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“The Greatest Cars Ever Built: Arthur Miller’s Production Line of Chevrolets, Buicks, Studebakers, Marmons, Porsches and Other Vehicles of Death and Destruction”

Scholarly inquiry often has noted how Arthur Miller frequently repeated patterns and motifs of images, objects, and language in much of his dramatic and non-dramatic canon. For example, Will Smith has focused on the wood motif that appears in *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, and *The Last Yankee*; Terry Otten has pointed out how many critics have examined the frequent appearance of lawyers as characters in Miller plays; my own recent work has highlighted the morality of the many doctors scattered throughout the dramas; language studies have discovered Miller’s penchant for recurrent uses of words and images in his dialogue, for example the repetition of the word soft and weight in *The Crucible* or the Christian religious imagery in *All My Sons*, *After the Fall,* and *Resurrection Blues*.1 Jane Dominik even has scrutinized the complexity of Miller’s musical strains in all but two of his plays. All of this repetition serves to show Miller as an artist for whom the “unity of the aesthetic” was paramount.

In the same way Arthur Miller repeatedly used automobiles as significant objects in the plots of many of his plays and fiction. From the luxury Marmon in Miller’s first Broadway production, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, to the Porsche of his late play, *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan*, Miller manufactured a production line of Chevrolets, Buicks, Studebakers, Fords, and other vehicles of travel and transport. These are frequently central to the road (with apologies to Robert Frost) that the characters of the respective plays travel, whether they drive the vehicles or not. And like Frost’s traveler, they are attracted to the dark and the deep, for most importantly, Miller’s autos are mostly vehicles of death and destruction, but contradictorily can also indicate freedom and liberation. In this, Miller’s use of automobiles ultimately signifies the “condition of tension” which Steven Centola has pointed out exists in much of Miller’s work.

Arthur Miller’s fascination with cars clearly began in his youth. In *Timebends,* he details how he and his boyhood chum Sid Franks would watch the cars from their apartment house on W. 110th Street in Manhattan, where Miller was born:

Sid’s father, president of a downtown bank, emerged each morning from the apartment house and strode confidently to a line of chauffer-driven cars waiting at the curb for him and the other big men whose daily departure was also rhythmical….He had a Locomobile, the most beautiful of all the cars, an open beige tourer with gorgeous wire wheels and two beige canvas covered spare tires mounted in its front fender wells. It was so aristocratic a car that it did not deign to put its name on the hubs or radiator. Automobiles then, the more pretentious of them, were close to being handmade objects; their owners wanted them to look different from those of the neighbors. We could hang out our sixth floor window, Sid and I, and call out the names of every car passing on 110th, recognizing them from above, so distinctive were they; at the time there was a far longer list of makes than there would be after 1929. To see a chauffeur-driven Minerva going by, or a Hispano-Suiza or even one of the greater Packards or Pierce-Arrows, the Marmon, Franklin, Stearns-Knight, some of them with the chauffeur’s compartment exposed roofless to the sky, was to feel the electric shock of real power. These were rolling sculptures, steel totems polished like lenses to throw back the light of the stars, and there was no question that the social power they represented could ever weaken or pass from the earth, for they spoke their own rumbling, deep-throated reassurance that within their glinting panes of glass sat the very rich who were so rich their chauffeurs were rich…. I loved talking to the chauffeurs as they awaited their bosses, and I hoped to be allowed sit beside a steering wheel for a moment or two, or to get a glimpse of an engine. I was forever trying to find out how a car worked but nobody would tell me….Sitting once as a very small boy in the front seat between my father and Uncle Abe, who was driving his Packard…I heard my father ask him how the car was running. “Oh, she runs beautifully," Abe replied, and looking through the windshield down the blue surface of the long hood to the silver-encased thermometer sticking up from the nickel radiator, I envisioned a running woman attached to the car underneath. “Is there a lady in there?" I asked Uncle Abe, and he and my father burst out laughing, but of course they didn't understand how an engine worked either. Since obviously there was no woman in there and yet the car ran, I was left with its she-ness, to account for its motive power, a living persona of its own (45-6).

