamics within the play and society.

John Barth discussed this idea of the characters performing as characters in 1967, writing, “[w]hen the characters in a work of fiction become readers or authors of the fiction they’re in, we’re reminded of the fictitious aspect of our own existence” (“The Literature of Exhaustion”, 73) and this is equally so for the theatre. The use of metatheatrical devices underlines the fact that *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* is not a realistic, polemical piece, but one in which the questions penetrate at a deeper level, and the basis for any sort of objective morality is cast into doubt. This is why the play must not be taken simply as addressing the explicit censorship of the Soviet Union, but as also discussing the nature of control and self-censorship in America and the wider world. I have already quoted Sofer remarking that the play’s real subject is dramatic form, and we can see this when Sigmund at one point says that their situation “is like a serious play, which no one really believes but the technique is admirable. Our country is now a theatre, where no one is permitted to walk out, and everyone is obliged to applaud” (155). Once again, he uses literary language to craft a metaphor to describe their situation, which foregrounds their lack of control of their situation. This also brings to mind Craig Owens’ comment that a key feature of postmodernism is “its preoccupation with reading” (7). These quotes from Sigmund, and Adrian’s above-quoted comment that one does not know what to believe in the country, not only show that Miller is creating characters in new types of situations, wherein reality is not easy to grasp, but also that he is commenting on his play even within the play itself.

This problematisation of reality and expressed awareness of the theatricality of the play are not only aesthetic devices, as they alter the way in which moral conclusions can be drawn. I have above quoted Sofer as saying that *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* shows the effect modern technology has on morality and individual consciousness, and without a doubt Miller’s method of expression seems to have been altered by technological advances, which will be a recurring theme in this dissertation. It is not only Miller’s method that we can see to

be changed here, but his unease with technological advancement is also clear. The fact that he portrays technology as distorting, not clarifying, reality brings to mind McLuhan's observation, quoted above, that the camera (and, of course, its human user) *can* and *does* in fact lie. David Edgar, meanwhile, said that in the play "alienation is a function not of the political and social system, but of technological society itself" (qtd. Bigsby, *Company*, 167), while I have already quoted Sofer as saying that it is a metatheatrical work about how drama confronts this alienation in postmodernist society. Accepting Sofer's analysis, *The Archbishop's Ceiling* can be viewed as both Miller's response to, and acceptance of, a new form of writing – that is, a form in which reality and morality are not as clear cut as they previously had been. Furthermore, he may be embracing the idea that both reality and morality are merely discourses with no more reality to them than there is to a play or work of fiction. Instead of being based on some reality, moral or not, plays of this later period tend to deconstruct and call into question the very fabrication of discourses hinging on moral or ethical dilemmas (among them, the ones he wrote about earlier in his career).

Regarding the focus on representations, a key phrase is uttered by Maya which will serve as a good key into this topic. Late in the evening, she says wistfully of Sigmund, "[h]e creates our memories. Therefore, it is only a question of time when he will create the departure of these tanks, and they will go home. And then we shall all be ourselves, with nothing overhead but the sky, and he will turn into a monument standing in the park" (160). This can be interpreted in numerous ways, and within these we see the growing number of directions in which Miller's writing was going. On one level, it can be read as an ironic comment on Miller's own self-importance, and his lost belief that a piece of writing can change the world – this, of course, then serves as another example of how self-conscious his writing was becoming. Another way to view this comment is to see it as Miller identifying the trend in which representations came to have such cultural force that they formed the very

basis of reality. This is distinct from Miller's liberal idea that a piece of art could be so politically or culturally powerful as to cause desired change to occur, as that assumes that the writer could control the work's interpretation. The one Maya describes, which aligns with the postmodernist saturation of reality with representation, is a more subtle change, wherein reality becomes so saturated with representation - often accelerated by technology and mass media - that it becomes difficult to distinguish between them. This confusion of reality and representation also works backwards in time - hence Maya's comment that Sigmund "creates our memories" (160). It is my contention here that Miller writes this being fully aware that the shift to a society in which representation and reality have been thoroughly confused has taken place. We must bear in mind here Hans Bertens' idea that in postmodernism, representations came to be endowed with the power of material facts, because that is exactly the process Maya describes and hopes for - that such will be the force of Sigmund's representation, it will not only have material effect, but he will be afforded the material status of a monument in the park.

There is a key moment late in the play which shows the power of representation to these characters. It springs from Sigmund's decision to steal Marcus's pistol, although he does not do this out of self-defence - "I will keep it and [Marcus] will tell them that I have it. In this case they will not arrest me" (130) he says, assuming they do not want a violent confrontation. Sofer, quoted above, says that this moment is metatheatrical, as Sigmund takes the gun in order for it to be used like a prop, and so we can see this as an ironic subversion of Chekhov's pistol, a rule which states that if a gun is brought on stage in the first act, it should be used by the end of the play - the gun is introduced, but only so that it is not used. Sigmund has no intention of using the pistol to fight his way out of the situation. However, the pistol *is* used later in the play, but it has nothing to do with self-defence or even violence. Maya makes one of multiple attempts to steal the gun back from Sigmund, after he learns that his

manuscript is to be returned, and he reacts by placing the gun on the piano strings – “I have read in American detective story... that criminal has placed revolver inside piano” (167), he explains. When he crashes his hands down on the keys and it does not fire, he is disappointed, but then cocks the pistol, and replaces it. This time, the gun goes off. He exclaims, “[i]s true! My God, I am so happy... The truth is alive in our country, Marcus! Is unmistakable, no? When something is true?” (167) Sigmund rejoices because he has a brief vision of a world in which there is truth in representation, in which things make sense, and action and emotion are linked.

3.5.3: Power

I have already shown how Miller came to express his preoccupation with the concept of power in his essays of this period, but now I would like to show how this operates in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Because the play centres around the bug, which does not even need to be there to act as a symbol of monstrous power, this concern with power is present in nearly every remark made throughout the play. It is perhaps a dramatic weakness that Miller has his characters reveal this preoccupation at an early stage, but this also serves to foreground the issue, and means that the play's scope is not restricted to this room, or this country.

Speaking of his partner, Ruth, Adrian says that she's overcome her depression by taking tablets, which we assume to be anti-depressants – “they gave her a pill. It was miraculous. Completely turned her around. She's full of energy, purpose, optimism” (95). This was the only thing that worked after going “back to psychiatry [and] other therapies” (95). This suggests a growing distrust of therapy on Miller's part, who had undergone psychoanalytical treatment earlier in his life. But we also see his unease with the concept of the pill – whatever is meant by it - because even this had not gotten to the root of the problem. It has solved Ruth's external issues, but left her without psychological depth.

Adrian bemoans that “she doesn’t talk about her mind anymore, her soul; she talks about what she does” (96). He sees in this idea of treatment that no real knowledge or understanding is gained, even though the problems that are manifesting externally may be solved. He reports that Ruth “knows neither more nor less about herself now than when she was trying to die”, but what is different “is her reaction to power. Before she feared it, now she enjoys it” (96).

Sofer relates this issue to Adrian’s writing, and the broader moral quandary that forms much of the core of the play, writing, “if the self can be switched on and off like a lightbulb by chemical means, then the self cannot be held responsible for its own actions or even feelings. Adrian’s psychological brand of fiction has become pointless” (100). Ruth is someone who has welcomed power, mastered it, and thrives in the postmodernist world Adrian cannot understand, clinging as he does to what Miller viewed as being so valuable in Ibsen – “valid causation” (“Introduction to the *Collected Plays*”, 119).

Maya tells Adrian that his dilemma is obvious: “[i]t is unnecessary to write novels anymore” (96), because literature can no longer explore the complex psychological issues that now, seemingly, can be solved by medicine. As he says,

[i]t made me think of Hamlet. Here we are tracking that marvellous maze of his mind, but isn’t that slightly ludicrous when one knows that with the right pill his anxiety would dissolve? [...] Correctly medicated he could have made a deal with the king and married Ophelia. (96)

Adrian believes that what is lost is “[s]ome wisdom, some knowledge found in suffering. But knowledge is power, so that’s why it’s good – so what is wrong with gaining power without having to suffer at all?” (96) These comments from Adrian point to one of the aspects of the

play that make criticism of it fair – Miller’s characters tend to talk far too much like Arthur Miller, and these jarring polemics can become irritating. However, they also serve to build up the character of Adrian as a pompous, naïve intellectual who understands little of the world, and in this sense he acts as Miller’s self-parody, down to their echoing names.

Miller examined these themes of mental health in later works, especially *The Last Yankee*, but what he expresses here, via Adrian, is his unease with separating one’s beliefs and actions from one’s morality or psychological processes. He has Adrian express this, saying, “I’m not sure that I believe in psychology. That anything we think really determines what we’re going to do. Or even feel” (95), and not only is this the process he laments in Ruth, but it is also what we are going to see throughout this play. Each character submits to the bug, allowing it to determine their speech and actions, in the same way that Ruth submits herself to the pill she takes. Adrian’s lament here is also not just one that refers to his relationship, as it contains a larger comment on the period it was written in. Indeed, this relates to a larger postmodernist fear – that anyone can be made into anything, whether it be by a pill, the media, or any other form of coercive propaganda. The conception of a person as a whole, integrated self, that is complex and difficult to understand, is replaced by a subject of whatever is exerting the most power upon it. Psychology is no longer needed, because internal problems are deemed to have disappeared – what matters is what one does, not what one is.

Each character places themselves before the bug, almost asking for absolution from it. The bug is power not only because it can control the characters’ utterances and, eventually, it is logical to think, their thoughts. It is assumed to be in the ceiling, so the characters must look hopefully up at it, as they would previously have done at God. This should not be interpreted as Miller bemoaning the decline of religion and collapse of society into some

relativistic and atheistic moral wasteland, but more providing an excellent point of contrast – this state power has effectively achieved the omnipotence that religion claimed for itself for so long. Miller lived his adult life as an atheist, so this is a far more likely reasoning for this imagery. What Miller does use religion to represent, though, is *some* form of guidance – undoubtedly a flawed one, but at least it was a discourse that focussed on issues of morality, right and wrong. As Otten writes, “on this stage without God, moral certitude, or even a clearly defined political presence, characters all struggle to locate a moral center [sic]” (169). With the operational lies they need to tell for the benefit of the bug, Miller’s characters act out what he describes in “The Sin of Power” as reality; what is said, and what peoples’ intentions are, are all dominated by what is politically expedient. The overwhelming power, which in this case engulfs any economic or identity-based interests, of the government is now able to control how its citizens speak and think, even when there may not be a bug in the room. As Mason writes, “[w]hat they say matters less than what the authorities *declare* they say” (*Stone Tower*, 135, author’s italics) – the power to define reality, even historical fact, rests entirely with the state.

Andrew Sofer’s work on the play focuses considerably on the issue of how power operates therein. Suitably, his analysis rests on the importance of the bug, and I have already quoted him as saying that the bug turns this play into one whose core principle is power. The bug represents pure power, and this has the ability, as we have seen, to define what is right or good in the world. He writes that “[t]he presumed bug in the ceiling only magnifies the conviction that one is always talking or behaving for an audience, a conviction that is at root existential” (103), and again this highlights the importance of the bug to the dramaturgy itself – despite being a realistic piece, it contains strong existential and philosophical questions in the way assumptions about reality are cast aside or disrupted. One can link all of these disturbances to the concept of power, and how far its tentacles have spread in the world.

According to Sofer, the play can be read as a depiction of how power operates in the world, and read this way, it shows Miller's growing acceptance of a postmodernist viewpoint, in that it is not really commenting on the issues, but simply displaying them. This renders it, in Sofer's terms, "prismatic drama" – wherein everything within the play has its root in the one place or issue – namely, the bug. He compares the play to *Three Sisters* (1901) and *Waiting for Godot*, writing that these two "dramatize [sic] the response of a set of characters to unhappiness [and] boredom" (99) respectively, while *The Archbishop's Ceiling* is the response to power. This analysis in a sense forgives the critics who bemoaned the lack of action or clear-cut polemical message, as it is simply a presentation of the condition of the contemporary human in a society in which power is so all-consuming it can hardly be defined. Sofer writes of the play that it "is a political fable about how power undermines the 'I' and turns resistance into performance" (96), and as we have seen these are constant features in the play – there is no stable basis for thought or expression, and even resistance is performed, by all characters.

It is in this topic that we see the greatest distinction between the American and foreign characters. Adrian is the liberal American persisting with a naïve, traditional approach that is entirely inadequate to his time and place. He believes that speaking directly with the Minister for the Interior would help the situation, and even proposes it, but is immediately embarrassed into realising it is a silly idea. He also, at Marcus's suggestion, claims he could go on a tour of the American television studios to try and help:

I've always refused to peddle my books on television but there's at least two national network shows that would be glad to have me, and for this I'd go on. Just telling the story of this evening would be hot news from coast to coast – including Washington, D.C., where some congressmen could easily decide we shouldn't

sign any more trade bills with this country. And so on and so on.

(119)

His final sentence here suggests a certain inability to consciously perform for the bug, but it is a crucial moment as Marcus, almost in the role of stage manager, encourages him to say all this – he “gestures him to continue speaking, to amplify” (119). While this suggests that Marcus is admitting to the bug, we cannot know for certain, because his later behaviour does not allow for such dissenting remarks. We see here shades of Adrian’s self-regard – this should not be considered a comment solely brought about by the bug’s presence, because it fits with what we have known about Adrian until now – that he holds faith in an informed, rational public making decisions in the best interests of justice and liberty – a faith which by this time had of course become almost unsustainable in its simplicity. He also fails to understand things at the personal level, asking Sigmund, “[i]s it really impossible to sit down with Marcus, man to man?” (132).

These expressed beliefs and attitudes can lead us to identify Adrian as the last modernist, at least among the play’s characters. He has no conception of the complex web of personal and political machinations that lie behind every comment and action in this country, in this room, and, increasingly, in the US itself. Maya recognises this fault of his, saying, “[h]e is a stupid man, he understands nothing!” (136), after he tries to trick Marcus into believing the manuscript had been smuggled out of the country. Mason writes that Maya “mocks him, no matter how gently, because he persists in believing in the availability of clarity” (137) – and so is utterly unsuitable to this play, and indeed this period in history. Timothy Melley quotes Daniel Ellsberg, who was primarily responsible for the leaking of the *Pentagon Papers*, as saying that once he was granted access to “whole libraries of hidden information”, he saw *The New York Times* as “fantasies, basically”, and read it “just to see

what the rubes and yokels were thinking” (Ellsberg (2002), qtd. Melley, 11). Melley continues, and here he highlights the contradiction Adrian embodies within this play:

From inside the secret archive of the security state, in other words, the most serious institutions of the public sphere seemed like vehicles of fiction. And yet the inside knowledge afforded by a top secret clearance did not open a special pathway to Habermasian public reason. (11)

Due, then, to their greater understanding of the world, and acknowledgement of the power dynamics at play, we can label Maya, as well as Marcus and Sigmund, the postmodernists in the play. Living behind the Iron Curtain, they know the harsh realities of the Cold War, and are entirely aware of the terms of existence that a paranoid society has brought forth. They live within the boundaries of this impenetrable power, occasionally seeking some small way out for themselves. This distinction repeatedly appears within the play, and is one of the key sources of tension between the characters – Adrian’s gradual understanding of the complexities of the situation are brought about by observing the other three discuss things in terms he had never previously considered.

What I have attempted to show here is that *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* should be regarded as the crucial play of Miller’s late career. In it we can see the reorientation of his drama in a more postmodernist direction – both aesthetically and philosophically. While he does not entirely adopt a postmodernist aesthetic or philosophy, though, the presence of this mode of thought is very clear in this and later works. In the metatheatrical, self-reflexive aspects of the play, as well as its preoccupation with power, we see a new Miller, one that is very comfortable working with the discourses of the postmodern – as Otten says, “Miller attempts to accommodate the relativity of postmodernism, without abandoning the idea of

moral choice and responsibility” (177). There is also of course the irony and self-criticism that undermine much of the perception of him as a humourless, self-serious man. I have also attempted to sketch out how we should see Miller as working in the cultural mainstream in this and later plays, and that he had a keen intuition as to the mood of the 1970s. I will later show how this continues in proceeding works, as he goes on to address topics and styles that were common in general cultural discussions, even as his plays continued to receive scant critical attention, especially at home in the United States.

4. Investigating the Real: Miller's Postmodernist Detectives

4.1: Opening Remarks

This chapter will concern two of Miller's one-act plays from the 1980s. Both were performed as parts of double-bills that in various ways echoed the same themes and styles. The first of these was *Two-Way Mirror* (1982), which included *Elegy for a Lady* and *Some Kind of Love Story*. The second was *Danger: Memory!* (1989), which contained *I Can't Remember Anything* and *Clara*. In both cases it is the latter two plays which I will be discussing here, although the other two will be briefly mentioned when relevant.

The plays all share a general sense of ambiguity about either the material facts, or the correct moral choices, in the world depicted. In *Elegy for a Lady* this ambiguity is evident from the start, as neither characters are granted names – they are simply “Man” and “Proprietress”. Throughout, it's never clarified what exactly is going on. The Man wishes to buy a gift for a younger woman who is dying – “[b]y the end of the month or so. Apparently” (190). The conversation continues in such a cryptic fashion, and it is unclear whether this is a fantasy, or a daytime dream of the man, or whether the two know each other; in fact, no aspect of their relationship is clarified. *I Can't Remember Anything* focuses on the more literal loss of direction – it concerns two retired friends coming to the end of their lives. Leo and Leonora bicker and tease each other, but there is evidently a long history of mutual affection there. The play's mood, and indeed one of the key messages in these four plays, is expressed when Leonora snaps, “nothing is ‘happening!’ Excepting that it keeps getting worse and more brutal and more vile” (*Play: 4*, 213). This quote sums up the mixture of stasis and defeatism that run through these plays. As will be shown, *Clara* perhaps has a more

hopeful message, but the play works through a considerable degree of nostalgia and regret at how “the American Century” was ending. They are, to varying degrees, anti-realist works (*I Can't Remember Anything* being the most realistic) and create their eerie atmospheres with sound and visual effects, unbelievable character changes, and dialogue that is patently self-conscious and overlaid with irony and ulterior meanings.

There is a compelling similarity between the two remaining plays that makes for a fitting comparison: they are both detective plays; plays that feature, ostensibly, a detective attempting to find the answer to a crime or mystery. In this chapter, I propose that we can best understand these plays by situating them within the realm of the postmodernist detective text. I use this phrase delicately, and advisedly, as I do not wish to continue the discussion over what the most appropriate phrase to be used is – “anti-detective story”, “metaphysical detective story”, “deconstructive detective story”, “analytic detective story”, “meta-anti-detective story”, and “ontological detective story” (Merivale & Sweeney, 2-4) have all been previously used, and I find the discussion to be generally irrelevant to my thesis. I will go into greater detail and use such terminology in my general discussion, but I am content, as far as these plays are concerned, to use the phrase “postmodernist detective story”. Much of what will be used in order to establish this rubric will be derived from literary theory and personal elaboration, as there is very little study of this area in drama.

The postmodernist detective style is one that has been discussed at length, and there are several notable works of fiction that use the style of detective writing in a postmodernist vein, including novels and films. This is not a coincidence, as there is considerable attraction in the possibilities that are afforded by the genre to one writing in an ironic, self-conscious, and paranoid style, to use just three of the key phrases by which I have defined postmodernist writing. Barry Lewis writes that “the detective genre is another candidate for the post of the true companion of postmodernism. The pursuit of clues appeals to the postmodernist writer

because it so closely parallels the hunt for textual meaning by the reader” (126), and this seems to be reflective of how often the style came to be used and parodied in the time of postmodernism. Detective fiction, in order to “work”, to make coherent sense, requires a world in which things will occur logically, without the interference of the divine or supernatural, and must include a trail of clues throughout that enable the eventual solution to be, in retrospect, obvious. Stefano Tani links the growth of the detective story to a growing need for rationalism, even in the works of Edgar Allan Poe. He writes, of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, that “Poe does not present good defeating evil but rationality exorcising the irrational, the ‘ape in the closet’” (7). So, while Poe’s Chevalier Auguste Dupin is an extraordinary man, of almost unreal intellect and calm, he is also, crucially, a rational man working in a rational world. This is where the distinction with postmodernism comes. Tani writes:

Two of the most unquestionable features of postmodernism are that it is de-structuring and asymbolic, so that it finds in the highly structured and symbolic detective novel the traditional genre that most needs its intervention and that potentially gives the plainest evidence of the change this intervention would initiate. Thus the ‘something else’ into which the detective novel is turned by postmodernism provides a perfect way to see postmodernism finally at work rather than as a catchy and elusive theoretical definition. (xi-xiii)

It appears, then, that the detective text was “postmodernised” so, because it had to be redefined in an age shorn of many prior certainties. As Tani again writes, “[i]n the fifties during the Korean War and the sixties during the Vietnam war [sic] and the beginning of the economic recession, the United States experienced an identity crisis of sorts; it is to that time

that I trace the first American examples of the anti-detective novel” (xv), so we see that the postmodernist detective sprang from many of the same roots as postmodernism itself.

4.2: The Postmodernist Detective

Michael Holquist uses the term “metaphysical detective story” to define what he saw in 1971 as the pattern of post-war writing. He hits upon several key themes of postmodernity in “Whodunit and Other Questions”. His writing on kitsch society - “[t]ourists travel from the Istanbul Hilton to the Athens Hilton, the only differences being in the quality of the plumbing and ‘motif’ of the hotel restaurant” (137) - echoes McLuhan, and foreshadows Jameson’s critique of similar societal forces. Holquist, despite not calling it paranoia, notes the paranoid fear that contemporary literature reflected. He writes, “it is clear that much recent spy fiction is aimed at allaying fears aroused by two human activities which seem to have got out of human control, science on the one hand and diplomacy on the other” (138). It would seem best, in order for this comment to retain its use, to widen the meaning of “diplomacy” to perhaps include all politicking, or maybe even to attach a cynical edge to the comment itself – in the age of the Vietnam War, it seems a rather strange thing to bemoan diplomacy in and of itself. However, his analysis is extremely useful in that it situates the postmodernist detective story in a particular historical context.

Holquist notes that subversion of old ideas is crucial to postmodernist writing, but also that, as has been discussed above, the Second World War is the point after which one can legitimately begin to discuss the postmodernist:

When after World War II [Alain] Robbe-Grillet was searching for ways to overcome the literary tradition of the novel he so naturally turned to the detective story as a mode. What myth was

to experimental fiction before World War II, detective fiction is to
avant garde prose after World War II. (148)

The postmodernist detective story, as we shall see below, is distinguished by its own awareness that the genre is a cliché, and therefore goes out to build up and then subvert expectations. We see this in each of the works I'll be discussing, as, for instance, William of Baskerville in *The Name of the Rose* not only resembles Dupin, but, even more obviously, instantly evokes the best-known Sherlock Holmes story, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Miller, on the other hand, plays on the cliché of the hard-drinking Irish cop struggling with his sexual urges, and also the bitter, violent cop who refuses to accept bribes. Holquist sees this as crucial to the genre, writing, “[p]ost-Modernism exploits detective stories by expanding and changing certain possibilities in them, just as Modernism had *modified* the potentialities of the myth” (149, author’s italics), which affords the genre considerable legitimacy, relatively early on in discussion of the topic.

William V. Spanos writes on this narrative subversion in “The Detective and the Boundary”, saying that it is “no accident that the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination is the anti-detective story, the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to ‘detect’ [...] in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime” (154). Postmodernist detective writing, therefore, is writing in which there is some form of investigation, in the loosest sense of the term, taking place, but contains multiple disruptive features – there may be no detective, no crime, and there will almost certainly be an unsatisfactory ending.

Bennett Kravitz focuses on this lack, or absence, of a solution in what he terms “anti-detective writing”. For Kravitz, this refusal to provide a just solution, which is of course far more subversive in detective stories than most other types, is caused by the very fact of

postmodernist society itself. He discusses numerous films, including *Chinatown* and David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999), and concludes that the detectives are unable "to bring the case to a satisfactory conclusion, because he or she is unwilling to step out of the postmodern system in which he or she operates, and cannot conclude with certainty whodunit, bring the criminal to justice, or even determine if a crime has been committed" (47-48). This analysis, from 2013, so over 40 years after the two previous articles discussed, is significant because it takes for granted that the characters in these texts inhabit a postmodernist world. The postmodernist world is now assumed to be one in which solutions are non-existent, or at best unsatisfactory. Kravitz writes of "the impossibility of finding out 'whodunit'" (45), but he also acknowledges that in a postmodernist world, there may not even be a crime. This, in a sense, is a more dread-inducing scenario for the detective. Without a crime, not only has he or she been wasting their time and skills, but then the detective has no purpose in life. We see this in the first novel of *The New York Trilogy*, "City of Glass", where the protagonist, who was only ever an amateur detective, allows his life to disintegrate, without really knowing why, for the sake of staying on a case. This is despite the fact that what he is doing is worthless, and certainly nothing resembling detection.

Kravitz hits on the essential nature of the postmodernist detective story in his writing. Binary systems, the kinds which detection is supposed to establish (true v. false, innocent v. guilty), are no longer as useful to anyone, especially the detective, in postmodernity. He writes that the "genre is less interested in the detective's psychological drives, but rather concerned with the unfathomable schemes of determinative social and political systems. Quite possibly, the anti-detective detects detective writing more than anything else" (47). The detective used to be Chevalier Dupin, discerning with phenomenal information and skill that the mysterious Parisian murderer was a stray orangutan, and now, as in the case of *Some Kind of Love Story*, he is depending for clues on (or, in some senses, is in fact) a schizophrenic

prostitute. This distinction suggests that the skills so useful for Dupin – research, reasoning, and the acquisition of knowledge – are no longer useful in the contemporary world, where Miller’s detective is regularly dragged out of bed late at night in the hope of extracting some meagre clues from a woman with a history of mental illness and addiction, or muddles through a meandering conversation in his dead daughter’s apartment. This exemplifies the contrast in determinative schemas that Kravitz observes these writers as commenting upon.

