Chapter 2: The influence of American society since 1900 and of Miller's conceptual framework, on his dramas

"I write out of life as I know it, rather than construct plays out of a theatrical imagination" (Miller in a letter in 1949, Welland: 17).

" 'I still feel kind of temporary about myself,' Willy Loman says to his brother Ben. I smiled as I wrote the line in the spring of 1948, when it had not yet occurred to me that it summed up my own condition then and throughout my life. The here and now was always melting before the head of a dream coming toward me or its tail going away (Miller Timebends: 69).

2.1 Introduction

When one examines literary works, it is consequential to acknowledge the impact that the author's society and personal experiences have on his work, as has been argued in Chapter 1.4, The impact of a changing society on the artist, particularly the tragic playwright and his works. An author's home environment, education, religious and political beliefs are all facets of his personality and do colour, to some extent at least, his works. Some authors are very autobiographical, and others draw more from their imaginations, beliefs and encounters when creating characters and incidents. Miller endorses the influence of an author's frame of reference when he remarks that, "The writer who wants to describe life... must describe his own experiences... " (Carson: 2). All people are affected by their environment and social circumstances: these mould ideas and beliefs and thus affect work and writing. Tyson (1994: 3) also highlights the idea that "literary works are concerned, first and foremost, with human experience". This autobiographical element is also evident in the work of James Joyce, who endorses the Aristotelian approach that the artist/ writer uses experiences of real life as the material of art, which is then transformed in his artistic faculty/ soul to immortal art.

The autobiographical elements in Miller's dramas have received both positive and negative criticism. Carson (3) employs the metaphor of Miller's being a painter who "works always from the same model. He does not so much create other people in his plays as divide himself up into a number of personae." This statement appears valid when one identifies the similarities between Miller and the main characters in his tragedies. They often reflect Miller at some stage in his mental development, or else they reflect people (such as Marilyn Monroe in After the Fall) with whom he has been

in close contact. Some critics experience this personal expression as giving the plays "a heightened intensity and psychological reality" (Carson: 3), whereas others view it as revealing an ineptitude [of Miller] to penetrate the lives of characters who are different from himself. Surely this autobiographical nature of his dramas, forms Miller's personal style, and is not necessarily a shortcoming. Miller's drawing material from his own experience gives his dramas a sense of realism and authenticity and allows for the expression of his philosophy of life.

Not only does Miller draw from his own experience, but he also draws upon documentary material, where he uses ideas from others' stories or novels or history, internalises and personalises them, and composes new dramas. The Crucible is one such example: Miller bases the drama on the Salem witch-hunt of the seventeenth century. Yet even in these cases, the dramas are affected by Miller's personal frame of reference, philosophy and reasoning. He changes some of the facts, such as Abigail's age (she is seventeen in the drama, and twelve in reality) in order to highlight the question of individual moral choice and self-knowledge in the character of John Proctor (Carson: 63).

Miller admits in his autobiography, Timebends (223), that "no work of any interest has a single source, any more than a person psychologically exists in any one place at any one time". His experiences and thoughts have found expression in the characters he has created and, although some of Miller's dramas have been dismal failures, others, such as Death of a Salesman, have had consistent world-wide success.

As the beliefs and political structures of society change, so do the outlook of writers who live in that society. This can be seen even during the lifetime of Miller. As his perceived values change, Miller's writings question different issues and have different focuses, intentions and meanings. With changes in the value systems of society, value judgements with regard to literature change. The criteria used to determine whether or not a drama is tragic could thus be adapted to accommodate the value systems of modern society.

I do not propose that the only way to study Miller's dramas is through an examination of his historicity, although this does offer the reader deeper insights into the works. Instead, I propose that if Miller's dramas have been influenced by events, ideologies and Miller's upbringing, then we can conclude that literature is affected by a changing society, so the criteria for judging literature, and tragic drama in particular, could be affected by a changing society as well.

Welland (17) warns that in highlighting the autobiographical connections in an author's works, one should not "encourage the scholar into arid grubbing after the sources of incidents in plays or the original on which this or that character is based." This chapter will rather expose the general connections between Miller's life and works, examining how Miller's intellectual and social development is manifest in his dramas.

2.2 The influence of Miller's educational experience and early life on his works

During the early years of Miller's schooling, when he attended Madison High School in the 1920's, his academic achievements were not a priority. His physical and athletic interests dominated his life. He often jogged the three miles to school in order to keep in shape (Schleuter: 3). This value system, where the physical is more important than the mind and contentment, is synonymous with that of the Loman brothers in Death of a Salesman. It appears that Miller used his own memories as a pupil as the basis on which to construct the values of the brothers (Schleuter: 2).

At the beginning of Death of a Salesman, we discover that Biff is a thirty-four-year old man who works as a "farmhand" (Salesman: 11). Willy Loman criticises Biff's laziness because he makes so little money. A few sentences later, however, Willy contradicts himself by saying that Biff is "not lazy" because he recalls Biff's popularity as "a young man with such - personal attractiveness" and how the other children in school "used to follow [Biff] around" (Salesman: 11). The physical - appearance - is used as the value system by which to judge Biff and Happy. Miller emphasises this when he describes the two boys in terms of attractiveness. Biff is "well-built"; Happy is "tall, powerfully made. Sexuality is like a visible colour on him." (Salesman: 14), yet both men are "lost" and "confused". Although they discuss this and start to dream, they eventually return to the tangible and physical, when they describe the "gorgeous creatures" (Salesman: 18) they had dated. When discussing jobs and contentment, Biff proposes an idea to Happy: "...maybe we could buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles. Men built like we are should be working out in the open" (Salesman:

17). Biff also implies in the Requiem, that the meaning of life is found in physical labour, when he says that Willy was far happier when finishing the cellar and laying the stoop, than in all the sales he ever made. The tangible, physical and importance of appearance, is an early mind-set of Miller's, which is reflected in the two boys.

