Jewishness and Judaism revisited in two Short Stories by Arthur Miller: "Monte Sant' Angelo" and "I Don't Need You Anymore"

Christiane Desafy-Grignard
Paradoxically it is in his short stories, which are not as well-known as his dramatic work, that Arthur Miller has mostly spoken of (his) Jewishness and Judaism. With the exception of the early unpublished plays of *The Simon Trilogy*, which showed a Jewish family very similar to his own during the Depression, and of his recent play, *Broken Glass*, which deals with what it means to be Jewish, his dramatic work is not Jewish: it contains few characters whose names are overtly Jewish or whose behaviour reflects some character features usually associated with Jewishness. On the contrary, it is peopled with the traditional characters of the melting pot. But perhaps it is appropriate first to remind the reader of the kind of Jew Arthur Miller is.

Miller is an Ashkenazi Jew who was born in the United States to a family of Polish origins. As a child and teenager, he lived in a large clan composed of his uncles, aunts, and cousins who, in cosmopolitan New York, retained the cultic and cultural traditions: "Our family knew almost no Gentiles and our prosperity helped seal us inside our magical apartness," he writes in his autobiography *Timebends* (62); he also confesses that, up to the age of six, "had he thought about it, he would have imagined that the whole world was Jewish" (24). It was of course when he happened to be out of the family circle that he became aware that he was different and experienced what he calls, in hindsight, "a minority anxiety"; for example, on the day his father, holding him and his brother by the hand and coming across an automobile accident in the street, kept them from mixing with the onlookers and advised them to stay away from any crowd henceforth in the future; or on that other day when, having entered a public library near 5th Avenue to register his name, and presumably somewhat intimidated by the dimness and the studious silence of the place,
he knew immediately (or imagined he did?) from the inquiring look of the librarian who was asking him for his father's name, that he was different: "Looking up into her blue eyes, I could not bring up to voice my father's so Jewish name, Isidore. I was paralyzed, could only shake my head. 'What does your mother call him?' I was trapped. The smile went from her face as though she suspected me of something. My cheeks were burning. 'Izzie' being impossible, I finally managed 'Iz.' She looked puzzled 'Is?' she asked; I nodded; 'Is what?' I rushed out into the street" (24).

3 This awareness became sharper in his teens, when he was working, during the Great Depression, in an auto-parts warehouse and was for a while the butt of jokes made by the Irish Catholic staff. However, this experience still did not beget a strong feeling of identity, either religious (since Isidore and Augusta Miller were no longer the zealous Jews their own parents had been, even if a Rabbi came to the house once a week to teach him and his brother some Hebrew), or even cultural, since Yiddish was rarely if ever spoken in the family. The three years spent at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and whilst there, the boyish enthusiasm for Marxism, the marriage to a Catholic girl in 1940 and to an Austrian-born, Protestant woman in the 60's combined to distance him from the traditions of his family, to make him a secular Jew, and a writer who, unlike other American-Jewish writers—Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Isaac Bashevis Singer—never remained ghettoized in his Jewishness, and who obviously takes relish in describing himself as "an undissolved lump floating on the surface of the mythic American melting pot and programmed to choose something other than pride in his origins" (24).

4 However, considered in the perspective of Miller's long life, such confessions are relatively recent (1987). In fact, up to the 70's, Miller seemed to consider his Jewishness as a private matter, for he rarely spoke of it in his numerous interviews; it seems he mentioned it for the first time in 1969 to critic Robert A. Martin, because the latter reported a remark made by Jewish writer Leslie Fiedler, who reproached him with creating "crypto-Jewish characters who are in habit, in speech and condition of life typically Jewish-American but who are presented as something else"—a disguised way of accusing Miller of himself being a crypto-Jew, and a remark which he did not appreciate since he retorted that "he had no doubt he was Jewish but was not brought up the way Fiedler evidently thought he should have been." 4

5 Miller's prose fiction in the same span of time offers a striking contrast with his dramatic work, everything happening as if he had abandoned the stage, the public place par excellence, the place of all contests, and turned to prose fiction, whether it be the novel, when he had to tackle an issue likely to raise a polemic, such as anti-Semitism (his novel Focus) or the short story, when the subject was too intimate. This is probably why in most of his short stories published between 1947 and 1966, all the characters are Jewish: Bernstein in "Monte Sant' Angelo," the little boy in "I Don't Need You Anymore," the playwright Meyer Berkowitz in "Fame," or the Broadway actor in "A Search for a Future."

6 "Monte Sant'Angelo" and "I Don't Need You Anymore" are absorbing, autobiographical narratives: in the former Miller revisits his Jewishness and in the latter, his Judaism.

7 It is thanks to the trip he took to Europe (mainly Italy, but also Paris, briefly) in 1947 at the end of World War II, that Miller wrote "Monte Sant' Angelo." He was travelling with an Italian-born American, Vincent James Longhi, a young member of the bar with political ambitions whom he had met on the piers of Brooklyn Docks. 6 Miller's and Longhi's relationship was the one to be expected, in the context of the American melting-pot, of two men who, coming from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, met only
for professional reasons, but never socialized. Longhi knew Miller was a Jew, the author of a successful novel (*Focus*) and of a successful play (*All My Sons*) and, consequently, held him in considerable awe. Miller, for his part, assumed that Longhi, being Italian, was Catholic.