Before discussing specific texts, and observing how the theories so far discussed manifest themselves in the plays in question, I will dwell for a moment on Stefano Tani’s analysis. Tani calls post-war literary detective novels “anti-detective novels”, and assesses them, like Holquist, as being a reaction against previous detective narratives: “[their] characteristics, although certainly more related to the Poesque tradition than to the hard-boiled one, deeply subverted the former and show a great difference to the latter” (35). The hard-boiled detective is arguably the most stereotypical view of the detective, popularised by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler around the middle of the twentieth century, and left a considerable cultural image, played upon by many, including Auster in “Ghosts” and Jack Nicholson in *Chinatown*. Tani identifies three core elements of the traditional detective story: “the detective, the process of detection, and the solution” (41). All of these, in one form or another, will be disrupted in Miller’s plays.

Tani’s view on postmodernism is not especially ground-breaking, but it does help to situate his thesis, and therefore should be addressed. He writes that the “main difference that separates postmodernism from modernism, then, is postmodernism’s lack of a center [sic], its refusal to posit a unifying system. Postmodernism’s new awareness is the absence of a finality, a solution” (41). This repeats much of what has been said, but the distinction is a crucial one, especially when the effort required to shift Miller from traditional paradigms is so great. It is no coincidence, I contend, that given all of this work on the absence of a

solution, Miller happens to write two detective plays without providing a solution. Tani notices the tricks that postmodernist detective writers use in order to create their mystifying worlds, and crucial to them is a knowledge of the genre and its conventions. He writes, “[c]onventions hence become deceitful clues planted by the writer to rouse the attention of the reader before disappointing his expectations; conventions are paradoxically functional in the disintegration of the genre” (43). The use, then, of typical detective markers, most obviously in *Love Story* and *The New York Trilogy*, is merely a distraction for the reader from other events and occurrences. Tani sees these markers as being so universal, so powerful as clichés across multiple media (see, for example, Bill Watterson’s extremely popular *Calvin & Hobbes* cartoons from the 1980s and 1990s, which occasionally featured the protagonist fantasising himself to be hard-boiled Private Investigator, Tracer Bullet) as to render literary detective fiction something of an oxymoron. He says that a “contemporary detective novel is almost necessarily an anti-detective novel, especially if its author is self-consciously aware of his place in the postmodern trend” (74), and this is one of the ways in which I locate Miller’s works in the postmodern, as they are evidently consciously constructed to establish certain expectations that are common around detective stories. Tani observes the shifting sense of reality in postmodernity, writing, “the confrontation is no longer between a detective and a murderer, but between the detective and reality, or between the detective’s mind and his sense of identity” (76), and this is a fairly good summation of the detecting process in Miller’s works, as they are to a much greater extent psychological, rather than investigatory, pieces.

The Crying of Lot 49 has been briefly discussed above, but now I should like to concentrate on it as a postmodernist detective text. Its protagonist, Oedipa Maas, is in many ways the prototypical postmodernist detective. She is a housewife, and so an amateur, and is thrust into the task of detection. She is even unclear as to what it is that she is detecting, or

why. Chasing leads that begin in the stamp collection of her now-dead former lover, Pierce Inverarity, she sets herself the task of discovering the nature of the “Trystero” (or “Tristero”), an underground postal service, whose signals she begins to see everywhere. Oedipa soon understands that her search will not be a fruitful one, as Pynchon writes:

Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, imitations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (66)

I have already mentioned the continuous sense of paranoia that pervades the novel, and that is displayed here, as, without being halfway through the novel, Oedipa begins to feel that her task is pointless, as someone or something will always be there to withhold the final truth from her. This is something that Tani refers to as deconstructive detective writing, saying that “the investigation is experienced by the detective as an existential quest” (43), as opposed to merely being a hunt for the perpetrator of crimes that, while potentially gruesome, do not question underlying systems of thought, upon which we depend for truth, morality, etc.

Oedipa attends a play, *The Courier’s Tragedy*, wherein a “fierce black performing ape” (46) attacks a character and, with the help of others, kills him. This is almost certainly a reference to “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, and thus suggests that Pynchon was conscious of his novel’s place in some form of detective tradition. David Cowart writes that

[m]uch of his originality – and what makes him postmodern – reveals itself in his ironic appropriation of tropes endemic to

formula fiction. His pastiche style embraces such ‘low’ material as much as it does high art. Thus he makes pastiche something wonderfully original, something his followers and imitators would in many ways make the formal and stylistic touchstone of postmodern narrative art. (“Pynchon in Literary History”, 85)

The novel, then, is aware of its heritage, but distinctly postmodernist in how it twists that heritage. McHale writes that “[m]odernist epistemological quests – quests for knowledge and certainty – still structure *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*; however, these quests remain unsolved, and the questing detective is left in limbo” (“Pynchon’s Postmodernism”, 104).

Oedipa is also a reader in the sense that she attempts to make sense of the mysteries she finds, which echoes the reader’s own attempt to understand the text. Cowart writes, “[a] Pynchon novel commonly stages for us the recognition of our own hunger to know and understand. One learns, first, that the desire to know can be warped by the desire that the known take a certain congenial or at least comprehensible form” (89). Oedipa is like the reader in the sense that she is determined to make sense of what she is experiencing. For, if there is no sense to what happens in the novel, it has been pointless to read, and for Oedipa, if there is no case then she has just wasted a few weeks in her life. Tani writes, “perhaps she cannot help seeing everything in terms of Tristero’s clues, even when the clues are not there because, once the chain of detection has started, she cannot abandon the quest for harmony and coherence” (92), and this suggests that Oedipa is not suited to this postmodernist world.

We also find this determination to focus on irrelevant material in Miller’s plays, with several topics of conversation leading to dead ends, despite appearing potentially relevant. There is also a similarity here with regards to how the revelation of clues builds the mystery. Again, Tani writes, “suspense is obtained not by aborted thriller-like episodes, but rather by

an overrichness of clues leading nowhere and by an interplay between the novel and the Jacobean revenge play in the novel” (96), and this is also done in *Love Story*, as the detective is overloaded with information surrounding the case, yet still cannot crack it. Madeleine Sorapore writes that Oedipa performs the job of detective admirably, that she

doggedly pursues leads, constructs plots, analyses seemingly insignificant clues [...] but is unable to solve the mystery [...]

This novel, like most anti-detective fiction, calls into question not the abilities or efforts of the individual detective, but rather the methodology of detection itself, a methodology that valorizes [sic] the powers of reason in the face of mystery, that validates the hermeneutic enterprise, and most importantly, that allows for an authoritative position outside the events themselves from which the omniscient knowledge is attainable: in short, the position and knowledge of the author, toward which detective and reader strive. (72)

This represents the transition from a modernist to a postmodernist conception of the world. Oedipa employs modernist techniques to solve an unsolvable mystery, and so is stranded in Pynchon’s postmodernist world. Similar experiences are had throughout the texts in discussion here, but it is worth noting that in Miller’s works, if we do not make the assumption that the detectives are the ones with the appropriate badge or licence, the detective begins to develop postmodernist methods of detection and comes to a form of resolution that confounds other detectives.

The postmodernist traits of *The Name of the Rose* are too numerous to mention in this brief space, but they include a preoccupation with books and reading, a focus on the image of

the labyrinth, a reversion to past narratives (it is one of Hutcheon's examples of "historiographic metafiction"), and a keen sense of both intertextuality and its heritage. There is not only the title of William of Baskerville, but the villain, the blind monk Jorge of Burgos, is a nod to Jorge Luis Borges, one of Eco's main influences, who also uses the labyrinth image in "The Library of Babel" (1941), and the postmodernist detective motif in "Death and the Compass" (1944). The novel is presented as a found manuscript that had been written in various ways and translated throughout the centuries from the occurrences described within it to its publication in the 1980s. This hall of mirrors of authors and translations is not only exacerbated by the novel's translation into English (by William Weaver), but is reminiscent of Borges, and Oedipa's search for the "correct" edition of *The Courier's Tragedy*. There is also a similar method of narration in Auster's work.

The story revolves around a young monk, Adso, shadowing William while he is on a diplomatic trip to an abbey. This is disrupted by a series of grisly murders which William is charged with solving. He displays his considerable acumen in the opening pages, as he and Adso approach the abbey, to be met by a group of monks and servants. He not only instantly comprehends that they are seeking the abbot's missing horse, but even the name of the horse, Brunellus. He explains how he discerned these facts, saying to Adso, "I have been teaching you to recognize [sic] the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book" (23). This idea of the world as a book, as something comprehensible and rational, is repeated throughout, and the novel itself focuses on a search for a book that kills all who read far enough into it. The hunt for this book is treated as the hunt for the killer, but, as Joel Black writes, this is a faulty assumption: "Eco's detectives (here and in *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988)) fail in the end to recover the prize texts that are the object of their respective searches [...] The detectives' failures to retrieve these prize texts are a direct result of their misreading the key texts that are their principle – indeed, their only – leads" (87).

William's detecting skills only take him so far, and it is revealed that the suppositions he had been working from, that murders were being carried out according to the Book of the Apocalypse, were in fact incorrect. William is a good example of what Black refers to when he writes that "[i]n postmodernist works of detective fiction in which the detective and the criminal simulate one another, it's typically the hyperanalytic detective, not the criminal, who proves to be too smart for his own good" (90). It is this tendency that undermines William's search in the end; as he says to Jorge, "I conceived a false pattern to interpret the moves of the guilty man, and that guilty man fell in with it. And it was that same false pattern that put me on your trail" (470). This points to the bizarre contradiction in the detective quest. William follows the wrong leads, working from incorrect presumptions, and yet finds the villain. All this is too late, however, and the abbey catches fire and is destroyed. William eventually comes to the realisation that his belief in an overarching plot, or metanarrative, was misguided: "I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe" (492). William is a different kind of detective to Oedipa, in that he has considerable skill and knowledge, and does in fact uncover the source of the mysterious deaths. However, this is to no avail, and he realises that it was futile to seek order in the world. As Jeanne C. Ewert notes, "[t]he reader of metaphysical detection must pattern herself after William rather than Adso" (188), because he now understands the arbitrary nature of the universe. As she writes, "Eco's novel [...] illustrates a universe destined to frustrate" (187).

The Name of the Rose is defined by Tani as "innovative anti-detective fiction" because William "arrives at solutions without justice" (76), and this is how it fits into the form of postmodernist detective writing. There are also repeated occasions whereby characters express postmodernist sentiments. Adso, for instance, says that "I had always believed logic was a universal weapon, and now I realised how its validity depended on the

way it was employed” (262), and this fluidity of knowledge and fact is also highlighted during a debate between two rival orders of monks over whether Christ embraced poverty or not. Knowledge and logic are treated as discourses, then, to be asserted or contradicted based almost entirely on one’s needs at that moment. This shows a postmodernist awareness on Eco’s part, which contrasts with the nature of the job of the detective – to try and find the objective truth of the case at hand.

The New York Trilogy is probably the most self-conscious of these texts, and knowingly deploys many postmodernist features throughout. Auster’s novel is comprised of “City of Glass”, “Ghosts”, and “The Locked Room”, and each one, in some way, resembles detective fiction. However, the most important fact is that they subvert detective writing as soon as they assert it. For instance, none of the stories feature a detective carrying out an investigation – in “City of Glass”, the narrator simply follows around a man who is assumed to be dangerous; in “Ghosts”, a private investigator watches a man do nothing until he begins to break down; and in “The Locked Room”, the narrator hunts for his old friend Fanshawe, but gives up the chase, only to be contacted by Fanshawe himself. Mark Brown writes that in “‘City of Glass’, Stillman Sr.’s intentions remain ambiguous until the end. ‘Ghosts’ is all investigation and no crime, while in ‘The Locked Room’ the Narrator seeks a missing person who does not want to be found” (58). These are all very apt and useful summaries, which highlight crucial aspects of the stories that Miller’s plays will also contain.

Sorapure compares “City of Glass” with *Lot 49*, writing, “Quinn’s dilemma recalls that of Oedipa [...]; either connections are correspondences are purely accidental, or they are evidence of a massive, extravagant plot” (80). These characteristics, then, evidently place the text in the postmodernist detective story realm. With regards to “Ghosts”, Jahshan writes, “Auster, through Blue, then frankly jumps into the heart of the problem; if one is to forsake the ‘old procedures’, trusty tools which have served the interpretive community for centuries,

what is to replace them?” (394) As we saw with the two previous texts, the reader then mirrors the activity of the detective, trying to make sense of the novel, or case. But the issue Auster highlights is the lack of validity of old methods of detecting, or even reading. “Ghosts”, in particular, is a meditation on the difficulty of the postmodernist world for the modernist sensibility.

4.3: Miler’s Anti-Detective Plays: Reality, Justice, and Morality in the Postmodernist World

I have provided the discussion of these three texts in order to show how theories of the postmodern came to impact on narrative in this time period. We have seen that ambiguity, paranoia, the importance of reading, and the disruption of older methods of interpretation are key factors in postmodernist writing, and I will show that Miller uses each of these techniques in the two plays under consideration. I will now move my discussion onto Miller’s postmodernist detective plays, with the work of Charles A. Hallett providing a crucial bridge between the two. Hallett’s 1978 essay “The Retrospective Technique and Its Implications for Tragedy” draws parallels between the detective story and the retrospective plot. He writes that “[i]n the retrospective technique, there is no single scene of exposition; rather, the exposition is woven through the entire fabric of the play” (24), and that this inherently leads to the truth being findable: “The omnipresent implication of the retrospective plot, no matter what the ostensible theme of the individual play, is the unspoken assumption that *the past holds the answer*” (26, author’s italics). This holds true for plays such as *A Doll’s House* (1879) or *All My Sons*, or even *Salesman*, but is not so apt a method for deciphering plays in the postmodernist world. Hallett asserts that “the archetype of the retrospective plot is the detective story” (27), and although his writing suggests an awareness of postmodernism, he makes little account for postmodernist detective writing. He writes that Zola’s “Naturalism in

the Theatre” (1881) posited that “[d]rama was to dissect life by means of investigation and analysis [...] in the drama as in the detective story, such an approach to the world could only be fruitful if the world created in the drama was a place which would reveal its essence when subjected to scientific scrutiny” (29). In a world without the strict rules encouraged by Zola, the methods of engagement and deciphering, as we have seen, are changed, and alternative modes of detecting and reading are required. These are provided by the postmodernist detective story.

4.3.1: Some Kind of Love Story

Some Kind of Love Story was Miller’s first detective play to be produced, and from various aspects of it, we can see not only his comfort with the genre, but also a marked change in his writing style. *Love Story* was, at this point, the play that dealt most explicitly with themes of crime, sex, and violence. I quote Welland, above, as saying that the language, sensationalism, and raw emotion make it distinct in Miller’s oeuvre, and indeed the familial setting, middle-class living rooms and tortured intellectuals have been cast aside, and replaced by a private investigator trying to extract clues from a prostitute in a filthy bedroom.

That Miller is writing in a particular genre is evident from the beginning, as Tom is clearly intended to evoke the classic hard-boiled detective, with his “narrow brimmed hat” (211), raincoat, and coarse language – “a man who takes his fists to his wife ought to be strung up by his testicles one at a time” (212), he tells Angela in relation to her abusive husband. Further details are revealed that develop this image – he has struggled with addictions to cigarettes and alcohol, been sexually involved with Angela, and is an Irish Catholic and former cop. This instantly recognisable figure establishes certain presumptions on the part of the audience. As with the naming of William of Baskerville, we are immediately reminded of the great tradition of detective narratives, but, as we have seen in

Eco's novel, these are subverted. Miller's ironic use of this trope is a means to build expectations in order to then not fulfil them. I will deal with that in due course, but first will sketch out the direction in which my argument will go.

Several critics have commented on the fact that *Love Story* is presented as a genre piece, only to then reveal otherwise. However, not only do they generally fail to examine it within the realm of the postmodernist detective narrative, they generally tend to stop short of discussing the play in relation to postmodernism itself. I have already quoted Bigsby as saying that it is not, in fact, genre fiction, but a debate about the nature of reality, and it is striking that Bigsby could, correctly, make such a comment, and then fail, or refuse, to situate the play within postmodernist detective writing. Sengupta, meanwhile, writes, "[a]s a 'detective' story, the play is an ironic commentary on rational inquiry in a world devoid of any criteria for rationality" ("The Late Plays of Arthur Miller", 113), which goes somewhat further than Bigsby, but still not as far as I wish to take the point here. I emphasise this to make it clear how conscious Miller's use of genre devices was, and to show how important it is to my thesis.

By employing the stereotypes he does, Miller's writing further develops its postmodernist edge to present a world in which reality, morality, and justice had been problematised to the degree that they were no longer even the topics of detective narratives, which should of course always be directed towards finding a solution to the crime, and a conclusion to the story. My contention with regards to *Love Story* is that it disrupts the detective narrative in several ways, the most important of which is the fact that the detective is not the detective – I will show that Angela should be regarded as the detective, as she is the one who has sourced the information necessary to crack the case, while Tom, relying on traditional methods of detection, has not. Angela, despite her significant personal problems,

can achieve something in this postmodernist world because she is not bound by rational methods of detection or investigation.

Beyond this construction of the characters, Miller does much to create the postmodernist ambiguity at the core of the play. Throughout, the true nature of the case, the characters, and their motivations remain unclear, and one begins to doubt everything that is presented onstage. Miller also uses multiple metatheatrical devices, as the characters not only begin to perform, in a sense, for each other, but also comment on the nature of the play, and possibly even drama, itself. As Irving Wardle said, it “is a play about finding out whether there is a play or not” (qtd. Bigsby, *Company*, 191). Finally, the conclusion is entirely unsatisfactory, and the case is no nearer to being resolved than it was at the beginning. This naturally leads one to realise that the case itself is not the concern of the play, and this lack of closure is of course another classic hallmark of postmodernist writing.

I will begin my discussion of *Love Story* by examining the relationship between Tom and Angela. As they are the only two characters in the play, everything focuses on them and their interactions. Their relationship is evidently not only a professional one, despite various efforts from Tom to keep the topic of conversation to the case. This case concerns the wrongful imprisonment of Felix Epstein, who Tom is determined to free. He believes that Angela can give him the information he needs to crack the case, free Felix, and restore his reputation. Tom has a suspicion that Angela knows more than she implies, but is reluctant to tell him, partly out of fear, and partly due to her need for his attention: “I see now that whatever you know you’re never going to tell me, because you don’t want me off and away” (249), he tells her near the end, although this co-dependent relationship undoubtedly works both ways. After all, he had just suggested to her that “maybe we could still walk off into that sunset?” (249) Aside from showcasing Tom’s contradictions, this is another good example of Miller’s willingness to engage with the tropes and clichés of detective writing, in order to

then subvert them. Bigsby flags this contradiction, when he says, “both perhaps have a vested interest in the game which they play, a game in which truth is pursued on the understanding that it must not be discovered” (“Afterword to *Two-Way Mirror*”, 254). This paradox is a good indicator, as Bigsby says, that the resolution of the mystery is not the intention of the play, or even of its characters. This point can in a sense be taken even further, as we see that the relationship between Tom and Angela is based on not doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing – namely, freeing Felix. The pair argue and go around in circles, yet in nearly five years have not been able to arrive at any conclusions. The façade of their professional relationship, then, can be said to be acting in the same way as Baudrillard’s fourth phase of image, in which the “image bears no relation whatsoever to reality” (*Simulations*, 12). Their professional relationship exists not only as a cover for their personal one, but more as a cover for the fact that neither of them have any intention of completing the task at hand. It is used to mask their refusal to work on the case, as opposed to the sexual activity in which they occasionally engage.

This breakdown of the professional relationship between the two is mirrored throughout the play, as, repeatedly, social order and norms upon which justice relies are broken down. We see this not only in the fact that Felix has been wrongly imprisoned, but also, as it will emerge, that Angela had had an affair with Charley Callaghan, the chief prosecutor. That, like Tom, he is of an Irish background is significant, as it highlights the similarities between the two, and suggests how easily one could have gone down the other’s path, had things been different. Tom, after all, is no paragon of virtue – he has had affairs, and is currently working on preventing a gay man getting a promotion – “you know – you can’t have a homosexual vice president of a ball bearing company” (233-234), he says. This also carries an echo of the idea of the double, crucial to detective fiction from Poe’s “William Wilson” to *The New York Trilogy*. The protagonist is often confronted by the one who

resembles them the most, in an unsettling irony. In Poe's story, the protagonist's schemes are consistently ruined by someone of the same name, age, and physical features as him, and in *The New York Trilogy*, in every case the protagonist's loneliness and isolation is underlined by his inability to connect with the person most similar to him. For Miller, as for Auster, this suggests alienation and self-doubt – if the protagonist, seen by himself as the good guy, is so similar to the story's incarnation of evil, then it suggests an examination of their virtue is required.

There is also another note of the breakdown of society, as Angela reveals she had been sleeping with Abe Kaplan, who, in her words, “ran the drugs in this town” (238). Tom is shocked at this – “Abe was one of the pillars, right? With the synagogue and the Boys Town and you name it” (239) - as he is at all of Angela's revelations, which suggests that Tom is not the most competent detective, and also that he had been unaware that society is so corrupt. He appears to display cynicism early on, saying, “[t]here's such a thing as the administration of justice, honey – which in this country, is laying on the floor like a busted dozen eggs, it is a fucking farce” (228), but reverts to a more naïve vision of American justice, declaring, “this is still the United States of America, you don't have to lay down in front of those punks” (244). Lew Livesay writes of Tom's realisation of society's breakdown, “Miller's version of a *noir* detective shows us someone who thought he was on the outside of corruption, but ultimately came to realize [sic] that everyone is implicated in this power struggle. No one is innocent, and no one is outside history” (“Dream Tissue”, 46). This is a development of the attitudes Miller displayed in *After the Fall*, and it follows that if no-one is innocent, then no-one is capable of being truly heroic. We have already seen that he referred to the late-1970s as an unheroic time, and he has continued in that vein here. Innocence and heroism are concepts based on justice and morality, and as they have been removed from the postmodernist world, *Love Story* shows the difficulty of administering the law without them.

Tom's view is that of someone who, as Bigsby implies the detective must, believes in the redemptive power of the justice system. Without this justice, there is no point in the traditional detective, and this is what Tom represents. However, the postmodernist world of the late 20th century is not a place that will reward Tom's traditional attitudes and habits, and so another form of detection is required. That is why Angela is the true detective in this play, as she is the one who detects, who discovers information and could, probably, solve the case and clear Felix's name. Crucially, she does not do it using traditional modes of operating. During one of her schizophrenic episodes, in the character of Leontine, Tom calls his psychiatrist friend, and asks, "could a person have delusions, but like inside the delusions is the facts? [...] maybe sometimes you've got to go to crazy people for the facts, though... Maybe the facts are what's making them crazy" (221-222). This, indeed, is what Tom must do – to solve the case, he must find some way to make Angela trust him when he says he'll be able to keep her safe from both criminal and police violence. However, he is not capable of working in this new scenario in which facts and evidence are not all that is required. In this way, he is reminiscent of Auster's Blue, from the story "Ghosts". Blue, having been tasked with simply watching a man in an apartment and awaiting further instructions, begins to wonder whether he needs to alter his style of detection. "His method is to stick to the facts," the narrator says as Blue begins to write his first report, "described events as though each word tallied exactly with the thing described, and to question the matter no further" (148). Blue almost realises the futility of his case, but still cannot withdraw from it – "it suddenly occurs to Blue that he can no longer rely on the old procedures. Clues, legwork, investigative routine – none of this is going to matter anymore. But then, when he tries to imagine what will replace these things, he gets nowhere" (149). Blue, then, stands midway between Tom and Angela, able to see that older methods are no longer useful, but unable to figure out what will take their place. This is representative of postmodernism supplanting modernism, as the

latter relied heavily on institutions, charters, groups, etc, and the latter on more freeform methods of expression.

Returning to Angela, we get clear evidence that she is able to supply Tom with the details he needs. He tells the psychiatrist, “she was the first one who told me about Carl Linstrom; - yes, the man who was seen covered in blood running away from the Kaplan house [...] She knows too many facts for just a crazy, fantasizing [sic] whore...!” (233). This is important because it is definite evidence that Angela can back up her stories. She claims to have letters from Callaghan that would implicate numerous high-ranking officials, and policemen, in Felix’s framing and wider drug-running. Although these letters are mentioned, they are never seen by the characters, and so serve to heighten the tension and expand the scope of the case, but not to bring about any closure. It is therefore hard to resist the idea of Miller employing this device as an ironic nod to Ibsen and the lengthy tradition of expository correspondences - instead of the letters appearing onstage and clarifying the matter at hand, they do the exact opposite; nobody sees them, and they only make the issues more complex.

Angela is not only able to direct him towards solutions, but also point out Tom’s flaws – “[a]fter five years you don’t know the first thing about this case” (231), she tells him, and, as we find out that, as she had maintained, in the face of Tom’s disbelief, there was in fact a police car outside her house, we begin to see Angela as a more reliable witness.

Schlueter foregrounds the suspect nature of Angela, but also her ability to crack the case:

Tom’s key witness carries little credibility, only a biased ability to interpret, and more reason to lie than to reveal. Yet after five years of silence she provides Tom with the clues he needs to prove his cause. If reality is suspect in *Elegy for a Lady*, it is

equally so here, where access to the truth depends on a schizophrenic. (“Miller in the eighties”, 164)

Angela is also the one who can see the political reality of the contemporary world, that Tom is only now appearing to grasp. He equivocates, and says, “I think that somewhere way upstream the corruption is poisoning the water and making us all a little crazy” (247), a possible nod to the storyline of *An Enemy of the People* (1882), which Miller adapted from Ibsen in 1950. This suggests that no-one is sane any more, and also that political and legal corruption are not, in fact, the results of decisions taken by people with vast amounts of power, but due to some more abstracted cause. Angela, on the other hand, understands the nature of justice in the world, exclaiming, “what about your delusions? All of a sudden *I’m in the United States of America?* And *I’ve got delusions?* This town is in the United States? This police force...?” (245) With “the United States” meaning a place where justice and freedom are secured by fair governance, Angela is right to be so dismissive of Tom’s wide-eyed claim that she “doesn’t have to lie down in front of these punks” (244), meaning the police officers who intimidate her into not revealing the truth of the case. There is also an irony in Tom’s statement here, because of course, as a prostitute, Angela *does* literally have to lie down in front of these people.

