

GENUINE TRAGEDY THROUGH THE BLENDING OF THE NEWER  
ELEMENTS OF MODERN DRAMA IN MILLER'S  
DEATH OF A SALESMAN

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requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I . . . . .	3
A Play Defined	
Modern Drama Defined	
Realism and Naturalism Defined	
Idealism Defined	
Symbolism Defined	
Expressionism Defined	
Tragedy Defined	
II . . . . .	27
<u>A Summary of Death of a Salesman</u>	
<u>Death of a Salesman - A Modern Tragedy</u>	
<u>Symbolism in Death of a Salesman</u>	
<u>Expressionism in Death of a Salesman</u>	
<u>Realism and Idealism in Death of</u>	
<u>a Salesman</u>	
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	60

## INTRODUCTION

Since its initial production, Death of a Salesman, a play written by Arthur Miller, has been the object of much controversy. The play has been analysed many times. It has been classified in many categories, from being a tragedy to merely being the tool of a left-wing propagandist. However, in this paper I shall attempt to prove that this work is a genuine tragedy. Admittedly, it is not a tragedy in the classical sense, strictly following the Aristotelian school, but it is a tragedy of the new school of drama. It is a tragedy of our modern theater.

This modern tragedy evolves from the skillful blending of a number of forms of drama. These forms are relatively new movements in the dramatic field. The movements include idealism, realism, naturalism, symbolism and expressionism.

The first chapter contains the definitions of the various dramatic terms that will be discussed throughout the work. Unless otherwise stated, all definitions given will be those which are accepted

generally by contemporary critics.

The second chapter consists of an analysis of the play itself, which proves the contention that this work is a tragedy that has been brought about by the implementation of modern dramatic forms. Examples and quotations from the play will be used extensively throughout this section.

## CHAPTER I

The term drama is accepted generally to mean a work which presents a sequence of situations in which characters express themselves through what happens to them, what they do or even fail to do. A situation is an involvement. This situation may occur when two or more characters are involved with each other; when a character is involved with external forces; or when one part of a character's personality is involved with another part. The significance of the situation may vary. Characters may not be involved unless they have some relation to something or to each other. They may be connected by some desire, which is still to be fulfilled, unless they meet with opposition which leads to a conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Modern drama is understood to be the dramatic movement which began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg and their contemporaries offered a new type of drama. Prior to this time, since the Shakespearean age, little was offered in the realm of dramatic literature.

Although these modern playwrights were not entirely removed from the limitations which existed in the works of their immediate predecessors, they rose far above these limitations. There were generally no senseless struttings in their plays, no empty tirades, no merely ornamental uses of theatrical devices. The plays of modern drama did not have that assembly line quality, with the all too predictable climaxes.

These first playwrights examined and developed almost every dramatic technique which has been used in the modern theater. As Barry Ulanov states,

Starting with cautious naturalism, they ended with elaborate and daring symbolic dramas which were the very antithesis of the naturalistic theater . . . And thus they set what is perhaps the only fixed and lasting pattern in the modern theater, the pattern of revolt.<sup>2</sup>

The appearance of realistic technique and style, which shall be discussed later in this chapter, was the first phase in modern drama. However, non-realistic stylization has been important in modern theater for almost the same length of time as realism. In reaction to realism it was the second phase of modernism, which took the form of the styles now known as symbolism, expressionism and even naturalism. Dramatic modernism consists of a succession and an interweaving of symbolism and realism, objective

naturalism and expressionism.

However, it may be noted that modern theater, with its stress upon style, has not over-looked conflict between elemental forces. These include conflict between man and society, and conflict between the creative and the uncreative. Also, modern drama may be one of interiority. The modern dramatist generally gives the internal struggle an external form. In this way, many different approaches may be used to express this conflict.

Barry Ulanov has stated,

Every change, every experiment, and every revolt in the modern theater has one thing in common: each has been concerned to get a large degree of reality onto the stage. Reality has been differently conceived each time. But reality has been the concern, whether effected by the reproduction of the lower depths of humanity in every squalid detail or the suggestion of the higher range of the human spirit by a few sparkling symbols.<sup>3</sup>

There has been one spark which has vitalized the realistic drama. It is the concept of theater as a means of revealing truth. The fundamental premise of realism is the Aristotelian one, that drama is an imitation of an action. Realists held that the most desirable theater is the one in which imitation is the closest.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore realism, as understood in this work,

is the movement in the theater, which was also present in the other arts, to depict life with complete and objective honesty. It intends to show things as they really are. Thus concrete, verifiable details are of more importance than sweeping generalizations. The author's individual interpretations of the situations are not as valuable as the photographic image which may be projected. Unfortunately, the realist often seems to stress the sordid and brutal aspects of life in an attempt to escape from a description of the idealistic aspects of the subject.

The evolution of our modern realism depicts its present qualities. The first step toward realistic drama was in the development of a mechanical realism. This existed even in some of the sensation scenes of melodrama. In the next step, details, instead of being merely mechanical, became organic and all-embracing. They enclosed the entire situation and became both symbolic and realistic. This brought drama beyond the surface truth of realism to the inward truth of selective realism.<sup>5</sup>

Within this evolution, the characters became more realistic. Formerly the characters were stereotypes, who existed on the surface, but lacked inner



truth. In the more realistic dramas, the characters are conceived as a part of their environment and moulded by their past experiences. They react to the situations that confront them in their own way, not in the way of theatrical tradition. Thus, it is difficult to classify the characters as villains and heroes; they are merely humans with both attributes and failings.<sup>6</sup>

If the theater showed, in accelerated form, the general wearing down of language into something more and more plain and prosaic, that may be because the ordinary decline of vivid speech was reinforced by that tendency toward dramatic realism which turned from gazing at the heavens to become a microscope focussing on the tiniest fibers of the human heart. Hence, came the inevitable change from gong and cymbal to the bald, broken speech of daily life.

