

The American Century Theater
Presents
That Championship Season

**AUDIENCE
GUIDE**

by
Jason Miller

Directed by Ed Bishop
March-April, 2007

Written by Jack Marshall, Artistic Director

About The American Century Theater

The American Century Theater was founded in 1994. We are a professional company dedicated to presenting great, important, and neglected American plays of the Twentieth Century... what Henry Luce called “the American Century.”

The company’s mission is one of rediscovery, enlightenment, and perspective, not nostalgia or preservation. Americans must not lose the extraordinary vision and wisdom of past playwrights, nor can we afford to lose our mooring to our shared cultural heritage.

Our mission is also driven by a conviction that communities need theater, and theater needs audiences. To those ends, this company is committed to producing plays that challenge and move all citizens, of all ages and all points of view. In particular, we strive to create theatrical experiences that entire families can watch, enjoy, and discuss long afterward. In 2004, the theater became the first and only professional theater in the Greater Washington area to admit children free of charge. It also strives to keep ticket prices low.

These study guides are part of our effort to enhance the appreciation of these works, so rich in history, content, and grist for debate.



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That Championship Season's Cultural Context: 1969-1972

By Jack Marshall

The disillusionment and cynicism of the Coach and his former team in Jason Miller's 1972 drama connected with feelings of many Americans their age, as the upheaval that began in the 1960s continued unabated into the 1970s. Traditionalists who thought they understood American values, ideals and priorities suddenly couldn't recognize their own country. America couldn't win a war against a backward East Asian country. American soldiers were committing atrocities. The government was courting Communist regimes. Homosexuals were coming out of the closet and demanding respect, rights, and opportunities. Women were pushing harder than ever to escape the confines of traditional female roles. Sex was everywhere; teenagers seemed to be taking over. The environmental movement was declaring that industrial progress and economic rewards didn't justify pollution and ecological destruction. Abortion was open and legal, and without shame. Religion seemed irrelevant, powerless. And corruption appeared to be seeping into every facet of American life, the signs of a fever that wouldn't break until the aftermath of Watergate. The popular entertainment of the time reflected the crumbling confidence in the American Dream. The top movie was "The Godfather." The most memorable song: "American Pie."

Where had it all gone? What was America becoming?

This is the America that greeted *That Championship Season* when as it opened on Broadway in May of 1972 and played through 1974:

1969

- Richard Nixon is inaugurated president of the United States and announces the beginning of troop withdrawal from Vietnam. He bans the use of chemical and biological weapons.
- Through NASA, the U.S. space program flies higher than anyone before. Neil Armstrong becomes the first man to walk on the moon when he exits the lunar capsule *Apollo 11* with the famous words, “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”
- The gay rights movement begins in New York with the Stonewall Inn Riot, in protest of a police raid of a dance club and bar in Greenwich Village.
- The Woodstock music festival reigns for four days in the Catskill Mountains. Recreational drugs are quite widespread.

- Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) begin between the United States and the U.S.S.R., as President Nixon tries to control the nuclear arms race and promote a policy of détente.
- *Sesame Street*, created by the Children's Television Workshop, debuts on public television and begins to change attitudes about children's learning capabilities.

1970

- Cambodia's Prince Norodom Sihanouk is overthrown and defense minister Lon Nol begins a reign of terror in the newly proclaimed Khmer Republic. American and South Vietnamese forces move into Cambodia.
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) activity in Laos is exposed. Senator J. William Fulbright accuses the CIA of ``an undeclared and undisclosed war in Laos."
- Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin both die, and become instant icons to America's youth culture.
- At Kent State University in Ohio, a student protest to end the expanding war in Southeast Asia ends in bloodshed

when National Guardsmen open fire, killing four and injuring eight.

- Five Arab nations meet in Cairo, Egypt, and resolve to continue to fight for Israeli-occupied territory. Many question the nature of U.S.-Middle East relations with respect to Israel.
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is created by Congress to control air and water pollution.

1971

- The 26th Amendment lowers the United States' voting age from 21 to 18.
- South Vietnamese forces begin an offensive in Cambodia with American support, but are repulsed after six weeks; the United States reduces its troops in Vietnam to about 200,000.
- The Supreme Court upholds a measure to bus children in order to enforce integration in schools; a bussing plan imposed in Austin, Texas, draws the criticism of Alabama

Governor George Wallace, who had previously urged southern senators to defy integration.