Abbotson writes of Angela that her “multiple-personality disorder is less a medical condition than a symbol of the modern condition by which it is hard for us to maintain a sense of balance among divided loyalties and identities” (*Critical Companion*, 319), and there is a sense in which this is correct. Angela, indeed, is torn between wanting to do the right thing and not wanting to see any harm come to Callaghan. However, it must be remembered that Angela is the one who can see reality for what it is, in the very limited sense of the case. Without Angela, Tom would have no way to stay on this case. Abbotson, quoted above, has observed that Angela, due to her wider perspective, sees and knows more than Tom – but she

does not have the mental health to appropriately martial her information. Tom, on the other hand, is too obsessed with some tangible, elusive reality. Angela has the information to crack the case, and in this sense operates as the play's detective, but we see in Abbotson's quote the problems inherent in her situation – her ability to avail of perspectives outside of the rigid ones that Tom inhabits allows her to access truth in this postmodernist world, but simultaneously threatens her very survival. This is a good example of the contradictions Hutcheon saw as being so crucial to postmodernism. In fact, Tom's entire method is another of these contradictions – he cannot crack the case because, as Abbotson writes, he “he is striving too much to grasp, completely and solely, the real” (*Critical Companion*, 319). This is an ironic enough paradox, but it acquires more importance when we consider this to be a postmodernist detective work - finding the real is of course the goal of the detective, and Tom is no different, but the concept is massively disrupted throughout this play, so his task is almost impossible.

Bigsby refers to the play as “a metaphysical work of great subtlety” (“Afterword to *Two-Way Mirror*”, 255), and while that is probably exaggerated language, it is a good cue into the discussion of the play's fragmented sense of reality. We have already seen, both in theoretical and practical terms, how in the postmodernist period questions surrounding reality, and how it is ascertained, became prevalent. We also saw how this is especially relevant to the detective genre, and how Bigsby himself highlighted that the rational process of detection no longer works in this complex reality Miller presents. This final point will also be relevant also with regards to *Clara*, and points to a strong postmodernist vein – Bigsby acknowledges that Miller is asking on what basis one asserts a given discourse as fact.

The most important device Miller uses to express the distorted reality of this play is Angela's schizophrenia. Throughout, she turns into numerous “characters” of differing personalities – Emily, a frightened eight-year-old who has suffered sexual abuse; Leontine, a

prostitute in a brothel; and Renata, an upper-class woman. Schlueter writes of these changes that although “Tom recognises each of her masks, he is never sure when he is seeing the naked self, never certain to trust what Angela says” (“Miller in the eighties”, 164), and it is of course the case that if Tom is unsure whether to trust Angela or not, then we should be too. The very reality not only of Angela’s personality, then, but also her testimony, is instantly questioned. While some closure is attained when Tom discovers that her house is in fact being monitored by the police, so much else remains questionable. This is seen in the play’s first moments, when Tom enters the room, and comments that the last time he was with Angela, he “was practically wiped off the scoreboard” (214). She in turn is “genuinely surprised”, and then vaguely “recalls a probability”, telling him “you were probably pressuring me, that’s all; I will not submit to pressure” (214). Given that Angela cannot recall something that we assume to have happened only recently, it is then fair to doubt her as a witness in this case.

Angela’s changes in personality tend to occur when she is at a moment of stress or pressure. She mentions being aware of the sensation they cause, telling Tom, “I’m trying to tune myself! They’re yelling tonight!” (218) Despite the evident intensity of Angela’s disturbance, we can see that Tom is slightly sceptical of it. He tells her, “[w]hat’s eatin’ you alive is not split personality, kid, it’s conscience” (218), and while there may be some truth to this claim, as we later learn that Angela could have freed Felix at any point, it also shows why the relationship between Tom and Angela cannot be a productive one. Tom operates on a different plane to Angela, one of morality, which is felt to be outdated, because of the difficulty in even ascertaining what occurred, let alone why, or who is to be held responsible. Angela, operating via a more wayward system, is more likely to stumble across the necessary information than he is. Tom says this in response to Angela expressing her reluctance to see a

psychiatrist, because she knows “what they’ll tell me – I’m a split personality. So what else is new?” (217)

I have already shown that this split personality is both Angela’s strength and weakness, and this is crucial to Miller’s character construction in this period of his career – Sofer writes of “the recurrent image of the split self [representing] an unintegrated identity that refuses to cohere into a morally accountable whole” (98), and this is what we see in Angela, amongst others. Tom, for his part, attempts to engage with Angela on her level, but while he gets close, he generally fails. Speaking to his friend on the phone, he says, “I think I’m *being* objective; maybe sometimes you’ve got to go to crazy people for the facts, though... Maybe the facts are what’s making them crazy unless I’m bananas too, by this time” (222). The circularity of this line indicates that Tom will never be able to crack the case by himself – as Angela tells him, “every single thing you know about it came from me, and don’t you forget it” (214). There is evidently a part of him that knows Angela must be the key to the case, but as he is unable to function in this postmodernist world, he cannot engage properly with her.

Angela’s split personality leads to another crucial aspect of postmodernism within the play, and that is its inherent metatheatricality. Much of what Tom and Angela do onstage is perform, so in a sense this creates a play within a play. For one thing, while Angela’s alterations are most likely genuine, the fact that she adopts these new personalities when under stress suggests that they are something of an escape for her. As she begins to change for the first time, into Leontine, Miller writes, “[s]he is almost visibly swept by a furiously pleasurable release, a sense of her real self; she stands, throwing out one hip, arms akimbo, mouth distorted into a tough sneer and her voice goes rough as gravel” (210). This is inherently performative behaviour, as Angela adopts the physical features and habits of a different character. Even her speech changes, telling Tom as she thrusts her breasts into his

face, “[g]rab onto this you jerked-off choir boy... come on get your finger out of your yum-yum and try some of this!” (220-221) This continues with her other characters – Emily, who has been abused by her father (given that Tom mentions Angela’s being raped by her father, we can assume Emily represents young Angela), and Renata. Tom, for his part, must reciprocate by acting as someone else. When Angela is Emily, he changes his tone of voice, and engages with the character – “[n]othin’ on me at all. Okay, darling? Why don’t you come out and we get a little ice cream for the corner? Your father’s gone, honey – honest, he won’t be comin’ back tonight” (232) This adds another layer of performativity to the play, as Tom’s actions get further away from his true self.

Tom also makes several self-reflexive comments that serve to remark on the nature of the play itself. In the opening moments, he tells Angela, “it’s amazing, I always leave here with more questions than I came with” (212), and although this ostensibly refers to his bemusement that Angela tolerates her husband’s physical abuse, it also indicates how the play will conclude – as they leave, Tom does indeed have more questions, and is probably no closer to cracking the case. Not only is this commenting on the process of the play, it also highlights Tom’s inability to understand Angela’s world, or at least her bedroom. Tom also comments on the play when on the phone to his friend he says, “I’ve got to stop looking for some red tag that says ‘Real’ on it” (247), and this is crucial because it not only acts as advice to the audience – reality and justice will never even be approached here – but it also hints that Tom is beginning to come to some form of understanding that his old methods of detection are no longer appropriate. Whether he is able to adapt sufficiently is another ambiguity left at the end of the play. In the last such self-reflexive comment, Angela tells Tom just before they leave and the play concludes, “[*t*]here’s a whole side of this case you never even heard of” (250). While this of course is most likely true, it is also directed to the audience, as if to make

it clear that the play has not approached the conclusion suitable to the genre, and, as Tom says, leaves everyone with more questions than they entered with.

This conclusion is of course vital, as not only does it refuse to offer any closure, but it also foregrounds that the relationship between Tom and Angela has no likely end in sight. This creates an almost Beckettian cycle, as one can see these same conversations in the same small room continuing ad infinitum. Angela prepares to leave to see a client, all the while promising Tom that she wants to meet and finally tell him everything she knows about the case. By this point, he is exasperated, and seems about to walk out – “[t]his has to be the last long night, yes. But you get evidence, something I can take into court, call me anytime” (250). Angela then tells him that “I’m the only one who knows. There are names that’d knock your head off, all the way to Boston, Washington, Providence and New York” (250). It is of course impossible to know how truthful Angela is being, but this plea for Tom’s attention, which works, is consistent with her overwhelming need for his presence in her life. And the fact that it works – Tom begins to cry, explaining, “I guess because I still believe you” (250) – shows that he needs her in his life. As explained above, this allows the case to function as some form of hyperreality for them even until the end, as they indulge each other in refusing to solve the case. Angela insists on meeting the following day, saying, “I want to talk... quietly and... honestly. And then maybe it’ll all fall out... all the rottenness” (251), but it is difficult to believe that this is the first time they have approached such a breakthrough. The lack of closure is highlighted in the play’s final line, as Tom, in response to Angela’s calling, rushes out of the room, saying, “[y]es! Coming, coming, coming...” (251) This suggests that the storyline will in fact keep going, and so no closure is attained. As Rudrum & Stavris wrote, “postmodernism rejected the thought of closure more than almost any other [...] In postmodernist terms, the *sense* of an ending is all we ever have – the end itself is another matter” (xv, author’s italics), and this is what we see in operation here – there is no reason

why the play's action is unlikely to happen multiple times in the future, so there is no real ending.

All of the features analysed here point to the fact that to best understand *Some Kind of Love Story*, we should treat it as a postmodernist work that comments on its own processes, and foregrounds the notion that reality and morality were coming to be considered more elusive and less certifiable than before. The play clearly adopts the aesthetic and language of a genre piece, and does this explicitly to build expectations which it then subverts. The play's goal is not showcasing the resolution of a murder, or even the wider corruption the murder was associated with, but instead expressing the difficulty of attaining justice in the contemporary world. We have seen that *Love Story* contains many elements of the postmodernist text, and while these have been noticed in isolation by critics, allowing the play to stand as a bridge into the phase of Miller's career marked by an awareness of postmodernism, it is rarely discussed in such terms.

4.3.2: Clara

Clara is of a distinctly different tone to *Love Story*, featuring a less stereotypical detective story set-up, and being more reflective and contemplative than the earlier work. However, we still see clear evidence of postmodernist thinking on Miller's part, and numerous links between the plays. The use of the noir trope is diminished, but it is still a recognisable scene – so much so that Frank Rich in his *New York Times* review, referring to a popular 1950s television programme, said that it was “essentially a ‘Dragnet’ episode, with middlebrow political ruminations substituted for suspense”. Coincidentally (or perhaps not, for Rich), *Dragnet*'s famous theme music was called “Danger Ahead”, with Miller's double-header containing *Clara* entitled *Danger: Memory!* I of course contend that Rich's analysis is far too simplistic, and that the play deserves a thoughtful examination with regards to the detective

narrative and postmodernism. The play also comments on a number of political issues, but a sense of ambiguity persists throughout, and so the precise nature of the critique is hard to pin down. I will argue that this confusion is a deliberate attempt by Miller to highlight the difficulty of taking an objectively moral stance at this period of time. Once again, Miller proposes in *Clara* that innocence and purity is not possible, and that guilt is an intrinsic part of contemporary life.

Clara focuses on two men, Albert Kroll and Detective Lieutenant Lew Fine, in the apartment of Kroll's daughter, the title character. She has just been brutally murdered, and Fine is attempting to gain information from Kroll about her life and relationships. He comes to believe that the killer was Clara's boyfriend, a Puerto Rican ex-convict who served ten years in prison for murdering his ex-girlfriend. He tries to get Kroll to give him the boyfriend's name, but he is reluctant, and at first it is not clear why. As the play continues, we see that Kroll had some hand in inspiring Clara to work with prisoners and people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and so feels a degree of guilt that she has died. He is also shown to be active in his community in trying to allow for poorer people to purchase homes in his neighbourhood, and though he seems like a generally admirable person, we see that many of his ideals have lapsed, and he no longer feels as sure about what is right in the world.

The issues that take this play out of relatively straightforward social criticism – or indeed genre writing – are multiple and complex. They include expressionistic uses of music and images, a distinct lack of realism, unbelievable coincidences, and a metatheatrical awareness of the performativity of so much of not only one's behaviour, but also one's thoughts and emotions. Alongside these features, in an especially postmodernist vein, is the ethical ambiguity at the play's core. Once again, the basis of this comes from the lack of objective reality that the play presents. Memory is shown to be at least faulty, and perhaps entirely deceptive, and from this everything begins to be questioned – one's identity, the

strength of the values one claims to hold, and even the nature and possibility of an objective reality. The use of the detective genre is again crucial, because, despite our expectations, we see that the crime with which the play is seemingly concerned is not the true subject. As in *Love Story*, the play concludes without any resolution to the case, and the detective is not really the detective.

Clara begins with Kroll waking up in his daughter's apartment, wherein Fine begins to ask him questions about Clara's life, in order to obtain clues to help solve the murder. We occasionally see, flashed above the character's heads, images that Kroll is visualising, and this is just one hint that this is not a realistic play. Even the working-out of the play itself does not conform to what would be expected of a rational detective piece. Abbotson, above, has observed that *Clara* is not a realistic work – there are surely easier ways to ascertain the suspect's name – but it serves to show how Kroll must find it within himself to identify the man. This indicates that the issue at hand is not discovering the identity of murder, but relates to something which Kroll must examine about his own personality. Indeed, the play does not find out who it was that killed Clara. It is heavily implied that it was her boyfriend, as Fine notes that “[t]here are two cups on the stove with teabags, and the kettle is melted. There was a fight, but no sign of forced entry, and there's still over a hundred dollars in her pocketbook, and the TV and all the rest are untouched” (225). However, it is still the case that we do not know for certain that it was Clara's boyfriend who killed her. And even if we make that assumption, the play ends just as Kroll gives Fine the name, so we have no idea whether he is to be apprehended or not. Bigsby writes that “[t]he crime at hand is not the one that has left a young woman dead” (1962-2005, 362), and so it must be asked what the “crime” that Miller is concerned about here is. Miller himself wrote that the play was about “bringing onto the stage a slice of our historical experience over the past decades since World War II” (*Timebends*, 591), implying that there has been an erosion of positive values over that period.

Kroll says something similar to this, early on, when he comments, “it’s just that you can’t ever let yourself rely on anything staying the same” (224). These kinds of lines make *Clara* the most melancholic, even nostalgic, of the plays under consideration here. But Miller is not actively resisting the postmodernist worldview which he nonetheless seems to be critiquing. It is more of a look at contemporary life than a call to arms. I suggest that, like Angela, Kroll uses postmodernist methods, unavailable to Fine, in order to approach an underlying truth, albeit one distinct from the case at hand.

The most important facts about this play in relation to the detective genre are that the detective is not the detective, and the case is not the play’s central concern. I propose that Kroll is the detective precisely because the true investigation is not the one with which Fine is concerned. While Fine is solely bent on getting Kroll to tell him Clara’s boyfriend’s name, Kroll needs to investigate his own psyche to examine how his previous self-image, of a progressively minded, open person, is now faulty or even in danger of being just a façade. As Abbotson said above, if the play was operating logically and Fine truly needed to get the suspect’s name, he would have phoned Kroll’s wife. Bigsby, meanwhile, writes, “[t]he crime at its heart is not the one that has left a young woman dead or the one the detective investigates. Nor, in a drama seemingly concerned with exposing reality, does it work by realistic means” (1962-2005, 363), and this analysis, while being correct, regrettably stops short of recognising the inherently postmodernist nature of the story. One of the things that signifies that Kroll is the detective is that he regularly ignores, or is not aware, of Fine’s presence. He is understandably confused, and goes off on tangents that are unrelated to the case or the plot. His mental detours include telling stories about his friend, Bert, who Fine resembles in multiple ways, talking about a zoning board meeting he was in the previous night, and mentioning how he met his wife. He is also distracted by Clara appearing onstage multiple times, after one of which he says to Fine, “[w]as I talking? Of course I was, I’m

sorry” (239). His confusion is evident throughout, as he says, “[w]here was I? [...] I forgot why I’m telling you this” (241). Kroll, then, is not using a rational process in order to discover what has happened, but is having his mind roam over the story of his life, and wonder how his parenting could have resulted in Clara’s death. Kroll’s method is almost a free-form roaming over his life, as incidents and memories arise to assemble a collage. Fine, meanwhile, sums up his approach in two questions – “what did the guy do, and can I prove it?” (238), indicating his more straightforward, less nuanced style. There at times seems to be an antagonistic aspect to their relationship, as Kroll avoids Fine’s rubric and methodology. Fine asks him for a physical description of Clara’s boyfriend, saying, “[s]hort? Tall?” Kroll’s answer, and it is difficult to know whether it the result of confusion or obfuscation, is “[m]edium” (234).

The play suggests that Kroll presented himself as a heroic figure to his daughter, and this in turn led her to work with underprivileged people and prisoners, which, the men assume, has now led to her death. Despite promptings from Fine, who says that he believes in “[g]reed. Greed and race [...] Gentile for Gentile and the Jew for the Jew” (245), Kroll appears to resist this line of thinking, albeit admitting, “tell you the truth, every once in a while I just about give up on those people” (236), referring to African-Americans. The purpose of the play, though, the case the detective, that is to say Kroll, sets out to crack is whether or not there is some value to these ideals. It is in a sense irrelevant that Kroll eventually provides the name – “Luis Hernandez” – because, as has been mentioned, the play ends almost as soon as he does, and so we do not see the consequences of his producing the name. Bigsby writes that Kroll “cannot accept it because his whole life seems to have laid the foundations for the murder. It is his own name he is protecting rather than that of the killer” (1962-2005, 362). The play’s true concern is asking whether, even though Clara has most likely been murdered as a result of her work with convicts, this work is worth doing. I can see

no way that the play does not assert this, and, in this sense, there is a solution provided. However, this does not make the play anything approaching a traditional detective narrative, as the play's solution is not the one that the "official" detective is seeking. Rather, it is a form of understanding which will allow Kroll to continue to believe in the values that, evidently, Miller thought had been weakening in society. As James Peacock writes about "City of Glass": "where the focus of the traditional detective novel might be said to be knowledge, meaning, or comprehension, the emphasis here is on the existential questions of identity and one's relation to the world" (44), and this also applies to Miller's piece. The true concern of the play is not the fact of the boyfriend's name, but what is revealed in the process of remembering it, and what it reveals about one's true identity.

Before discussing how identity is handled in the play, there is a final issue related to the detective genre that requires discussion. As mentioned above, Kroll notes that there are a number of similarities between Fine and his old friend, Bert. Kroll tells Fine, "I mixed you up with Bert, but you're the spitting image, even the way you sit with your legs crossed. And the same kind of attitude" (224). As the play goes on, we learn that the two men share a surname, a missing toe, and the fact that their sons, soldiers in Vietnam, killed themselves. When confronted with these coincidences, Fine denies their importance, saying, "[w]hat's so amazing? [...] your friend and I have missing toes, so what?" (228) and "[w]e're all one step away from a statistic, Albert" (230). What is curious about this is that Fine is in fact correct – these coincidences are entirely irrelevant to the play, or at least to the case of Clara's murder. These are the kinds of things that a good, traditional detective narrative would never allow to pass without it being for some reason important, but here it is glossed over. Bigsby writes of this, "[t]he issue is never referred to again. In a play that seems to be the working-out of a rational process, this element refuses incorporation" (1962-2005, 363). It resembles, in a way, a moment from "City of Glass", in which the protagonist expresses interest in his client's

wife and carer, Virginia. It is assumed that this will be followed up on, or at least mentioned again, as it fits with the image of the stereotypical detective, but it is then dropped from the narrative. In the case of *Clara*, one feels that such a coincidence should lead to some kind of insight into the case, but it goes nowhere, and like Felix says about Ralph lighting up in *Resurrection Blues*, “it’s one more *thing*, that’s all” (*Plays: Six*, 144).

This issue of identity is a core concern of the play, as Miller problematises the tensions between Kroll’s conception of himself, and how he truly acts and thinks in the world. Langteau’s analysis argues that Kroll’s ideals are not quite what he believes them to be, and they in fact are vacuous platitudes that mark his prejudices. She highlights the dehumanising language he uses when talking about enemy soldiers, or African-American people he knew throughout his life, and also his propensity to identify people as members of a group instead of as individuals. Her contention is that the play “points out the dangers of settling for a politically correct posture that does not penetrate underlying values” (“Arthur Miller’s *Clara*”, 39), and while there is validity to her argument, in general it is not hugely relevant to the discussion of *Clara* and postmodernism. However, the fact that she sees Kroll’s vision of himself to be purely a façade does in a way help us to think about the play in terms of the postmodern. As Bigsby writes of Miller’s later period, “he questioned the status of the real and the extent to which lives are performed rather than lived” (*1962-2005*, 13). In the case of Kroll, we see that much of his life is performed, and he has reached the point where he finds it difficult to justify himself and his actions. In his community, he is chair of the Zoning Board, and is attempting to lower the plot size needed to build a house, in order to allow more people from ethnically diverse communities to live in the neighbourhood. Explaining this to Fine, he says, “[w]e’ve got to let them in. I don’t know what else to support” (243). Aside from the language – “them” – of which Langteau is so critical, we see a kind of exhaustion around Kroll’s beliefs. There is little conviction, but more a resignation to

his being the “correct” opinion. Unable, or unwilling, to frame his argument in any kind of moral setting, he simply asserts its value.

Sengupta foregrounds the problematised reality, and, alongside that, the performativity of identity, in his analysis, writing, “Kroll cannot remember the name of the person because to remember, in his case, would be to confirm a suspicion, which would amount to questioning his self-reality” (“The Late Plays of Arthur Miller”, 114). Like *Love Story*, then, we can call this a self-reflexive, metatheatrical work, as the characters are almost always playing roles even within the play. Kroll’s personality is placed under scrutiny for the duration of the work, as he tries to examine what has happened in his life, and the very nature of his being and beliefs come under intense scrutiny. Fine appears almost relieved to be able to act out all of his worst impulses in front of Kroll, under the guise of wanting to catch the man he assumes to be Clara’s killer. He tells Kroll, referring to the ideals he assumes him to have, that “there’s no need to carry this on anymore – you’re one of us. You admit that to yourself and I’ll bet that name comes popping right out” (246). While Kroll eventually does produce the name, it is not because he confesses to distrusting people from ethnic minority backgrounds, but because he has a vision of Clara appearing onstage and praising a story he tells of rescuing black soldiers of his company from being lynched. While we have no reason to doubt the truth of Kroll’s story, it once again foregrounds the performativity of the play. He seems to lapse into his younger self while telling the story, even though Fine, to whom he is generally oblivious, is still present. This moment in a sense serves as a metaphor for Kroll’s life, as he is shown to be performing a good deed, and not living one out. As Langteau acknowledges, genuinely held liberal ideals are a positive thing, but having only one lock on one’s apartment in a rough neighbourhood, as Clara is revealed to, is not, and it is certainly not moral.

Clara shows that Miller has not entirely disregarded the existence of a moral framework that underpins society. However, he does seem to recognise the complexity in acknowledging such a framework. He told Bigsby that the moral world “has been [disappearing slightly] in my work for a long time. I’ve been struggling with it, anyway. I think the struggle is necessary” (qtd. Bigsby, *Company*, 165). Although this play does achieve a kind of moral end, it must be recognised that Kroll comes to this understanding only through the death of his daughter. By acknowledging this, the complexity Miller appears to see in coming to any moral standpoint is now clear. Sofer acknowledges the complexity of Miller’s later characters, as he writes of “the recurrent image of the split self [representing] an unintegrated identity that refuses to cohere into a morally accountable whole” (98), which he also sees in Lyman Felt. This fractured subject is another element found repeatedly in *The New York Trilogy*, where each protagonist has as his antagonist someone who deeply resembles him. The essential feat that Auster creates with this device is that, in the wasteland of late 20th century America, human connection has become impossible for many people, and the only thing left is identification with one’s greatest fear or enemy. We also see this with Kroll’s old friend, Bert, almost sharing his name – Bert is alleged to be corrupt, amoral, and “turning into a first-class son of a bitch” (229). In a sense, this is also Kroll’s fear about himself. He had imagined himself to be a Second World War hero and someone who was a friend of disadvantaged communities – from lobbying to help poorer people live in his neighbourhood to leading a company of black soldiers during the war. He confesses to Fine, “tell you the truth, every once in a while I just about give up on those people” (236), which is another example of the language which Langteau found to betray Kroll’s true prejudices.

Clara operates not just by complicating morality, but also by questioning the nature of reality in this world. This ambiguous reality is even expressed by Fine with relation to what time it is. Early in the play, he tells Kroll that it’s five past one. Towards the end, Kroll again

asks him the time, and he gives the same answer. Kroll realises this discrepancy, and says, “[y]ou said that before”. Fine replies, “[m]ake it later then” (244), and this exchange suggests that the two men are currently existing in some form of vacuum, where it is not that time has disappeared or stood still, but that it is no longer deemed to be relevant, and this removes them somewhat from the real world. Kroll is shown to be quite confused, especially at first, and throughout the play engages with visions of his daughter. She appears onstage three times, in the final instance seeming to offer some form of absolution. David Savran writes of this,

Clara is the mirror in which Kroll sees himself, the embodiment of all he cherishes, the one whose ‘look of intense love’ and ‘sublime smile’ narcissistically reflect back upon Kroll the moral purity to which he aspires, despite – or, perhaps, because of – his questionable business dealings. (73)

In this analysis, which is closer than most to Langteau’s, Kroll is sacrificing his daughter, not really for the values she appeared to aspire towards, but for his own sense of ethical superiority. In either case, this device is the main indication that *Love Story* is not a realistic work, and by extension that the case will not be solved rationally, and probably not even adequately. This is a world in which ghosts appear, and images of what Kroll sees are flashed overhead, so one cannot expect the case it discusses to operate in any kind of realistic way. This is of course not simply an aesthetic device, but also a moral one.

By creating a world that refuses to align with normal, orderly processes, Miller suggests that normal morality will not be sufficient to negotiate it. Even further, this problematises what is regarded as morality. Kroll is shown to be operating in a world where morality is not what he had considered it to be. He tells Fine that Bert dropped him from their

business partnership without a warning, and talks about the sexual and financial corruption of his current bosses, a pair of Italian brothers who own a construction company, which are further indications to him that the world has changed into something unrecognisable. This change in morality that Kroll mentions not only confuses him, but also shows that the nature of reality is not what he assumed it to be. Once again, then, we see that Miller links reality and morality, and seems to argue that they have an almost cyclical relationship – one cannot ascertain reality without a moral framework, and one cannot establish a moral framework without knowing what is real and what is not. This postmodernist paradox means that morality, by relating so directly to reality, takes on an almost material status. Sengupta links this ambiguity to the time in which it was written, saying that it “reflects the contemporary mood – doubts about the grandly moral. An act can be morally right, and wrong at once. It can be right to the extent that it contributes to a value, but wrong to the extent that it detracts from another” (“The Late Plays of Arthur Miller”, 115). Kroll himself reflects on this contemporary mood, saying, “[i]n the old days I can’t remember people being this complicated” (229), which points not only to moral confusion, but a proliferation of subjectivities. We have seen that postmodernism partly involved an increased expression of subjectivities outside of the norm, and this is what Kroll seems to be discussing here.