Along with the development of the realistic characterizations moved the development of realistic situations, action and theme. The themes became topics which were the immediate concern of the audience; topics that the audience could relate to their private lives. The new playwrights also drew the spectator into the action personally and completely. The spectator no longer observed with interest conflicts

involving persons he could see only from a distance. These plays presented the spectator's people, problems and conflicts, and he, the spectator, would be actively concerned with the solutions to the situations. Finally, realism of character, theme and situation are a prelude to realism of action. No longer was there to be an assured, ideal solution. It is in the nature of human existence that this is not possible.<sup>7</sup>

Realism in its extreme form is termed naturalism. Naturalism pretends to complete objectivity; it attempts to observe character, environment and situation with scientific detachment as well as scientific correctness.

True realism takes into account not only the surface appearances but the basic realities of life as well, although the dramatist can step in and rearrange his details to suit his purpose. Naturalism, however, aims at a completely objective, scientific exposition of life, with impartial, cool observation. It may be almost a clinical case history. Arising from their philosophy, the efforts of the naturalists and the realists have led to an emphasis on the ugly in subject matter. Both are likely to view mankind as helpless before the overwhelming forces of nature.

In both naturalism and realism the dialogue is colloquial and natural to the characters. It must be more precise and colorful than it would be in real life, even though the attempt is made to make the audience feel that they are one with the characters on the stage. Full use must be made of justifiable moments of eloquence.

The naturalistic movement attempted to dispel superstitions and idealizations. It applied the scientific method of analysis to literary subjects. It observed closely, gave an unlimited choice of subjects, and was more widely inclusive of details than the realists. It attempted to depict the environment exactly. "It stressed the fatalistic, mechanical aspects of the universe, the materialism of men's motives, and the commonplace and coarser forms of their life."<sup>8</sup>

Joseph Wood Krutch states that the "post-Renaissance" civilization rests upon many premises; the following he distinguishes as crucial.

First, man is a creature capable of dignity. Second, life as led in this world, not merely life as it might be led either in the Christian's City of God or the Marxist's Socialist State, is worth living. Third, the realm of human rationality is the realm in which man may most fruitfully live.<sup>9</sup>

These premises are also basic to the term idealism, as it is used in this paper. Idealism can be described as an acting according to one's ideals of what ought to be, regardless of the circumstances or the approval or disapproval of others. An ideal may be defined as a model to which an individual strives. It acts as an inspiration in one's life. Ideals provide the motive, or stimulus, for human actions. These ideals may be high, noble and dignified, as were those found in the classical works, or they may be high and important, merely within the context of a man's life, as found in our modern drama.

Mr. Krutch states further that a great proportion of modern works in literature imply the rejection of one or more of his major premises. When psychological or economic determinism starts to deprive man of the validity of any of his ethical beliefs, then he ceases to have dignity. When the radical pessimist or the reformer represents this present life as inevitably defeated, then the Renaissance thesis that life is worth living becomes valueless. Finally, when the subject of a work becomes the "obsessions, fixations, neuroses, and perversions to which the human psyche sometimes falls victim," then the belief that human

rationality is the most important realism has also been negated.<sup>10</sup>

While modern drama does attempt to deny the basic premises of "post-Renaissance" society, this negation can never be complete. The fact that works of art are produced indicate the existence of a belief in some additional quality which is superior to the material matter in this world. Animals cannot write plays, but man, with his intelligence and his basic realization of this superior quality, can do this. Therefore, to a greater or lesser extent, idealism must pervade all dramatic writings, all works of art and even all life, as lived by an intelligent being.

Symbolism, another dramatic movement, is a technique of the use of symbols which is both conscious and deliberate. It avoids direct expression whenever possible and invests its materials with a suggestion of some hidden significance, in particular, a spiritual or intellectual one. The underlying philosophy of the symbolists was a conviction that the material, transient world was not true reality. The symbolists rebelled against the techniques of realism and naturalism, which believed that transient reality represented the only means of existence. This

movement, as previously stated, was one other phase of the revolt of the modern dramatists in their movement.<sup>11</sup>

The school of symbolistic playwriting was led by Maurice Maeterlinck. Symbolistic playwrights, in the main, merely blurred or softened the outlines of realistic dramaturgy with their mood style of writing, their mysterious pauses and repetitions, and their portentous indefiniteness. The actor was separated from the audience, and reality was kept at a distance. The symbolists tried to universalize the theater.

Symbols have been used by more authors than the few pure symbolists who employed this style. They have been used even in plays written by classic realists. Symbolic figures and objects have been used in realistic drama since the beginning of modern theater. Today, realistic styles and symbolic styles are often interwoven.<sup>12</sup>

Another dramatic movement, which had its beginning about the first quarter of this present century, is expressionism. This movement attempted to express the basic reality of its subjects rather than to reproduce the mere appearance or surface. An expressionistic work relies heavily on distortion of salient features; it is exclamatory and dynamic, and

sometimes very cryptic. Expressionism did supplement realism, but it could not take its place.

The expressionist followed a view of life and art that required the destruction of the external shape of reality. The stage was to be a means of projecting the disintegration of modern man and twentieth century society. The expressionist playwright dispensed with the middle-class incidentals found in men's minds. He depicted depersonalized persons, individuals transformed into symbols and allegorical types, and deprived of a personal name. The expressionist, giving the reins to his own fancy and intensifying his character's subjective states, felt free to distort all manifestations of character and environment. Therefore, the technique of flashback, the free movement in both time and space, could be used. The imagination was entirely free to violate the rules of logic and art. The physical transformation of characters and settings called for in expressionistic dramas offered unlimited, constructive opportunities for the exercise of imagination by the scene designer and the stage electrician.<sup>13</sup>

A fundamental change is to be found in the expressionist's treatment of the dramatic action and

characterization. This change was in the form of a characteristic fragmentation and distortion of their substance. The distortion could be brought about either through a character's state of mind, the play being shown through his disturbed mental condition, or by the author's revelation of his own disturbed frame of mind, or by his deliberate attempt to make a figurative appraisal of man and the world. In the realm of the structure and texture of the play the expressionists brought about a change in the dialogue. The dialogue often became violent and almost telegraphic.<sup>14</sup>

Tragedy has been commonly regarded as the greatest and most noble form of drama. It is simply one fruit of the human instinct to tell stories, to reproduce and recast experiences. Since experiences are often sad, so are their copies. The religious ceremonies out of which tragedy has twice arisen chanced to lend themselves to the dramatic impulse, as the cavern wall lent itself to the caveman's magic paintings of bison and mammoths.