Miller admittedly took this youthful attraction to automobiles into his adulthood. In fact, throughout *Timebends*, he consistently describes cars in some extraordinarily specific detail. For example, on a trip to Hollywood studio in 1945 he sees a bulky old Minerva open touring car driven by a uniformed chauffeur, the “kind of glorious limousine that Sid Franks and I had loved to watch lining the curb on 110th St.” out of which stepped W.C. Fields (286-87). He also observes Clark Gable’s “silver Mercedes gull wing coupe”(472) and watching Gable for the last time getting into a “big Chrysler station wagon” (486) four days before he would die. Miller describes himself driving down Sunset Boulevard in “my clunky rented green American Motors mess” (486). He also remembers riding in a new green 1940 green Chevy van when traveling in North Carolina (498). After he and Marilyn Monroe separated, she went up to Miller’s Roxbury, Connecticut home and noted his new Land Rover, which Miller details as specially outfitted for the planting of trees on the property. The photo section of *Timebends* includes a picture of him with his children with the curious caption, “With, Jane, Bob, and a new Ford.” Miller’s attraction for automobiles, particularly his penchant for the Mercedes-Benz, was well-known late into his life.

Despite this fascination with cars, Miller also ascribes negative connotations to them. In “A Boy Grew in Brooklyn” Miller complains about the increasing congestion of automobiles on the streets of Brooklyn in the late 1930s and 1940s contributing to the despoiling of the pastoral landscape of the Brooklyn of his youth. Also, he spent some time for a few months right after high school graduation as a delivery truck driver, and for two years he worked at the Chadick-Delamater warehouse, the largest wholesale auto parts warehouse east of the Mississippi. To the young Miller’s vantage point as a driver, Chadwick had a “certain panache, handling the best brands that serviced parts for similar luxury cars he was attracted to as a youth: Bear ignitions, Timken roller bearings, Detroit axles, Brown and Lippe transmissions, Packard-Lackard ignition wires, Prestone anti-freeze, Gates gaskets and radiator hoses, Perfect Circle piston rings and wrist pins—these were heavy names that bespoke grave and established firms sold as rock.” (215). But this was a bleak two year period when he was saving up the money to attend the University of Michigan, and Miller experienced the grim, dark, reality of the auto shop and the plight of the factory worker, rather than the sheen of chauffer- driven luxury vehicles.

As in much of his canon, Miller transformed this personal experience into art. The amount of cars which appears in Miller’s work is staggering. *The Man Who Had All the Luck* contains the Marmon and the death car of Hester’s father; *Death of a Salesman*, the Chevrolet, and Studebaker, *A View From the Bridge* contains references to cars, taxis, and images of riding; in “The Misfits” a pickup truck is used in a crucial perversion of a cowboy roundup; the short story “The 1928 Buick” uses autos as symbols of sensual male power; in *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* a Porsche both destroys and liberates Lyman Felt; an Austin and a Land Rover deliver the characters of Miller’s 2004 novella, “The Turpentine Still” to their fate. In many works, the automobiles are particularly central to the action.

*The Man Who Had All the Luck*, Miller’s first Broadway production, is in many ways the prototype for the use of automobiles in the rest of his canon. In this “fable,” Miller’s automobiles clearly are vehicles of death and destruction, but also ironically indicate freedom and liberation. In fact, automobiles are vital to the plot and characterization. The main character, David Beeves, is a young man whose “luck” at the inception of the action revolves around his success as an auto mechanic, a trade in which he admittedly has no training, but which inexplicable circumstances have led Ford after Ford after Ford to his repair shop. Two significant events in act 1 involving a luxury Marmon catapult him to wealth and marriage. Dan Dibble, the owner of a lucrative mink rank, has a luxury Marmon which needs immediate repair and he is referred to David. At the same time, David intends to ask Andrew Falk, the father of his childhood sweetheart, Hester, for her hand in marriage, but Falk is violently opposed to the marriage. Luck first strikes for Dave when Falk is ironically run over and killed by Dibble driving the Marmon to Dave’s garage as Falk is pushing his car in the dark without the lights on. Here the Marmon is vehicle of death for Falk, but one of liberation for David, free now to marry Hester. Luck strikes again the next day as David futilely attempts to fix Dibble’s Marmon. Gus Eberson, an Austrian immigrant mechanic who intends to open a repair shop down the avenue from David’s, appears to assure him that he does not intend to be a rival. David expresses his frustration at being unable to diagnose the car’s mechanical problem and Gus, clearly much more expert a mechanic, selflessly offers his assistance. As Gus fixes the car, David falls asleep. The next morning Dibble arrives, quite pleased that the car is repaired and he consequently offers David the exclusive and lucrative contract to the repair work on his tractors.