In the short story, Vincent Longhi becomes Vincent Appelo, and Miller becomes Bernstein, his Jewish fellow-traveller. The two are contrasting characters, but Bernstein's is more developed and complex than Appelo's, the story being told from the former's point of view, which is Miller's of course. Bernstein looks very much like him in the 50's: shy and reserved, "thin, quite gaunt and long-armed," with "eyes that gazed rather than looked, [that...] turned away often, or downward for fear of being fathomed," (56) whereas Appelo is effusive, strong-armed, darkly handsome, with eyes "that glistened back, direct, and for women, passionately" (56): an irresponsible womanizer. Yet, whereas Miller and Longhi's relationship during the trip, as they are discovering an Italy recovering from Fascism, sounds balanced, in the story it becomes a rather ambiguous and complex one: "They liked each other not for reasons so much as for possibilities; it was as though they both had sensed they were opposites. And they were lured to each other's failings" (56-57). In fact, Bernstein gets irritated by Appelo's way of yielding, back in the mother country, to the pull of the blood. He takes Bernstein to Mount Sant' Angelo, a small mythical town rising on a hill in the middle of the monotonous plain of Foggia, near the town of Lucera and not far from Naples, to visit an old aunt of his; whilst there, he recognizes his great grandfather's and grandfather's portraits hanging on the walls of the courthouse where they had been renowned judges, but fails to find in the church crypt the tombs of two other ancestors—two monks who are thought to have built the church in the Middle-Ages. Appello's quest, though at that stage of the story only partly fruitful, gives Bernstein a feeling of frustration in his being doubly uprooted—as a Jew and as an American, an exiled European of some sort—as he remembers his father telling him (though strangely raising no particular emotion in him at the time) that his native town soaked in the muddy plains of Poland—"a common barrel of water"—and its population—"a town idiot, a baron who lived nearby" (61)—had been entirely exterminated by the Nazis during the war. Realizing that, unlike Appello, he has nothing in his background to be proud of, Bernstein feels like a child "who discovers that the parents who brought him up were not his own" (61) until the moment when, in the village inn, he finds an ancestor of a kind in the person of a travelling cloth salesman who is obviously a Gentile (since he is surprised at Appelo and Bernstein's sitting at a nearby table having meat on a Friday whereas he is having fish), but whose black hat and very careful way of untying the ties of his bundle in order to place in it, on the eve of Sabbath, a broad round loaf of bread that he will eat with his family the following day, can only mean that this Mauro di Benedetto (Morris of The Blessed, i.e., Moses) must be the descendant of those Jewish itinerant salesmen who used to walk across Europe in the Middle Ages. The meeting of this unexpected forebearer fills Bernstein with a new confidence in his up-to-then unconscious quest for an identity and for a culture so often on the verge of total eradication; he rationalizes that there [is] an irony in this nameless traveller carrying home a warm bread on Friday night and kneeling in church on Sunday. Yet pride is running through him. Of what he should be proud of, he has not a clear idea; perhaps it is only that beneath the brainless crush of history, a Jew had secretly survived, shorn of his consciousness, but forever caught by that final impudence of a Saturday Sabbath in a Catholic country; his very unawareness being proof, a proof as mute as stones, that a past lived, a past whose importance astounds Bernstein all the more as "he
had never had a religion or even, he realised now, a history" (69). The meeting makes him aware for the first time of the ambiguous character of his relationship with his Catholic friend, made up of secret condescension on his part—that of the Elected Race—and also of shame and embarrassment—that of the down-trodden. Here is how Miller describes his alter ego, after the fateful meeting in the village restaurant, waiting patiently for his friend who, with unrelenting determination, has come back to the church crypt to carry on his search: "He feels he would look differently into Vinny's eyes; ... He feels loose, somehow the equal of his friend—and how odd that is when, if anything, he had thought of himself as superior. Suddenly, with Vinny a yard away, he sees that his life has been covered with an unrecognised shame." (69) When Vinny comes back at last, elated from finding the tombs, the two men share the same happiness and a new, genuine friendship.

One can see from this text that, to Miller, being a Jew is mainly a cultural and historical identity and not a religious one, for though the salesman's secular habits and customs are Jewish and attest to the perennial character of Judaism, he is unaware of it and is a regular Catholic. The character may seem unbelievable to the reader and all the more so to any devout Catholic, unless he knows it is founded on a genuine historical fact: in the Middle Ages the only way for a Jew to get assimilated was by conversion. This is traceable in *Timebends* when Miller mentions the meeting during the trip with another of Longhi's aunts, Emilia, a maiden school teacher living in the nearby town of Lucera, who "was fascinated to learn that he was a Jew, having taken for granted that they no longer existed, not because of what was not yet called [in 1947] the Holocaust, but out of some unexamined belief that the Jews had all been converted after the resurrection of Christ or had somehow vanished into the pages of the Bible" (163). This historical fact suits Miller. The itinerant salesman in his "unawareness" thumbs his nose at religious sectarianism, for Jewishness to Miller is what Yosef Yerushalmi names "an inward identity," i.e., those mysterious bonds, feelings and thoughts a Jew shares with his Jewish brothers and sisters. One also sees that Miller's attitude to his Jewishness was already, in 1951, what it has been ever since, except that in his youth it was tempered by reserve and, no doubt in troubled times, by legitimate caution. Now at the end of his life the privilege of age and renown gives him the jubilant right to declare "that his Jewishness is not any more important now than it was... [that, in fact] what has happened to him is that he recognises it more as he grows older, [that]...it is a part of [his] mental, emotional equipment. [That]. . it does not make him different from anybody else, it is just that certain things are emphasised..."," and to unveil (as he did lately in his play *Broken Glass*) the psychological throes that an ill-accepted Jewishness can beget.

