



# Abstract

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.

Literature, as an expression of man's perception of reality, is bound to its context. According to Marxist precepts, for example, man is formed by social influences and interactions. These specific influences can be traced in an author's works. 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, are all represented in his dramas.

Similarly, the critic and audience have their own unique frames of reference, consisting of the various ideologies and circumstances from within which they operate. They are in a sense thus also limited according to their time and society. Since literature is thus bound to the social values of its time, and social values and contexts change through history, the tools/ values whereby a literary work is assessed could also change. In particular, the requirements by which a modern drama can be judged to be tragic or not, could be re-assessed in the light of modern times and modern values.

Arthur Miller's works are examples of literature that is influenced by the context of modern times. In his tragic dramas, most notably Death of a Salesman, he has rejected some of the traditional requirements for tragedy and has replaced them with modern concerns, in order to make them more relevant to a modern society. He has, however, also retained aspects of tragedy that have persisted through history. These essential qualities include seriousness in content (tragedies must question the meaning of life and suffering); the hero should be presented in a manner that manifests his dignity, and lastly, the hero suffers and the audience learns from it.

Miller replaces the poetry of the past, which manifested the dignity of the noble hero, with a poetic voice of the theatre, which manifests the dignity of the common man. The common man, as representative of modern man, is endowed with a particular quality, such as a passionate clinging to a dream, like Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman. The hero also has a faulty view of the world, or a character flaw, which leads to his suffering. His suffering must impact on the audience, whether it be in the form of traditional pity and terror, or as a challenge to the audience to consider the issues treated.

The dissertation suggests that Arthur Miller portrays modern social values in an adapted form, modern tragic drama, while retaining the essential qualities of tragedy.

**Key terms:** Arthur Miller, tragedy, tragic hero, modern tragedy, drama, contextual framework, Marxism, Death of a Salesman, common man, poetic voice.

# Samevatting

Hierdie argument konsentreer op veranderende persepsies en vereistes met betrekking tot die konsep van die tragiese held. Wat maak 'n held tragies binne die verwysingsraamwerk van die moderne tyd en waardes, en hoe is die begrip van die tragiese dramatiese held betrokke by die waardes van die samelewing waarin hy funksioneer en waaruit hy waargeneem en beoordeel word? Hierdie vrae word beantwoord met verwysing na die tragiese dramas van Arthur Miller en in die besonder na Death of a Salesman.

Literatuur, as 'n uitdrukking van die mens se waarneming van die werklikheid, is aan konteks gebonde. Die mens is, soos die Marxisme beweer, deur sosiale invloede en interaksies gevorm. Hierdie spesifieke invloede kan nagespoor word in 'n skrywer se werk. Arthur Miller se persoonlike lewe, gesinslewe, Joodsheid en verhoudinge, sowel as die sosiale (die Amerikaanse Droom), ekonomiese (die Groot Depressie) en politieke (wêreldoorloë, McCarthyisme) invloede van sy tyd, het sy dramas beïnvloed, en is daarin inkorporeer.

Die kritikus en gehoor het ook hul eie, unieke verwysingsraamwerke, wat deur die verskeie ideologië en omstandighede wat hulle aangeraak het, gevorm is. Hulle is dus ook beperk tot hul tyd en samelewing. Omdat literatuur gekoppel is aan die sosiale waardes van die tyd waaruit dit spruit, en sosiale waardes en kontekste verander met die verloop van die geskiedenis, kan die waardes waarvolgens 'n letterkundige werk aangeslaan word, ook verander. In die besonder, sal die vereistes waarvolgens 'n moderne drama as tragies of nie beoordeel word, herskat kan word in die lig van die moderne tyd en moderne waardes.

Arthur Miller se dramas is voorbeelde van literatuur wat beïnvloed is deur die moderne konteks. Dit kan gesien word uit die invloed wat sy opvoeding, sowel as twintigste-eeuse aangeleenthede, op sy dramas gehad het. In sy tragiese dramas, in besonder Death of a Salesman, het Miller party van die tradisionele aspekte van die tragedie verwerp, en hulle met moderne preokkupasies vervang, sodat hulle meer relevant tot 'n moderne samelewing sou wees. Hy het egter ook sekere aspekte van die tragedie wat deur die eeue bly voortbestaan het, behou. Hierdie kerneienskappe sluit die noodwendige erns van die inhoud in ('n tragedie moet die betekenis van die lewe en van lyding bevraagteken); die wyse waarop die held aangebied word en sy waardigheid openbaar, en laastens ook lyding: dit wat die held ondergaan en dit wat die gehoor daaruit leer.

Miller vervang die tradisionele poësie van die klassieke tragedie, wat die waardigheid van die held bevestig het, met die poëtiese stem van die teater, wat die waardigheid van die gewone mens openbaar. Die gewone mens, wat die moderne mens verteenwoordig, het 'n besonderlike eienskap, soos bv, Willy Loman se vasklou aan 'n droom in Death of a Salesman. Die held het ook 'n defektiewe wêreldbeskouing, of 'n karaktergebrek wat tot sy lyding lei. Sy lyding moet die gehoor tref, hetsy in die vorm van medelye of vrees, of as 'n uitdaging aan die gehoor om sekere idees ernstig te bedink en oorweeg. Arthur Miller kry dit dus reg om moderne sosiale waardes in die vorm van tragiese drama te beskrywe terwyl hy die kernkenmerke van tragedie behou.

**Kernuitdrukkings:** Arthur Miller, tragedie, tragiese held, moderne tragedie, drama, kontekstuele raamwerk, Marxisme, Death of a Salesman, gewone mens, poëtiese stem.

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**This degree is dedicated to God.**

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example, the notion of a Salesman is a tragic, or perhaps tragic, hero.

Yet all this is not really Eric Bentley's idea, but rather a reflection of the

Willy Loman's tragic hero, a tragic hero.

From this point of view, the notion of a tragic hero is a reflection of the

requirements of the tragic hero, which have changed during the course of

precisely that which the hero finds in the course of his or her journey.

These changes and developments are part of a larger, broader, and

a historical perspective. One also needs to bear in mind that the notion

a literary work is determined to some degree by the writer's social and

context of the society in which it is written and read.

Contextual studies can be validated, as it is self-evident that literature, to a

degree at least, is a reflection of its author's ideas and values. These values have

accordingly, been influenced by the author's background, his education, his

certain challenges he may have experienced and his perceptions of the prevailing

value system within his society. Arthur Miller acknowledges this influence in his



# Introduction

***"Life is a comedy to those who think, and a tragedy to those who feel" (Horace Walpole).***

Arthur Miller (born 1915) is an eminent American playwright whose modern tragic dramas, especially Death of a Salesman, have been central in debates concerning the intrinsic features of modern drama, particularly tragic drama. Miller insists, for example, that Death of a Salesman is a tragic drama and Willy Loman a tragic hero. Yet some critics, most notably Eric Bentley, have questioned this view, proposing that Willy Loman does not attain tragic dimensions.

From this debate, there arises the need to ascertain how the perceptions and requirements regarding tragic drama have changed throughout history, and what, precisely, makes a hero tragic in the context of modern society and modern values. These changes and requirements are examined in Chapter 1, The theory of tragedy: a historical perspective. One also needs to bear in mind, however, that the "value" of a literary work is determined, to some degree, by the social, economic and political context of the society in which it is written and read.

Contextual studies can be validated, as it is self-evident that literature, to a certain degree at least, is a reflection of its author's ideas and values. These values have, accordingly, been influenced by the author's background, his education, lifestyle, certain challenges he may have experienced and his perceptions of the prevailing value system within his society. Arthur Miller acknowledges this influence in his

writing when he states, "a writer is limited by his time and the nature of his society" (Gomez 1988: 61).<sup>1</sup> Miller implies that his work should not be studied in a conceptual vacuum: the intellectual and social contexts of his work are pertinent. Miller's dramas show evidence of the effect that the First and Second World Wars, the Great Depression, Capitalism, McCarthyism and Marxism have had on him. Personal relationships with his family and wives, as well as his Jewishness and educational experiences, have also profoundly affected his writings, as will be explained in Chapter 2, The influence of American society and Miller's conceptual framework on his dramas.

This recognition of the significance of context reveals a shift from the strict literary principles of New Criticism, which have dominated most twentieth century literary studies up to the 1970s. It does, however, correlate to some degree with the Marxist critical approach, which recognises literature as bound by its historical context. Coyle et al. (1991: 709) and Jefferson et al. (1983: 8-10) explain that Marxism views the status of all symbolic activity such as language, law, politics, religion, moral codes and art as secondary to economic processes and structures. In other words, social domains are divided into a superstructure, where the foundation or base influences the upper levels. The foundation or base consists of the class into which man is born, with its specific powers and privileges. Economic and social forces influence,

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<sup>1</sup> **Referencing:** Referencing in this dissertation is as follows:

The first time an author is quoted or referred to, the surname, date and page numbers are written, for example: (Draper 1980: 12).

Thereafter, only the surname and page numbers are reflected: (Draper: 12).

When an author's name is incorporated into the sentence, only the date and/ or page numbers are in brackets: Draper (1980: 12) asserts that...  
or Draper (12) asserts that...

When two or more books are written by the same author, the date is always included in the reference: (Gurr 1980: 12) and (Gurr 1988: 57).

Dramas and books written by Arthur Miller are reflected by a shortening of the full title and the page numbers, for example: (Timebends: 34), (Salesman: 21).

The book referred to as "Weales" is a collection of Miller's original essays, as well as Death of a Salesman and others' commentaries.

and to a large extent form, his conceptual development. This in turn influences man's interaction with the world around him. One way of expressing this interaction is through literature. Literature is thus part of the superstructure and is bound by the social and economic context of the author. To simplify this, Miller's conceptual development is formed by his experience of the world, which, in turn, is expressed in his dramas and other literary works.

The pertinence of context also applies to the critic and his conceptual framework, as Marxist critic Raymond Williams admits. The critic should "be aware of the dependence of the work of art on the period to which it belongs, and of the influence which his own time exerts on the judgements he himself makes" (Draper 1980: 13). Critics have responded to Death of a Salesman with completely opposing interpretations and attitudes. Each critic analyses the drama from his own perspective and experience; since these differ, so do their responses. The fact that Death of a Salesman elicits such debate points to its value as a drama of depth and versatility.

Since society is dynamic, it follows that literature, which is constrained by its context in society and perceptions of literature, would also constantly change. This change would include a modification of the traditional concept of tragedy and the tragic dramatic hero. Social values and the concept of the tragic dramatic hero are thus intrinsically linked. Draper (12) supports this view:

When one takes the view of the whole tragic tradition from Aristotle to the present day, it becomes quite apparent that tragedy does alter its shape and meaning from one century to another with chameleon variability, reinforcing the sense that a single, unchanging definition of tragedy is unattainable.

Draper seems to suggest that there are actually no set prerequisites for a tragic concern with the meaning of life, with suffering and with man's place in the drama, but rather that each era's social contexts determine what that society

understands as tragedy. Frow's explication of Marxism sustains this: Marxism redefines "the contours of its field of study and what goes on inside this field, and [it thinks of] this field in relation to social determinations" (Coyle et al: 780). Developments in society thus result in changes in concepts and, extending from this, in changes in literary perceptions and judgements, such as those concerning the prerequisites for a tragedy.

Miller's dramatic works reflect this change in the concept of tragedy, and these works have thus been subjected to a great deal of critical debate in which critics have found it necessary to re-evaluate accepted measures of evaluation. Miller has, for example, employed modern techniques such as realism and expressionism in Death of a Salesman, while disregarding the more traditional techniques of classical tragedy such as soliloquy and poetry. He 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 into humanity and does not have disastrous effects for everyone else. Yet Loman does represent modern man, and does reflect the modern American's desire and failure to attain the American Dream. Loman's character has developed from American society and, as Ferguson (1978: 83) elucidates, "tragedy cannot take place outside of or detached from the society that has nurtured the character of the tragic hero". As modern American society is very different from Ancient Greek society, so the tragic hero must necessarily be different.

Yet, probably because humanity is fundamentally unchanging within a changing context, one can trace through history basic similarities in all tragedies, such as the concern with the meaning of life, with suffering and with man's place in his

environment and universe. Miller has kept at the core of his tragic dramas the same concerns, but he has adapted other aspects of tragedy to make his dramas relevant to modern man. Three requirements of tragedy have remained inherently unchanged, yet have been outwardly adapted to each society. These are: the dignity and seriousness of the content and in the presentation of the hero, the character of the tragic hero, and the suffering which the hero undergoes, that invites the audience to understand more of life from it. Chapter 3, Basic requirements for tragic heroes: an examination of Miller's heroes in his tragic dramas, looks at how four of Miller's dramas manifest these basic requirements of tragedy. The crux of the debate, exposed in Chapter 4, Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman": a tragic hero or an anti-hero? pertains to whether or not Death of a Salesman meets these requirements in modern society, and whether Willy Loman can be seen as a modern tragic hero, or is to be regarded as an anti-hero. The dissertation concludes with the assertion that Loman, although not a traditional tragic hero, is indeed suitable for a modern tragic hero.

Arthur Miller has, as said, deviated from the expected tragic dramatic form, but this dissertation asserts that his works are no less valid as dramatic expressions of tragedy than older dramas, which have adhered more closely to the expected dramatic form and traditional attributes of the tragic protagonist.

Miller's dramatic tragedies, as with all forms of art, serve the purpose of expressing the writer's view on life and enabling the readers or audience to experience that view. Taking Marxist precepts into account, it can be argued that art as an expression of a person's concept of reality, is affected by the artist's personal experience and frame of reference; artists thus manipulate literary devices for artistic, religious, didactic or

entertainment purposes. Drama is a literary vehicle that allows for a variety of purposes.

The powerful effect drama may have on people was known long before the novel even existed as a literary form. One reason for drama's popularity and forcefulness is that through the enactment of drama on stage, an author can disseminate his sentiments effectively. This intention can be explicit, as was the case in the Middle Ages, when the actors enacted biblical stories for illiterate and uneducated peasants, or it can be subtle. This move to a more subtle and underlying meaning in drama ought, as Miller says, to "bring us closer to ourselves if only [drama] can grow and change with the changing world" (Welland 1985: 13). Other aspects of drama that have correspondingly changed with society's changes in values, such as content, form and purpose, will be discussed later in the context of tragedy.

Although all literature expresses the author's sentiments concerning life and society, some people consider drama by its very nature to be a more complex literary form than poetry or the novel. Carol H. Smith ascribes to this perception:

...drama requires a much more complex relationship between the author and the world of the play than lyric poetry requires. Drama requires the construction of a world, not a response to a world. It requires a certain tolerance of multiple perspectives and a flexibility in the creation of a distinctive 'culture' within the dramatic world... (Brooker 1991: 146).

If drama represents a world, as Smith proposes, rather than responds to a world, then drama should represent or reflect the changes in the world it represents, and thus in society. Modern tragic drama would then represent modern man, the modern world, and contemporary concepts, values and problems. Modern drama would be outwardly very different from dramas of other eras.

Looking back at other eras, we realise that Aristotle, too, preferred tragic drama as a literary form. Greer (1987: 68) writes: "though Aristotle admired poetry, he regarded tragic drama as a higher form of art. In addition to being read or sung, Greek drama was acted out."

Drama is a dynamic literary form that can encompass contextual changes, as it is often deemed to be more versatile than poetry or the novel. Gurr (1980: 22), another critic who regards drama as a preferred literary form, reasons that drama possesses "the narrative properties of prose fiction and the imagistic properties of poetry", thus facilitating the desired concepts or reflections which the author wishes to convey. Poetry and drama "both use language to weave verbal chains which create imagistic pictures" (Gurr 1980: 22), but drama has the added advantage of being enacted on stage, visually reinforcing the words being spoken.

Dramas are considered by some critics to be more mutable or changeable than novels, thus making the dramatic form an excellent vehicle for the reflection of changes in concepts. Dramas and novels both relate stories, alternating between groups of characters and still maintaining a central plot. "They entwine lines of the main plot and the sub-plot in a complex sequence from the beginning to the end, and the different strands create a pattern of parallels and contrasts around the main theme" (Gurr 1980: 22). Drama, however, as mentioned concerning poetry, goes one step further as it re-creates the world on stage.

As life involves different emotions, situations, perceptions and personalities, so the drama consists of many categories, reflecting this complex reality. These categories include, among others: tragedy, comedy, history, romance, satire, farce, melodrama

and tragicomedy. Weales (1977: XV) perceives tragedy as the most controversial form: "some aestheticians and critics have spent the last 2500 years trying and failing to agree on a definition of tragedy.... For many critics, the word 'tragedy' is a value judgement", but before one can make a value judgement or offer any valid comments pertaining to the debates surrounding modern tragedies, a knowledge of the traditional and accepted parameters of tragedy is necessary. From there, one can determine how societal developments have affected these traditional parameters and changed literary concepts. Thus, conclusions can be drawn as to the status of modern dramas within a new canon.

Some dramas, such as Beaumont and Fletcher's A King and No King, fall into the category of tragicomedy, where the distinctions are difficult to make. Potter (1987: 131) defines tragicomedies: they "often open with a tragic situation in the old style [but] end artificially, with a comic or happy ending in which all the problems [are] neatly solved." Traditionally, however, these two forms, tragedy and comedy have been separate and easily distinguishable. According to the traditional parameters described by Aristotle, tragedy's aim is to "represent men... as better than in actual life", whereas comedy's aim is to represent men as "worse" (Draper: 17). Comedy is a collective activity, where the audience laughs together and feels a group in social harmony. Comedies emphasise humans as social beings. Tragedy, however, is more personal and thus more isolating. It emphasises the individual. Steiner (1963: 247, 249) delineates this conviction:

Comedy is the art of the lesser orders of men. It tends to dramatise those material circumstances and bodily functions, which are banished from the tragic stage. The comic personage does not transcend the flesh; he is engrossed in it... The comedy and prose belong to low life, the grief and the poetry to high.



