

The Last Yankee

October 19-November 18, 1995

By Arthur Miller

Directed by Anthony Powell



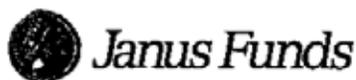
Study Guide



Catch Us In The Act.

Denver Center Theatre Company

A Division of The Denver Center for the Performing Arts / Donovan Marley, Artistic Director



In order to find more information about Arthur Miller's life and work, take a trip to your school or local library. There is a wealth of material on these subjects for both adults and children. Ask your librarian for help in finding the books, videos, records, tapes and magazines you need. Become familiar with your library and you will find that a world of information will be at your fingertips. Most libraries are not restricted by their own collections but can borrow from other libraries to satisfy your informational needs. Become a skillful library consumer. Never hesitate to ask questions. Planning is important, however, and the farther ahead you plan, the more time you give your librarian and yourself to find the best resources.



Each show the Denver Center Theatre Company produces has its own unique informational needs. We, here at the theatre, use the resources of our own and other libraries continually. Without access to information, it would not be possible to do what we do whether it is searching for the costumes of a particular period; defining the language of a specific time; discovering the customs and culture of when and where the play takes place; or finding technical information to produce the special effects on stage. Our people have to be well informed. We also think it is important that we share with you some of the resources we have discovered. In fact, this study guide has taken many hours of research, writing and editing in order to help you enjoy the production you are about to see and enrich your theatrical experience at the DCTC.

—Linda Eller
Librarian, National Theatre Conservatory
A department of the Denver Center Theatre Company
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The SCFD has been recognized as a national model for the enhancement of community quality of life through the arts: cities from California to Pennsylvania have sought to replicate this special funding District. The residents of the Denver Metropolitan area benefit every day from its programs.

SYNOPSIS OF *THE LAST YANKEE*

“Anybody with any sense has got to be depressed in this country.”
from *The Last Yankee*

The *Last Yankee* is set in New England in the gray confines of a state mental hospital where two men are visiting their wives who are being treated for mental depression. This setting provides the backdrop for the audience to witness the crisis of these four individuals. Each is experiencing bitter disappointment that manifests itself in different ways. The title character, Leroy Hamilton, is a descendant of founding father Alexander Hamilton, but he is reluctant to acknowledge it and has forsworn his pedigree of class and status enjoyed by the rest of his family. Leroy doesn't approve of his ancestor, who founded the National Bank and usually favored the monied interests. Instead, he is a craftsman, a self-employed carpenter who deplores competing and charging the going rate. His wife, Patricia, aged 39 and of Swedish extraction, has borne him seven children and for the past 20 years as been suffering from depression. This is her third hospitalization. The other visitor is John Frick, sixtyish, who is a wealthy local businessman. He is dumbfounded that his wife Karen has recently been hospitalized, chafing at the knowledge that, when he has provided her with so much, she is still depressed.

When the audience meets the women in the second act, it finds a frail, insecure and childlike Karen who can't seem to focus on a single topic and who speaks in disjointed sentences that make a kind of simple-minded sense. It becomes clear that any kind of self-confidence she might have possessed has been ground down by her husband. It is also obvious that she has been emotionally dominated and neglected by John. However, she is

emboldened to chat by the warmth and volubility of Patricia. Patricia discloses to Karen the fact that she has stopped taking her medication for three weeks and is feeling so well that she may decide to go home again in spite of the fact that there are many unresolved issues still to be addressed with her husband, Leroy. His Yankee stubbornness and stoicism as well as the family's not-so-genteel poverty caused by his complacency towards being successful in business are the main sources of her depression. Her unrealistically high expectations for herself and her family are another source of this recurring depression. But during these three drug-free weeks, she has accepted the reality of her situation and begun the process of letting go of old wounds and resentments. It is her realization that one must live one day at a time, that gives her some hope of having a normal life.

Karen remains and Patricia walks out of the hospital. One is, perhaps, at the end of her association with mental institutions and the other is just beginning. However, Patricia knows that she is on thin ice. She recognizes her separateness and that only she can take responsibility for her life. With Leroy, she leaves the hospital and goes back to her children, intensely aware of her limitations, but with an acceptance of the present conditions of her existence. She knows full well that all will not be resolved immediately and that her life will be replnce of her separateness brings strength and ironically seems to bring to her a sense of nobility because she lives with a conscious recognition of her situation.

