University of New Orleans
ScholarWorks@UNO

English Faculty Publications | Department of English

Fall 2013

Death of a Salesman in Beijing Revisited

Ou Rong
Hangzhou Normal University

Zhaoming Qian
University of New Orleans, zqian@uno.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.uno.edu/engl_facpubs

Part of the Literature in English, North America Commons

Recommended Citation
Ou, Rong, and Zhaoming Qian. "Death Of A Salesman In Beijing Revisited." Arthur Miller Journal 8.2 (2013): 57-76.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

Death of a Salesman in Beijing Revisited

Ou Rong and Qian Zhaoming[1]

Death of a Salesman, which introduced stream-of-consciousness writing to Western Theatre, has been considered a turning point both in Arthur Miller's career and in the history of American Theatre. In 1983, Arthur Miller and Ying Ruocheng, a Chinese actor-director-translator, collaborated on staging this play in Beijing. Its success led to the revival of *Salesman* in the U.S. and a breakthrough in Chinese Theatre in the 1980s. Based on the first-hand materials including Miller's seven-week diary and Ying's memoirs, this paper traces and elaborates the two artists' respective contributions to their joint effort to make the play new and worldwide. It also discusses its impact on the theatre in the U.S. and China in the 1980s and afterwards.

How It Happened

When *Death of a Salesman* won its instant success on February 10, 1949 and ran for 742 performances through Nov. 18, 1950, China was undergoing a tremendous political revolution and a New China was founded. Since then until the 1970s, China had been isolated from the western world and the Chinese people knew little about American writers except a few "progressive" ones like Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, and Pearl S. Buck. In late 1970s, the ice between China and the U.S. was breaking and the bilateral relationship tended to be normalized step by step. Chinese and American drama societies began to establish regular communications in which the Center for U.S.-China Arts Exchange (the Center) founded in 1978 at Columbia University and the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (the Association) played important roles.

In 1978, Arthur Miller made his first visit to China with his wife Inge Morath. As guests of the Association, Miller and his wife met with many Chinese writers and artists. In his first meeting they

with Cao Yu, China's most respected playwright and head of Beijing People's Art Theater (BPAT); Miller had read some of Cao's plays but Cao knew little about Miller. As a matter of fact, few people that Miller encountered in China on his first trip knew him or his plays. When Xia Yan, the vice deputy of the Chinese Theater Association learned that Cao Yu was embarrassed and that Miller was not pleased with Cao's ignorance, he contacted Mei Shaowu immediately because Mei Shaowu, Mei Lanfang's second son and a brilliant translator, had written an article in the early 1960s on Miller's plays which was published in a Chinese journal with very limited issues.[2] Xia told Mei to send his article to Huang Zuolin as soon as possible and Mei did it accordingly.

Therefore, when Miller went to meet Huang Zuolin, head of the Shanghai People's Art Theater, Huang could talk with Miller about his plays. Miller was happy. Then Huang asked Miller to recommend one of his plays to a Chinese audience, and Miller suggested *The Crucible*. Huang accepted Miller's suggestion and had Mei Shaowu translate the play into Chinese. In 1979, the first issue of *Foreign Theater* hosted by the Chinese Theater Association published a special feature on Arthur Miller, including a report on Arthur Miller's 1978 trip in China, an excerpt of *Salesman* translated by Chen Liangting and Mei Shaowu's introduction to six of Miller's plays. In 1980, Liu Rongxin published his article "Why Should the Salesman Die" with an ideological analysis of *Salesman* in *Foreign Literary Studies*, a renowned academic journal in China. In 1981, *The Crucible* was staged in Shanghai with the new title of *The Salem's Witch*, directed by Huang Zuolin. It was a great success and ran more than 50 performances. For Chinese audiences who had suffered bitterly from the persecutions during the Cultural Revolution, they found incredible echoes in the play and they could not believe it was written by an American author.

Back in the U.S., the Millers published *Chinese Encounters* in 1979 with the text written by Miller and photographs by Inge Morath. It is strange that in this book, we cannot find the name of Ying Ruocheng, a director and one of the leading actors of BPAT. He was among the few people who had some knowledge of Miller when Miller first visited China; it was he who told Cao Yu about Miller and played a predominant role in bringing *Salesman* to China's stage.

How Ying Came to Know Miller and *Salesman*

Ying Ruocheng's life is fully chronicled in his collaborative memoir *Voices Carry* (2009). Ying was born in a Chinese Catholic family in 1929. His grandfather was Ying Lianzhi (1866-1926), founder of Furen Catholic University and *Dagongbo*, one of the most influential newspapers in modern China; his father was Yin Qianli (1900-1969), a prominent scholar and educator in Chiang Kai-shek's reign. Ying Ruocheng went to Catholic schools, graduated from Qínghua University in 1950, and became a founding member of BPAT, where he performed as an actor and worked as an archivist, literary supervisor, and director. He is the translator of numerous plays from English to Chinese and vice versa. He had been the Vice-Minister of Culture for four years (1986-1990), [3]yet he never regards himself as a government official but as an artist.