- Concerned about inflation, President Richard Nixon announces a “New Economic Policy” that includes a 90-day wage freeze, the imposition of a 10% import surcharge, and a freeze on the conversion of dollars to gold. Despite a record one-day jump of almost 33 points in the Dow, the uncooperative AFL-CIO has “absolutely no faith” in the measure.
- “The Pentagon Papers,” a highly classified document detailing U.S. involvement in Vietnam, is submitted to the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* by Defense Department official Daniel Ellsberg.

1972

- United States President Richard Nixon has an unprecedented state visit with Chairman Mao Zedong in Beijing. Nixon takes advantage of the Sino-Soviet split to ease decades-old American hostilities towards China.
- United States President Richard Nixon makes an historic visit to the USSR. In the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I, Nixon and Brezhnev negotiate reductions in their nuclear arsenals. The talks mark a warming in the Cold War and usher in the era of détente.

- Richard Leakey and Glynn Isaac find a skull in Kenya which potentially dates the first humans to 2.5 million B.C.
- The United States resumes bombing on the North Vietnam cities Hanoi and Haiphong, leading to arguments in the Senate.
- Five men are arrested inside the new Democratic National Headquarters with surveillance equipment and cameras, marking the beginning of the Watergate scandal that destroys Nixon's presidency. *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein begin to investigate.
- The Senate approves the Equal Rights Amendment, guaranteeing equality for women. The amendment will not become the law of the land, however, as it fails to be ratified by the required number of states.

1973

- Direct American involvement in Vietnam ends with the January declaration of a ceasefire. Bombing of Cambodia continues in an effort to retrieve POWs.

- U.S. Vice-President Spiro Agnew resigns for tax evasion and is replaced by Senate Minority Leader Gerald Ford. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger becomes secretary of state.
- Fierce fighting surrounds the beginning of the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War. The United States supplies Israel with military equipment to offset Soviet support of Arab forces. A United Nations resolution sponsored by the U.S. and U.S.S.R. calls for a ceasefire, finally affected in late October.
- In *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court rules that women have the unrestricted right to abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy, after which the state has some interest in protecting the fetus.
- Both East and West Germany are admitted to the United Nations.
- In a tennis match billed as the "Battle of the Sexes," Billie Jean King, an outspoken proponent of female equality, triumphs over former Wimbledon champ Bobby Riggs in 3 straight sets.
- A global energy crisis emerges, and President Nixon encourages conservation of energy, pointing out that the

U.S. has 6% of the population but consumes one-third of the world's energy. Arab nations exacerbate the energy crunch, cutting back oil production for political reasons.

- OPEC jacks up oil prices, and President Nixon signs an act limiting highway speeds to 55 MPH which successfully conserves fuel.
- The towering World Trade Center becomes New York City's latest calling card. The structure briefly reigns as the tallest in the world; the Sears Tower tops it the next year.

1974

- Richard Nixon becomes the first United States president to resign office. Nixon sought to avoid an impeachment trial stemming from lurid Watergate discoveries. Vice-President Gerald Ford is sworn in and grants Nixon a full pardon.

The Playwright: Jason Miller (1939-2001)

By Jack Marshall

Son of an electrician and grandson of a coal miner, the writer of *That Championship Season* was born in 1939 in Long Island

City, New York, but grew up, like the characters in his play, in the Lackawanna Valley of Pennsylvania. He was an outstanding athlete, but as he was always emphasizing, he never had his own "championship season" in school. "I was never involved in a state basketball championship," he told one interviewer. "It is, however, the material of my life."

Miller graduated from St Patrick's Academy, and then studied English and philosophy at the University of Scranton, a Jesuit institution, on an athletic scholarship. He credited the nuns at St Patrick's with steering his interests toward the arts when he began having disciplinary problems. "They thought poetry writing might help," Miller said. They drilled him in elocution and encouraged him to act in school drama and study writing for the theater. It helped a lot.