In the ensuing years, David’s fortune increases—all revolving around cars: Gus had to close down his shop because customers inexplicably preferred David’s shop even though Gus’s was in a better location. Gus is now working for Dave. Dave even benefits from the fortunate coincidence of the state building a highway directly in front of his shop. As the play progresses, David comes to question his lucky streak, especially when contrasting it to the unfortunate suffering of his brother Amos, wrongly trained to be a baseball pitcher who could not pitch with men on base. Dave awaits—in a maniacal way even wishes for—bad luck by perversely expecting the death of his unborn child and wildly speculating his fortune on a mink farm. At the climax of the play, Dave finally comes to (perhaps) control his own fate; that he is, as Gus says, “the boss of his own life,” when he (inadvertently) makes the decision not to feed his mink the poisoned feed which has ruined Dibble’s herd.

At play’s end Miller clearly uses automobiles to signify David’s realization. Gus indicates this when he tells Hester that David is “not a piece of machinery” (185) to be put back together—exactly like the Marmon which Gus repaired. Moreover, David himself declares: “I could have never fixed that Marmon if you hadn’t walked in like some kind of angel!—that Marmon wasn’t me” (193). His declaration that, “That Marmon was not me.” shows how David’s fate is not tied to the vagaries of luck; his separation of his success from the Marmon liberates him from his angst.

The centrality of the automobile in Miller’s masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman*, cannot be overstated. No character in Miller’s oeuvre is as intimately connected to his automobile as Willy Loman for it is the vehicle in which has plied his trade as a traveling salesman for 36 years. Willy’s realization that his ability to sell is tied to his vehicle is evidenced when he says to Biff and Hap in Act 1: “The woods are burning.” “I can’t drive a car” (41). The duality of cars as vehicles of death and destruction and freedom and liberation is best illustrated by Willy’s own proclamation in the first imagining in Act 1: “Linda, Chevrolet is the greatest car ever built”(34) which is quickly followed by his complaint: “That goddam Chevrolet, they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car! (36). Many critics have, of course, noted the significance of the cars to Willy’s life as a “road man.” For example, Richard Brucher has described Willy as the “soul of the machine.”

But the specific type of vehicles in *Salesman* also contributes to the tension and contradictions in the play. There are definitely two, perhaps three or more, types of automobiles specifically mentioned or referred to in the text: some of those vehicles with negative associations, others positive. The very first mention of a vehicle in the play is a negative one when in the fifth line of the play, Linda says: “You didn’t smash the car, did you? In the real time of the play, Willy is driving a Studebaker. Linda wonders whether Angelo, their mechanic, “knows” (13) the vehicle and she refers to previous steering problems with it. Of course, Willy’s literal and figurative steering is the problem. The play is ambiguous whether the Studebaker which Willy is currently driving is the car which he smashed the previous February. In act 1, scene 2 Hap and Biff wonder if he smashed the car again, but Linda conveys a vagueness about its severity. She refers to an insurance adjuster questioning whether Willy deliberately smashed the car. She says he crashed into a “little bridge” and refers to the shallowness of the water saving Willy. So, did the car go into the water? Was Willy thrown from the vehicle which clearly went off the road? Was the car totaled if it went in the water? And is that the need for the adjuster’s visit? There is no mention of repair work. Was it a new model if Willy had totaled another car the previous February?