MILLER THE MAN

Arthur Miller has been called one of the twentieth century's most coherent social dramatists who creates plays with fine psychological portraits, rather than moralistic pronouncements.¹

The dramatist was born on October 17, 1915 to Isadore and Augusta Miller, a conventional, well-to-do Jewish couple. The Millers were a newly prosperous family in a then-fashionable part of Harlem. Miller's mother was an avid reader and his father a barely literate immigrant coat manufacturer. Miller vividly remembers his boyhood in the Twenties, before the Depression hurled the family into economic distress. After working for two years in an auto parts warehouse to earn his tuition, he went off to the University of Michigan, where, during the years of the Spanish Civil War and the rise of fascism, he discovered his vocation as a playwright and formed the political outlook that, two decades later, was to bring him into courageous and ultimately victorious confrontation with the House Un-American Activities Committee.

As a young man, he was impressed by Shakespeare, Bertolt Brecht, George Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill, Jean Giraudoux, Jean Anouilh, Sidney Howard and others. He attributes his chief literary obligation to Henrik Ibsen.

He has won the Pulitzer Prize, The New York Drama Critics Award, the Antoinette Perry Award and many more. When, some 20 years ago, he lent his prestige and energy to the international presidency of PEN, an organization of playwrights, poets, essayists and novelists, Miller inaugurated the present era of concern for human rights, becoming an honored citizen of the world for his efforts on behalf of the victims of repression by regimes of both the right and left.

Arthur Miller is the author of *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, *A View from the Bridge*, *After the Fall*, *Incident at Vichy*, *Playing for Time*, *The Price*, *The American Clock* and other plays that successfully continue to hold the stage throughout the world. Through his work and wide-ranging associations, Arthur Miller's life has been a dramatic one that has influenced much of our national debate for the last four decades.

THEMES

The *Last Yankee* is one of Arthur Miller's most recent plays, written in 1992 and premiered in both New York and London during January of the following year. As has been the case with most all the author's work for a decade, *The Last Yankee* was damned with faint praise by American critics and applauded as a "miniature masterpiece" by their British counterparts. It is ironic that an artist who has spent the better part of his career investigating the nation's collective psyche "poking and prodding at the myths we've erected around the American Dream" should find himself so under-appreciated in his own country. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Americans still believe that

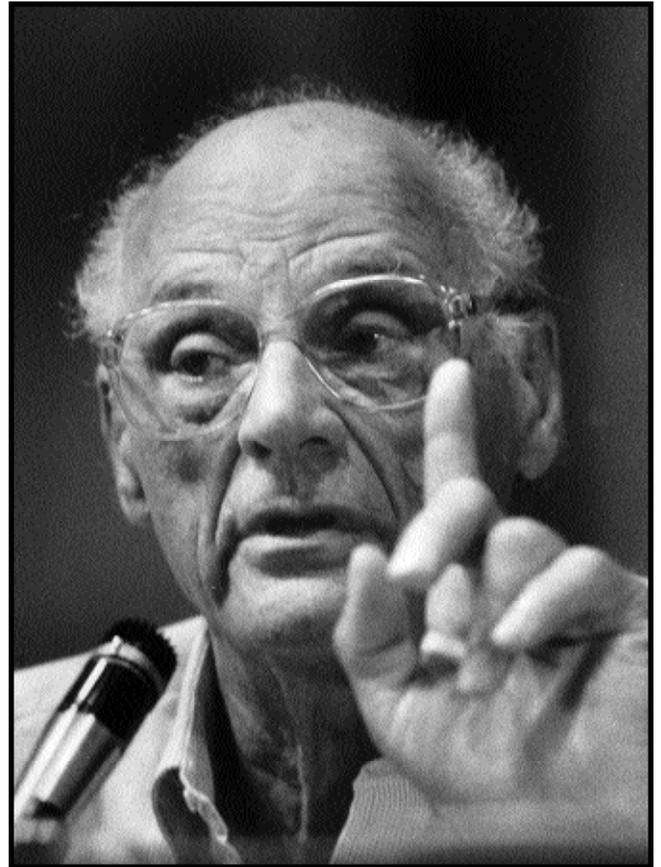
lost innocence can somehow be reclaimed and that happiness is a national birthright owed us by a beneficent cosmos.