There is only one theater, as there is only one world. But there is a continuity which slowly changes and develops from ancient to modern form.



However, certain schools of tragedy are recognized generally. These include the classical tragedy, the tragedy of the middle ages, the Renaissance tragedy, and the present-day, modern tragedy.

Aristotle, representing the school of classical tragedy, has defined tragedy as follows:

Tragedy is a representation of an action, which is serious, complete in itself and of a certain length; it is expressed in speech made beautiful in different ways in different parts of the play; it is acted, not narrated; and by exciting pity and fear it gives a healthy relief to such emotions.<sup>15</sup>

He insisted that the action must have an artistic unity, free of irrelevancies. He remarked that the duration of plays was in practice generally limited to twenty-four hours or a little more. He did not mention the unity of place. Due to the staging of Greek plays these unities were adhered to generally.

To Aristotle, since the essence of tragedy reduces itself to the pleasure the audience takes in a rendering of life both serious and true, then it must be serious, whether or not, incidentally, it has comic relief. It must seem to matter, or else the experience would belong to a different category. It must also seem to be true or it would not move us. In tragedy is embodied the eternal contradiction between

man's weakness and his courage, his stupidity and his magnificance, his frailty and his strength. Human splendor is greater and finer, even in defeat, than the blind universe that crushes it.

Of the plot of tragedy Aristotle makes three observations. It must be of a certain size, of a certain structure and that it is the soul of drama. To Aristotle, the deepest tragedy is not when men are struck down by the flow of chance or fate, but when their destruction is the work of their own unwitting hands.<sup>16</sup> It is the perpetual tragic irony of life that again and again men do thus laboriously contrive their own annihilation, or kill the thing they love. At best, tragedy is a story of human blindness leading human effort to checkmate itself, a tragedy of error. This error may or may not be moral and its dramatic importance is not based on any conception of life's justice, but on the purely artistic and logical consideration that it is better that calamities should begin at home. The peculiar virtue of the tragedy or error is that it is convincing in its logic, neat in its form, poignant in its irony. It remains, not the only kind of tragedy, but the best.

"Of the characters of tragedy, Aristotle

stipulated that they must be good, but not perfect; appropriate, or true to type, and consistent or true to themselves." When he states that the characters must be good, but not perfect, he means that the dramatic personal of tragedy must be as fine in character as the plot permits.<sup>17</sup>

During the middle ages tragedy changed meaning. By the seventh century Horace and Juvenal were considered to be tragedians, but gradually the unhappy ending once again became essential. For Chaucer, tragedy was "A dite of a prosperite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse."<sup>18</sup> However, at the Renaissance the word's connection with drama was revived and its association with a sad ending remained.

Renaissance tragedy was influenced by classical theory, the example of Seneca, and medieval definition. In the sixteenth century, however, English tragedy did not keep its types and forms separated, but regularly mixed tragedy and comedy, verse and prose. Shakespeare's "King Lear" and "Hamlet" are nevertheless tragedies never surpassed in poetic and dramatic power.<sup>18</sup>

Traditionalists tend to be inflexible on the issue of tragedy. They rarely admit that any modern

dramatist has written a true tragedy, and a play dealing tragically with a commoner's fate is likely to be treated as pretentious vulgarity. Their view holds that realistic dramaturgy and prose are incompatible with tragedy. According to this view, the would-be tragedian, unless he renounces modern thought and popular art, will end up with only melodrama, propaganda, pathology, pathos and sentimentality, or just plain nastiness.

Today, all rejected tragedies become melodramas and so, to some people, there is no such thing as a bad tragedy. Yet tragedy should be the product of the writer's struggle with his matter, rather than of conscious conformity to patterns and principles that are considered uplifting.

The reality of each country is composed of its historical personality which is constantly being modified. The theater takes part in the expression of that reality which is traditional, in the case of old countries, or which is fresh and unconventional, in the case of new countries.

Genuine tragedy has always been more realistic than moralistic. Tragedy has always recognized that there is a built-in capacity for disaster in man, and

that life always has its impossibilities, whereas reformers have ever been concerned with its possibilities. Realism has been blamed for the fact that in modern tragedy it has given primacy to verisimilitude, illusionism and intellectualism or rationalism. There is a validity to this, but verisimilitude is not intrinsically anti-tragic. The dying words of King Lear, "Pray you, undo this button,"<sup>19</sup> do not detract from the intensity of that final scene. Illusionism is also a relativistic effect. Realism can influence the writing of prose, but surely this does not exclude the possibility of tragedy.

Modern tragedians do meet the fundamental requirements of tragic art with considerable fidelity. They approach the subject with high seriousness; they motivate human conduct; they refrain from mere pathos by attending to social and psychological causation; and they make calamity a means for achieving significant revelations concerning the individual character and his world. Error, evil and suffering are never devoid of meaning. Calamity in some way produces tragic sight, either by the individuals or by secondary characters who serve as a Greek chorus.

In modern tragedy there is simply the consolation of the sheer integrity which faces life as it is. The characters may no longer be heroes sublime even in their fall, they may be the ordinary man and woman over whose lack of tragic splendor critics have mourned needlessly. Complaining of the want of great personalities in this play or that, they forget the author. For the characters may be poor in spirit and feeble in desire, and the play remains tragic in spite of it, if we feel that the author is himself none of these things, but has portrayed men as they are. Tragedy then, is a representation of human unhappiness which pleases us notwithstanding, by the truth with which it is seen and the fineness with which it is communicated. The world of everyday seems often a purposeless chaos, but the world of tragedy we can face, for we feel a mind behind it and the symmetry is there. Tragedy, in fine, is man's answer to this universe that crushes him so pitilessly. Destiny scowls on him and his answer is to sit down and paint her where she stands.