Ying came to know Miller and *Salesman* when he studied at Qinghua. In his memoir, he recalls his first reading of *Salesman*:

> Qinghua is where I first read Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*. During my senior year, the librarian pulled me aside. She knew I was very keen on having a first look at the new books. "There's a new play," she told me. "I don't know whether or not it's interesting."
>
> I saw that the playwright had a name I didn't recognize—Arthur Miller—and that the play was one I had never heard of—*Death of a Salesman*. So I took it away, and started reading. I finished it that same night.
>
> . I was so drawn to the play, but immediately thought it would be impossible to produce at that moment in China. It was only a couple of months after the inauguration of the People's Republic, and it certainly wasn't—or didn't seem to me at the time—an appropriate time to introduce something like that. But it left a very deep impression on me. (Ying and Conceison 122-3)

Therefore, when he was told by his friend who was working for the Association that Miller was visiting China as a tourist in 1978, Ying was very excited. He told Cao Yu about Miller and they went together to find Miller in his hotel. They invited Miller to attend the

performance of *Cai Wenji* at BPAT and Miller had a talk with the cast afterwards. Pushed by Cao Yu, Miller made a critical comment on the play written by Guo Moruo, an iconic figure of Chinese literature. Cao and Ying were surprised by Miller's critique but pleased with his candidness. Later they discussed with Miller doing a production of *All My Sons* in Beijing. In 1980, Cao and Ying visited New York as guests of the Center to arrange for a touring production of *Teahouse* and had more encounters with Miller and the Center director Chou Wen-chung. They talked about the collaboration again but did not put into concrete details.

It was in the fall of 1982, when Ying visited the U.S for four months as the Edgar Snow Visiting Professor of Theater at the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC), that Ying and Miller discussed in earnest the possibility of staging one of his plays in China. Miller suggested *The Crucible* because he thought most of the Chinese audience who had gone through the persecution of the Cultural Revolution could identify with the play. But Ying tried to convince Miller that "a story of persecution wasn't enough anymore," because "China's trauma had gone much deeper than the persecution of intellectuals." According to Ying, *The Crucible* would not have been something new to a Chinese audience as the early 1980s was the period of *shanghen wenxue* (scar literature), with so many works of literature exposing the persecutions during the Cultural Revolution. (Ying and Conceison 161)

Ying was keen on *Salesman* and it was an unfulfilled dream that had strong impact on his youth at Qinghua:

> While I was still a student at Qinghua, I imagined what it would be like if only we could stage Miller's play. I remember toying with the idea, saying to my classmates, "But anybody can understand the plight of this Willy Loman. The circumstances may be a little different, but what he faces is the same all over the world over. As a father, he is willing to give up his life for his children. This is something any Chinese would understand." (Ying and Conceison 123)

Moreover, Ying believed *Salesman* was "truly a breath of fresh air, especially because of the way it was staged"; and he felt it was Miller's "most representative work" (Ying and Conceison 160-1).

Except for Ying's personal preference, in the early 1980s with China's near opening to the West, Chinese artists became more experimental and prepared Chinese audiences for more sophisticated style. With the import and impact of contemporary Western plays, Chinese artist-intellectuals wanted to seek more artistic autonomy. As Belinda Kong states in her analysis of the cultural-political dimensions of the *Salesman* production within Chinese contexts: "Dramatic activities in China intersected significantly with extradramatic forces," and "the Beijing *Salesman* was part of an attempt by certain Chinese artist-intellectuals to navigate dangerous political waters" (40).

As to Cao and Ying's insistence that he come to China to direct *Salesman,* Miller felt rather astonished and skeptical at first. He could not help asking himself: "how could one hope to direct a cast without being able to talk to them?"; how could Chinese audiences understand the commercial civilization "that had no existence in Chinese memories"? And "no foreign director had ever attempted to mount a new play in China with Chinese actors" (Miller, *Beijing* vii). However, encouraged by the success of *The Crucible* in Shanghai, backed by Chou Wen-chung's enthusiasm, and added to Ying's mediation between Miller and BPAT, Miller eventually agreed to direct his own play in Beijing on condition that Ying would play Willy Loman and do the translation.