Clara is a play that does not conform as easily to what would be expected from a postmodernist as *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* and *Some Kind of Love Story*. The aesthetic is more ambiguous and free-floating, while the situation, whilst being recognisable and superficially realistic, is more personal and less obvious at first glance. However, what is crucial about this play is that it showcases Miller’s view of contemporary morality as the 20th century was approaching its end. The play is very much historically situated, as Fine recalls the revelations of the Holocaust: “[t]hat day in 1945, remember? When they first showed those pictures of the piles of bones? [...] That was the day I was born again, Albert, and I’ve

never let myself forget it. ‘Do it to them before they do it to you. Period.’” (246) This idea, that morality was in some way given up on as a result of the horror of the Second World War and the Holocaust, is of course extremely important for the postmodern, as it is often considered, as has been discussed above, to be a result of these atrocities. By situating the status of morality in the play in this fashion, Miller seems again to be engaging in a popular discourse of postmodernism. If Miller was not explicitly discussing the ideas and merits of postmodernism, his drama was most certainly affected by them.

5. “A man is a fourteen-room house”: Memory, Identity, and Postmodernity in *The Ride Down Mount Morgan*

5.1: Opening Remarks

The Ride Down Mount Morgan is the next crucial work in understanding the postmodernist nature of Miller’s later works. It has prompted considerable variation in critical and academic reception, and is constructed in such a way that it remains open to a large number of interpretations. For some critics, *Morgan* was another sign of the development of Miller’s writing at the beginning of a new decade. Others viewed it as Miller returning to the territory he knew so well – a family play centred on guilt, betrayal, and an overpowering central male figure. This, as we have already seen, indeed has defined much of the scholarly response to the play, as critics seem incapable, or unwilling, to differentiate between the protagonist, Lyman Felt, and Miller’s most famous creation, Willy Loman. However, this is a largely incoherent stance, as Lyman is the opposite, in most respects, to Willy, and these critics occasionally admit it – I have quoted Abbotson above as stating the men are similar, but then proceeding to name more distinctions between the two. What we can see from this, in fact, is that Miller has very deliberately created a character who in very few ways resembles Willy Loman – aside from the similarity of their names, with Lyman being far too similar to Loman to be ignored. This last issue will be mentioned below, but given the regularity with which it is discussed by critics, I do not wish it to play too big a role in this discussion. It can be interpreted as just one sign of a developing confidence and humour that Miller also exhibits in this play, which continues in his later work. This is perhaps the greatest strength of the

play, as has been noted by Scanlan, above, that it renders comedic what previously would have been depicted as tragic.

In *Morgan*, he consistently showcases his greater ease with irony, humour, crude language, and intertextuality, all of which form part of his idiosyncratic postmodernist style, and will be discussed below. There is also a seeming awareness of the classic view of postmodernism's distrust of metanarratives - at one point, Lyman tells his first wife, Theo, "with all the analysis and the novels and the Freuds we're still as opaque and unknowable as some line of statues in a church wall" (34). This is one of the frankest admissions by a late Miller character that they are in fact living in a postmodernist world, in which generations of accrued information and wisdom no longer seem useful or relevant.

The most immediate context, though, in which the play should be put is that of the time when it was written. Although it is not as neat a comment on the culture of the 1980s as is generally considered - Otten records that in 1989 Miller had been "working on the play for eleven years" (219) - *Morgan* is undoubtedly influenced by, and indeed playing on, the ethic that came to sum up the popular perception of the decade, best articulated by Gordon Gekko in Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987): "Greed is good". Miller himself said that Lyman was "the quintessential Eighties Man, the man who has everything, but there's no end to his appetite" (qtd. Roudané, *American Drama*, 181.) There are also similarities between the play and Tom Wolfe's novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), noted by Roudané (*American Drama*, 181), though the latter is a neater critique of a precise time and place than Miller's play. Wolfe's novel is a sprawling tale of ruined reputation, public scandal, and satirical commentary on the lives of the super- and not-so-super-wealthy in 1980s New York. The protagonist, Sherman McCoy, is a bond trader and self-styled "Master of the Universe", who shares many traits with Lyman. The similarities of the novel are curious to note alongside

Miller's play, but this will not form a core part of my argument, or be as crucial a link to the non-dramatic culture as previous texts I've discussed in relation to Miller have been.

The 1980s saw the predominance in American and British politics, in particular, of right-wing parties who decimated what remained of the manufacturing industries and trade unions, and redirected the economy towards financial and service sectors. This resulted in ballooning unemployment and inequality, much of which was excused by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, and the fall of the Berlin Wall two years later. While this was a decade of regression for the values Miller had consistently espoused in his writing, both dramatic and non-fictional, it was a time when the likes of Lyman Felt, and indeed Sherman McCoy, could make a great deal of money. However, Lyman's greed is not necessarily portrayed in financial terms. His is more of a sexual and emotional greed. We see the roots of this in his early interactions with his father, and it is revealed throughout as we are told how he behaves with his children – consistently buying them things in order to secure their adoration. But Lyman's greed, overall, is the greed to do what he desires most. To such end, he weaves a vacuous moral argument that sustains him through nine years of bigamy, before the accident which leads to the action of the play.

While this is an important context to *Morgan*, I do not plan to pursue it here for several reasons. For one, it is remarked upon in almost every piece of work on the play, so I have little new to contribute. It is also not especially relevant to my conception of the play as postmodernist, as there is nothing inherently postmodernist about 1980s wealth accumulation, as there is with 1970s Cold War paranoia. To that end, I will be using a slightly different methodology in relation to this play. Whereas I have seen it crucial to align the previous plays with films or novels of the postmodernist period, as this allows a greater understanding of their nature and context, with *Morgan* I will be relying more on theoretical material to show how the ideas Miller works with are ones associated with a postmodernist style. Out of

all of the plays being discussed here, *Morgan* is the one that has least often been considered postmodernist, so the best way to make the case is showing the similarities between how the text operates and theoretical underpinnings of postmodernism.

The play opens with Lyman Felt, a sprightly man in his fifties, in a hospital cast, immobile and asleep. He awakes, and the nurse tells him where he is, and why. He is in upstate New York, having gone, in the words of his nurse, “skiing down that Mount Morgan in a Porsche” (2). Lyman is told that his wife and daughter are on the way, and he becomes panicked, and begins to imagine their arrival to the waiting room. At this point, they appear on a different part of the stage. His wife, Theo, is also in her fifties, and their daughter, Bessie, is an adult of unspecified age. Very little direction is given with regards to the design of the stage, but props and furniture are moved on and off as the rapid and frequent scene changes demand. Miller directs that “[f]letting chords of music accompany the shifts of time and place” (1), though these are not noted at every scene change. Lyman slips out of his cast, as he does repeatedly throughout, and is invisible to the women. They are soon joined by Leah, described as being “about thirty; blondined hair” (6), and, to Lyman’s horror, she and Theo learn that they are both “Mrs Felt” – not only had he been having an affair with Leah, he had married and fathered a child with her.

After such an occurrence, questions emerge: what will happen after Lyman’s wives confront him? How did this situation come to pass? How did Lyman deceive them for so long, and why has it come crashing down now? Yet, crucial to my examination here is that, hard as they try to elucidate such questions by resorting to memory, their often-confused and necessarily unreliable memories do the opposite, and the question of their own complicity with Lyman’s transgressions is raised. The play moves back and forth through these memories, which are conjured up by Lyman himself, Leah, Theo, and Lyman’s lawyer and friend, Tom. We see Lyman’s initial courtship with Leah, the day he convinces her not to get

an abortion, and the day he tells her he divorced Theo. He and Theo, meanwhile, seem to have a somewhat idyllic, if a little dull, middle-aged marriage, with dinner parties, expensive gifts, and trips to the opera and fancy restaurants regular occurrences. As Tom tells him, “[g]ive or take a bad patch or two, you’ve had the best marriage of anyone I ever met” (51). His life with Leah, on the other hand, is exhilarating; he flies a small plane, hunts, and drives fast cars. He is able to lavish their son, Benjamin, with expensive gifts, and in turn basks in his adulation.

While the play moves backwards and forwards through time with regularity, it encompasses only about a day or two after Lyman wakes up. He is visited by his wives, Tom, and Bessie, and begins to defend himself and his character. He professes to love both women still, and claims he always has. His desire is to have both wives, as this is the only way he, and, in his view, they, could be happy – he could tolerate Theo’s boring old stories knowing that they were “not going to be my entire fate till [sic] the day I died” (57). He starts to defend himself aggressively in this way, and soon we see the crucial event in Lyman’s “escape” from guilt. While on safari with Theo and Bessie, just before he married Leah, he confronts a lion, and declares, “I *am* happy, yes! That I’m married to Theodora and have Bessie... yes, *and Leah, too!*... And that I don’t sacrifice one precious day to things I don’t believe in – and that includes monogamy, yes” (61). This is the point where Lyman commits himself to both Theo and Lyman, and develops his moral code – as long as he, and his families, are happy, his actions are moral. This ethical dilemma echoes that of Adrian’s partner, Ruth, in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* – “knowledge is power, so that’s why it’s good – so what is wrong with gaining power without having to suffer at all?” (96) – what is wrong, Lyman asks, with deceitfully pleasing both families, as long as they are not aware of his deceit? Despite his attempts to explain himself, eventually, Leah and Theo, the latter of whom has seemingly suffered some kind of stroke, leave him alone in his hospital bed. He

asks his nurse to stay with him for a little bit, and she tells him about ice fishing with her family and discussing the shoes they've bought at a discount shop. She gives Lyman a kiss and leaves, while he ruminates on the simplicity and contentedness of their lives. Just before the play ends, he "begins to weep" (88). The ending, signified with "[b]lackout" (88) is therefore inconclusive and ambiguous, and our feelings towards Lyman, which fluctuate throughout, are not necessarily clear-cut – he may well be apologetic and contrite, but, on the other hand, he may deserve his fate, which is of course serious health problems, and estrangement from his two families. Either way, the play, as I will show, does not condemn or absolve him in full.

I should like to briefly mention a crucial facet of Lyman's personality, which is remarked upon by most critics of the play: his attractiveness as a character. We are left in no doubt as to the damage he causes – "you've raked her soul" (50), Tom, speaking of Theo, tells him – but his presence in the drama is nevertheless welcome, as he is an energetic, amusing protagonist, who, determined to live his life guilt-free, could not be further from John Proctor or Quentin. As Leah says of him, "he *wants* so much; like a kid at a fair; a jelly apple here, a cotton candy there, and then a ride on the loop-the-loop... and it never lets up in him" (23), and this longing is not only expressed in his bigamy, but in his onstage persona. Even towards the end, when a visibly ill Theo confronts him, he attempts a form of impish, sarcastic charm – "I guess our whole life was a mistake then. But I made a good living" (53). He is shown as being sexually voracious with both Leah and Theo, and they both evidently adore his company – "Lyman – how wonderfully, endlessly changing you are!" (74), Theo tells him when he pays her a surprise visit in New York. His opening lines are even amusing, as he drifts slowly out of his coma, telling an imaginary audience,

[w]e have a lot of material [...] to cover this afternoon, so please
take your seats and cross your legs [...] I'd like you to consider

life insurance from a different perspective. I want you to think of the whole economic system as one enormous tit [...] So the job of each individual is to get a good place in line for a suck. Which is incidentally gives us the word 'suckcess'". (1)

Abbotson writes that "at times, we inevitably are absorbed by his energy for life, even accepting some of his rationalizations" (*Critical Companion*, 304), although she continues to say that he is, in the end, entirely consumed by his own desires. As I have quoted above, she makes the point that the fact of our attraction to Lyman is crucial to understanding him, and the play, and I will address this below. His energy is also physically manifested, as he often moves out of the cast of the opening scene; as Mason writes, "Lyman is so dynamic that he must be free; not for him the restriction of a hospital bed" (*Stone Tower*, 251). Finally, the issue of Lyman's contradictory nature makes the play even more ambiguous – Toby Zinman writes that the "play presents a central problem of tone: does it laugh *at* Lyman or with him?" (166, author's italics). I see this as more of a deliberate move on Miller's part than a problem with the play's tone, and I will return to Zinman's analysis below, but for now it is an apt summation of the play's contradictions.

The returning of Miller to the family setting is significant for several reasons. This is the first time he had done so – with the exception of *Creation* - since *The Price*; but although he may seem to be retreating to a more familiar and comfortable form of drama, this is by no means a characteristic family play, simply for the fact that we are presented with two families that share a patriarch. Lenke Németh writes that "Miller reverses the pattern of the well-made play [...] thus here the climax precedes the careful preparation, the cause-and-effect arrangement of incidents" (82). This calls to mind Shepard's family plays, in which familial harmony is never disrupted, because there has never even been any to begin with. The play's

drama is rooted in Lyman's decision to fragment himself, which eventually leads to his physical, personal, and social disintegration. Lyman's goal, throughout the play, is to stop this process – although there are hints that he caused the crash in the first place - and salvage something from the disaster he has created of his life. The remaining characters, meanwhile, undergo something of an investigation into why Lyman has been so deceptive, and how he evaded their detection for so long. In a sense, though, their vague conclusions are immaterial – as would be expected, and as always seems likely, both of Lyman's wives leave him. Their searching of their own memories is relatively shallow, and they realise that Lyman's actions are not as surprising as they had at first thought. This represents one of the key methods Miller employs here to destabilise clear ideas of reality and memory – as we see characters recall certain events, we learn that they are more culpable than we, and they, had first assumed.

One of the main points that is mentioned in relation to this play is how similar the names Loman and Lyman are. Many critics see a deep significance in this, and suggest that Lyman is an update on Loman, a fin de siècle version of the everyman. This is evidently untrue, as there is nothing that suggests “everyman” about a wealthy businessman who commits bigamy. I contend, then, that Miller's selection of this name is an ironic, amused nod to his previous work, done in a way that he knew would intrigue and infuriate critics. Of course, there are other meanings to the name, as “Lyman” is a suitable name for someone so practiced in deceiving people, and “Felt” is a suitable surname for a man who is so obsessed with the physical delights of life. There is another potential nod to his past work, in this case *All My Sons*, when Lyman remarks to Tom, “people think I turned in my partner to save myself. – Which maybe I did, but I don't think so” (16). We see here the moral ambiguity – Lyman does not “think” he did anything wrong, but it sounds otherwise when he then says, “I might have lost Theo if I'd gone to jail” (16), which suggests that he did or said something

that would have deserved his going to jail in the first place. This reference is dropped randomly into the play, and is never revisited, so it cannot be said for certain why it is included. It is surely at least partly to create the image of Lyman as inherently deceitful in both his personal and private lives – “I’ll always be contemptible to a lot of people” (16), he says. I contend that it is another example of Miller hinting at his classic texts, as if to remind the audience how his writing had changed since that period, in a self-referential move so typical of postmodernist writing.

As has been stated above, this play has been the subject of many different interpretations, and this seems to be intentional on Miller’s part. Some claim that Miller does not judge Lyman harshly enough for having such a ruinous effect on the lives of his loved ones, while others assert that Miller stands in firm condemnation of Lyman’s actions. My interpretation is somewhere in the middle, and this is where Miller is self-consciously playing on a postmodernist morality – he does not allow for simple solutions, and indeed Lyman is given most of the play to attempt to justify himself. I contend that Miller intended this play to act as a test on contemporary ethics and morality. By presenting us with such an attractive yet ultimately dangerous character, Miller asks how much evil society will tolerate from a person, and still forgive them. Miller said in 1999 that the play “is testing whether there needs to be any restraint on human instinct and why. Why can’t we all do exactly what we want to do?” (qtd. Plimpton, 187). Miller’s fear, though in some ways hope, is that Lyman’s bluster will fool the audience, that his attitudes and opinions will be deemed acceptable in the modern world. This idea is also expressed by Linda Hutcheon in reference to historiographic metafiction, which she saw as the dominant mode of postmodernist novel writing, although it can be applied equally well here. She writes that historiographic metafictional novels “make their readers *question* their own (and by implication others’) interpretations. They are more ‘romans à hypothèse’ than ‘romans à these’” (*Poetics of Postmodernism*, 180, author’s

italics). Miller's pessimism is backed up here by Kerstin Schmidt's analysis of postmodernist drama and culture, as she writes, "[p]ostmodern drama no longer views the decomposition of value systems and ethics as a problem of metaphysical anxiety, but rather presupposes it as a crucial condition of postmodernity" (32-33).

Whilst being an ironic play on postmodernist morality and attitudes, the play uses several aesthetic devices associated with the postmodern, and displays a postmodernist sensibility in numerous ways. *Morgan* matches up well with Rodney Simard's conception of postmodernist drama, with the use, and abuse, of such conventions as doubling, ambiguous memory, disrupted reality, and metatheatre. This chapter will provide a brief discussion of the more relevant critical writing, a review of Simard's work, and a discussion of the way theoretical aspects of the postmodern align with the play. Notions of identity, memory, and reality will all be shown to be disrupted by Miller, and as we have seen in the previous plays, when these are questioned, it follows that issues of morality are rendered more complex.

5.2: Memory and Ambiguity

Morgan consistently creates ambiguity around itself. From the moral ambiguity of how much we feel we should be judging Lyman to the material ambiguity of not knowing whether what we are seeing is "truly happening" or not, the play generally refuses to allow for comfortable interpretation. For example, Miller undermines the certainty of reality in the play by having much of the action happen, seemingly, in the mind and memory of the characters. Of course, he had used this technique in *Salesman* and *After the Fall*, but it is put to different uses here. For one thing, in these plays, the memories are the product of one consciousness – in *Morgan*, however, the memories of four characters are staged. This multiplicity of viewpoints, getting away from the individual subject to a more pluralistic concept of memory and reality, is a subtle, yet crucial, indicator of Miller's postmodernist thinking. Also, in the

earlier plays, some sense of knowledge or understanding was gained through this style. We see how Willy Loman's mind wanders, realising that if only he could understand his memories, he would be able to relate to his family in a more honest, healthy way. Quentin, meanwhile, is working towards a resolution from the start – the play acts in many ways like a therapy session for him, and he comes to comprehend that everyone is guilty, and therefore gains the courage to continue his relationship with Holga. For Lyman and his wives, however, memories make things less clear – they dredge up forgotten conversations that are now seen to be foreshadowing, question the validity of previously stable recollections, and produce more questions than answers.

Memory is crucial to the play, as it is in many ways all that we are given. As the play opens with Lyman in his hospital bed, the notable incident, the “ride” of the title, has already occurred. In order for there to be a drama, then, memory is summoned by all the characters. Because Lyman is such a blatantly deceitful person, it is understandable that we treat his memory suspiciously, but this principle must also be extended to the others, or at least Theo, whose own memory is later called into question. By allowing memory, and therefore the play's own reality, to be so ambiguous, Miller is highlighting the difficulty of firmly asserting a moral or material truth. This accords with much postmodernist dramatic and theoretical writing, as we shall see. Aside from highlighting the deficiency of Lyman's ability to conjure his own reality, I will also discuss here one key scene that has been almost entirely ignored by critics. By taking a closer look at the scene featuring Theo and Tom, discussing a time when Lyman may or may not have tried to save Theo's life, we see that there are far more questions than answers provided by the way the play allows memory to function. This idea of ambiguous memory is especially important to the play because it helps situate it within a postmodernist frame. As Jeanette R. Malkin writes,

[w]ithin postmodernism, I contend, there has occurred a shift in *the way we remember*, and hence in the way culture, and for our purposes the theatre, represents and reenacts [sic] remembering. Where once memory called up coherent, progressing narratives of experienced life, or at least unlocked the significance of hidden memory for the progressions of the present, this kind of enlightenment organization has broken down in postmodernism and given way to nonnarrative reproduction of conflated, disrupted, repetitive, and moreover collectively retained and articulated fragments. (4, author's italics)

Malkin's study does not refer to *Morgan* (although she does make occasional reference to *Salesman*), but this is nonetheless a good description of how memory functions here. Whereas in *Salesman* there is some degree of clarity surrounding the facts of the Loman family, as we see from Willy's recollections, in *Morgan* memory makes things even more confused. Leah recalls Lyman's deception, when he claimed that he would get a divorce from Theo, but this largely serves to reinforce Lyman's deceitful nature. The only likely conclusion to be drawn, in fact, is that, on some level at least, Leah knew about, and was therefore complicit with, Lyman's lies. This therefore begs the question as to how much blame needs to be apportioned in these marriages. Leah knows Lyman is married, and he even admits to having left a woman he had gotten pregnant whilst he was married to Theo. Theo, on the other hand, is fully aware of Lyman's character, and admits to having separated twice. Tom, it is also worth noting, also knows about Lyman's habits, as they discuss Tom walking in on Lyman "humping that Pakistani typist on your desk" (17), and so this indicates that he cannot act as the play's moral core.

Lyman recalls instances of his own lies and immoral actions, but there is little to no moral weight attached to them – he does not seem to invest them with the meaning necessary to gaining any kind of understanding or insight. Memory, therefore, leaves everybody guilty in this play. In many ways, this is what is to be expected in a postmodernist play that centres on memory. Attilio Favorini writes

late twentieth-century memory plays often seem riven by contradicting impulses, tracking similarly paradoxical findings in cognitive memory science: that we both control our memories and are controlled by them; that memories are uniquely individualized [sic] by the rememberer's idiosyncratic experience, yet fully inflected by the subjectivities of others; that memory both marks or scores an encounter with the life-world, yet revises and reconstructs is; and that forgetful, distorting, malfunctioning memory is at the same time normal, efficient, and naturally selected memory. (9)

We see many of the features Favorini notes at work in *Morgan*. While Lyman and the other characters are capable of using memory to return to past events, they are not in control of the memory once they get there – they are forced to observe their own moral flaws, and therefore try to understand their current situation.

For Lyman himself, meanwhile, memory acts in a very physically threatening way – his father berates and beats him, and we see this impacting him in his current moment in the hospital. As he demands that Leah bring his son to the hospital, which she refuses to do, his father appears, and pulls the cloth over him. He yells, “[n]o! Don’t! Pa! Please! Don’t do it!”, while “all they [the other characters in the hospital] see is that he has been thrashing about” (84). As we will see with the crucial shark scene, memory is “corrected” and re-appraised

throughout, and yet these faulty memories, as well as memories depicting faulty characters, are taken to be the norm for these characters. Nobody has a memory that either absolves them or satisfactorily explains how these families came to their tragedy. It is notable that Bessie, who remains the coolest towards Lyman at the denouement, is not granted the power of staging memories – perhaps she would be able to provide a slightly less guilt-ridden perspective on past occurrences.

Memory fails to provide a path towards reconciliation for these characters, and instead serves to obscure the moral reality of their situation. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth wrote that “[p]ostmodern narrative can be instructively thought of as a temporal instance of collage, or rather collage in motion” (8), and this is an apt description of *Morgan*. The play’s staging is generally bare, and this is what allows for the rapid change of scenes, or “temporal collage”. Whilst this is in some ways similar to *Salesman*, *After the Fall*, and *The American Clock*, the conclusions to be drawn from the stylistic effect is different. In each of the above plays, this collage allowed the audience to penetrate the characters’ psyche, to understand their history and motives, and to gain appreciation of their experiences. Memory served to inform whereas in *Morgan*, memory seems far more random, and serves to confuse the narrative.

As I have mentioned, Malkin does not examine *Morgan* in her study, but she writes, “the plays I address here have various agendas and are not all doing the same kind of ‘memory work’; but the sense of a *conflicted and traumatised relation to the past* is common to them all” (9; author’s italics). The past is most certainly traumatised here, as Lyman’s wives go back there to relive his deceptions, and even he himself is traumatised several times by the presence of his father. Lyman’s father is only a memory for him, though, a recollection of his own inadequacy, and his fear of suffering his father’s abuse. He appears onstage in stern clothing – “wears a Panama hat, carries a cane, smokes a cigarette in a holder” (1), and

drags a black cloth, symbolising death. Lyman “utters a cry of mixed fear and hopeful surprise” and “whimpers pleadingly” (2) as his father berates him for his sexual appetite. Later, his father “begins to stalk him, the black cloth trailing behind him” (46) and Lyman climbs back into his bed as his father “starts viciously pounding the stick on the bed; with each blow a booming sound resonates as from deep in the earth” (46). Not only does this show Lyman’s traumatic relationship to his own memories, but also highlights Miller’s increased willingness to write stage directions that are more abstract and less functional. Lyman ends the sequence “crying out in terror as the Nurse hurries in” (47), as we see that his memories have gained such strength that they interact with his current reality. Lyman tells Leah that he has a positive view of his father’s toughness, laughing at a story where he belittles Lyman’s early success as a writer, but we see that memory, when he is left alone and without a woman to impress, is a traumatic and dangerous place for him to inhabit. With regards to Lyman’s wives, memory is undoubtedly an unpleasant realm for them too, but Lyman’s interactions with his father are the most explicitly traumatising memory scenes in the play.

According to Schmidt, the aesthetic of time, and by implication memory, is intrinsic to postmodernist drama. She writes:

Postmodern drama furthermore aims at deconstructing time as a continuum and a linear progressive movement. Time is predominantly rendered as discontinuous and relative. The result is the production of new forms of presentation no longer based on progressive time concepts. The aesthetic of time in postmodern theatre is grounded in an effort to present time itself, to exhibit time and trigger a metadramatic reflection on aspects of time. (76)

Time is consistently portrayed as discontinuous, as people move easily between times and places. It is relative in the sense that when a character wishes to summon a memory, they are allowed by the drama to do so, and transport themselves, and whoever is necessary to the particular memory, to said memory, in an attempt to view it from a different perspective than before. This leads to, as Schmidt describes, a different form of representation of time. The audience is no longer asked to consider a narrative that follows logically from one scene to another, but to conceive of a time that is more subjective to the characters. This leads to a metatheatrical development in *Morgan* which shall be discussed below.