Traditionally, therefore, the features of comedies and tragedies have been antitheses, although these have sometimes become integrated within the same drama, as in the genre of tragicomedies. Richard Dutton (1986: 14) explains tragicomedy as:

Cutting across the traditional generic boundaries of tragedy and comedy, they aimed for a new style of drama which could include everything from the most arcane divine mysteries to the most mundane of characters.... [It concerns] the most massive and ineffable topics of human existence. ...this could not be achieved within a realistic framework... dramatists therefore cultivated an artificial, quasi-operatic mode... which deliberately distanced the audience, keeping them in a state of bewildered amazement rather than engaged sympathy.

It needs to be noted that tragedy in the dramatic context does not necessarily mean disaster, such as a devastating earthquake. "Meaningless events whose causes we cannot trace, contingencies we cannot fit into any intelligible frame of things, occurrences out of all relation to human conduct, can have no place in art," Dixon (1925: 40) insists. Tragedy as an art, Dixon proposes, dramatically presents a manner of thinking about and viewing the world. The thinking pertains to "certain aspects of human life and experience. Tragedy is preoccupied with the more serious, enigmatic or afflicting circumstances of life" (Dixon: 11). According to Dixon's definition, then, a tragedy concerns faulty reasoning and thinking about the world or about life, which results in an agonising experience (as in Willy Loman's case in Death of a Salesman). Surely, then, as human views, experiences and circumstances differ with time, so tragedy as an art must differ with time.

Dixon (5-9) makes the disputable statement that "in real life there are no tragedies", as he perceives a tragedy as art intended to please, not as a reflection of reality which can be upsetting. This view negates the idea of art and thus tragedy being a reflection or mimeses of life. Anderson (1986: 28), a South African critic, argues this

point in an article published in CRUX magazine. She asserts that "art is a reflection of life and inevitably mirrors the real world". Tragedy, as an art, must therefore, necessarily mirror some aspect of real life.

Germane to Dixon's argument that tragedy cannot exist in real life, Gomez (36) allows for the possibility that it could have existed as an art form in the past, but that "many literary authorities consider tragedy as no longer possible in this day and age. Many are of the belief that the contemporary plays are no longer sharply distinguishable as tragedy or comedy." While in modern theatre one encounters plays which are tragicomedies or where the differences are difficult to discern, there are, however, some dramas which can clearly be categorised as modern tragedies, such as Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman and The Crucible. These tragic dramas do differ from the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, but our society also differs from Ancient Greek society. Furthermore, Aristotle's definition was descriptive rather than prescriptive, and tragedy's definition changed before and has changed since Aristotle, as will be explored in Chapter 1, The theory of tragedy: a historical perspective.

Gomez (35), quoting Gassner, highlights four major periods in dramatic literature: the fifth century BC Athenian (Greek), the Elizabethan, the seventeenth century French and the Modern, commencing with Ibsen and his contemporaries at the end of the 1800s. "The drama of the modern age differs sharply from that of the other three periods," Gassner observes. Downer, quoted by Gomez (35) explains how modern drama differs from the other dramatic periods. Modern drama is

...an art without a country, a vehicle for the expression of the ideas and ideals of an ever narrowing world. The great dramatist, whether he be Ibsen, or Shaw, or Giradoux, is instantly at home in all countries with all audiences.

Thus, a modern drama such as Death of a Salesman is relevant to non-American audiences since the central problems - materialism 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. This depends on the degree of cultural-specific themes and content contained in a drama. Most modern tragic dramas deal with fundamental aspects of human nature, which are relevant to all societies. Such aspects include the meaning of life, family relationships, and man's place in the society and moral structure in which he lives.

Steiner (324) agrees with Gomez's assumption that modern tragedy cannot exist, but he classifies the dilemma of modern tragedy as there not being a suitable public context or society in which tragic drama can exist. In order for a tragic drama to be understood and have its desired effect on the audience, there needs to be a society that believes in a higher being, whether it is a God, or the forces of nature. This higher being must punish man for his mistakes and thus teach mankind a universal lesson. If one denies the existence of a universal order, drama cannot touch man's soul. There must also be a society in which there are people who can achieve tragic dimensions, who can have tragic stature. They should be of higher moral standards, or possess a higher rank in society. One could argue that politicians and rulers of countries could be tragic protagonists, but society needs to believe in a universal order, force or structure as well. Miller, however, replaces an outright belief in God and the moral universal justice, by man's social responsibility. His tragic heroes, generally, need to discover what their responsibilities towards society, family and basic morality are. The quality of their lives depends on the extent to which they realise where they fit in, and for what they are accountable.

Ferguson (85) asserts, "It was an all-consuming dream that any goal was attainable". In the context of these requirements of society and personality, Willy Loman in Miller's Death of a Salesman is not considered to be admirable enough to be a tragic hero. He is merely a common man. Yet Aristotle's prerequisites, although a good framework for tragedy, do not dictate the requirements for tragedy. Steiner relies too heavily of Aristotle's description of tragic drama, and disregards the history of changing definitions of tragedy. Common man as tragic hero is an apt subject for modern tragedy.

The dramatic forces that confront Willy Loman, someone that is not a hero to the "traditional" universal order or forces of nature, against which the tragic hero must struggle, need not be external according to Ferguson, but could be "internal, within the divided consciousness of the tragic protagonist" (Ferguson: 84). We live in an era where an awareness of psychology is prevalent and is used to explain mind-sets and actions, so this could be relevant in modern tragedies. As to the elevated status of the hero, Ferguson (85) debates that "he need be neither king nor prince to achieve this status. He only need be human... [he must be a] loser to the manner born".

In order for a drama to be tragic, Steiner requires society to believe in a higher order. He explains that tragedy is based on an outdated idea that there is a higher being in nature which can destroy (Steiner: 342). Although he refers to the belief in God or a moral force that punishes man for his mistakes, this belief can, and has, also mutated over time. The prevalent belief in the American Dream, which has virtually achieved the status of a religion, is the social context from which Death of a Salesman springs. "Death of a Salesman dramatises the tragic life and death of the American Dream",

Ferguson (85) asserts. It was an all-consuming dream that any goal was attainable. If the majority of people in the USA at that time believed in the American Dream and in materialism, then a drama portraying the failure of those values would touch the souls of the audience.

Death of a Salesman does touch the souls of the audience. The drama ends on a note of victory, of hope, as the audience can recognise where Willy Loman's blindness to reality causes suffering and death, and they can see how victory could have been accomplished, how Loman could have achieved insight and meaning. The drama forces the audience to relate to Loman, compare their own situations to his, and achieve self-knowledge so that they can avoid making similar mistakes.

The changing perceptions and requirements with regard to the tragic hero are identified throughout history, so that the qualities that make a hero tragic in the framework of modern times and modern interests, can be identified and illuminated. Germane to this is the interrelation between the concept of the tragic hero and the values of the society within which he functions and from which he is perceived and judged. Willy Loman in Miller's Death of a Salesman, will be scrutinised in order to validate the modern concept of a tragic hero and tragic drama.

# Chapter 1: The theory of tragedy: a historical perspective

*"Noble are the men who can weep. Leave me alone - you who have a dry heart and dry eyes! I curse the happy for whom the unhappy is only a spectacle" (Goethe in Elective Affinities, 1809).*

## 1.1 What is tragedy?

"Tragedy... is impossible to define satisfactorily", Draper (11) asserts. This difficulty is the result of the evolving sentiments surrounding tragedy. The significance of tragedy has changed in every age, as in every age society has differed in terms of political, economic and moral standards, and of what it has considered significant. If one accepts the view that tragedy is an imitation or "mimesis" of reality, or, as Aristotle says, the imitation of an action, then it follows that since the perception of realities has changed through time, the nature of tragedy must have changed.

Lodge (1953: 170) differentiates Plato's concept of mimesis into general and special senses. In a general sense, any artist is capable of miming, representing or copying whatever he is trying to reproduce. This can be a sculptor imitating reality in his sculpture, a painter imitating reality in painting, or a literary work being created as the imitation of the author's perception of reality. The artist tries to reproduce reality as

accurately as possible. However, since reality is flawed, this art must necessarily be flawed. Truth to life, not pleasure obtained, must be the condition by which to measure this mimesis in the general sense. The responsibility of the artist here is merely to represent reality as truly as possible. Perhaps Loman, with all his flaws, can be seen as a tragic hero, a person who represents reality as truly as possible - who represents flawed reality. If one accepts this hypothesis, then the "traditional" tragic hero, who is a man of higher stature, can be seen as representing the ideal reality. Since perception of realities has changed, tragic heroes, representing reality, must therefore change in character.

Mimesis in the special sense results from an inspiration of the author or artist. He "reaches out into what is beyond human control... He is feeling after guidance, entrusting himself to what he believes to be the higher spiritual powers" (Lodge: 174). A turning away from the superficial, to the transcendental occurs until an understanding of the ideal reality is acquired and imparted onto paper or canvas. This is thus the reality of the ideal, and is the highest form of art. This ideal is represented as that which all can admire and for which all can strive.

One may thus deduce that this is the basis for the traditional concept of the tragic hero. A person (hero) has ideal characteristics, for which others can strive, yet since perfection does not exist, this hero must have a fundamental flaw in his personality, beliefs, or behaviour, which results in his death. The responsibility of the artist is to ensure that the qualities and values of the tragic hero are those which that society holds as important and virtuous, so that the audience can learn from the tragic hero's suffering, and can experience a *catharsis* (cleansing) of terror and pity. Thus a

traditional tragic hero embodies the qualities and values of a particular society. As societies change, so do their values, and so must those embodied by the tragic hero. A tragic protagonist undergoes a crisis, resulting in a response from Miller, as will later be investigated, gives Loman in Death of a Salesman the qualities of a normal working person, not qualities others would wish to imitate. His passionate clinging to his principles and phoney dream is admirable in its intensity, but not in its blindness. Yet Miller has imitated society's reality in the portrayal of Loman. Can Loman be classified as a tragic hero? Has the definition of tragedy and the tragic hero changed enough to encompass this man? Surely Loman can be said to represent reality in Plato's general sense, in other words, to represent reality truthfully, with all its flaws? Does the tragic hero have to represent reality in the special sense? Are both mimeses acceptable? As society changes, the character of the tragic hero, because it involves a reflection of reality, will change, in both the special or general senses of mimesis. Yet, underlying the surface changes that make the hero relevant to the context in which he is created, the tragic hero still possesses timeless human qualities and traits.

Before these questions can be answered and a general definition of tragedy determined, it is necessary to examine how tragedy has changed and evolved through the centuries in relation to the changes in society. There have been many changes through the eras, relating to what is meant by tragedy. The society of each era has contributed to these changes, yet three aspects or considerations, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1.4, The impact of a changing society on the artist, particularly the tragic playwright, and his works, seem to be foremost in the debate concerning whether or not modern drama can be tragic. The first aspect is the seriousness and dignity of the content and in the presentation of the hero (and



whether prose or poetry is used). The second concerns the nature and significance of the tragic hero (his character and flaw), and the last aspect is the suffering that the tragic protagonist undergoes within a basic moral force, resulting in a response from the audience.

Tragedy thus reflects perceptions of reality, whether in the general or special senses of mimesis. As societies have undergone changes and growth in ideologies and values, so has the perception of reality changed, thus changing the concept of the tragic dramatic hero. There are, as said, three constituents of tragedy that have formed the basic idea of tragedy throughout history, and that continue to do so.

## 1.2 The history of the concept of tragedy

The concept of tragedy has fluctuated and been modified through time, according to the personal views of the authors of each era and the political, economic and social climates of each age.

The earliest age from which we have records of tragic drama, is the fifth century BC in Greece. Here tragic drama originally started in the form of a choral song in honour of the god, Dionysus; this then developed into an alternation between an actor's speech and the chorus. Tragedy, in these productions, was a vague idea. "It presented terrible things about great people... [it] told of man's subjection to the gods... of the fact that through suffering men had the opportunity to grow" (Leech 1986: 12-13). The Greeks were polytheists, "believing in hundreds of deities" (Greer: 56) and cited them as the reason for inexplicable events or suffering.

Dixon (14) further clarifies the Greek religious perspective:

Greek tragedy rested on a sacred ritual, dealt with a sacred legend, was performed in a sacred place and in honour of a sacred person. [The Hellenes tended] to identify morals with piety, to think of the good man as the religious man, a worshipper, and above all, to see life always in its setting, mysterious and divine in its manifestations.

The gods were thus very prominent in that society, as opposed to modern society, and they were held responsible for what society still tends to call fate. Greer (56) elucidates the importance of religion in A Brief History of the Western World. He says that religion "ordered the daily lives of citizens, inasmuch as the community undertook no important act without giving thought to the gods." Furthermore, Dixon (30) continues to explain that the themes of Greek tragedies were lofty, concerned "with man's cosmic attachments, his relation to the gods and the eternal laws." The religious beliefs of fifth century BC Greek society dominated its concept of tragedy.

It is interesting to note the parallel between the themes of Greek tragedies, and Miller's notion of theme. In arguing the question of rank, Miller allows for the common man to attain the role of tragic hero, providing that his life and/ or career

...engages the issues of, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationship of man to God - the questions... whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home, instead of a battleground or a fog in which disembodied spirits pass each other in an endless twilight (Gomez: 61).

Tragedy, by the fourth century BC, had become more popular, but more importantly, the idea of logic became more prominent, resulting in Aristotle's attempt to set down certain descriptive guidelines for the writing of tragic drama. The deductions Aristotle makes about tragic drama in his Poetics, are not meant to be prescriptive, though. They were written in an attempt to explain how tragedy operated in the Hellenic era.

Leech (14) clarifies this statement:

In the fourth century, Aristotle wrote The Poetics.... He deduced from the tragedies he had seen and read that there were certain general characteristics of the tragic hero, of the effect of tragedy, of the time-span of a single tragedy, and also of the structural devices commonly used in tragic writing.

Although Aristotle's suggestions were made centuries ago, his analysis is often used as a springboard when discussing tragedy. His theories are open to criticism because, as Dixon (25) points out: "Aristotle assumes that tragedy and drama can be scientifically analysed; he accepts the world as open to logical interpretation, but this is not so.... Not everything can be logically explained." Dixon reflects the modern, post World War I, sense of chaos and disintegration. Greer (65) corroborates Dixon's point about Aristotle. "To Aristotle, logic is the indispensable key to truth and happiness. For this reason, he worked out precise and systematic rules for logical thinking..."

The need to explain everything logically was not only limited to Aristotle; it prevailed in that society. There was an increased interest in, for example, biology, the sciences and philosophy. There was an attitude that the world could be explained scientifically, and events that could not be explained, were attributed to the will of the gods.

Greek society's view of life is reflected in the structured form of the dramas, as defined by Aristotle, as well as in the content. Poetry was the accepted vehicle of expression. The tragic hero had admirable qualities, marred by a tragic error, and the hero suffered. The audience, too, experienced a pleasurable cleansing or catharsis of pity and terror. As to the theme of tragedies, "the connection with Dionysus [gradually] faded away, and writers of tragedy were allowed to choose whatever serious themes suited their purpose... [although] tragedy remained moral in purpose

and character" (Greer: 68). Already, within Greek society, one can see a change in tragic drama.

The Roman Empire, which succeeded the Greek, existed for centuries and as it developed, the taste in literature changed. Horace's patriotic verses, for example, "consistently reflect the spirit of the Augustan revival and sing of the destiny of Rome" (Greer: 105), whereas Latin tragedies, especially those written by the philosopher, Seneca, consisted of violent imagery and subject matter (Leech: 15). Greer (105) explains that Seneca "emphasised passion and horror in his plays [to cater] to the Roman taste for plotting and violence." At that time, the first century AD, Nero reigned; he delighted in lighting up the streets with human torches - Christians set alight. Roman literature thus reflects the qualities of mind and situation of the time in which it was written.

From the third century AD, when Constantine declared toleration for the Christians, the spread of Christianity accelerated, so that tragedies soon had the dissemination of religious principles as their main didactic aim. Dramas were used firstly as a vehicle for presenting Christian interpretations of world history, then to present moral lessons in order to save souls. The tragic moments in these dramas were simply when the audience was made aware of the lamentable. Leech (15) reveals that a tragedy was a story with a sad ending, serving to warn the audience that they, too, would end up unhappily if they were not careful. This is clearly a deviation from Aristotelian principles.

During the sixth and seventh centuries, Isidore of Seville defined tragedy as consisting of "sad stories of commonwealth and kings" (Leech: 2). The dignity of the

story and the qualities of the tragic protagonist were ensured, as the hero was a man of higher status, whose life ended sadly. Kingdoms, such as that of the Franks, prevailed in Empires at the time, so it was fitting that esteemed rulers be subjects for tragedies.

By the Middle Ages, tragedy had little to do with drama and performance. It simply described a certain type of narrative (Leech: 15). John of Garland, who lived around the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, described tragedy as "a poem written in the grand style, which treats of shameful and wicked deeds, and, beginning in joy, ends in grief" (Leech: 2). Here there was a certain dignity or grandness; it was written in poetry and ended sadly.

The progress, or rather alteration, of tragedy has so far been discussed with reference to non-English societies. Steiner (11) maintains that "the word tragedy [only] entered the English language in the later years of the 14th century." Chaucer gave a definition of it in the Prologue to the Monk's Tale in The Canterbury Tales. His definition is:

Tragedy is to say a certain story  
 From ancient books which have preserved the glory  
 Of one that stood in great prosperity  
 And is now fallen out of high degree  
 In misery, where he ends wretchedly (Chaucer 1988: 239).

There is no implication here of dramatic form. A tragedy is a narrative recounting the life of an eminent person who suffers a downfall of fortune and ends disastrously. It is interesting to note that Chaucer served the English Aristocracy for most of his life, so that he was respectful of the distinguished aristocracy. He also travelled and read extensively and this markedly affected his outlook and writings. Greer (231) contends that Chaucer "displayed a rare combination of scholarship, insight and

humour... his outlook was cosmopolitan and urbane." Understanding Chaucer's context enriches a person's understanding of the literature he wrote. The Canterbury Tales were popular among all literate people of his time. In the stories, "as in a mirror, [the people] could see themselves and their society" (Greer: 231). This is relevant as it demonstrates how his writing reflects Chaucer's society.

