



Timebends

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The book's eight sections are arranged in loose chronological order, but each follows the dictates of thought and theme rather than those of the calendar. Past, present, and future blend in a Sargasso Sea, and anyone who would dive in and out abruptly is vulnerable to a temporal caisson disease: timebends.

Miller's ambition in the theater from the outset was to offer something more important than merely the diversion of meringue in the face-- his dramas were in the face of war and oppression: "I could not imagine a theatre worth my time that did not want to change the world." Miller's autobiographical meditation is worthy of his seventy-two years and the several hours a reader might snatch from the distractions its author mistrusts.

Two acronyms pervade TIMEBENDS-- HUAC and PEN, and Miller's experiences with both demonstrate his belief that "there could be no aesthetic form without a moral world, only notes without a staff." THE CRUCIBLE implicitly compared the Salem witch trials to the Red-baiting by the House Un-American Activities Committee, to which he later refused cooperation. Under Miller's presidency, the international writer's organization PEN became a mighty sword wielded for freedom of expression. The author who, following a Broadway triumph, sought menial factory work making beer crates was uncomfortable with celebrity, but his extraordinary second wife made him hugely famous. Miller's marriage to Marilyn Monroe seemed an elemental pairing of mind and body, but it did not survive THE MISFITS, a screenplay he wrote to fortify a woman "dancing at the edge of oblivion."

Omissions and evasions prevent TIMEBENDS from being a definitive account of Miller's life. This self-portrait of the playwright in a world where theaters are going dark, however, is the testimony of a decent, thoughtful, occasionally sanctimonious man. His epitaph for Marilyn Monroe might do double service for himself: "She was a poet on a street corner trying to recite to a crowd pulling at her cloths." Miller wears his duds with dignity.

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