One of the most important memory scenes in the play concerns a memory of Theo's, yet it is seldom discussed by critics. This is one of Theo's few memories, and is by far the most ambiguous in the play. It is a short scene, but shows precisely why the accuracy of the memories is not merely a factual issue, but a moral one. Theo is discussing Lyman with Tom, and she claims, "he tried to kill me once" (40). She then tells a story of being on a boat with Lyman, during which they heard reports of sharks in the water. Ignoring the advice, she is about to dive into the water, only to be stopped by Lyman. Having counselled caution previously, Lyman says, "[h]oney... when are you going to start believing something I say!" (42), a comment dripping with irony, given that this was around the time that he married Leah. Theo then reconsiders just how it was that Lyman saved her. When Tom says that it sounds like he saved her, Theo's response again highlights the fluid, uncertain nature of memory in this play: "Yes, I've always *tried* to think of it that way, too, but I have to face everything now – it was not quite at the top of his voice" (42). At this point, Theo "replays" the event, with Lyman making considerably less effort to save her. We see here an example of what Hutcheon refers to when she writes that "[p]ostmodern historical awareness is this 'presence of the past', as the architects claimed. The past can no more be denied than unproblematically returned to. This is not nostalgia; it is a critical revisiting" (195). This

scene also brings to mind Malkin's contrast between a selection of modernist playwrights (Strindberg, Chekhov, Miller, and Williams), and the "postmodern memory-theater" [sic] of her discussion. She says of the modernists, "we find paradigms of a basically unified (personal or group) consciousness, employing coherent dramatic enunciation in order that a past be illuminated and a present explained – rather than diffused, decentered, problematized [sic] – through memory" (21). Of course, Malkin here assumes that Miller (and, indeed, Williams) remained "modernist" (itself a questionable term when being applied to the pair, but that is for a different discussion), and never approached a postmodernist dramatic style. In fact, we see exactly what Malkin describes here in *Morgan*, proving that it made little sense to conceive of him as a "modernist", especially at such a late date as the early-1990s.

As noted, memory confuses Theo, and indeed Tom and the audience, as our only way of drawing a moral conclusion is based on this entirely murky memory. While it is certainly true that Lyman is a deeply selfish, even cruel, man, there is little else in the play to suggest that he is capable of what would effectively amount to murder. Abbotson recognises the relevance of the scene, writing, "[s]he recreates the scene a number of ways until it becomes unclear as to what really happened – it is even possible that he saved her life" (*Critical Companion*, 302). Schmidt discusses the use of this device in other postmodernist drama, writing that

time is sometimes stretched and slowed down as in filmic slow motion, and time frames are repeated to similar effects. Such repetitions also draw attention to detailed differences within the repetitions [...] This also entails a destruction of the self that is no longer certain of a coherent sense of time." (76-77)

I will discuss below Lyman's own duality and fragmentation, but it is worth dwelling on how Theo deals with the distress, not only of having her marriage so disturbed, but also of her memory being revealed to be so faulty. I propose that it is not a coincidence that Theo is the only one of the wives to be shown to doubt the facts of her memory, as she is the one who suffers most from Lyman's revelations. In her final scenes she appears in a state of confusion and distress, having possibly had a stroke of some sort, and even not wearing a skirt under her coat. This matches with Schmidt's conception of the destruction of the self, but is also possibly an attempt to seduce Lyman, insecure as she was at how attractive her younger counterpart is.

Morgan does not just portray and comment upon the harm Lyman does to others and himself in material or emotional terms, but also in the very fundamentals of belief in one's own memory. Theo enters her final scene on Tom's arm, with a "'seeing' air about her, [and] a fixed dead smile" (78). She soon mumbles, "[s]ocialism is dead. And Christianity is finished, so... There is really nothing left to... to... Except simplicity? To defend?" (78) This, again, is an expression of the "demise of metanarratives" concept. Malkin writes that the "fragmentation of experience and the dissolution of a unified self – the basic topoi of postmodern thought – banish memory from the security of individual control, rendering it sourceless, without a psychological home" (7-8), and this is exactly the process we see Theo go through, as her memory is no longer able to form the basis of her actions or personality. She suffers a fragmentation, a disruption in her character, expressed, or perhaps even caused, by her faulty memory. She later refers to this, saying to Leah, "it doesn't really matter – we're all sort of interchangeable anyway" (79). Theo is consistently presented throughout the play as the stubborn, reliable, dull alternative to Leah's sensuality. While this is overblown by critics, as I will show below, we can assert that Theo represents security and sensibility for Lyman. However, by this denouement, we see that this air of reliability has evaporated into a

jumble of nothingness. We can say, then, that so traumatic is Theo's experience of this period, as it undermined her previous beliefs in conservative, rational values, that she has become in ways symbolic of the worst of postmodernism; detached, cynical, without memory, and wearily consenting to being exchanged.

Favorini says of the late work of Miller (and Williams), "memory may be unsuccessful in bringing order to the past, or the past may not stay where it belongs, or memory lapses become morally suspect" (8), and this is what we see in this instance. Memory refuses to either give clear information on what happened in the past, or how one should act in the present. When we consider that Favorini focuses on both the personal and the social with this comment, and recall Linda Hutcheon's work on memory and reality, detailed above, we can see the postmodernist implications for Miller's writing – what Favorini describes is effectively what would be expected of postmodernist drama dealing with memory. As Hutcheon writes, in postmodernism, "[h]istory is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought – as a human construct" (*Poetics of Postmodernism*, 16).

We can see that the personal history of the two Felt families has been constructed in the events before Lyman's crash, and, equally, it is being rethought now. These histories have been constructed in the sense that they were built on faulty premises, and have been highly controlled by Lyman, with his constant deceit. Now, with Lyman's revelations, this false nature of the families is exposed, and so their respective histories are being rethought. As the wives, and Tom, recall conversations with Lyman, they occasionally see instances where Lyman had provides hints of his deceit. For instance, Tom tells Leah that Lyman came to him, around the time of their marriage, and asked about bigamy insurance – "[b]e great, especially for minority women" (15), he tells Tom. He goes on to confess being depressed, and also, "I think I've fallen in love" (17). This should have been enough for Tom to grow highly suspicious of Lyman, but crucially, he never acts. He also goes on to, in a sense,

provide Lyman with the moral cover to marry Leah. He tells Lyman, “I don’t have to tell you, the problem is not honesty but how much you hurt others with it” (18). This allows Lyman to realise that there is a simple way to avoid feeling guilty at cheating on Theo – “I just don’t want to cheat any more – it’s gotten hateful to me, all deception has. It’s my Nazi, my worst horror” (18) – and that is to simply not tell her. This is a useful scene for many reasons, as it shows Lyman’s ingenuity, his arrogance, and also hints at his possible social conscience. After all, Tom says that he had built “one of the most socially responsible companies in America” (49), and Lyman himself claims to have created “forty-two hundred jobs for people and raise[d] over sixty ghetto blacks to office positions” (18). While this use of memory appears to be an accurate recall of the events, it only serves to create further moral complexity. It introduces us to the idea that Lyman is, in his professional life at least, a righteous man who is making a positive change in the world. This scene also questions the moral value of Tom. He is considered to be the moral core of the play, the reliable and informed man who speaks honestly with Lyman, and to whom the women come for advice. He is mentioned as being a Quaker, and so assumed to be upstanding and charitable, and Lyman tells him, “there’s nobody I trust like you” (17). However, he seems to have let such a bizarre idea from Lyman go by without giving it a second thought, which is surprising given how much Tom knows of his numerous infidelities.

Hutcheon focuses much of her writing on the possibility of knowing the past, and this is again where we can see a link with the shark scene as described by Theo. Hutcheon writes, “[h]ow can we come to know the past real? Postmodernism does not deny that it existed; it merely questions how we can know real past events today, except through their traces, their texts, the facts we construct and to which we grant meaning” (*Poetics of Postmodernism*, 225). We see that enacted consistently here. The whole play is a process of asking how certain events came to pass, and questioning one’s own memory of them. Carson writes:

A major problem of the play is the complexity and ambiguity of these departures from strict realism. To begin with, the ‘flashbacks’ are not the product of a single consciousness, but rather the dramatized [sic] recollections of four different minds, who [...] disagree in their interpretation of events. While these contradictory recollections illustrate the difficulty of reconstructing the past, the problem for the audience is that there is no objective truth against which to test the reliability of any particular witness. (123)

This comment gets to the core of the moral issue of the play. Miller is dramatising the fact that people tend to have vastly differing interpretations of the same events, and so draw entirely different conclusions. How is one to know what to think of this man, these wives, this play? By reducing the play to the facts of Lyman’s lies, it is easier to judge the protagonist – as Tom says to him, of Theo, “you’ve raked her soul” (50). This, in many ways, should be the point at which the moral conversation is over. However, because Miller is not writing a straightforward drama, and indeed seems to invite differing interpretations, the play’s focus is not on one climactic scene, or on the revealing of the true nature of events or characters – as has been shown above, this true nature has consistently been both evident and, paradoxically, concealed throughout. Instead, Miller displays the problematic nature of finding the truth of an event, or even of a person. As we have seen above, he offers little closure and few answers, and so the fact of Lyman’s moral guilt, evident from the very beginning, is in many ways irrelevant – not really intending to condemn him, the play instead questions the basis on which a condemnation of him would be mounted.

Having established that memory provides an ambiguous basis for anyone trying to settle on one moral meaning for this play, I should now like to discuss further how this

interacts with postmodernist views on morality and reality. Robert Eaglestone writes, quoting Simon Critchley, that postmodernism

can be seen as an attempt to respond to the ‘primordial ethical experience’ that underlies ‘the construction of a system, or procedure, for formulating and testing the moral acceptability of certain maxims or judgements relating to social action and civic duty.’ This is because postmodernism is, first, the disruption of the metaphysics of comprehension, which is the gesture that characterizes [sic] Western thought. (43)

This quote can be used to suggest my reading of *Morgan* as a play testing to what extent morality and ethics have broken down in postmodernist society. Postmodernism, for Eaglestone as for Hutcheon, is effective as a method of producing questions for pre-existing institutions or ideas. Eaglestone views it as essentially disruptive, with potential for creative impulses, but that its value rests mostly in the willingness to doubt received wisdom, and this can refer to aesthetic, political, or moral, among other, issues. Otten notes this trend in Miller's work, writing, “moral certainties blur in these later texts, and they tend to be open-ended rather than resolved” (210).

While, in a sense, *Morgan* is not open-ended and shows that Lyman has ruined the lives of all of his family members, it is unclear just how much moral blame should be attributed to each member. Miller no longer seems certain that there are so many innocents in society, as there is no hero to personify righteousness. Lyman expresses this for him, saying to Leah, “I just want to know – do you feel a responsibility or not? [...] I know I’m wrong and I’m wrong and I’m wrong [...] You knew I was married, and you tried to make me love you” (69). Whilst being the entirely incorrect thing for Lyman to say in his situation, he is of

course technically correct – Leah knew about his marriage and that did not stop her from becoming engaged in a relationship with him. Lyman is the one character closest to some sense of reality, then, if we consider the reality of the situation to be that no-one is innocent or heroic. The closest there is to the innocent or heroic, meanwhile, is Bessie, who conveys the simple message to her father as the play’s end nears: “There are other people” (85), a message which is echoed later by Stanley in *Resurrection Blues*, who sums up the new messiah’s core idea: “don’t do bad things. Especially when you know they’re bad. Which you mostly do” (167).

Bessie, though, is not a strong enough character to be the full focus of the play; the scene is very much stolen by Lyman and his wives. We once again see Miller’s writing here match up with Hutcheon’s, as when she writes, “[t]he postmodern impulse is not to seek any total vision. It merely questions. If it *finds* such a vision, it questions how, in fact, it *made it*” (*Poetics of Postmodernism*, 48; author’s italics). This is the impulse in the play, to consistently explore how or when a character’s basis for moral certainty has been undermined. To quote Hutcheon again, she says, “[t]he challenging of certainty, the asking of questions, the revealing of fiction-making where we might have accepted the existence of some absolute ‘truth’ – this is the project of postmodernism” (*The Poetics of Postmodernism*, 48). The lack of a hero is a literal manifestation of this, as none of the characters are strong enough to withstand the constant challenging that Miller’s postmodernist vision now subjects them to.

5.3: The Fragmentation of the Postmodernist Self

The fragmentation of Lyman, and the doubling of himself, his personality, and his families, is another element that feeds into the postmodernist viewpoint of this play. Hutcheon notes this facet of postmodernist writing, commenting that “[m]any of the foes of postmodernism see

irony as fundamentally anti-serious, but that is to mistake and misconstrue the critical power of double-voicing” (*Poetics of Postmodernism*, 39). Irony, humour, and intertextuality shall be discussed below, but I should like for now to focus on this doubling. Hutcheon’s comment here can be considered in two ways: it can be used to discuss the sense in which Lyman has doubled himself and his life, and also to examine the way Miller has doubled himself. By having an attractive, interesting character be so thoroughly deceitful and damaging, it can be tough to pin down his precise attitude to Lyman. Zinman, referring to the question of Lyman’s guilt, writes that “Miller seems to be arguing the question out of both sides of his mouth” (167), and this is where the strength of the drama comes from. Lyman’s contradictory nature, his ability to amuse and horrify us – which he shares with *Resurrection Blues*’ Felix – complicates our ability to make a moral judgement about his behaviour and personality. There is almost even a dignity in his commitment to deception that Tom, who is presented as the play’s moral centre but is in reality a weak, ineffectual figure, lacks.

The doubling of Lyman, though, is more interesting from the perspective of postmodernism, as this is a feature of postmodernist texts that multiple critics have identified. Hutcheon writes that postmodernism contains a “nudging commitment towards doubling or duplicity” (1), while Gordon Slethaug says that “the idea of the double has seized the imagination of a number of the major modernist and postmodernist writers” (1). He points out, however, the different meaning this device acquired in postmodernism: “[the double] had been used to illustrate the desire for unity in human personality and spirit but now signals double purposes, fragmented understanding, and self-parody in all life and literature” (2). It is especially important in postmodernist writing, then, because so much of contemporary thought revolved around the dissolution of the idea of the coherent, unified individual, and this is best expressed through duality or fragmentation. From John Barth’s early novel *The Floating Opera* (1956) through works of Shepard and Paul Auster, we can see this at work in

postmodernist writing. When people came to be conceived of as products of their environments, media, and various other forces, postmodernist literature expressed this using either doubling or fragmentation. Abbotson, referring to *Morgan*, wrote “[c]omplete fragmentation ever threatens, and this is a fact that all of the characters we see must face: it is something with which they must learn to live” (Miller and the Postmodern Impulse, 308-309), which emphasises that the condition as depicted in the play is something that is a fact of life now; it is hardly up for debate any more. At one point, Lyman suggests that this sense of fragmentation being a fact of contemporary life. He tells Tom,

we’re all the same; a man is a fourteen-room house – in the bedroom he’s asleep with his intelligent wife, in the living room he’s rolling around with some bareass girl, in the library he’s paying his taxes, in the yard he’s raising tomatoes, and in the basement he’s building a bomb to blow it all up. And nobody’s any different. (51)

This is in a sense a good example of Lyman being able to conceive of anything outside his own experiences, but also hints at a severe pressure he, and others, feel – that such is the level of split personalities it is impossible to find, and act like, a coherent individual.

Jasbir Jain, in a general context, wrote in 1997, “[c]entral to this process of experimentation is the changing concept of character. No longer is it viewed as a cohesive, integrated being, but one invaded by doubts and desires, fragmented and contradictory” (8). Brian Friel’s *Philadelphia, Here I Come* (1964) is an early example, as he has two characters representing his protagonist – there is both a “Public” and “Private” Gar O’Donnell, the latter of which, unseen and unheard by the rest of the cast, says and does what Public Gar desires.

In Slethaug's view, this use of the double within postmodernism is not incidental, but an intrinsic aspect to the style of both writing and thinking. He writes,

I see [postmodernism] as rejecting the existence of consistent personalities and psychological wholeness as well as any stable relationship between signifiers and signified. To me it also emphasizes destabilized [sic] and duplicitous meanings, self-reflexivity, discontinuous and polyphonic discourses, arbitrary codes, and inclusion of previously excluded or ignored discourses. (5)

While Miller had played opposing characters off each other before, under the general archetypes of the heroic, romantic, idealist vs. the hard-nosed, clinical businessman (Chris and Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, Willy Loman and Howard Wagner in *Salesman*, Victor and Walter in *The Price*), he had never before done so in the same character. Lyman, though, is the first such contradiction in the one character. Slethaug writes that the double gained a particular nature in the postmodernist period, saying that the "literature of the double increasingly speaks of man's employment of, and scepticism about, traditional modes of systematizing [sic], classifying, categorizing [sic], and constructing" (30). Lyman resists categorisation at all times, as it necessitates restraint – as he tells Tom, "I can't worship self-denial; excuse me, but it's just not true for me" (49). Bigsby writes that in *Morgan* "there seems to be no coherent self, no moral core to identity, and hence no purpose in restraint. The only arbiter is an imperial self whose presumptive rights go unchallenged by faith or conviction" ("The last plays", 172). The fact of Lyman's humorous nature is also relevant to Slethaug's conception of the postmodernist double, as he writes that it is "rarely trivial, though not infrequently comic. The issues are real and sometimes tragic" (1). This brings to

mind Rodney Simard's conception of postmodernist drama, mentioned above, as being simultaneously tragic and comedic.

Lyman's duality does not merely derive from his having two families. He is, in fact, an entirely distinctive character with each of them. With Theo, he has "always been terrified of speed; he never drives above sixty..." (39), while with Leah he owns several sports cars, and even competes in races. He also hunts in his life with Leah, and flies a small plane – while in his life with Theo, he is generally afraid of flying. Bigsby comments that Lyman doubles "himself through doubling his wives" (*Critical Study*, 368), and this is yet another expression of Lyman's egotism – it's almost as if he wants there to be even more Lymans in the world. Slethaug writes that "[t]he postmodern double raises questions about fixed categories and constructs, especially about the notion that any human being has a unified identity" (9), and again, Lyman seems to be a personification of this theoretical concept – he deliberately resists attaining a unified identity. Simard also wrote of the double in postmodernist drama, saying in relation to Shepard's *True West*, but equally applicable to *Morgan*,

[p]ostmodern individuals are shown to be hopelessly divided, continually at war with conflicting images of self. As is characteristic of Shepard, the play presents a condition without philosophic argument; readers are given a case study, and it is up to them to diagnose individually the condition and prescribe for themselves. (95)

To an extent, I think the same process is undertaken in *Morgan*. The main characters are all shown to have faulty memories, as well as images of themselves, and others, and so this results in there being no agreed-upon version of reality within the play – it is not only that

Lyman is doubled, or fragmented, but the very idea of solid character, individual, or memory is problematised. The play operates as an attempt to show how and what has happened in the lives of these people, and it ultimately fails at providing an agreed-upon vision of the past, leaving the future open to doubt. As Jain writes, the “fractured, plural ‘self’ of the experimental theater [sic] reflects the loss of the integrated, consistent self” (14). Sengupta, meanwhile, writes that Lyman “ends up as multiple selves beneath which we find no constancy” (“The Late Plays of Arthur Miller”, 116).

Slethaug conceives of the double in the period of postmodernism as enhancing, or accelerating, the destabilising aspects of the narrative, and this leads back to the moral ambiguity that has been discussed above. He writes of a core group of postmodernist American authors, including Pynchon and Vonnegut, that they interrogate

the present order of things not to present a single, clear-cut new answer, but to call into question a rational, consistent order of reality, to transgress social and literary conventions, to debunk a correspondence between the experiential or real world and the text, to raise possibilities of a multiplicity of credible answers, and to use traditional elements of fiction both ironically and parodically but without satiric motives. (3)

Each of the things he describes are done by Miller in *Morgan*. The resistance shown towards any sort of narrative or epistemological closure suggests not only double, but multiple, meanings and endings to the text. Slethaug’s above comment brings to mind Hutcheon saying that that “postmodernism’s initial concern is to de-naturalize [sic] some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as natural are in fact cultural; made by us, not given to us” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 1-2), as

we see again the idea that postmodernism, and in this case the postmodernist double, is not necessarily concerned with proposing a solution, but with exerting greater critical force on issues.

The issue of the postmodern double, or split self, can also be seen in a text that is interesting when considered next to *Morgan*. Woody Allen's *Zelig* (1983) is a mockumentary investigating the life of Leonard Zelig, portrayed by Allen, a man who instantly changes his appearance, habits, and profession to be more like those who are near him. The film is told in retrospect, and features contributions from intellectual figures such as Saul Bellow, Irving Howe, and Susan Sontag. There is no suggestion that Miller may have been influenced by the film, but it is noteworthy how much they resemble each other. While *Morgan* is told largely through memory and recall, *Zelig*, as a mockumentary, is told with clips of old footage, memorabilia, and contemporary interviews. This creates confusion for viewers, as the ambiguity is heightened by so many different forms being layered upon each other. It begins with Sontag claiming that this figure of Zelig was as famous as Charles Lindbergh, and so while we then recognise that the story is happening in our world, that is, the real, recorded world, the supernatural qualities of the film begin to cloud our judgement. Reference is made to Zelig discussing politics with F. Scott Fitzgerald, and there is a doctored photograph of him with Eugene O'Neill. Ruth D. Johnson writes, "*Zelig* collapses the distinction between genres and old and new forms. Thus, it calls into question the notion of history as a linear narrative of development; it insists on the coincidence of old and new forms" (301), and, as we have already seen, this is very much in line with traditional postmodernist styles of narrative.

Morgan does the same, to a degree. While it is a serious drama, as I have mentioned above, it utilises the same set-up as *Run for Your Wife*, Ray Cooney's sex farce. This contributes to the play's preoccupation with sex and humour, which divert the attention from

what should be a personal tragedy – thus a jarring effect is created, wherein one is consistently jerked between several conflicting emotional states, reflecting how one is also moved rapidly through time and place. Favorini writes of the play, “[b]ecause the play veers between farce and tragedy, its moral compass is difficult to follow” (156). An example of this jarring effect is when Lyman declares, in the middle of a serious conversation with Tom, “[t]hat red river of tail-lights gliding down Park Avenue on a winter’s night – and all those silky white thighs crossing inside those heated limousines... Christ, can there be a sexier image?” (18-19). Zinman, quoted above, describes this as puerile, sleazy, and clichéd, and she is right in her critique, but it is not necessarily a criticism of Miller’s writing, but more of the personal morality of Lyman. Zinman’s quote here also serves to reinforce a crucial facet of postmodernist writing that is at play throughout – the juxtaposition of popular, mass entertainment with more serious art forms. As Schmidt writes, “[i]n its attempt to create a new aesthetics that contrasts with forms of high culture, postmodernism, for many critics, is also firmly rooted in the popular and the low-brow” (15-16), while I have above quoted Connor on the importance of sexuality to postmodernist society. When we consider the likes of John Proctor and Quentin of *After the Fall*, and remember how Miller characters were formerly guilt-ridden by their sexual desires, we see the significance of this change. Sex is dealt with in a far more comedic, ironic tone here, with Miller appearing to have fun with the topic.

Zelig is also interesting to consider because it concerns the divided self, and, almost inevitably, the topic of bigamy. It is discovered, after Zelig has become famous across America as the “human chameleon”, that he has married multiple women, and fathered numerous children, without the current, cured, version of the man being aware of it. The parallel with Lyman is obvious, even if Zelig’s condition is more personally sympathetic and psychologically interesting. Ruth Perlmutter writes that “to prove masculinity, Leonard must

surmount his single-voiced state, hysteria-ridden narcissism, and onanistic preoccupations (note all the references to masturbation in the film) by becoming multiple *male* subjects.” (208, author’s italics). We can say the same thing of Lyman. Only by dividing himself, and becoming different people with each of his wives, can he begin to live with himself. Lyman throws off his father’s admonishments – “[s]tay off the roof – very bad for business the way you fucking all these girls up there” (24), he berates him in one of Lyman’s traumatic memories – and fulfils his strongest desires by becoming a powerful, masculine figure, with multiple identities.

By examining *Zelig* alongside *Morgan* we see another example of a representation of postmodernist memory at work in a contemporary cultural work. Postmodernist memory, as I have shown here, serves to complicate and recontextualise the past, which is precisely what would be expected of a mode of thought that was an attempt to re-evaluate much of what was considered normal or good.

5.4: Postmodernist Drama, Performativity and Metatheatre

I will turn now to some of the more aesthetic qualities of *Morgan*, as opposed to its moral, political or epistemological ones. This will necessitate a return to Simard’s work on postmodernist drama, which will serve to highlight the clarity and perception of his writing, and also the specific relevance it has for *Morgan*. Simard’s discussion of postmodernist drama is written before *Morgan*, but he mentions several features that Miller uses therein. Once again, this suggests Miller’s writing was more attuned to the cultural mainstream than is generally thought. Simard writes that the

postmodern dramatist is concerned with action and choice, and the forces which precede choice, not with any absolutes which may be inferred from those actions [...] Contemporary people

have come to recognize [sic] that reality itself is subjective and therefore multiple [...] They have come to realise that shared reality is a myth, and that individual reality is simply a matter of existential choice; this is the essential condition postmodern drama seeks to dramatize [sic] and explore. (132)

It hardly needs explication, but we have already seen much of this in *Morgan* – the lack of a shared reality or understanding of the past; the revising of history in order to discern how choices were made; and dramatised realisation of the subjective nature of so many experiences. Simard focuses on the writings of the generations of playwrights that followed Miller – Albee, Rabe, and Shepard among them – and writes that in

[a]dopting the methods and techniques of their predecessors without the philosophical limitation frequently seen as attendant upon them, these younger dramatists attempt to reflect a world view that characterizes [sic] their generation's concerns. Their efforts to represent accurately the postmodern world results in a new form of existential realism, wherein reality is displayed as subjective. (x-xi)

While focusing, understandably, on the younger generation, these words are similarly apt to describe Miller's drama at this stage. What we see in all of Miller's plays under discussion here, and especially in *Morgan*, is work that is far less concerned with putting forth a stringent political or social view. He takes the aesthetic forms of other drama, and uses it to make more oblique social and political commentary. Simard's "existential realism" is a concept that he does not define adequately, but if we disregard this sloppiness on his part, and instead focus on the rest of his description of postmodernist drama, we see the relevance of it

for this discussion. Miller, consistently in these plays, shows himself to be freed from the “philosophical limitations” of his previous conception of the world, and more willing to combine opposing styles or themes – hence the juxtaposition with comedy and tragedy, the banal and the sacred, that we repeatedly see in these works.

