

Remembering Arthur Miller

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Arthur Miller. The name is a mantra to me. Arthur alone is enough. For some, William Shakespeare or just plain Will does the trick. For me it's Arthur, Arthur Miller. I never tire of chanting that name. But why? When I was a kid, my dad, who was a terrific salesman (Austrian-Jewish, the best), used to say to my elder brother, "Son. Whatever happens, never work for commission only, it's the death of a salesman". That phrase meaningless to me then, stuck. Years later, by chance, I saw Rod Steiger on UK Television in a play with that same title and was poleaxed by the similarity in dialogue and attitudes to business and people that pervaded my own family. In the same year I saw Richard Castellano play Eddie Carbone in "A View from the Bridge" at the Sheridan Playhouse in New York. I had never seen a family drama with such real and natural acting as in that production and I went round to ask to see Mr Castellano afterwards to tell him so. I had to. I couldn't not. We chatted happily for about 15 minutes and I felt a bond had been forged between myself and Mr Miller. The following year I saw John Neville play Willy Loman on Stage at The Nottingham Playhouse (He was a revelation. Willy as a thin man! By now I had seen pictures of Lee Cobb and Paul Muni) and shortly after that Albert Salmi and Harold Gary in "The Price" in London. I went with my Dad and we sat very near the front row and at the curtain call Dad looked up at Mr Gary (who was playing the 90 year old Furniture dealer Solomon, quite easily the best I have ever seen) in open-mouthed admiration. I had never seen that look on my father's face. So strong was it that Harold Gary looked down

at my Dad and smiled and nodded in a kind of mutual understanding.

All these were the works of one man, Arthur Miller, who wrote about families and their conflicts, conflicts that were real and true and, as I have said, in part bore comparison to my own family and background. How on earth could a total stranger know so much about my family and me? Arthur Miller did. Ten years later the National Theatre revived "Death of a Salesman" and more than anything I wanted to Play Biff. I had to. I met the Director Michael Rudman who had directed John Neville in "Salesman" at Nottingham and read for him and also with Warren Mitchell who was to play Willy. He and I had already played Father and Son on Television in a play by another Jewish Playwright, Bernard Kops. I got the part! I was in Arthur Miller heaven. The great man himself came over from Connecticut to work with us for a week. That was Miller heaven times ten as it must be for anyone who has had the good fortune to work with him and be in his company. Over the years I have corresponded with my great hero and once when I had difficulty with a moment in "A View from the Bridge" I wrote and asked him for his advice. He replied by return, clarifying the moment and solving my dilemma.

But it's not just the work. It is the man and his character and his wonderful face. Is there another face to the Miller we have seen over the years in documentaries and in print, championing the cause of political writers and injustices? I think not.

What I think I will cherish and remember most is that rascally, almost cheeky, narrow-eyed grin after a wise and knowing remark of his; that and his hearty open mouthed laugh on the photograph commemorating his eightieth birthday, which stands proudly on my desk as I write this and fills me with joy and a smile every single time I look at it.

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