Eugene O'Neill has explained this pleasure-giving function of tragedy in his statement,

It is mere present day judgment to think of

tragedy as unhappy. The Greeks and Elizabethans knew better. They felt the tremendous lift of it. It roused them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life. Through it they found release from the petty considerations of existence. They saw their lives ennobled by it. A work of art is always happy.<sup>20</sup>

In modern tragedy, the lyrical element may either disappear altogether as in the "Ghosts" by Ibsen or pervade a whole play, as in "Riders to the Sea" by Synge. A strong belief in the use of the lyrical element is found in the Irish dramatic movement. To Yeats, and to some degree Lady Gregory also, characterization, that is the discrimination and definition of individuality, is a hinderance to tragic ecstasy and the revelations made at the moments of lyrical intensity is not individual, but generic; as the emotional experience deepens and the characters explore the profundity or intensity of their own passions or thoughts, they cease to be a particular man and become everyman, sinking in from the circumference of being to its center. However, tragedy must not offer only archetypal figures broadly differentiated, but rather that as the moment of tragic ecstasy approaches, the characters will be found to resolve themselves into mediums for expression of the underlying major realities of their being.<sup>21</sup>

The use of comic relief in a play is a point that has been debated and used and opposed at many times. Even in our day, T. S. Eliot has argued that, though human nature may permanently crave for comic relief, "That does not mean that it is a craving that ought to be gratified. It springs from the lack of capacity for concentrations."<sup>22</sup> Only one rule remains about humor in tragedy: that is, it must not clash with the tone of the whole. It is extraordinary how seldom this fault is found in Shakespeare and how often in his contemporaries and successors.

The main characters in modern plays are themselves ordinary human beings; therefore they do not need ordinary human beings to contrast with them. Thus, the chorus is dead in our drama. Soliloquies were formerly employed, but this breaking into the other world of the audience through the invisible wall is very difficult and it is more effective and natural to have the characters talking to themselves, as in some of our modern plays.

The theme of modern drama, in contrast to that of the ancient drama, in most cases springs only from love. In our world, love remains the great source of real tragedy. In modern drama, the use of psycho-



analysis and sociology can add to the tragedy if the characters are not dwarfed by the thesis and anti-thesis.

The ways of beginning a plot are many and varied. After beginning the plot the dramatist must explain it. In this, a progressive growth of technical skill has been maintained right down to our present day. To be dramatic it must be charged with emotion, for a resumé of the bare facts can hardly be thrilling in itself. Tragedy uses both suspense and tragic irony in revealing her plot to the audience. Both require full knowledge on the part of the audience to be fully realized.<sup>23</sup>

Representing modern dramatic theory, D. D. Raphael states that modern tragedy always presents a conflict. This conflict, he states, is between inevitable power, which may be called necessity, and the reaction to necessity of self-conscious effort. Writers on the subject of necessity, not fate, often draw a distinction between classical tragedy, which attributes human disaster to fate, and modern tragedy, which attributes it to human character. Raphael's necessity is an inevitable power that is bound to defeat any opposition. We must respect the character's

effort to resist the power, although he must fail. Herein lies the satisfaction, the elevation produced by tragedy. Raphael suggests that at least some of the peculiar satisfactions of tragic drama comes from a feeling that the sublimity of the hero's spirit is superior to the sublimity of the power which overwhelms him. The dramatist stirs in us more admiration for the human spirit than awe for the powers of necessity.<sup>24</sup>

The movements in modern drama, as described in this chapter, rarely exist as distinct divisions in present writings. Today, the playwright uses symbolism, expressionism, naturalism, idealism and realism within a single work wherever he deems expedient. Therefore, our modern plays generally are composites of these many forms, blended to give the most effective means of communication to the audience. The following chapter will contain an examination of the different dramatic methods found in the modern tragedy Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>John Gassner, Producing the Play, (New York: The Dryden Press, 1953), pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Barry Ulanov (ed.), Makers of the Modern Theater, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Calvin S. Brown (ed.), A Reader's Companion to World Literature, (New York: The New American Library, 1956), p. 378.

<sup>5</sup>Alan S. Downer, Fifty Years of American Drama, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), pp. 41-43.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>8</sup>Brown, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>9</sup>Joseph Wood Krutch, Modernism in Modern Drama, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), pp. 130-131.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Brown, op. cit., p. 432.

<sup>12</sup>John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre, (New York: The Dryden Press, 1956), p. 135.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 120-21.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>F. L. Lucas, Tragedy, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 24.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-23.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>18</sup>Brown, op. cit., p. 453.

<sup>19</sup>William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of King Lear, ed. by George Lyman Kittredge, (Boston: Grimm and Company, 1940), p. 117.

<sup>20</sup>Harold Clurman, Lies Like Truth, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958), p. 15.

<sup>21</sup>Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1954), p. 86.

<sup>22</sup>Lucas, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>24</sup>D. D. Raphael, The Paradox of Tragedy, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959), pp. 25-27.

## CHAPTER II

Death of a Salesman, a modern tragedy written by the playwright, Arthur Miller, is the most universally accepted of his plays. Following a very successful reception in the United States, it was produced in many foreign countries. Around the world it has been acclaimed as one of the finest dramas of the modern theater.

The play, Death of a Salesman, is a challenge to the new American dream, not the dream of enterprise, courage and hard work, but the new one of salesmanship which implies a certain element of fraud, the ability to put over or sell a commodity regardless of its intrinsic value or usefulness. The goal of salesmanship is to make a deal, to earn a profit, with the accumulation of profit being an unquestioned end in itself. This creates a new philosophy. To place all value in the mechanical act of selling and in self-enrichment impoverishes the human beings who are rendered secondary to the transaction. To possess himself fully, a man must have an intimate connection

with that with which he deals, as well as with the person with whom he deals. When the connection is not more than an exchange of commodities, the man himself ceases to be a man, he becomes a commodity himself, a spiritual cipher. This is a humanly untenable situation. The salesman realizes this. Since his function precludes a normal relationship, he substitutes an imitation of himself for the real man, He sells his personality. This personality not only becomes a means to an end, namely the consummated sale, but is a mask worn so long that it soon comes to be mistaken, even by the man who wears it, as his real face. But it is only his commercial face, with a commercial smile and a commercial aura of the well-liked, smoothly adjusted, oily cog in the machine of the sales apparatus. This leads to a behaviour pattern which is ultimately doomed; not necessarily because of the economic system of which it is the human concomitant, but quite simply because a man is not a machine. The death of Arthur Miller's salesman is symbolic of the breakdown of the whole concept of salesmanship inherent in our society. Miller does not say these things explicitly. But it is the strength of his play that it is based on this under-

standing and that he is able to make his audience realize it, no matter whether or not they are able consciously to formulate it. When the audience weeps at Death of a Salesman, it is not so much over the fate of Willy Loman, Miller's pathetic hero, as over the millions of such men who are our brothers, uncles, cousins, and neighbors. The loveable, lower-middle class role Willy Loman represents is related to a type of living and thinking in which all "professionals" as well as salesmen share.