His one-act play about a prize-fighter, *The Winner*, won the top prize at the regional Jesuit Eastern Play Contest. In 1963 he married a fellow student, Linda Gleason, the daughter of TV legend and dramatic actor Jackie Gleason, best known as "Ralph Cramden" in the iconic series, "The Honeymooners." Jason and Linda performed Shakespeare together for local high schools before made the move to New York and starring actor-dom. They divorced, but not before Miller had sired Jason Patric, today a successful movie actor who has starred in such films as "The Lost Boys," "Speed II," and "Alamo."

Miller auditioned while continuing to write. "When you write a play," he said, "you act out all the parts, so what you're doing in the daytime is preparing you for your performance at night. You get to the theater warmed up." He completed several plays, including *Nobody Hears a Broken Drum*, about oppressed Irish miners in Pennsylvania in 1862. It had a brief off-Broadway run in 1970, but bigger things were on the horizon.

While appearing in the play *Subject to Fits* at Joseph Papp's Public Theater complex in 1971, Miller persuaded Papp to read his new play, called *That Championship Season*. Papp liked the script enough to produce it in 1972, and the critical reaction made it a hit and Miller the toast of Broadway. Critic Clive Barnes wrote, "Here at last is the perfect play of the season." Walter Kerr in *The New York Times* called it "rock solid, bitterly funny, painfully shaming." Miller won the 1973 Pulitzer Prize, and the play won both the Tony and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award that year.

His personal championship season had arrived. That same year, Miller's darkly handsome looks, prize-fighter build and Jesuit background won him the role of Father Damien Karras, the brooding, ex-boxer Jesuit priest who fights a demon for the soul of a possessed girl in the film version of William Blatty's "The Exorcist." His performance won him an Oscar nomination as Best Supporting Actor. He commented at the time, "I can't quite catch up with it. I still wake up some mornings and ask myself, 'Is today the day I go to the unemployment insurance office?'" His success had come after a long struggle. "I worked for welfare, I worked as a truck-driver, I worked as a waiter. And then I'd go out to the provinces and do some resident theater and come back and have to get another job or go on unemployment." The author told *The New York Times* that he felt an obligation to continue writing for the theater. "I think it would be ungracious not to. Theater is in desperate straits, and I'd like to help pick it up."

But Miller's writing and acting careers were never to approach the success and acclaim of 1973. On television he played the title role in the TV movie *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood* (1976) and starred in the mini-series "The Dain Curse" based on Dashiell Hammett's novel, in 1978. He also starred in a well-received 1981

“disease-of-the-week” drama about a young girl's battle with *anorexia nervosa*, “The Best Little Girl in the World.”

In 1982, Miller directed the film version of *That Championship Season*, starring Robert Mitchum as the coach, Bruce Dern, Martin Sheen, Stacy Keach and Paul Sorvino, reprising his original role. The movie was a flop. He went back to his roots, serving as artistic director of the Scranton (Pennsylvania) Public Theater, which kept him busy. Miller reprised his role of Father Damien in the second sequel to “The Exorcist,” “Legion,” starring George C. Scott. That movie was also a failure, and spelled the end of Jason Miller’s film career.

Again he returned to the past for inspiration, re-working his first produced play, *Nobody Hears a Broken Drum*. He was also working on a play about the life of his father-in-law, Gleason, and was rehearsing for his theater’s upcoming production of the *Odd Couple*, in which he had cast himself as Oscar Madison, when he died suddenly and unexpectedly of a massive heart attack. He was just sixty-two.

Miller’s career was never able to return to the heights of 1973, his championship year, but he left a creative legacy that includes one of the most honored dramas of the Seventies, and a powerful performance in what has been called the best horror movie of all time. He will not be forgotten.

Non-traditional Casting and That Championship Season

By Jack Marshall

That Championship Season, when it played on Broadway in 1972, was about five white, middle aged men in the Lackawanna Valley of Pennsylvania. This was where Jason Miller grew up. In transferring the drama to Alabama and casting the play with African American actors, The American Century Theater and director Ed Bishop are to some extent changing the author's intent and veering from the company's usual production practice of trying to stay as close to the spirit of the original show as possible. This is the still-controversial realm of non-traditional casting, and *That Championship Season* is an excellent case study of the practice.

First, let's get our terms straight. "Non-traditional casting" is not the same as "color-blind casting," though it is frequently used to describe the practice of casting without any regard to race and sometimes gender, age, and physical disability. The latter practice, illustrated locally by the Arena Stage's provocative revival of *Our Town* and on Broadway with the revival of *Carousel*, often becomes a case of sacrificing the audience's enjoyment and understanding of a show to political objectives. When siblings are presented as belonging to different races in a 19th Century New England town, it is likely to create confusion and distraction that are impediments to telling the playwright's story.