These values are acquired from Willy, who thinks that the secret to success is in being "well-liked" (Salesman: 23). Willy's warped values are shown when he overlooks the fact that Biff stole a ball for practise. Instead, he says that Biff's coach will "probably congratulate [him] on [his] initiative" (Salesman: 23). Physical appearance and surface achievement are more important to Willy than moral values.

This possibly reflects Miller's experience of school, as he was indifferent to school-work (Schleuter: 3). Owing to his lack of scholastic achievement, Miller was unable to attend university when he graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School in 1932, so he worked for his father in his attempts to establish another garment firm (Schleuter: 3). There are connections between this part of Miller's life, and that of the life of Victor in The Price.

Victor sacrifices his dreams by giving up college (Miller was unable to attend college at first) and becoming a policeman when his father suffers financial ruin (Miller helped his father during the Depression by delivering rolls and bread for a neighbourhood bakery (Schleuter: 2)). Victor's brother, Walter reacts selfishly instead and pursues a medical career. Walter says to Victor, "I told you then that I was going to finish my schooling come hell or high water, and I advised you to do the same. In fact, I warned

you not to allow him to strangle your life" (Price: 90). Victor reacts responsibly: "Who the hell was supposed to keep him alive, Walter?" (Price: 91). This is a similar reaction to Miller's when he worked for his father, according to Nelson (1970: 19). "Torn between his commitment to his father and his increasing distaste for his job [at his father's garment factory, Miller] stuck it out for a few months before finally striking out on his own". The play may be a dramatisation of Miller's divided feeling, with Victor embodying his sense of responsibility, and Walter his hopes and dreams, which he followed.

The themes of guilt, moral debt and choices (Schleuter: 109), which are evident in this drama, are also evident in other earlier plays, such as All My Sons, where Joe Keller ships out defective aeroplane parts and is thus directly responsible for the death of twenty-one flyers. Keller admits no responsibility for it, nor does he seem to be burdened with guilt. He ultimately has to confront his actions.

In his autobiography, Timebends (114), Miller comments on the father-son collisions, which resulted from the Great Depression. He notices that there were "many male writers [who] had fathers who had actually failed or whom the sons had perceived as failures. He lists examples, including Fitzgerald and Hemingway. In Miller's own work, the father-son relationship is first depicted in The Man who had all the Luck, where Patterson Beeves is determined that his son, Amos, will not fail as he has done. The play "was to move me inch by inch toward my first open awareness of father-son and brother-brother conflict," Miller observes (Timebends: 90). From this, the father-son relationships in All my Sons and Death of a Salesman were born (Carson: 38).

Returning to The Price, Miller, by his own admission in Timebends, creates Gregory Solomon, the used furniture dealer in The Price from people that he had known. "Boris's Russian-Yiddish accent and his plastic attitude towards language were among my sources for Gregory Solomon... the true model for the character was quite a different man" (Timebends: 14). Miller does not create new characters entirely from his imagination, but instead draws on his own experience of people to form his characters.

Although not then attending a University, Miller's attitudes towards literature became more positive and enquiring when he started reading a Russian novel, Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov. Schleuter (3) suggests that this novel was Miller's "...awakening to the power of literature," and the experience is simulated by Bert's experience when he, in A Memory of Two Mondays, reads Tolstoy's War and Peace on the subway. It has been alleged that Miller's idea to write about a salesman originates from his first working experiences. Schleuter (3) explains that "he came to hate the coat business, especially the almost inhuman treatment of salesmen by the brusque, arrogant, often crude buyers." Miller attempted to write a short story, In Memoriam, in which he sympathises with the life of a salesman. This story was simply filed away.

These early experiences later provided the basis for Death of a Salesman:

> ...one evening [in 1948] Miller began thinking about a salesman he had known when he worked for his father. Gradually he found his imagination flooded by images of this man. He worked feverishly through the night, and in the morning had finished two thirds of a play which he called The Inside of His Head (Carson: 12).

This drama was reworked and became known as Death of a Salesman, which was first performed in January 1949, and which ran for 742 performances on Broadway (Carson: 12).

After working for his father, Miller moved on to an auto-parts warehouse in Manhattan in 1932, as Bert does in A Memory of Two Mondays. There he is able to save money in order to reapply for college (Berkowitz: 286). When Miller was accepted at the University of Michigan in 1934, he was exposed to a variety of ideas and "...developed a strong aversion to any institution - economic, political, academic, or theological - that claims sole possession of the truth" (Schleuter: 4). He concedes that, although the University was not a leftist institution, it "did earn its reputation for democratic attitudes... and it was one of the few universities in the thirties where Marxism as such was actually discussed in the classrooms" (Timebends: 97). Years later, Miller criticises Marxism as an idol that tells people "exactly what to believe" and keeps them as "dependent children" (Timebends: 259). Miller's aversion to institutions is reflected in his drama Honours at Dawn, in which a young man, Max Zabriskie, views his brother's university as a "citadel of idealism" until he realises the truth and "sees corruption in many areas of university life" (Nelson: 26). He leaves the university and participates in another strike, fully understanding its meaning, but having gained a sense of social responsibility and personal integrity (Nelson: 26).