From Rehearsal to Première

As the agreement was reached, Miller and Ying set to work on the rehearsal. In early 1983 when Ying was still in the U. S., Miller invited him to dinner at a Sichuan Food restaurant in New York and discussed the translation of the script, the stage design, the lighting, the music, the selection of the cast, the schedule of rehearsal etc. Impressed by Miller's proficiency and earnestness, Ying felt excited at the prospect of working with "a professional director who is thoroughly familiar with the stage" (Ying, "Impression" 36).

When Ying went back to China and found that the extant translation of *Salesman* by Chen Liangting was too literary to be suitable for performance, he spent 6 weeks turning out a more colloquial, more rhythmic and more stage friendly Chinese script. As the original play in English is very colloquial, in translating it into Chinese, Ying tried hard to avoid literary language, because he

didn't want it to sound like a stiff translation. His translation is heavily slated with Beijing dialect and slang in the late 1940s, which to Ying would be the closest equivalent to the playwright's intentions. He also paid much attention to maintaining the original tempo of the dialogue, because he thought that was important to the feeling of the play. In the first rehearsal of the play, not knowing any Chinese, Miller timed it all the way through with a stopwatch and he was satisfied to find that the play in Chinese was the same as the play in English to the minute, thanks to Ying's brilliant translation.

Ying was also responsible for selecting the cast and crew and putting everyone to work accordingly. When he came to China on March 20 1983, Miller found almost everything for rehearsal was ready; he was fairly satisfied (Miller, *Beijing* 4).

In the less than two months of rehearsal time, Ying became Miller's most competent partner, sort of a jack of all trade. In Miller's seven-week journal, *Salesman in Beijing*, Ying's name appears almost daily. "Ying worked very hard," Zhu Lin, the brilliant actress who played Linda in *Salesman*, recalls, "He was a translator, an interpreter, as well as an actor; he fell ill soon after the play was staged. He is very keen on this play. To me, it is the play in which he plays the best."[4]

Ying firmly supports Miller's directing work. He helps to select the cast, illustrates the modernist techniques applied in the play and transfers Miller's intentions to the Chinese cast. He helps with the positioning. He finds that "as a director, Arthur was not very versatile in the positioning of the actors, so I actually stepped in quite a bit in that regard" (Ying and Conceison 163). When Miller has days off, Ying leads the cast with their rehearsal, drills them on lines and goes into the questions the Chinese cast "had not dared to ask the Foreign Expert that might reveal their naiveté or ignorance" (Miller, *Beijing* 126). Ying stands side by side with Miller in the press conference, promoting the publicity of *Salesman*; to prevent the play from being interpreted as "anti-US propaganda," Miller puts emphasis on the universal humanity demonstrated in the play and Ying insists that the play is selected owing to his aesthetic preference and the innovative form of the play (Miller, *Beijing* 45).

Miller always relies on Ying to communicate with others in rehearsal, though he is provided with one assistant director and one interpreter. "[W]ith him [Ying] beside me I forget altogether that I am not understanding Chinese instantaneously; he is but a breath behind the speaker, with not a single hesitation" (Miller, *Beijing* 15. Ying in his memoir admits: "I was serving as his [Miller's] interpreter, but at times I usurped his role and nobody really knew Arthur Miller's ideas from Ying Ruocheng's ideas" (Ying and Conceison 163). Whenever he disagrees with the cast or the crew, Miller invariably resorts to Ying's understanding and support. For example, from the start of the rehearsal, Miller stresses to the cast: "You must not attempt to act like Americans at all," and "the way to make this play most American is to make it most Chinese (Miller, *Beijing* 5). Miller rejects wigs and heavy make-up like chalk-white faces, heavily rounded eyes or false noses for the cast. Miller's rejection at first disappoints the make up staff and is not understood by most of the cast. Nevertheless, Ying supports Miller's decision and explains to the cast that Miller "wanted the audiences to know the pulse of their hearts, not the color of their hair" (Ying and Conceison 164). With the continuous effort of Miller and Ying, the cast gradually accept Miller's view; they are no longer worried about their appearance in the play and get more attentive to the inner heart of the characters that they act.

Ying is very helpful when Miller explains the sub-consciousness technique of the play. When Miller came to China, the Chinese cast had already read the script and was very familiar with the plot and their lines, but they, including Ying, did not truly understand the juxtaposition of illusion and reality, the past and the present in the play. With Miller's explanation, Ying is the first one to understand his intention and assists him in his illustration to the other cast. For instance, the actor who plays Ben used to think that he was playing "a ghost" because Ben had been dead. Miller tells him that Ben exists in Willy's memory "with certain characteristics that are not necessarily realistic" and he "must play him as Willy recalls him" (Miller, *Beijing* 28). The actor still feels confused. Ying helps to explain further that "sometimes Ben has his own character and sometimes he simply voices Willy's thoughts. In other words, he is and is not a real person like the other people in the

play" (Miller, *Beijing* 28). As a result, the actor better understands his role and acts accordingly.