The common argument defending color-blind casting, that audiences "get used to it" over the course of the evening, is no argument at all. Audiences will "get used to" a too cold theater, a rickety set or an actor's annoying mannerisms too, but that doesn't mean that they are good features to have, or that there is a justification for making ticket-buyers endure them.

The primary objective served by color-blind and gender-blind casting is to increase employment opportunities for groups of actors who are historically under-represented among the characters of major stage works. When that can be accomplished without undermining the script, it is laudable, but this is more likely to be the case when the race or gender of the original character is irrelevant to the story. Charley, Willy Loman's soft-touch neighbor in *Death of a Salesman*, could be cast with a black actor and there would be no resulting confusion. Charley could be black; he just wasn't written that way. But casting Biff, Willy's oldest son, with a black actor would be confusing and suggests a back-story to Miller's play that would be a distraction. A *black* actor would have to play Biff as a *white* man, a too-difficult assignment. But playing him as a black man in a white-bread '50s house-hold makes no sense.

Sometimes non-traditional casting can run afoul of copyright laws. U.S. copyright laws give the playwright ownership of all "derivative works" arising from his or her creation. Thus the all-female version of Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* was, in effect, a different play derived from his original hit; only Simon could do it, because it substantively changed the original play and its characters. A female version of *That Championship Season* would require substantial re-writing and require permission from Miller's estate or license-holder, even though women's basketball is common enough at high schools and college to make such a production conceivable.

This version of *That Championship Season* was not significantly changed, with the exception of a change in local and the alteration of few ethnic and racial references. Still, African-Americans have not been cast to portray white men. The championship high school team in this production was an all-

black team, and they live in a community with a substantial African-American population, unlike the Lackawanna Valley. This cast turns the play into a drama about the reunion of a black high school team, twenty years after its life-altering triumph, in a Southern town. Is that fair to Jason Miller's work?

One could argue that it's a *gift* to the work. If Miller's play proves versatile and successful with a different kind of cast than it traditionally employs, then it becomes accessible to more companies, artists and communities. Its chances of survival and lasting popularity have been increased. But is it a *legitimate* change, one that does not overstep the director's artistic right to interpret a playwright's vision?

Answering this question requires an answer to a different one, and the inquiry must be an honest. I once saw a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* in which the Captain, a character who rejects his daughter's choice of a sailor as the love of her life because he is "beneath her station," was played by a terrific black baritone. Now, *Pinafore* is a satire on the British class system in Victorian times; a black captain who was a class snob simply didn't and couldn't exist during the show's required time period.. But *H.M.S. Pinafore* is an absurd comedy and musical entertainment; the class issues are simply a plot device, and one that hasn't had much connection to the real world in decades. The famous trick resolution of the story, in which a nurse reveals that the Captain and the lowly sailor were switched as infants, so the Captain is really the sailor and vice-versa, was always ridiculous (the Captain is about twenty years older than the sailor), and simply more so when the Captain was black and the sailor was white. The operetta's objective---to be funny, fun, and musically enjoyable---was not impeded and quite possibly enhanced by the non-traditional casting. But musical theater is

an easier case: look at opera, where black divas are routinely cast as “Carmen.” What counts isn’t “Does she look Spanish?” but rather “How well can she sing the part?” A non-musical drama, however, may be less forgiving. Thus the key questions are what the objective of the work really is, and whether non-traditional casting help it, undermine it, or make no difference at all.

That Championship Season is a VietNam era play; in many respects, it is the epitome of a VietNam era play. It premiered in 1972, at a tense time in the public debate over the war. As anti-war candidate George McGovern headed to a landslide defeat by President Richard Nixon, many Americans felt that the country had lost its way. The World War II generation was living on the memory of its past triumph, a predominant theory held, while the intervening years had eroded its values and idealism. 1972 was still in a hang-over (or LSD flashback?) from the deep Sixties; the graduating college classes of that year had seen sit-ins, campus strikes, riots, protests and violence. The feeling lingered that anyone over the age of 30 (the “heroes” of *That Championship Season* are all over 35) was corrupt and couldn’t be trusted. Miller’s characters and script reflect all of this. His aging basketball team is a stand-in for the country as a whole; its trophy the reputation and ideals of the past that are being tarnished with each passing year.