Miller was always searching for the truth: truth, and the different perceptions of truth, are dealt with by Miller in After the Fall, where Quentin attempts to rationalise the truth for himself and to work out how much responsibility he has to accept. The watchtower of a concentration camp, which is in the background of After the Fall,

recalls the horror of the Second World War concentration camps and the idea that, since the concentration camp, no-one can be innocent - humanity has been corrupted. There is no absolute truth. The watchtower also symbolises judgement - Quentin has to judge or measure his actions and worth. He has to judge his moral worth and come to terms with his actions, values and conscience and decide to what extent he will accept responsibility and guilt for his and others' actions, and to what extent he will reject responsibility (Schleuter: 91). By the end of the drama, Quentin has developed enough to "reject individual obsession, accept complicity, and once again embrace personal choice" (Schleuter: 101). Similarly, Miller has to come to terms with the knowledge of the horrors that the concentration camps brought to the Jews, and with his own concept of social responsibility. He clearly expresses this concept in An Enemy of the People and A View from the Bridge.

Miller uses personal experience, but universalises it in his dramas. Carson (8) comments regarding After the Fall: "Quentin is partly Arthur Miller painfully reviewing incidents in his own mental and emotional development [for example, characteristics of Miller's first two wives are portrayed in Louise and Maggie], but he is also Everyman looking for a way to survive with dignity in the modern world." Survival in the modern world, where a man has to discover the truth within himself, for himself and not depend on institutions of beliefs to dictate the truth, is a recurrent theme.

As a result of his aversion to any institution that claims to embody the absolute truth, Miller's writing style expresses a cynical attitude towards capitalism, Puritanism and the American political system. For example, Capitalism and the American political system "are institutions which, when they pretend to represent the truth, become

forces of destruction for several of Miller's heroes" (Schleuter: 4). The destructive force of capitalism is predominant in Death of a Salesman, as Willy Loman is seen as a failure because he cannot provide materially for his family. Miller believed, as Carson (5) explains, "...that there was a need for change and progress in society." He thus took upon himself the responsibility of making people aware of problems in society and of their own accountability in society.

Perhaps one reason why Miller was opposed to Capitalism, was because he had seen it fail during the Great Depression. Tyson (63) comments that Death of a Salesman can be read in two ways: "as a psychological drama or as a Marxist critique of capitalist culture".

A significant influence on Miller's social conscience, as well as his playwriting skills, was the works of the Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen. Professor Kenneth Rowe, the lecturer for a playwriting course which Miller attended, "...particularly admired Ibsen's emphasis on social problems and the way in which the playwright focused on the questions of moral values, integrity and will underlying these problems" (Carson: 4). Miller, similarly, admired these questions and explored them in his dramas. Miller's first play, No Villain, which won the Hopwood Award, was probably inspired by Miller's working experiences with his father, since it deals with the conflict between Arnold Simon, a socialist with a university education, and his father, who owns a garment-making factory (Schleuter: 4). Social issues are examined in this drama. The following year, 1937, Miller's drama Honours at Dawn, won him the Hopwood award again. This play is set during the Depression and deals with the conflicts

within the Zabriski family. Once again, capitalism is viewed as a destructive force and unionism as the better system.

The causes of Miller's protagonists in the dramas written while he was in college, are social or political, reflecting his own social and political concerns while he was at university: communism, unionism and socialism. Later, Miller continues to be moralistic in his dramas, such as his questioning of moral values in the father-son relationships explored in The Price and Death of a Salesman. Here, sons are influenced by their fathers, but as individuals, they eventually have to make their own choices and accept responsibility for them.

In Incident at Vichy, Miller examines moral accountability, and explores how everyone has to be held morally accountable to a certain degree. Schleuter (102) says:

> The vision of Miller's play extends to a judgement of human nature, not as helpless occupant of an arbitrary world in which there is nothing to be done, but as heir to a moral depravity that demands action and accountability from everyone. No one in Miller's sorry group of oppressors and oppressed, escapes blame: all are participants in a human shame incapable of being collectively or individually denied.

Here Miller judges all of humanity and calls for accountability in each one of us. His social conscience, first awakened through studying Ibsen, permeates all of his dramas. In Timebends (93), Miller states that he was convinced that "art ought to be of use in changing society".

Miller's art, his dramas, are of use in a changing society. In them he challenges people to take a moral stand and to be socially responsible. This perception towards life developed from his personal experiences. Early life experiences are clearly reflected in his dramas. His childhood perception of life through appearances and the physical is conveyed in the attitude of Biff in Death of a Salesman. Similarly, Miller's early hatred for his work in his father's garment factory, and the choice he had to make by leaving it, is evident in the choices Walter and Victor make in The Price. Death of a Salesman, too, draws on this early experience.

Miller models characters on people he has known: Solomon in the Price, and Maggie and Louise in After the Fall are isolated examples of this. Finally, Miller's college experiences opened him to socialist ideologies, which led him to a search for the truth (as it does Quentin in After the Fall) and to distrust any system that claims to embody the absolute truth. Capitalism and the American political system are thus both criticised in Death of a Salesman. Finally, Miller's interest in socialist ideologies led him to write dramas in which he challenges the audience to become socially responsible.

