



Paul Rogers exuding querulous irritation.

PHOTOGRAPH DOUGLAS JEFFERY

Miller the shrink

Nicholas de Jongh

ARTHUR Miller has been busy observing the arts and tricks of memory from the hazy porthole of old age. His double bill *Danger: Memory!*, emerging from this scrutiny and now receiving its European premiere at Hampstead Theatre, shows up two examples of elderly minds protecting themselves from the pain of clear and true recall. Miller in his own words is dramatising procedure and the moment when "a buried layer of experience suddenly surges upwards... and flashes news from below." Yet no real dramatic flashes, no fresh illuminations, are sparked from this damp-squibbed double bill which reveals Miller playing the amateur psychiatrist.

The second play, *Clara*, alone exemplifies Miller's theory while presenting Albert Kroll's struggle, in the first blast of bereavement, to recollect the name of the young man his murdered daughter Clara brought home on a visit. The young man, it almost instantly emerges from Kroll's recollection, had already served time for murder and we are there-

fore to assume that if he remembers the fellow's name an arrest can be made.

A glib and phoney sequence of psychoanalysis is initiated by a delving detective, each recollection conveniently inspiring another clue to the man's name and credentials. Lightly buried memories are unearthed, revealing Clara as a lapsed lesbian and Kroll as a man who would prefer his daughter making love to a murderer than another woman, until the father's own account of his wartime bravery induces his memory to unearth the final clues.

But there is no convincing connection between his inability to remember the crucial name and the nature of his repressed memories. We may perhaps deduce that Kroll believes his own reckless bravery in war has been inherited by his daughter and that her lesbianism is even a symptom of his own failure as a father. Indeed the play is so adorned with constant vignettes of Albert's derelictions and gulls, that any diagnosis is possible.

The first play, *I Can't Remember Anything*, by contrast deals with an old widow, Leonora, who manages to remember virtually nothing at

all. The distant past and the most recent conversation are forgotten, far off things. But Miller never reveals whether these failures are different in kind, either tactics to keep painful memory at bay or to avoid present reality. That reality is represented by the plea from her old friend, Leo, to moderate the frequency of her visits to him. And it is a message which she seems quite incapable of comprehending.

In the space of 40 minutes the play manages to be both allusive, desultory and evasive. Leonora's defective memory and nonchalant aimlessness could be either a symptom of senility or unhappiness, but Miller neither explains or illuminates.

Jack Gold's production, with Sue Plummer's spacious evocation of New England, is hampered by Betsy Blair, looking 22 years too young to be Leonora and behaving with misplaced sprightliness, while Paul Rogers exudes only querulous irritation. In the second play, Paul Rogers, all wry-faced, manages manfully and movingly to run a gamut from bewilderment to revelatory disgust, while John Bennett counterpoints this emotional display with elegant displays of cynicism.

Nicholas De Jongh *Danger: Memory!*

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