

The Newman household was one in which you “dared not lose hope, and I would later think of it as a perfection of America for that reason. . . . It was a house . . . trembling with resolutions and shouts of victories that had not yet taken place but surely would tomorrow.”<sup>2</sup> Manny’s son, Buddy, like Biff in Miller’s play, was a sports hero and, like Happy Loman, a success with the girls, but, failing to study, he never made it to college. Manny’s wife, meanwhile, “bore the cross of reality for them all,” supporting her husband, “keeping up her calm, enthusiastic smile lest he feel he was not being appreciated.” (123) It is not hard to see this woman honored in the person of Linda Loman, Willy’s loyal but sometimes bewildered wife, who is no less a victim than the husband she supports in his struggle for meaning and absolution. Though Miller spent little time with Manny, “he was so absurd, so completely isolated from the ordinary laws of gravity, so elaborate in his fantastic inventions . . . so lyrically in love with fame and fortune and their inevitable descent on his family, that he possessed my imagination.” (123) To drop by the Newman family home, Miller explains, was “to expect some kind of insinuation of my entire life’s probable failure, even before I was sixteen.” (124) Bernard, son of Willy’s next-door neighbor, was to find himself treated in much the same way by the Lomans. There is, however, something more than absurdity about such people as Manny, who managed to sustain their faith in the face of evidence to the contrary. Of a salesman friend of Manny, Miller writes, “Like any traveling man he had to my mind a kind of intrepid valor that withstood the inevitable putdowns, the scoreless attempts to sell. In a sense, these men lived like artists, like actors whose product is first of all themselves, forever imagining triumphs in a world that either ignores them or denies their presence altogether. But just often enough to keep the game going one of them makes it and swings to the moon on a thread of dreams unwinding

out of himself.” (127) And, surely, Willy Loman himself is just such an actor, a vaudevillian, getting by “on a smile and a shoeshine,” staging his life in an attempt to understand its plot and looking for the applause and success he believes to be his due. He wants, beyond anything, to be “well liked,” for, without that, he fears he will be nothing at all. During the run of his first great success, *All My Sons*, Miller met Manny again. Rather than comment on the play, his uncle answered a question he had not been asked: “Buddy is doing very well.” The undeclared competition was still under way, as if time had stood still. The chance meeting made Miller long to write a play that would recreate the feeling that this encounter gave him, a play that would “cut through time like a knife through a layer of cake or a road through a mountain revealing its geologic layers, and instead of one incident in one time-frame succeeding another, display past and present concurrently, with neither one ever coming to a stop.” (131) For in that one remark Manny brought together past hopes and present realities while betraying an anxiety that hinted at a countercurrent to his apparent confidence