An all-black team communicates this as clearly as an all-white team. The metaphor survives. Moreover, the casting choice makes the play universal; it clarifies Miller’s point by eliminating any chance that he intended to comment on the *ennui* and desperation of struggling Pennsylvania mining town. It is a play about America, not Pennsylvania.

But it is also a play about bigotry. The strongest objection to the non-traditional casting of the American Century Theater production is that the bigoted and hateful comments against Jews and blacks now come from a Coach who is black himself, rather than the red-necked white coach originally played by Charles Durning. Isn't this a distortion? In the view of Ed Bishop, it is not.

In 1972 the Civil Rights movement was still teetering on the edge of violence; calling attention to the casual racism of Middle America was still vibrant theme in American drama and film. Today, there is a greater understanding that all forms of hatred can infect any group. Bishop strongly believes that it is important to show that African Americans, as Americans, are fully capable of the same habits and conduct incubated by our culture. Again, the message is more powerful if it is more universal.

That Championship Season is an ideal play for a non-traditional casting approach, which is why the American Century Theater decided that it was fair to both play and playwright. The perplexing challenges of non-traditional casting for artists and audiences continue, however. New York City's Non-Traditional Casting Project continues to take the lead in exploring and encouraging the practice, and its web site (www.ntcp.org) provides a wealth of information on the topic. Among the many provocative essays on the organization's site is one by theater critic Jeremy Gerard, writing in 1994. He concludes,

*Mixing up race and gender have long been tools used effectively by politically-oriented directors, and some of the theater-going experiences that still stand out in my memory — Gloria Foster's *Mother Courage*, Morgan Freeman's *Coriolanus*, Raul Julia's *Petruchio*, Diane Venora's *Hamlet*, to name just four from the*

Papp legacy — were electrifying precisely because of the way race and gender were employed to force an audience to view a familiar work in a completely new social context.

It goes without saying that we are still a long way from a theater in which talent prevails over other casting considerations, particularly in the mainstream. But in those places where non-traditional casting, and especially colorblind casting, has long been established, audiences and critics alike are confronted with an interesting challenge. For if we suspend disbelief on matters of race and gender, we risk willfully ignoring a key point of a production. But if such casting prompts us to wonder about the political implications of a production, we must do so by putting aside the very notion of non-traditional casting. It's a dilemma I haven't fully worked out, and one I suspect stymies many of my colleagues as well.

The test, in the final analysis, is whether or not non-traditional casting results in good art as well as a memorable theater experience. And that will always be affected most by the power of what is on the page as well as the talents of those on the stage.

The One Hit Wonders of 1960-1975

By Jack Marshall

Pop quiz: *What do Tad Mosel, Howard Sackler, Charles Gordone, Paul Zindel and Jason Miller have in common?*

A lot, actually. From 1960 to 1975, only Frank Gilroy (*The Subject Was Roses*) and Edward Albee won Pulitzer prizes for drama as previously-established playwrights. Albee won twice in

that period, with 1967's *A Delicate Balance*, and in 1975, when the prize came back to him for his sea monster play, *Seascape*. During the rest of that decade and a half, only Mosel, Sackler, Gordone, Zindel and Miller won Pulitzer prizes for original dramas. In four of the years, the awards committee deemed no American play worthy. All five men were unknown playwrights who had never had any kind of Broadway success; in fact, only Miller had ever had a play produced professionally.

And not one of them ever wrote a successful play again.

Of the five, only Zindel, whose *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* won the award in 1971, ever got another play on The Great White Way, with his short-lived *Miss Reardon Drinks a Little*. They were the ultimate one-hit wonders, scaling the heights of playwriting success, and never returning.

What was going on?

Beginning in 1960, the realization dawned on the theater world that the salad days of American theater had come to a crashing end. Eugene O'Neil was dead; Arthur Miller had settled into repetition, political preaching and failed experiments in comedy (Miller was just not a funny guy, but thought he was.) Tennessee Williams' talent had waned with increased drinking and depression, and every new play he unveiled was criticized as something he had done better before or should not have attempted at all. Albee was the heir apparent to these acknowledged Greatest American Playwrights, but after *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (which the Pulitzers snubbed) he was struggling to write a play that could be simultaneously profound

and watchable. It seemed like no great plays were being written any more, and no great playwrights were around to write them.