Moreover, what kind of Studebaker was Willy driving? For the play does not specify one. It is likely that Willy was driving a Champion, whose production began in 1939. The Champion was one of Studebaker's best-selling models by virtue of its low price ($660. for the two-door business coupe in 1939), durable engine and styling. For its size, it was one of the lightest cars of its era; its main competitor in this regard being the aptly named Willys Americar. (How could Miller not have been aware of this vehicle?) During World War II, Champions were coveted for their high mileage in a time when gas was rationed in the United States, which, of course would be practical for a traveling salesman like Willy. Could Angelo not have known the Studebaker because it was a new vehicle? Yet Linda does not mention payments on any car (either in the present time of the play or any of the imaginings) Nevertheless, clearly it is the Studebaker which Willy drives to his death at the end of the play. And of course, whether Willy’s suicide is liberation or destruction has been argued for almost 60 years now. Willy’s destruction, his suicide in the car, is contradictorily his liberation as well: as Linda say, “We’re free, we free.”

The car that is the most significant vehicle in the play is the 1928 Chevrolet which Willy believes he was driving in the first scene, the one which he says he opened up the front windshield. However, didn’t Linda know that the front windshield on the Studebaker didn’t open? The 1928 Chevy functions as an important symbol of Willy’s longing for the idyllic past which he has created in his mind along with memories of the two trees in his backyard and the pastoral Brooklyn which has been radically transformed by the “bricks and windows, windows and bricks” of the apartment houses surrounding the Loman house. Willy’s lament that, “They massacred the neighborhood” and “The street is lined with cars” (17) would echo later in Miller’s “A Boy Grew in Brooklyn.” The 1928 Chevy is the vehicle which Biff simonizes with the chamois cloth and Willy drives to the championship football game at Ebbets Field. Miller’s selection of a 1928 Chevy is telling, for that year is a crucial year in Miller’s own life and longing, when his father lost the coat and manufacturing and the family moved to Brooklyn. Like the Studebaker, the play does not specify a model for the 1928 Chevy. It is likely that Willy owned a “National” which was the model name given to the sedan, coupe, roadster and touring models. Willy certainly could have bought a new model if 1928 was his “big year” as he claims in the scene with Howard. Interestingly the manual for National series A and B contains warnings about servicing the carburetor with which Willy owes money for a repair job (54). Why isn’t the manufacturer fixing the vehicle?

Other automobiles and vehicles also are suggested in *Salesman*, modes of transportation which offer further implications about characterization. At the end of the first imagining in Act 1, Bernard screams that Biff is “driving without a license.” Whose car is he driving when Willy is out on the road most times? If Biff has stolen a car, this is in line with his stealing of the football, the basketball, the suit and the fountain pen later in his life. Hap, too, owns a car which is twice referred to along with his apartment and his women—fitting symbols of his life of debauchery. Also, there is no mention of any vehicle that Willy owned between the 1928 Chevrolet and the Studebaker in 1948, the presumed time of the play. If Willy was not driving a brand new Studebaker, was he driving a model produced before WW II consequently having much mileage on it? Willy claims to have had 80,000 miles on the Chevy. Ironically, the play suggests that it is trains and not automobiles that are vehicles for many of the economically successful characters in the play. Dave Singleman rides the New York, New Haven, and Hartford; Bernard is catching the train to argue his case in front of the Supreme Court, and Ben has to catch a train as he leaves Brooklyn for his foray to Africa.

Miller focused on another vehicle produced in 1928 when he published in 1978, “The 1928 Buick” in *The Atlantic*. This story is significant because not only did Miller return to focus on a vehicle manufactured in 1928, but also the story is thinly disguised autobiography, arguably one his most personal fictional pieces. And it illustrates how in tune he was to the significance of automobiles—even in circumstances of family tragedy. It is striking to see how Miller transforms his personal experience into art, for this story is the one of special times where you can actually parallel, as in *After the Fall* and *The American Clock*, the actual event with its fictional counterpart.

In *Timebends* Miller relates the tragedy of his cousin Jean, one of the three daughters of his aunt Esther (Miller’s mother’s sister) and Uncle Lee Balsam, the salesman, who along with Manny Newman (the prototype of Willy) lived in the side by side houses in Brooklyn some ten years before the Millers in 1928. Jean, her husband Moe Fishler, and his mother lived across the street from the Millers on East 3rd St. Moe was a “strikingly handsome man…who radiated an aura of competence and good fortune” (88). During the Depression, when everybody else was financially gasping, Moe had steadily risen to become a prosperous textile executive. However, Miller perceived that something had come between Moe and his cousin Jean for they barely spoke to one another. He relates how his Aunt Esther and her three daughters were meticulous house cleaners; Millers says, “They were kept together by all the polishing they did” (88). This mania even transferred over to Moe who would polish his red Buick’s engine until it shone like the body paint.