Death of a Salesman is the story of a mentally distressed, sixty-year-old, American salesman, Willy Loman, who is lacking in nobility. Yet Willy somehow achieves a measure of tragic greatness, perhaps through Miller's excellent language and skill as a dramatist, perhaps through his use of numbers, for in the common man, Miller has captured the tragic essence of the millions of common men who worship the modern goddess of success. Willy is the victim of glittering but shabby ideals. He knows all the formulas, the hearty smile, good friendship, popularity, athletic prowess and influence. But by the time the play opens, these formulas are worn threadbare, and the relentless fact of his failures

has begun to close in upon him. In one flashback after another we realize the sorrows and mistakes into which his shabby ideals have plunged him, and in the end the common man, who might have been a successful father and an excellent carpenter, is driven to suicide.

Willy Loman never acknowledged or learned the error of his ways. To the very end he was a devout believer in the ideology that destroyed him. He believed that life's problems are solved by making oneself "well-liked," in the salesman's sense, and by a little cash. His wife knows only that he is a good man and that she must continue to love him. He indoctrinated his sons with his false ideals. These sons, who were his victims, as he had been the victim of the false dream by which he lived, drew different conclusions from his failure. The younger boy, Hap, believed only that his father was an incompetent, but he did not reject his father's ideals. However, through self-discovery, the older boy, Biff, comes to understand the falsity of his father's ideal and determines to set out on a new path guided by a recovery of his true self.

Death of a Salesman has been classified by



many critics as a modern tragedy. This play, however, is a tragedy in one classical sense. This is the drive of an inner inevitability that springs from a single flaw. Willy is a good man. He has worth, but he is a salesman with a salesman's philosophy. Therefore he dooms himself.

The audience feels pity, compassion and terror for Willy. He is a fine, tender, capable, potentially useful human. He is just socially mis-taught. He has sufficient depth and universal significance to make him a worthy successor of the characters of Greek classics and Shakespeare.

There is tragic worth in this greatly flawed character, and anybody familiar with his struggles and who is not too sheltered or snobbish to be capable of sympathy should know what heroism is required of the Willy Loman's of the world. The man is a tragic hero of sorts through his abundant capacity for suffering. He asserts a sort of tragic dignity, with his fine resentment of the slights and his battle for respect as well as for self-respect. He makes a claim for tragic intensity by his refusal to surrender all expectations of triumph for and through his son. He is passionately unwilling to resign himself to failure.

His very agony gives him tragic stature within the recognizable world of middle-class realities. Tragedy is no one man's prerogative; it is earned damnation and redemption. The hero makes himself tragic, differently in different societies; he is not tragic by his status prior to the play.

Even the character's awareness, the perception or tragic recognition upon which so much has been placed is bound to be different in the case of characters differently conditioned by their social situation. Miller would be justified in insisting that, within the limitations of his characters, themselves valid dramatic factors in the play, Willy does struggle toward and arrive at realizations convincingly his own. Characters make themselves tragic in collaboration with their world. In tragedy there is both self-determination and social determination. Willy seeks the truth about himself and his situation. The search is his, for we must not ignore the fact that all the flashbacks and hallucinations in it represent Willy's own anguished consciousness of failure. Willy pursues truth and struggles against it within his personal and social limits no less arduously and catastrophically than did Oedipus.

Thus Miller's protagonist brings not only personal and social meanness into his play, but also personal stature and heroism.

This stature and heroism do not seem to be of sufficient height to enable the reader to classify this play as a high tragedy. Throughout, although Willy consciously recognized this failure, he refused to admit it, even to himself. He questioned at times, but ignored the replies. Self-realization and insight are achieved and accepted by his son, Biff. His neighbor, Charlie, and his wife are the only ones who understand Willy and his circumstances.

Since this tragedy is written in a realistic style, with colloquial language prevalent throughout, there is no true, verbal, poetic worth in this play. However, in the play a great sensitivity is revealed. Linda's defense of Willy to her son shows this as she says,

Then make Charley your father, Biff. You can't do that, can you? 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. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. You called him crazy.

(Act I)

Another example is found in Linda's cry at the grave of her husband,

Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. We're free and clear. We're free. We're free . . . We're free . . .

(Requiem)

Arthur Miller, who claims strongly that his is a tragedy, states that, "Tragedy sees life from the lip of the grave."<sup>1</sup> As a result, the incidents in the play, the stress on certain elements, is colored to fit the pattern and thus Willy could only struggle against the tragic factor, in the same way as Hamlet and Oedipus could only struggle but stood no chance for victory. In the final scene of the play, Arthur Miller uses Charley, the next-door neighbor, to state this when he says,

Nobody dast blame thé man. You don't understand; Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back - that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and you're finished. Nobody dast blame

this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.

(Requiem)

Symbolism pervades Death of a Salesman and any discussion of this play must include some remarks about the presence of this dramatic form. However, this symbolism is of a nature that is readily discernable to the audience and the meaning of the story is completely apparent in the action itself. The audience is not required to interpret a set of special symbols to arrive at comprehension.

The play is capable of holding an audience and moving it to tears by virtue of its ability to arouse the audience to a tribute of recognition. The audience's interest and sympathy are engaged by the pathos of a man who gave all his life to a business only to be removed when the manager found it expedient, a house-holder whose pattern of life was interwoven with installment plans with which he could hardly catch up, a doting father, disappointed in his children, and an American middle-class worker whose downfall came as a result of his worship of uncreative success and of his assumption that personality, that being "well-liked", would assure success and happiness. Thus, when all the formulas become threadbare and when, in a final

effort to retain his dignity as a man, Willy Loman commits suicide, he symbolizes a type of our middle-class society. As he dies, so eventually will it.

However, to inject an element of hope, Arthur Miller has placed the neighbor Charley in the play. Charley also represents middle-class society but he represents that element which is built on firm foundations, the element whose goals are both realistic and worthwhile. This is the element which will enjoy at least limited success.