In "I Don't Need You Anymore" Miller deals explicitly with the spiritual values of being Jewish, i.e., with Judaism. He pictures himself in a highly sensitive and impressionable five-year-old little boy—Martin—who lives, as he did himself, in the bosom of a Jewish family. Consequently, this long elaborate narrative has many autobiographical aspects.

The story takes place at Far Rockaway on Long Island where the Millers often found themselves in the fall, on Rosh-Ha-Shana or Yom Kippur. The family composition replicates Miller's: there is a father, a mother and two sons, Ben and Martin; there is also the expected arrival of a baby (as was the case for the Millers with the birth of Arthur's younger sister, Joan), suspected, in the story, by the little boy but never mentioned by the rest of the family; it is like a chessboard; there are two camps: the father and elder son's and the Mother and the younger one's, until the fatal day when the latter, on discovering that his mother no longer pays attention to him, rejects her, and, after uttering the
terrible cry "I don't need you anymore," symbolically becomes a big boy by joining the men's camp.

There are several autobiographical passages in the short story. For example the one in which Martin remembers his mother meeting, in his company in the street, a dentist—a former sweetheart of hers to whose flirtatious banter she is not insensitive—can be found in *Timebends*; it comes after the child has thrown the terrible words at his mother and it shows that, confusedly, he associates her with duplicity and betrayal. In a similar way, the passage when Martin, sitting on the beach, thinks of disappearing forever in the waves to deprive his mother of his unwanted presence, echoes one in the autobiography in which Miller tells how one day, in his teens, he decided to take an expedition to Harlem on his bike in order to chastise his parents for not loving him, purposely "leaving with no explanation to hurt them all the more" (48). Another passage in the story is reminiscent of another one in *Timebends*. In the story, the little boy, on seeing his father and brother suddenly appear (most likely on their way back from the synagogue) on the beach among a group of men wearing shined black shoes and prayer shawls, holding prayer books, "swaying backward and forward"(16) [...] and hitting themselves on the chest with their fists,"(18) remembers a ceremony he attended with his grandpa at the synagogue and which filled him with such awe that he dreams a similar one is now taking place on the beach in open sunlight. In *Timebends*, Miller also tells of a ceremony during which, after being instructed not to look at what was going on by his long-bearded grandpa, he disobeyed him, peeking through his fingers, and saw a bunch of old men dancing and singing crazily (40). Both episodes in the short story and the autobiography convey the same combination of guilt and awe (as the meeting with the dentist): the child's uneasiness at witnessing something strange, forbidden, and beyond his grasp.

The four characters also resemble the Millers but seen, from beginning to end, through the little boy's eyes and mind. Thus there are elements of Isidore Miller in the kind-hearted, easy-going Papa of the story. When, on his way back from the service, he is embarrassed by the little boy's questions about the Cantor gesticulating on the beach, it is said that "he looks down [at the little boy] with his kind incomprehension and his wish for happy behaviour" (19). At this stage, the character is not the forbidding father he becomes later but a benevolent one: when, back home, it falls to him to punish Martin for his cruel words to Mama, Papa thinks it suffices to threaten him with his leather belt, for in fact he much prefers sipping a (tiny) glass of whisky in his rocker by the window. Isidore's religious lukewarmness and scepticism also come through when Papa is at a loss when asked by Martin what the Cantor is throwing into the ocean: he obviously feels relieved when Ben provides his brother with an acceptable answer—"he throws his sins"—and confirms it eagerly by adding "sure he does" (19). Papa is also the one of the family who is the most impatient to break the fast: pursued and baffled by the little boy's question "Who is the Cantor's boss?", he shrugs and answers "God," but adds, sceptically, "Who knows?" and quickly "stirs his soup and mumbles a prayer"(25).