Simard’s view is that the postmodernist drama of the playwrights mentioned is a “synthesis of realism and absurdism [sic], often relying heavily on the third and less discussed major movement in modern drama, Epic Theatre” (x). While this idea of a synthesis of realism and Absurdism is again questionable, what does merit exploration here is the relationship between Epic Theatre and postmodernism. Without wishing to recapitulate the entire history and aesthetic of Epic, it will of course be necessary to describe its most salient features. Epic Theatre is mostly associated Bertold Brecht’s work, and was largely confined to continental Europe. Undoubtedly influencing Absurdism and postmodernist drama, Epic was a style that relied upon creating a “*verfremdungseffekt*”, or alienation effect that foregrounded the falsity of what was on show. Highly political, as would be expected from a Jewish writer in 1930s Germany, Brecht’s intention in using this style, arguably most clearly in *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (1938), was to shock an audience out of becoming engaged in the narrative of the drama, and into political and social awareness. Brecht used rapid and multiple scene changes, music, cue cards, actors in many roles, and explicit declarations of political standpoints to avoid a comfortable, safe experience for his audience. Simard, crucially, notes the political difference inherent in how these techniques are used by the original Epic practitioners and subsequent Absurdist and postmodernist dramatists: “[t]he similarities between the two modes are misleading, however, if they are viewed as originating from the same sources, rather than the same motive – to supersede traditional realism” (22).

Use of the Epic aesthetic is without a doubt present in Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, with little scenery and rapid changes between scenes, which, along with a one-character chorus, serve to highlight the falsity of what is happening onstage. This can be thought of as the direct opposite of the kitchen sink realism of Osborne or Shelagh Delaney, whose most notable works largely attempted some form of replication of realistic social settings and relationships. We also see it in Shepard, who, Simard writes, "[l]ike Bertold Brecht relies heavily on song and monologue, roles constructed not to reveal character but to promote a sense of performance" (77), especially in early works such as *The Tooth of Crime*, which, as has been mentioned above, relies heavily on song and performance within the drama itself for its power. Schmidt also makes this link, writing, "[t]he Epic Theater [sic] shares with postmodern forms, for example, the reflection upon its own constituents and the attempt to unveil theatrical illusion" (33). This of course harks back to some of the most central ideas of postmodernist writing, that it is explicitly self-referential and self-aware. Every play I have discussed here, to varying degrees, makes self-referential comments on its own issues and structures. Elements of Epic Theatre appear in several other Miller works, such as *After the Fall*, but the expressed theatricality and the blatant performativity of so much of *Morgan* makes it stand out. Intriguingly, Linda Hutcheon links Epic Theatre to historiographic metafiction, writing,

[h]istoriographic metafiction, in particular, offers many parallels with epic theatre [sic]. Both, for instance, place the reader in a paradoxical position, both inside and outside, participatory and critical: we are to be thoughtful and analytic, rather than either passive or unthinkingly empathetic. Both are equally accessible and entertaining, and equally didactic. (*Poetics of Postmodernism*, 219)

While postmodernism and historiographic metafiction should not be considered synonyms, and so I have no need to conclude that *Morgan* is didactic, it is nonetheless a very useful quote to understand the links between Epic Theatre and postmodernism.

Miller's use of metatheatrical, self-conscious devices is a curious, though rarely scrutinised feature of *Morgan*. Being a play in which reality and memory are consistently in doubt, this brings up the issue of authorship – if what we are watching is not even real in its own terms, it does not seem so outlandish for there to be an internal author. In many ways, Lyman himself is this internal author. Not only does he set in motion the play's events – by having so many affairs, by committing bigamy, by (possibly) removing a roadblock and crashing his car on purpose – there are even scenes when Lyman controls events. We have already seen that the first meeting of the two wives, although it “actually” happens, is also a product of Lyman's imagination. There are similar occurrences throughout, as we are shown projections of Lyman's fantasies. Bigsby notes that Lyman “writes”, and indeed “directs” the action occasionally. He says that *Morgan* is a play “in which we see the characters in part through Lyman's eyes [...] He becomes the playwright” (1962-2005, 409), another postmodernist indicator – we see the same thing at work in the writings of Vonnegut and Auster, to name but two authors.

The most explicit example of this is early on, when Lyman, Theo, and Leah are all present and conscious in the same room for the first time. As the two women are about to start physically fighting, Lyman shouts, “[e]verybody lie down!”, and they “instantly de-animate as though suddenly falling under the urgency of his control” (28). They lie on the bed where Lyman's cast remains, as he often slips in and out of it throughout, in order to act out other scenes and events. This is the most clichéd and predictable heterosexual male sexual fantasy, so it is not a surprise, in many ways, for Lyman to imagine it. He kisses both of them and declares, “[o]h what pleasure, what intensity! [...] Oh the double heat of two

blessed wives – this is heaven!” (29), and it is evidently some kind of heaven for Lyman. However, his ability to not only retreat there, but bring the characters and drama with him, hints at Lyman’s control over the narrative. Again, we see the idea of an objective reality being challenged, as Lyman can do what he desires with it. Lyman, in some ways, echoes the Stage Manager of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* (1938). In Wilder’s play, the Stage Manager acts as a guide to the location, characters and action of the play, but does not actually interact as a character in the drama (within the drama). Lyman does not interact with the audience in the way Wilder’s manager does, but he is the closest among the characters to being in some form of control. Lyman is more of a writer – and actually was one in his youth – though, so the comparison is curious, if not exact.

Another scene enacts a fantasy for Lyman, and displays his role in creating the drama, and that he is not merely a character in it. Leah and Theo are directed to be “on elevated platforms, like two stone deities: they are in kitchen aprons, wifely ribbons tying up their hair” (44). Once again, the cliché of “wifely ribbons” is so extreme that it feels as if it is Lyman’s direction, and not Miller’s. They debate over who gets to cook what for Lyman, and fuss over his dietary needs – “he’s had to cut out the sausages” (44), says Theo. They come to a harmonious decision, as Theo declares, “[g]ood! Then you’ll have your lies and I’ll have mine!” (45) This is another example of Lyman’s heaven, as everyone agrees to sustain the lie. He even “chuckles in his sleep” (45), before the spell is broken by the return of Lyman’s father, who, as we have seen, signifies death and fear. Bigsby writes of this scene, “in a sense, they are merely rehearsing the roles conventionally ascribed to women, recalling the extent to which character is a projection of other people’s fantasies and presumptions. They are what Lyman wishes to make them, minor characters in the drama of his life” (*Critical Study*, 375). It is also a glimpse into a world that has begun to disappear, which would undoubtedly be a regret to a man such as Lyman, and this is the world of traditional gender

roles. The “wifely ribbons” and competition over cooking for their husband are part of a narrative of femininity that was coming under increasing pressure throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, and this was often considered a feminist application of postmodernist thought. Postmodernism, as we have seen, served to undermine traditional ideas, among them gender roles, and what we also see here is the dissolution of a coherent, unified individual –women were no longer seen to be just wives or cooks or child-bearers, but, to Lyman’s horror, acquired a multiplicity of roles and identities that had long been denied to them.

Schmidt’s analysis makes no mention of *Morgan*, although she writes of a postmodernist dramatic device that is similar to Lyman’s use of Theo and Leah in these scenes. She writes:

A central bodily image is that of the pose in the well-known tableau or filmic freeze in which the action on stage is brought to a halt and characters freeze in a static image. The pose here functions as an interface between theatrical action and performance: it appears to be essentially anti-theatrical and not oriented towards a linear movement of action but used more as a spatial device. (50)

This is applicable to this scene because of course Lyman’s directing of the women in these incidents does not, in fact, propel the narrative, but allows for a depiction of where Lyman wants his women to be placed physically – in both instances they end up either on his bed, or kneeling beside his bed sucking on his fingers. It certainly serves to jolt the audience out of a regular theatrical experience, at which point we again see a link with Epic Theatre.

The conclusion of this play is predictably ambiguous, and serves to underline the difficulty in fully assessing its moral position. As Lyman's families, and friend, leave him alone in the bed, he is left with only his nurse for company. He seems to control, once again, their actions, saying, "[i]t's okay – if you want to go now. It's over" (88), another metatheatrical nod to both his directing, and a comment on the play. He makes a final admission of confusion, whimpering, "in some miserable dark corner of my soul, I'm still not sure why I'm condemned" (86). While this sounds like a form of confession, as he concedes that his position is a miserable one to take, he is still unavoidably self-pitying, if at least, for once, honest. It also displays a chronic lack of understanding other people. June Schlueter writes in relation to this scene, "[u]nable to write the moral ending the women prefer, he cannot script the closing scene" ("Scripting the Closing Scene", 84-85), and this is what we would expect from a self-referential author-within-the-postmodernist text – his moral and aesthetic limits refuse to allow him to bring the play to a satisfactory end.

Lyman concludes with a conversation with his nurse, asking what she and her family talk about while ice fishing. When she says they recently talked about new shoes, Lyman marvels, "[t]hat... that's just wonderful to do that. I don't know why, but it just is" (87). This appears to be Lyman coming around to an appreciation of the simple things in life, and after she leaves he begins to weep with "painful wonder and longing in his face" (88), but it is not so easy to believe that Lyman is in some way redeemed. Miller contended that "the play has no solution" (qtd. Bigsby, *1962-2005*, 413), while Porter sees that "this lack of resolution is also the result of Miller's valiant effort to tell the whole truth" (362) – the truth now being not that there is a man or system we should condemn as guilty, but that we struggle to even know how to decide a person or system is guilty. Lyman's redemption is unbelievable because he consistently engages in deception and self-justification throughout, so a quick reversal is not as credible as it would appear. There is also ambiguity in the fact that Miller is creating the

space for some form of forgiveness – if, after all he has done, Lyman shows contrition, does this excuse him? Is he to be allowed return to either one of his families, to regain control of his business after public disgrace, simply because he now appears to understand the importance of family life? These questions are merely posed by the play, not answered, and so this ending, by refusing to offer closure, is open-ended, and, as we have seen, this continues the postmodernist aesthetic and moral awareness on show throughout.

The Ride Down Mount Morgan was one of the most ambitious plays Miller crafted in his entire career. Even Gottfried, in a biography that was both personally and artistically very harsh on Miller, wrote that it “is the unlikeliest of Arthur Miller’s plays and as such, best exemplifies his ingenuity of style” (424). It expanded his writing both in terms of dialogue and offstage sound effects, and showed a playwright who was continuing to craft different types of character. The postmodernist elements discussed above were both conscious efforts at presenting ambiguous realities, and also a more natural product of living in a society that had become familiar with the concept of postmodernism, or just imbibed perceptions and modes of perception and action we have come to label “postmodern”. While Miller remained a critic of much of this way of thinking, he still doubtless incorporates much of it into the aesthetic and attitude of this play.

6. No Resurrection, but Lots of Blues: Miller's 21st Century

Mediascape

6.1: Opening remarks

Throughout his career, Arthur Miller set various plays in the past. Even though he consistently tried to address contemporary issues in his writing, one of the most common criticisms of him remained that his political and aesthetic ideals were rooted in a lost time. Works such as *Incident at Vichy*, *The American Clock*, *Broken Glass*, and *Mr. Peters' Connections* contributed to this perception, but only when given superficial readings. The habit he had, which was arguably more pronounced in his essays, of consistently returning to events and issues of the past is what makes *Resurrection Blues* one of the most intriguing plays of his career: in this work, he starkly confronts the modern world, and takes it on its own terms by addressing the importance of television to 21st century life, in a funny, ironic way. This is the Miller play most firmly situated in the postmodern, as he explicitly engages with many of its core concepts, and uses a style occasionally close to Absurdism, of which he had previously been critical – in 1990, he told Janet Balakian, “it’s true I was rather uncomfortable with [Absurdist playwrights]. When people tend to celebrate the meaningless, it ends up with fascism” (“A Conversation with Arthur Miller”, 415). While Miller was not new to satire, this is the most comedic and ironic play of his career, as he presents an early-21st century moral wasteland, where not only is the issue of how to act in a situation problematised, as in, for instance, his version of Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* (1950), but the very concept of what is right and wrong largely disintegrates. Discussions of what is right or wrong become discussions of what is most expedient to the individual at that point. While Miller himself does not abandon all sense of morality and justice, he portrays a world in

which these qualities have been degraded and devalued. In this chapter, I will again place particular focus on how Miller's non-fiction writing of the period makes evident his growing satirical voice, and we will see his developing sense that politics was becoming less anchored in ideology and causes. I will also highlight the huge influence of television on American culture throughout this time period, while at all times keeping the core concepts of postmodernism in view, paying particular attention to the works of Baudrillard.

The most important frame I wish to place this play in is that of the postmodernist media landscape. Miller had consistently used technology as a discomfiting device in his plays, from the voice recorder that disturbs Willy Loman to the recording of Albert Kroll singing "Shenandoah" in *Clara*. In *Resurrection Blues*, his focus is on television, and in particular the culture that television had done so much to shape and create in the post-war years – as Joyce Nelson wrote in the late-1980s, "[c]ulture has become almost entirely television culture, or television-derived 'culture'" (25). Given that my conception of postmodernism and postmodernity is largely based on the distorting roles that media plays in destroying and creating narratives as it chooses, this play is the work that gets closest to this idea. Television, in particular, is the most effective tool in establishing the narratives of this period, and has only recently been taken over by the internet and its attendant devices. In this chapter, I will discuss the work of several writers on television culture, and its impact on society, to observe how crucial, and arguably damaging, television was to creating the world Miller critiques here. I will argue that Miller observes a world dominated by television, which had by now been accepted as a fundamental and unquestioned aspect of American life. This sharp attention to the contemporary world and the methods of media manipulation showed that Miller remained a keen social critic, even into his late 80s – though this criticism was now filtered through a strong postmodernist sensibility.

Resurrection Blues is set in an unnamed Latin American dictatorship, coming to the end of a lengthy civil war, which survives partly due to support from the American government. Possibly influenced by Miller's trip to Venezuela in 1981 – Bigsby writes that he found "there that mixture of wealth and poverty that would later be reflected in *Resurrection Blues*" (1962-2005, 306) – Colombia may have been another model. Chomsky notes that "[i]n 1999, Colombia became the leading recipient of US military and police assistance [and] compiled by far the worst human rights record, in conformity with a well-established and long-standing correlation" (*Rogue States*, 62). In any case, the social reality of the play – a Latin American police state underwritten by US money – was by this point a long-accepted facet of American political life. Miller uses very little to set the scene, simply writing, "[v]arious locations in a faraway country" (128). As is the case in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, the location is not specific, and this removes us somewhat from the realm of realistic drama. The play begins as a violent civil war is coming to a close, and the dictator appears willing to commit his government to mild social reforms. Said dictator, General Felix Barriaux, plans to use the money received for televising an execution of a criminal, \$75 million (the figure tends to change in performance to stay relevant), to invest in the country's infrastructure. While some of these investments are useful – "we once had an estimate to irrigate the entire eastern half of the country and that was only thirteen million!" (142) – others are more trivial ("I could put the police in decent shoes and issue everyone of them a poncho") (142), serve to reveal Felix's true concerns ("And real sewers... with *pipes!* – so the better class of people wouldn't have to go up to the tops of the hills to build a house [...] send all our prostitutes to the dentist..."), or are entirely useless ("we could maybe have our own airline") (142).

The complications soon begin to arise for Felix. The criminal in question is judged as a terrorist by some, while to others he is a messiah, and potentially the son of God. One of

these people is a revolutionary and recovering drug addict, Jeanine. She begins the play describing her failed suicide attempt and how the messiah, Ralph, saved her life. Her speech at the start of the play sets the ironic tone that continues throughout: “I finally decided, one morning, to jump out my window. In this country even a successful suicide is difficult” (129). Felix’s cousin, and Jeanine’s father, Henri, tries to persuade him to call off the execution, which is to take the form of a crucifixion. This is the core of the play, as Miller uses the most extreme, tasteless event to satirise contemporary media and corporate culture. Much of the money is to be made through advertising, for various bodily ailments, prompting Henri to despair, “[i]s there a hole in the human anatomy we don’t make a dollar on?” (141). This is curious, because the implication is that he would be less disturbed if the advertisements shown were for “classier” products than cures for “athlete’s foot, sour stomach, constipation, anal itch [...] runny stool, falling hair, gum disease, crotch itch, dry skin, oily skin, nasal blockage” (141). There is also a certain hypocrisy in his use of the word “we”. While he seems to be using it in a general sense, meaning the upper class (2% of the population own 96% of the country’s land), or perhaps even humanity, in fact he is very specifically in that “we” group, as he owns considerable shares in the companies that distribute these products, and so will benefit financially from the crucifixion. This jars somewhat with his image of himself as a philosopher and intellectual, and is another instance of the lack of heroism in the play – as Miller explores in *After the Fall*, everyone carries some form of guilt or complicity. Felix and Henri are two extremely interesting characters to whom I will pay particular attention below, but first I will sketch out the rest of what is a fairly convoluted play.

Henri’s protests are futile, but Felix’s plans are interrupted when Ralph escapes from prison. His soldiers hunt for him while Skip L. Cheeseboro and Emily Shapiro, respectively the account executive and director who represent American interests, arrive in the country. Felix takes a special interest in Emily, who he believes will cure him of his erectile

dysfunction. She agrees to go on a date with him, hoping to persuade him to call off the crucifixion. He changes his mind repeatedly, and threatens to torture Ralph's disciple, Stanley, to find the secret of how Ralph pleases women. The play concludes with Ralph, only ever represented by a blinding light from offstage, having escaped, as the characters advise him on what to do – Skip and Felix want him to come down to be crucified, while Emily and Jeanine recognise that he should leave. At the close, his light dims, and one is never really sure whether or not he was the messiah.

To a greater extent than any other Miller play, this is an unsatisfactory ending, when there is in fact no resurrection, and so no redemption. This creation of a world without even a guiding moral centre, let alone a redemptive conclusion, reveals his increasingly sceptical perception of contemporary life. It's not that Miller believes there is no potential for improvement, as would a real Absurdist, but more that he now considers the world to be absurd, and that it has been made absurd by forces, such as politics and the media, that are under human control. He does, though, make at least one explicit reference to the theatre of the Absurd. The set description for Scene Five reads "Darkness. A moon. A palm tree" (176), a blatant echo of Beckett's "A country road, a tree. Evening" (1) in *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Ralph also goes under numerous names throughout the play, at one point being called Vladimir, which again brings to mind Beckett's tramps. What Miller constructs, then, is a world that adheres to what is described by theorists of the postmodern. Characters discuss the demise of metanarratives, both personally and politically; consciously mix high and low culture; ridicule belief systems; and, crucially, much of their behaviour and attitudes are blatantly influenced by overexposure to media systems, especially television.

Miller's tone throughout, as has been mentioned, is one of irony. This is reflected in the way conversations take place throughout. Skip and Emily consistently pepper their sentences with the word "like" in place of a comma or pause, which lands a contemporaneity

to the dialogue, but also suggests detached boredom on their part. Many comments have double meanings, and people discuss matters of grave importance and banal details parallel to each other – Felix confesses his erectile dysfunction to Henri with a metaphor – “[m]y dog just won’t hunt” (137) – while they discuss the planned crucifixion. Later, Emily, between half-heartedly protesting the crucifixion, calls her mother and asks her to feed her cat. Also in this conversation, Emily reveals she may be pregnant, and we get a grotesque juxtaposition of birth and death, violence and care. That is not to say that every character speaks in this flippant way, however. Henri makes a lot of earnest-sounding comments, but eventually his inert nature conquers any convictions he may hold. Jeanine tells him of his true nature when she comments, “[o]h Papa, why do you go on caring so much when you know you will never act?” (183) For his part, Henri believes that “there is no politics any more” (183), an idea that is repeated in several ways throughout. Jeanine herself is a recovering drug addict who finds solace in Ralph, as does Stanley, an ageing hippy who has been into every fad going, and now says, “I’ve ruined my whole life believing in things” (165). Whilst her being a drug addict should not discount Jeanine from the realms of the heroic, she does not actually *do* very much in this play. Her role is to be the mirror Henri generally refuses to look in, and also to show that belief in something, irrespective of its veracity, can be a comfort to the vulnerable.

Resurrection Blues lacks one central character on whom we are to focus our attention. The catalyst for the story, Ralph, never appears onstage or in human form – he is a Godot who has both come and has not, leaving the world in a state of paralysis. The human characters, meanwhile, all have significant flaws that make it impossible to root for them. As I have already mentioned, this makes the drama more ambiguous, and shows Miller’s lack of belief in heroes. In the pages that follow, I will pay particular attention to three of the main characters, all of whom are varying shades of unpleasant. By closely addressing these

characters, I will highlight the levity with which Miller wrote this play, the potential links with previous texts, and address how his ear for specific speaking styles creates a fake, multi-layered form of dialogue wherein language is used to cloud and distort rather than clarify.

It is necessary, however, to spend a few pages placing *Resurrection Blues* in the context of the power of television in late-20th century America. *Resurrection Blues* concerns itself, to a large extent, with the power of television to create events, and this is reflective of a general societal trend, as it came to define realities of the world for a vast number of people. Television spectacles were an entirely new form of cultural event in the post-war world, an awareness of which is present throughout the play. The 1960 presidential debates, Kennedy's assassination and funeral, the 1968 Democratic convention, the Moon Landing, and the Watergate Hearings were some of the most notable events of their time, and these fostered new methods of delivery for television programming that continue to this day. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was another such event, and for Guy Debord, this was a fulfilment of what he described in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). In a preface to the third edition, in 1994, he argued that the fall of the Wall itself, and the resultant demise of Communism in Eastern Europe, was rapidly turned into a spectacle by the media, stripping it of its ideological importance or potential. He writes,

[n]o one in the West felt the need to spend more than a single day considering the impart and impact of this extraordinary media event – proof enough, were proof called for, of the progress made by the techniques of the spectacle [...] The phenomenon was duly noted, dated and deemed sufficiently well understood; a very simple sign, 'the fall of the Berlin Wall', repeated over and over again, immediately attained the contestability of all the other *signs of democracies*. (9-10, author's italics)

The media, in Debord's view, had instantly rendered the event devoid of meaning and opportunity for radical change or interrogation, and instead used it as a symbol for its own ideological purposes.

One aspect to my argument around the impact of television is the way in which critics have sought to discredit the idea that the medium can be objective. Derek Paget refers to this as "phantom objectivity", writing that it

haunts cinema, TV, and even theatrical representations of reality to the extent that the Imaginary is still often accepted very readily as the real *provided it conforms to the conventions of realism*. The world of commercial screen entertainment is predicated upon such mystification. (114, author's italics)

Once again, we see the idea that the actual world has to be adapted to fit what our representations tell us is reality. Conceptions of reality become, therefore, as illusory as anything else on our television screens. This is what, as we will see, is understood so well by the protestors Miller met at the 1972 Democratic convention. Not only did they know how to act on camera, but they knew the necessity of establishing their presence in the media world.

Stuart Hood also wrote about the very deliberate way images and events are portrayed on screen. He said of camera crews and directors that they do not wish to admit

that the framing of a picture on the screen or setting that is chosen for a subject can be of more than aesthetic importance; that it is an indication of how we should react to the subject that is presented on the screen; and that an aesthetic judgement can conceal a political one. (6)

One implication of Hood's perspective, though, could be that this happens because of individual choices. However, it is generally understood that the media function this way because that is the intention of the institution; as we have seen with Baudrillard and Debord, the media have an interest in diluting potentially radical political events, and rapidly transforming them into signs. Paul Anthony Taylor links this to the way images change so rapidly in television. He writes that "the media's visually determined and entertainment-oriented grammar means that an innate tendency for depicting context-free images of destruction routinely displaces underlying political issues" (393). Television, in this sense, is a medium whose sole intent is to entertain above all else. If it does not entertain, it soothes; as Taylor writes, "[w]hat might otherwise disorientate and profoundly shock us is transformed into an easily recognisable and thereby less threatening category of experience" (395), which instantly brings to mind Baudrillard's claim that all media events are mere simulacrum, repetitions that follow a script. This also suggests the discussion of violence in *Resurrection Blues*, which has been severely diluted by its repetition in the media - Felix says, "shooting doesn't work! People are shot on television every 10 minutes [...] it's meaningless" (139).

Much of the discussion around television comes down to how it subverts what is natural. Hood writes that

[t]elevision pictures tend to be unquestioned; they are accepted as being as natural as gas, water or electricity. They seem to be untouched by human hands. This 'natural' look is so important to the people who choose the pictures on our screens – which they do with the help of very costly and complicated electronic equipment – that they go to great lengths to eliminate any clues to their part in the process of selection. (1)

This idea that television images are beyond real, or even hyperreal, and are now what we take to be natural, is one that is repeatedly expressed in discourses of postmodernism, and while it has in some ways been made an easy way of criticising postmodernism, it would be negligent to assume that there is no validity to the argument. Neil Postman, who was largely critical of television and its cultural impact, wrote that “[t]here is no more disturbing consequence of the electronic and graphic revolution than this – that the world as given to us through television seems natural, not bizarre” (79). He writes, “[w]e have reached [...] a critical mass in that electronic media have decisively and irreversibly changed the character of our symbolic environment. We are now a culture whose information, ideas and epistemology are given form by television and not the printed word” (28). It is difficult to see any way to disagree with this statement. However one believes the world should be negotiated, it should be expected that television (and further technological advances) has brought about some deep changes in human experience. McLuhan, while unable, of course, to predict the future of technology in the 1960s, made this point repeatedly, with considerable historical references, so it is entirely logical that technology should continue to alter human consciousness in some ways.

Postman’s critique is interesting to observe because it comes from a time, the mid-1980s, when the value, or otherwise, of television could be reasonably debated. Whilst he was undoubtedly aware that he was unlikely to halt the advance of television, his argument was still valid. By the time Miller came to write *Resurrection Blues*, there was no argument. All Miller could do was observe the postmodernist world and comment on what it had become. For Postman, “television forges ahead, making no concessions to its great technological predecessor, creating new conceptions of knowledge and how it is acquired” (145). Once again, while this may appear at first glance extreme, it is something approaching a self-evident fact. With television, information began to be transmitted in a way that meant

one could hardly engage with the medium – this is what makes it one of McLuhan’s “cool” media. Watching television requires far less effort than reading a book or newspaper, and because it has generally been a commercial operation, especially in America – as Nelson writes, “there was never any doubt that television’s primary function as a mass medium in the United States was to be the dissemination of advertising” (27-38) - the most important fact of its existence is the need to have as many people watching as is possible.

