

**Literature for Competitive Exam**  
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**Module - 06**  
**Lecture - 24**  
**American Poets and Dramatists**

Welcome back friends. So, we have been talking about American novelist and then we have also been talking about American dramatist and poets. So, one of the greatest dramatist of all time. American dramatist of all time is Arthur miller, who was born in 1915 and who died in 2005. So, the some of the terms that we are going to refer to with reference to Arthur miller, one is the group theater. And what was group theater? And what was federal theater project? These are the things that we should be concerned with and then the major works of Arthur miller life and time and his life and his times also.

Along with O'Neill and Tennessee Williams we have already done some practice extracts from their plays. He is the most influential American playwright of the twentieth century. He was born in a Jewish family and his father was a manufacturer of ladies hats. He had an elder brother and a younger sister and one of the most formative influences on him especially on his personal life was the great depression, which changed the fortunes of the miller family. At when he grow up a little older he went to he enter the University of Michigan in 1934 where he won awards for playwriting. He wrote several plays dealing with family relationships which later on you know, with sort of anticipated Many of his later plays.

He graduated in English in 1938 and then he return to New York and joined the federal theater project, where he also wrote his scripts for radio programs. Now you have to know that the group theater was formed in New York by the trinity of Harold Clurman, Cheryl crow ford and lee Strasberg in 1931. The group was an attempt to create a theater collective a company of players trained in a unified style and dedicated to presenting contemporary plays. Members of the group tended to hold left wing political views and wanted to produce plays that dealt with important social issues and concern that is important to remember while working at the group theater.

Lee Strasberg developed the famous theory of the method acting, which was based on the ideas of the Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski. This is the method of training and rehearsal for actors which bases a performance upon inner emotional experience of very complex theory. Many great actors on stage as well in cinema they are the practitioners of this branch of acting. The group theater disbanded in 1941. After the Second World War most of the members of the group were investigated by the house UN American activities committee the dreaded HUAC. So, this is one another term that you should know HUAC house UN American activity committee.

Which targeted many people's like a stargazes the artists the film makers the writers, some of the famous stargazes were people like Elea Kazan, Clifford Odets and Lee J. Cobb. And unfortunately the testified and named other members of leftwing groups those who are name were blacklisted. And those who refuse to new names were also blacklisted; however, in 1940 going back to Arthur miller, he married catholic girl Mary Slattery. And he had 2 children his first play to appear on broad way was the man who had all the luck, which is sort of loosely based on Henric Ibsens a master builder. The man who had all the luck is a 1944 play. He also wrote his first novel focus a 1945 novel which was about anti Semitism.

You have to remember the, it was the waves of hatred for the Jews even in America. And the play sorry, the novel addresses that issue. His first success came in 1947 with all my sons. All my sons is structurally follows the conventional Aristotelian construction of plot. It has unity of time plays and action and it is quite similar to a Greek tragedy the conflict is between father and his sons resulting in the death of his father. Millers next great play and one of the greatest play is ever is death of a salesman which was performed in 1949 and it brought him everlasting fame, the recent ranian film is a salesman is also sort of you know, a group of it is about or it refers to Arthur miller's death of a salesman.

It is about a group of irani, Iranian theater people who are trying to stage death of a salesman. The play also won him his first and only Pulitzer Prize for the best play. And it is protagonist is Willy Loman and miller famously uses expressionistic theatrical devices which was so successfully used earlier by Tennessee Williams in a streetcar named desire. You should also know what is expressionism, now this expressionist movement of course, it is started with painting like most major movements, but in drama this is started

in Germany with playwrights like George Kaiser and Ernst Toller using this device in their plays.

The plots and stories of the expressionist films often dealt with madness, insanity, betrayal and other topics like you know it is not like a standard action adventure. Kind of they were more introverted and intellectual kind of plays and expressionism was gave them the right kind of atmosphere, the right device to handle the theme. In cinema it was famously used in particularly the last laugh the cabinet of doctor caligari. And these were and also Nosferatu so, these were all made by the German directors like Fritz Langan and F. W. Murnau. You should also know that there is a painting called the scream by Edward Munch which clearly shows that what is the you know effect on mankind on of unbridle materialism and rapid and unbridle mechanization and urbanization.

Expressionism in other words is a practice in which sub conscious thoughts or the subjective or inner realities of life are presented by a wide range of non naturalistic techniques. Eugene O'Neill in the emperor Jones and the hairy ape successfully uses this device of course, Tennessee Williams popularized it with street car named desire and then Elmer rices in the adding machine which was performed in 1923 satirizes the growing regimentation of man in the mechanical of machine age through the life and death of the hero mister zero.

So, the dominant theme was horror over urban life and apocalyptic visions of the collapse of civilization. Miller's next great success following death of a salesman was the crucible 1953 which is based upon the evens of 1692 which let to the Salem witch trials which was a series of hearings before local magistrates to prosecute over 150 falls people who are falsely accused of practicing witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts in 1692. So, the play was written, he set the play in 1692 in Salem, but it was sort of you know allegory of the times of McCarthyism.

So, as I told you earlier on that McCarthyism, HUAC these were very important sort of events that forged or that informed millers a plays of that period. So, the crucible was written in the early 50's during the time of McCarthyism when the US government blacklisted the so called accused communist miller himself was questioned by the house un American activities committee. And the play was first performed on Broadway in 1953. Here is a slide that I want you to look at.