Due to bewilderment at both his own and his older son's failure to conquer the world, Willy Loman's mind begins to crack. Unbidden memories come back to him and are acted out for the audience, memories of his brother Ben who made a fortune by the ruthless exploitation of "the jungle," of his happy young manhood when his house was surrounded by trees instead of confined by apartment buildings, when he found satisfaction in making improvements in his property, of his father who went West selling flutes which he had made himself, of his garden where he grew things before the encroaching city cut off the sunlight, of his son's youthful devotion and of the affair with the woman in Boston which had turned his son against him.

Some of these recollections have symbolic value, and are as much related to the theme of the play as to its action. But Willy never understands them. He only remembers. Ben, the brother, appears as he lived, and the early years of Willy's marriage are presented as objectively as if they were the opening act of a chronologically arranged history. The audience makes its own conclusions and understands the connections between these recollections and the present situation. To Willy these recollections mean nothing; he merely thinks any connections are coincidence.

Within this play, the playwright's perception and apprehension are realistic. But before we discuss his realism it will be necessary to look at the modified expressionism without which Miller's play would have been ordinary and which, when blended with realism, redeemed it and gave meaning to his commonplace Willy Loman. It is with imagination that he gave Willy dimension and stature.

Death of a Salesman, with its skeletal setting, non-realistic lighting, musical background provided by the playing of the flute, and free movement in time and space, suggests expressionism rather than realism. However, these elements involve no distortion

of reality. They are readily acceptable to the audience.

The play involves memory as subject-matter. The concept is immediacy, that everything exists together and at the same time within us, and in Willy Loman is the interweaving of memory scenes and present action, all as in the present.

Furthermore, these flashbacks into Willy's past life, which are largely Willy's encounters with his younger and more confident self, are used to indicate a disturbed mind. This dealing with the mentally-ill individual is another characteristic of the expressionistic style. Although within the scope of the play there is no stress laid upon the ultimate meaning of these flashbacks, they are ominously present and the audience is made aware of their significance in a manner of an acceptance of the "status quo".

In this unique, special world of the actions in the expressionistic recall, the everyday distinctions in manners and beliefs do not have to be appeased. Within this scope the author can place before the audience just the amount of information he wishes, at any point, and still retain plausibility



with the realm of the setting of his play.

Harold Clurman has stated that,

Some people have objected that the use of the stream-of-conscious technique - the play dramatizes Willy's recollection of the past, and at times switches from a literal presentation of his memory to imaginary and semi-symbolic representation of his thought - is confusing, and a sign of weakness in the author's grasp of his material.

These objections do not impress me. The limitations of "Death of a Salesman" are part of its virtues.<sup>2</sup>

These "limitations" are indeed part of the play's merit. The result of the employment of this technique is the removal of the play from the category of a newspaper documentation, with the inevitable propagandistic interpretation which would follow from the information given in this work, to the realm of a sensitive, moving story. This story is of the breakdown of a good man. His thoughts are confused, not through any weakness in the author's work, but as a skillful interpretation of the mental problems faced by an aging man who has out-lived his usefulness. Due to its universal significance, it excites pity and fear in the audience.

The above are merely brief outlines of the dramatic styles found in Death of a Salesman. The overwhelming interaction between realism and idealism

is the unifying factor of this modern tragedy. The following pages will contain an analysis of this feature. However, to achieve a true comprehension of this a limited understanding of the major dramatic devices employed by the author was necessary.

John Gassner has stated that,

Since realism had remained the dominant style of the American theater and had, in fact, acquired augmented prestige from the pressures of a decade of economic depression and half a decade of total war, the advantage of fusing realism with imagination was a necessary rediscovery. Its possibilities were sufficiently appreciated by the American public, to provide some hope for a theater that had become, economically, almost untenable.<sup>3</sup>

An example of this type of drama is found in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman.

Willy Loman, the hero of the play and an aging travelling salesman, was a tragic character. His idealism made him such. He was an extremist who lived intensely rather than realistically and wisely. Willy's glorification of material success, salesman-ship and personal popularity allowed no compromise. Although Willy committed errors and floundered in the sea of illusion, as does the rest of society, although he had extra-marital diversions, and although he instilled the incorrect ideals into his sons,

he was not commonplace. He maintained his faith in his ideal, which was almost heroic and when this faith began to crumble, so did Willy, the man.

Willy had never been a successful salesman, even at the height of his career, and he had been burdened by the debts of the average man, the refrigerator, the car, a twenty-five year mortgage on his house, and all the necessities of his station in life. "Once in my life I'd like to own something outright before it's broken." is his cry. But these things cost him his life. The day arrived when he could face the world no longer. His old firm refused to employ him. Thus, grasping the futility of his life, he decided to join his "successful" brother, Ben, who had been dead for some time. This gesture is the final effort of this tragic character to maintain his dignity, to live up to and defend his ideals.

Yet, what causes a man to find himself in such a position in life as Willy? Was Willy a victim of society or was he a victim of self-delusion? Society does cruelly discard Willy when his usefulness has been served. Howard, his employer, dismisses this aging man, despite the many years of service which he has devoted to the company. Willy eloquently expresses

his feelings at this time when he makes a plea for his dignity, ". . . you can't eat the orange and throw the peel away - a man is not a piece of fruit!" However, the two elements, society and the human being, are fused in this play to such an extent that the one is the other. In addition to being a member of society, Howard represents reality in Willy's life. This reality would necessarily come in conflict with Willy's extremely idealistic view of life.

It was his idealism which caused Willy's downfall. It was Willy who freely accepted his own debased system of values. His father was a "drummer" and so he also became one. Willy did question whether or not he might have led a happy life if he had followed his natural talents, and had become a carpenter. Thus, his tragic downfall was the result of his ideals, which were not true to himself. This, according to his neighbour Charley, he could not help. Charley said of Willy that, "Nobody dast blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman . . ."

Thus, throughout the play a strange mingling of realism and idealism are present. It is the interaction of these two factors which precipitates all the action and creates all the tension within the

here of this work, Willy Loman. Willy is an idealistic man, a man with ideals which are not in accordance with reality. The two are incompatible, but Willy, with the dignity of an intense man, continues his belief in the ideology which destroys him. Finally he commits suicide to retain this belief.