Postman saw television as not just another branch, or distributor of American culture, but the culture itself. He writes, “[t]wenty years ago, the question, Does television shape culture or merely reflect it? held considerable interest for scholars and social critics. The question has largely disappeared as television has gradually *become* our culture” (79, author’s italics). This is perhaps where television made a greater leap than any other previous medium had. By becoming culture, television served to subsume the rest of culture, and so everything became mediated by it. Elections came to be decided by television debates and polls (indeed, debates were devised *for* television), stage plays and novels were adapted for the small screen, soap operas had viewers in the tens of millions in America, and, with the explosion of reality television in the earliest years of the 21st century, newspapers themselves became submerged in television, analysing the events on television as seriously and thoroughly as they did political affairs. This power of television is present throughout *Resurrection Blues*, because the fundamental point of the crucifixion is that it is to be broadcast on television – without television, there is no representation, and thus no point to the act.

6.2: Television, Cynicism, and Satire in Miller’s Essays

In order to fully appreciate *Resurrection Blues*, and its importance in Miller’s oeuvre, we must first return to his non-dramatic writing. By examining a number of essays he wrote from the late-1960s onwards, we can see the development in both his view of politics, and also of

his satirical voice. In these works, the earnest, almost solemn style he had in the 1940s and 1950s is replaced by a tone that is amusing, ironic, and yet still angry. The first of the relevant essays relates to the Democratic convention of 1968, “The Battle of Chicago: From the Delegates’ Side”. Miller was a delegate from Connecticut for the anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy, although it was always likely Lyndon Johnson’s vice-president, Hubert Humphrey, would be nominated and continue the same policies in South-East Asia. This was Miller’s first formal involvement with the party, and it revealed to him the depressing realities of contemporary party politics. To the experienced party members, he wrote, “[i]ssues are not something you feel, like morality, like good and evil, but something you succeed or fail to make use of” (“Battle of Chicago”, 191). This idea of politics, where issues are merely operational, and not rooted in any real principle, was a surprise to Miller, although perhaps that simply serves to reveal his naivety. Despite the violence that occurred outside the convention centre, as police attacked anti-war protestors, “it struck [Miller] that there was no issue cleaving the convention; there was only a split in the attitudes toward power, two mutually hostile ways of being human” (“Battle of Chicago”, 195). This is perhaps his way of seeing that politics had been overtaken by culture – for instance, he also notes that Ohio’s representative Wayne Hays “was talking about hippies in paired contraries. Not long hair, he says, but long thought; not screaming in the streets but cleaning the streets” (“Battle of Chicago”, 194). Miller’s focus on power, and the increasingly cynical view of party politics continued to be expressed in his non-fiction as well as his dramatic works, as we shall see below.

Miller was of course not the only writer to label the convention, and 1968 in general, as a moment of cultural shift for the United States, but in his essay on the next convention in 1972, “Making Crowds”, he is already clear on the significant differences. He says of the newer delegates that “these people bore a double perspective: like actors they related to the

reality around them, but at the same time they played it for the home screen” (“Making Crowds”, 234). What Miller sees is not simply a shift in the sort of person who attends political conventions. He is observing the fruits of a generation of people raised, at least in part, by television. These people are not just acting with ease around television cameras, but know how to act in order to maximise their performance. He writes:

[t]he young, suckled on TV, knew that you never look into the lens and that you have to condense the statement of your position or be cut off, and they did both with ease and naturalness. The old guard had been more cagey than this before the camera, suspicious of the interloper, for a convention was an authentic rather than an artistic occasion. The new understood that the camera is the main thing and that nothing could be said to *happen* until it had been filmed. (“Making Crowds”, 234, author’s italics)

Tichi makes a similar point, writing how inadequate real life, as opposed to television life, had become: “As for the quality of off-screen life, even at its most intense it is implicitly mundane, removed from the centers [sic] of action, pallid. The TV realm is the only desirable place to be” (135). I quote Miller at length here because it reveals that he had been considering the issues at play in *Resurrection Blues* for at least 30 years before the play was staged. Within this crowd that Miller observes is an acknowledgment, both innate and practiced, that what matters is being recorded, as this is how one makes news. This is a further development, as we shall see in Baudrillard, of the turning of events into news automatically serving to neuter them politically.

Miller does not necessarily make a firm judgement on this new attitude to politics; he is largely ambivalent to it, which is, again, typical of the view he begins to express in his

drama from this period. He says that “the new delegates were ironical towards the very idea of a convention, and even the party” (“Making Crowds”, 234). I will not labour the importance of Miller’s choice of “ironical”, as what this reveals about Miller’s view of American politics is that the metanarrative, one could say, of the political party had begun to break down. Miller later attends a sit-in with protestors at the hotel of George McGovern, the eventual winner of the primary, and disastrous loser of the general election. The youthful protestors made demands based on specific issues, and while abortion was the first one raised by the crowd, this was followed by a pause “in which hiatus it was made clearer than ever that the issues were being dragged behind them rather than leading them forward” (“Making Crowds”, 245). There is perhaps a hint of the curmudgeon about Miller here, as he views contemporary youth not to be, perhaps, as politically informed or operative as in previous years. But this is not all that is going on in this work. He discusses the convention with two sheriffs from Connecticut, who were sceptical about McGovern. Following a conversation in which they contradicted themselves numerous times, Miller concludes “[t]here was no ideology to wrack falsehoods into a straight line” (“Making Crowds”, 242), and so no guiding principles upon which they based their political decisions.

What we see in these two convention essays is, to Miller, the exhaustion of the political process in contemporary America. He sees that there is a certain ridiculousness to youthful socialists protesting at McGovern’s hotel – because he will never run on a socialist platform. But he knows that they are aware of this, and their goal is to provide media images and content. Politics, at all levels, has been separated from the ideals one does or does not hold. He acknowledges this in relation to the nominee, as well:

A nominee, and later a president, is [...] an ambiguously symbolic figure upon whom is projected the conflicting desires of an audience. Like the protagonist in a drama he rises to the level

of the fictional. As he comes closer to being the nominee he becomes less an ordinary man than a performer who is merely like a man. (“Making Crowds”, 233)

He would continue this ironic, knowing viewpoint in his dramatic writing, especially in *Resurrection Blues*. What Miller describes suggests that his view of morality as underpinning both public and personal issues, as expressed in earlier works, is largely gone. He is aware, as anyone must have been after the Kennedy presidency, that politics, so much of which is shrouded in vacuous morality and pseudo-ideology, is mere performance.

We see Miller’s more subjective view of the world branch out further than politics in his non-fiction writing of this period, too. In “On True Identity” (1975), he expresses what would come to be regarded as a core pillar of postmodernist thinking. He writes, as part of a satire on American citizens being issued with identification cards,

the real evil, if one may use a dramatic word, is that the urge to ‘identify’ is the urge to freeze and fix forever what in truth is fluid and flowing. Indeed, if a ‘true identity’ is needed in this country it is the government’s: every poll shows that the people don’t know what it stands for anymore, yet it takes more of their substance from them than all the con artists put together. (“On True Identity”, 281)

Disregarding for a moment the now-customary cynicism about politics, this is quite an extraordinary comment from Miller. Here, he clearly and fully expresses the view that identity is a constantly changing aspect of one’s life, not simply a solid, unchangeable fact. Given that so much of postmodernist thought has involved re-thinking what was previously considered to be fixed or natural, it is notable that Miller, calmly and without gaining much

attention, espouses one of the core concepts of the idea. In “The Sin of Power” (1978), he again makes claims for the subjectivity of experiences, but also refrains from denying the possibility of a strong moral frame. He roots much of this in political power, referring to “the inevitable pressure, by those holding power, to distort and falsify the structures of reality” (“The Sin of Power”, 289). We have already seen how this idea was manifested firstly in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, where the difficulty of taking a moral action without knowing the nature of reality was discussed. However, in this essay he shows that he has not lost all hope. He writes, “I have also been lied about in America by both public and private liars, by the press and the government, but a road – sometimes a narrow path – always remained open before my mind, the belief that I might sensibly attempt to influence people to see what was real and so at least resist the victory of untruth” (“The Sin of Power”, 290). It is not, then, that Miller saw no possibility for advancing the truth, but that it had become a far harder route to take. In *Resurrection Blues*, each character, either consciously or unconsciously, refuses to take this path.

It is perhaps a stretch to say that his growing weariness with political systems led to his developed satirical voice, but regardless, his writing became more resigned and ironic into the 1990s, culminating with *Resurrection Blues*. Two works, in particular, foreshadow the play. In “Let’s Privatize Congress” (1995), at a time when many liberals were celebrating both the end of the Cold War and the election of Bill Clinton, Miller is at his most critical of the process. “Let each representative and senator”, he writes, “openly represent, and have his salary paid for by whatever business group wishes to buy his vote. Then, with no excuses, we will really have the best representative system money can buy” (“Let’s Privatize Congress”, 451). In this piece, Miller has moved away from the abstractions, the discussions of morality and reality that characterised his earlier essays: this is a calm, rational observation of the problems in politics. He finishes the essay, “we already have a corporate state. All

privatization would do would be to recognize [sic] it as fact. Conclusion: we are in bad trouble” (“Let’s Privatize Congress”, 452). He acknowledges that it is not individuals who influence political outcomes, but the system itself, which is designed to produce inequality. Whereas he had previously written praiseworthy pieces on Franklin Roosevelt and Kennedy, and campaigned for McCarthy in 1968, he now seems to be utterly pessimistic.

The essay that bears the greatest importance to *Resurrection Blues*, though, is 1992’s “Get It Right: Privatize Executions”. This has been discussed at length by other critics, so I will not recapitulate every point he makes in it, but simply gesture at where his thinking was going on the issue of capital punishment. In this essay, he proposes, in a deliberate nod to Jonathan Swift, that executions be held in public for profits, partly because “[t]here can no longer be any doubt that government – society itself – is incapable of doing anything right” (“Get It Right”, 438). As ever, he retains a sense of his own morality throughout, as he comments that, if executions were to be open to the public in large stadia, “[t]he take would, without question, be sizable, considering the immense number of Americans who favour capital punishment” (“Get It Right”, 438). This hypocrisy, in people supporting capital punishment without wishing to be fully aware of it, is later parodied in the voice of Skip. We also see his willingness to condemn the skewed morals that, in *Resurrection Blues*, have Skip express no problem with a crucifixion, but claim that “[c]arrying him up to the cross would be like... I don’t know... blasphemous in the United States” (158). In the essay, meanwhile, Miller writes, “[t]his climactic entrance (of National Guard or Army soldiers) might be accompanied by trumpet fanfare or other musical number by the police or Army band, unless it was thought to offend good taste” (“Get It Right”, 438) – again showing his awareness that peoples’ standards of “good taste” are by no means consistent or moral.

Miller also taps into the rapidly accelerating celebrity culture that has continued to characterise American public life since. Having been a celebrity for nearly 50 years at this

point, and lived through a hearing before HUAC and a marriage to Marilyn Monroe, it is perhaps not surprising that he would be sensitive to this issue, and indeed he does seem especially well-attuned to it. He writes that the prospect of having public executions would not entirely be unappealing for the condemned: “it would have its achievement aspect, because he would know that he had not lived his life for nothing” (“Get It Right”, 439). He notes that fame, almost always filtered through and crafted by the media, is seen as an end in itself in contemporary America. Baudrillard, as we have seen, made similar comments about the Loud family featured in *An American Family*, suggesting not only that people will go to extraordinary lengths to achieve fame, but that appearing on television in the service of entertaining others, even or especially if it leads to the disintegration of one’s family, is now considered to be a ritual of almost religious importance. Miller closes this essay by suggesting that such a policy would eventually lead people to become bored with executions, and instead question “why it is that Americans commit murder more often than any other people” (“Get It Right”, 439), which is of course the root of the essay.

I have provided these outlines in order to show how Miller developed his ideas not only through his drama, but through his non-fiction writing. We can see a more complex and diffuse Miller with this context, and also a very clear line that runs throughout his writing, as his awareness of postmodernist ideas, even without naming them, increases significantly. With these developments in mind, I will now turn to my analysis of the play, first of all through examinations of specific characters, who are excellent exemplars of Miller’s lack of faith in heroes at this point in his career.

6.3: The Anti-Heroes: Felix, Henri, and Skip

Felix, despite being a brutal dictator, is a character to whom it is surprisingly easy to warm. He is an entertaining presence on the stage, and makes ludicrous declarations of his love for

Emily: “You are more marvellous to look at than... six mountains and a waterfall!” (179), he says to her, as well as “when I imagine myself making love to you, entering into you, I... I almost hear a choir” (180). He is an enjoyable character whose personality reflects that of the play itself. Between these kinds of comments, he threatens Ralph’s disciple, Stanley, with torture, and shoots every member of Jeanine’s rebel group, except for her. In this way, Felix is part of a long tradition of comic tyrants and dictators. The best-known is Charlie Chaplin’s satire of Adolf Hitler in *The Great Dictator*, who shoots a man dead while he is modelling new body armour, and in the next frame trips over a mosaic of the party emblem on the floor. Contemporary examples include Dr. Evil of the *Austin Powers* franchise, and the depiction of North Korea’s Kim Jong-II in *Team America: World Police* (2004). The idea of the dictator being someone whose opulence leads necessarily to their own infantilisation survived, therefore, the age of totalitarianism. Concerning *Resurrection Blues*, Mason says of Felix, in comparison to *The Crucible*’s Danforth,

we must take the judge seriously and deal with his menace, while the general embodies a situation that has already moved past our control. A Danforth inspires concern and action as we see the possibility to defeat him, but a Felix is far too firmly placed, so our only option is grim humour. (*Stone Tower*, 269)

Felix is also incredibly capricious, and repeatedly changes his mind towards the end, as he seeks a meeting with Ralph to learn how to pleasure women, then offers him a place in his government, before finally losing his temper and deciding again to crucify him. Abbotson writes that he is “humorously self-concerned and resistant to belief: a South American version to some degree of *Morgan*’s Lyman Felt” (*Critical Companion*, 296), and there are definite similarities, especially in the sense that while we know they are dangerous people, they are extremely good fun to watch on stage.

The thing that makes it hardest to fear Felix, however, is his erectile dysfunction, and, more specifically, his shame at it. Following Jeanine's prologue, the plot begins with him telling his secretary, "I want you to forget last night" (131). Richard Brucher says of this that "his puerility dissipates the mystique of his power without mitigating his capacity for cruelty or blunting his bourgeois avariciousness" (71). The erectile dysfunction itself shows that, despite his material power, there is in fact a natural realm he cannot control. His way of talking about it shows not only his shame, but also his reluctance to express his very real vulnerability, whether it is to rebels, Ralph, or the whims of the Americans who fund him. He is even undergoing psychoanalysis in Miami, which again detracts from what should be a position of total power. Brucher writes, of a scene where he hides his erection with a hat, that "the play's sardonic comedy reveals how arbitrary Felix's power is, rather than how firmly placed and beyond defeat he thinks he is" (71), and we see here that power is, as would be expected from a postmodernist text, consistently undermined and shown to be a man-made force, and certainly not one that is unchangeable.

However, there is an element to his character that shows how comfortable Felix is in this world. It must be kept in mind that this is not a story of liberation – the tyrant does not fall at the end, nor does a democratic government seize power, punishing Felix for his crimes. It is, similar in ways to Sofer's conception of *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, a play about power, and how people react to and deal with it. In his early conversation with Henri, Felix expresses his views on power and politics, and they are appropriate for this world. He tells his cousin that "revolution is out... I'm talking everywhere" (135), an apt expression of Miller's feelings at this time, as we have seen in his essays. One must also consider the post-Cold War context of the play, as the great ideological conflict that had dominated the post-war world rapidly dissipated, and yet did not lead to a flourishing of democracy and prosperity. This led to a greater understanding that the Cold War was not, after all, a supreme conflict of

contrasting ideals, but one that was rooted in mutual drives for power, and tended to suppress dissent on both sides.

Felix – whose name means lucky or successful in Latin -is comfortable in this world, though, while Henri, a confused figure throughout, is not. He tells Felix that “at times nothing seems to follow from anything else”, to which his cousin replies, “[o]h, well, I wouldn’t worry about a thing like that” (132). Henri struggles with guilt throughout the play, both personal and general. He has given up the Marxist politics of his youth to become a wealthy landowner in the country, allowing himself to live in Europe and lecture on tragedy. He is recognised by soldiers, not because of his writings or teaching, but because the products his company distributes bear his name. He also feels guilt that his daughter has become addicted to drugs and attempted suicide in his absence. Henri is a satire of self-regarding public intellectuals in general, and, more specifically, of Miller. He drops several clues throughout that link himself to the character, as we have seen he does with Adrian in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. It is mentioned that he had previously been the ambassador to Russia, a country with obvious connotations for Miller, and he also tells Felix that he has not “been a Marxist for twenty-five years!” (137). Espejo, quoted above, interprets this as being a self-aware joke on Miller’s part, and links it with postmodernism, in a similar way to the manner in which Vonnegut and Auster, as we have seen, have also done.

It is indeed difficult to imagine that Henri is not a self-mocking character, such are the contradictions he expresses. He tries to implore Felix to improve the lives of the country’s citizens, but begins complaining that pollution is peeling the paint off his artwork, and that the foundations in his house are too weak for his wife’s grand piano, and so she “has to practice in the garage, Felix! When she plays for me I have to sit listening in the Mercedes” (136). This could also represent a physical manifestation of the decline of classical or high-brow art forms, wherein society itself has no interest in sustaining them. Henri seems entirely

unaware of the position of extreme privilege he holds that allows him to afford such luxuries. This exchange creates the impression of Henri as an inert figure who cannot see issues as clearly as he likes to think he does. In another conversation, with Skip, we see the political ramifications of his mindset. He attempts to dissuade Skip from filming the crucifixion, even though they come from two different worlds, and have entirely different ways of communicating – even to the point that they do not really communicate. While Skip is a businessman who concerns himself only with the bottom line, Henri tells him that “I thought an exchange of ideas could be useful – the two of us, quietly...” (170). This is a ridiculous prospect, as it is not ideas which influence matters in this world, but the ability to manipulate and coerce.

Skip is predictably bored by the conversation, but it is extremely revealing of Henri’s character when he tries to convince him that Ralph is a figment of the collective imagination, of the need to have something in which to believe. The abstract nature of his speech goes over Skip’s head, and Henri refers to historical events as if they were merely other narratives or “poems”. He says of the Vietnam War that it “was a fiction, a poem; but 56,000 Americans and two million Vietnamese had to die before the two sides got fed up reciting it” (174). That someone who considers himself to be an intellectual could have this view of the Vietnam War, against which Miller was a vocal protestor, shows the obscene detachment between such people and real life. Viewing the war as simply sprouting from a “poem” (the Gulf of Tonkin incident), as opposed to decisions taken by powerful politicians and military personnel, entirely discredits Miller’s own view of the war as obscene, and commenting that both sides “recited” it also massively exaggerates Vietnamese agency in the war – there was little choice but to “recite” the poem for them, with the war in their own country. While Henri, to a large extent, stands in for Miller, in this instance he can be viewed as being an actively damaging societal presence. Having started the play depressed and upset that “[a]

faith in the revolution is what I gave [Jeanine]” (137), he ends similarly resigned, but at least somewhat aware of the nature of the world. He tells his daughter, “[t]he world will never again be changed by heroes; if I misled you I apologize to [sic] the depths of my heart. One must learn to live in the garden of one’s self” (184). This suggests that he gains some understanding of the world throughout the play, but not such as to leave him with much of an actionable ideology for the future. Carson’s view of this is that “[c]hange can no longer be affected by heroes or by grand political gestures. Politics no longer exists, and it would seem that nothing remains in which to believe” (141), and this is consistent with the opinions we have seen Miller express in his essays.

Skip is the third character I wish to explore, and in him we see the most likely villain of the piece. He certainly seems to be the one for whom Miller holds the most contempt, and in many ways, despite his protestations, is the person most responsible for the crucifixion taking place, and therefore its consequences. Henri sees these consequences in the starkest terms possible: “To a lot of people it will mean the immanent end of the world [...] I can see thousands jumping off bridges in Paris, London, New York...!” (142) Skip, however, refuses to take responsibility, despite the fact that it is the money his company is paying, and the fact of its recording, that makes Felix so eager to perform the crucifixion. He tells Henri, “this I resent – I am not ‘creating’ anything!” (176) He is a prime example of who and what Hood was talking about when he wrote that most professionals working in the media, when told that television and its images have the function to convey an ideology of extreme rationality “will be politely ironical and reply that, on the contrary, the images are chosen on the basis of judgements which are ‘natural’ or common sense” (6). Skip’s view, that he is a mere chronicler, is of course a simplistic one, but this is also an example of him adopting whatever guise or viewpoint serves him best at that time.

Skip is representative of the contemporary media world's tendency to constantly speak out of both sides of one's mouth, to contradict oneself in order to create the necessary narrative. He sums up this world when he says, "I mean, we're not here to make some kind of a *comment*" (156). His is a world that appears empty of ideology, because the ideology of his own class is dominant, evoking Antonio Gramsci's comment that "common sense is the sense of the ruling class" (qtd. Hood, 7). Skip uses language as his main method of distortion, as Bigsby notes when he writes, "Miller's ear for self-validating language is acute, as is his sense for the absurdity of words used less to describe or engage reality than to deny it" (*Critical Study*, 428).

The exchange that shows Skips' linguistic and moral gymnastics most evidently, however, is when he tries to convince Emily to film the crucifixion. She has been brought to the country without all the details, and, until the cross is raised, she still believes it to be a fake crucifixion. Skip knows that Emily's career will be over if she walks off the shoot, so she will most likely agree. Despite this, he uses every possible trick to try and convince her that it is not objectionable to film the crucifixion. As Henri tries to stop the soldiers from getting the set ready, Skip tells him, "[y]ou are endangering a woman's career!" (151), and proceeds to tell her how beneficial it will be for her. Miller then describes him as having a "[s]udden new idea", and he tells Emily that her filming it "could help put an end to it forever! Yes! That's it! If I were moralistic I'd even say you have a *duty* to shoot this! Really. I mean that" (152). He continues, in what would be moralistic if it was not so blatantly false, "[i]n fact, it could end up a worldwide blow against capital punishment, which I know you are against as passionately as I am" (152). This comment regards himself and Emily, and by implication the culture in which they are members and participants, as moral beings because of their stern stance against capital punishment. In reality, of course, this is merely another myth Skip peddles, yet certainly believes in the moment, in order to get what he wants. There

follows an exchange where Emily and Skip debate the merits of her commercial work, and its reality versus its fakery, in one of the best-written exchanges of Miller's career:

EMILY: ... I do commercials!

SKIP: But your genius is that everything you shoot *becomes* real, darling!

EMILY: My genius is to make everything look comfortably fake, Skip. No agency wants real. You want a fake-looking crucifixion? – call me.

SKIP: Dear, what you do is make real things look fake, and that makes them emotionally real, whereas... (152-153)

I have quoted this exchange because it is a perfect example of Skip's willingness to engage in whatever discourse suits his purposes at that moment. With his being so flippant about having such a crucial role in what could prove to be an apocalyptic moment, Miller laments that public issues have been hollowed out and replaced by people whose sole pursuit is power, through whatever means, and in whatever narrow world they are present.

There is another moment with Skip that highlights the limits of his ability to control the situation, and also gives more examples of his manipulative streak. As Ralph beams down on the cast at the end, he tries to convince him to come down and "serve [his] legal sentence" (194). Ralph is at this point going by the name Charley, although Skip refers to him as "Charles" in an attempt to assert some form of control, which also reveals his bourgeois attention to formality. He tries to impress on him the importance of the contract his company has signed, and says, "I will forebear mentioning our stockholders, many of them widows and aged persons, who have in good faith bought shares in our company" (194), another example of Miller juxtaposing the banal with the sacred, the trivial with the vital. Here, Skip employs

whatever argument deemed necessary to achieve his aims. He speaks on behalf of the political system, the legal system, his company, and even his shareholders, yet they are a means to an end for him. Skip is a perfectly postmodernist character, then, because he is comfortable adopting whichever guise, and using whichever language, is required. To him, morality, language and decency are only things to be used by him to achieve his aims. Skip is eventually reduced to meekly asking, “the sun is rapidly going down so may I have the favour of a quick reply?” (194) As we have seen consistently throughout the play, the language is so perfectly precise to capture exactly what is so unappealing about Skip, and the other characters – this use of courteous words in an attempt to get someone to agree to be crucified is utterly obscene, yet consistent with his character.

By looking at these three characters in detail, we can see some of the most important themes Miller addresses in the play. These characters represent different, yet inter-locking facets of the postmodernist landscape, each of whom has contributed to, and indeed profited from, the hollowing out of meaning, and the reduction of politics and life to competing discourses.

6.4: Baudrillard and Postmodernism in *Resurrection Blues*

As has been discussed above, Baudrillard’s conception of the postmodernist world was almost a post-apocalyptic hellscape made entirely of false realities thrown at individuals who no longer even held the idea of an objective reality, let alone a way of finding it. Such was the power of the media – especially television – that representation in them came to be considered the closest thing there was to a tangible reality. As I have mentioned, it is advisable to take a dim view of Baudrillard in his most extreme moods, and so the best way to consider much of his writing is as being metaphorical, not literal. Instead of taking his version of “reality” to refer precisely to the knowable, objective world, it should be applied to

more subjective, ideological issues, events, and concepts that attain the status of fact. Of course, this status is largely granted by the media, so in the same way that Hutcheon refers to postmodernism leading to a questioning of institutions and the presuppositions that allow them to consolidate their power, we should read Baudrillard as attempting to question how and why the status of real is granted by the media to some things and not others.

Baudrillard's ideas are especially important to my study of *Resurrection Blues* because much of what he writes is found, in various ways, within the play. The power of television is the most obvious one, as the core concept of *Resurrection Blues* is very Baudrillardian – simply, if the crucifixion was not being televised, it would not be happening. That is to say, the event only matters, indeed it only exists, as a function of the media's representation of it - it is an invention by the media. It should not be forgotten, of course, that the crucifixion, like most television broadcasts, exists in order to sell advertising – as Nelson writes, “the role of television is neither to inform nor entertain us, but to sell ‘heads’ to sponsors” (105). This is made explicit in *Resurrection Blues*.