In 1960 and 1962, the Pulitzers punted and selected musicals rather than dramas as the best of the American stage: *Fiorello!* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. The truly exciting playwriting seemed to be occurring in Great Britain and Europe, where Ionesco, John Osborne, Peter Schafer, Harold Pinter and Samuel Becket were at or near the peaks of their talent. So the Pulitzers, like the New York critics and audiences, began searching for The Next Great American Playwright, with their hopes being successively pinned to five unknowns: Mosel, for *All the Way Home* in 1961; Sackler, for *The Great White Hope* in 1969; Gordone in 1970 for *No Place to Be Somebody*; Zindel in 1971; and Jason Miller for *That Championship Season* in 1973.

Significantly, none of them were committed playwrights. Miller was as much an actor as an author, and indeed was more active on screen during his career than at his desk. So was Gordone, a major figure in the development of Black theater, who was active as a teacher, director, political organizer and award-winning character actor. Tad Mosel (actually George Ault, Jr.) was a television writer who had great success in that medium, notable as the Emmy award-winning writer of the PBS dramatic series, "The Adams Chronicles." He wrote screenplays too, such as "Up the Down Staircase," which made Sandy Dennis a star. *All the Way Home* was a special project, an adaptation of James Agee's novel "A Death in the Family" that was a surprise success. Mosel didn't consider himself primarily a playwright even then.

Sackler and Zindel, on the other hand, tried to stay on Broadway but failed. Then each found success in another realm of the arts

and was successful. At the time of his death, Zindel was one of the stars of the teen fiction world, with more than a dozen published novels to his credit, one of which, "The Pigman," is a classic of the genre. Howard Sackler was a successful screenwriter, adapting his script of *The Great White Hope* for film and penning the screenplays for such successful films as "Jaws II" and "Grey Lady Down." He is also said to have written Quint's famous monologue about the *S.S. Indianapolis* in the original "Jaws," although others attribute it to Robert Shaw, who played the haunted shark-killer in the film and was himself a successful playwright.

This group of One Hit Wonders display many of the characteristics we associate with the breed. Gordone, Zindel and Miller all drew strongly on autobiographical material for their single Broadway success; Sackler adapted the biography of a real historical figure, and Mosel turned someone else's novel into a play. The five may simply have lacked inspiration for a second compelling story. None of them wrote many plays after their Pulitzer prize-winner, seeming to confirm the theory that the Muse eluded them. All were versatile and multi-talented enough, however, to be able to make a good living without Broadway. Thus none of them felt the urge or dedication to endure hunger, poverty and ignominy while they labored to write another classic. Sometimes such desperate and stubborn playwrights succeed after years of failure. Sometimes, they just get old, frustrated and hungry. But neither Mosel, Zindel, Gordone, Sackler nor Miller ever felt that desperate. Not all of them had that much time to create another drama: three died relatively young: Zindel at 66, Miller at 58, Sackler at only 52. (Gordone died in 1995 at the age of 70; Mosel is still alive at 84.)

It may also be that it is expecting too much of any playwright to deliver a series of successful plays. Those who have written three or more like Williams, Miller, O'Neill, Hellman, George S. Kaufman, Elmer Rice, and Terence McNally are a very select and remarkable group; we should not be critical of those who do not reach that level, or scratch our heads in wonder that a playwright couldn't "do it again." It is impressive enough for any writer to do it *once*.

The career paths of the One Hit Wonders also convey an ominous message about the future health of the theater. Once Broadway success was a popular path to fame and riches; once promising writers of dialogue and drama would be drawn to the stage as a first choice and the source of most prestigious and profitable careers. No longer. The gold is in movies and television, and most promising playwrights move to Hollywood long before they have given their playwriting skills the chance to bloom. This is what caused the sudden shortage of new playwrights at the beginning of the 1960s, and while the Pulitzers have settled into lesser standards, the problem is worse today. Had they been born a generation or two earlier, we may now have had many more memorable stage works from the quintet of Mosel, Zindel, Gordone, Sackler and Miller.