Tragedy struck when Moe decided one hot summer afternoon to drive alone to Brighton Beach some two miles away for a swim. By sundown he had not returned. As darkness came, an unfamiliar car drove down the street out of which stepped a tiny hunchbacked man in a bathing suit—a doctor who had been lying on the beach when Moe collapsed and who had tried to revive him. He had Moe’s body in the backseat of the car. Miller ends the recollection with the removal of Moe’s body from the car, the wailing of Jean, and the mourning of Moe’s mother who for months rocked on her front porch facing the cemetery beyond the dead end street.

Miller places an odd interjection in the middle of this story about a neighbor who helped carry Moe’s body out of the car. Miller includes a long digression about the neighbor, Mr. Clark, and his obsession with his car. (Continued proof of Miller’s extraordinary focus on the identification of people and their cars) That day Mr. Clark had just finished lubricating his Model A Ford, a car he rarely drove, which he kept shining in the garage where he had dug a grease pit for it. The vehicle had less than three hundred miles on it and was eventually bought by Moe’s sister, Mae. Miller judges that the “Vehicle was less an auto than an icon—a symbol: the childless couple had no where to go; they merely needed something to care for and worry about protect from the elements” (89).

In 1978, Miller expanded the tragedy of Moe and Jean into the short story and clearly uses the 1928 Buick as a symbol for Moe Fishler, changed to the character, Max Sions. Miller leaves the basic true story intact, but includes himself as a thinly disguised first person narrator who is central in pointing out the significance of the vehicle for both Max and him. Miller immediately cements Max’s connection with the car by beginning the tale with a detailed, sensual description:

The car was two years old, a 1928 Buick Coupe he’d gotten for a song from a bankrupt sweater manufacturer. From the front seats the hood looked a mile long, all brilliant glistening maroon. The chrome radiator was the shape of a drawn bow. The car rode majestically; growling deeply like a boat as he gently increased her speed. He had been polishing her all morning in the driveway and I had watched as he rubbed her sides to a liquid shimmer….She had a built–in radio, with antenna underneath the running boards, wooden steering wheel, leather seats, and a built in heater…On each high fender, like two shiny eyes, mirrors stood on slender stalks bathed in chrome (49)

Note how the femininity of the car echoes the “she-ness” which Miller uses in the *Timebends* recollection of driving with his father and uncle. In the story, the narrator is a 14 year old boy (The summer of 1930, when Miller was 14) and Max is 25. Although the narrator says, “I had every reason to respect him” (49), this is, indeed, ironic understatement, for Miller devotes a long section describing Max physically: his teen age adulation of the man is obvious. At the start of the story, the narrator is driving with Max from the 3rd Street block, to Virginia’s house, the name of his cousin in the tale, for they are not yet married.2 Miller describes Max as beautiful to look at. “Women, of course, but men, too would let their gazes linger on him” (50) (Later in the tale, even the doctor who tried to save Max describes him as resembling Michelangelo’s statue of David, even in his shifted stance.) Max’s identification with the 1928 Buick is summed up in the narrator’s description of the happy couple and the vehicle: “I stood outside the car looking in at them in the front seat. Of course she had seen the car several times before, but it was so powerfully promising that they both enjoyed just sitting in it and talking in their soft voices” (51). When Max and Virginia decide to take a drive to Sheepshead Bay, the narrator observes: “The car moved away from the curb, its perfection of metal flashing back the sunlight all the way down the block(51). Thus, Miller clearly connects the power, promise, and perfection of the vehicle with the same in Max.

The second part of the story fast forwards seven years later, the narrator has been to college and is home for the weekend (This is the summer 1936 or 1937) on a hot July day. The narrator foreshadows the impending tragedy through images: 3rd Street a dead end stopping at a fenced off school athletic field, and cemetery beyond—the one where Max will be buried at tale’s end. (The locales are the same in present day Brooklyn) But the narrator also highlights the 1928 Buick again—now parked “permanently” in the Sions wide driveway for the

shine was gone and even at a glance one saw the deadly worms of rust along the

cowling and the dull dying chrome of the radiator. Its wooden spokes had lost their

yellow varnish and were as gray as clothespins. A purplish haze was spreading through

the rear window where the glass laminations were quietly separating (51).

