Chapter 4: Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman: a tragic hero or an anti-hero?

"Willy Loman... has been responsible for our seeing ourselves through him" (Schleuter: 66).

4.1 Modern tragedy: a reflection of modern social values

It has been argued that Death of a Salesman does not fall under the classic definition of tragedy as "a serious action, complete in itself, evoking pity and terror in order to produce catharsis" since there is perhaps no serious action in the play, nor does Loman's death have catastrophic results. Willy Loman is also not the Aristotelian tragic hero, "a great man of flawed goodness" (Koon 1983: 4-5). Rather, Arthur Miller has evolved a form of drama that deals with the crises of the twentieth century, just as classical French or Greek dramas related to the concerns of their own times. Miller has adopted certain characteristics of classical tragedy, such as the responsibility of the individual, but he has also rejected others, most notably that of the required stature of the tragic protagonist (Jackson 1963: 68). Rather than

social or political standing being the mark of stature as in the traditional hero, this play reveals a modern emphasis on the humane or moral qualities of the hero. The common man represents man's value as a human. Also, since most of mankind is fascinated by and understands tragedy, the common man is an apt subject for tragedy (Koon: 5)

Regarding the universality of the drama, Roudane asserts that people of both genders and of all races, nationalities and ideologies, respond to this particular drama. In 1951, two years after its premiere, Death of a Salesman was being viewed in at least eleven countries outside the United States of America, including Israel, France and Argentina (Bigsby 1997: 61-62). The reason for its popularity is probably that the drama replicates a community (the domestic situation) most theatregoers recognise, and it questions the meaning and purpose of life, something all people do. Although responses differ as cultures, societies and individuals differ, many people interpret the play as an embodiment of the peripeteia (suffering) and hamartia (error) that classical tragedies encompass (Bigsby 1997: 61). Modern drama uses what is relevant from classical tragedy, and adapts or excludes other characteristics, in order to make the drama pertinent to modern society, and to relate it to contemporary questions concerning, for example, the American Dream, materialism, industrialised society and the value of life.

Hope is ingrained in Death of a Salesman, as Miller presupposes that each person, no matter his occupation, race or intelligence, is indispensable to the community – and that each community is a microcosm of the universe (Koon: 14). Thus, in making his characters human - people just like us – Miller enables the audience to identify

with the characters. They, like the audience, have a place in the community and their lives can have meaning, but blindness and unrealistic dreams can hamper their discovery of this meaning.

To a realistic person, Loman appears weak and deluded because of his inability to face reality, and his obstinate desire to hold on to his dreams. Some critics view Willy Loman's limitations as strengths, not weaknesses, because they make him more representative of the common, flawed modern man. Even Willy's blindness to reality can be regarded as a valid representation of modern man's experience (Carson: 59). The play ends victoriously since, although Loman dies, his struggle represents man's indestructible will to achieve his humanity. He dies for his beliefs and hope in his sons. The audience can learn from Loman's death as they become aware that they can avoid disaster by taking control of their lives, facing reality and searching for the truth.

The exact nature of Death of a Salesman shall be discussed in the course of this chapter, but surely a drama's ultimate test is the response of the audience. When the drama was first produced in 1949, Wyatt, in the Catholic World wrote that it is "a great American tragedy, shattering to the audience, overwhelming in its implications, cutting to the root of the poisonous fruit of the success rule of life" (Koon: 4).

Aspects of Death of a Salesman will be examined in the light of the following definition, to demonstrate how its characteristics coincide with the general definition

of tragedy that pertains throughout history, into the twentieth century.

> Tragedy necessitates a serious theme and content, presented in a dignified manner with a moral or serious tone, written in prose or poetry as long as the language and style manifests the dignity of the hero. The tragic hero should be a representative character, not necessarily of status and virtue, but depicting fundamental aspects of human nature, so that the audience can identify with him and his suffering, and thereby learn from it. His character, being human, allows for a flaw, or faulty view and judgement of the world, which results in the protagonist's suffering and death. This suffering happens within the context of a greater structure, cosmos, or moral forces, which constitutes the ideology in which man believes, whether it be materialism, Christianity or fate. The hero struggles within, against and to try to make sense of this cosmos, only to be defeated. The defeat seems meaningless, yet allows the audience to question life, forces of life, action, and the meaning of suffering. This might result in catharsis of pity and terror in the audience, or simply in the questioning of one's own humanity (Chapter 1).

4.2 Dignity and seriousness of content and in the presentation of Willy Loman

4.2.1 Serious content and themes

Serious content and theme, an appropriate moral tone and language that manifests the dignity of the hero, are all traditional requirements for tragedy. There is no doubt that the content and tone of Death of a Salesman are serious. The drama investigates and questions serious issues, such as what makes life meaningful, as well as the importance of family love, the destructive force of self-deception and the necessity for each person to find his place in society and in the order of things.

Miller is concerned with large issues that pertain to the meaning of a life of quality. The nature of personal values, justice and morality are presented through his portrayal of individuals (particularly Willy Loman) facing crises in ordinary circumstances (the domestic-work situation) (Koon: 3).

Willy Loman's personal values include hard work, loyalty, initiative and hope, yet he fails to find ultimate contentment in his life, due to his lack of a concept of right and wrong: he lies and encourages his sons' thefts. This counteracts his positive personal values, leading to his living a life of confusion and deception. He, for example, congratulates Biff's initiative in stealing a ball – rather than condemning his theft thereof. Loman also refuses to face the full truth that his life is based on deception, on lies that he had created to make himself appear better than he is. He does not realise that his life simply has value because it's life. In this deception, he robs his family of love based on openness. Loman has a mistress, thus deceiving his loving wife, he lies to Linda about his earnings and he believes false and unrealistic images of his self and his sons. At the end, Loman only reaches partial enlightenment – he cannot face harsh reality and clings to his false illusions. He dies in an act of self-sacrifice because he chooses to cling passionately to his dreams, rather than face the truth that he has been living a lie.

Finally, the concept of universal justice is suggested when Willy Loman's life seems meaningless because of the lack of truth and morality in it. This implies that one can live meaningfully when one lives truthfully and morally, giving a moral tone to the drama. These issues of right and wrong values, truth and justice are serious issues underlying the drama.