The society of Italy in the sixteenth century, the Renaissance period, saw a revival of interest in art and experimentation with art forms, as well as a rediscovery of the classics. Tragic drama was no exception. Seneca's dramas from the first century AD were performed, Greek dramas were adapted and performed and new dramas blended both classical and modern (or "romanti") form and subject matter. It was especially the authority and horror of Seneca's plays which were imitated in the creation of new dramas, possibly because there was a general feeling of daring and bravery when it came to art. Steiner (16) observes: "The rediscovery of Senecan drama during the 1560's gave to the word [tragedy] clear implications of theatrical form. Henceforth, a tragedy is a play dealing with tragic matters".

Italian theorists at this time, such as Vida and Catelvetro, expounded The Poetics, studied and adapted the principles in Horace's Ars Poetica and imposed strict rules for writers, returning to the descriptions of Aristotle (Leech: 18). Draper (16) also comments that Aristotle's suggestions concerning the custom of Greek theatre were given "a codified formalisation, which isolated them from the conditions to which they were appropriate". In other words, Aristotle's outlines concerning Greek theatre were taken out of their context, and were considered as the undisputed precepts in the writing and appraisal of tragic drama. Since Shakespeare's works conform to a large

extent to Aristotle's principles, this may have done a lot to enshrine Aristotle's principles as authoritative.

There have been a number of developments in the concept of tragedy in English society; they can all be linked to changes in the political, economic or social circumstances of the time. Gorboduc, which used to be known as "The first English Tragedy", was written by Sackville and Norton in 1561. It was, Leech (15-16) illustrates, more of a didactic political play on proper government, than a tragedy. Yet this shows the increased interest in tragic drama during the Renaissance period.

Sidney (1554-1586), in An Apology for Poetry, also defines tragedy. According to him, it is:

...the high and excellent Tragedie that openeth the greatest wounds, and sheweth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the effects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded (Sidney 1923: 23).

Sidney here implies that admiration and warning should be facets of tragic writing, whereas Chapman (1559-1634) declares that "tragedy is primarily a thing of moral purpose, encouraging us to cultivate the good and avoid the contrary" (Leech: 16), giving it a didactic purpose.

From this, it is evident that there is no fixed definition of tragedy. Writers interpret tragedy as they understand it, not necessarily as Aristotle concludes. Marlowe, in 1590, published his Tamburlaine as "Devided into two Tragicall Discourses". Tragedy was also used loosely in the division of Shakespeare's 1623 Folio into comedies, histories and tragedies (Leech: 16). Dixon (25) adds that "by

Shakespeare's day, the long alliance between religion and drama had come to an end, and so complete was its secularisation that no trace of his theatre's origin could have been so much as suspected by an Elizabethan audience." It seems as though each author had his own explication of the word tragedy.

On the other hand, Potter (128) draws parallels among the tragic plays of Shakespeare, Chapman and Middleton, all dramatists from the Jacobean Period:

...if these plays had anything in common, then it was a powerful sense of the misery and misfortune of human life, and the pain of struggling against forces too great for even the tragic hero to overcome. These forces were either the general decay in values and the corruption of the times, or the overpowering force of destiny which led even the greatest men and women towards inevitable defeat. The plays provided a clear statement of the feeling that an age of near-perfection had passed, and that men had nothing to look forward to but increased discord.

The similarities Potter identifies are related to the idea of the helplessness of the tragic hero against stronger forces, and his suffering. This echoes Aristotle's thoughts regarding tragedy, as well as anticipating those of Miller. There is a powerful sense in Death of a Salesman of misery, struggling and defeat, in the light of the power of the American Dream and materialism. Milton's Samson Agonistes (1671) also turns back to Aristotle, but in a more obvious way. Milton stresses the notion of catharsis and of tragedy being a formal presentation of action.

Diverting again to non-English countries in order to achieve a more widespread perception of the rise of tragic drama, we can discern that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, German authors gave us "major tragic drama again" (Leech: 21). It is interesting that the new attitude, of a tragic sense of life, was only introduced by Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in the nineteenth century.



Leech (22) argues that "the change in philosophical approach" of these plays reflect the change in understanding or perceptions of life. He illuminates this:

It implies that our situation is necessarily tragic, that all men exist in an evil situation and, if they are aware, are anguished because they are aware. Hegel emphasises a necessary opposition of forces dividing man from man and man from himself, Kierkegaard a desperate need for man to break out from an imposed pattern.

Leech, hereby, indicates that the views of life of the author and the values of the society in which he lives, influence the literature he writes, and are evident in the literature. Greer (421) details how the different notions in society form the concepts of an author and are reflected in the literature. Greer specifically scrutinises Hegel. He speaks of Hegel's thought as being "a blend of many elements that had previously been regarded as contradictory. It assigned value... to science, reason, and individual freedom - and... to faith, intuition and authority" (Greer: 422). Seventeenth to eighteenth century society embraced a conglomeration of thought: Victorian, or uncompromising reason, as well as Romantic thought, or belief in individuality and intuition. Hegel is thus a good example of someone whose thoughts were formed within his society.

Ibsen from Norway and Strindberg from Sweden wrote notable tragic dramas in the late nineteenth century. Henrik Ibsen is notable because he addressed himself directly to the problems of his day. His plays reflect his views of the problems of his particular society. His earlier plays, Pillars of Society (1877) and An Enemy of the People, examine the corruption of moral values, a real problem in Norway then, as he saw it. "He is today recognised as one of the prime moulders of modern dramatic form and technique" (Greer: 473) and the era of modern drama is generally taken from the time of his plays to the present.

The modern period poses problems regarding the genre of dramas and thus tragedy. Dramas do not all fit easily into clearly defined types. A modern form of drama is tragicomedy, for example, which seems to merge aspects of tragedy and comedy within the same drama. Gassner (Gomez: 47) makes a sweeping statement about modern drama:

[It] often consists of an analysis or challenge carried to a consistent conclusion. It offers no happy endings as a salve for suffering characters or as an evasion of an issue; nor does it substitute sentimentality for stern confrontations of reality. Yet, whether it concludes in victory or disaster for the protagonist, this type of drama falls between the provinces of comedy and tragedy.

There are such modern dramas, which we can classify as tragicomedies, such as Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Literature is mutable. It can alter its form and content to reflect the transformations of a dynamic society. Yet there are also modern dramas, which can be classified as tragedies, such as Miller's Death of a Salesman, as will be investigated in Chapter 4, Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman": a tragic hero or an anti-hero?

It has become evident through this scrutiny of the history of the concept of tragedy, that the meaning of the word "tragedy" and the form, content and principles inherent in tragic dramas, are reflections of the author's perception of life in his time and his society. Literature (and thus tragic drama) is subject to the prevailing thoughts, theories and discoveries of each era.

Dixon (48) aptly states: "And time moved on, and with time came change... and with it came the need for a new setting, a new expression for thoughts suited to an age no longer epic." We have arrived at a time where we need to accept the new setting for

and new expression of tragic drama. Modern consciousness has gone through such a transformation that the descriptive concepts of Aristotle's are no longer completely relevant to modern thought and definitions of tragedy.

## 1.3 A definition of tragedy

There are certain links, common ground, underlying the various definitions of tragic drama that have persisted throughout the eras. The essential qualities of tragedy that have survived through all ages are: dignity and seriousness of content and in the presentation of the hero, the significance of the tragic hero (character and tragic flaw) and the suffering of the hero within a basic moral force which impacts on the audience.

### 1.3.1 Dignity and seriousness of content and 1.3.2 in the presentation of the hero

Firstly, tragedy necessitates a serious theme or content for the drama. Dixon's interpretation of this involves a serious way of thinking about and viewing the world; "tragedy is preoccupied with the more serious, enigmatic or afflicting circumstances of life" (Dixon: 11). John of Garland, from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, talks about "shameful and wicked deeds" (Leech: 2). Potter (128), in identifying the links among the plays of Shakespeare, Chapman and Middleton, finds the "powerful sense of the misery and misfortune of human life" as the most striking similarity. Elder

Olson, in Tragedy and the Theory of Drama, correspondingly postulates that tragedy “shows an individual living a life without meaning... it portrays the disintegration of contemporary civilisation... in the eyes of the author or of his hero, reality is a chaos instead of a cosmos (Gomez: 57). Miller considers the most important aspect of tragedy to be the questions that arise from the drama: they must “define humanity and the right way to live” (Gomez: 61).

Moreover, the presentation of this serious content should be dignified, with a moral or serious tone. John of Garland defined tragedy as “a poem written in a grand style” (Leech: 2). George Jean Nathan asserts that in presenting the tragedy of the “little men” (the common man, not the great tragic heroes of old), the treatment also calls for a serious and moral tone, as well as a “splendour of prose or poetry” (Gomez: 58). The tragedy need not be written in poetry, as Aristotle suggests, but, like Miller, Elder Olson avers that “the language and style should simply be that which is appropriate to the tragic character - one that manifests his dignity” (Gomez: 58).

## 1.3.2 The significance of the tragic hero: character and flaw

A common strand in perception of tragedy is that 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 of the world, so that he suffers and dies.

Although the tragic hero represented mankind in the traditional tragic dramas, and his suffering showed justice, from which all of humanity could learn, the modern tragic hero's suffering seems to be a single, separate phenomenon, which doesn't affect humanity (Gomez: 59). Yet for Dorothea Krook, representativeness is more important than social status (Draper: 19). He should represent "some fundamental, persistent aspect of man's nature" (Draper: 20). Aristotle proposes that the hero possess grandeur in both status and character, so that his suffering is far-reaching and affects the audience (Gomez: 60), but both Miller (Gomez: 61) and Joseph Conrad (Leech: 46) contend that rank is unimportant and that the hero should be "one of us". More important to these writers, is the message in the drama. This coincides with Aristotle's Poetics; he describes tragedy as "an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life.... Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse... if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character... you will not produce the essential tragic effect..." (Draper: 41). Character comes second to action and thus content. Character, Aristotle continues, reveals "moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids" (Draper: 41). Choice is an aspect of tragedy that Miller deems vital. The hero must have the capacity to choose between alternatives that are sufficiently serious to have changed the course of his life (Jackson 1963: 75).

Because the hero represents humanity, he naturally has a flaw - he represents reality (the fundamental aspects of man) in the general sense. This flaw can be in a matter of judgement, a poor decision, or having a defective view concerning the world. This flaw is not necessarily limited to those of higher status, but is inherent in the common man. He is not "pre-eminently virtuous or just", according to Aristotle (Leech: 1).

### 1.3.3 Suffering of the hero within a basic moral force, and the impact on the audience

Tragedy also presents suffering of the hero, as a result of his flaw or faulty judgement. This suffering happens within the context of a greater structure, cosmos, or moral forces. These forces constitute 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 a catharsis of pity and terror, or simply in the questioning of one's own humanity.

Dixon (11) considers the agonising experience to result from faulty reasoning and thinking about the world. For John of Garland (Leech: 2), tragedy simply ends in grief. Potter's study of Shakespeare's dramas sees suffering as the "pain of struggling against forces too great for even the tragic hero to overcome" (Potter: 128). Reality is seen as a "chaos instead of a cosmos" for Elder Olson (Gomez: 57). Implicit in this struggle, is the idea of a structure within which and against which the hero fights. The fight and questioning and seemingly unjust consequences of his action or views, cause the hero to see reality as chaotic and meaningless. Potter (128) reveals that the tragic heroes in Jacobean dramas struggle against forces such as decay in values and corruption or the forces of destiny. Justice and reason seem limited and the forces, which lead to the inevitable defeat of the tragic hero, can be

neither fully understood nor rationalised (Steiner: 8). Perhaps this is one of the causes of the fear that the audience experiences.

The classical idea of fear is that it originates from the idea that we might also be overcome by misfortune, as the tragic hero is (Gomez: 59). This has developed into the modern idea, espoused by Miller, that the fear is of being uncertain of who we are, “the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world” (Gomez: 59).

No matter whether tragedy is classical or modern, there is always a response from the audience. I.A. Richards, following Aristotle, asserts in Principles of Literary Criticism that the ideal tragic effect should be “a balance and reconciliation of pity and terror” (Draper: 23). Geoffrey Brereton supplements the importance I.A. Richards places on the emotional response of the audience when he states that “the significance of a work of art is dependent on the emotions which it generates” (Draper: 23). Whatever the emotion that is evoked in the audience, the ultimate effect of a tragic drama should be, as Leech (54) declares, to “sharpen our feeling of responsibility, to make us more fully aware that we have erred as the tragic figures have erred.”

### 1.3.4 Definition of tragedy

A definition of tragic drama that incorporates the common essential features throughout tragic dramatic history would thus be:

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 system of 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.

## 1.4 The impact of a changing society on the artist, particularly the tragic playwright, and his works

The influence of the developments in society on literature and thus on the concept of tragedy has been discussed in the previous section. One needs to examine, however, the importance of the playwright and how a changing society affects his context. It thus affects his work, the tragic drama, since the concept of the tragic hero is involved with the values of the society within which he functions and from which he is perceived and judged. Particular attention will be given to the modern era and how modern society and concepts, such as realism, expressionism and modernism, have affected the works of modern playwrights. What can be considered to be the three defining aspects of tragedy through all the eras and how they have been affected as a result of the authors' modern context, will be addressed.



## 1.4.1 The contextual influence on the author's work: a Marxist perspective

The basis of my argument lies in the Marxist idea that the context of the author influences his literary work. Not all literary theories agree with this assumption. Ironically, literary theories are affected by society and new theories are developed according to society's current concerns. If literary theories are affected by society, then surely literature is, too. Some theories, such as New Criticism and Russian Formalism exclude the author's biography completely, emphasising the importance of an autonomous text. For example, the Russian Formalist view of literature as an expression of the author's perception and personality is rejected; the author is downgraded "in order to guarantee the independence of literary studies, and to save them from being merely a second-rate form of history or psychology" (Jefferson *et al*: 8). Marxism, instead, sees literature in the context of the author, who is again assessed within the structure of his political, social and economic world.

Marxism is not alone in emphasising the importance of the author. In 1863 a French scholar, Hippolyte Taine, published his views on Positivism:

A literary text... must be regarded as the expression of the psychology of an individual, which in its turn is the expression of the milieu and the period in which the individual lived, and of the race to which he belonged. All human achievement can be explained by reference to these causes (Jefferson *et al*: 3).

Positivism, like Marxism, thus regards an author's mind-set, race and time as influencing the literary text. If art is an expression of a person's perception of reality (mimesis), and is influenced by the person's life experiences, then art is necessarily influenced by the history, the social lifestyle, the political structure and the economic circumstances of the period in which the artist lives. This reality represented in art

can be a social reality, a psychological one, or an experimental reality (Jefferson *et al.*: 10), depending on the interests of the author.

## 1.4.2 The ideological influences on the modern playwright and his works

The modern playwright (modern drama generally being dated from approximately 1880, the time of Ibsen's plays) is exposed to numerous influences on modern society, such as nationalism, revolutions and world wars. One of the influential forces that emerged from political change, is Liberalism, which has been seen to be a dominant force in the early part of the twentieth century. Liberalism, which is characterised by sentiments of tolerance, understanding and progressiveness, was expressed in the suffragette movement, a movement which empowered women, undermined the power of men and encouraged women to stand up for their rights. There was also an escalation of the numbers of people adhering to the principles of liberalism, Ford (20) suggests, at the end of the First World War (1914-1918). Liberalism was a reaction against authority - it was the people in authority who caused the war - hence the liberal twenties (Ford: 20), so accurately portrayed in Fitzgerald's well-known novel, The Great Gatsby.

Since Liberalism challenged authority, it follows that it encouraged a desire to challenge traditional approaches. This is very similar to Modernism, which experimented with different forms of art. "Modernist literary texts... [were] experimental, enigmatic and richly ambiguous" (Eagleton 1983: 139). Liberalism and Modernism in turn affected the playwright, as it inspired him to experiment with

different forms and techniques of drama. An example of this liberalism can be seen in the "little theatre" movement of the 1920's. This movement was begun in order to raise drama above a purely commercial level. Performances were staged of plays by unknown writers and this encouraged further experimentation, such as with content and structures of plays (Gomez: 54), so, for example, although modern plays do have acts and scenes, they are not necessarily divided into the usual five-acts. Death of a Salesman is an example of a modern play that has only two acts.

Increasing knowledge and advances in anthropology, psychology, technology and the sciences also served to promote liberalism and modernism, and to undermine absolute values in authority, religion and ethics (Ford: 22, 24). Greer (552) maintains that both scientists and non-scientists were affected by scientific discovery, as established ideas and knowledge were challenged. "The common thread in the new scientific ideas is that the universe is not as knowable or as orderly as had been previously thought" (Greer 552). There was no longer a firm or solid belief in which to feel secure, so people began looking for something new to adhere to and in which to believe.

Realism is another force that impacted on the modern playwright and thus his dramatic works. This literary movement started in France in the 1830s with the novelist, Honore de Balzac, who portrayed human strengths and weaknesses in his novels. Charles Dickens from England, and Henrik Ibsen from Norway, were also concerned with human problems, hardships and themes. Dickens, for example, showed the horror of the workplace and the debtors' prisons (Greer 472). Realism thus resulted from an increase in scientific knowledge and social interest, and "eclipse[d] romanticism in European literature" (Greer: 473). A realist does not see

the world as an idealistic place full of hope and goodness; a realist considers the universe and man to be mechanisms, as the scientist sees his work objectively and detaches himself from it. C. Hugh Holman clarifies realism in terms of Marxism:

man's personality is seen as an

...inevitable product of the forces of heredity and environment; his physique, a psychophysical organism; and his conduct, not the product of character and free will, but of chemical and physical processes over which he has no control (Gomez: 48).

Man is seen in purely scientific terms, with no control over his behaviour or character.

This appears excessively deterministic, surely a human is an individual with a mind and a will and the ability to accept responsibility for his actions?

