

was vying for control of Rome. On the eve of battle, high above the hills over Rome, the emperor saw a cross in the sky, with the words *In Hoc Signo Vinces*—"In This Sign, Conquer." As the story goes, with the psychological terror inspired by the crosses painted on their shields, Constantine's forces were indeed victorious. Filled with the power of this new god, Constantine converted on the spot, made Sunday a day of rest, forbade the death-torture of crucifixion, hired Christians into his government, and generally became known as the man through whom Christianity had subdued the Empire.

Or was he? Eusebius' story was written 10 years *after* the battle, in his laudatory *Life of Constantine*, and is essentially *legend*, not history. More tellingly, in Eusebius' tale, the cross is not one of wood, but rather, one more fitting the Empire it would serve: the image is that of the *hilt of a sword*. The implications are mammoth. As Carroll writes, "When the death of Jesus—rendered literally, in all its violence, as opposed to metaphorically or theologically—replaced the life of Jesus and the new life of Resurrection at the heart of the Christian imagination, the balance shifted decisively against the Jews." From here, Carroll expands the story,

concentrating on how the image of the cross would again and again be raised against the Jews. So the question remains: Had the Church conquered Rome, or had the Empire, in fact, subdued the Church?

Empire and Church

The official history of the Catholic Church begins with this "corporate merger" of Church and State. It is from here that the first Pope is officially traced, now that the Empire had adopted this new religion. But again, this history comes to us by way of Eusebius, who, it turns out, although a Bishop in his own right, was a victim of the Arian heresy which denied the Divine nature of Christ—a version of Christianity much more compatible with the other pagan religions in the pantheon of the Empire. The story goes on and on, but, like the so-called "Donation of Constantine" written by fraudsters some 400 years after the Emperor's death, the message keeps coming back: Not only did the Romans kill Christ, but, at a certain point, they (as did later and current, like-minded imperialists) moved to take over His Church as well.

The point is further made if we consider that the same story could be told with Muslims in the role of antagonists.

For example, the first sequel (as told by Carroll) to the Constantine story takes place in Palestine, where, on the first pilgrimage of a Christian to the (now) "Holy Land," Constantine's mother, Helena (revered as a saint in the Orthodox Catholic Church) is led (by a Jew, of course) to discover the original "true cross" that had somehow been preserved for three centuries. Untold by Carroll is that this very same cross, this very "weapon of mass destruction," would somehow (it is now over 1,000 years old!), be dragged back to Palestine during the Crusades, when the declared foes of the Church/Empire were now Muslim, and not merely Jewish.

With today's financial collapse fuelling the drive to merge religion and empire into some newfangled fascist form of government, it is no surprise to see some fool like a Mel Gibson again raising the cross in this image of bloody fury. To his credit, Carroll resurrects some of the best Christian thinkers of previous eras—Augustine, Abelard, and Cusa—to deal with these issues, for example citing as his source for Cusa's ecumenical approach to religious conflicts, the Schiller Institute volume, *Toward a New Council of Florence: On the Peace of Faith and Other Works by Nicolaus of Cusa*.

—Mark Bender

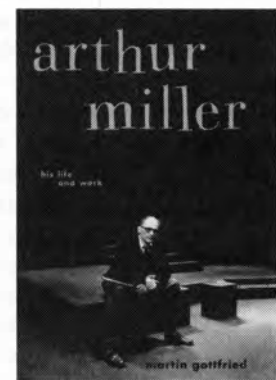
Courage and Seduction

In assessing playwright Arthur Miller, one must take into consideration both the insightful artist with flashes of genius, and the critical shortcomings of his work, and then set them against the backdrop of Great Depression of the 1920's and '30's, the uplifting of the nation by Franklin Roosevelt, and the horrible downfall initiated by Harry S Truman and his successors. In this new—and only—biography of Miller, author Martin Gottfried attempts to deal with the contradictions and accomplishments of a playwright who, while never able to achieve consistent artistic greatness, did for a time wage a gritty fight against the prevailing moral degeneration and cultural collapse that

gripped the nation.

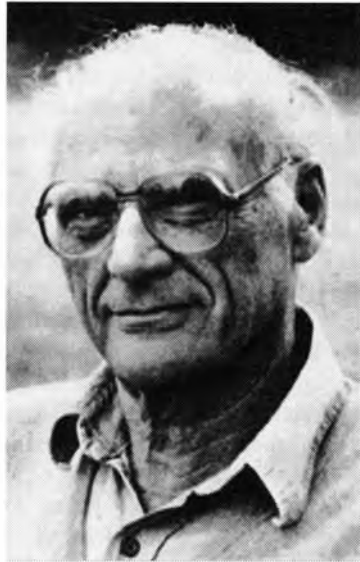
The author of such widely celebrated works as *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *All My Sons* (1947), *The Crucible* (1953), and *The Misfits* (1957), Miller came out of the same milieu as Depression artists Clifford Odets, Lee Strasberg, Eugene O'Neill, and Tennessee Williams. All were struggling to create an American school of drama, and each achieved a modicum of success, although they all ultimately succumbed to the increasingly decadent culture launched by post-war "Trumanism."