Death of a Salesman's universal appeal is found in these issues it ponders. Willy Loman is an individual who creates his own fate of self-deception and death, while believing himself to be an agent of social progress. His dreams of success and public myth (the American Dream) distract him from reality and necessity. As Miller states, "People feel these themes, no matter where they are" (Bigsby 1997: 63). Often, people believe and live their lives passionately, unaware that their beliefs are misguided and passions wasted. Willy Loman is in this way representative of humanity, the common man: his internal struggles are those facing everyone. A moral lesson can be learnt through Loman's failure – that of seeking and living by truth and in reality.

4.2.2 A poetry of the theatre

The serious, moral tone of the content in Death of a Salesman, is underscored by the realistic dialogue and heightened by the overall poetic effect of the colour, lighting, acting and interactions between characters. Since Miller portrays "the common man" in his dramas, Miller never allows them to supersede their emotional and intellectual capacities. Willy Loman's language and statements are realistic and appropriate (Bigsby 1990: 55). In reply to Bigsby's comment that Death of a Salesman seems to him to be the most lyrical of all his plays, Miller responds:

> Most of the plays I had written before had been reaching toward it. I was trying to find a poetic voice in the theatre while at the same time making the scenes and the characters believable. Then I was also interested in time. We don't stop when we remember something; we go right on talking or doing whatever we're doing. Meanwhile, in another compartment of the brain the

> past is working. That was what I was trying for with the play. That was the form (Bigsby 1990: 55).

Most critics agree that Miller managed to "find a poetic voice in the theatre". Welland (14) remarks that one of the reviews of Poetry without Words saw the play as "an attempt to make a poetic approach to everyday life without using poetry - or even heightened speech. The characters are to remain as inarticulate as they are in real life."

Ronald Duncan, a poet-dramatist, disagrees with this view. He contends that a character must express what he might say if he were given a poet's power of expression; such a character is not, however, realistic (Welland: 15). Prose used by Shakespeare's commoners, serves the purpose of not raising the audience's expectations (which accompany the use of poetry), as they do not possess stature. Similarly, Anderson (27) insists, the concerns of the modern world are "relatively trivial", making prose appropriate. No explanation, however, is given concerning the difference between concerns of the Elizabethan period and the modern world. Both deal with fundamental issues such as relationships between the protagonist and others, his society, a universal order, and himself. Finding true joy and fulfilment, whether it is in being true to oneself, or finding one's place in the order of the universe, are not trivial issues. Perhaps Anderson refers to the issues of materialism and the American Dream as trivial, but these are not trivial if they have a profound effect on the formation of one's values and choices.

Koon (6) also indicates that Miller's dialogue is not poetic or beautiful, but common: "Except for the Requiem section, the words in Death of a Salesman are seldom applicable beyond the immediate situation, do not echo with great truths, and are, in fact, frequently banal." Willy, for example, tells Linda, "I'll start out in the morning. Maybe I'll feel better in the morning" and Linda replies, "Take an aspirin. Should I get you an aspirin? It'll soothe you" (Salesman: 9). Koon adds, however, that because Miller writes for the stage, dialogue is not as important as the entire visual picture. Miller succeeds in using "language in combination with all the theatrical resources at his command, to provide a poetic experience in the playhouse" (Koon: 7).

An example of such a poetic experience is where Miller refocuses the attention abruptly, alters tone, and distorts normal time simultaneously. In the middle of an ordinary conversation, Ben (Willy's dead brother) appears, and the tone shifts from Happy's pointless "I'm getting married, Pop, don't forget it. I'm changing everything. I'm gonna run that department before the year is up", to Ben's ominous, "The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy" (Salesman: 106). This is, Koon (12) justifies, "perfectly appropriate and not in the least distracting, for the effectiveness of the play requires such a sudden alteration in time and place."

Notwithstanding the arguments about the language used, Miller does manage to expose the inside of Willy's head (the original title of the play) and to present his daydreams and thought processes vividly. Whether this is done through the use of simple language, poetic metaphors and symbolism or through the entire theatrical experience, the fact that it is presented so convincingly, speaks for itself. Roudane

(Bigsby 1997: 74) lauds Miller as "one of the most gifted and radical sculptors of language in America". The poetic experience or presentation, manifests the dignity of Willy Loman.

Death of a Salesman seems to incorporate different levels: on the one level, it is realistic, with a simplicity of language and easily recognisable characters. This is the "banal" language that Koon identifies. On another level though, the thought processes of Willy, the extended metaphors (eg: of woods/ fires, as will be discussed later), the manipulation of time and the lighting all complement the dialogue to draw the audience into Willy's head and identify with his world and his struggles.

Jackson (71) insists that Death of a Salesman is a kind of poem in that Miller projects his vision of experience by creating a sea of images. It reconstructs Willy's perception of facts, events, dreams, passions and fears. "It is a myth which projects before the spectator an image of the protagonist's consciousness. The playwright attempts to reveal a tragic progression within the consciousness of the protagonist" (Jackson: 73). He does this through a union of music, light, colour, dialogue and gesture. This becomes poetry in the theatre.

In Timebends (182), Miller expresses his aim when creating Willy Loman. He was:

> ...a salesman always full of words, and better yet, a man who could never cease trying, like Adam, to name himself and the world's wonders. I had known all along that this play could not be encompassed by conventional realism and for one integral reason: for Willy the past was as alive as what was happening at the moment, sometimes even crashing in to completely overwhelm his mind. I wanted precisely the same fluidity in the form, and infiltrate it with a kind of super-consciousness.

This fluidity in the form is achieved through the combination of Loman's memories interacting with each other and the present, as a stream of consciousness, as well as the links made through the use of extended metaphors (eg: fire and death) and themes (eg: deception and blindness) entwined throughout the drama. The choice of words, the theatrical devices and skilled acting all work together to create a drama which has a moral, serious tone and that illuminates something of life's value through the suffering of Willy Loman.

4.3 Willy Loman's character and flaw

> The tragic hero should be a representative character, not necessarily of status and virtue, but depicting fundamental aspects of human nature, so that the audience can identify with him and his suffering, and thereby learn from it. His character, being human, allows for a flaw, or faulty view and judgement of the world, which results in the protagonist's suffering and death (Chapter 1).

According to Miller, the modern tragic protagonist is representative of man in his depiction of characteristics of human nature, so that the audience can identify with him. Because he's human, his character is flawed – he has a faulty view of the world and faulty judgement. He also, Miller declares, has the capacity to choose between alternatives that are sufficiently serious to have changed the course of his life. Lastly, he should possess an intensity/ fanaticism in his "insistence upon his self-conceived role" (Draper: 19).