Miller has many intimate talks with Ying to learn more about Chinese culture and Chinese history, especially what happened to China in the Cultural Revolution. Pao is correct to have noted that the transportation of *Salesman* to Beijing inevitably involves reframing "the American content of the play into a Chinese content" (408). Provided with much knowledge of China's past, Miller tries to approach how Chinese people consider contemporary society, how they read his play, so that he could explain his play from a Chinese perspective and his explanation could be sopped up by Chinese actors. For instance, he encourages Chinese actors to understand Willy's expectations on Biff just as Chinese parents hold high hopes for their children, *wang zi cheng long*, in Chinese idiom; he asks the Chinese cast to imagine that the Lomans are the second generation of Chinese immigrants in Brooklyn. As to Happy trying to pick up the woman in the restaurant scene by telling her that he got his nickname at West Point, he asks the actors to think of a parallel in China and Happy comes up with "having a father in Hong Kong" (Miller, *Beijing* 126). As selling has always been a disreputable pursuit for the Chinese and certainly not something to be romanticized, Miller encourages Ying to imagine an equivalent to this romance of hope in some Chinese occupation. Ying finally seizes on "the outriders who in the old times had companied caravans across China, protecting them from bandits," but "with the coming of the railroads the need for their services vanished, and they ended up in local fairs firing at targets, swallowing swords, and drinking to forget," filled with disillusionment and frustration (Miller, *Beijing* 126).

Miller manages to familiarize himself with the style and conventions of traditional Chinese operas. Miller attended some performances of traditional Chinese operas when he was in China and was impressed by the ideographical style of Chinese art. The Chinese actors want to play Biff boxing with Uncle Ben in a realistic American way because they feel at a loss how to give the fight some kind of conviction. However, Miller reminds them of "the marvelous choreography of the Beijing Opera battles, where nobody loses his aplomb, nobody is actually hit, and yet the effect of battle is amply produced" (Miller, *Beijing* 107). Enlightened by

Miller's dramatic analogy and brilliant mime, the two actors play the fight in a simple and artistic way to a satisfying effect. This incident, nevertheless, induces Chinese actors to reflect on the value of the more poetic techniques in traditional Chinese operas that have been discarded in Chinese modern theatre.

Miller's accessible directing style and charismatic personality are also important factors that ensure the success of the collaborative venture. Miller learned much from Elia Kazan, the great director of the 1949 *Salesman*. In his 1950 article to celebrate the anniversary of *Salesman*, Miller speaks highly of Kazan:

> And Elia Kazan, with his marvelous wiles, tripping the latches of the secret little doors that lead into the always different personalities of each actor. That is his secret; not merely to know what must be done, but to know the way to implement the doing for actors trained in diametrically opposite schools, or not trained at all. He does not "direct," he creates a center point, and then goes to each actor and creates the desire to move toward it. And they all meet, but for different reasons, and seem to have arrived there by themselves. ("*Salesman* Has a Birthday")[5]

Years later, in his autobiography *Timebends* (1988), Miller again recalls Kazan as:

> a small, compact man who walked on the balls of his feet, he had the devil's energy and knew how to pay attention to what the writer or his actors were trying to tell him; he could make each actor think he was his closest friend. I think his method, if it can be given so self-conscious a name, was to let the actor talk themselves into a performance. For more by insinuation than by command, he allowed the actors to excite themselves with their own discoveries, which they would carry back to him like children offering some found object to a parent. And he respected rather than scoffed at actors' childishness, knowing that it was not a grown-up occupation and that the sources of their best inventions were in their earliest years. Instinctively, when he had something important to tell an actor, he would huddle with him privately rather than instruct before the others,

> sensing that anything that really penetrates is always to some degree an embarrassment… (132)

When Miller became the director of his own play in Beijing, he must have made much use of what he had learned from Kazan. He impressed the Chinese cast very positively, although he reveals his patronizing attitude occasionally in his journal. Ying admires Miller for his "rich sense of humor" and loves "getting together" with him (Ying and Conceison 160). In Ying's eyes, Miller shows high respect to Chinese actors and is generous with his compliments to everybody for a bit of progress; Miller is not arbitrary, willing to accept any suggestion when he finds it proper, for Miller believes that "there is only one principle—to be faithful to the play" ("Impression" 36-37). Miller's respect for Chinese actors' creation and autonomy is also illustrated in his journal, when Miller mentions in particular the scenes of Willy with his mistress in Boston hotel room:

> The actress who plays the part, Liu Jun, has invented all her business, I having left to herself out of fear of overstepping bounds of Chinese propriety in this sexual encounter; I have no idea what they might find distasteful and what erotic. Left to herself, she enters with the music, a long white scarf draped along her outstretched arms, as she slowly turns and turns, approaching the self-absorbed Willy, and at the same time softly laughing. At one point, where the script calls them to kiss, they have arranged for her to revolve into his arms with her face and mouth turned from the audience. (Miller, *Beijing* 114)

Ying's favorable impression of Miller is echoed by Zhu Lin, who played Linda in the play and remembers Miller for his artistic strictness and humane patience with Chinese actors (176). In the early rehearsal, Miller finds that Zhu tends to act with obvious self-pity and sentimentality. He does not criticize her much, but patiently explains Linda's personality and psychology to her and helps her achieve more profound understanding of the character until she performs with real feeling and poignancy that moves Miller to tears. (Miller, *Beijing* 79). Zhu regards Miller "as one of the most inspiring directors" from whom she benefitted in improving her acting (176).

The most successful collaboration between Miller and Ying is Ying's role as Willy Loman. Like Zhu Lin, Ying owes his accurate understanding of Willy most to Miller's minute and vivid analysis of the character (Ying, "Idea" 45). Miller warns Ying at the beginning of rehearsal: "You should neither attempt to play an American, nor think of playing a Chinese; just act in accordance with Willy Loman's mental logic and present this role with its own values. And Chinese audience will understand him!" (qtd. in Ke 86). Sensing that Ying just feels pity for Willy and that other actors seem not to understand Willy very well, Miller emphatically points out that:

> […]the one red line connecting everyone in the play was a love for Willy; not admiration, necessarily, but a kind of visceral recognition that in his fumbling and often ridiculous way he is trying to lift up a belief in immense redeeming human possibilities. People can't stand him often, they flee from him, but they miss him when he isn't there. Perhaps it's that he hasn't a cynical bone in his body, he is the walking believer, the bearer of a flame whose going-out would leave us flat, with merely what the past has given us. (Miller, *Beijing* 49)

Greatly illuminated by Miller's vivid elaboration, Ying sees Willy in a new perspective and improves his performance accordingly. But in one of Willy's final speeches debating his suicide with Ben and recalling the past, Miller finds a lack of conviction in Ying's voice, "achieving only an intellectual recognition of a hopeful time gone by, but not the taste of it, the smell of it, the vision of something concrete and real" (Miller, *Beijing* 108). Miller warns Ying against the tendency of petulance, repetitiousness and too much vehemence (Miller, *Beijing* 108-109). With the help of Miller's minute analysis and relentless observations, Ying manages to draw closer and closer to Willy by heart.

Apart from Miller's help, Ying explores the inner world of Willy with his own efforts. When he was young, Ying read Eisenstein's *Film Sense* and translated it into Chinese, in which he

found Eisenstein's "analysis of the modern Stanislavsky's method of acting was very penetrating" that:

> Eisenstein made a sharp distinction between what he called representation and an image. A representation is simply something like a picture, something that one encounters in daily life—but an image is something that is formed after the accumulation of a number of representations, which drives the actor to the inescapable conclusion of an idea. So it's no longer just one—or a few—representations, but it becomes a desire or a mood, much more than what the representations usually depicts. (Ying and Conceison 123)

When he is acting, Ying applies what he has learned from Eisenstein, bearing in mind:

> How does one translate what one wishes to achieve as the end result of all the images that arises in one's mind? What can one create through the juxtaposition of representations? Each representation may only be a simple picture, but combined together they become a force independent of their sum, and then the image comes alive. That's how I approached my roles in Lao She's *Teahouse* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman.* (Ying and Conceison 123)

Besides, Ying resorts to the "affective memory," an essential element of Stanislavsky's system. He reflects on what happened to his friends and himself during the Cultural Revolution; how they were insulted, wronged and even maltreated brutally, but they did not despair; they remained lively and optimistic despite all plights. With this "affective memory", Ying finds the key to "unlock the door to Willy Loman's heart" and completely empathizes with Willy on the stage (Ying, "Idea" 45) .