### 1.4.3 Dramatic realism and expressionism in modern dramas

Dramatic realism refers to the attempt to represent life as realistically as possible in dramas (rather than to represent a Platonic ideal), so Aristotle's description for realism would have probably been mimesis in the general sense. In England, realism in drama was first perceived in domestic tragedies of the sixteenth century, such as the Yorkshire Tragedy. In the nineteenth century, this form was reintroduced, most notably through the works of Ibsen. It is a significant form as the subject matter is the life of the common person, and modern dramas, such as Death of a Salesman copy this pattern (Gomez: 48). Also, Gomez (49) demonstrates, modern social dramas show the impact of an increasingly widely-held view, advocated by men such as Alexandre Dumas *films*, that a play should serve a social purpose and relate to social questions. Miller's play, A View from the Bridge is an example of such a social play

as it probes the “psychological and social forces that lead inevitably to Eddie Carbone’s destruction” (Biggsby 1997: 13).

The effects of realism on the tragic playwright and thus on tragic drama are extensive: prose as opposed to poetry is used. Extensive stage directions are employed in order to make the characters more authentic. The hero often has psychological complexities, and character becomes more important than plot. Since heredity determines character, the responsibility of the hero for his actions diminishes. The hero is often also a collective character, or a crowd, because of the emphasis on society. Lastly, the common man is used as the tragic protagonist (Gomez: 50). These features differ markedly from those of traditional dramatic tragedies, yet they are in line with the thoughts and views of the artists in modern times.

Realism gives way to symbolism and expressionism. Instead of literature representing actual reality, symbolism and expressionism see literature as only representing “inner significances”. These are represented by symbols created in the mind of the author or characters. Playwrights thus give generic names such as “Father” or “Son” to their characters, to depersonalise characters and make them representative of people generally. An expressionist writer, August Strindberg (Gomez: 53), explains this philosophy:

Any thing may happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. On an insignificant background of reality, imagination designs and embroiders novel patterns; a medley of memories, experiences, free fantasies and improvisations.

Expressionism is intensely subjective as each person can understand different levels in the drama, or can interpret the drama in the context of his own frame of reference

and personal beliefs. Subjectivity, which proposes that each human is unique and that life can only be understood through one's internal experiences, is an element characterising literature after World War 1. Greer (570) calls this "Contemporary Literature" and characterises the tendency as moving "away from seeing the individual as an object geared to an orderly and purposeful environment." The individual is unique and thus the playwrights "desired to penetrate more deeply the minds of their characters, to enter in the characters' private thoughts" (Greer: 570). This tendency is evident in Death of a Salesman. Miller penetrates into Loman's mind and shows us his thoughts and memories. The original title for the drama was, pertinently, to have been The Inside of his Head (Welland: 43).

The psychology of the mind of characters is one of the new ways of interpreting people and trying to make sense of a seemingly senseless world. There is, however, "no commonly accepted metaphysical picture of man" (Ford: 23). Is he, as Freud believed, a biological phenomenon who is subject to his instinctive desires, or is he "the outcome of economic and social forces" (Ford: 23) as the Marxists believe, or is he a sinful man whom only God can redeem? This confusion is a far more personal result of the rapid change, which followed the increasing explosion of knowledge and the disintegration of a unified perception of the world. Each person and each playwright is left to decide on his own philosophy.

## 1.4.4 The Death of Tragedy?

This question of how society and playwrights view man and his relationship (or lack thereof) with a higher being or force, is integral to the modern concept of the "death of tragedy". Many critics have expressed concern about the "death" of modern tragedy, for example, Dixon (24) makes the valid statement that "modern man regards the drama... as a secular amusement", and that it has completely lost its religious significance. At a time when few playwrights are Christians and when so many different religions are accepted, it seems superfluous to expect dramas to be religious, or to negate their worth just because they are not religious. The playwright may be more concerned with materialism, or social or psychological problems. These aspects, then, and not religion, would be an integral part of his drama. Miller makes his dramas applicable to the audience by writing about basic aspects of humanity. In an interview with Robert A. Martin, he asserts that, "the psychology of man is basically unchanged. It has to be or we wouldn't be able to watch Shakespeare any more with any emotion; we would be simply like archaeologists" (Martin 1970: 36).

Gomez suggests that the death of tragedy is not only due to the indiscriminate use of the word "tragedy" to refer to anything catastrophic, but also results from the "the worship of progress [instead of a God] that followed the advent of industry and technology" (Gomez: 56). He explains further:

This faith in progress made modern man's outlook generally optimistic for seemingly everything is within his reach - even absolute happiness. He is so secured in this little illusion that bleak events such as wars and revolutions - stuffs that tragedy can easily be made of - fail to dampen his spirit" (Gomez: 56).

Tragedy rests on an idea that events or circumstances are beyond one's control. If man believes himself to be in control of all things, and believes that there is no influence from a natural force or God, then it follows that man cannot be deeply affected by tragic events that occur in dramas.

Henry A. Myers's opinion about the death of tragedy coincides with Gomez's: he believes that a society cannot simultaneously hold onto the belief that man is the most superior being and can achieve utopia (as in the American Dream), as well as comprehend tragic wisdom. He adds: "those who are not taken in with this popular illusion unfortunately do not have anything worthwhile to replace it. Hence, [there is] the impossibility of nurturing the tragic spirit" (Gomez: 56). As progress has continued, old values such as spiritualism, idealism and morality have been replaced by different sets of values: materialism, pragmatism and immorality (Gomez: 46). These changes are evident in modern dramas. Willy Loman, in Death of a Salesman, is consumed by materialistic values. A sense of displacement, alienation and insecurity, arising from too-rapid change and world wars, have caused many people to adopt a *laissez-faire* policy leading to moral decadence, and thus a general degeneration of society has ensued (Gomez: 46). These sentiments of alienation and materialism have in turn affected the tragic playwright and been expressed in tragic dramas.

The context of the modern author explains, to a large extent, the themes evident in dramas. There has been an increase in the belief in man in modern society; people, rather than spiritual beings, are now able to bring about social changes in order to solve problems of evil (seen as social in nature, rather than spiritual). Arthur Miller's



theory concerning the lack of the tragic spirit in modern society and literature blames the psychiatric and sociological views of life. He says, "If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action, is impossible" (Gomez: 56).

Gomez (57) also makes the valid, Marxist, point that heredity and environment, rather than fate and destiny as the Greeks believed, are the constraints behind modern tragedy. A person living a meaningless life, or a civilisation disintegrating, or chaos reigning instead of a cosmos, are modern perceptions of tragedy. This view is expressed in Death of a Salesman.

### 1.4.5 Unity beneath diversity

Owing to ever-increasing change, progress and technology, society in the Modern Age interprets literature in a variety of new ways. Yet Draper (12) insists that, for tragedy, there is "an underlying unity beneath diversity." As defined earlier, this unity can be seen in three aspects of tragedy: dignity and seriousness of content and in the presentation of the hero, the significance of the tragic hero, and the suffering of the tragic protagonist within a basic moral structure, which impacts on the audience (Gomez: 58). These three aspects are central to determining whether or not a drama can be seen as tragic, yet these aspects have altered considerably in accordance with time and the particular playwright's views of life. Tracing their development reflects how a changing society impacts on the tragic playwright and his works.

## 1.4.5.1 Serious content and a dignified hero

Firstly, seriousness and dignity in presentation and in character still exists in modern tragedies, even though moral disintegration has led to cynicism about moral elevation. The question of whether or not the employment of prose or poetry in drama affects the dignity and seriousness of the tragedy is often asked, yet tragic dramas written in prose are as effective as ones written in poetry. George Jean Nathan (Gomez: 58) argues that

The fall of kings calls for a splendour of prose or poetry (tragedy traditionally demands a highly moral and serious tone), otherwise it might be quite as unimpressive as the fall of little men. But the tragedy of the little men, to be as impressive as that of a king, calls as well for such treatment.

Tragedies written in prose can thus also be dignified and serious. Anderson (27) takes the opposing, traditional view that "Shakespeare's commoners converse in prose... because their lack of stature does not raise the expectations which accompany the use of verse. So, too, in our democratic world, whose concerns are relatively trivial, verse as a means of communicating commonplaces, is inappropriate." She continues (Anderson: 28): "This does not mean that Miller sees no place for the benefits of poetry in his work. Drama is art and will use whatever means are necessary to achieve its heights."

Aristotle, in his outline of Greek tragic drama, mentions that the speech expressed must be beautiful, or have "pleasurable accessories" (Leech: 1). He seems to exclude dramas written in prose, as prose does not sound as beautiful as poetry. Steiner (1963: 238-239) is also against the idea of a tragedy written in prose. He

acknowledges that prose tragedy is a modern idea, but declares prose tragedies to be paradoxical because verse precedes prose in literature. He argues:

Literature...raises discourse above common speech for purposes of invocation, adornment, or remembrance. The natural means of such elevation are rhythm and explicit prosody. By not being prose, by having metre or rhyme or a pattern of formal recurrence, language imposes on the mind a special occasion and preserves its shape in the memory. It becomes verse. The notion of literary prose is highly sophisticated... It is certain that Greek tragedy was, from the outset, written in verse. It sprang from the archaic rituals of celebration or lament and was inseparable from the use of language in a heightened lyric mode... Greek tragedy is sung, danced, and declaimed. Prose has no place in it (Steiner: 23).

It is important to note that Steiner talks about Greek drama, written in a different society to modern drama. A central reason for Steiner's views is that he considers the heroic characters to be royalty and of a higher status than the common man and this elevation must be reflected in their speech. "Common men are prosaic, and revolutionaries write their manifestos in prose. Kings answer in verse", Steiner (241) explains.

Gomez (58) makes the point that prose drama uses language similar to the ordinary speech of man. Language is used which does not allow for the expression of profound thoughts, and nor should it. It should reflect the entirety of the tragic hero. If the tragic hero is a common man, so should language be common prose. This is not to say that there should not be dignity in the language, but simply that "poetry is not an absolute requirement for the tragic genre... the language and style should simply be that which is appropriate to the tragic character - one that manifests his dignity" (Gomez: 58).

Language and style do reflect the modern tragic hero, but realistically. The effect the realist dramatists intend is to make the tragic hero seem more realistic and thus identifiable: they even use dialect to make the drama seem realistic. There is no room for poetry or verse in the ordinary, everyday speech of the ordinary man. If one says that prose and dialect oppose dignity and seriousness, then one would have to say that no human who speaks in prose has any dignity.

Dignity, or in modern drama, realism, is also reflected in action. This action should be serious and applicable to the audience. In modern dramas, there is a preoccupation with social issues and a determination to enforce the point of the drama, so settings are familiar and realistic, often a factory or street to enable the drama to be performed in different countries and still be effective (Gomez: 62).

The rise of liberalism and realism, an increase in interest in psychology and the sciences, social issues and political changes, have all served to create a certain mind-set in modern artists, particularly tragic playwrights. This mind-set is revealed in the content of the dramas, as well as the realistic presentation of the tragic heroes.

## 1.4.5.2 The significance of the tragic hero: character and flaw

The tragic protagonist, secondly, has always been central to a tragic drama. There have been changes in the exact nature of the hero, and whom he represents and what his rank is, but his significance has remained unchanged (Gomez: 58).

What are the specific qualities that determine whether or not a character is worthy of being a hero? Aristotle suggests in The Poetics that he be "a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity, but by some error of judgement, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity..." (Leech: 1).

Leech (38) qualifies Aristotle's hero as not being completely good or evil, as the fall of a saint would horrify us and the fall of an evil man would not move us at all. Dixon (130) explains Aristotle further. He feels that the audience instinctively sides with good, so the villain cannot be a hero. "His passage from bad to better fortune... could not evoke either sympathy nor moral satisfaction; while [if] his collapse [were] from high to low estate... compassion would be sought in vain, its place taken by contentment with the justice done." The saint should thus also not be a tragic hero, as his misfortune would be morally wrong.

The common man is not completely good or evil, nor is he "pre-eminently virtuous and just", so he should be a suitable figure for the role of the tragic protagonist.

Aristotle's criteria that the hero have a good reputation and be prosperous have a three-fold purpose. Firstly, he will "appear to have a special claim to our attention, [so] it is a dramatic convenience if the central character is given a position of manifest eminence" (Leech: 35). Secondly, he has something to lose: a reputation or wealth or rank, which will make his suffering seem even worse. Thirdly, he will embody whatever society considers important, such as wealth or rank or virtue, and thereby represent mankind. If the tragic protagonist is central to the plot, then surely that is enough reason for his eminence. Also, every person has something to lose, whether it is wealth or dignity, or the joy of living. It does not necessarily have to be wealth or status. One of the worst types of suffering is psychological, when the psyche is at odds with the world and the soul is unhappy. Lastly, a modern man, such as Willy Loman, can embody what society considers to be important: values of materialism and competitiveness.

A modern belief is thus that the ordinary man, speaking in ordinary prose, is worthy of being a tragic hero. Jean-Francois Marmontel (1723-99) shared this view years ago: "We wrong the human heart, we misread nature, if we believe that it requires titles to rouse and touch us" (Draper: 18). Yet it is only from the nineteenth century that a common man or bourgeois is commonly deemed worthy enough to be a tragic figure. Until then, he was assumed to be a "person of exalted rank" (Draper: 18). There has indeed been a great deal of criticism concerning lower class people assuming the roles of the tragic hero as "their social position deprives their fall of any wider significance, and therefore any element of real catastrophe. And their limited mental range deprives their suffering of any greatness" (Draper: 18). This is an unfair generalisation, assuming that lower class people are mentally inferior. As to the significance of modern dramas, the majority of the so-called lower class are literate

enough to understand modern performances, and if the hero is a common man, he will represent the masses and thus be significant to them.

Joseph Conrad says, in discussing the tragic hero, Lord Jim, in his novel: "[The tragic hero] is one of us. He is not necessarily virtuous, not necessarily free from profound guilt. What he is, is a man who reminds us strongly of our own humanity, who can be accepted as standing for us" (Leech: 46).

Gomez (60) suggests that Aristotle's prescribed hero cannot exist in the modern day as many critics have stated that "kings and nobles have lost their aura of dignity". There is also the view that society no longer believes in the importance and greatness of men. Levin supports this view when he comments that "today's plays deal with littler people and less mighty emotions, not because we have become interested in commonplace souls and their unglamorous adventures, but because we have come... to see the soul of man as commonplace and its emotions as mean" (Gomez: 61).

Miller strongly opposes this idea. He attributes the insistence upon nobility and rank of the tragic protagonist to a desperate adherence to the "outward forms of tragedy" (Gomez: 61). Miller argues in Tragedy and the Common Man:

If rank or nobility of character were indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king...[Rank] is significant only as it reflects the question of the social application of the hero's career. But at the same time, his stature as a hero is not so utterly dependent upon his rank that a grocer cannot

outdistance a president as a tragic figure - providing, of course, that the grocer's career engages the issues of, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationship of man to God - the questions, in short, whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home, instead of a battleground or a fog in which disembodied spirits pass each other in an endless twilight (Weales 1977: 145).

Miller mentions an eminent concern of tragedy - the importance of the issues presented in the drama. Like Aristotle, he places action (or issues) above character in significance. Leech (37-38), on the other hand, feels that there must be something notable about the hero for him to actually be the hero. This eminence can be a special virtue, or seen through "the particularity of the distress" or seen "through the sharpness of the revelation", the "anagnorisis". Regarding Willie Loman in Death of a Salesman, Leech says that he "comes to a desperation, but [does not] seem to know more at the end than at the beginning. [He does not] seem 'notable' in the sense that we need from a tragic figure... he is the victim of the American Dream rather than of the human condition" (Leech: 37-38).

### 1.4.5.3 Suffering of the hero and its impact on

Nathan compromises these two views. He argues that "we are not without kings, though they may not wear the royal purple, we have men of heart and spirit - and also mind. They are or may be the meat of important tragedy" (Gomez: 60-61).

There have been further developments in the concept of the tragic hero. As in the domestic tragedies of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the common man is the central hero. Sometimes, the central figure is a group, a collective character or a mass hero. This is because modern views include the concept that society and the environment shape man. During the period of Industrialisation, a new type of hero,



the capitalists who rose from the working class, became popular in drama (Gomez: 50). Societal changes do affect authors and these changes are reflected in literature.

The tragic hero has in essence remained the same: changes have occurred in terms of which specific moral qualities and what rank the hero should possess, but this is not the only concern of tragedy. "The philosophy of tragedy usually involves coming to terms with death. This may entail the question of personal justification for the death", Gurr (1988: 49) proposes. Is the hero responsible for his actions, or is his death due to fate? Tragedy should promote a growing awareness and understanding of life, through understanding the meaning of death.

### **1.4.5.3 Suffering of the hero and its impact on the audience**

Death and suffering is the third aspect of tragedy that has survived time. Draper (12) believes that central to this continuity "is the preoccupation with suffering, the experience from which tragedy springs and to which it seeks to give a meaningful context... The effect of a tragedy may well be to underline the inexplicability of suffering, to ask the question to which no answer is expected: Why?". Draper furthers his argument by saying that suffering gives people a sense of context and knowledge of what it means to be human. Perhaps, with the disjointedness and alienation of society, more tragedies should be produced.

Gomez (59) details the portrayal of suffering in modern drama as a "single, separate phenomenon"; the hero is no longer representative of mankind. Anderson (26), in her comments on suffering in Death of a Salesman, supports this aspect as a characteristic of modern drama: "Death of a Salesman is not a traditional tragedy. We cannot expect any widespread tragedy to follow his death. No one knows. No one cares." Yet again, Ferguson (84) argues that "The struggle [or suffering] is internal, within the divided consciousness of the tragic protagonist." It cannot thus have widespread disastrous results. One must bear certain considerations in mind when examining suffering: tragedy is a demonstration of the universal moral law: man gets what he pays for and pays for what he gets. The actual suffering experience, the context of suffering and the religious or secular interpretation of the meaning of suffering have changed with time, but suffering has not. Yet, surely, if this isolated suffering becomes common enough, it becomes, in its own way, representative of the isolated nature of suffering in modern society.

Suffering, disaster and ultimately death come to the tragic hero through an error in behaviour, thought or perception. Aristotle calls it "hamartia" and believes it to be an error in judgement (Leech: 38); Dixon (130) calls it a fault or frailty of the hero which leads to his downfall. Ruin is thus self-inflicted. The hero's own actions cause his ruin. Yet the specific error, Dixon (133) states, has not been pin-pointed. "Whether it means a moral or intellectual error, of the heart or head, no-one has yet discovered; an error rising out of a momentary or permanent state of mind or character, an error to which responsibility attaches or does not attach itself, an error which could or could

not have been avoided, whose results could or could not have been foreseen, an error of ignorance or passion or miscalculation" has not been determined.