Koon (3) considers Miller's protagonists, especially Wiily Loman, as being unexceptional and non-heroic, people whose lives do not affect a wide circle or bring

down nations with them as they fall. Their heroic qualities of character (understanding, compassion, respect for human dignity), as well as their worst qualities, are brought to the fore when confronted by difficult situations. In this way, they question, and cause the audience to question, profound topics of the modern world. When Willy Loman commits suicide, it shows his love for his sons, as he hopes they can use the insurance money to start their own business.

Like Loman, situations that modern men face, bring out their best and worst qualities. These situations are often common domestic and work situations, such as how a man treats his sons or when he has a confrontation with his boss. It is far easier for an audience to identify with a protagonist when he has experienced similar situations, than when the protagonist has to fight a duel or defeat a monster.

4.3.1 Loman: representative of humanity

Willy Loman may not be the classical tragic protagonist in that he is no noble leader, has little self-knowledge, achieves no insight at the end, and has poor moral values. He reacts without thinking, and substitutes dreams for knowledge. Yet his belief in, practice of, and death for, his beliefs, enable him to touch our souls. He "represents a part of all people, and his fate brings no brief, superficial reaction in the theatre but a lasting impression too deep for tears" (Koon: 7-8, 11). He is a modern tragic hero. We can identify with him, see his struggles as representative of mankind's and we

recognise his blindness to reality, as we are also flawed humans. At the same time, we admire the passion with which he clings to his dream and holds onto his beliefs.

Linda summarises Willy's character to Biff: "I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him" (Salesman: 44). As a human being, Willy is a representation of modern man and thereby suitable to be a tragic hero.

Willy may be no traditional prince, but Biff is right when he says of Willy, to Miss Forsythe in the restaurant scene, "...you've just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hardworking, unappreciated prince" (Salesman: 90, Rosinger 1987: 56). He is a prince in that his passionate clinging to his hopes and beliefs, as well as his hope in his sons, give him dignity and stature, suitable for a modern tragic hero.

Loman, "hardworking and unappreciated", thus represents an individual trying to find his position in society, a position as a respected salesman, husband and father. For all his flaws, we see something of Loman's dream. The ideal salesman can be recognised in Dave Singleman's popularity and selling expertise. This is what he, too, would like to be. He has a sense of loyalty and responsibility: he tells Howard, "I put thirty-four years into this firm..." (Salesman: 64). Willy also wants to be the kind of father to whom his sons look up. He puts his best efforts into his sons' upbringing.

Linda tells Biff and Happy that Willy is "the man who never worked a day but for your benefit" (Salesman: 45).

Willy also wants to be a husband who can provide for his family. "He has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to [Linda] that it's his pay" (Salesman: 45), because he's too ashamed to tell Linda that he's not making money.

Although he has a mistress, Willy truly loves Linda. "On the road – on the road I want to grab you sometimes and just kiss the life outa you", he tells her (Salesman: 29). He is willing to throw everything, including his life, into the battle to find his rightful position in modern society. In this way, Loman is a "ritual representative of an industrialised society" (Jackson: 64). He tells Ben that "A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something" (Salesman: 99). He needs to make his life worth something, even if it's "worth more dead than alive" (Salesman: 77).

Most people can identify with these hopes and principles, and with the desire to find meaning in life and one's worth in society. Loman, one could say, finds his worth in self-sacrifice. Unfortunately, it is for the wrong dream.

Loman personifies shared values of men in the twentieth century. Loman reflects Western civilisation's increasing concern with a democratic interpretation of moral responsibilities. The drama explores the implication of a life where men are wholly responsible for their actions (Jackson: 64-65). Willy Loman's teaching his sons the

wrong values, taking a mistress when he has a loving wife, borrowing money from Charley while refusing the job he offers him, all show choices Willy has made. He has no-one to blame for his actions. His ordinary actions and choices express conflict in the moral universe. The actions of common men in this way have ultimate meaning (Jackson: 65).

Willy Loman is representative of the characteristics of humanity: Carson (58) "responds more strongly to Willy's universality than [he does] to many more exceptional tragic heroes". Miller, as explained in the introduction, has given Willy Loman the social standing of an average, ordinary man, instead of that of a person better than us. He has made Loman suffer, but his suffering does not result in insight for humanity and does not have disastrous effects for everyone else. Yet Loman does reflect the modern American's desire to attain the American Dream, as well as the belief that money brings happiness, and he fails on both accounts. Loman's character has developed from American society and, as Ferguson (83) elucidates, "tragedy cannot take place outside of or detached from the society that has nurtured the character of the tragic hero". Loman's society is one where materialism and possessions are the mark of success and human worth. Linda says to Willy at his funeral that she made the last payment on the house that day.

4.3.2 Loman: flawed with choices

Loman's character is revealed in how he reacts to the choice that he has to make. He has to choose between acknowledging and facing the reality of his life – of his worth as a human being and the mistakes that he has made, or blindly clinging to his self-deception and to his phoney dream. He chooses to cling to the tenets of his life and believes the lie that he has brought up his sons well and that he is a successful salesman who is well-liked. Loman embarks on a journey into his own mind. In his search for truth, even if it does not lead to full enlightenment, his life gains ultimate value (Jackson: 75).

Willy Loman values principles of "initiative, hard work, family, freedom, consumerism, economic salvation, competition, the frontier, self-sufficiency, public recognition [and] personal fulfilment" (Bigsby 1997: 60). He reveals these values through his desire to build a future for his sons through his own hard work. Anderson (25), points out that Willy's positive qualities of loving his family, being enthusiastic about the happiness of the past and being a hard worker, are negated by his lack of a sense of moral law. He dishonestly approves of Biff's initiative when stealing the football, and encourages his sons to steal sand from a nearby building site: "Go right over to where they're building the apartment house and get some sand. We're going to rebuild the entire front stoop right now" (Salesman: 39). He even boasts to Charley about the stolen "lumber they brought home last week" (Salesman: 39). At the same time, Willy asks of Biff, "Why is he stealing? What did I tell him? I never in my life told him anything but decent things" (Salesman: 32). He is deluded, unwilling to face the truth.