With Miller and Ying's joint efforts, Ying presents a brilliant Willy on the opening night. Years later, Ying recalls in his memoir his final scene in Willy's role debating his suicide with Ben on that night:

> While onstage playing the role of Willy at this moment, I could hear the audience sniffling. The happier I got, the stronger the sniffling of the audience became... And by that point in the production process, he [Miller] was being very careful, like a sensitive conductor trying to mold me, trying to lead me on in my fantasy and encouraging it in a way. So I suppose we two were in league against the audience."(Ying and Conceison 165)

Besides, Ying has worked hard to persuade the theatre authorities to keep the final scene of the play, the Requiem because, in the Chinese way of thinking, when the protagonist of a play dies, that's the end of it. On the opening night, when that crucial moment of the play came, the cast was worried that the Chinese audience would be impatient and leave. After the sound of car crash, Ying told the actors not to hurry, but to make their way onto the stage to the designated place (which was indicated by the lighting as Willy's tomb) and act out the scene seriously. Miraculously, nobody left the theatre and quite a number of the spectators watched the Requiem with tears. The play was a total success, with Miller and Ying receiving a rare five-minute standing ovation at the end. The applause came like "an avalanche", and Ying recalls that the applause "was unlike anything I had ever experienced as an actor. It was like a tidal wave. For an actor, this is the moment one lives for" (Ying and Conceison 167). At the celebration party after the show, Miller won unanimous cheers from the Chinese cast with "Mee-la, Mee-la, Mee-la!" (Miller, *Beijing* 253).

Aftermath of *Salesman* in Beijing

The success of *Salesman* staged in Beijing not only has promoted the Sino-US cultural communication, but also has made a strong impact on the development of both Chinese and American contemporary theaters.

The staging of *Salesman* in Beijing was hailed in the Chinese press as "the most significant cultural event in China since the Cultural Revolution" and Ying regarded it as "the first truly successful new play since the end of the Cultural Revolution" (Ying and Conceison 167). Ying and his cast toured with the play to quite a few places, including Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and Canada.

Performed in Chinese, it spawned an explosive growth in contemporary vernacular theater.

In the early 1980s, Ibsen's mode of play writing and Stanislavsky's mode of acting still dominated Chinese stage. Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize Winner for Literature as a Chinese French writer in 2000, was a playwright at BPAT then and complained about the restraining stage that "without Ibsen's or Stani's shadow, speak drama seems not able to exist. (27). The year 1983 witnessed a widespread and heated debate on the Principle of Theater in response to the theory of *Xieyi* Theater put forward by Huang Zuolin which cherished the value of China's native theater tradition.[6] The staging of *Salesman* was just up to the moment, inducing Chinese playwrights to note the discrepancy between the "orthodox western play" in Stanislavsky's mode and Miller's play, and rediscover the value of traditional Chinese opera in the depiction of characters, the acting techniques and the poetic treatment of time and space (Wu 54).

Ying was overseeing the playwrights at the theatre during the period following the production of *Salesman* and he tried to encourage writers to experiment "to break out of the old frameworks and stereotypes"(Ying and Conceison 161).

Liu Jinyun wrote *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* (*Gou'er ye niepan* 狗儿爷涅槃) shortly after the production of *Salesman* in Beijing. A Chinese peasant is nicknamed "Dog" after his father eats a live dog upon a dare by a landlord promising land. The play chronicles Uncle Doggie's efforts to retain ownership of his land throughout three decades of political movements and social upheavals. He pursues his dream for land like Willy who pursues his dream for commercial success and goes to self-destruction when that dream dies. Ying points out that "the play's structure, the characters, even the story—and the passage of time back and forth—were definitely influenced by *Salesman*. Even the ending with destruction of Doggie's throwing himself in front of the fire, hints at a suicide" (Ying and Conceison 161). The play has been added to BPAT's repertoire since its premiere in 1986. Diao Guangtan and Lin Zhaohua were the co-directors of 1986 *Nirvana*. Diao is the husband of Zhu Lin who played Linda in *Salesman*, and Lin, who had directed the experimental *Warning Signal* written by Gao Xingjian, had attended the premiere of *Salesman*. Both of them were familiar with the dramatic effect of *Salesman*; therefore, in their direction of *Nirvana*, they applied the dramatic techniques to combine expression with representation, *Xieshi* with *Xieyi*, absurdity with symbolism, and externalized the protagonist's interior monologue in dramatic scenes, achieving the effect similar to that of *Salesman*.

Several other plays such as *Death Visits the Living* (1985) and *Chronicles of the Mulberry Village* (1988) written in Beijing during that period were influenced by *Salesman* as well. These plays were experimental in the form, making use of juxtaposition and overlapping of time and space, pursuing the dramatic presentation of the character's inner world. Later on, they are known as the Exploration Plays in the history of Chinese theater. Meng Jinghui, the most established young generation director leading Chinese experimental theater, claims that he has grown up along with the performance of BPAT and *Salesman* in 1983 is the first spoken drama that he attended. [7]

