

ARTHUR MILLER

## The Freedom of the Writer

THE FREEDOM OF THE WRITER

In New York on May 7 Arthur Miller spoke before the National Assembly of the Author's League of America at a panel on "The Writers' Position in America." The text of his talk appears below.

In six minutes one can't hope to do more than make an assertion or two about so complex a thing as the writer's position in any society, let alone in America. One relationship, however, can at least be profitably touched on, even if a just balance cannot be struck in so short a time. It is the question of the integration of the writer into the domestic and foreign policies of the nation at any particular moment.

Through most of history the relationship between the artist and political power has been, how shall I say, uneasy. Our profession has had a higher percentage of exiles, jailbirds, and public offenders than any other. This is probably due to the conflict between the artist's personal search for life's meaning, and the politician's insistence that his policy and his power embody all the wisdom any honest patriot requires. It is possible to pity both politician and artist, but it seems evident that the welfare of the race must insist upon those conditions of freedom which will make the competition for truth at all possible.

I believe that we are in a period when, in a rather submerged and stuttering way, power is striving, sometimes consciously, often-times in ignorance of what is at stake—striving to preempt the field entirely for itself. The most recent and blatant example can be found in last week's exchange of letters between Mr. Sulzberger who publishes the N.Y. Times, and Mr. Dulles. The immediate issue revolved around newspaper writers, but in 1957 it seems no longer possible to imagine that its weight does not fall equally upon novelists, playwrights, and poets.

Mr. Sulzberger wrote to protest the State Department's refusal to allow American newsmen to go to China to report the news and its threats of reprisals for any who dared to disobey. He wrote, "As things now stand, I cannot escape the feeling that the Administration is abridging the freedom, of the press and using the press as an instrument in its diplomacy." Mr. Dulles replied in part, "When young men are drafted and sent abroad, they are used as instruments of foreign policy— When business people are not allowed to trade with Communist China, they might equally argue that they are being used as instruments of our diplomacy.

"Foreign policy and diplomacy cannot succeed unless, in fact, it channels the activities of our people, and in this respect newspapermen have also their loyalty and patriotic duty."

I do not know how many of you share my view of history in this respect, but I believe that this statement of Mr. Dulles is a new thing among us and represents a way of thought which, to phrase it charitably, departs from our practice and traditions. I am not saying that you can't agree with this "channeling," but if you do it seems to me you have to recognise that it entails certain! drastic concessions of traditional liberties. My point is less Mr. Dulles than the accuracy with which his statement reflects a misconception, widely held in and out of government, concerning all writings and **all** writers, science and scientific thought as well. The basic assumption here is what Mr. Dulles says it is, that "foreign policy cannot succeed unless, in fact, it channels the activities of the people . . . ."

I don't think it unfair or inaccurate to say that this is what has been called "Total Diplomacy." If it means anything, it means that every resource of a nation is organised into the effort to achieve a diplomatic end, and not the least of the resources required is the thought, the ideas, the information of the people and their projection of what should be in the world . . . .

I cite this exchange of letters only because it puts the dilemma so clearly.

I can say from my experience that plays and playwrights are also considered as bearing upon high policy, and are justified as being forbidden to go abroad, while within the country other arms of government are used to organise them out of circulation. The State Department has interfered with the circulation of American books abroad, American music and musicians, and American paintings. It is no news that it is now impossible for American scientists to act as hosts to international scientific congresses within the United States because so many foreign scientists will not be admitted here. I believe that once we assent to the idea that high policy alone is sacred, and that every other value can easily be sacrificed to it, we shall have abdicated our independence as writers and citizens. I believe we have by silence given this consent, and by silence helped to raise the state to a kind of power over all of us which it cannot have without crippling the soul of art and people themselves.

I wonder if it is not time for some expert testimony on this problem. I wonder if it is not time for writers, who know best the delights of freedom because they use freedom every day, to make it clear to the government and the people that there is in fact a very important difference between businessmen and soldiers on the one hand, and writers and artists on the other, even if the actions of all do bear upon foreign or even domestic policy. The government is proceeding on a very hollow syllogism. All mice have four feet; all lions have four feet—therefore a mouse is a lion. The virtue of syllogism is that while it may bring out

similarities, it totally obscures differences that in real life separate one thing from another.. It is not the part of writers to concede, let alone pretend, that they are the same as businessmen and soldiers. And this, simply because the salvation of the nation and the race do not and cannot depend upon steel ingots and shoes and jet planes in the same way as they do upon free expression of opinion of viewpoints and of the saving awareness and wisdom that not infrequently springs from the written word and cannot spring from iron or armies. The mission of the written word is not to buttress high policy but to proclaim the truth, the truth for whose lack we must surely die; it is a mission not lightly to be cast aside for temporary advantage.

It is now common amongst us, if not downright fashionable, to inveigh against the trends of conformity, the emergence among us of the "organisation man," the "lonely crowd," the—in short—"channeled" personality. The writer knows that for him to be organised-in, so to speak, is to lose his very field of action, his reason for existence as a writer.

Is it not time to state that high policy is not the only value worth serving, just as we do not believe—at least I hope we do not—that efficiency and progress may rightfully consume whatever in the human being does not fit into efficient and progressive patterns? Is it not time to state that the news is still sacred, too, that freedom to write, to create unmolested and unblackguarded by government is at least equal to the sanctity of high policy. For God's sake let us at least cling with one finger, if we cannot grasp it with our hands, to the most secure proposition mankind has ever proved in its bloody time on this earth—that an artist and his vision need not be any more mistaken than even a politician's.

It is not a question even of our rights. It is not a question of complaining. It is not even a question of **trying** to uphold the dignity of America before the world, even though, believe me, it has been gravely sullied by this brand of "realism." It is purely and simply a question of preserving the conditions of a free press and a free literature.

The people do not understand those conditions, not because they care little for things of the spirit, but because we who are experts, or should be, have not made clear what those conditions are, nor how they differ from conditions required if business is to flourish, or soldiering. What freedom we are using now we have not helped to make, and what is being eroded around us we are making no effort to protect. And I say these things because I have learned them at my cost, and because I wish none of you will have to learn them the same way.