Willy is well-meaning, yet lacking in his ability to be a good salesman or to be a good father to his sons. He ends up clinging to ideals and fables that allude him. We see this when, despite Biff's attempt to tell his father that he is not the magnificent Hercules Willy thinks he is ("I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that?" (Salesman: 105)), Willy refuses to face the truth and continues to idolise Biff: "...that boy is going to be magnificent!" (Salesman: 106). Willy Loman is corrupted by his passionate belief in a phoney dream, and by his lack of self-knowledge. Biff astutely observes at Willy's funeral that "He had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong [and that] he never knew who he was" (Salesman: 110-111).

Despite all of these qualities, Willy does not adhere to the basic standards of right and wrong. (Koon:10). Owing to his self-deceit and lack of self-knowledge, Loman never sees his value as anything other than what he produces – sales, commodities, "successful" children. Willy teaches his sons that for success, one needs to be well-liked, to have contacts, to make an impression and to be fearless. "I've got a couple of fearless characters there", Willy tells Charley when his sons steal building materials (Salesman: 39). Ironically, Willy does not fulfil his own requirements for success. He is not well-liked and does not make a good impression. He confides in Linda that, "People don't seem to take to me... I'm fat. I'm very – foolish to look at, Linda" (Salesman: 28-29). Sadly, these rare insights show that Willy has the ability to see reality for what it is, but he prefers living in a world of lies, where others might think of him as successful. He has a choice, and chooses blindness, lies and dreams instead of facing the truth and working from there.

Consumerism and economic salvation are also clear values, as Willy finds his essence in the business world. He tells his family to, "Go to Filene's, go to the Hub, go to Slattery's, Boston. Call out the name Willy Loman and see what happens! Big shot!" (Salesman: 48). His real life, however, tells a different story. He cannot make sales and all his old buyers that he used to sell to, are "dead, retired" (Salesman: 49). No-one besides his family, Charley and Bernard come to his funeral. Linda sadly asks, "Why didn't anybody come?" (Salesman: 110).

Although Willy Loman values these principles, his failure as a salesman fuels his pride, which in turn becomes arrogance and then ignorance, "an ignorance fostered by a competitive American business work ethic" (Bigsby 1997: 77). Death of a Salesman can, in this light, be viewed as a critique of a capitalist society that marginalises and destroys the unsuccessful. Yet Willy Loman reduces himself to an object within this society, as he refuses to recognise his own or anyone else's value simply as a human being. He finally makes his last sale – that of his life – for a hoped-for insurance payout so that his sons can start their own business (which they will not do) and "be magnificent" (Salesman: 106.). Loman passionately clings to his belief in his sons' success, to the idea that money will bring happiness, to the phoney American dream. Although deluded, Loman's passion is admirable, his desire for his sons' success and happiness noble.

Willy Loman has a modern version of the Aristotelian tragic flaw (hubris): a lack of self-knowledge, which he instills in his sons. Throughout the drama, as said, theft occurs. Happy steals other executives' fiancees: "...he's the third executive I've done that to" (Salesman: 19); Biff steals the high school football, the box full of

basketballs, the suit in Kansas city and Bill Oliver's fountain pen; the boys also steal lumber and cement from the neighbourhood. "The question of stealing deepens to encompass not only social crimes but fundamental private issues: the stealing of one's very identity, the loss of self, the abrogation of responsibility" (Bigsby 1997: 69-70). Willy, Linda and their sons know that they have broken the social law by stealing and being deceitful (Willy knows it's wrong for him to have a mistress, and lies to Biff to try and cover it up), but they choose to ignore their consciences. They do not show self-knowledge. It is only on the last day of Willy's life that they begin to face reality. "The Real has long been devalued, deformed, de-fleshed. Illusion and its relation to familial bonds and the larger... social contract have been conveniently twisted into the appearance of Truth. In brief, the Lomans remain co-conspirators, master builders of their illusory world" (Bigsby 1997: 70).

Willy Loman does, at times, see reality honestly, such as when he meets his sons in the restaurant. He tells them "I'm not interested in stories about the past... because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around. I was fired today" (Salesman: 84). He also perceives reality within the market place, as evident during the scene in Howard's office: "I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit!" (Salesman: 64). Such rare examples of comprehension enhance Willy's stature as a tragic hero, because they show that he has the capability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. He has the capacity to choose. Moments of comprehension also foil the extent of Willy's self-deception when his remarks do not show comprehension of reality, such as when he can't understand Biff's stealing. Although possessing powers of

understanding, Willy's self-deception is so great that it overshadows his comprehension at times.

In Tragedy and the Common Man (1949), Miller writes of Willy Loman that, "we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing – his sense of personal dignity" (Weales: 144). When he commits suicide, he does just this. Out of love, he sacrifices his life to give his sons a chance to start a business, thereby affirming his own sense of dignity. He needs assurance of his worth. In response to Biff's assessment that they are both "a dime a dozen" (Salesman: 105), Willy bursts out, "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman!" (Salesman: 105). His name, as with Proctor's name, represents his humanity, so is important to him. He will not let it go, as it manifests his dignity. Ironically, however, Loman's name means nothing in the business world.

Loman's effectiveness can be seen in how the audience responds: some see him as the normal man destroyed by progress, others see him as a representation of the failure of the American Dream (Koon: 5). Either way, Death of a Salesman is sufficiently encompassing that people in all audiences can identify with Willy, and interpret the drama from their own frames of reference. While Willy does not have the traditional stature of a tragic hero, what he represents – the struggle for meaning in normal life – is sufficiently significant to give him the dramatic stature of a modern tragic hero.

4.4 Suffering of the hero within a basic moral force

> His character, being human, allows for a flaw, or faulty view and judgement of the world, which results in the protagonist's suffering and death. This suffering happens within the context of a greater structure, cosmos, or moral forces, which constitutes the ideology in which man believes, whether it be materialism, Christianity or fate. The hero struggles within, against and to try to make sense of this cosmos, only to be defeated (Chapter 1).

Willy Loman suffers from a "disease of unrelatedness" (Jackson: 73). He has a sense of alienation, a loss of meaning in his life, and a growing despair (Jackson: 73). Miller comments that the name Loman meant to him, "a terror-stricken man calling into the void for help that will never come" (Timebends: 179). Modern suffering thus results from an ancient cause: ignorance. Willy Loman progresses from ignorance, through suffering to partial enlightenment.