Miller has his own interpretation of the tragic flaw. He maintains that it is the hero's "inherent willingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status" (Gomez: 62).

In denouncing modern tragedy, Dixon (37) says that all tragedies end in defeat. Circumstances overpower the hero, but his error or frailty is his alone. It is some "error or folly or disease in one not shared by all" (Dixon: 37). This implies that another person who was stronger, better or wiser than the hero might have overcome the problem and emerged victorious. Modern tragedy thus presents the world as understandable. Yet Dixon believes that this is not true tragedy, because tragedy must not allow reasoning and comprehension. Destiny and the unknown are not to be reasoned out (Dixon: 35-37). Tragedy "must not expose the moral world to criticism" (Dixon: 130). Steiner (8) also believes that "where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but not tragedy".

Gomez (51) supports these interpretations of tragedy, but adds that in many modern tragedies the hero is not considered to be responsible for his actions. This results from a belief that hereditary traits and instincts govern man. Moral judgements are therefore treated rather indifferently and taboo subjects are being presented on stage. Suffering resulting from a man's error can be blamed on heredity. The

meaning of suffering is lost. Suffering, in traditional tragedies, is ensured by the hero's decision, as Brooks (1960: 4-5) indicates.

He finally wills to accept it as properly pertaining to the nature of things, including his own deepest nature... The acceptance is not a weary submission: the tragic hero is possessed of tremendous vitality... Nor is the acceptance necessarily a joyful submission to what the hero recognises to be the just order of things: few tragic heroes are saints... the acceptance springs from a desire for knowledge, for the deepest kind of self-knowledge, knowledge of the full meaning of one's ultimate commitments.

Aristotle mentions that suffering is brought about by the reversal of a situation. The action or situation makes an about-turn (Draper: 45). Aristotle calls it "peripeteia". It is "a change of fortune basic in tragedy...a sudden change is likely to have a greater impact" (Leech: 63).

This "peripeteia" leads to suffering and "agnorisis", sometimes simultaneously. Tragedy is about suffering. "The suffering presented in tragedy is an image of something we intellectually know is in store for ourselves but cannot in imagination properly anticipate" (Leech: 67). Suffering leads to "agnorisis", or discovery. It is when the hero changes from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge. Agnorisis "is the agency through which suffering, in the ultimate, mental sense, is brought into full being" (Leech: 67). Draper (1980: 45) explains this agnorisis as "producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune".

Leech (61) mentions that Aristotle does not claim peripeteia or agnorisis to be essential to tragedy. There must be a decline in fortune, but it is not necessarily sudden, as peripeteia is. A decline in fortune, a suffering and an awareness of the

moral order in the universe breaks the tragic protagonist. It cannot be understood. It cannot be repaired. There can be no compensation for the suffering. "Tragic drama tells us that the spheres of reason, order, and justice are terribly limited and that no progress in our science or technical resources will enlarge their relevance" (Steiner: 8).

The elements of most modern tragedy have thus changed significantly, as each playwright has adapted these elements to his own context. There are, nevertheless, some plays that adhere to the traditional concept of tragedy. One has to question why these changes have occurred. Society has changed and literature reflects the important interests and problems of each society. Individuals are also different. Each playwright is limited to his time. He cannot change his frame of reference. His particular upbringing and society have formed his concepts of reality. Had Arthur Miller lived in the sixth century, he would have produced works very different to his present works. These considerations about how a changing society has impacted on the playwright and influenced his works, particularly regarding the concept of the tragic dramatic hero, demonstrate that the concept of the hero is indeed involved with the values of the society within which he functions and from which he is perceived and judged.

## 1.5 The impact of a changing society on the critic and audience

Each era produces new literature, concerned with different problems and portraying different perceptions of life, in order to mean something to the audience/ readers. Each new work of literature forces the critic to analyse it in the context of the existing canon, and possibly to add to or alter existing concepts concerning that type of literature. "Each new work in any recognisable Kind modifies to some degree our conception of that Kind", Leech (25) comments. The same is true of the concept of tragedy. It is important for the audience and critic to remember how his own context influences his value judgements of literature.

### 1.5.1 The change in the critic and audience

In discussing Shakespeare's plays, Gurr (1988: 1), makes the important point that although "the texts of the plays themselves do not change much... the readers of the texts do, and so the readings have to be constantly modified by the different kinds of preoccupations each new generation of readers brings to them." In reading or watching a Shakespeare play, modern man interprets themes and reacts differently to aspects of the play, from the audience of the seventeenth century. To name one example, superstitions which the Elizabethan audience believed and feared, are no longer an issue in the twentieth century. We have changed. Our society is different, and although Shakespeare's dramas are still widely read because they encompass

universal and timeless themes of human emotions, our context does affect our comprehension of the dramas.

Comprehending dramas goes hand in hand with analysing them. Over the years, readers, scholars and critics have encountered problems in their practical analyses of literary texts. Responses to these problems have led to the creation of literary theories. A "literary theory provides not only a means of dealing with differences of critical opinion, but also the basis for constructing a more rational, adequate and self-aware discipline of literary studies", Jefferson et al. (7) explains. As there are a variety of ways to view man and the world, as illuminated in the previous section, so there are a variety of ways for the critic to analyse a literary work, on the basis of these metaphysical pictures of man. Each person needs to determine to which philosophy of the world and which corresponding literary theory he adheres. This obviously has implications on which literary works the critics and audience choose to include in the canon.

## 1.5.2 The changing canon

Jefferson et al. (4) highlights the diversity and variability of the canon. The canon consists of literary works which have been considered by institutions and convention to be of literary value, but the canon is undergoing changes as a result of opposing ideas as to what determines a literary and a non-literary text, and how one measures

literary value. Most literary theories subscribe to the “special values” of literature, which makes a more rational analysis of works of literature possible.

What is the importance of the reader and audience in analysing dramas? What role does the literary approach ascribe to the reader? The reader has been neglected in many theories, sometimes specifically excluded in order to ensure an objective analysis of the text. In more recent theories, though, the subjective response of the reader and critic is regarded as important, but it should be understood within the context of that reader or critic's time (Jefferson et al: 9).

### **1.5.3 The relationship between the text and response of the critic and audience, according to some literary theories**

The Formalists, in their literary studies, separate life and art. The non-literary has no place in the study of literature. Formalism tries to create literature as "an independent science... which studies specifically literary material" (Jefferson et al: 18). Subjective responses of the audience are excluded, as they are not scientific (Jefferson et al: 9). The gap in this theory, is that, in ignoring the response of the audience or reader, the whole point of writing and creating is consequently ignored. An author writes in order to express his views of society, and his reality, and thus to make people think about these views. How can a drama be performed in front of an



audience and not affect the audience in some way, be it positive or negative? A novel will not be bought and read and a drama will not be watched if the response of the audience is not a factor in the writing of the literary work.

Current Marxist criticism, as opposed to Russian Formalism, sees the historicity of literature as "a system of normative values with a complex relation to class power" (Coyle et al: 718). Literature is seen as being an expression of an author's class (and background), written for a specific class. The response of the reader is thus vital in the writing and performance of the drama. The concept of the value of literature, in Marxism, has developed from "a conformity to a set of unchanging aesthetic attributes... [to a] function of the uses of texts" (Coyle et al: 718). Literary texts now have a purpose; certain effects on the audience are desired. Literature does not just consist of artistic language and a pleasing plot.

Another opinion pertaining to how a reader's context affects his interpretation of a literary work, is New Criticism. Leavis maintains that a critic's aim is to experience the text fully, then explain that experience eloquently to the readers. His explanation should be concrete, particular and comparative, not general and abstract (Jefferson et al: 5-6). The experience a critic has is affected by his circumstances and past incidents. It is intensely personal and subjective. The content of the text is merely what is said and the way in which it is said (Jefferson et al: 8); the context and purpose of the author are not contemplated. Yet as an advocate of practical criticism, I.A. Richards warns against bringing irrelevant personal experience to bear on the interpretation of a poem (Richards 1973: 15).

The Pluralist or Liberal Humanist approach to literature, developed after Leavis's New Criticism. It became during the twentieth century "the traditional academic approach to literature" (Peck and Coyle 1986: 154). Generally, in this approach to texts, the critics focus on the texts, but then "move fairly swiftly from the discussion of the text to an impression of the view of life it expresses". What the text says (content) and how it says it (form) is of central importance. Biography and history are combined "with a close discussion of the text in order to move towards an appreciation of what sort of complex statement it is making. Peck & Coyle (154) assert:

It is an approach that seems to look at the text with an open mind and without any apparent commitment to any particular ideological position.

This idea of neutrality has, however, been seriously challenged by contemporary theorists.

The fact that literary theories change and develop and give way to new theories as the critics' societies and frames of reference change, show that the interpretation of literature is linked to changes in context of the author, critic and audience. A changing society thus impacts on the response of the audience and critic. Different needs and wants of the audience, resulting from an era of new interests necessarily means a different response from the audience is evoked. Within the audience, are individuals, who each react to the drama in a different way, depending on his or her intellectual philosophies and background.

# 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.

## 2.2 The Influence of Miller's educational

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<sup>2</sup> 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).

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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 explicitly 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

the entire work-force" (Keller: 37).

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<sup>3</sup>, 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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).

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

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.

## Miller's heroes in his tragic dramas

Tragedy, "an attempt to make some positive statement about human life in the face of defeat and death" (Carson: 78).

### 3.1 Introduction

David Kovacs, who acted as Reverend Hale in a production of *The Crucible* at the National Theatre in June 1992, reports that Miller's plays are tragedies:

Miller's plays are tragedies. Tragedies in the classic sense of the word – in the way that Shakespeare's plays are tragedies. They are about the big things, they are about life and death, good and evil. But beyond that, there is always an enormous compassion for people, for the characters he's creating... because when you read his plays, or act in his plays, what strikes you is the pity of what happens to good, well-intentioned people, broken on the rack of life. And they are broken, very often, by the consequences of their own actions. In the end, as we all have to, they must take responsibility for what they've done. (Bigsby 1990: 86-89)

This relatively simplistic view of Miller's more tragic dramas, highlights one aspect of tragedy that we tend to forget: the effect of the drama on the audience. A drama

# Chapter 3: Basic requirements for tragic heroes: an examination of Miller's heroes in his tragic dramas

***Tragedy: "an attempt to make some positive statement about human life in the face of defeat and death" (Carson: 78).***

## 3.1 Introduction

David Burke, who acted as Reverend Hale in a production of the The Crucible at The National Theatre in June 1990, asserts that Miller's plays are tragedies:

Miller's plays are tragedies, tragedies in the classic sense of the word, in the way that Shakespeare's plays are tragedies. They are about the big things, they are about life and death, good and evil. But beyond that... there is always an enormous compassion for people, for the characters he's creating... because when you read his plays, or act in his plays, what strikes you is the pity of what happens to good, well-intentioned people, broken on the rack of life. And they are broken, very often, by the consequences of their own actions. In the end, as we all have to, they must take responsibility for what they've done. (Bigsby 1990: 98-99).

This relatively simplistic view of Miller's more tragic dramas, highlights one aspect of tragedy that we tend to forget: the effect of the drama on the audience. A drama

need not fit into the perfect tragic mould for it to have a cathartic effect on the audience and thus possibly be classified as a tragedy, but there are some basic principles or characteristics that most tragic dramas exhibit. The aim of this chapter is not to prove that these four plays are tragedies, but instead to show how they manifest both basic principles of tragedies and the principles of Miller's theory for a new form of tragedy.

Tragedy examines seemingly undeserved suffering and injustice. In doing so, it attempts to absolve religion's claims. Religion is not blamed for the tragedy that occurs, but the tragic outcome is rather attributed to fate and the decision of the gods, as in Greek tragedies, or to a universal justice which punishes man for his errors, as in Christian (Shakespearean) tragedy (Carson: 79).

In both of these traditional types of tragedies, as in modern tragedies, there seem to be three underlying requirements for a work to be tragic, as argued in the first chapter. These include: seriousness and dignity of the content and in the presentation of the heroes (domestic dramas, social dramas, whether prose or poetry is used), the nature and significance of the tragic hero and the suffering which the protagonists undergo, within the context of a basic moral force, which impacts on the audience. In section 1.3.4, a basic definition of tragedy, incorporating the essentials throughout tragic dramatic history was formulated. This definition is as follows:

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.

## 3.2 General patterns of tragedy and Miller's theory of tragedy

Tragedy emerged in Ancient Greece and interest was re-ignited during the Renaissance period: the Greek idea as to why people suffer, implicates the power of fate and man's blindness to his problems and moral weakness. Man's faults are thus acknowledged, but fate also plays a major role in the suffering. This view reflects the Greeks' attitude to the gods; they were mysterious and powerful and their ways were impenetrable to the people (Carson: 79). Thus, the effect of the protagonist's suffering on the Greek audience, according to Aristotle, was a mingling of fear for one's own fate, terror for the power of the gods and pity for the protagonist. Oedipus Rex is an apt example of such a tragedy. The prophecies made about his life came true, not because of a fault of his character, but simply because that was his destiny, mapped out by fate.

Christian tragedies, such as Shakespeare's tragedies, emphasise human error, rather than fate. Suffering in Christian tragedy is the consequence of human evil,

passion or decisions, not that of fate. As in Greek tragedy, the protagonist must die in order for the chain of being, or order in the universe, to be restored. Yet the catharsis on the audience in Christian tragedy is different to Greek tragedy: there is still pity for the protagonist, but instead of being terrified of the power and mystery of the gods, there is a "kind of reverend dread" (Carson: 79). The suffering of the protagonist is understandable and acceptable because the universe is understandable and morally just. As a result of his onerous ambition, in Shakespeare's Macbeth, Macbeth makes a morally wrong choice, breaking the chain of being and throwing Scotland into turmoil. He has to die in order to make amends for his actions - his death is just and points to a universal moral order.

Modern tragedies again differ. Since modern thought is preoccupied with scientific knowledge and religious scepticism, there is no longer a religious faith to provide assurance of justice in the world, so the twentieth century dramatist finds it difficult to present suffering as meaningful or morally just. Modern drama instead seems to show significance in a person's subjective experience of despair or anger (Carson: 79), such as in Eugene O'Neill's dramas, which examine the psychological suffering experienced by the protagonists. In a drama such as Miller's The Crucible, the protagonist's suffering seems excessive compared to his crime. John Proctor is essentially a good man who is accused of witchcraft by a jealous Abigail. Just prior to Proctor signing the confession of his alleged involvement in witchcraft, he and Elizabeth search their souls, leading to profound suffering:

ELIZABETH (*upon a heaving sob that always threatens*): John, it come to naught that I should forgive you, if you'll not forgive yourself. (*Now he turns away a little, in great agony.*) It is not my soul, John, it is yours. (*He stands, as though in physical pain, slowly rising to his feet with a great immortal longing to find his answer. It is difficult to say, and she is on the verge of tears.*) Only be sure of this, for I know it now: Whatever you will do, it is a good man does



it. (*He turns his doubting, searching gaze upon her.*) I have read my heart this three month, John. (*Pause.*) I have sins of my own to count. It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery.

PROCTOR (*in great pain*): Enough, enough- (Crucible: 109-110).

Proctor signs the confession in order to live, but refuses to name anyone else. He then tears up the confession, knowing that he cannot sign his name to a lie - he would rather die.

DANFORTH (*pointing at the confession in Proctor's hand*): Is that document a lie? If it is a lie I will not accept it! What say you? I will not deal in lies, Mister! (*PROCTOR is motionless.*) You will give me your honest confession in my hand, or I cannot keep you from the rope. (*PROCTOR does not reply.*) Which way do you go, Mister?

*His breast heaving, his eyes staring, PROCTOR tears the paper and crumples it, and he is weeping in fury, but erect* (Crucible: 115).

It does not seem just that John Proctor has to suffer at the hands of corrupt girls and judges, but he does. Yet the key to the impact of this drama is the seemingly unfair suffering which Proctor experiences and which leads to his moral growth and discovery of his inner goodness. In this there is victory. In the fact that, as Miller defines in the introduction to his Collected Plays, Proctor's death is "an assertion of bravery, and can serve to separate man from the death of animals" (Weales: 167), there is victory.

Miller wrote a series of essays after 1949, in which he formulated his theory of tragedy. This theory reintroduces justice and victory into tragedy because the hero could have chosen another path, which would have led to his avoiding or overcoming tragedy. Justice shows that the hero gets what he deserves and victory in the tragedy results from the knowledge that man is superior to animals, that man's death has meaning and asserts humanity's bravery and passion. Miller sees the most

basic element of tragedy as a quality of the tragic hero, namely the quality of a sense of indignation in the tragic hero. He also values, in Tragedy and the Common Man, the drive of the protagonist to "evaluate himself justly" (Weales: 145), which results in his own remorse and suffering.

Miller says this succinctly in his introduction to the Collected Plays (Weales: 167):

"...in a great variety of ways even death, the ultimate negative, can be, and appear to be, an assertion of bravery, and can serve to separate the death of man from the death of animals; and I think it is this distinction which underlies any conception of a victory in death".

Miller also explains in these essays that all tragic heroes are destroyed in trying to find and obtain their position in society. Man is a social being and needs to establish a balance between his social responsibility or accountability and his personal desires. Corrigan (1969: 3) further explains that Miller believed that "if each man faced up to the truth about himself, he could be fulfilled as an individual and still live within the restrictions of society." The tragic heroes of Miller's earlier dramas, Willy Loman, Joe Keller, John Proctor and Eddie Carbone, all face conflicts between their incomprehension of their selves and the structures in society (social, economic, family or community). The connection between the tragic hero and this structure is either broken by the protagonist, or is shown to have never existed. Both result in catastrophe.