Mama's character is more mitigated than the others: it resembles and at the same time does not resemble Augusta. She is not as bright as Miller describes his mother as being and she sounds more homely, but like the latter, she is emotional and intense, more unpredictable than Papa; her devastating love for her younger son, her pride and the great expectations she has in him, echo Miller's words when he writes humorously in *Timebends* "I needed only to draw a straight line to hear myself praised as a coming da
Vinci"(28). During the conversation about the Cantor, Mama is far more sanctimonious than the real Augusta was, but the latter's shallow, superstitious approach to religion, unquestioned acceptance of rites and of the high morality of Jews shine through: Papa is taken aback by the Cantor's performance on the beach; Mama is not, she takes the Cantor at his face value, she thinks he is not a faker but a genuine religious man. Papa is of a different mind: he does not go as far as saying he is not religious; he only knows that if he were in his place, he could easily stand all the dancing and singing and fasting two days a year had he got all the year to rest up, and when he ends by concluding that "the Cantor's boss is a good boss," Mama, horrified, "raises her eyebrows and closes her eyes to ask God to pay no attention to what He has just heard"(25). Another reminder of Augusta is Mama's propensity to dramatize situations and her lack of humour as described in the scene that follows the "bathroom incident." (Ben has locked himself in the bathroom to hide his emotion and grief after hearing the cruel words Martin has thrown at their mother.) When Papa, on seeing that she has recovered from her fright, risks a little joke at her expense to relax the atmosphere, saying to Ben, "Why didn't you report to her that you were going to the bathroom, because if you don't report, you might've got killed," "grinning and angry," Mama says "Stop it!" (26), not quite sure Papa is talking seriously or making fun of her. Augusta's quick temper and fits of bitterness (after having been married off too young by an authoritarian father, or after the bankruptcy of the family business) come through in Mama's words when, being told by Papa that she should not help Martin anymore to cut his matzoh balls because he is a big boy now, she snaps at him, "He's going to cut his own maztoh ball? You crazy? ...I slave like a dog all day and you come home and he should do whatever he wants" (38). Similarly, like Augusta, Mama is educated in comparison with Papa; at least she can write and spell correctly and the three books that are placed on her bedside table bear witness to her intellectual pretensions. When Papa ventures to say that at Martin's age he was already out selling newspapers, she snaps at him, as Augusta often did at Isidore whose illiteracy she was never able to accept, "That's why you got such a good education!"(38).

Ben sounds very much like Kermit, Miller's brother. His being in the story like Papa, though of a more sensitive, emotional, graver cast of mind, echoes Miller writing in *Timebends*, "I early on paired Kermit with our father as a force for order and goodness" (11), and religion is to him no laughing matter, which explains why he remains terribly upset by Martin's callous behaviour towards their mother, why he likes to converse at all times with his father about what is or what is not against the Law, and why the saying of grace at the beginning of the meal is devolved upon him. Unlike Papa who, unable to resist hunger, has already started to eat, Ben takes time "to adjust his satin cap on his head and he stares meaningfully at the silver centrepiece which is full of fruit [...] now there [is] quiet [he begins to pray] ... without faltering or moving"(26-27). Mama standing in the doorway is caught by this (outward) gravity and unlike Papa, who as soon as the prayer is finished, resumes eating, "she [takes] Ben's grave permission to move" (27). Ben, still under the shock of the incident, is described as unable to eat, delaying the moment "to break his terrible fast, selecting his spoon and stirring his soup so long that it seems he is even reluctant to eat at all, and finally eating in grief" (27).

Miller describes himself with obvious complacency in the mischievous, precocious, bright little boy whose perplexity at fathoming Jewish religious rites echoes Miller speaking in *Timebends* of his "unilluminated religious life" (38). The story being told from the little boy's point of view (which is obviously Miller's in hindsight) is the weakness of the text;
whatever pains Miller takes to recapture the way a little boy's mind works, some of his remarks—particularly at the end of the narrative when he decides to become "the guardian of his brother's and parents' innocence" (51)—sound a little unlikely, Miller giving him more intellectual capacities than the reader expects to find in a five-year-old child. As Allen Shepherd writes, "the story is irritating to read at times because Miller undertakes to raise to the level of metaphysical tragedy what is virtually by definition the poignant-pathetic experience of a little boy. Almost, in self-defense, one doubts the insight, suspects ersatz sensitivity. One cannot say that is an untrue account but one can resist being played upon."

The whole narrative in its process is in phase with the spiritual meaning of Yom Kippur, the most important religious festival of the Jewish year. Martin lives in a family which, unlike the Millers, is imbued with and very respectful of traditions: his parents and brother are orthodox Jews and the influence of the Law is very strong on them. The festival punctuates the tempo of family life—the father and the elder son go to the synagogue to pray, while the mother busies herself at home, cooking a good meal and giving the dining room table a festive look: "the tablecloth and silverware sparkle" (24) and soup is eaten out of "gold-bordered plates" (25).