Miller's work offers a stern critique of American values mixed with a sense of hope that something better may occur somewhere down the line. *The Last Yankee* is a return to many of Miller's favorite themes, revisited from the vantage point of his seventy-odd years: the souring of the American Dream, the pressures of living in a hopelessly materialistic world and the pernicious effects of self-delusion.

CHARACTERIZATION

Miller believes that society makes such heavy demands on individuals that they have to give up their individuality. Sometimes this conflict, as in *The Last Yankee*, manifests itself in mental breakdowns and neuroses. In this play, the female characters are obsessed with retrieving a lost identity; they are either displaced and no longer can find themselves or are on the verge of not being able to.

When young, we live on potential and dreams and unrealistically high expectations. As we mature we somehow must accommodate reality and the fact that we have a "history." We begin to recognize our separateness, our "apart-ness." Alienation often results with this recognition. Because of this total separateness only the individual can take responsibility for what he/she is in life. Acceptance of this condition brings strength and seems more tragic because the character is self-aware.



DRAMATIC TENSION

Miller states that tragedy results when the protagonist tries to attain honor by putting on a mask and acting for the public instead of being what one really is and doing what one does best. But there is a price to pay for putting on the mask and the price is the loss of something. Mask and reality identify the conflict, the friction, the opposition between what the individual is and what the individual feels he/she must be. Tragedy may be considered as a fundamental condition of being. Miller writes about the conflict between self-determinism and social

responsibility. His vision is optimistic in that it affirms life by showing the person's possibilities within one's limitations and sometimes within the dramatizations of one's failures. His interest is in capturing the dilemmas and visceral sense of this thing we call existence.

**In Latin America and Great Britain, anybody from the U.S. is considered a “Yankee,”
In the U.S., it’s anyone from New England,
In New England, it’s anyone from Maine,
And in Maine, it’s anyone who eats pie for breakfast.**

THE YANKEE CHARACTER

Leroy Hamilton is the “Last Yankee” of this play. As defined by the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a Yankee is simply a citizen of a New England state (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut). The term “Yankee” is more often associated with such characteristics as shrewdness, thrift, ingenuity, conservatism and stubbornness.

The Yankee character had its roots in the Puritanism of the early New Englanders. They stressed that leaders should have the qualities of wisdom, piety, courage and industry. Puritans believed in the firm hand of authority and a structuring of life, which would develop steady and resolute personalities. This structure included the pursuit of useful work, because by working a man serves his community and God. Through work, Puritans found an outlet for their emotions denied expression elsewhere by their strict moral code.

A defensive independence, avarice tempered with regard for the public good and yearning for hardheaded rationalism was firmly entrenched in the New Englander by 1765. But the Yankee was a much freer man than his Puritan progenitor, for he could acknowledge to himself and the world more of what he was. Thus, Leroy isn’t ashamed to tell John that he’s a carpenter; after all, America used to value the honest, hard-working craftsman. But class tension emerges and he becomes angry when he feels that John is making assumptions that aren’t correct. Still, the Yankee repression and conservatism emerges when neither man can understand or express his emotions about his wife’s mental state and his own.

The following are two popular theories of the origin of the word Yankee:

The word “Yankee” may have originated in Maine. “Yankee” has long been said to be the Indians’ approximation of *English* (i.e., Englishmen). However, we like to forget the French influence on Maine before any Englishmen arrived. We should, rather, notice that the first Englishmen who did come to Maine were first identified to the Indians by the French as *les anglais*. It is far more logical to develop “Yankee” from *Anglais* than from English. A Yankee was thus an early English visitor to Maine as pronounced by an Indian trying to say *Anglais*.³

Another theory surmises that the word Yankee comes from the Dutch term *Jan Kees* (the *J* in Dutch being pronounced like a *Y*), which means “Johnny Cheese”: a patronizing name the English gave the Dutch since the Dutch could not live without their cheese. It is important to remember that New York was once New Amsterdam, a Dutch colony. The term was commonly used before the Revolutionary War and stood primarily for those who were from the New England and New York regions.⁴

In this day and age, the term has retained a proud place among all similar terms now in disrepute. Everyone is careful to avoid pejorative labels or stereotypes of various communities, genders and ethnic groups, but New Englanders take no offense whatever in being called “Yankees.”