2.3 Miller's Jewishness as an influence on his writing

Miller's Jewishness is "...not easy to define," Welland (17) confesses, "but certainly crucial to his work." Although he was not brought up as an Orthodox Jew, his parents could speak Yiddish and the family observed Jewish customs (Carson: 4).

In Timebends (36), Miller recalls with great fondness his experiences with his great-grandfather: "It was a kind of waking dream". They went to the synagogue, with his mother watching from the balcony, and the men would pray and read Hebrew. He did not understand much then, but enjoyed his mother's pride in his being there, and enjoyed the mystery and stature of being with the men (when he was four or five years old), and having his great- grandfather instruct him.

Miller has a few negative memories as well: he recalls rejection when he was working at the auto-parts warehouse in Manhattan. Although no-one said anything, he realised that there was a general feeling of dislike for him because he was a Jew. He realised that "the fear of a Jew is first of all a fear of his intelligence... it is the fear, too, of people who appear not to live by one's own rules" (Timebends: 217). Once the others realised that he was not particularly intelligent, they seemed to accept his Jewishness, but Miller calls this a "mask of acceptance" (Timebends: 218).

Miller again experienced Anti-Semitism when he came to marry Mary Slattery, as he was Jewish and she Catholic. Miller felt classified with the "Moslems [and] Heathen"

(Timebends: 74) when meeting the Slattery family before the wedding. He was relieved when Mary's relatives who were the same age as they talked to them and made him feel accepted "as though we were all citizens of the same nation" (Timebends: 74).

Miller's Jewishness is evident in his drama, Incident at Vichy. Here, Miller deals with the Jewish experience in the Second World War, where Jews were abducted and then sent to the concentration camps upon proof of their Jewishness. The moral lesson of the play is that everyone is responsible for what has happened - even those who were silent, such as Ferrand, who knew about the camps, yet did not risk their lives to show their disapproval, are guilty. This play was dismissed by critics as moralistic lecturing (Carson: 111).

Miller sustains the theme of anti-Semitism in his novel, Focus, where a Gentile is mistaken for a Jew and he explores Jewishness in the television film, Playing for Time (Welland: 18).

It is interesting to note that Miller never lost his social conscience and desire to help others. This desire, or "fanaticism" as Schleuter (33) calls it, may be attributed to his Judaism: "What drives Miller with such persistent fervour derives in large part from his roots in Judaism", Schleuter (33) proposes. A reason for this fanaticism is illuminated by Miller himself: "It has to do with the Apocalypse... all these people to a profound degree are dancing on the edge of a precipice" (Schleuter: 33). This gives him the courage to make a stand against moral injustice - both in practice (such as

when he helped Peter Reilly[2] in the court case in the 1970's) and in his writing. He desired to set things right.

2.4 The influence of the American Dream and the Great Depression on Miller

"In ideal terms, the American dream is a social vision" in which each individual is able to realise his full potential (Tyson: 15). This full potential is judged mostly in terms of wealth or socio-economic status. Thus, as Tyson explains, the American dream is one of possessions and commodity, and "the implied premise is that one's spiritual worth and well-being are directly proportional to the value of the commodities one owns" (Tyson: 15). The material and spiritual therefore become inextricably confused. Gatsby, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, The Great Gatsby, is in many ways a tragic hero resulting from his confusion between his dream (the spiritual) and his material desires. Ross Posnock quotes the Marxist philosopher Theodor Adorno on the dualism of capitalism: on the one hand it results in a "grotesque inversion of human values", and on the other, it has a "power to endow mobility and grace" (Donaldson 1984: 212).

2. Peter Reilly was accused and convicted of murdering his mother. Miller helped him by organising another investigation, as he believed Reilly to be innocent. The case resulted in a retrial and the charges against Reilly were dropped.

The American Dream did not originate as a corrupt value system. It originated as a myth that enabled the Americans to endure the harsh realities of climate, social inequality and problems, and it lured others to America. Bishop George Berkeley, the Irish philosopher, first had a vision of a New World in America. It would be a world where man would no longer be restrained by older societies, but could "practise his trade or his religion with freedom and control his political destiny" (Walker 1983: 4).

Although colonial life provided constant hardship, during the early seventeenth century, the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the Puritans held on to the image of America as the Promised Land. William Bradford (1590 – 1657) and Cotton Mather (1663 – 1728) confirm in their writings "the New World as chosen by God for the purpose of rewarding faith with prosperity" (Walker: 5). The later intellectual and material progress of the eighteenth century firmly established the Dream in American national consciousness.

Despite the conflict of the Civil War, the Americans looked optimistically to the future, validated by the nineteenth century industrial progress and by writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Unfortunately, as American society became more secular, so the Dream's proof came to be judged according to material progress: Calvin Coolidge stated this explicity in 1925, when he said, "the business of America is business" (Walker: 5).

The American Dream was corrupted as society allowed materialism to dominate. Donaldson (8) points out that it is particularly the "commodity fetishism" of the

distorted American dream that is "assimilated into [The Great Gatsby's] imaginative life ...mere objects take on an ideal glow in the eyes of Gatsby himself, until they are finally dulled to materiality." This materialism is what also blinds Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman. Gatsby (and similarly Loman) is seduced by the American dream "...into the worshipful service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty" (Donaldson: 9). Personally, Miller experienced the temporary collapse of the American Dream during the Great Depression: the collapse of lives built on materialism. In Willy's downfall, Miller exposes this false trust in materialism. Yet, Miller clings to the hope and optimism embodied in the American Dream. He continues to hope that mankind can become better and more caring.

Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman aligns his spiritual value (value as a person) with material wealth. When boasting about how much gross he has made, he lies to Linda and says that he has made far more than he really has. When she starts to work out his commission, he has to admit that he has made far less, but then starts giving her excuses (Salesman: 27):

WILLY: I did five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston.

LINDA: No! Wait a minute, I've got a pencil. *She pulls pencil and paper out of her apron pocket.* That makes your commission... Two hundred - my...! Two hundred and twelve dollars!

WILLY: Well, I didn't figure it yet, but...

LINDA: How much did you do?

WILLY: Well, I - I did - about a hundred and eighty gross in Providence. Well, no - it came to - roughly two hundred gross on the whole trip.

LINDA: *Without hesitation:* Two hundred gross. That's... *She figures.*

WILLY: The trouble was that three of the stores were half closed for inventory in Boston. Otherwise I woulda broke records.

The yardstick by which Willy measures his personal value, is how successful his business has been that day, and he employs the same yardstick when determining his sons' values. When deliberating on Biff's work, Willy concludes that Biff's merely lazy, as he earns so little working as a farmhand (Salesman: 11). Willy Loman admires Biff's popularity, as Willy thinks that being "well liked" is the key to power and thus success. Loman's superficial value system dictates that since a rich man is well liked, the natural conclusion is that popularity is the key to wealth and thus success (Tyson: 64). Willy says to his sons, "That's the wonder, the wonder of this country; that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being well-liked." Biff recognises that his father's value system is distorted when he says in the Requiem, "He had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong" (Salesman: 110).

Gomez (39) supports Tyson's assertion that the American dream comprised the idea that success could be measured in terms of power and wealth. He reasons that progress was idolised in the US and not even the outbreak of the First World War could diminish this belief. This war did, however, bring a consciousness among the American people of different political systems such as democracy, communism and socialism (Gomez: 41). By the 1920s, then, there was such a desire for materialism, that traditionally held values and ideals were rejected in favour of a laissez faire policy. Hindus (1968: 36) calls those days the "turbulent 1920s in America". The 1920s were "a time of general rebelliousness and breakdown of tradition and a time of worship of youth by America" (Hindus: 4). The Jazz society as a whole, the surreal life of the upper class and the shallow materialism they epitomised, is symbolised by the "foul dust" surrounding Gatsby. Modern society was becoming an arid wasteland, as T.S. Eliot suggests (Lee 1987: 218).

Keller (1995: 19), in discussing the American Critical Realists describes the moral and spiritual decadence of the 1920s. He says of those authors:

> They all portrayed the needs and illusions, the hopes and shattered dreams of their protagonists by underlining how deeply the fate of the individual depended on the determining forces of a capitalist society. Be it through a portrayal of man as sum of social forces, be it by exposing vulnerable individuals to an alienated and hostile environment, the authors had basically the same goal: the amendment of a society which seduces its members with the promises of the American Dream, but yet excludes most individuals from having their equal share.

The American dream as seducer, but not provider, characterises Loman's problem in Death of a Salesman. Willy Loman's dream is shattered because he is not materially successful. He has been seduced by the promises of the American Dream, yet does not manage to get his share. Biff, too, mistakenly assumes that Happy is content, just because he's "making money". Yet Happy is not - he replies, "I don't know what... I'm working for" (Salesman: 17).

The 'golden twenties' was a period when free enterprise and businesses, rather than political authorities, were seen as the answer to disenchantment with the strict government and the First World War. Private enterprise was endorsed until the Great Depression of 1929. The years preceding the Stock Market Crash were years of prosperity for the upper and middle classes due to the increase in productivity. There was "...mass-production of automobiles, the spreading of radios, the beginnings of a large-scale movie industry and the introduction of electric household appliances" (Keller: 32-33). These changes positively influenced the American standard of living.

Willy and Linda's concern with paying for appliances, such as his fridge, washing machine and vacuum cleaner, when they do not have much money, reveals this attitude of materialism still prevalent in America during the 1940s. Willy Loman does not worry too much about earning the money to pay for the appliances, because he, like every worker, firmly believes "that industrial production and therefore prosperity, too, would prevail, and, consequently, that everyone could amass a private fortune" (Keller: 34). Loman shows this belief that he can "amass a private fortune" when he wonders how he is going to pay for all of the appliances, and Linda protects him from reality by assuring him that he will do better the following week. He believes her (Salesman: 28).

> WILLY: A hundred and twenty dollars! My - if business doesn't pick up, I don't know what I'm gonna do!
> LINDA: Well, next week you'll do better.
> WILLY: Oh, I'll knock 'em dead next week...

The Lomans live in a dream - the superficial American dream - and protect one another from reality. They create their own perceptions of the truth and thus adhere to a distorted value system.

The distorted moral values in a society where people wanted to make money, but were not concerned about whether or not their dealings were legal, were supported, as there were many who were involved in running illegal distilleries and smuggling, but "since so many took a profit, little was done about it" (Keller: 34). Some of this warped value system is seen when Willy Loman approves of Biff's stealing the ball to practise, as it shows initiative. He believes that standards by which to measure right

and wrong differ from person to person. He tells Biff that "if somebody else took that ball there'd be an uproar" (Salesman: 23).