Willy's ideals are mean and base, but his devotion to them is heroic. His goal in life, as he told Howard, his employer, was inspired by a travelling salesman he encountered while still in his youth,

. . . I met a salesman in the Parker house. His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he'd drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And one day, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on his green velvet slippers - I'll never forget - and picked up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many people? Do you know? When he died - and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston - when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that. In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect and comradeship, and gratitude in it . . .

(Act II)

Although this ideal is insubstantial, could Willy come

close to attaining this goal? His potential does not warrant his aspiration to these heights but he does persist.

When, in his earlier life, Willy was not boasting that he "Knocked 'em cold in Providence, slaughtered 'em in Boston," to the outside world, to his wife and to himself he worried that "I don't know the reason for it, but they just pass me by. I'm not noticed." Although he made a good living at that time he admitted to his wife that he did so because,

". . . I gotta be at it ten, twelve hours a day. Other men - I don't know - they do it easier. I don't know why - I can't stop myself - I talk too much. A man oughta come in with a few words. The thing about Charley. He's a man of few words, and they respect him.

(Act I)

This basically insecure individual goes further in illustrating his lack of self-confidence when he worries that,

I'm fat. I'm very - foolish to look at, Linda. I didn't tell you, but Christmas time I happened to be calling on F. H. Stewarts, and a salesman I know, as I was going in to see the buyer, I heard him say something about - walrus. And I- I cracked him right across the face. I won't take that. I simply will not take that. But they do laugh at me. I know that.

(Act I)

For Willy, a man of this personality, the attainment of his goals would be impossible.

Willy was basically aware that he could never soar to the heights. However, he retained his belief in them. Willy then began to live this same intense dream for the success of his elder son, Biff. Biff's success would also be Willy's. Therefore Willy rears his son, Biff, in the same tradition by which he lived. Their ideal would be the easy-going, back-slapping, sports-loving, locker room popularity. This ideal he repeats to Biff many times throughout the play. Willy unhesitatingly criticizes the boy next door, Bernard, for not being well-liked. He tells his sons,

That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer, 'Willy Loman is here!' That's all they have to know, and I go right through.

(Act I)

Thus Willy indoctrinates Biff. Biff is popular while in high school. His friends will work for him, and according to Willy's interpretation, he shows qualities of leadership. Willy indulgently overlooks Biff's easy-going cheating in school and his petty pilfering from the contractor next door.

So long as Biff plays good football, wins games, gets his name in the newspapers and makes friends, Willy thinks that he will succeed in life and carry on the jovial Loman tradition.

But these are the most unsubstantial things in life. Although Biff is well-liked, he is flunked out of school because he is not interested in studying. Although he is as good-hearted as his father, he never gets over his habit of stealing, which finally lands him in jail. As Biff himself stated, "I stole myself out of every good job since high school." Willy staked his whole happiness on Biff's success, but Biff also is a failure.

Willy's intense devotion to his ideals created a different relationship between himself and the younger son. In the play it appears that Willy sees the mirror image of himself in his younger son. Although little was revealed about this boy, the parallel between Willy and his younger son seems evident. Hap, as a child was preoccupied with the problem of his weight, as was his father. Hap, as a young man, has become a salesman also. He has wholeheartedly accepted his father's ideals for living. He merely thought that his father was a failure, an



incompetent with the proper ideals. Hap exposes his doubts and fears about his work and social relationships to his brother Biff, but the self-confident mask, the same type as Willy had worn, slips over his face when he is in public. Hap, with his pose, which is more successful, according to the norms of society, than his brother's, has also turned into a thief of a more insidious type. He tries to explain his way of life to Biff and he explains that while he is not supposed to take bribes, he does not hesitate to do this, nor to steal some other man's fiancé. Hap claims that while he does not like himself for doing these things they provide temptations which he is unable to resist. This is the result of the training in ideals provided by Willy.

Willy Loman's memories and hallucinations moved erratically over time and space, but they were tied tightly together by Willy's immediate tensions and conflicts. Realistically, each flashback arose from some tension within Willy. These tensions generally arose from conflicts with his family members. Reminiscences of Willy's errors as a father, husband and human being emphasize and explain his present, immediate difficulties with his sons and his

employer. Past and present move forward, illuminating one another, and mounting in intensity. The play is realistic even in its transferred settings. The reminiscent scenes are merely accurate documentations from Willy's mind and they are valid with reality.

Besides adding to our fund of information about the characters, each recall gives a step towards the inevitable doom. There is discovery and revelation to the audience in each recall. Willy does not gain the same benefit. While Willy is aware of failure, he refuses to accept it. He appeals to Bernard, the boy next door, who is a successful lawyer, to tell him the secret of success. "How - how did you? Why didn't he ever catch on?" This was asked by Willy in seeking some advice about Biff, and Biff's future. Then he asks Bernard,

Let me talk to you - I got nobody to talk to.  
Bernard, Bernard, was it my fault? Y'see? It  
keeps going around in my mind, maybe I did some-  
thing to him. I got nothing to give him.

(Act II)

Bernard suggests that some occurrence earlier in Biff's life might have been responsible for this failure, but Willy refuses to accept this. When this episode comes to an end, and Bernard is departing, he and Willy hold a conversation which explains

Willy's problem, much more eloquently than can any words in this paper. Taken within the context of this story, these few lines fully explain the many heart-breaks.

Bernard: . . . Good-bye, Willy, and don't worry about it. You know, "If at first you don't succeed . . ."

Willy: Yes, I believe in that.

Bernard: But sometimes, Willy, it's better for a man just to walk away.

Willy: Walk away?

Bernard: That's right.

Willy: But if you can't walk away?

Bernard: I guess that's when it's tough . . .  
(Act II)

Willy and Biff are good fellows, strong, full of fun and carefree. But, they live in a world of golden illusions and they flounder on reality in the end. Not that they are not good men, especially Willy, who never has had a mean thought in his life. Out of sheer good nature he has gone cheerfully down a dead-end street. Outwardly he was self-assured. Although one of his boys does not understand him, he loves him. His wife not only loves him but understands him thoroughly.