Over the years many writers have characterized and stereotyped the “Yankee” in books, film, plays and television. Here are just a few examples of the “Yankee” that have become part of our popular culture.

Bachelor, Irving – *Eben Holder*

Benet, Stephen Vincent – *The Devil and Daniel Webster*

Dodge, Marshall – *Bert and I* (audio tapes)

Gould, John – *Maine Lingo: Boiled Owls, Billdads, and Wazzats*

Halburton, Thomas Chandler – *The Clockmaker* featuring the

unflattering stereotype SamSlick of Slickville

Maclachlan, Patricia. – *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *Skylark*

Marquand, John P. – *The Late George Apley*

O’Neill Eugene – *Desire Under the Elms*

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Musicals: *Carousel* and *State Fair*

Taylor, Phoebe Atwood – *The Asey Mayo Murder Mysteries*

Clemens, Samuel – *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*

Westcott, Edward Noyes – *David Harum*

Wilder, Thornton – *Our Town*

Wharton, Edith – *Ethan Frome*

The doctor’s character in *Murder, She Wrote* starring

Angela Lansbury

Walter Brennan’s character in the movie *Northwest Passage*

Percy Kilbride’s character as Pa Kettle in the movies

Ma and Pa Kettle

WOMEN AND DEPRESSION

By Sally R. Gass

Some of the earliest research in depression indicates that across cultures the depressed population is predominately comprised of women. A leading authority in the field of depression, Myra Weissman, and her colleagues conducted research that indicates women have a 20-26% lifetime risk for depression and a 6% hospitalization rate. This compares with men who have only an 8-12% lifetime risk and a 3% hospitalization rate.⁷

Perhaps the simplest definition of depression is that of Harvard Medical School psychiatrist, Ned Gasseem. He says it is "misery requiring treatment."⁸ Depressed people are not merely unhappy but profoundly miserable. Some of their symptoms include:

- change in appetite (increase or decrease)
- weight loss or gain
- loss of interest in activities normally enjoyed
- feelings of hopelessness or despair
- sleep disturbances (sleeping more or less)
- loss of energy or general fatigue
- feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- indecisiveness
- inability to concentrate
- recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.⁹

There is strong evidence that depression is somehow related to changes in chemicals situated in the brain, called neurotransmitters, whose function is to help pass messages from one nerve cell to another. The two neurotransmitters most often implicated are serotonin and norepinephrine. Many anti-depressant drugs such as trazodone, trimipramine and desipramine help balance these neurotransmitters. Other depressions are deemed clinical or psychological and are caused by childhood trauma or separation. Sigmund Freud, the psychiatric pioneer, believed that depression occurred when the "superego" (the internalization of parental and societal rules) "beat up on" the "ego" (the conscious mind), causing a sense of guilt.

Lois Frankel believes that in women, anger and depression are linked. She reports that women patients often make the claim that they feel powerless and out of control in their lives.

Many women simply cannot distinguish between anger and other feelings because they've never been permitted to express their anger.... Anger turned inward, a frequently feminine phenomenon, creates depression. Each time we deny our feelings, blame ourselves, or make excuses for the inappropriate behaviors of others, we turn our anger on ourselves.¹⁰

In the play, Patricia is angry, but she is learning to express it.

Struggling with the responsibility of seven children and a pile of bills, she confronts Leroy with his under-achievement and stoicism about life. Her anger also extends to the community and their prejudicial treatment of her Swedish family. There is disappointment and loss over her unrealized expectations, and perhaps genetic predisposition to depression; the suicide of her two brothers may indicate the latter. On the other hand, Karen is so far down that she doesn't realize her anger. The emotional neglect of her husband and mother have left her bereft of most feelings and it will take time for her to recognize her hostility.

In her book, *Silencing the Self*, Dana Crowley Jack feels that depressed women have suffered a "loss of self."¹¹ She postulates that the woman's role in a male-dominated society has been as a suppressed group. They have been entwined with men in intimate and intense relationships creating the family and home. A loss of self may result when women conform to the positions of wives/mothers. Ms. Jack questions whether this loss contributes to their vulnerability to depression.