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## HUAC

- “In 1956, the House Un-American Activities Committee (Huac) subpoenaed me - I was cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to identify writers I had met at one of the two communist writers' meetings I had attended many years before. By then, the tide was going out for Huac and it was finding it more difficult to make front pages. However, the news of my forthcoming marriage to Marilyn Monroe was too tempting to be passed. That our marriage had some connection with my being subpoenaed was confirmed when Chairman Walters of the Huac sent word to Joseph Rauh, my lawyer, that he would be inclined to cancel my hearing if Miss Monroe would consent to have a picture taken with him. “

And this is I am quoting, Miller he Miller on HUAC in 1956 the House Un-American Activities Committee HUAC subpoenaed me - I was cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to identify writers I had met at one of the two communist writers meetings I had attended many years before. By then, the tide was going out for HUAC and it was finding it more difficult make front pages. However, the news of my forthcoming marriage to Marilyn Monroe was too tempting to be passed. That our marriage had some connection with my being subpoenaed was confirmed when chairman Walters of the HUAC sent word to Joseph Rauh, my lawyer, that he would be inclined to cancel my hearing if Miss Monroe would consent to have a picture taken with him.

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“I think it may be, however personal it may appear. Kazan's testimony created a far greater shock than anyone else's. Lee J Cobb's similar testimony and Jerome Robbins's cooperation seemed hardly to matter. It may be that Kazan had been loved more than any other, that he had attracted far greater affection from writers and actors with whom he had worked, and so what was overtly a political act was sensed as a betrayal of love. “

Also look at this another quotation from miller, take a look at it. I think it may be however personal it may appear. Kazan's testimony created a far greater shock than anyone else's Lee J. Cobb Similar testimony and Jerome Robbins's cooperation seemed hardly to matter. It may be that Kazan had been loved more than any other that he had attracted far greater affection from writers and actors with whom he had worked, and so what was overtly a political act was sensed as a betrayal of love. And this is Arthur miller on Elea Kazan.

You should remember that the crucible and this kind of question may be ask for your exams, was adopted for film twice and particularly by jean Paul Sartre as a 1957 film les sorceries de Salem and then miller himself adopted it for the 1996 film the crucible which had Daniel day Lewis and Wynona Ryder acting in it. And then in 1955 there was a double bill with a memory of 2 Mondays which is a sort of semi autobiographical play and also view from the bridge which is like his a Greek play, with all the melodrama of insists and betrayal. Miller married Marilyn Monroe and after the marriage they went on to live in Roxbury Connecticut. Miller wrote the misfits for Marilyn Monroe, he wrote the screen play which is about 3 cowboys and a girl. The girl's character is also loosely based on Marilyn Monroe. He wrote after the fall in 1964 the title derives from the bible and also Albert Camuss existentialist novel the fall.

And after the fall is also notable for its autobiographical theme as well as innovative techniques. It broad back Elia Kazan and Arthur Miller again after long break. In the 60's and 70's Miller wrote a very successful play *Incident at Vichy* based on the Holocaust in France and then also *The Price*. And *The Price* is a very popular play which is staged over and over again everywhere including in our own country, which is about an un-easy relationship between brothers. So, his own un-easy relationship between his own brother Kermit Miller. In the 70's he wrote *The American Clock* which is again semi autobiographical about his experiences of the depression years.

And then he wrote his biblical play which is satire called *Creation of the World*. Miller was a president of PEN that is PEN Society poets playwright essays novelists and he also took very active part in supporting writers and exile such as Wole Soyinka Aleksandra Solzhenitsyn and later also Salman Rushdie, in the 80's and the 90's he wrote *The Archbishop's Ceiling* which is based on writers in exile in communist Czech Republic. He also wrote *Elegy for a Lady* and some kind of love story in something called *2 by AM*, which was a double bill in 1983. He wrote *Danger Memory* in 1987 which is about the unreliable role of memory. So; it is that his memory play.

And he then next he wrote *Ride Down Mount Morgan* which is a 1991 play followed by *Broken Glass* which is again a play about the Holocaust. He wrote short stories and also another novel called *Homely Girl* and then of course, his great autobiography which is called *Time Bends* which was published in 1987. Some before his death some of his last plays were *Mister Peters Connections* in 1999 and then he also wrote *Resurrection Blues* in 2002 which is a satire on media and its materialistic values. And last play was *Finishing the Picture* which appeared in 2004 just a few years few months before his death. Which is again a Marilyn play and it is about writer who is unsuccessfully trying to complete a screen play so, it is based on his experience with Marilyn during the filming of *The Misfits*.

Miller's greatest legacy is democratization of tragedy and the democratization of the ideal tragic hero. And this and his play and his comments on what is a tragedy are worth noting, because he directly challenges Aristotle's concepts of ideal tragic hero. See remember for Aristotle an ideal tragic hero is someone who is of noble stature and birth and granger with one tragic flaw, fatal flaw; however, for Miller this is not the case,

and he says even a common man is apt to be the subject of a tragedy. So, democratization of tragedy is one of his greatest you know contribution to dramaturgy.

So, thank you very much, and we will be doing more on American dramatist in our next class.