Kept away, because of his young age, from the religious rites, feeling unwanted at home and estranged from the family circle, little Martin takes refuge on the beach where, from what he holds for certain about Kippur—a day which takes place when "the beach, white as salt, [is] deserted and there is [no longer] the tinkle of the ice-cream-man's bell" (5), on which "everybody gets dressed up [...] and nobody is allowed to eat all day except him"(4)—and what he gathered from the few services he previously attended at the synagogue—he builds up his own religion and rituals. Thus, sitting alone on the beach, he thinks the ocean is stormy—"the waves [are] banging down on the sand ... skidding in like big buildings that sway drunkenly and then topple over on their faces and splatter all over the sand" (3)—because God is wrathful; the water "is kind of gray and even black in certain places [...because]it is running with sins"(3). He feels guilty for having breakfast in the morning and for the piece of jam-spread rye bread his mother forced on him at 11 o'clock and on which he compromised to please her. At this stage of the narrative, such guilt has apparently no spiritual value, being prompted not by repentance but mostly by resentment and rebellion against the mother's authority (for he rightly suspects that it was she and not his father who objected to his going to the synagogue and who insisted on his being dispensed from fasting) and the desire to behave like his father and brother. The feeling of frustration and exasperation, combined with the empirical, disturbing discovery recently of some changes in his mother's physical aspect—her puffy face, slow-moving gait—and of her failing attention to him, turns into open aggressiveness when, in the afternoon, she dares present him with a glass of milk and suggests to him, with unbelievable disrespect, that he take off his holiday tweed suit and change into his shorts, and finally culminates in the terrible cry (which gives its title to the story). After uttering it, Martin does not feel guilty, for "it did not seem a bad thing to say, only the truth; she did not need him, so he did not need her" (10). Back on the beach, because there, at least, there is a privacy" (10), he knows he has done something bad but does not know why; he is only full of fright: on seeing several men dressed in black moving on the beach, he is afraid that "God might appear and not just the Scrolls of the Ark"(16) and that the sound of The Shofar (the curved ram horn in which the Cantor blows to remind God that the
time has come for him to forget his wrath and give vent to his mercy) "might drive HIM out of the ocean to burn them all with his blue-eyed gaze" (18).

But God cannot possibly bestow his mercy on a little boy who does not know why he is bad; neither can he on the rest of the family when it is reunited at home to celebrate the festival, for none of its members is in the mood for Yom Kippur, a day of atonement. Ben, deeply upset, cannot forget Martin’s cruel words to their mother. Mama is ensconced in her grief and resentment; Papa, mostly looking forward to the good meal that is awaiting him, hardly listens when being told about Martin’s bad behaviour and contents himself with chastizing the culprit with a flat "you should not say a thing like that Marty" (23). Only the little boy, though feeling relieved to see that "the sea-roaring evil has not been brought into the room" (23), knows that a showdown is inevitable. There are two violent, almost apocalyptic scenes in the story—the dinner scene and the bedroom scene. Staged by God, they have a double purpose: to lay bare everybody's souls and initiate a process of change and repentance in them.

The dinner scene exposes Martin's badness: infuriated by his mother who tries to help him eat his matzoh soup, he tips over his bowl, spilling the hot beverage on himself and the table and, kicking out, he hits his mother's belly inadvertently. On seeing her "gasp and hold her breast," the cause of her recent "strangeness" begins to dawn on him, as does the realization that she has a share of the responsibility in the havoc made of the dining room table (it looks like a land devastated by a hurricane or a battlefield where a slaughter has just taken place): he screams at her "you made me do it" (28). However, even if the incident gives the little boy some insight into his mother's behaviour, it does not bring about the change God expects to find either in him–now he says he is not guilty because "[he] didn't kick that baby [because he] didn't see it" (31)—or in Ben and Papa. The former keeps sulking, unable to forgive his brother and the latter, though "now frowning with no trace of a smile even in his eyes" (31), carried away as usual by his propensity to smooth things over, contents himself to enjoin Martin "to be a man" and to decide that he will start school on the morrow.

The final showdown takes place during the bedroom scene. Unlike the dinner scene which showed her as an innocent victim, the bedroom scene exposes the mother's evil, not only her devastating motherly love, but the secret motive that lies under it: when she boasts to Papa, who has just said he had left school when he was six, that Martin is eager to go to school, and, when she urges the latter to spell the word "beach," it is not so much to show how bright he is as how blatantly he is her son and not Papa's. Similarly the scene reveals not only Martin's complicity with his mother but the secret motive that also lies under it: the pleasure of usurping his brother's place in their mother's heart. He enjoys his mother calling him "her bandit" because she never addresses Ben this way; "he lowers his eyes with pleasure," the pleasure "to be distinguished by his crimes" (37). Yet, aware of his father's innocence, won over by his "warm and magnanimous smile, wholly selfless gaze and wonder" (40), he refrains from spelling the word because he sees through his mother's trick; he strikes her hand for her falseness which brings the meeting with the dentist to his mind. When finally his father, sensing things are getting out of order, decides to take him to bed and Ben gives the correct spelling, the little boy, struck by what he regards wrongly as an iniquity—to be robbed of the opportunity to surpass his brother when he was only trying to spare his father's self-respect—flies into a terrible fit of anger and, kicking out, hits his father's belly and thus reiterates his gesture against his mother in the dinner scene. Carried forcibly to bed half-unconscious, he
comes to his senses and notices that now his parents—as God, after hearing the Shofar, changes places, leaving his throne of Wrath and Judgement to sit on that of Mercy—occupy "novel positions" (43) at his bedside: Papa is seated by his side, whereas Mama is now at the foot of the bed. His nearness and her distancesuggest that some changes are underway in the family order. Yet such changes cannot be achieved until the final showdown has taken place. It is the mother once more who provokes it. Alarmed at seeing that Martin has turned dumb, Papa and Mama urge the little boy to speak but, whereas the former asks him to say "boy," Mama urges him to say "b"; suspecting she means the "b" of "beach, Martin, instead, comes out with "Papa" which, under his mother's gaze, becomes "Mama." Papa then bursts out into a holy rage; addressing Mama, his voice is like thunder, it rumbles before a crash, it hits the earth; it bellows: "When are you going to stop bothering him? [...] You can't treat a boy that way [...]. "You're killing yourself and everybody else" (46-47) and his arm commands her to leave the room.