Thus, that once beautiful machine is like the beautiful man and his fiancé, whose promise and power are now decayed. In this, Miller expands on the real life saga: the unhappiness of Max and Virginia, the narrator’s perception that Max and Virginia were breaking up, Max’s drive to the beach alone on a Sunday leaving his wife and children at home. Miller has him drive away in a new green Caddy convertible, the potent and ironic symbol of Max’s promising new life. This section ends with the narrator wondering if Max would sell him the ’28 Buick cheap when he returned to college in the fall. He speculates that perhaps the time had come for Max to “dispose of such things” (54), as he disposing of his youth, his wife, and his family. Clearly, the narrator would like to recapture the power, promise and perfection of that vehicle.

The next section details Max’s death: the doctor—now driving not an “unfamiliar” car, but a Cadillac sedan—bringing the body. This narrative is an expanded version of Miller’s autobiographical story: he adds a family doctor and Max’s father. The story ends as does the *Timebends* account, with his aunt, Eva in the tale, staring and rocking at the cemetery beyond the block mourning her son. But the actual focus at the story’s climax is on two haunting images of cars. In the final paragraph, the narrator notes that when he left for college in the fall he was unable to ask Virginia to sell him the ’28 Buick. Therefore, it will remain in the driveway, decaying with its worms of rust—not far from where Max’s body lies too with worms—in the driveway of his grave. This signifies, too, the narrator’s realization of his own lost youth. The final image of the story focuses on Eva’s fear of unknown cars: “Whenever a large car turned into that street, especially one that was moving slowly, she would stare calmly at its approach and then turn her back on it and go into the house before it arrived” (56), her never ending fear of the death and destruction any vehicle could deliver.

In Miller’s late play, *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan*, the vehicle of destruction and liberation is a Porsche. Susan Abbotson has pointed out how this serio-comedy “signifies” off *Death of a Salesman* (101). She maintains that the main character, Lyman Felt, is Willy Loman forty years on; he is Willy as a success, but with the same moral failings. Whereas Willy drives a practical, economical Studebaker, Lyman drives a luxury car. In *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* Miller takes the simple “road of life” motif and complicates it. Lyman Felt has traveled many roads; indeed, he has lived many lives. He is a well-off insurance executive who, ten years before the play begins, married a younger second wife, Leah, while never divorcing his older first wife, Theo. Moreover, he unabashedly has maintained ties with both wives and his children, shuttling between lives in New York City and upstate New York. When the play begins, Lyman has crashed his Porsche in a snowstorm on Mt. Morgan in the middle of the night. He is hospitalized, and both his wives inadvertently have been summoned to the hospital. Ironically, Lyman’s literal “ride” down the mountain—the euphemism for the car crash—stops his wild ride through his double life, and forces him to confront the tragic results when both wives meet in the hospital’s waiting room. The action occurs in his hospital bed, and in recollections of the past, Lyman confronts his infidelities and immorality with his wives. The literal ride in the Porsche reflects the figurative way Lyman has moved selfishly and recklessly through life without once stopping to consider the consequences of his actions. It is the dominant image of the play signifying the unity of the aesthetic which Miller consistently uses in his canon.

Although many of the titles of Miller’s plays have significant symbolic meaning, *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* contains as part of its title, the actual metaphoric language which applies to the automobile and other vehicles in the play. Literal forms of riding pervade the text, but metaphors of travel and transportation—driving, riding, skiing, flying, walking, racing, hunting—illustrate Lyman Felt’s literal and figurative fall. For example, Lyman, Theo, and Leah recount him shuttling on commuter planes, traveling cross-country, flying abroad on safari, flying a plane, driving a race car, hitchhiking, strolling, skiing, driving to school, controlling a glider, and sailing off Montauk. Even the way Lyman has crashed his car in the snowstorm on Mt. Morgan is described in various forms of riding. In the first scene of the play, as Lyman comes out of his coma and asks why he cannot move, the attending nurse tells him: “You broke some bones. They say you went skiing down that Mount Morgan in a Porsche” (3). Later, Lyman’s young wife, Leah, exclaims to Theo and her daughter Bessie: “I still can’t believe it—the man driving on ice...and at night yet!” (12) At the end of the play, Leah describes the crash as “falling off a mountain” (114).