The success of *Salesman* in Beijing not only has had an impact on Chinese playwrights and directors, but also resulted in a different acting style of foreign plays. Remarking on the production of BPAT, Yang Qianwu emphasizes that the artists of BPAT, while being faithful to the original play, set up a model of "performing foreign plays" in the Chinese way; the actors no longer wear make-up to look like foreigners or pretend to be foreigners, but concentrate on the internal world of the characters and act with sincerity and real passion, which brings them closer to the audience. [8]

Miller also benefitted much from his experience of directing in Beijing. When Miller accepted the invitation to Beijing, he was filled with a sense of mission and superiority to promote Chinese theatre and Chinese audience. At the beginning of rehearsals, Miller was annoyed at Chinese actors for their "mechanic acting" with 'little inner life" (Miller, *Beijing* 62). In the process of rehearsal, however, he was impressed by the flexibility of Chinese actors and the warm atmosphere of their cooperation. He began to remind himself:

> I must keep correcting my prejudices toward melodramatic acting; Chinese people do have a habit of nodding overemphatcially when agreeing with something, especially

> with something funny. There is a danger I will tame their native reality to make it confirm to mine. (Miller, *Beijing* 150)

In working with the Chinese artists, Miller gained new insights not only into the Chinese idea of theatre but also into his own play. He felt inspired by the imagery Ying used in his translation of the play that differs from the original and which he found more pictorial and more vivid. He also realized that in this production, "forced to find the central lines of motions by the sheer difficulties of translation, I have inadvertently undergone a kind of exercise that has kept me stimulated and sensitized to a play I wrote more than three decades ago" (Miller, *Beijing* 240). Miller was impressed by the adaptations the Chinese cast made to his play. For example, he was very satisfied with Liu Jun's unique treatment of the Boston woman:

> The Woman in Boston, for example, enters Willy's memory of the fateful night when Biff discovered him with her, in a baroque fashion that would be on the very verge of the intolerable by conventional New York standards. On her line "Whyn't you have another drink, honey, and stop being so damn self-entered?" she slowly circles him as in a dream, offering a drink with a long white silk shawl flowing over her back and outstretched arms. It is so un-American that I begin to reject it, but so beautifully naïve and so chaste compared with the customary crude sexuality with which the moment is usually played that I am about to decide to keep it in perhaps her obliqueness will be even more erotic than our normally more blatant rendering. (Miller, *Beijing* 150-1)

The actress's more poetic rendering sent back Miller to reread his own play and he realized that "I indeed had originally intended a hallucinatory surrealism which had somehow gotten lost in the various productions, including the original" (Miller, *Beijing* 151).

Schlueter notes that Miller expressed dissatisfaction with the commercialization of American theater since 1952, and in the 1980s, "Miller frequently expressed his disillusionment with this powerful strip of commercial American theater, which, over the years, had become less inclined to encourage his writing" (156). Cheap and affordable tickets in China (one yuan —about fifty cents —for *Salesman* in Beijing vs. eighteen-to-thirty-two-dollar range on Broadway) made Miller increasingly critical of the commercialization of the Broadway Theater. However, the recognition awarded him for *Salesman* in Beijing stimulated a renewal in his career. In 1984, *Salesman* was revived on Broadway with Dustin Hoffman playing Willy, and in 1985 *Salesman* was filmed for television with millions of viewers rediscovering the charm of Miller's masterpiece. The revival of *Salesman* on Broadway in its fiftieth anniversary became a winner of four 1999 Tony Awards and the play again was revived on Broadway in 2012.

How It Ended

In his collaborative autobiography/memoir, Ying looks on the staging of *Salesman* as the "chance of a lifetime to have an opportunity to work with Arthur Miller. I consider myself very lucky" (Ying and Conceison 157). He regards his partnership with Arthur Miller "only next to his partnership with his beloved wife Wu Shiliang" (Ying and Conceison ix).

Likewise, Miller writes much about Ying in his books *Salesman in Beijing* and *Timebends*. In the former, Miller recalls his visit to Ying's house for the last time on the day of the premiere, realizing that "I have never had this kind of relationship with an actor…Ying Ruocheng has been my rock, a man of double consciousness, Eastern and Western, literary and show business (239-240); in the latter, Miller includes a photograph of Ying in rehearsal of *Salesman* in 1983 and calls him a "brilliant Willy." [9]

On Dec. 27, 2003, Ying Ruocheng passed away in Beijing at the age of 74 and on Feb. 10, 2005, Arthur Miller left us at the age of 89; the collaboration of two great artists leaves behind them the legacy of *Salesman* in Beijing that still impacts on Chinese and American theaters today.

Notes

[1] Ou Rong, Professor of English, School of Foreign Languages, Hangzhou Normal University of China.
Qian Zhaoming, Professor of English, School of Foreign Languages, Hangzhou Normal University of China.