With his parents now in their room and his brother and himself in their own, Martin, cleared of guilt by his father, "purified" by his holy rage, falls quickly asleep; he is soon woken up by Ben who, sobbing, keeps repeating "how could you say a thing like that to her?" (29). The little boy can protest as much as he can that he still does not know what has been so terrible about what he said, it is beyond Ben to forgive him. Left to his own thoughts, he realizes that although Papa has taken his defence, his judgement is flawed: unable to see harm, he cannot know how bad he is; Ben knows that Martin secretly enjoys their mother's infatuation for him.... Papa is good, but Ben is fair and just. Leaving his brother now asleep, Martin goes out of the bedroom and enters the dining-room: the sight of the bare table and of the floor strewn with the remains of the meal, makes him aware of "the reality of his badness" (49) and he begins to have an inkling of what repentance is. Unable to repair the mess, he slips outside and there finds a wonder: a moonlit landscape and on the beach "the new gentleness of the falling surf" (50). He assumes that men having thrown their sins into the ocean, "God had taken them up with Him, leaving the water clean and hairless" (50). Overwhelmed by a blissful peace and now fully aware of the turmoil his badness has caused, he falls asleep on the beach.

Under the cloak of this banal family crisis, and through the character of his young hero, Miller comes back to his own roots, not his Jewishness this time—as in Mount Sant' Angelo—but to the heart of Judaism. The narrative has many biblical resonances: the family composition is that of the first human family in Genesis, there is a rivalry between the two brothers as there is between Cain and Abel in the Bible, and Papa's and Mama's fundamental character features are those God gave to the first man and the first woman: he is naïve and innocent, she is cunning. The little boy's God is the God of Israel. It is a God who forbids and chastises, a God of Wrath, who fills him with awe, an all-seeing God, "who sees through his skull" (14), an all-knowing God who knows the motive that underlies every single act of his (he knows he cannot fool HIM), who accompanies him throughout the narrative: the little boy feels HIS presence on the beach, in the ocean, he hears "HIS" wrath roaming about the house. God awakens him to the idea of his badness; "HIS" thunder warns him whenever he does something bad or comes close to evil: on entering the bedroom and approaching his mother, he "hears the ocean's hiss and boom coming into the room [...] he smells the water and sees the bearded thing floating just beneath the heaving water like seaweed" (37). As the narrative proceeds, God's image evolves from one of wrath to one of truth and justice: through HIM, Martin discovers the
flawed quality of his mother's love (which is very upsetting for a child), his own evil complicity in it. In fact he is the only one in the family who is truly in phase with the religious meaning of Yom Kippur, who has an intimate relationship with God, in this respect following Judaism which places inner spiritual life over the outward aspects of piety. At the beginning of the narrative, though dispensed from fasting, he discovers, unawares, the redemptive power of penitence through privation—he thinks in hindsight that "the piece of jam-spread rye bread tasted good but not delicious" (4) and he cuts out his afternoon glass of milk—and mortification—he insists on keeping on his holiday tweed suit, though "it scratches his neck and thighs." Picturing his father and brother hungry praying to God in the synagogue, he intuitively senses the heavenly joy that asceticism can beget. Watching his family accomplishing rites that they do not take the trouble to explain to him, he casts a critical eye (at times a little unlikely, considering his age) on his parents' and brother's religious attitudes. He is obviously disappointed at seeing his father unable to explain the Cantor's gesticulations on the beach, and doubts his sincerity when the latter confirms Ben saying that there are sins in the Cantor's hand. He also regards his mother's religious ethics as too liberal, declaring with indignation "a holiday [is] a holiday (5) [...] if it was up to her, people would be allowed to do anything they want" (9); he finds her faith shallow, and her piety cheap. The description he makes of her listening to Ben saying grace, carried away for a short while from her usual worldly preoccupations, borders on derision: "she stood there listening in the doorway, caught by his gravity, her hands clasped, her face raised toward the air [...] impressed by his immaculate memory" (27). The last two words testify that even Ben does not escape Martin's critical eye. Though genuinely impressed by (and envious of) his brother's perfection—his always remembering everything, never forgetting anything—a shade of criticism comes through in the description Martin makes of his brother praying. Of course Ben, respecting the Hebrew rule of kawwana, makes his prayer an act of fervour and not of routine, which explains why he concentrates before starting "staring meaningfully" (26) at the fruit in the middle of the table, but one feels that Martin judges his brother too obedient to the Law and above all too immovable in his "condemning sulk" (34). Whereas Papa's goodness and willingness to forgive and Martin's eagerness to be forgiven herald God's Mercy, Ben stops halfway through the religious process: unable to forgive his brother, he proves to be impervious to God's mercy.