Miller explores the negative issues of the American Dream in Death of a Salesman, thereby highlighting what society considers important and worships, and showing the tragic consequences of clinging to the wrong dream.

Tyson (12), however, criticises Miller's emotional manipulation of the audience in his exploration of the American dream in Death of a Salesman by commenting:

> Miller unconsciously tries to sabotage the rich psychological subtexts that make his work the masterpiece it is by manipulating the play's formal elements to foreground an overly sympathetic reading of his protagonist. The play's critics...have responded to Miller's desire, and to their own identification with the protagonist's project, by finding Willy Loman both the victim and the tragic hero that Miller wants him to be.

The fact that the critics can identify with Willy Loman's shortcomings does not necessarily "sabotage" the work, but rather allows for a deeper, emotional realisation of the destructive effects of materialism and capitalism.

The American Dream temporarily collapsed with the onset of the Depression. An event of such magnitude and widespread repercussions as the Great Depression of 1929 would inevitably lead to criticism of the social and economic structures which precipitated the Wall Street Crash (Berkowitz: 4). Consequences of the Great Depression include homelessness and unemployment, poverty and starvation. From "1929 to 1933, the number of unemployed rose to 14-15 million, about one third of the entire work-force" (Keller: 37).

Miller explains in his autobiography, Timebends (115), how the Great Depression was more than just a matter of money. "Rather, it was a moral catastrophe, a violent revelation of the hypocrisies behind the facade of American society." Keller (36) also comments on the psychological effects of the Depression: "...a whole nation seemed to face its effects quite helplessly. In dismay, the people hardly had recourse to protest marches or mass-meetings."

The collapse of Miller's father's clothing business, which almost destroyed his father and strained the family relations instilled in Miller a belief that "family solidarity" is more important than self (Welland: 18). Carson (4) also highlights the importance of family above self when he writes:

> That relative poverty to which they had been reduced meant that sacrifices were called for and every desire to place self-realisation above family solidarity implied a fundamental betrayal.

The Loman family in Death of a Salesman reflects a breakdown of family solidarity. Biff, in a moment of truth, tells his family, "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!" Happy, deluded, fights back with, "We always told the truth" (Salesman: 104). The core of the Loman family is broken. There is deception and lies. Willy even has a mistress, although his wife, Linda, is loving and supportive.

Miller alludes to the Great Depression in some of his dramas: A Memory of Two Mondays (1955), The Price (1968) and The American Clock (Berkowitz: 286). It is especially in The American Clock that the horror of The Great Depression predominates: "Nobody could escape that disaster" (Welland: 18).

In The Price, the two brothers, Victor and Walter, react differently to the Depression and their father's loss of money. Walter is selfish and materialistic, while Victor is idealistic. These two men embody the opposing moral values that the Americans faced. Walter, fearful of being degraded and limited by his father's material collapse, leaves and pursues materialism. He tells Victor that "[he] was going to finish his schooling... and [he] advised [Victor] to do the same" (Price: 90). He becomes a successful doctor. On the other hand, Victor reacts kindly by helping and supporting his father and thus resenting his brother. Thinking that Walter has left them, he confronts Walter: "I didn't invent my life, not altogether. You had a responsibility here and you walked out on it" (Price: 101). Both, as adults, face different problems as a result of their choices made at the time of the Depression (Carson: 126-127).

Miller's experience of the decadent, laissez-faire, materialistic society embracing the American Dream, and then the disillusioned American Society after the Stock Market Crash, influenced him in his dramas. He was able to explore materialism, the American Dream, the effects of the Depression, the psychological and moral questioning and choices the people must have experienced, and he also reflected real situations of poverty.

Miller vividly describes in The Price the devastating emotional effect of the Depression in the voice of Victor.

> He [Victor's father] couldn't believe in anybody anymore, and it was unbearable to me... my mother - the night he told us he was bankrupt, my mother... she vomited... all over his arms, his hands... just kept on vomiting, like thirty-five years coming up... And a look came onto his face. I'd never seen a man look like that. He was sitting there letting it dry on his hands... I

> thought if I stuck with him, if he could see that somebody was still... I wanted to... stop if from falling apart (Price: 108).

Miller's own growing awareness of the real effects of the Depression led him to realise that "...the Depression was only incidentally a matter of money. Rather, it was a moral catastrophe, a violent revelation of the hypocrisies behind the facade of American society" (Timebends: 115) and the American Dream.

2.5 Miller's social conscience and political awareness

The political interests of Miller during his University years, as well as his interests in Marxism during the years of the Second World War, endangered him in the 1950s, when anti-Communist hysteria broke out in the US. In his version of Ibsen's An Enemy of the People (1950), and in The Crucible (1953), Miller deals with the McCarthyite anti-Communist witch hunts[3], albeit obliquely in The Crucible (Berkowitz: 286).

The Crucible is based on the Salem witch-hunts of 1692, when a number of young girls and women accused people of being involved in witchcraft. Hysteria spread

[3] In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy publicly charged that 205 communists had infiltrated the state department. This led to a national mania for four years, during which time he ruined the characters and professional lives of a number of Americans by his accusation of their having communist sympathies (Schleuter: 74).

through Salem as more people were identified as being witches. The hunt was ended when church leaders in Boston discredited the court because the witnesses' evidence was unsupported, and so the death penalty was unjustified. Nineteen adults and two dogs had been hanged for witchcraft, and 150 people were awaiting trial (Carson: 63). For Miller, "Salem represents a microcosm of human society as a whole" (Carson: 65), so Miller is able to explore in his drama what guilt is and what its effects are, as well as whether or not society has the right to judge the actions of individuals (Carson: 66).