The difference between the tragic hero and ordinary man is the hero's desire to "question and attack the scheme of things that degrades him" (Carson: 80). The audience experiences terror because the protagonist challenges the universe/cosmos/ structure that seems just and stable. The audience fears their concepts of the universe and their selves being uprooted and re-evaluated. At the same time, the destruction of the protagonist suggests that a just moral code exists in the midst of the evil in the hero and his environment.

Thus the conflict in modern tragedy is not between the hero and fate, which cannot be changed, but instead the hero struggles against social forces and personal desires that can be changed and overcome. For, as Miller says, "tragedy must always show how the catastrophe might have been avoided, how good might have been allowed to express itself instead of succumbing to evil" (Carson: 80).

Miller's theory of tragedy differs significantly from traditional classical and Christian theories. Some of these differences can be traced to recent developments, such as Ibsenism, which involves a moral theatre which argues a case as well as enacting a story (Bigsby 1997: 19), as well as the social dramas of the 1930s (focusing on man's social accountability). Yet it also owes something to Miller's own experience and exploration of the dramatic form as he has written and produced both highly successful plays and dismal failures. Carson (90) explains that when Miller compared the reception of his plays in various cities, he "became convinced that the ultimate test of a play's effectiveness was performance in the theatre". In his introduction to the Collected Plays, Miller writes: "a play ought to make sense to

common people... It is their innate conservatism which, I think, is and ought to be the barrier to excess in experiment and exploitation of the bizarre” (Carson: 90).

### 3.3 Dignity and seriousness of the content and in the presentation of the hero

Throughout history, as has been explained, tragedy has necessitated:

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 (Chapter 1).

This is a prerequisite of tragedy as tragedy involves a serious way of thinking about and viewing the world (Dixon: 11). There is a sense of misery in tragedy - of misfortune (Potter: 128), because insight is given into the dynamics of life and suffering. Life and its meaning are questioned, so as to evoke a sense of moral responsibility in the audience. This is indeed Miller's aim when writing his tragic dramas. In the introductory essay to A View from the Bridge in 1955, Miller explains the idea of victory in tragedy:

In Greece, the tragic victory consisted in demonstrating that the polis - the whole people - had discovered some aspect of the Grand Design, which also was the right way to live together... It meant a way to live that would create citizens who were brave in a war, had a sense of responsibility to the polis in peace, and were also developed as individual personalities (Biggsby 1997: 11-12).

Drama as a vehicle for dramatically creating a sense of victory in tragedy - of individual responsibility, thus necessitates a serious content and dignified style of presentation.

### 3.3.1 Elements of social and domestic drama in Miller's tragedies

The influence of social dramas, from Ibsen to Shaw and the playwrights of the 1930s, are evident in Miller's presentation of man in conflict with a destructive or repressive social environment. The "underlying implications of [social] plays are that society is flawed, that the majority of men are too blind, superstitious or venial to see it, and that what is needed is a radical re-examination of conventional ideas in preparation for a complete overhauling of the system" (Carson: 152). Two examples that illustrate these ideas are All My Sons, when Joe Keller is too blind to see his social responsibility and The Crucible, where John Proctor delays too long in providing evidence that the girls are lying. Yet even in these two plays, the general thrust "does not seem to be outward towards the changing of political systems so much as inward towards the world of private relations and emotions" (Carson: 153). This is where Miller proposes his new type of social drama, a drama that deals with the whole man, in relation to his family and society.

The domestic drama that Miller uses, reveals man in his home environment and his family relationships. Miller finds in the family “a microcosm of those tensions which equally characterise a society in transition” (Bisgby 1997: 24). He tends to give an in depth analysis of the men (often ill-educated fathers with two sons). The father often embodies the past and an authority, which must be challenged. The sons “are an expression of a necessary revolt which nevertheless is tainted with guilt” (Bisgby 1997: 24). Joe Keller in All my Sons is the authority who believes that he is right in denying his culpability, whereas his sons challenge him, by Larry’s suicide to make amends for his father’s deed, and by Chris’s condemnation of his father’s socially irresponsible act. As soon as Chris realises Joe’s culpability, he says to his father, with burning fury:

What... do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? What... are you? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you? What must I do to you? I ought to tear the tongue out of your mouth, what must I do? (Sons: 68)

Chris condemns and challenges his father’s view of his criminal act.

Carson (153) postulates that Miller does not show the problems, moral choices or individuality of women. Women are rather shown in their relationships to men (as wives, mistresses or daughters), rather than as individuals. The moral dilemma is seen from the man's point of view, and women are excluded from this moral choice: they are not real, believable characters: they are either too good (Linda, Catherine) or too bad (Abigail). Although this view holds truth in it, as the tragic protagonists are all men, women such as Elizabeth Proctor in The Crucible and Maggie in After the Fall, are represented as characters in their own rights who have to make a choice. Maggie has the choice of controlling her life or seeing herself as a victim of others - she chooses the latter. Elizabeth faces the choice of either persuading her husband

to lie and live, and be judged by herself, or to allow him to forgive himself, die with a clear conscience and not to judge him. She finally refuses to judge John, which, according to Adler (Biggsby 1997: 98), sets her apart and above other Miller protagonists such as Biff Loman in Death of a Salesman and Chris Keller in All my Sons. These two men judge their fathers and find them wanting – neither of the fathers manages to live up to his sons' expectations.

Man is, for Miller, a social being, who cannot be understood properly unless his society is understood (Carson: 154). Life is a symbiotic relationship between man and his social and intellectual environment. In an interview with Biggsby, Miller explains this concept: "The metaphor I like is that of the fish. The fish is in the water but the water's in the fish. You can't extricate individuals from society and hope to create a rounded picture of them" (Biggsby 1990: 80). Miller sees this society in two lights: as a support, and as a prison and man has a certain social responsibility: selfishness (i.e. materialism or self-indulgence) is contrary to the interests of society. Thus, according to Miller, man is created to be in association with others. Miller also condemns the desire of man not to be accountable for his actions or to be merely thought well of by the neighbours.

Gerald Freedman, of the Roundabout Theatre, New York City and Carson both sense a moral responsibility or religious concern in Miller. Freedman (Biggsby 1990: 104) asserts that in all Miller's plays, he is concerned with the individual's responsibility to both the self and society. Although Miller does not dictate morality, he does make one wrestle with one's conscience and realise that one has to live with the choice of accepting responsibility or not. Chris, in All my Sons observes that

“...you can know there’s a universe of people outside and you’re responsible to it...” (Sons: 80). Carson (154) concludes that Miller is a religious writer, rather than a social or domestic writer because “He is not so much concerned with establishing utopias as with saving souls. That is why he is always more interested in the individual than the group.” Systems such as capitalism, socialism, McCarthyism or Nazism “provide the fire in which the hero is tested”, but it is the hero’s response in that fire/ crisis that is Miller’s primary interest. Miller’s concern with aspects such as conscience, presumption, despair and faith, shows a reversion to the traditional tragedies, which dealt with these topics (Carson: 155).

In his essay On Social Plays, Miller’s explains a new type of social drama which could “recapture the Greek breadth of vision” (Carson: 84). Miller feels that classical drama and modern plays mainly differ in their concern with ultimate law. Classical drama was concerned with the discovery of the universal order or law and the right or moral way to live (Carson: 85). Greek drama thus treated both private life and the social context. Man was considered as a whole and man’s place in the ultimate order was established. Conversely, Miller feels that modern drama no longer deals with the whole man. Social dramas (e.g. of Ibsen and Shaw) highlight social motives; psychological dramas are often merely an examination of individuality for art’s sake. Instead, Miller suggests, a new form of social drama is needed, which will examine man as a whole, combining classical approaches with modern interests in psychology and economics (Carson: 85).

The modern tragic dramatist, thus, must somehow show that there is a sense of social causation, a sense of reason or justification in society, for a man to accept



responsibility for his actions. He must show that a single individual can be considered representative of a whole people, so that in identifying with the hero, the audience may learn something about human nature, the hero's nature and the structure of the universe. The contemporary playwright must, in Carson's words, "portray the kind of tragic figure who would have the power to pass over the boundary of the known social law in order to discover a way of life which would yield excellence." One of Miller's ways to portray this kind of hero (and he has a variety) can be found in his first version in A View from the Bridge. He creates an objective narrator, Alferi, who can see the larger context that is hidden from the hero and who "provides a contemporary point of view on the mythic tale as it unfolds" (Biggsby 1997: 13). Miller wrote about a closed society "in which the conflict between the protagonist and the social law would engage the passions of the whole community" (Carson: 85). When Marco stabs Eddie, it implies that Eddie has violated the laws of kinship by his illicit passion, and must consequently be purged from the community. The natural law of society commands this (Biggsby 1997: 14).

There are four of Miller's dramas which, although they may not fit into the categories of classical (Greek) or Christian tragedies, do contain elements of these tragedies, combined with elements of Miller's theories of a new type of social, domestic tragedy, in which the protagonist's actions reflect on a system in society. These dramas are All my Sons, A View from the Bridge, The Crucible and Death of a Salesman. Elements of these dramas will be examined to see where they overlap with and differ from traditional concepts of tragedies.

### 3.3.2 Dignity of person

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).

Dignity of person in the protagonist ensures that the drama is a tragedy, not just an example of pathos. In order for an audience to identify with a protagonist, the hero should have a certain degree of decorum or stature. There is no reason why the modern tragic hero cannot embody these qualities. The qualities of the hero will be discussed further in section 4, but as an example of dignity, I quote Carson, who saw Lee Cobb act as Willy Loman in the first performance:

[He was] a huge, ruffled man with a deep, rich voice [who] endowed the character of Willy with a dignity beyond his station in life. It was Cobb's ability to lift his performance onto the high plane of tragic acting, to create a character who was exhausted without being weak, misguided rather than insane, that contributed so largely to the impact of the New York production (Carson:46).

Although a character may not be one of stature and importance in himself, he can still represent mankind and or the society in which he lives, depending on the relevance of the issues he deals with. For example, Eddie Carbone in A View from the Bridge deals with issues of illicit passion, deception, jealousy and breaking the social law of that society; issues relevant to mankind in general, and thus attains a dramatic dimension or significance beyond his identity as a Sicilian longshoreman.

### 3.3.3 The language of tragedy

Traditionally, the tragic hero was supposed to be of a higher status or social level than the masses and this was shown by the hero's use of poetry. When Aristotle outlines Greek tragic drama, he does not prescribe that poetry must be used, but rather postulates that speech must be beautiful and have "pleasurable accessories" (Leech: 1). Although poetry would appear to fulfil these requirements more easily than prose and was long associated with tragedy, Miller's prose attains the necessary lyricism and beauty. Steiner's assertion that "prose has no place in [tragedy]" (Steiner: 23), is based on the assumption that prose cannot "raise discourse above common speech" (Steiner: 23), but it can and does. Miller uses a heightened prose (as will be explained shortly), which simultaneously sounds pleasurable and roots the drama in reality - appropriate for a tragic protagonist who is rooted in the reality of a domestic setting.

Being socially conscious, Miller focuses on human and moral issues, rather than the political and ideological. He examines issues such as the impact of the public life on the private. One of the ways in which an individual person is related to society is through the family. Sometimes the family threatens his individuality, and at other times it solidifies individuality and helps a person form an identity (Welland: 12-13).

In The Family of Modern Drama, Miller writes that "the language of the family is the language of the private life - prose. The language of society, the language of the public life, is verse" (Welland: 13). Miller writes about private life - domestic dramas.

Although his dramas are written in prose, the dignity of presentation is still there because of a heightened speech that Miller uses - almost poetic. In an interview with Bigsby (Bigsby 1990: 29), Miller justifies his particular use of language: "I also wanted to stretch the realistic theatre anyway; I was very impatient with it. I didn't know how to do that except by the use of language which always seemed to me to be terribly important in the theatre".

Although Miller writes Death of a Salesman in American prose, it has achieved recognition for its poetic beauty. In 1953, Hobson spoke of it as "beautifully and movingly written, eloquent, yet perfectly within the common American idiom" (Welland: 15). Kenneth Tynan, in 1954, said of the play that it was "Miller's triumph in the plain style..." (Welland: 15). Miller's style is to lift the dialogue's register above the level of everyday conversation, while "keeping it firmly grounded in the rhythm of ordinary speech and the idiom of the vernacular" or familiar (Welland: 16). Loman, for example, tells his sons that "...the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around. I was fired today" (Salesman: 84). Miller insists to Bigsby (1990: 55) that: "I was trying to find a poetic voice in the theatre while at the same time making the scenes and the characters believable."

Beautifully poetic, yet simple vocabulary is employed. In After the Fall Quentin says: "How few the days are that hold the mind in place, like a tapestry hung on four or five hooks" (Fall: 50), and Victor in The Price tells his brother: "You can't walk in with one splash and wash out twenty-eight years" (Price: 98). Von Berg in Incident at Vichy (Vichy: 39) says of the Germans that "Their motives are musical, and people are merely sounds they play." Later (Vichy: 50), Lebeau comments that, "You get tired of

believing in the truth. You get tired of seeing things clearly. I always collected my illusions in the morning. I could never paint what I saw, only what I imagined." In A View from the Bridge, Rodolpho explains to Catherine: "If I take in my hands a little bird and she grows and wishes to fly. But I will not let her out of my hands because I love her so much, is that right for me to do?" (View: 337). Lastly, Alfieri explains about law to Eddie, "When the law is wrong, it's because it's unnatural, but in this case it is natural and a river will drown you if you buck it now" (View: 339). In all of these examples, the language is simple yet poetic, grounded in the familiar and not excessive - it rather adds to the interest of the audience and shows how important language is in dramas. (Welland: 16).

Carson (150) criticises what he sees as Miller's attempts to "substitute a poetry of the theatre for poetry in the theatre", as being misguided, but he does, however, acknowledge that Miller has contributed significantly to "an effective stage speech combining the power of formal rhetoric with an impression of colloquial conversation."

In The Crucible Miller uses heightened, figurative speech, such as when Proctor despairingly speaks to Elizabeth, "I see now your spirit twists around the single error of my life, and I will never tear it free" (Crucible 51). The setting in Salem's history, however, licences this as it is set in Puritanical Massachusetts in 1692. Wood, who writes the introduction to The Crucible, asserts that the strange dialect, phrases and peculiarities of grammar such as "Goody" as a title, "there be no road" and "I am thirty-three time in court" all serve to create the atmosphere of another time and environment. Since the characters are Puritans whose reading is confined to the Bible, their heightened speech is in tune with biblical metaphor (Crucible: xix-xx).

The British playwright, John Arden, supplements this praise of Miller's use of language in The Crucible:

It was not just the monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon strength of the words chosen so much as the rhythms that impregnated the speeches. Avoiding mush of sentiment on the one hand and throwaway casualness on the other, he never fell into the trap of rhetorical emphasis over and above the probabilities of an archaic Bible-based culture (Bigsby 1990: 91).

Miller successfully changes contemporary American speech into something powerfully moving. Willy Loman's comments that "The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress" (Salesman: 31) and that he feels "kind of temporary about [him]self" (Salesman: 40) or Gregory Solomon's expostulations that "She was pure like the morning" (Price: 46) and "The piece of used furniture is nothing but a viewpoint" (Price: 38) are examples of this metamorphosis of the common into the poetic. Carson praises Miller's dialogue that is "based on the slangy, wise-cracking speech of ill-educated or bilingual New York immigrants, mainly Jewish or Italian. Within this seemingly narrow compass or regional idiom the playwright expresses a remarkable range of feeling" (Carson: 151).

Although poetry is not used as such in the plays because Miller aims at maintaining a sense of reality in his dramas, the language used is clearly more powerful and moving than ordinary speech.

Dixon and Steiner's view oppose this interpretation. Dixon (37) insists that tragedy must end in defeat. One cannot imply that a tragic flaw resulting in death can be

### 3.4 Suffering of the tragic protagonists

Before the qualities of the various protagonists can be ascertained, we need to look at their actions, sufferings and reactions to the sufferings.

In the traditional tragedies (Greek and Christian), the suffering the hero endures is seen to bear some relation to his own erroneous action, so that he must accept some responsibility for it. In order to accept at least partial responsibility for it, the hero develops insight into his situation and the fate or universal cosmos that justifies his suffering (Carson: 60), but he cannot change fate and he cannot be excused from suffering. Miller's own definition incorporates the hero's struggle against social forces, which, unlike fate, can be changed and overcome. This is where Miller reintroduces victory into tragedy. For, as Miller says, "tragedy must always show how the catastrophe might have been avoided, how good might have been allowed to express itself instead of succumbing to evil" (Carson: 80). For Miller, the Aristotelian tragic flaw is the protagonist's "inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity..." (Weales: 144). Most people are thus flawless, as they are passive and "accept their lot without active retaliation" (Weales: 144). The tragic protagonist acts "against the scheme of things that degrades" him (Weales: 144). The individual challenges the stable cosmos. In this there is victory, showing in man a force of passion and bravery, which uplifts his humanity.

Dixon and Steiner's views oppose this interpretation. Dixon (37) insists that tragedy must end in defeat. One cannot imply that a tragic flaw resulting in death can be

victorious, nor can the playwright imply that the world is understandable. Steiner, (8) also postulates that one only has serious drama, not tragedy, where “the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means.” Miller’s idea of victory in tragedy does not mean that the protagonist lives at the end (then it would not be a tragedy), but that the protagonist has the freedom of choice and has to bear the consequences of that choice. He could have chosen another route or made a different decision, which would not have uplifted his humanity or shown his passion. By fighting against his cosmos, instead of passively accepting it, the protagonist reveals his desire to maintain his dignity.

In Chapter 1, the following idea of suffering of tragic protagonists has been formulated:

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.

Using the traditional approach, Death of a Salesman and All my Sons can be read as existential plays which examine the relationship between an individual and his fate or the justice he receives (Carson: 55). Willy Loman’s suicide seems just, as he has lied to his sons, committed adultery and followed materialistic dreams: he does not deserve to live happily ever after. Joe Keller’s suicide seems right: he has caused others’ deaths, as well as his own son’s. He does not deserve to be forgiven and to live.