24 Judaism also comes through in the way the little boy perceives and places his father and mother. The father image is very strong and grows in stature as the story proceeds. Though not educated, the little boy looks up to him because he is the support of life, an example of goodness, balance and proper conduct. At the end of the story, he becomes a godhead, the father image merges into a God image: his anger is holy. God and his father inspire the little boy with similar feelings, albeit different in intensity: fear and awe but also trust and love; he is afraid of his father (who often threatens him with his leather belt when he has been naughty) but he loves him too because he knows he never hits him; the thought of Papa learning that he kept Mama's meeting with the dentist secret terrifies him, "he would look down on him from his height and roar with terrible hurt and horror" (13), but that of Mama "having thoughts that Papa did not have" (12) is simply unbearable and fills him with compassion. In the same way God inspires Martin with awe but at the end of the narrative, when once more on the shore he sees "the magical new calm of the ocean" (50), his heart fills with gratitude for God's mercy and he "yearns to know what he should do for HIM" (51).
On the contrary, in spite of all that the child shares with his mother, the latter's image is a negative one. It gets more and more eroded as the story proceeds, as Martin comes to think of his mother as an intruder, a regular troublemaker: joining his father and brother as they reach home on their way back from the synagogue and on finding the house unusually quiet, for a moment "he envisions that she has gone away forever, disappeared, so that they, the three men, can sit down quietly and eat in peace" (21). Actually his exclusion from the synagogue makes him feel assimilated to his mother's womanly status (for he knows that, had she attended the ceremony, she would have attended it, like himself on the beach, "from afar," and like all women in synagogues "consigned to the balcony with the privilege of looking on and admiring, captive and saved" (Timebends 36), a victim like himself of ostracism, motivated, temporarily in his case, by his youth, but for life, in hers, by her gender. This feeling incites him to draw away from her to join the men's club and influences his vision of woman. It is a Judaic vision: Woman is impure and imperfect, since in his mind all that is troubled (dishonesty, betrayal, duplicity), worldly, carnal, is linked to his mother, whereas all that is just, fair, honest in everyday life, asceticism in religious life, is linked to his father. In Judaism, Woman's impurity is linked to her gender, her sexuality. Now it is symptomatic that Martin rejects his mother when he discovers her pregnancy, therefore her sexuality. It is also symptomatic that Martin associates hair and hairiness with sin: at the beginning of the narrative, sitting on the beach, he pictures sins as beards floating like sea-weeds underneath the water and, at the end, once God's wrath has subsided and he has carried away men's sins, he describes the ocean as "flat and hairless"(50); he also associates these two words with the mystery of woman's body: still on the beach "he idly wonders why the mothers (to a little boy all women are mothers) always[ leave] so many bobby pins and hairy pieces of soap [...] why under their skirts it [is] dark, whereas with fathers there[is] always more light around"(5). Now, in Judaism, hair and hairiness are associated with sexuality, temptation and sin: orthodox Jews wear beards as a sign of masculinity and women are forbidden to show their hair when they go out for fear it should rouse sexual desire in men.

This is Judaism and, in its wake, Judeo-Christianity, but revisited and analysed as such by Freud, since the little boy finds himself caught, as Miller did himself, in the bosom of his own family, in an impossible triangular situation (named the Oedipus complex and the Fixation on the mother) between his father he loves and holds in respect for his honesty, and his mother whom he admires but does not trust.

Judaism is also obvious in the way the family crisis evolves and is finally solved: the mother is found guilty of all the disruption, as Eve is in Genesis after eating the forbidden fruit; she is relegated to the foot of the bed then ordered to leave the room, and so symbolically expelled from the family circle as Eve was from the Garden of Eden. She does not acknowledge any guilt, she remains totally in the dark, impervious to God's enlightenment. She is the only one in the family who does not improve spiritually, who does not come out of the crisis purified, does not accomplish a "catharsis." Unlike Papa, after the dinner scene, she has resumed her usual self: she is smiling at him as if nothing had happened. So, however imperfect the father's judgement is—blind as he is to Martin's own badness—however blind Ben chooses to remain—"he lowers his eyes when his father's thunder hits the earth" (46)—by ignoring his mother's hopeless duplicity as well as God's infinite power of mercy (since he cannot figure out how Martin can ever be forgiven), the family crisis is solved: the father's authority restores what, in Judaic Law, is
the proper family structure, hierarchy, i.e., the one God decided on when he created the world and in which woman occupies the second place, plays second fiddle.

Martin's Judaism is fundamental (whereas his family's is only surface Judaism). His God is a god of Truth and Justice, it is the god of the Old Testament. However he does not find "HIM" in synagogues but in Nature, in the elements of God's Creation—the Sun, the Sea, the Sky: it is a pantheistic, universalist God. Though he loves his parents and brother deeply and is not contemptuous of their down-to-earth spirituality, he places himself well above them spiritually, Miller in this respect describing his hero not only as a gifted child but as a potential visionary. At the end of the story, once more on the moonlit beach, with his family now asleep, the little boy decides that henceforth "he would be the guardian of his parents' and brother's innocence" (51) [...] "he would, by the power of his silence, keep them from badness" (52).