Carson (74) criticises those who view The Crucible as "an attack on the House Committee on Un-American Activities", as the issues are far more complex: they are issues about guilt and self-doubt and self-knowledge. In an article published in 1967, a few days before the CBS presentation of The Crucible, Miller discusses the relevance of his dramas to politics. The article, `It could happen here - and did' enables The Crucible to transcend the parallel to McCarthyism. It instead exposes the "irrational terror" of people, which suffocates moral goodness, so that "the serpent of madness" that lies in the nation, "might die of light" (Schleuter: 19). Miller believes that evil is within the heart of the nation, so hopes to destroy it by exposure. The Crucible, then, instead of merely reflecting McCarthyism, reasserts "...the need of constant vigilance in the face of social paranoia and government brutality" (Schleuter: 19).

In 1956, Miller appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee. He recalled attending a Marxist study course in Brooklyn at the outset of the Second

World War, but was not as interested in American political problems as with "the war against fascism that had to be won" (Schleuter: 6-7).

Different types of patriotism, or laws with which one identifies and to which one adheres, are scrutinised in A View from the Bridge. Eddie Carbone "cannot reconcile the social laws and the moral laws that claim him" (Schleuter: 78). He is ruled by American Immigration laws, because he is an American, but he does not adhere to them because he is part of a community that protects illegal immigrants. Since he is sexually attracted to his niece, Catherine, and cannot prevent her from marrying an illegal immigrant, Rodolpho, he informs the authorities about Rodolpho, who, with others, is arrested (Schleuter: 78). Eddie's lack of self-knowledge - his refusal to admit his attraction for his niece, and his confusion as to with which law to comply, leads inevitably to his destruction.

Miller's choice of law with which to comply made him not reveal, and thus not incriminate, the names of people he knew to have similar political motivations as he. He was thus convicted for contempt of Congress. Miller's choice of law was also a moral choice, which he reflects in various dramas, such as An Enemy of the People (Welland: 18). In After the Fall, as has been discussed an examination is made of Quentin's psychological processes in his search of truth and meaning, while society is also criticised. Incident at Vichy concludes that all people have a moral responsibility, as does All my Sons, in which Joe Keller breaks the law by allowing men to be killed for the benefit of his family.

Politics has always intrigued Miller and his political involvement has been aimed at trying to resolve problems. In 1968, he was chosen to attend the state Democratic convention in Hartford. Here he offered a resolution which no-one acted upon: he asked the delegates to call on the United States government to cease bombing North Vietnam and to attempt to involve everyone in negotiations (Schleuter: 19). Another concern of Miller's was freedom of speech. He lobbied for writers to have the freedom to "express themselves without fear of political repression" (Schleuter: 23), as he believed that writers should "have the imagination to go out into the highways, byways and ghettos to make it apparent that the writer belongs to the street and not to the power" (Schleuter: 23).

Miller made a stand for what he believes in, and in his works he probes the responsibility of individuals to make a stand for what they believe in. Miller does not believe in a system of absolute truth, so he ponders in his dramas the various forms of truth: being true to one's emotions, one's convictions, one's guilt and one's responsibilities. He also surveys the various political ideologies such as capitalism and socialism. His critical contemplation serves to make people aware of the dynamics of these systems and in order to change themselves and know themselves better. Even with reference to tragedy, Miller is fundamentally optimistic. He says in his essay Tragedy and the Common Man (Weales: 147), that tragedy is fundamentally optimistic, as it deals with man's attempts to "achieve his humanity" and to believe in man's ability to attain perfection.

2.6 The link between Miller's family life and domestic realism in his dramas

Miller views the family as a unit and family frictions as a microcosm representing the macrocosm of the world. The families in his dramas therefore live in a recognisable, real world. Miller and other American playwrights discovered that "the small events in the lives of small people could be presented so that they reflected the world outside the living room" (Berkowitz: 3). This domestic setting and content can be called Domestic Realism. Welland (13) illuminates Miller's basis of his domestic dramas: "...his drama constantly sees the family as one of the ways in which the individual is related to society."

One needs to explore Miller's place in society, in order to understand why he chose domestic realism as a vehicle for his message. Miller had a relatively ordinary childhood: he was born on 17 October 1915, the second son of Isadore and Augusta Miller. The Millers first lived in Harlem, a cosmopolitan, prosperous middle-class area, where he had a happy and innocent childhood. Then in 1929, they moved to Brooklyn, a suburb of New York. His early family life was relatively carefree and family relations good, but during the Depression, relationships became strained because it was considered selfish to put one's own will and well-being before that of the family unit (Schleuter: 1-2). As mentioned previously, the bond between father and son(s) is an issue which Miller investigates in All my Sons and Death of a Salesman.

This solidarity of the family that Miller experienced is expressed in his dramas, as Berkowitz (3) remarks:

> Not only are American plays about recognisable people in a recognisable world, but they are about the personal lives of these people... Whatever the deeper meanings of an American play, on one solid level it is about love and marriage, or earning a living, or dealing with a family crisis.