Miller succeeded better than most (although he never fully appreciated the concept of historical specificity, as presented by Lyndon LaRouche—the



**Arthur Miller:
His Life and Work**
by Martin Gottfried
Cambridge, Da Capo Press, 2003
483 pages, hardcover, \$30.00

metaphor of *The Crucible*, for example, is symbolically compelling, but historically untruthful.) Unlike Odets and others, he withstood the witchhunt of the McCarthy show trials of the 1950's and refused to capitulate to the Senate committee, even with the threat of imprisonment. Nevertheless, Miller did capitulate to the Iago-like manipulations of F.B.I. stooge Elia Kazan, and sold some of his soul



Playwright Arthur Miller

to the devil. Eventually, he, like the others, fell prey to the existentialism of his environment and the seductive lure of Hollywood.

Willie Loman: Trumanism's 'Common Man'

Three crucial events played defining roles in Miller's development, both as a writer and a political figure: the stock-market crash of 1929, in which, Miller's family went overnight from a life of affluence to a world of poverty and conflict, leading to his questioning the idea of economic justice; his refusal to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC); and his ill-fated marriage to actress Marilyn Monroe.

Throughout his plays, Miller continually addressed his characters' selling out, especially by selling themselves. This is particularly true for his most memorable character, *Salesman's* Willie Loman. Miller has Willie eulogized at his funeral: "Willy was a salesman . . . he didn't put a bolt to a nut . . . he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and you're finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A

salesman has got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory."

In this emphasis on "selling," Miller was consciously addressing the consumer society of the 1940's and '50's, and the shift from the era of optimism and production during Roosevelt, to the service economy of the post-war era. Gottfried quotes Miller, first from a sketch for *A View from the Bridge*: "A man who doesn't build anything must be liked. He must be

cheerful on bad days. Even calamities mustn't break through 'cause one thing, he has to be liked." And later, from an interview, speaking of Willie Loman: "What happens when a man does not have a grip on the forces of his life and has no sense of values which will lead him to that kind of grip?"

There is little question that Miller's intention was to change society for the better. As one of his characters says in *The Great Disobedience*: "The world has got to be changed, so we can live, and if you've gotta die, then die changing it." And, in the last scene of *Salesman*, Miller provocatively opens up the question of immortality. Willie Loman is planting seeds in his garden by flashlight—just before he kills himself—and says to his absent brother, "A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something." I.e., man must produce, he must create—he cannot just consume.

Stuck in the Fishbowl

As a result of his refusal to name names before HUAC, Miller was convicted of contempt of Congress in 1957 (later overturned by the Supreme Court, in 1958). This was at the high-point of his literary and political life.

But on the day Miller's stand made him a hero, he announced he was going

to marry Marilyn Monroe. During his eight-year involvement with Monroe, Miller never wrote anything significant for the Broadway stage—his next play, *After the Fall*, was written after Monroe's suicide. (She, like the fictional Charlie Castle in Odets' *The Big Knife*, was destroyed by the Hollywood system. She said she was "tired of being Marilyn Monroe . . . it's a burden. What do you call it? An albatross.")

Miller had written *The Crucible*, set during the Salem witch trials of the 1600's, at the height of the McCarthy hearings in 1953. This period comes together in Miller's words: "'what was in the air' provided the actual locus of the tale. It was the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance. . . . It was as though the whole country had been born anew, without a memory even of certain elemental decencies which a year or two earlier no one would have imagined could be altered, let alone forgotten. Astounded, I watched men pass me by without a nod whom I had known rather well for years; and again, the astonishment was produced by knowledge, which I could not give up, that the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered . . ." (Introduction to *Collected Works*).

Miller often asserted that the duty of a true artist was to take on the prevailing axioms of society. In the same Introduction, he wrote: "An idea if it is really new, is a genuine humiliation for the majority of the people; it is an affront not only to their sensibilities, but to their deepest convictions. It offends against the things they worship, whether God, or science or money." But he made a certain, uneasy peace with the fishbowl of modern culture, insightfully criticizing it while never fully breaking with its underlying axiomatics. Even so, as in *Salesman*, there were flashes of brilliance.

—Angela Vullo