These two plays highlight an interest of Miller's: people's different and diverse reactions in times of crisis. Some people are crushed and give up, while others survive and grow from the experience of suffering. Loman is crushed by his inability to be materialistically successful, while his death is actually unnecessary. Miller had first-hand experience of this diversity in reaction to crises; he saw it during the Great Depression when everyone was faced with similar circumstances. Their fates must thus have been determined by their individual reactions to it, and by their inner qualities, values, perceptions and strengths. The different ways in which John Proctor and Rebecca Nurse react to the accusations of witchcraft against them in The Crucible is just one indication of this. Rebecca flatly refuses to confess to witchcraft, "Why, it is a lie, it is a lie; how may I damn myself? I cannot, I cannot" (Crucible: 112), whereas Proctor at first refuses to confess, then does confess because he feels that he is not as good as Rebecca, therefore cannot be equated with her. He then withdraws his confession, knowing that he will hang.

Miller's theory concerning coping with the Great Depression is underscored in certain characters in his dramas. Miller theorised that during the Great Depression, "the people blamed themselves, not the system, by and large, which is why the country never got radicalised in any way... And it therefore became my job in effect to teach him that he should stop blaming himself so much" (Bigsby 1990: 21). Miller saw that the people who believed in Capitalism (the system) felt guilty for their material failure and gave up the struggle, so survival seemed to lie in a person's capacity to make sense of the universal law (Carson: 55). Someone who could not understand it or see sense in it, gave up, and, in the case of Willy Loman, committed suicide, took the

easy way out rather than trying to face a new perception of reality. Some people, such as Joe Keller, wilfully blinded themselves to this knowledge and suffered as a result. Keller refuses to feel guilty because he has blinded himself to the knowledge that his responsibilities spread wider than that of the family. "I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet to my head!" Keller vociferates (Sons: 73).

### 3.4.1 Suffering of Joe Keller in All my Sons

Suffering thus does not necessarily mean joyfully submitting to the order of the universe, but more desiring self-knowledge and being on the path to realising what one's commitments and connections are (Brooks: 4-5). The 'peripeteia' or change of fortune of the protagonist sometimes leads to a discovery or awareness, as well as suffering because of that awareness. We can see this in the case of Proctor, when he realises that he cannot live a lie. In other instances, such as with Willy Loman, there is no true discovery of reality, but a false recognition of his connection and responsibilities, so his misguided suicide to try to improve the lot of his family is based on blindness. Even if he does not come to a point of awareness, his family does, and so does the audience.

The tragic protagonist suffers within a structure: traditionally the universal moral law, but in some cases such as that of Eddie Carbone in A View from the Bridge and Joe Keller in All my Sons, they sin against the social moral law and do not fulfil their social responsibilities. In The Crucible, John Proctor does not sin against the Universal moral structure - this is what he remains true to at the end; he does, however, stand in conflict to the misguided society (social law) of Salem. Finally, Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman shares the values of his society. Since his

society is depraved, his fall is linked to and representative of the nature of that society.

### 3.4.1 Suffering of Joe Keller in All my Sons

Joe Keller, in All my Sons, does not seem to suffer for his actions at first, as he does not see them as wrong. He does not believe in a universal moral law (as in traditional tragedies) that will punish him for his wrong doing, nor does he believe in his wider social responsibility that extends further than his immediate family. He knowingly sells defective cylinder heads for aeroplanes, but escapes the blame of the death of the twenty-one pilots by making his partner, Steve Deever, seem guilty. He is unaffected by the death of the pilots or the destruction of his partner's career and family support, and returns home and continues with his life, confident that he has sustained the needs of his family.

His oldest son, Chris, returns from the war and works for his father, believing in his father's innocence. Joe Keller's partner is meanwhile serving his prison sentence, abandoned by his children, George and Ann. Ann had been engaged to Larry Keller, who was reported missing during the war, but her family had moved away from the Kellers and the town after the incident which resulted in their father's imprisonment.

Chris and Ann have maintained contact through letters, so Ann comes to visit Chris. George then joins his sister at the Kellers and discovers the truth: he believes that Joe Keller has framed his father and so he rejects Chris as a possible brother-in-law. George then leaves and Chris also finds out the truth. Initially, Keller denies involvement: "I didn't kill anybody!" he states emphatically (Sons: 97). He then tries to justify his actions by saying that he had no choice. His business would have been destroyed, and anyway, he did not think that the cracked cylinders would be installed. He appeals to Chris's pity: "You're a boy, what could I do? ...what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? I never thought they'd install them" (Sons: 67). At this stage, however, Joe Keller still refuses to acknowledge that he did something wrong. When his wife suggests that he apologise to Chris and say that he's willing to go to prison, Keller is amazed and tells her, "I don't know what you mean! You wanted money, so I made money. What must I be forgiven? You wanted money, didn't you?" (Sons: 72).

Chris's mother, Kate Keller, discovers that Larry wrote a letter to Ann in which he said that he was going to commit suicide because of his father's arrest. This makes Joe realise that Larry died because of Joe's action. In a moment of insight, Joe realises that not only was Larry his son, but to Larry, "they were all [his] sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were". (Sons: 79). Joe says he will own up and turn himself in, but goes upstairs and shoots himself as he cannot face his guilt and shame (Bigsby 1997: 51). He realises that there is something bigger than his family.

This play embodies a principle that Ibsen first expressed. He managed to adapt Greek tragic drama to realist drama in "the play of ripe circumstance" (Carson: 40).

This is where events which cover a long period of time, or principles upon which a life is based, are put into perspective and shown to be wrong or to lead to tragedy. Since Kate and Joe have built their lives on the principle of capitalism, where "you don't love a man, you eat him" (Sons: 77), they believe that Joe's deception was not wrong because it was motivated by love for their children. Centola explains:

He denies his relation to society so that he can excuse unethical business practises that keep his manufacturing company fiscally sound and his family financially secure. He convinces himself that his sole responsibility is to be successful so he can support his wife and children (Bigsby 1997: 53).

This principle is shown to be faulty when it becomes clear that their younger son's (Larry's) death results from Joe's action, and when it is compared to the belief in justice that George and Ann uphold. In this world, everyone gets what he deserves. Yet, within the structure of social relationships, where Joe Keller does not have a sense of social responsibility, there are also characters (Chris and Larry) who do have an unselfish sense of social responsibility, whose lives are marked by love and co-operation (Carson: 41). Because they have discovered their place in the structure, they are fulfilled. (Centola (Bigsby 1997: 59) sees Larry in a different light, however; he views Larry's death as an attempt to escape from the humiliation which he would experience in the community).

At first, Keller does not gain insight into his actions, nor feels ashamed for what he has done. Keller continually excuses himself when Chris confronts him with his action. After saying that he had no choice, as he had to keep his business going for his sons, Keller concludes that everyone else was working by the same moral standards as he. He explains: "When they worked for nothin', I'll work for nothin'. ...What's clean? Half the ...country gotta go if I gotta go!" (Sons: 78). It is only when Keller realises that his son has died because of his deed, and the tragedy thus

touches him directly, that he expresses remorse and sympathises with others and “recognises his connection with the rest of humanity” (Carson: 42). Unfortunately, Joe kills himself at the end because he cannot face trial and imprisonment. “His suicide is partly an act of penance for his previous deeds, but is also the act of a man who cannot live with himself” (Carson: 43). He realises that his area of responsibility is not limited to his father-son relationship, or just to his immediate family, but that it extends to a universe of people (Carson: 43). As indicated by the title, Keller realises that the boys who were killed were all his sons (Sons: 79).

Gregory Hersov from the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester identifies with the issues in All my Sons: it is a general human characteristic to make decisions which are harmful to others, for the sake of our own interests of self-esteem, love for our family and business. When Joe Keller finds out the awful truth of his actions, his whole family and neighbourhood are also brought face to face with this trouble, destroying their ideas about their world and themselves. They realise their connection with everything, their place in the universe (Bigsby 1990: 52).

All my Sons explores choices Joe Keller has to make between his own needs and desires, and those of others. Instead of acknowledging his complicity in the crime, he lies about it and denies his involvement in order to “preserve his false image of himself and maintain the illusion that he has regained his rightful place in society”. He cannot face the negative impulses in himself (Bigsby 1997: 52). He portrays himself as, and tries to convince Chris that he is a victim of forces beyond his control, who made the best possible choice available at the time. He clarifies his reasons: “I’m in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty cracked, you’re out of

business; you got a process, the process don't work you're out of business... they knock you out in five minutes" (Sons: 67). He then tries to rationalise the crime, explaining that he hoped the parts would perform satisfactorily. Finally, he blames his decision on the prevailing code of ethics of American businesses at that time. Unfortunately, Keller's denial just aggravates the family crisis and intensifies his alienation and anguish (Bigsby 1997: 54).

### 3.4.2 Suffering of Eddie Carbone in A View from the Bridge

Eddie Carbone, who is a long-shoreman in the Red Hook district of Brooklyn, and his wife, Beatrice, have brought up their niece, Catherine, since her parents' death when she was very young. When the play opens, Catherine is seventeen and Eddie feels far more than fatherly affection for her, although neither he nor Catherine seems aware of it. When Catherine desires to marry, Eddie becomes extremely jealous.

As a social play, the action occurs within the strict code of loyalty of the Sicilian-American community, and deals with Eddie's infraction of that code: Eddie betrays Rodolpho and Marco, Beatrice's Italian relatives who have been smuggled into the United States. Eddie and Beatrice provide for them, but Rodolpho and Catherine fall in love, which arouses the jealousy of Eddie. Eddie cannot admit to himself the true nature of his feelings for Catherine, so he convinces himself that Rodolpho is

homosexual and only wants Catherine so that he can obtain American citizenship. Eddie seeks legal advice from the district lawyer, Alfieri, to try to stop Rodolpho and Catherine. Alfieri realises the real reason that Eddie is so fanatical, but cannot make him see it. He advises Eddie that “the child has to grow up and go away, and the man has to learn to forget” (View: 332). He also reminds Eddie of the community’s strict code against informers, so warns him not to betray Rodolpho to the immigration authorities.

When Eddie returns home early one day to find Rodolpho and Catherine in the bedroom, he orders Rodolpho to leave whereupon Catherine starts to go with him. Eddie grasps her arm and kisses her on the mouth and will not let her go.

EDDIE: Pack it up. Go ahead. Get your stuff and get outa here. (*Catherine instantly turns and walks towards the bedroom, and Eddie grabs her arm*). Where you goin’?

CATHERINE: (*Trembling with fright*) I think I have to get out of here, Eddie.

...

EDDIE: You aint goin’ nowheres.

CATHERINE: Eddie, I’m not gonna be a baby any more! You -

(*He reaches out suddenly, draws her to him, and as she strives to free herself he kisses her on the mouth.*)

RODOLPHO: Don’t! (*He pulls on Eddie’s arm*). Stop that! Have respect for her! (View: 338).

In Eddie’s anger at the forthcoming marriage between Catherine and Rodolpho, he seeks Alfieri’s help; Alfieri merely tells him to allow the marriage to go ahead and to bless her. He says that “Somebody has to come for her Eddie, sooner or later” (View: 339). Instead, Eddie plunges in and phones the immigration officials, who come and arrest Marco and Rodolpho, as well as two other immigrants.



In front of all of the neighbours, Marco spits in Eddie's face and accuses him of betraying them. Marco finally returns for vengeance, but Eddie refuses to run; instead he tries again to separate Rodolpho and Catherine despite the fact that they are about to be married. He refuses to make amends with Rodolpho, instead shouting that he wants his name. "I want my name... Marco's got my name..." (View: 345). When Marco finally arrives, Eddie accuses him and Rodolpho of stealing Catherine from him and making his name "like a dirty rag". Eddie pulls a knife, but Marco turns it on him, and Eddie is fatally wounded. As he dies, he says to Beatrice, "My B.!" (View: 346), showing that he still loves his wife.

Carson (84) comments that this first version of the play is similar to a Euripidean tragedy of passion, "in which the protagonist is overcome by an irresistible and self-destructive madness". The final speech implies that this kind of passion is primitive and that humans should move towards more rational behaviour, but this implication is unclear and Eddie does not seem to exhibit the qualities of the tragic protagonist as Miller defined them in his essays. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times criticises Eddie in this first version of the play: "far from being a 'hero' Eddie seemed mean and vicious, and got just about what he deserved" (Carson: 87).

In the revised version, Miller focuses on the relationship between Eddie and Marco, instead of on Eddie's passion for Catherine and it is Marco's insult, not Rodolpho's rivalry, which preoccupies Eddie. When Beatrice tries to confront Eddie with his love for Catherine, Eddie turns away; but he then dies in the arms of Beatrice, suggesting that he has finally accepted something of his unusual passion (Carson: 88).

Also in the revised version, Alfieri's final speech discusses Eddie's unique qualities, rather than the primitive nature of man. He says of Eddie that "he allowed himself to be wholly known and for that I think I will love him more than all my sensible clients" (View: 346). "Alfieri is contrasting the sensible people who settle for half and the potentially tragic individuals who cannot let well enough alone. [S]uch individuals are driven to act when others would retire and in so acting, they cause the scheme of things to act with retributive violence against them" (Carson: 88).

If we are to consider this drama to be tragic, then how "can Eddie's actions be interpreted as a challenge of the 'stable cosmos' and how do they lead to the discovery of new understanding or a moral law? What 'holy truth' has been pursued by this protagonist or revealed by his death? Superficially it would seem that the evil in the play is not in the environment, but in Eddie, and in this respect the play is fairly traditional" (Carson: 89).

By Miller's revising the play, Eddie is made into a character who is more sympathetic to the audience, making it possible for the audience to mourn a man who has a certain dignity, even though he is guilty of serious offence (Carson: 90). Throughout the play, Eddie has a choice between accepting Catherine and Rodolpho's love, and continuing to fire his illicit passion for her. He repeatedly makes the wrong choice in pursuing his inappropriate passion for his niece. This series of choices leads to the betrayal of the smuggled relatives, and finally the rejection by his society for breaking their trust. For all his wrong choices, there is victory in the knowledge that Eddie

fights passionately for what he desires, although it is illicit. He doesn't just accept life, but lives it intensely and dies passionately. There is also victory in the suggestion that Eddie dies having made amends with his wife - it is Beatrice whom he addresses just before he dies. This play, like All my Sons, serves to warn the audience that decisions must be made with the knowledge that one has a responsibility towards one's society, not just towards one's own desires. It is the social law and structure that one needs to obey.

### 3.4.3 Suffering of John Proctor in The Crucible

Basic themes are explored in The Crucible which are still relevant to our modern world. Gregory Hersov compares the Salem persecution, scapegoating, hysteria and killing, "society [devouring] itself in front of our eyes", to modern examples of exploitation, racism and bigotry, through which societies destroy themselves. "We haven't lost our need for witches; they just have different names" (Biggsby 1990: 52), such as McCarthyism.

In a society that becomes irrational, John Proctor undergoes suffering. The nature of this suffering reduces him to his purified, essential self. Carson (60) puts this eloquently: it strips "the central character of layers of protective covering until in the end [Proctor] stands naked - totally exposed," or as Adler elucidates, "the trial will be

the crucible that burns Proctor down to his essential elements” (Biggsby 1997: 95). The dramatic pattern differs significantly from the conventional design of Greek or Christian tragedy. In traditional tragedy, the universal law applies and the protagonist fails in terms of this law. In The Crucible, Proctor finds and upholds his place in the universal moral law; it is the society that is corrupt and fails the law.

Proctor’s suffering ends in triumph rather than defeat; this expresses Miller’s desire to reintroduce victory into tragedy. The conventional tragic hero is a deluded, blinded or obsessed individual in an ordered universe, Proctor is a just man in a universe which seems to have gone mad (Carson: 60). Here there is a crucial difference between Proctor, and Eddie Carbone and Willy Loman. Eddie and Willy are the conventional deluded individuals in an ordered universe.

Miller’s concept of a family being a microcosm of society is broadened in The Crucible: Salem is seen as a microcosm of human society. The girls’ accusations are merely a catalyst to a problem in the community, a problem that seems to be inherent in mankind. Miller’s interest appears to be in what could make an innocent person confess to a sin that has not been committed (Carson: 65-66). Miller’s conclusion seems to be ‘terror’ and ‘guilt’, which he develops through focusing on the relationship of Abigail, John Proctor and his wife, Elizabeth Proctor. He examines the nature of this guilt in Proctor, the effect it has on him, and questions what right a society or community has to judge other members of that community.

The play opens with the adults in Salem trying to ascertain the cause of the frightened, hysterical reactions of five girls, when Reverend Parris discovers that they had participated in a seance and a dance in the woods. Mercy Lewis was dancing with Mary Warren and Betty Parris watching; Ruth Putnam had been sent by her mother to commune with the dead, and Abigail Williams had tried to ensure the death of John Proctor's wife.

The responses of the townspeople are standard to human nature: the sinner or victim tries to place the blame on someone else, or at least on something outside her/himself (Carson: 68). Ann Putnam blames witchcraft for her children's death, Parris blames the devil because he is unpopular, Abigail blames Tituba for Abigail's drinking the blood (which was a charm against Elizabeth), and Tituba blames the Devil for her involvement in the seance and dance. At first, Tituba is terrified by threats of punishment, but when she is offered forgiveness and security if she confesses, she does. This becomes the standard procedure in dealing with the other "victims".

John Proctor's relationships with others are the central force of the drama, the most damaging being his relationship with Abigail (Carson: 67). The audience never knows the extent of this relationship, but at the beginning of the drama, Proctor shows no embarrassment on his part, merely openness and friendliness towards Abigail, yet we are later told that he feels that he went against what he sees as decent conduct. Proctor confesses, "...I thought of her softly. ...I lusted, and there is a promise in such sweat" (Crucible: 89). Proctor is a complex hero: he seems to have two sides to his nature, a radical side is revealed when he resents Parris' calling in Hale without

consulting the wardens, and when he opposes the preacher's fire and brimstone preaching.

Hale and the Salem court have passed their first death sentence by the beginning of Act 2, and Proctor has told Elizabeth that he has evidence which would discredit the girls as witnesses, yet he delays in telling the court until it is too late and he is discredited. At this stage, he lies to Elizabeth about Abigail, seeming reluctant to expose her and he hypocritically praises Elizabeth for a stew. He is suffering - "these are the actions of a man who is rationalising in order to avoid facing himself...[he] is happier with external conflict than he is with inner strife" (Carson: 69). Proctor also projects his faults (and thus the blame) on others, when he opposes Parris, browbeats Mary Warren, threatens the court clerk and tears up the Governor's warrant. (Carson: 70).