There is no doubt that Loman suffers as a result of his refusal to face reality and his obstinate desire to cling to his dreams. There are a number of interpretations to explain in which greater structure/ ideology he suffers, two of which will be examined closely: capitalism and the American Dream. The American capitalist system as a cruel ideology that values machines more than humans (Carson: 47), is partially evident in how Willy Loman esteems materially successful men, such as Dave Singleman (whose name suggests an isolated achiever (Anderson: 26)) and Charley. Loman derives his own lack of value, which causes suffering, from his lack of material success. When Howard fires Willy after 34 years, it points to a person's productivity as being more important than his loyalty or humanity. When Willy is in

Howard's office pleading for his job, Howard indifferently insists that "business in business" (Salesman: 63). This interpretation tries to simplify the play, because it ignores Charley, a humane capitalist, as well as the fact that Willy "is an active collaborator in his own downfall" (Carson: 47).

Secondly, the American Dream that promises wealth and happiness if you work hard enough, is a part of Loman's suffering and downfall. The allure of wealth and thus (according to Loman's thinking), fulfilment, entice Willy to dream, and die. He has a romanticised vision of the American Dream, that hard work, being well-liked and making an impression, will result in material wealth and thus happiness. The embodiment of this myth is the perfect salesman, Dave Singleman, who could "...pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room... he made a living" (Salesman: 63). He was loved and had a big funeral. Willy's independent brother, Ben, too, represents a success of the American Dream, because "when [he] was seventeen [he] walked into the jungle, and when [he] was twenty-one, [he] walked out... rich" (Salesman: 37).

Material possessions are important to Loman, and he suffers in a materialistic society where his sense of self-worth is linked to his income. As previously mentioned, he is too ashamed to tell Linda that he is not earning money, so he borrows fifty dollars a week from Charley. His life centres around paying off the house, fridge, washing machine, vacuum cleaner, roof and car repairs (Salesman: 27), and he owes more than he earns. He lies by telling Linda, "I'll knock 'em dead next week" (Salesman: 28). This life where he cannot even be true to his loving wife, is one of loneliness. He says, "... I get so lonely – especially when business is bad

and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys" (Salesman: 29).

Ferguson (85-86) proposes that Willy Loman personifies the American Dream. As the American Dream promises elusive wealth and happiness, so Loman promises this to his family, deluding them and himself. Since the American Dream is a myth, it cannot be sustained. It cannot live and has to die, just as Willy Loman has to die. Loman thus becomes the anti-hero of a failed mythology that cannot be sustained.

Anderson sees this lack of a real and sustaining force as the cause of modern tragedy. "Tragedy today... is serious drama in which the protagonist, in our unheroic age, fails to find any sustaining force and comes to a broken and miserable end" (Anderson: 26). Willy fails to find anything substantial to sustain him as his life is built on self-deception, lies and passionate, yet unrealistic hopes. He takes these to the grave with him: his suicide is misguided and his hopes for his sons' use of insurance money that will probably not pay out, are deluded. As Charley says at Willy's funeral, "Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory" (Salesman: 111). This interpretation removes the responsibility of the protagonist for his choice. Willy Loman has moments of insight when he sees reality, yet his entire life has been based on the wrong dream, so that he never knows who he is. It is easier for Loman to remain living in his own created world, than to face reality and admit his failure. When Biff tries to force Willy to face reality, by telling Willy that "I'm nothing, Pop" (Salesman: 105), Willy ignores him and withdraws into his dream world where Biff "is going to be magnificent" (Salesman: 106).

Our own society is as encumbered by dreams of success and materialism as Loman is. Most people can recognise this hope within themselves, which makes Willy Loman representative of humanity. Death of a Salesman, in this way, questions what causes fulfilment, and what enables one to be ultimately happy in this existence. Willy represents more than a salesman; he represents humanity's search for fulfilment. It is not found in Willy's attempt to mould himself on Dave Singleman or Ben, as he loses his own personal worth in the process. However, as Koon (9) concludes, Loman "gradually destroys himself through ignorance and blindness, placing his trust in false values that must inevitably crumble". The flaw leading to his downfall is in Willy himself, not in Howard, Charley or materialism.

Loman suffers as he clings to his phoney dream, a dream that encompasses his attitude towards life. It includes his desire (and failure) to be well-liked (Anderson: 26) and his interpretation of the American Dream (Ferguson: 97). He passionately holds on to the hope of material success for him, and when that fails, for his sons. He progressively recognises that his life is meaningless by the standards he has set for himself, yet he chooses not to change his standards or dream.

Throughout the drama, there are numerous references to being tired, to death and to fire, which create the impression of Willy Loman suffering and of being tired of life and of trying. At the very start of the play, Willy admits: "I'm tired to the death" (Salesman: 8), which recurs to haunt us throughout the play. "I'm so tired", he says to Linda at the very end of Act One. Act Two opens with his saying that he slept "like a dead one" (Salesman: 55), and he later confides to Howard that: "I'm just a little tired". He is a man who is exhausted from trying.

Allusions to death permeate the drama and ones with reference to Willy include Linda's comments that all of Willy's old friends are "dead, retired" (Salesman: 41). As the play reaches its climax, Biff shouts at his father to "Forget I'm alive" (Salesman: 102). Willy responds by telling Biff that he "cut down [his] life for spite [and that he should]... hang [himself]! For spite..." (Salesman: 103-104). For Willy to speak so harshly to his beloved son shows that he speaks as a man who is burdened by guilt. Bernard told Willy that after Biff had visited his father in Boston (where he discovered Willy with his mistress), Biff had just "given up his life" (Salesman: 74) and stopped trying.

There are also, as said, images of fire, of burning up. Willy speaks twice of the woods burning (possibly his own dreams burning up), and Biff burns his sneakers in the furnace after he discovers his father's infidelity. He also begs his father to "...take that phoney dream and burn it before something happens" (Salesman: 106). Indirectly, these images and references create an atmosphere of suffering, and of a hellish life. The final funeral scene confirms Willy Loman's ultimate fall, his ultimate sale of his life.

"It is [the] overwhelming need to have his sons succeed that is the underlying drive of his life and the cause of his tragic agony" Carson (53) proposes. Willy Loman suffers when his sons don't seem to be as popular or successful as they had been as youngsters. He has put his life into trying to teach them his values, but instead, Happy is blinded as much as Willy is, and will probably follow in his footsteps,

because he defends Willy's dream: "He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have – to come out number-one man" (Salesman: 111). Biff, on the other hand, realises the reason for his failure. He never got anywhere because Willy "...blew [him] so full of hot air [he] could never stand taking orders from anybody" (Salesman: 104). Willy Loman fails his sons.