Clearly, Karen has been dominated by her husband; though she possesses all the creature comforts of life, she lacks self-esteem or a sense of self. John has been an excellent provider but emotionally negligent and uncaring; he is even ashamed of his wife when she indulges in her one remaining passion— tap dancing. Patricia, too, lost her self in her role as childbearer/nurturer, but she is regaining it. In the act of denying her medications, she is striking back at the institution which kept her "doped up" and asserting her independence over doctors. In going home with Leroy, she is ready to spar with him, while supporting him, his old Chevy and his banjo picking. "Between the banjo and that car I've certainly got a whole lot to look forward to," Patricia says at the conclusion of the play. Yet we cheer her—her sense of humor and her courage to face life and find her "self" in it.

SURVIVAL AS HEROISM

By Sally R. Gass

Leroy and Patricia are bedrock, aspiring not to greatness but to other gratification...successful parenthood, decent children, and a decent house and a decent car...and above all, of course, some financial security...But a great many, in fact, have grown ill with what would once have been called a sickness of the soul." ⁵

Patricia Hamilton, a carpenter's wife, is a sufferer of depression. She knows that more Americans are in hospitals for depression than any other ailment. Though she possesses a high degree of objectivity and a great deal of knowledge about her illness, she has been unable to free herself from it for 20 years. She is a common woman with uncommon expectations, waiting for her ship to come in.

For Miller, stature is a necessary requisite of heroism. However, he does not define stature in terms of social status, or even mental or

moral superiority. Miller deals with the common man, such as Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* or Eddie Carbone in *A View from the Bridge*. He views a hero or heroine in terms of his/her intensities, will to break through the boundaries imposed by society. In his *Introduction to Collected Plays*, he writes: "So long as the hero may be said to have alternatives of a magnitude to have materially changed the course of his life, it seems to me in that respect at least, he cannot be debarred from the heroic role."

Patricia has very few good alternatives. She can: commit suicide, leave Leroy and her children, continue to depend on drugs, or change—and survive. When Patricia stops her medications and faces the prospect of living one day at a time, she assumes a "changed" role. For Miller, that action is heroic.

ARTHUR MILLER CHRONOLOGY

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|---------|---|------|---|
| 1915 | • Arthur Miller born October 17 | | |
| 1920-28 | • Attends public school in Harlem | | |
| 1929 | • Family moves to East Third Street in Brooklyn | | |
| 1932 | • Graduates from Abraham Lincoln High School | | |
| 1932-34 | • Works at various laborer jobs | 1956 | • Married Marilyn Monroe |
| 1934-35 | • Enrolls as a student in journalism at The University of Michigan | 1957 | • <i>Arthur Miller's Collected Plays</i> |
| | • Becomes a reporter and night editor for the student newspaper, <i>The Michigan Daily</i> | | • Charged with contempt of Congress, tried and convicted. |
| 1936 | • Writes first play, <i>No Villain</i> , in six days | 1958 | • Elected to The National Institute of Arts and Letters |
| | • Receives Hopwood Award in Drama | | • Contempt conviction overturned |
| 1936 | • Changes major to English | 1959 | • Receives Gold Medal for Drama from The National Institute of Arts and Letters |
| 1937 | • <i>They too Arise</i> – This play receives \$1250 from Bureau of New Plays | 1961 | • <i>The Misfits</i> |
| | • New play Honors at Dawn receives a Hopwood Award in Drama | 1963 | • <i>Jane's Blanket</i> , a children's book |
| 1938 | • The Great Disobedience | 1964 | • <i>After the Fall</i> and <i>Incident at Vichy</i> premiere |
| 1938-43 | • Joins the Federal Theatre Project in New York City | 1965 | • Elected International President of P.E.N., an organization of playwrights, poets, essayists and novelists |
| | • Writes radio plays for CBS and NBC | 1967 | • <i>I Don't Need You Any More</i> , a collection of short stories |
| 1944 | • Tours army camps for material: <i>The Story of G. I. Joe</i> , <i>Situation Normal</i> , <i>The Man Who Had All the Luck</i> | 1968 | • <i>The Price</i> |
| 1945 | • Focus | 1971 | • <i>The Portable Arthur Miller</i> |
| 1947 | • <i>All My Sons</i> – Receives New York Drama Critics Award and Donaldson Award | 1972 | • <i>The Creation of the World and Other Business</i> |
| 1949 | • <i>Death of a Salesman</i> premieres – Receives New York Drama Critics Award, the Pulitzer Prize, Antoinette Perry Award, Theater Club Award and Donaldson Award among others | 1973 | • <i>The Archbishop's Ceiling</i> |
| 1950 | • Adapts Ibsen's <i>An Enemy of the People</i> | 1978 | • <i>Theater Essays of Arthur Miller</i> |
| 1953 | • <i>The Crucible</i> – Receives Antoinette Perry Award | 1980 | • <i>The American Clock</i> and <i>Playing for Time</i> |
| 1955 | • <i>A View From the Bridge</i> and <i>A Memory of Two Mondays</i> premiere | 1982 | • <i>Elegy for a Lady</i> |
| | • Subpoenaed to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee and queried about his political | 1983 | • <i>Some Kind of Love Story</i> |
| | | 1987 | • <i>Timebends: a Life</i> , an autobiography |
| | | 1990 | • <i>Danger</i> and <i>Memory!: I Can't Remember Anything, Clara</i> (one-act plays) |
| | | 1991 | • <i>Everybody Wins</i> |
| | | 1994 | • <i>The Ride Down Mount Morgan</i> and <i>The Last Yankee</i> |
| | | | • <i>Broken Glass</i> |