John Proctor lapses into a hatred of himself: he tries to force Mary Warren to tell the court that the evidence against Elizabeth is fraudulent, but she responds by telling him that Abigail will charge him with lechery. He realises then that his hypocrisy and pretence must be exposed, and hates himself for his faults.

When Proctor tries to overthrow the court, he cannot, as each official, besides Hale, has a personal stake in its continuation. Danforth believes that Proctor is trying to ruin the reputation of the Deputy Governor, his prejudices blinding him, so that by the time Proctor reveals and accuses Abigail of lechery, Danforth is already against him. Elizabeth's lying to protect Proctor is accepted as proof that Proctor is a deceiver.

His public revelation of his lechery does, however, mean that any pretence is removed - burnt on the crucible. Finally, "enmeshed in a madness he could not overthrow" (Carson: 71), Proctor responds with anger, then with insight:

I hear the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy face! And it is my face, and yours, Danforth! For them that quail to bring men out of ignorance, as I have quailed, and you quail now when you know in all your black hearts that this be a fraud - God damns our kind especially, and we will burn, we will burn together! ...You are pulling heaven down and raising a whore!" (Crucible: 96).

This quotation shows that Proctor sees himself as partly responsible for the evil he has tried to condemn because he was reluctant at first to expose the lies of the girls and thus hurt his name. Adler probes Proctor's moral integrity:

[Proctor] sees a larger social role and responsibility, arguing that to fail to bring the community out of ignorance, that is, out of its self-imposed condition of blindness to what is ripping it apart, would be the greatest sin and a failure worthy of damnation (Bigsby 1997: 97).

In the final act, Proctor accepts his guilt. He falls to a state of utter self-loathing and has neither self-respect nor dignity. His decision to confess is because he feels too unworthy to be placed in the same category as Rebecca Nurse, who is innocent and also charged with witchcraft, but he does not want to confess to the wrong sins. Elizabeth knows that Proctor must first forgive himself before her forgiveness, which he asks for, can mean anything to him.

Finally, Proctor makes a stand to oppose the court when he refuses to name confederates or have his confession publicised. He cannot blacken others' good names by his confession being publicised and taken as evidence that he claims others to be in Satan's power. Even though the "lie" would save his life, it would ruin the good name of himself and his children (Bigsby 1997: 98). Proctor thus gains

insight into his own character, that he is not as evil as he has thought, when he realises that he cannot publish a lie about himself. Although he is not as good a man as he hoped, he realises that he is not completely evil. Elizabeth's statement at the end that "He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him" (*Crucible*: 116) shows that he has found the true core of his nature that has been hidden by self-loathing (Carson: 74).

### 3.4.4 Suffering of Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*

Proctor's triumph over himself and his belief in himself, is the victory in the tragedy. It is not up to his wife, nor society to judge him; only he can do that. He is judged by his own conscience (Carson: 75). His choice is between spiritual death – calling true what he knows to be half true - and being true to his conscience. "Even the law must, in fact, be violated, when it comes into conflict with the dictates of a rightly formed conscience" (Biggsby 1997: 98). Tom Wilkinson, who played John Proctor in the June 1990 production at The National Theatre, discusses Proctor's sense of morality:

...John Proctor has a sense of morality which sees the betrayal of his wife as being amongst the lesser crimes... if he hadn't been placed in the crucible which will reduce him to seeing the world in terms of this morality, he would have been able to reconcile this sense of sexual betrayal to an overall moral structure... Proctor is just a man, a man more good than bad, who one day betrays his wife with Abigail Williams... The moment he sees his own name written on a piece of paper... he comes face to face with John Proctor reduced to his quintessence; the crucible has burned off the flabby bits of John Proctor and he's left with his own irreducible moral self, the person he is. And he knows then that life wouldn't be worth living if he gave in and signed his name to save himself... He's not defending an abstract principle. He's defending an idea of himself... [he] is finally confronted with who he is (Biggsby 1990: 95-96).

Proctor saves his name, although Eddie Carbone cannot. A man's name for Miller "assumes a talismanic power... an outward sign of inner integrity" (Biggsby 1997: 98). And so Proctor dies a victorious physical death, having accepted his humanity, his



responsibility, and his core being. Proctor's death thus stands in stark contrast to the misguided suicide of Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman.

### 3.4.4 Suffering of Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman

Death of a Salesman will be dealt with only briefly in this chapter as a detailed analysis of this drama as Tragedy comprises the next chapter. In the last 24 hours of his life, Willy Loman recalls events and episodes from his youth and his earliest memories of his father, to the summer Biff failed school. It is written from Willy's point of view and encompasses three generations: Willy's father's life - a memory in Willy's imagination, because his father left when Willy was a small boy, Willy's own life and that of his two sons. Willy's desire to give strong, although misguided guidance and advice to his sons results from his own lack of it, since "Dad left when I was such a baby... I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel - kind of temporary about myself" (Salesman: 40).

Willy is absorbed into the American system of materialistic values, where he measures his success by how much money he makes and how many possessions he has. Willy is determined that Biff be a material success, but Biff works with his hands and wants a different kind of success. After Willy has returned home on the Sunday evening, his memory is triggered by events that occur. He remembers the

time when Biff was younger and full of promise and Willy exaggerated his own accomplishments to his sons. He talks about his inadequacy and inability to earn as much money as he would like to - and here he remembers his mistress, whom he seems to have treated better than his own wife, Linda. He buys his mistress stockings, yet finds his own wife mending hers! Willy Loman chose his job under the influence of David Singleman, an old, successful and well-liked salesman in New England. Willy wanted to be like him: materialistically wealthy and well-liked by salesmen and buyers, but, in fact, such a possibility does not exist and Willy fails to realise this. He is not suited to the ruthless nature of competitive selling, nor is he aware of the double standards he sets for his sons: he tries to teach them that being well-liked will mean success, yet encourages competitive and unlawful behaviour (Carson: 47-52). In contrast to what he teaches his sons, Willy is not a material success, nor is he competitive.

“It is this overwhelming need to have his sons succeed that is the underlying drive of his life and the cause of his tragic agony,” Carson (53) postulates. Willy sees his father as a “prince” when he understands his father’s love for them, but Biff, having been disillusioned by his father when he was fifteen and having discovered his father with a mistress, sees Willy as a fake or “phoney”, yet still tries to please him. It is only near the end that he realises that he is trying to become what he does not want to be. His father has had the wrong dreams, and so has he.

The destructive nature of dreams - the wrong dreams - comprises the core of this drama (Carson: 55). Willy Loman, his sons and his wife, all to a certain extent, disguise or ignore the true facts: they constantly deceive in order to conceal the truth

from themselves. Biff eventually becomes aware of following the wrong dreams, and when he confronts his father, Willy Loman cannot face the truth: he prefers to sacrifice his life rather than his illusion. Carson (56) contends that the ending is ironic in that “Miller intends the audience to see that Willy is deluded and that a way out exists.” As Willy says to Biff, the door of his life was wide open if he had had the courage to go through it.

The “tragedy” of Loman’s suffering and death is that it is unnecessary. He dies rather than accept the truth that he fears will cause his life to become meaningless. He believes himself to be no more than a salesman (hence the title) and since he’s a failure as a salesman, his life is a failure. His value as a human is negated as the society in which he lives affords it no value (Bigsby 1997: 4). Willy Loman’s death is the symptom of a depraved society that has the wrong values, and the victory in his tragedy is that, had he been willing to face the truth about himself, the truth that he has value as a person, not as a salesman, he could have lived. He has a choice, as does the audience.

### 3.5 Qualities of the tragic protagonists

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).

The tragic protagonist is supposed to be representative of mankind, so that the audience can identify with the protagonist's suffering, and learn from it. Aristotle's criteria included the hero having a good reputation and being prosperous, having something to lose (eg: rank or prosperity), and embodying values that society sees as important. He elucidates on the proper tragic hero as being

...the man who occupies the mean between saintliness and depravity. He is not extraordinary in virtue and righteousness, and yet does not fall into bad fortune because of evil and wickedness, but because of some error of the kind found in men of high reputation and good fortune (Gilbert 1962: 86).

Miller proposes in his Introduction to Collected Plays that even a common man, with no rank or status, may have a certain dignity and be representative of mankind if he deals with questions and issues such as "the survival of the race, the relationships of man to God - the questions, in short, whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home..." (Weales: 165). The hero should not necessarily represent a particular society, but rather represent fundamental aspects of human nature within that society. Some of the issues that Loman and Death of a Salesman deal with, include a family's battle to pay bills, unemployment, a child's quest, felt but unexpressed love, guilt and shame, self-reliance, loss, spite and wayward children. These issues enable any audience, whether French, Japanese or English, to relate to the characters, as they see themselves, their parents or their children in the play (Bigsby 1997: 62).

Miller's idea of a hero is thus based more on the kind of questions raised by the protagonist than on whether or not he is a prince. Not all of Miller's heroes can be said to be representative of mankind, or to encompass the qualities which people admire and with which they can identify. The most hailed and controversial of all of

Miller's heroes is Willy Loman. Carson declares that when Death of a Salesman was first performed, "Willy Loman was recognised as a kind of American Everyman - a universal symbol made real by hundreds of minutely observed details of speech, manner and psychology" (Carson: 44-45). People could identify with him, identify with his suffering and identify with his wrong dreams. "It is Miller's most successful attempt at creating individual characters with universal significance," maintains Carson (44).

As has been suggested, a tragic protagonist needs not have a higher status, or be a better person than the rest of humanity. Rather, he must have the qualities with which people identify and recognise in themselves. He must, too, have some kind of eminence or special virtue, according to Leech (37-38), which makes him notable. Miller's tragic protagonists do embody something admirable, even if misguided, whether it be a deluded hope in his sons' material success (Willy Loman), an excessive love for his family which blinds him to social responsibilities (Joe Keller), a desire to expose society's wrongs mixed with a fear to expose one's own wrongs (John Proctor), or a strong, even though mistaken passion which causes a man to go against his community's rules (Eddie Carbone). These protagonists embody a degree of strength in beliefs and desires, which is admirable. They feel strongly about something and suffer for it.

Robert Davies probes the nature of tragedy: suffering is relative to the sufferer's ability to handle it:

I have become convinced that Arthur Miller is the true successor to Eugene O'Neill, and in my judgement superior to O'Neill in his perception of the tragic

downfall of people who, through the malignity of society or their own weakness, or a combination of the two, have become psychological cripples. They are not great people, but suffering is relative; their pain is as much as they can bear, and does tragedy demand more? Arthur Miller's concept of tragedy has enlarged my understanding (Bigby 1990: 63).

Gurr (1988: 49) also contends that tragedy should promote a growing awareness of life, through understanding the meaning of death, and through justification for the protagonist's death.

A protagonist, therefore, need not be great, but he needs to have a belief in a cause, hope, dream or passion. It is this belief which at first blinds him to reality, leading to his suffering in proportion to what he can bear, and results in his remorse and suffering. We can identify with this. We are not great humans. We, too, are sometimes blinded by the force of wrong values and dreams.

The tragic protagonist sometimes triumphs over his misguided beliefs. Proctor triumphs over his self-loathing and accepts himself as having some good. Loman never triumphs over his wrong dreams, but takes the best action he can to ensure what he thinks is material success for his family, misguided as it is: he commits suicide. The irony here is that the insurance will probably not pay out because of his act of suicide. Keller, even though he does not triumph over his conscience, comes to a state of such shame and remorse, that he cannot live with himself and commits suicide. He has at least shown development from being a hard, uncaring man, to one who realises the extent of his social responsibility.

As previously asserted, Miller prescribes what he sees as basic elements of tragedy as the hero's sense of indignation and his drive to evaluate himself justly, which results in his remorse and suffering, as well as the hero's desire to question the structure of the universe, fate or society, that degrades him, and in so doing, to find his position in the society or order of the universe (Carson: 80). In the introduction to his Collected Plays, Miller explains that "the intensity of the hero's commitment to his course [and]... the intensity, the human passion to surpass his given bounds, the fanatic insistence upon his self-conceived role" are vital elements in Tragedy (Weales: 166). "Evils" against which Miller makes the tragic protagonists fight are selfishness in various forms such as materialism, self-indulgence and the desire to be thought well of by neighbours. Instead, he sees voluntary moral and social accountability as a desirable aim (Carson: 154).

As Miller has been described as a "religious writer" (Carson: 154), it stands to conclude that the suffering of the tragic protagonists in their systems of capitalism, socialism, McCarthyism or even Nazism, tests the heroes and enables their growth from selfishness, pride and despair, to a discovery that they should be socially conscious. The characters' qualities combine insight and blindness, doubt and assertiveness, and this makes them avoid at times, and confront and accept at other times, their core beings (Carson: 155).

The qualities of Miller's heroes reflect his personal concerns. Having experienced the Great Depression and Nazi anti-Semitism, Miller refuses to believe that man is a helpless victim of circumstances, but rather that he has a choice in how he approaches these circumstances (Carson: 155). Miller's tragedies end in hope - he

believes that the greatest enemy to life is despair, and the only way to counteract it is to have faith and hope. Miller is thus “the spokesman for those who yearn for the comfortable certainty of a belief, but whose critical intelligence will not allow them to accept the consolations of traditional religions” (Carson: 126).

### **3.6 Reaction of the audience to the suffering of the tragic protagonist**

According to Miller’s theory of tragedy, the audience experiences terror because the protagonist challenges the universe/ cosmos that seems just and stable and they fear their concepts of the universe and their selves being uprooted and re-evaluated (Weales: 144). Simultaneously, a moral code in the midst of evil and society is implied by the death of the protagonist.

As has been stated, Christian and Greek tragedy differ in the catharsis that the audience experiences: there is still pity for the protagonist, but instead of being terrified of the power and mystery of the gods (as in Greek tragedy), there is a “kind of reverend dread” in Christian tragedy (Carson: 79). The suffering of the protagonist is understandable and acceptable because the universe is understandable and morally just. The effect of the protagonist’s suffering on the Greek audience, according to Aristotle, was a mingling of fear for one’s own fate, terror for the power of the gods, and pity for the protagonist.



The effect Miller achieves is to enable the audience to see a structure, a causal connection, and to make each person question his own place in the cosmos. To do this, Miller tries to make his characters real psychologically, so that the audience can identify more readily with them. He never creates them to be mechanical, depersonalised or caricatures without choices. His aim has been to present in a more easily understandable way, the connections between things and influences by things, to suggest a world with meaning (Carson: 150). John Proctor is a man who makes a mistake by lusting after Abigail, and then waiting too long before telling the truth. Eddie Carbone is a man who lives passionately, and refuses to acknowledge and deal with his illicit passion. Joe Keller loves his family so much that it blinds him to his social responsibilities and Willy Loman is a victim of a society that offers him no value as a human. These men are fully formed individuals whose choices and conflicts and battles can be representative of man in general. Everyone faces difficulties and choices.

Referring to Death of a Salesman, Carson (59) commends Miller's ability to evoke "an appropriate blend of pity, fear and consolation - pity for Willy, fear that we may be as self-deluding as he, and hope based on the knowledge that we can, if we so decide, take control of our lives." Can we ask more of a serious drama of the twentieth century?

The four dramas discussed in this chapter have thus all shown, to some degree or another, aspects of tragedy, whether they are aspects associated with traditional Greek and Christian tragedies, or aspects associated with Miller's own theory of the possibility of victory in tragedy and thus in life.

# 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 (Biggsby 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 Willy 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” (Biggsby 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' fiancées: "...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" (Biggsby 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" (Biggsby 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 of 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 possibly 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.

1944 The Man who had all the Love

1945 They that may Win, a one-act play, is completed.

1947 An Ivy Song. It wins the New York Drama Critics' Award and the Donaldson Award.

1949 Death of a Salesman (originally entitled The Inside of His Head) opens in New York. It wins the Pulitzer Prize, New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, Antoinette Perry Award, American Newspaper Guild Award, Theatre Club Award and the Donaldson Award.

1950 An Enemy of the People. Miller's adaptation of Ibsen's play, is produced.

1953 The Crucible. It wins the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards.

1955 A Memory of two Mondays and A View from the Bridge. "View" wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

1954: After the fall and Incident at Vichy.



# Appendix: Miller's dramas

1970: Farewell and The Russian Wife are written.

1971: The Creation of the World is written.

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1936: Honours at Dawn wins the University's Avery Hopwood Award. No Villain is produced and wins the Avery Hopwood Award.

1937: No Villain is revised and entitled They too Arise. It receives an award from the Theatre Guild Bureau of New Plays.

1944: The Man who had all the Luck.

1945: They that may Win, a one-act play, is completed.

1947: All my Sons. It wins the New York Drama Critics' Award, as well as the Donaldson Award.

1949: Death of a Salesman. (originally entitled The Inside of his Head) opens in New York. It wins the Pulitzer Prize, New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, Antoinette Perry Award, American Newspaper Guild Award, Theatre Club Award and the Donaldson Award.

1950: An Enemy of the People, Miller's adaptation of Ibsen's play, is produced.

1953: The Crucible. It wins the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards.

1955: A Memory of two Mondays and A View from the Bridge. "View" wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

1964: After the fall and Incident at Vichy.

- 1968: The Price.
- 1970: Fame and The Reason Why, two one-act plays.
- 1972: The Creation of the World and Other Business.
- 1974: The Creation of the World and Other Business is revised as a musical, Up from Paradise.
- 1976: The Archbishop's Ceiling
- 1980: The American Clock
- 1981: Playing for time. It wins the Peabody award.
- 1982: Elegy for a Lady and Some Kind of Love Story, two one-act plays.
- 1983: Up from Paradise is revised.
- 1987: Danger: Memory! is published, consisting of two one-act plays,  
I Don't Remember Anything and Clara.
- 1991: The Ride Down Mount Morgan opens in London.
- 1993: The Last Yankee opens in New York.
- 1994: Broken Glass.

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