Although Ibsen and Chekhov had already written realistic domestic dramas, Miller and other American playwrights discovered how effective a vehicle domestic realism was for their discussion of more consequential moral or political issues, as society could be reflected in the lives of the common person (Berkowitz: 3).

Domestic realism is also adaptable to the styles of different writers, as well as their subjects and ambitions. Berkowitz (86) lists some of the benefits of domestic realism: "domestic realism could address such diverse and ambitious subjects as private morality, public policy, tragic destiny and the American Dream." Private morality and public policy, for example, is portrayed in the character of Stockmann in An Enemy of the People. When he tries to expose the contamination of the community's profitable health spa, the public resists his allegations, and ostracises him and his family - they are merely concerned with the money from the health spa, not moral issues.

Miller uses domestic realism effectively when he selects his protagonists and tragic heroes "from the ranks of the ordinary" (Berkowitz: 86). By doing this, Miller intimates that ordinary Americans are worthy of this status. "Miller repeatedly took as his subject the ordinary person, placed under extraordinary pressure by his society,

either destroyed by it or... triumphant over it", Berkowitz (77) explains. Miller's plays, in effect, thus create the possibility of stature for the ordinary man. As regards who qualifies to be a tragic hero, Miller proposes in Tragedy and the Common Man that "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were" (Weales: 143). All can be tragic heroes because the "exalted" and the "lowly" have the same mental processes when they question accepted norms or beliefs, then experience fear as the beliefs are shaken. Thus the problem that an ordinary person in a domestic setting faces, can symbolise the general problems facing humanity. Miller, also, believes in questioning the world and people's motives because "no tragedy can ... come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable" (Weales: 146). Miller certainly does not consider any institution to be absolutely correct or to have exclusive access to the truth.

Miller focuses his dramas on the protagonist's relationship to his social and political community, and how a violation or destruction of this social contract can lead to disaster. This is relevant to all of humanity. The contract is either violated by society, such as capitalism and materialism in Death of a Salesman and a judgemental Puritansim in The Crucible, or else by the individual, as in the father's mistake in All my Sons and Eddie's violation of the community code of conduct in A View from the Bridge. Thus, in these plays of the 1940's and 1950's, Miller is able to manipulate the form of domestic realism in order to address social and political issues (Berkowitz: 172).

Domestic realism explores the lives of normal people, in an imperfect world. The recognition of the shortcomings of ordinary life reflects Miller's own life: it was no idealistic perfection. He was married three times, first to Mary Grace Slattery, whom he met at the University of Michigan (Schleuter: 6). This marriage (1940-55) ended in divorce and he married Marilyn Monroe the following year. When Monroe had a miscarriage in 1957, Miller wrote a screenplay for her, The Misfits. Their marriage also ended in divorce - in 1961 - when Monroe applied for a divorce based on incompatibility of character. The following year, on 17 February, Miller married Ingeborg Morath, a photo-journalist for the French service Magnum, with whom he collaborated on several books of photography and reportage (Berkowitz: 287).

When After the Fall was released in 1964, it became popularly known as "that play about Marilyn Monroe" (Schleuter: 16), yet Miller denied the similarities between himself and Quentin. There were stark biographical details in the play, which critics condemned and deplored. An example is that Maggie in the drama dies due to an overdose of sleeping pills, just as Marilyn Monroe did on 5 August 1962. The critic, Robert Brustein, writes for the The New Republic that he "represented critical opinion when he termed [After the Fall] a three- and-one-half-hour breach of taste, a confessional autobiography of embarrassing explicitness" (Schleuter: 17) and Carson (121) also says that the drama is "disconcertingly autobiographical."

After the Fall represents a shift in Miller's focus and style:

> Where his earlier plays had all used domestic stories to raise and explore larger social and political issues, he was now to focus on the individual experiences themselves. His particular subject was ...guiltiness: the sense of

> having failed some abstract or specific moral obligation and thus of having proved oneself inadequate or unworthy (Berkowitz: 156).

Although the idea of moral failure was present in the first few plays he wrote, it was used as a vehicle to criticise "the social situation that produced such feelings" (Berkowitz: 156). In his later plays, Miller rather dramatises the emotions of inadequacy and the pain that it evokes. Plays such as After the Fall and The Price explain life and emotion in such a way that the individual does not need to condemn himself unnecessarily (Berkowitz: 157).

Thus, as Miller's interests changed, so did the content and concerns in his dramas. As people in society change, that general change is reflected in literature. Tyson (1) explains how literature reveals the problems and concerns in society:

> Because literature is a repository of both a society's ideologies and its psychological conflicts, it has the capacity to reveal aspects of a culture's collective psyche, an apprehension of how ideological investments reveal the nature of individuals' psychological relationship to the world.

The correlation between Miller's life, his experiences and the material for and content of his dramas, show that as society changes, as wars occur and new issues evolve, so literature changes, and so could the criteria used to determine whether or not a drama is tragic. Miller represents his own version of reality in his dramas - mimesis in the general sense. Is that really unacceptable for tragedy? Surely domestic dramas can be as tragic as classic tragedies, where mimesis in the special sense, representing an ideal of reality, is used? Current thought looks for new and creative explanations and views, and so, surely, should the assessment of literature.

Because the Great Depression, the American Dream and personal attributes, such as his Jewishness and his social conscience have affected Miller's writing, we can conclude that society affects literature. So, too, is our assessment of literature dynamic and adaptive, including our perceptions of what is tragic.