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Leroy is a descendant of Alexander Hamilton, but, by choice, has very little contact with his famous family. Leroy states his father had little respect for their ancestor and his philosophies.

Hamilton was the foremost champion of a strong central government for the new United States. He was an apologist for the aristocracy. At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, he presented his own idea of what the national government should be. His model was the England of George III: a government of three departments (i.e. legislative, executive and judicial). The legislature would consist of a lower house elected for three years by free male citizens and of a senate chosen indirectly by electors for life. The president, who also would hold office for life and was to be selected by a double set of electors, would have absolute veto over the legislature. This plan was essentially monarchical and had little impact on the convention delegates.

Hamilton was the first Secretary of the Treasury in George Washington's administration. He firmly established the credit of the nation by persuading Congress to pay at full face value all public debts incurred during the Revolutionary War. Taxes or duties on goods brought into the United States were imposed to provide money to pay the debts and run the government. Hamilton's taxes included a tax on whiskey made in this country. New England farmers disliked this tax and many participated in the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. Alexander Hamilton accompanied the Federal troops, which put down this rebellion.

Hamilton proposed a mint and a bank supported by the government. Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, believed this proposal was unconstitutional. Hamilton defended the constitutionality of the bank by using the "doctrine of implied power" and the Supreme Court adopted Hamilton's policy. Out of this dispute grew the first two national political parties; the Federalist and the Democratic-Republican.

Hamilton had difficulties, too, with John Adams, our second president. Because Adams purged his cabinet of "Hamiltonian influences," in 1800, Alexander wrote a pamphlet, "The Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States," which attacked Adams personally. This act caused a schism in the Federalist party.

Finally, in 1791 Aaron Burr was elected to the United States Senate, defeating Alexander Hamilton's father-in-law, General Philip Schuyler. Burr ran with Thomas Jefferson for the presidency of the United States both in 1796 and 1800. Burr was really the Democratic-Republican Party's choice for Vice-President, but the way the original Constitution was worded, both men were technically running for the first office. Burr failed to gain either office in 1796, but in 1800 he tied with Jefferson. The U. S. House of Representative had to take 36 ballots to choose Jefferson over Burr. Alexander Hamilton used his influence to help determine the final outcome. After that, supporters of Jefferson never quite trusted Burr. Vice-President Burr ran for governor of New York in 1804 but lost. Hamilton had again successfully opposed him. Hamilton made disparaging remarks about Aaron Burr, his long-time political enemy whom he called "despicable." Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel, and during this "dance of death," Burr's bullet found its mark. Hamilton fell and died.

—*The Encyclopædia Britannica*



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Notes

1. Moss, back cover.
2. Moss, p.3.
3. Gould, p. 325.
4. Shipley, p. 396.
5. Miller, Arthur. *The Last Yankee* and an Essay About Theatre Language, p. 92.
6. Miller, Collected Plays p. 32.
7. Frankel, p. 3.
8. Hales, p. 19.
9. Hales, p. 20.
10. Frankel, p. 15,17.
11. Jack, p.21.