As we have seen through the characterisation of Skip, the media refuse to see themselves as creators, claiming instead that they are “recording a pre-existing fact” (176). This is consistent with what one expects if Baudrillard's analysis of the media is accepted. He writes,

the media make themselves into the vehicle of moral condemnation of terrorism and of the exploitation of fear for political ends, but simultaneously, in the most complete ambiguity, they propagate the brutal charm of the terrorist act, they are themselves terrorists, insofar as they themselves march to the tune of seduction. (*Simulacra and Simulation*, 84)

It should again be acknowledged that his language is exaggerated here, but it should not obscure the point. The media do in fact present themselves as moral arbiters of the world, but simultaneously exist to attract as many consumers as possible, and so their motives should not be considered to be as pure as it may seem. Indeed, in many cases, their reactions to events they claim to be horrifying and dangerous serve to exacerbate the harm caused. They also, as he alludes to here, have a hand in aestheticising the behaviour which they condemn, and so glorifying it. The Gulf War led to perhaps the first large-scale acceptance of this, but it had been occurring for decades – Nelson writes that “[i]t has been television’s role to fascinate us with the new world of the bomb, to hold us spellbound as a mass audience in the midst of extraordinary technological advance geared to benefit an elite minority of power-brokers” (29). For Nelson, state violence and the media go hand-in-hand, and again, this too is the case in *Resurrection Blues*.

At one point, Skip asserts that their role is as chroniclers, and are not supposed to pass comment on the events they are due to record, despite also attempting to convince Emily that broadcasting the crucifixion would help prevent future executions. This again has echoes of Baudrillard, who sees the facile nature of the products of this thinking, writing “[i]nstead of producing meaning, [information] wears itself out staging it [...] The domain of information is increasingly invaded by this kind of phantom content” (“The Implosion of Meaning in the Media and The Implosion of the Social in the Masses”, 139). By this, he means irrelevant segments in news broadcasts that, while seemingly premised on information, do nothing to create anything worthwhile – “non-directive interviews, phone-ins, all-round participation, verbal blackmail – ‘you’re involved, the event is you’” (“The Implosion of Meaning in the Media and The Implosion of the Social in the Masses”, 139). For Baudrillard, the main effort in modern media is in concealing its true ideology, which even then is largely subconscious, and built into how media systems are constructed, and in whose interests they are designed.

The broadcasting of the crucifixion, then, for example, has no meaning other than the one attached to it by the broadcasters. They supply the frame and context; as he writes elsewhere, “the media are marketing and merchandising of the dominant ideology” (“Requiem for the Media”, 169).

Poster writes that to Baudrillard “the media produce only simulations and remain in that register: they create both intensifications of reality and substitutes for reality without ever attaining it” (17), and this is how we should think of the crucifixion in *Resurrection Blues*. In fact, we can see this attitude within the play itself. Skip, at various stages, reminds people that the crucifixion must conform to “the original”, while also insisting that “this has nothing to do with the Jews! Or Jesus either!” (159). However, he goes on to show his hand by refusing to allow a doctor present because no depictions of Christ’s crucifixion contain a doctor. This shows that the crucifixion does not need to bear any resemblance to the reality of Christ’s death, but simply conform – when it suits Skip – to the artistic representations of it throughout history. To Baudrillard, this would be a classic example of hyperreality – “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality” (*Simulations*, 2). He goes on to say,

all hold-ups, hijacks and the like are now as it were simulation hold-ups, in the sense that they are inscribed in advance in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media [...] where they function as a set of signs dedicated exclusively to their recurrence as signs, and no longer to their ‘real’ goal at all. (*Simulations*, 41)

We can add to this the crucifixion, as it is not being presented merely *as an event*, but one with huge ideological underpinnings that are pre-planned by the media. The “goal”, so to speak, of broadcasting the crucifixion, is to sell advertisers, so, in an almost McLuhanite way, the content of the media is irrelevant; it is simply the fact of the broadcasting that matters.

With these quotes, I wish to turn to Baudrillard's *Simulations*, wherein we see a larger vision of his postmodernist world. Here, he writes that the real "no longer has to be rational [...] It is nothing more than operational" (3), which is an excellent description of how Skip operates in the world. Baudrillard asks, "what if God himself can be simulated [...] reduced to the signs which attest his existence?" (10), and of course this is precisely what happens in *Resurrection Blues*, as Ralph is only ever represented as a beam of light coming from somewhere offstage. To Baudrillard, this would render "the whole system weightless – exchanging itself in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (11), which is in a sense what happens as Ralph constantly changes his name while remaining elusive to all the human characters. We should also consider here the circular nature of how Ralph is conceived by them – as Henri points out, Ralph is said to exist because the main players involved *need* him to: for various reasons, the country's peasants, Felix, Jeanine, and Skip are heavily invested in Ralph being real.

I have already discussed Baudrillard's view on Watergate, that it was a false scandal created and perpetuated by power in order to "prove" that the political system is capable of operating within a moral framework. However, I should like to go slightly further into this line of thinking and suggest that we can conceive of Ralph's crucifixion in the same way. In *Simulations* Baudrillard calls Watergate an example of "a scandal as a means to regenerate a moral and political principle, towards the imaginary as a means to regenerate a reality principle in distress" (27). Watergate had to be exposed, in order to conceal the fact that not much had happened, and certainly nothing worthy of the vast array of political denunciations that resulted from it. Exposing Watergate, in Baudrillard's terms, served to fortify "the order of capital" (27), as he sees journalists from the *Washington Post*, that is to say the media, as being entirely complicit with the aims and values of capital in the United States. The idea of capital producing Watergate is crucial here, because of course it is the same idea which

underwrites Ralph's crucifixion – the financial interests of Felix's government and Skip's company are shown to be paramount, but also, on a personal level, there is the example of Emily, who, for personal and financial reasons, is almost tempted into filming it.

Baudrillard writes that “[a]ll that capital asks of us is to receive it as rational or to combat it in the name of rationality, to receive it as moral or to combat it in the name of morality” (28), and in this we can possibly see some roots for his anti-rational writing. It is important here because the crucifixion in many ways *is* rational, and potentially even moral – Emily and Skip will retain their careers, Felix will be able to improve conditions for his people with the resultant earnings, and the peasants will benefit massively from the tourism it will create. We can see, then, that rationality and morality are not always the best methods to combat something, because they can both be defined so easily by capital. This is important, because it is where he places the blame for Watergate's inflation, writing, “before, the task was to dissimulate scandal; today, the task is to conceal the fact that there is none” (*Simulations*, 28), and this is echoed by Miller. In order to conceal that there is no hope for the future of his country, Felix must produce one in Ralph – as he is the saviour for the peasants, so is he a saviour for Felix. By creating a “terrorist” and “enemy of the state”, Felix hopes to protect himself from the harm represented by real enemies, who would be the peasants who are aware of the gross inequality he presides over. Felix is the true terrorist of his country, and so hides in public. He is that which needs to be concealed by the crucifixion, just as capital is that which needed to be concealed by Watergate - what Baudrillard writes of capital, “its instantaneous cruelty, its incomprehensible ferocity, its fundamental immorality – this is what is scandalous” (*Simulations*, 28-29), is equally applicable to Felix and his government.

Baudrillard's writing on television in *Simulations* is also crucial because it addresses an early example of reality television, which now dominates the medium – *An American*

Family. The Louds, however, break up amidst a spate of arguments during the series, leading Baudrillard to ask if television itself was responsible, and indeed whether the various crises would have occurred without the presence of the recording crews. One way to consider this is that for the vast majority of people who watched the programme, and did not know the Louds, their break up would not have happened without television – that is to say they would not have been aware of it, or the family themselves. Of course, in the case of *Resurrection Blues*, we know that the crucifixion would be meaningless without it being recorded and represented. But the point about the Louds is that it is impossible to know what would have happened if they were not being recorded, and so the whole premise of the show is bogus – this is not a family going through their everyday lives, but a family being recorded - and having these recordings carefully edited – for the benefit of a television programme. While it made claims to representing their lives accurately, in effect there was no way to do that. This is especially interesting for postmodernism because it creates a new standard of real – real is that which is recorded and put on television, real has a certain method of filming, editing, etc. It is in this sense that reality, to Baudrillard, has disappeared – ironically, only because we know what is *not* real. He writes,

it is TV which is the Loud's truth, it is it which is true, it is it which renders true. A truth which is no longer the reflexive truth of the mirror, nor the perspective truth of the panoptic system and the gaze, but the manipulative truth of the test which probes and interrogates. (51-52)

This is Baudrillard's redefinition of truth for the postmodernist age – truth is now conferred via depiction on television. So powerful is television that it has the capital and ability to not only define, but to create, the truth – the truth of the Louds, the truth of the crucifixion, and countless other examples that continue to proliferate in the 21st century mediascape.

I want to turn now to focus more on how and where we see these ideas in *Resurrection Blues*. Baudrillard discusses at length the ways in which media systems have contributed to the increased difficulty of ascertaining what is real, and therefore, moral. His ideas extended beyond this, and he came to believe that reality itself was unknowable, largely because representations in the media had become too far removed from the reality they claimed to present. In *Resurrection Blues*, we see multiple characters expressing ideas similar to Baudrillard's, whether they are tacit confessions that representations of reality are purposely deceptive, or more subtle comments that suggest that the character in question lives almost entirely in a world composed of distorted representations.

I have already mentioned that Felix is reluctant to execute Ralph in a contemporary manner because on-screen violence has become so ubiquitous - "it's meaningless" (139), he says. This is a key early line, as we see that even violence has ceased to be real, because of the saturation of it in the media. This evokes Baudrillard's fourth and final stage of reproduction of the image, which is pure simulacrum, when signs "bear no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (*Simulations*, 11). In this world, a person being shot on television is no longer notable, because it has no effect on how people feel about people being shot. It is considered to be an event different in every way to violence that actually occurs in the social, as Baudrillard would phrase it. William Merrin writes that "[t]he media do not reflect and represent the reality of the public but instead *produce* it, employing this simulation to justify their continuing existence" (25, author's italics), and this is what happens in *Resurrection Blues*, as all the promised benefits of the crucifixion are contingent on it being recorded and reproduced by the media, in effect creating the event for its own sake.

This idea of representations in the media is present throughout the play, as, conversely, characters can only value something because of the fact of its being represented.

Felix, for instance, hails his countryside because it has been praised by *Vanity Fair* and *National Geographic*. Henri thinks that the civil war is over because the European papers no longer report on it, and later likens the Vietnam War to a fiction or poem. We consistently see here that representations are acknowledged to be more valuable than the realities they purport to show, but actually conceal. Henri himself says that he has “spent a lifetime trying to free [him]self from the boredom of reality” (174), an ironic statement because in the postmodernist landscape one cannot avoid escaping reality - due to the extent to which it has become questioned and undermined. Skip and Emily, meanwhile, list off the exotic locations they’ve worked in by connecting them to the banal products they were shooting ads for. In a perfect example of what Debord was referring to when he wrote that “tourism is the chance to go and see what has been made trite” (120), they bicker about whether they shot ads for expensive cars and shampoo in the Himalayas or Venezuela. While Emily seems to have some reverence for the country’s scenery – “[h]uman beings don’t deserve this world. I mean look at this! Look at this glory!... And look at us” (146) – Skip can see things solely in terms of the value of the representation. He tells Emily, hinting at benefits to her career if she continues with the shoot, “[l]ook at this! - if you shot from here, with that sky and the mountains...” (152). This media-filtered world is similar to the one described by Baudrillard, writing that “socialization [sic] is measured by the exposure to media messages [and] anyone who is underexposed to the media is desocialized [sic] or virtually asocial” (*Simulacra and Simulation*, 80), and this is certainly the case in the world depicted, where the only reality is the media. Felix, Henri, Emily, and Skip all relate to the world primarily through images and representations, because this is all that is left in a postmodernist landscape.

One of the core issues in the play is whether the crucifixion would take place without it being chronicled, and, if not, what responsibility does the chronicler take. Skip claims that he is “recording a pre-existing fact [...] and not creating it – I create nothing!” (176) This

brings to mind, again, Baudrillard's analysis of *An American Family*, whose producers stated that they lived as if the cameras weren't there, a claim he describes as "absurd, paradoxical [...] utopian" (*Simulations*, 50). For Baudrillard, this signalled a dissolution of any referent for reality, as representation became truth. Baudrillard suggests that because people have entrusted television as being truthful, it has become an objective barometer of truth, and arguably even the sole one, such is its socio-cultural power.

We see this idea played out in the exchange between Skip and Henri. Speaking of Ralph, who of course is never actually seen or described, and only takes the form of a blinding light, Henri says,

for the General his crucifixion will powerfully reinforce good order, so he must exist; and I know a suicidal young woman of high intelligence who insists that he has restored her will to live, so for her he certainly exists [...] his execution will sell some very expensive advertising, so you are committed to his existing.

(173)

In Miller's postmodernist world, the matter of existing or not can depend on individual needs. It is only by broadcasting – i.e. representing - Ralph's crucifixion that his reality will be confirmed. Espejo notices this trait in Henri in particular, and situates the idea in the postmodern, writing that

[t]he thing seems to exist for him only when there is a threat of its being represented, as though only in the act of representing would it acquire that brand of reality [...] it is in the postmodern age when the vehicle has turned into an end in itself, and nothing seems to be real until it is recorded into being. (23)

Reality, then, is created by recording, and despite the claims of Skip and others, this is of course the main motivation for the crucifixion.

In one scene there is an extremely revealing debate about the need for the proposed crucifixion to mirror the “original” one. We see much of the characters’ motivations and flaws at this point, and also Miller’s exceptional skill at creating deceitful, self-justifying people who struggle to see beyond their own immediate needs. Skip refuses to allow a doctor present, or for Ralph to wear a hat, saying:

In all the thousands of paintings and the written accounts of the crucifixion scene I defy anyone to produce a single one that shows a doctor present! I’m sorry, but we can’t be twisting the historical record! [...] on a cross with a hat? [...] I defy anyone to find a painting where he’s wearing a [hat]. (156)

His hypocrisy is soon shown, though, denying that the act has any relation to Jesus, and that “[t]his is simply the execution of a violent criminal!” (159) There is logic to his contradictions, though, as he protests:

[T]his will run in Mississippi and even the Middle East, like Egypt... we do a lot of business in Egypt and Pakistan, and there’s no point irritating the world’s largest religion [...] it’s bad enough implying the son of God was Christian without making him Jewish. (160)

Again, we see Skip allowing rationality and morality to submit to the wishes of capital, while also altering reality – in this case, the reason for the crucifixion – to suit his own needs, via distorting language and contradictions. It is not that he is wilfully lying, but more that he has

no interest in either truth or falsity. His objective is to film the crucifixion, and anything that serves that purpose is just and appropriate.

Skip is using a common tactic of recorders to evade responsibility, and pretend that they are, or even can, present information without it being affected by its framing or context. Director and cinematographer David MacDougall, quoted in Eliot Weinberger's "The Camera People", claims that film speaks "directly to the audience, without the coding and decoding inevitable with written language" (149), which is a more sophisticated version of something Skip would say, and is also a perfect example of the utopian thinking Baudrillard had previously identified. Derek Paget, on the other hand, says that

no information is contextless; information does not exist in a kind of vacuum-space antiseptically free of mediation (and, therefore, corruption) by human agency. The phenomenon of objective information is itself a hegemonic myth designed to anchor populations in a unified view of the world. (19)

This kind of critique became more prevalent with the advance of postmodernism, and was both cause and effect of a growing paranoia and distrust in politics, institutions, and individuals. Paget's comment suggests one reason why so much of this paranoia was justified.

Paget identifies "cinema and TV" as "the major mediators of this hyperreality" (117), which, as has been discussed, was a key concept to Baudrillard's work. Baudrillard himself writes that it "is false that in the present order the media are 'purely and simply means of distribution' [...] the media are marketing and merchandising of the dominant ideology" and "[n]ot only is their destiny far from revolutionary; the media are not even, somewhere close or potentially, neutral or non-ideological" ("Requiem for the Media", 169). It is not simply a

specific analysis of the media Baudrillard is interested in here, but a structural critique, and I have already shown that Baudrillard viewed the media as set up to disqualify subversive or transgressive ideas from being broadcast. In *Resurrection Blues*, Skip and Emily represent these forces. We have already seen how Skip's overriding concern is to film the crucifixion, but Emily's mild protests are also a good example of how ideas and concepts are weakened by their appearance in the mainstream media. She says to him, "I mean there's something deeply, deeply offensive, Skip" (151), but does not reach for a moral condemnation. She refers to how it "like... disgusts me" (152) and that "somebody actually dying in my lens would melt my eyeball" (153). Emily grounds her protests in her personal response, not in either a moral sphere, or even the wider ramifications of the event. She tries to mitigate the visceral nature of the crucifixion by suggesting that Ralph should wear a hat, or that they should refrain from nailing him to the cross. She tells Felix at one point that she has "half-decided to stop this travesty from happening" (158), a perfectly weak-willed and equivocating comment.

A final point regarding the conception of morality in this play can be made by analysing several comments made by Henri to Skip, in the course of their "exchange of ideas" (171). This in itself is an interesting, and amusing, choice of words for Henri. It instantly shows his naivety; an "exchange of ideas" is evidently something that Skip is not going to be interested in, yet he persists with it anyway. It also betrays Henri's refusal to engage in the real world, thinking as he does that the parsing of theories can intervene with the material world of events and capital. We also see a contradiction within Henri, who although appalled by the state of the country, is in some ways used to it. When Skip asks him "why don't they fix it?" (172), referring to the phone service, he replies, "[t]hey? There is no 'they' here; hasn't been in most of the world since the fall of Rome" (172), which is delightfully ironic and serves to wrongfoot Skip. These comments suggest Henri is more

cunning and aware than perhaps he had previously shown, and the ensuing conversation, while full of far too much abstraction to be of more than theoretical value, serves to highlight a key element of the play's ideas. Henri notes that "most human activity [...] has no other purpose than to deliver us into the realm of the imagination" (175). This is in a sense Henri's acknowledgement of Baudrillard's hyperreality – everything is fake, a distraction, and has no material outcome. This has led to a deadening, or at least a numbing, effect on people – "to enter that hall one must leave one's real sorrow at the door and in its stead surround oneself with images and words and music that mimic anguish but are really drained of it" (175). Henri sees over-representation as subtracting the core essence of humanity, leaving a void in its place. Nelson had a similar view of the state of the contemporary human:

In the figure of the astronaut, we find the new hero of the nuclear age: the completely masked man, rootless and floating, impermeable and disconnected (except for technological mediation), fully beyond circadian rhythms and influences, underground, efficient, and completely monitored and dependent on technology. (161)

To Henri, this view of the modern world is why Ralph must be crucified – as he says, "*he still really feels everything*" (175). He continues: "[i]magine, Mr Cheeseboro, if that kind of reverence for life should spread! Governments would collapse, armies disband, marriages disintegrate! Wherever we turned, our dead unfeeling shallowness would stare us in the face" (175). Henri here identifies the key conflict at work in the late-20th century, between ironic detachment and hyperreality based on media representations, and some form of human connection based on compassion and honest goodwill. However, Skip, as is his role, immediately undercuts this – "[o]n the other hand, shallow as I am, I have twins registered at Andover" (175). This conversation does little to alter or even advance the storyline, as

nobody's mind is changed, but it does allow Henri to make a sincere-sounding appeal, which acts as Miller's lament, but, crucially, not plea – he sees that the world truly has become as postmodernist as he feared, and has reverted to humour. The scene ends with Henri alone on stage, and it's tempting to see his remark here as a parody of Linda Loman's requiem: "And so the poem continues, written in someone's blood, and my country sinks one more inch into the grass, into the jungle, into the everlasting sea" (176).

Resurrection Blues, although placed at the end for reasons of chronology, deserves to be at the centre of any study of Miller and the postmodern. Nowhere else in Miller's later period is his language so sharp, his satire so biting, or his attention so keenly focused on the contemporary world. What is most striking about this play, indeed, is this engagement with contemporary ideas. From paranoia to television theory, all filtered through a postmodernist lens that has come to doubt any and all intentions, Miller takes in the vast expanse of the early 21st century mediascape and denounces it. At times, his characters seem to almost act as personifications of the theories of Baudrillard, yet they consistently retain their engaging, often comedic, edge. With the recent popularisation of the term "fake news", the explosion in independent media, and the increasing ability to surround oneself with the ideology of one's choosing, cynicism and scepticism around the role of the media show no sign of abating, which not only makes the ground more fertile for a revival of Miller's penultimate work, but shows that he was also ahead of his time in it.

Conclusion: Future Reputation of a Contemporary Playwright

In this dissertation, I have tried to show that the work of Arthur Miller, in the latter period of his writing career, came to display clear signs of a postmodernist sensibility. This was expressed aesthetically, through forms of drama that hardly relied on valid causation and a fixed reality, and also philosophically, in the sense that we can see Miller's developing sense that morality was not as straightforward to either decide upon, or express, as it once was. We have also seen this on display in numerous essays of the period. This view of Miller may become useful and pertinent, as Miller's late works are rarely considered by producers, directors, and scholars. This new vision will, hopefully, not be defined by Willy Loman's bemused planting of seeds moments before his suicide; John Proctor's protestation that he must have his name over and above anything else; Miller's own testimony in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activity; or his tempestuous, and very public, marriage to Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s.

Any vision of Miller will, necessarily, have to take these things into account, but we should also consider him as the man who wrote plays that centred on women with mental health problems in the early 1990s (*The Last Yankee*), or who saw that identity can be something to shed as much as something to strive for (*Broken Glass*). In works such as *Elegy for a Lady* and *I Can't Remember Anything*, meanwhile, he writes in a muted tone of ill-defined loss, in stark contrast to the exaggerated masculine force and energy we see in Willy Loman or Eddie Carbone.

Hopefully, we will also be able to re-consider the role played by Miller the essayist in this new conception of his life and work. His essays have been crucial for this dissertation,

and in many ways are indicative of the overall goal. By analysing them, we can see that Miller was far more attuned to contemporary life than one would perhaps think from cursory readings of his plays, or their critics. While references to the Depression, the Holocaust, and Vietnam abound, he was also present at two major political conventions, wherein he identified key political trends that would come to be even more pronounced in the years and decades following. He travelled considerably behind the Iron Curtain, and so came to understand the life and consciousness of someone in the Cold War's "enemy territory". This also contributed to his understanding of American political life and culture. By viewing the obscene and blatant power of the Communist secret police forces up front, Miller came to see that in many ways power was as much weighted towards the state in America as it was in the Eastern Bloc. In the 1990s, meanwhile, his two satirical works reflected the popular distrust of politicians, and the acceleration of celebrity culture, fuelled, of course, by television.

My intention has been to show the influence of postmodernism and postmodernity on Miller's writing, and another way this can be expressed is in discussing the extent to which Miller's work were surely products of their time – that is to say, of a postmodernist society. *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, which expressed the paranoia and awareness of surveillance that was so crucial to postmodernity, should be considered as emblematic of its period as any of the great films of the 1970s. In all of them, we can see a distrust of high-powered officials, individual and group paranoia, and a sense that technology is the main driver of the existential paranoia that grips the characters. This also includes Miller's first self-parody, an indication that he had developed a sense of humour about himself, and, crucially, the necessary irony that he failed to showcase in *After the Fall*.

In Miller's detective plays, we have seen that he was working alongside contemporaries such as Thomas Pynchon, Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, and Paul Auster, all influenced by Jorge Luis Borges, in the tradition of postmodernist detectives – those who

seek the truth, but ones who, because truth has become so elusive (if it has not disappeared), are destined to be disappointed with their results. As ever, Miller's postmodernist detectives are not the ones who seem to be the detectives – classical detection no longer works in a postmodernist world that fails to operate along traditional, logical lines. While his characters try to come to understand this world, it seems that the human cost, to many people, is mounting, as the corrupt politicians, falsely imprisoned victims, and dead daughters stack up.

The Ride Down Mount Morgan, focussing as it does on a hypermasculine character's extramarital affair and fall from grace, was in many ways the perfect play to begin a decade that came, for many, to be defined by Bill Clinton's sex scandals. Beyond that, though, it was also an apt work for the post-Cold War period, when everything, it seemed, was up for grabs, and any desire one had would be satisfied. Miller, of course, problematises this view of life, but does not do so from a traditionally moralistic viewpoint – Lyman Felt is not an entirely bad man, even aside from his amusing and entertaining stage presence. Miller complicates morality to a considerable extent here, and *Morgan* is a key play for showing that he was now refusing to offer easy answers to the dilemmas his works posed.

Resurrection Blues was a perfect play for the early 20th century, and a country still recovering from the attacks of 11th September 2001. The paranoia, cynicism, and fear on show from most characters in the play indicate that even though it was not set in America, its subject most certainly was Miller's own country. Key to this play is the understanding that television had come to define reality for many people. This was not only the product of a keen eye and sharp satirical tongue, but it was also the clearest sign that he had become influenced by postmodernism. The way in which representations and reality are exchanged at will and that each character happily changes beliefs from moment to moment make this evident, foregrounding as well the pessimism that Miller felt in the early years of the 2st century.

This conception of Miller as being very much a contemporary writer is complimentary to my core hypothesis that we should regard these plays as postmodernist works. This can only be understood by examining the key debates around postmodernism and postmodernity alongside Miller's writings, and this is where my dissertation hopes to make its prime contribution to our understanding of Miller. On the rare occasion that Miller has been discussed around postmodernism, there has been a deficit either in the theoretical or close-reading work done, so I hope to have brought them together here. Only by debating and defining what we mean by postmodernism, and indeed postmodernist literature and drama, can we hope to place Miller in that context. When this theoretical work fails to be undertaken, it leaves terms too ill-defined, and so anything can be placed under the postmodernist rubric. However, a discussion of postmodernism without reference to literary and dramatic texts hardly serves a purpose, and so a balance must be found. By establishing my definitions of postmodernism and postmodernist literature, as well as a brief narrative of post-war American drama, I have shown that Miller's writing makes most sense when considered alongside these intertwined subjects.

Arthur Miller's reputation may be destined to be forever associated with his early plays, and there can be no doubt that they are powerful dramatic works that will always be vital to an understanding of 20th century drama. However, his later works are also vibrant, complex, and even quite funny, while having much to teach us about American life and literature in the late-20th and early-21st centuries. The hope is that by considering these plays as being aligned with the ideas of postmodernism, we can forge a new, greater understanding that allows them to be appreciated like their predecessors.

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