All of these literal rides dramatically highlight the metaphoric ride which Lyman has taken throughout his life and psyche. Leah blatantly says to him: “One of the most sensuous things about you was that I could lie back and let you drive....” (35) Lyman has driven through his life in non-stop fashion and significant riding images point out the sense of continual movement which he has traveled. Lyman himself in one of the final flashbacks of the play says: “No! I know what’s wrong with me—I could never stand still for death! (110) In this, Lyman connects his movement through life to his essential conflict in the play. For Lyman’s inability to stand still for death, indeed turns out to be his inability to accept the reality of his mortality, just as he is unable to stand still and accept the consequences of his non-stop shuttle between two marriages and two lives—and the immorality of it. Lyman’s literal movements through life are his ways to figuratively escape the moral consequences of what he has done. Thus, his ride on his Porsche both destroys and liberates him.

Like *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan*, there are other vehicles besides automobiles in other Miller plays which can signify destruction or liberation for characters: for example, the cart which rounds up innocent witch suspects in *The Crucible*; Guido’s plane which rounds up the mustangs in *The Misfits*; Rodolpho’s taxi in *A View From the Bridge*; the suicide subway train in *After the Fall*; the trains which bring inmates to destruction at Aushwitz at the opening of *Playing For Time*, but delivers them to liberation at play’s end; the subway on hot mornings in the summer which repulse Biff; the horse-drawn wagon which Willy and Ben reminisce about. (How ironic that Studebaker manufactured these type wagons in the early years of the company.)

Finally, most of the cars in Miller’s plays are offstage vehicles, but many automobiles have had striking roles in stage and film productions. Miller’s stage directions in *The Man Who Had All the Luck* call for David to be repairing the Marmon on stage; in a review of the original production, Lewis Nichols noted that the set designer, Frederick Fox designed a garage “complete with automobile.” For the revival of the play at Williamstown in 2001, the director Scott Ellis found a 1930 restored Marmon which was used to significant notice in both that production and when it moved to Broadway in 2002. *Death of a Salesman* calls for both the 1928 Chevy and the Studebaker as offstage vehicles. Hap and Biff simonize the 1928 Chevrolet offstage, and we hear Willy crash the Studebaker in the space between Act 2 and Requiem. The controversial 1951 film of *Death of a Salesman* starring Frederic March concludes with an extended scene of a deranged Willy driving his car to his death. The 1985 studio television production with Dustin Hoffman allowed the on-screen use of both the Chevrolet and the Studebaker. One of the more innovative uses of onstage vehicles was for the 1996 National Theatre production *Death of a Salesman* in London. Fran Thompson designed a set with the arresting use of moving concentric circles with a large tree, a section cut out its trunk, and 1928 Chevy half-buried in the center stationary circle: the ultimate symbol of the death and destruction of Willy’s idyllic dreams.

Notes

1 See Balakian, Jan and Egerton, Kate. *Resurrection Blues*. Performance Reviews. *The Arthur Miller Journal*, Vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2006, 101-109; Marino, Stephen. “Arthur Miller’s ‘Weight of Truth’ in *The Crucible*.” *Modern Drama*. Spring 1995; Marino, Stephen. “Religious Language in *All My Sons*” in *The Journal of Imagism*. (3) 1998. 9-28; Marino, Stephen. “Language and Metaphor in *After the Fall*. *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 70, No. 2. Spring 2005. Murray, Edward. *Arthur Miller, Dramatist*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1967. Stinson, John. “Structure in *After the Fall*: The Relevance of the Maggie Episode to the Main Themes and Christian Symbolism.” Modern Drama 10 (1967): 233-40.

2 In the story the narrator details the turns the car made from 3rd St. to get to Virginia’s house. This is the site of the side-by-side Newman-Balsam houses which were located on East 4th St. In *Timebends* (121), Miller relates how his family came from Manhattan to visit these houses in the 1920s. In a conversation I had with Miller’s sister Joan Copeland, March 28, 2007, she confirmed this location.

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