In his 1970 Editor's Introduction to The Portable Arthur Miller when stage director Harold Clurman, Miller's friend and one of the most perceptive analysts of his life and work, was pointing out "the relevance of "I Don't Need You Anymore" (written in 1959) to the meaning of Miller's work as a whole," he was of course referring to the plays prior to the writing of the short story—The Simon Trilogy (1936-1938) The Man Who Had All the Luck (1944), All My Sons (1947), Death of a Salesman. (1949), but also to two others immediately subsequent to it—After the Fall (1964) and The Price (1968)—which offer the same family composition as the short story, in which the character features and attitudes to life of the two brothers are, though to various degrees, set in contrast (to the point of open rivalry in The Price) as Ben's and Martin's are, and in which (particularly in the last two) the mother image is negative. When Clurman was also speaking of the "relevance to the early years of Miller's life's history—[as it is suggested] in several of his plays [...] especially the strength of ministry and a premonition that he would astonish the world" (XXXIV), he was referring both to Miller's already well-established reputation of being in his plays, often at the expense of his popularity, a staunch defender of Truth, as an existential value (all his heroes are shown to have a need for inner genuineness) and of social Justice, an attitude which undoubtedly can be ascribed to his Hebraic heritage, and to "the notion his mother had planted in him that he would be a bright star, a light in the world" (ibid XVII), a kind of prophet. But Clurman (who died in 1980), in writing such, did not know he was also being a prophet, since there are traces of these characteristics in several of Miller's subsequent and even in the very latest plays: in The Creation of the World and Other Business (1972) which shows Cain and Abel's rivalry and Eve's responsibility in it in the bosom of the first human family, in The Ride Down Morgan (1991) in which the same negative mother image recurs and in Mr. Peters'Connections (1998) in which the old competitive spirit with the brother flares up again.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


---. The Hook (screenplay) The Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.


NOTES

1. There are two (purposely emblematic) Jewish characters: the old, long-bearded Jew in Incident at Vichy who carries along his eiderdown, the symbol of the Wandering Jew and the aged antique dealer Gregory Solomon in The Price.

2. WASPS (The Crucible, The Last Yankee), Irish Catholics (A Memory of two Mondays, Some Kind of Love Story), Italian-Americans (A View from the Bridge), and crypto-Jews (All My Sons, Death of a Salesman).

3. I do not mention Miller's second marriage to Marilyn Monroe, which was celebrated by a rabbi, as Marilyn's sincerity in converting to Judaism seems to me highly questionable!


5. In various reviews and gathered in 1967 under the title of the longest one, "I Don't Need You Anymore."

6. Miller had been introduced by Longhi to the mafia-like fiefdoms of the Italian longshoremen for the purpose of a movie-script he had in mind at the time (but which would never be produced): "The Hook." Longhi was organizing a revolt against the allegedly Mafioso President of The International Longshoremen's Association, Joseph Ryan (who extorted money from the
longshoremen in return for giving them work), after the mysterious assassination of a young Sicilian dockworker who had initiated the revolt. Running for Congress as a member of the young American Labour Party, Longhi was going to Italy with the objective of bringing the news to the immigrant longshoremen’s wives and children in the hope of securing votes of gratitude in the forthcoming elections.

7. Unpublished interview with Christopher Bigsby.

8. Rosh-ha-Shana is New Year’s Day in the Jewish Year but it is also in Judaism the Day of the Last Judgement; the feast takes place in the month of Tichri i.e., in September/October. Sinners have ten days to repent before Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement, i.e., a day of expiation and reconciliation with God on which they say propitiatory prayers (selihot) and beg God for mercy.


10. As he had seen them being removed out of the Sacred Ark and taken about the synagogue to be kissed.

11. Whence the interdiction for a husband to have sexual intercourse with his wife during and for a few days after her periods and the bath rituals she has to perform to purify herself.

12. Who holds woman impure and inferior to man.

13. One has to bear in mind that when Miller wrote this short story in 1959, he had been in analysis for a decade trying to solve a personality crisis and that he transposes in his text the Freudian bond that existed between his mother and himself in his childhood and adolescence and also very astutely exploited the fascination of the era for psychoanalysis, as he confesses in Timebends: "I would learn in analysis far less than it simply confirmed.... My mother was and was not the woman who was tempting me sensually to capture her from my father, and was both culpable of disloyalty to him and, as herself, perfectly innocent" (TB 146).

14. In The Price, this is how Walter Franz, one of the two brothers, evokes his mother when she was told by his father of the bankruptcy of the family business during the Depression: "when he needed her she started to vomit...there was no love in this family, there was no honesty... they had never loved each other" (The Price, Act II). Similarly in After the Fall, Quentin’s mother’s ghost appears several times associated with duplicity and betrayal.

15. To his mistress, Leah, who is surprised to hear that his mother was Jewish, Lyman Felt confirms she was and adds "and the source of my conflicts" (The Ride Down Mount Morgan, Act I: 32.)

ABSTRACTS

Le présent article étudie deux nouvelles d’Arthur Miller. Dans la première, "Le Mont Saint Angel, l’auteur livre-fait presque unique dans son œuvre—sous le couvert d’un personnage qu’on reconnaît aisément comme étant autobiographique, son rapport personnel à sa judéité. Dans la seconde, "Je n’ai plus besoin de toi," par le même biais autobiographique mais de manière plus subtile, il nous fait percevoir l’héritage spirituel fondamental que lui a laissé le Judaïsme.
AUTHORS

CHRISTIANE DESAFY-GRIGNARD