There is a sense of tragic loss in the drama, as Miller's poetics emphasises the importance of one's social duty and of familial love. In all of his plays, Miller's belief in the unifying force of love that leads to personal insight within the family, is evident. The Loman family never finds or expresses love that frees one to be oneself.

Koon (10) quotes Miller from Morality and the Modern Drama. Willy Loman is not the average American person – he commits suicide. Instead, "Willy Loman is... a person who embodies in himself some of the terrible conflicts running through the streets of America today." These conflicts lead to his suffering, as Willy's moral sense is undermined by his arrogance and pretensions. He is contemptuous towards those who try to help him, and never finds the fulfilment he searches for (Koon: 38). Willy Loman has illusions of grandeur, being well-liked and having successful sons; he holds on to these illusions, rather than live in reality. These breed expectations that are impossible to meet, which leads to despair and then moral confusion. "Moral confusion renders action chaotic and impotent, experience insignificant and existence meaningless" (Ferguson: 94). The illusions, promises and hopes of Loman, are impossible to meet or keep.

Bigsby (1997: 79) asserts that Loman's tragic agony is caused by his "...insecurity in the universe, his profound sense of being unfulfilled, and his inability to observe his own emotional speed limits. ...Willy exaggerates, cheats and lies", but denies doing so. But when he screams to Biff, "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman" (Salesman: 105), he lays claim to his own, and everyone else's, dignity and individual worth, even though his name means nothing in a materialistic world.

According to Kennedy (Koon: 39), tragedy should bring knowledge as well as sadness. It should teach the audience about the right way to live. In other words, it should, in Miller's words from The Nature of Tragedy, "make us aware of what the character might have been" (Koon: 39). Loman might have been a man aware of his worth as a human being and of his responsibility towards society as such. There is a suggestion of victory in the paradox of Loman's death. His suicide is intended as a victory over his circumstances, and as an act of his love for his family (Jackson: 75) and as an act showing the depth of human worth and human love, but the audience interprets it as a misguided action that could have been avoided. In Tragedy and the Common Man, Miller sees tragedy as being fundamentally optimistic, as it deals with man's attempts to "achieve his humanity" and to believe in man's ability to attain perfection (Weales: 147). Loman attempts to "achieve his humanity" in his sacrificial act.

Willy Loman suffers because he blindly clings to his phoney dream of wealth, success and happiness, and in so doing, denies himself and his family, the opportunity to live and love truthfully. Loman's world (created by misguided goals

formed in the context of distorted American values), values materialism, and sees human worth and success in terms of productivity and wealth. Loman suffers within this context as he searches for the truth, but cannot accept that he has had the wrong dreams. His death, in which he shows his love for his family, is misguided and tragic as it need not have happened.

4.5 The impact on the audience

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the drama of the modern age differs sharply from that of the earlier three periods: fifth century BC Greek, Elizabethan and seventeenth-century French. Modern drama is relevant to non-American audiences since the central problems – personal fulfilment and alienation - are prevalent in any modern society. Since the social context determines the nature of the tragedy, the question thus arises as to whether the social context is national, Western or global. In the case of Death of a Salesman, the drama and questions it asks are relevant globally. All cultures and nationalities respond to the basic questions of humanity: what is the purpose of life and what leads to fulfilment?

Bigsby (1990: 52) quotes Gregory Hersov from the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester. Hersov explains the relevance of Miller's dramas to modern man:

> Part of the enduring power of these plays is that these crisis points contain basic themes that still bear strongly on our modern world.... Willy Loman is a salesman. We live in a world where buying and selling, competition and work-rate are fundamental to our identity. Death of a Salesman shows the consequences this system has for our humanity. Again, the most intimate

unit, the family, is torn apart by the protagonist's inability to find feeling, sustenance, love and meaning in that system.

In every country, there are problems in trying to keep the family a unit, in trying to find "feeling, sustenance, love and meaning". That is the essence of life. Death of a Salesman asks these questions about what gives life meaning, of the audience and forces the audience to contemplate the answers.

A tragedy must evoke a response from the audience, whether it is pity, terror or questioning life and the moral forces and structures within which our society is embedded. Ferguson (85) explains the effect of tragedy: "...the exaggerated agony of tragedy does not oppress, but uplifts us... to a higher level of consciousness, to a greater awareness of what it means to be human."

Although Willy Loman never reaches a stage of enlightenment – he prefers to remain blind to this – it is the enlightenment of the audience that is ultimately of most importance. One feels pity for Willy Loman, as he remains deluded and could have made a different choice. There is also a sense of fear that we might also be deluding ourselves and not facing reality in certain aspects of our lives, and there is hope, because it is a choice that we can make. We can blind ourselves to reality and live in our dreams, or we can take control of our lives and face reality head-on (Carson: 58).

Miller does not use conventional realism in Death of a Salesman, but instead he uses subjective reality to explore the subjective relationship between Loman and his

social and intellectual environments (Carson: 151). He invites the audience to enter the inside of Willy's head. This draws the audience into the private crisis within Willy (Bigsby 1997: 78). Willy loses his sense of individuality, as many people do today, due to suppression by technology and society. This makes Death of a Salesman more pertinent now than ever before.

As said, a tragic drama must effect a response from the audience. Death of a Salesman ends on a note of hope for the audience. Even though Willy's death does not lead to widespread chaos and the future, represented by Biff and Happy, seems bleak, at least Biff has faced the truth and been freed from his father's deceit (Koon: 11). He accepts responsibility for the person he has become when he tells Willy that "This isn't your fault; it's me, I'm a bum" (Salesman: 102). Biff is also realistic concerning the deception if their house: "We never told the truth for 10 minutes in this house" (Salesman: 104), Biff admits. Since he knows who he is, he can move on. There is hope for a new, realistic perspective of life for him, and there is hope for the audience in the knowledge that Willy made a bad choice, but the audience still has the chance to make the right choice in their own lives.