[2] Mei Lanfang (梅兰芳) (1894 –1961) was one of the most famous Peking opera artists in Chinese modern history, exclusively known for his *qingyi* roles, a type of dan role. Mei, Shang Xiaoyun, Cheng Yanqiu and Xun Huisheng were known as Four Great Dan in the golden era of Peking Opera.

[3] Ying refused to issue a statement supporting the Chinese official action in the Tiananmeng Square Incident in 1989; he was relieved of his responsibility as Vice-Minister of Culture a year later.

[4] Quoted from 王菲 任燕
英若诚：真正的世界文化大使,《北京娱乐信报》 2003.12.29
[Wang Fei and Ren Yan, "Ying Ruocheng: An Excellent World Cultural Ambassador", *Beijing Entertainment Paper*, December 29, 2003]

[5] Arthur Miller. "The 'Salesman' Has A Birthday," *The New York Times*, 5 February 1950.

[6] *Xieyi* Theater, a coinage given by Huang Zuolin, "ideographical theater" in his own English, is a technical integration of Brecht, Stanislavsky and Mei Lanfan and is based on the four major features of the traditional Chinese theater which Huang summarizes as fluidity, flexibility, sculpturality, and conventionality. The opposite terminology is *Xieshi*, meaning "photographical," which is sometimes used as a substitute for realism in Chinese. See Ronnie Bai. "Dances with Brecht: Huang Zuolin and His *Xieyi* Theater," *Comparative Drama*, 33. 3 (Fall 1999):339-364.

[7] 王菲、孟京辉：实验戏剧以形式取胜，《北京娱乐信报》2004 .05.15.
[Wang Fei and Meng Jinghui, "Experimental Theater Excels in the Form", *Beijing Entertainment Paper*, May 15, 2004]

[8] 杨乾武：外国戏剧的不同演法《北京娱乐信报》 2004.05.08.
[Yang Qianwu, "Different Acting Style of the Foreign Plays", *Beijing Entertainment Paper*, May 8, 2004]

[9] Arthur Miller put many illustrations between page 248 and page 249 in *Timebends* including one of Ying playing Willy in 1983 with Miller's comment "A brilliant Willy". Arthur Miller. *Timebends: A Life*, New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Works Cited

高行健：论戏剧观，《戏剧界》1983(3): 27-29.
[Gao, Xing Jian. The Principle of theater. *Theater Circle*, 3(1983):27-29.]

柯文辉：《英若诚,北京：十月文艺出版社，1992.
[Ke, Wenhui. Ed. *Ying Ruocheng*, Beijing: Beijing October Art and Literature Publisher, 1992.]

Kong, Belinda. Traveling Man, Traveling Culture: *Death of a Salesman* and Post-Mao Chinese Theater. Ed. Enoch Brater, *Arthur Miller's Globe Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007: 35-56.

Liu, Jinyun. *Uncle Doggie's nirvana*. Trans. Ying Ruocheng. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing Corporation, 1999.

Miller, Arthur. *Salesman in Beijing*. London: Viking, 1984.

---. *Timebends: A Life*, New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Pao, Angela Chia-yi. Changing faces: Recasting National Identity in All-Asian(-)American Dramas. *Theatre Journal*, 3 (2001):389-409.

Schlueter, June. "Miller in the Eighties", Ed. Christopher Bigsby, *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

吴戈：英若诚、阿瑟·米勒——
中美戏剧交流的两个"推销员"，《中国戏剧》2006(7):52-55
[Wu, Ge. "Ying Ruocheng and Arthur Miller: Two Salesmen in the Communication of Chinese and American Theater. *Chinese Theater*, 7 (2006):52-55.]

英若诚：美国名导演阿瑟·密勒印象记，《八小时以外》1983 (6):36-37
[Ying, Ruocheng. "Impression of Arthur Miller: An American Director". *After Eight Hours*, 6(1983): 36-37.]
---.让思想"化"为人物的血肉——参加《推销员之死》演出的一点感受，《戏剧报》1983 (9):44-45.
["Turn the Idea into Blood and Flesh of Characters: Experience of Performing in *Death of a Salesman*". *Journal of Theater*, 9(1983): 44-45.]
Ying, Ruocheng and Claire Conceison. *Voices Carry: Behind Bars and Backstage during China's Revolution and Reform*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc. 2009.
朱琳：一次艰苦、愉快的创作——扮演林达的感受，蒋瑞、王宏韬编著：《刁光覃、朱琳论表演艺术》，北京：中国戏剧出版社，1991.
[Zhu, Lin. "A Difficult and Happy Production: Playing Linda", Ed. Jiang Rui and Wang Hongtao. *On Acting by Diao Guangtan and Zhu Lin*, Beijing: China Theater Publisher, 1991]