Kennedy (Koon: 44) opposes this view. He claims that Death of a Salesman fails as a tragedy as it does not satisfactorily show the right way to live. Biff should be the character to demonstrate what Willy might have been and what the right way of living, which might have saved him, is. But Biff shows only the beginning of wisdom when he realises that he is nothing. He implies that his value will consist in doing the outdoor physical work he is best fitted for, not that his value lies in his humanity. Charley, too, lets the audience down as he is unable to explain the principle, which

underlies his good deeds, by which he lives. Kennedy (Koon: 45) asks, "What might Willy Loman have been? What can Biff Loman become? These great possibilities are left for each person in the audience to answer for himself. Miller has no precepts to offer.... Taken in the largest sense, as Miller would want it to be, this can only indicate a grave defect in the play's total vision."

If Biff had suddenly come to an awareness of the meaning of life, after living in a world of his father's deception, or if Charley had all the answers, then the characters would cease to be realistic representations. They would be given an awareness that is beyond their characters. Surely it is enough that Biff breaks through his father's blindness and the audience responds with awareness and questioning.

Ferguson (93) does not consider Willy Loman to be a tragic hero, as he is "a pathetic salesman [who dies a] pathetic death". The play, however, symbolises the tragedy of America, a "noble and proud nation impelled to tragic misadventures and misfortunes because of the moral intensity and presumptive uniqueness of its national consciousness..." (Ferguson: 93). Although Willy Loman is destroyed by this American tragedy because he does not understand it, the audience who grasps its meaning may be uplifted by it. Willy, Ferguson postulates, thus dies without the tragic vision: "as mythic anti-hero, he has never really lived. And the other characters do not learn from his sacrifice" (Ferguson: 97). Similarly, Trowbridge does not consider Loman to have achieved the stature of a tragic hero because there is too much pathos and too little tragedy.

Trowbridge (223) quotes Miller from Tragedy and the Common Man: "The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules... a character has fought a battle he could not possible have won. ...tragedy requires a nicer balance between what is possible and what is impossible. ...In tragedy... lies the belief – optimistic, if you will, in the perfectibility of man." The paradox in tragedy is thus that, even though the tragic protagonist is destroyed, his struggle shows the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity (Trowbridge: 224). Death of a Salesman stirs more our pity than our fear, Trowbridge (225) declares. He even quotes Miller's statement that "...Willy Loman lacks sufficient insight into this situation which would have made him a greater, more significant figure". In my opinion, this does not preclude Loman from being a modern tragic hero, it merely means that he could have been more significant had he had greater insight. Willy Loman's needless, but understandable death, does arouse pity and fear in the audience, as it forces the audience to contemplate their own lives in comparison to Willy's. One wonders how much of one's own life is based on fact and fantasy, and one is forced to contemplate the struggles Willy goes through: what makes life meaningful? Loman suffers for his blindness, but he also dies by the principles by which he lived, misguided as both are.

Death of a Salesman is a modern tragedy and Willy Loman is a modern tragic protagonist. The drama investigates and questions serious issues, such as what makes life meaningful, as well as the importance of family love, the destructive force of self-deception and the necessity for each person to find his place in society and in the order of things. Although prose is used, the combination of beautiful poetic phrases, lighting, colour, music, gestures and content, creates a "poetry of the

theatre", which is appropriate to a common man as tragic hero, yet still manifests his dignity. Willy Loman, being a common man who struggles with issues that man struggles with, and who lives by values and principles by which many people live, is representative of humanity. His flaw, that of a refusal to give up his wrong dreams and to face reality, leads to his suffering as he cannot find meaning in his life, and is disappointed that his goals of success have not been attained by himself, not by his sons. They have not been attained as he has the wrong goals. Within his society, material wealth, popularity and being "better" than others, is important. But this does not bring happiness. Loman struggles to make sense of his life and journeys into his own mind to find the truth, but he is defeated. This defeat seems meaningless, yet allows the audience to question life, forces of life, action, and the meaning of suffering. This results in catharsis of pity and fear in some audiences, and in others there is at least a questioning of one's own humanity.

Death of a Salesman certainly deviates from traditional tragedies as modern social concerns and values differ from those of the past. Yet it also deals with fundamental issues that are present in traditional tragedies, too. These concern man's quest for meaning and man's responsibility for the decisions he makes in life. Ultimately, Death of a Salesman offers insight into the human condition, insight which can help man better his own life and know more of his place in the structure of the universe.

Conclusion

"The most socially conscious of all major American dramatists, he has always taken a stance more moral than strictly political and focused on issues human rather than ideological... He is a concerned dramatist rather than a committed one; a thinking writer rather than the intellectual that he has often been called" (Welland of Miller: 12).

Death of a Salesman is a modern tragic drama and Willy Loman is a modern tragic hero, representing modern man. As society has developed, so have perceptions regarding assessment of literature been modified.

The assessment and value of literary works are bound to the social, economic and political contexts of the author, critic and audience. Since these elements are mutable and change over time, so do literary perceptions. Miller's works are examples of literature that reflect these changes. Arthur Miller is a dramatist who is bound by his time and context, and the influence thereof is evident in his works. He is a modern writer, so his dramas, particularly his tragic dramas, reflect the modern age. They should, therefore, be assessed in terms of modern thought.

The focus of this argument concerns the changing perceptions and requirements with regard to the tragic hero. What makes a hero tragic in the framework of modern

times and modern values, and how is the concept of the tragic dramatic hero involved with the values of the society within which he functions and from which he is perceived or judged? These questions are answered with reference to the tragic dramas of Arthur Miller, and in particular, with reference to Death of a Salesman.

The intrinsic features of modern tragic drama are determined by the nature of modern society. Man has always expressed his world and concept of the world through literature. He is formed, as Marxist critics point out, by social influences and interactions. These interactions are expressed through literature. An author's background and upbringing will affect his work because, as Miller says, "A writer is limited by his time and the nature of his society" (Gomez: 61).

Arthur Miller's personal life: his family, Jewishness and relationships, as well as the social (The American Dream), economic (The Great Depression) and political (World Wars, McCarthyism) influences of his time, have all influenced his dramas, and are incorporated in his dramas. He is bound by his context.

Miller's lack of early educational interest can be seen in Biff and Happy in Death of a Salesman, men who see life in terms of the physical and appearances, rather than through ideas. Miller's distasteful experience when working for his father in a garment factory is evidenced in the characters of Walter and Victor in The Price. Victor represents the responsible nature of Miller, while Walter the desire to follow his own dreams, without feeling guilty. Themes of guilt, moral debt and choice, issues which Miller had to deal with, run through a number of his dramas, including The Price, All my Sons and An Enemy of the People.

While at University, Miller's exposure to socialist ideologies, especially that portrayed in Ibsen's writing, helped form his sense of social responsibility, which permeates his dramas. He determined to search for the truth, and to distrust any ideology or institution that professed being the absolute truth. Herein lies the reason for critique on capitalism, political systems and ideologies in his dramas. For example, Quentin, in After the Fall, embarks on just such a search for truth.

The experiences he endured as result of his Jewishness, are also portrayed in various literary works, such as the novel, Focus, which deals with Anti-Semitism, and the drama, Incident at Vichy, which deals with the Second World War experience of the Jews.

Lastly, the devastating effects of the Great Depression and the failure of the American Dream, which lead to wide-spread disillusionment and questioning of the superficial, distorted values that the American Dream represent, underlie Death of a Salesman. The collapse of family solidarity and the suffering accompanying the collapse of a dream world based on false values, are poignantly characterised.

Miller felt a need to make the people aware of the dynamics of the various systems, and so discover their own responsibilities in the modern world. Owing to his interest in socialism, Miller was persecuted during the period of McCarthy's rule. He refused to name others who had also been interested in socialist issues because he believed in his own form of a moral law. He believes that man has responsibilities towards himself, his family, his community and his society. Thus a man must find the balance between his own desires and those of his society. Then, one must fulfil these

responsibilities. All my Sons and A View from the Bridge highlight the effects of breaking society's or the community's moral laws.

Since Miller, and other authors and critics are bound by their contexts, it follows that as societies change through history, so are the artists affected. Art expresses an author's perception of reality (mimesis), which is in turn affected by his experiences and background. Liberalism of the twentieth century, which is similar to modernism, was characterised by a desire to challenge traditionally approved ways of doing things. This thought inspired playwrights to experiment with different forms and techniques in dramas, such as changing the number of acts. Realism, too, changed the content of literature. Authors began to present life realistically in their works. The world was no longer seen as an idealistic, hopeful place, but rather one where people face struggles. Dramas changed in that playwrights used common, complex people as heroes and detailed staged directions made the dramas as realistic as possible. Developing from this portrayal of the hero, is subjectivity, or "contemporary literature" (Greer: 570), which sees individuals as unique, and that life can only be understood through internal experiences and thus through penetrating the minds of characters. Death of a Salesman penetrates the mind of Willy Loman, revealing his memories and thought processes, so that the audience can understand him and thus something of the meaning of life.

Changes in the way that man views life is thus connected to the developments of philosophies and manners of thinking in his society. As these social values change, so do literary forms, content and perceptions. Similarly, so do value judgements of literature, and in particular tragic drama, change. It is therefore necessary to redefine the concepts of tragedy and the tragic dramatic hero, within the framework of modern

times and modern values. The concept of the tragic hero is involved with the values of the society in which he functions and from which he is perceived. The Ancient Greek society believed in the decisions of the gods and in fate, so they valued a hero who would fight against fate before eventually being defeated by it. Terror accompanied the tragedy as they believed that the gods determined their fate. Christian tragedy was characterised rather by the hero's human error, while in the nineteenth century the tragedies of, for example Ibsen, emphasised social issues. Modern Society, however, with an increasing knowledge, and ironically, an increasing religious scepticism, portrays the common man as tragic hero, who can make a difference; and be responsible for his own destiny.

The modern tragic hero must show how a man can find his place in the order of things – according to Miller, this means in modern times, taking one's responsibility socially and adhering to the social or universal moral law. Despite these changes in social values, there are fundamental characteristics underlying all tragic dramas, from Ancient Greek to the Modern. These pertain to the fundamental characteristics of humanity. They include serious content and dignity in the presentation of the hero. This means that issues such as the desire to find meaning in life, the effects when one fights against a universal moral structure (fate, the gods, God, social responsibilities, moral law), the nature of suffering (whether it is physical or spiritual) and the difficulties of relationships between the protagonist and his family, friends, society or his self, are explored. The tragic hero is also noteworthy in character. Although neither good nor bad, he must have a quality or passion, which makes his suffering seem worse. Willy Loman, for example, has an intensely passionate desire to cling to his principles and believe in his phoney dream. Thirdly, the hero must

suffer, so that the audience can be affected by it, whether it is in the form of terror, pity, or thinking more deeply about life.

Arthur Miller retains these aspects of tragic drama, and rejects others that do not pertain to modern society, such as the protagonist being a man of higher social stature, for example a king. He also rejects the use poetry by the protagonist, for although that suited a king or knight of the past, it does not suit a common man who represents society. Miller thus substitutes poetry with a "poetry of the theatre", where dialogue, metaphors, acting and theatrical devices such as lighting, music and colour, all work together to form a fluid, poetic experience. These adaptations are evident in four of his modern dramas: All my Sons, A View from the Bridge, The Crucible, and Death of a Salesman.

Death of a Salesman, especially, fulfils the three fundamental requirements of tragic drama that have persisted throughout the history of tragic drama, although other aspects deviate from traditional tragedy. Willy Loman is a common man, who possesses an intense belief in his phoney dream that he and his sons will find happiness in material possessions and popularity. He values principles of hard work and initiative, but lacks a sense of morality and refuses to face reality. He and his family have spent their lives drowned in deception and a false dream. Willy Loman has no self-knowledge, and refuses to face the truth. Instead, he suffers because of his blindness: he has momentary flashes of insight into reality, which depress him, but he smothers them and ends his life for a dream. Being a common man, poetry would have been inappropriate; instead prose full of imagery, working together with colour, lighting, music and acting produce a poetic effect, which manifests Loman's dignity – his passion and suffering. Through this drama, the audience is forced to

consider life-changing concepts, such as the value of truth and self-knowledge above the value of possessions, principles. Learning from Loman's mistakes, the audience can avoid making similar mistakes. Having seen the effects of self-absorption, they can gain a sense of responsibility towards one another.

Many critics do not agree that Willy Loman meets the requirements of a tragic hero, yet many others do. This is right, as critics and audiences are also products of their particular set of circumstances, and view literature from their own frames of reference. Literature, along with social values, is dynamic. Different value judgements of literature prove the subjectivity of literary interpretations, and the fact that a drama such as Death of a Salesman can arouse such opposing interpretations when the text never changes, shows the extent of its depth and value.