The play is also the story of love, the end of a tragic love between Willy and his son, Biff. Since, as mentioned above, Willy built his life on his son and since he mistaught his son, the result is that the

son crashes and he with him. Through information revealed by Willy's hallucinations, it may be seen that Biff, as a child and adolescent, accepted Willy's ideals as his own. Linda Loman made the statement to her husband, "And the boys, Willy. Few men are idolized by their children the way you are." The boys did accept Willy and his ideals and Willy deliberately made himself to exist as a god to his children. He glorified himself and his way of life to such an extent that the impressionable youngsters accepted Willy completely. This acceptance was much more complete than that of most children for their parents.

However, Biff failed a mathematics course during his senior year in high school. In confusion and disappointment he sought solace from his father. His father was on one of his trips to Boston and when Biff arrived in the hotel room, he discovered that his father has been unfaithful to his mother. This discovery of Willy's marital infidelity by Biff ended the relationship which had existed between Biff and his father. Biff lost all interest and ambition in life. He then became a drifter. Willy had idealized himself and when his son found him in a compromising position his belief in his father was shattered and

their relationship was no longer compatible.

This scene has been discredited by many authors as being invalid. Harold Clurman has stated that,

There are a few minor flaws in the play, as the constant pointing to a secret in the older brother's past which is presumed to be the immediate cause of his moral breakdown - the secret turning out to be the boy's discovery of his father's marital infidelity.<sup>4</sup>

To Willy, however, although it was painful, he believed that his unfaithfulness was the cause of the present difficulties which Biff was experiencing. Still he did not realise the shabbiness of his ideals. He truly believed that Biff did not love him and had become a failure, merely to "spite" him. Biff's problem was not a lack of a spirit of forgiveness but an absence of an ideal to follow. He could no longer completely accept his father's way of life, but he knew no other. However, when he finally gains insight into his problem and resigns himself to being just an ordinary, dollar-an-hour citizen, he then once more finds the ability to talk to his father.

An unsuccessful interview with a former employer, with the resulting theft of a fountain pen by Biff, leads the young man to self-realization and adjustment. Once Biff sees life in its true perspective he determines to repair the situation.

He revealed his truly deep love for his father when he stated to the woman in the restaurant, on the occasion of her criticism of his father, that,

Miss Forsythe, you've just seen a prince walk by.  
A fine, troubled prince. A hard-working,  
unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand?  
A good companion. Always for his boys.  
(Act II)

Having arrived at this stage in his development, Biff can now talk to his father and he realistically explains himself to Willy in saying,

And I never got anywhere because you blew me so  
full of hot air I could never stand taking orders  
from anyone! That's whose fault it is!  
(Act II)

Finally, from pure love and anxiety, Biff pleads with his father,

Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you  
take that phony dream and burn it before  
something happens?  
(Act II)

Willy refuses to accept the facts of Biff's insight into himself and the relationship existing between them. Willy cries, "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman." Willy's tragedy is in his inability to give up his dream. Had Willy arrived at this insight, and had he realized his own and Biff's littleness, he would have lost the heroism which he maintained throughout the

the play. He would not have been distinguishable from the many other men who go through some part of their lives believing in the wrong ideals, only to alter these ideals whenever they find it expedient.

Willy does not reject his ideals, but he does gain an understanding of Biff's love for him. Biff broke down and cried to his father in an effort to help this aging man save himself. Willy, finally recognizing that his son loves him, cries, "Isn't that - isn't that remarkable, Biff - he like me!" and then he adds, "Oh Biff! He cried! Cried for me! That boy - that boy is going to be magnificent!"

Willy's defeat is tragic because he feels so intensely. He is cast in the heroic mould because he can feel greatly, even though his thinking is bound within a very, confined space. To Willy, the acceptance of a position which he was offered with his friend Charley's firm, was unthinkable. He preferred to accept fifty dollars a week from this friend, in order to maintain his own image as a salesman. However, his splendid, final solution to his problem involved no less of his own dignity. Money, he believed, would solve all problems which Biff would encounter. This money could be obtained from an

insurance policy and therefore, "When the mail comes in, he'll be ahead of Bernard again," Willy thought.

"That boy - that boy is going to be magnificent," with his twenty thousand dollars which would be Willy's last gift to his son. This faith in Biff was not justified by reality, but Willy refused to accept this.

Thus Willy, a purely sensitive human being, with limitations and errors, but also with a consuming parental passion and a passion to maintain his self-respect and his ideals, kills himself to protect these things which he considered all-important. He misjudged reality and this error destroyed him, but the beauty and value of his last and most heroic effort can do nothing but add to the stature of this great, "little" man. "A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something," Willy cries in a hallucination. When he decides upon the solution he eloquently states,

Oh Ben, that's the whole beauty of it! I see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand. Not like - like an appointment! This would not be another damned-fool appointment, Ben, and it changes all the aspects. Because he thinks I'm nothing, see and so he spites me. But the funeral - Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont,



New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates - that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized - I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey - I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben! He's in for a shock, that boy!

(Act II)

Linda Loman, who has been ignored by Willy throughout their married life, and who mended her worn stockings while Willy gave new ones to his lady friends, was always present when Willy needed her. "You're my foundation and my support, Linda," was her position in Willy's life, according to himself. She completely understood Willy. She apparently could understand even his infidelity which he stated was,

'cause 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. There's so much I want to make for - "

(Act I)

But at Willy's grave she cannot understand why she cannot cry. "It seems to me you're just on another trip," she states. She sounds the same note as does the flute in the background. It makes little difference whether Willy is dead or alive; his world is an illusionary one. Linda Loman's last sobs are not for Willy. They are because the house is free and clear. "We're free . . . We're free . . . We're

free . . ." The family is free, or at least it finally is capable of making itself free of Willy's illusionary world.

The younger son, Hap, was virtually forgotten by his father. Many times throughout his childhood Hap's childish plea for attention, "I'm losing weight, you notice, Pop?" was ignored by Willy. Later we hear his adult device, "I'm gonna get married," achieve the same result. Biff was the son whose life Willy planned to direct. All his love seems to have been given to Biff, and it is only fitting that at the end of the play Biff alone can give love to his father. Hap does not and probably cannot feel this emotion. It had never been shown to him. His father merely educated him to trust the false ideals of life.

Charley and Bernard, while playing minor roles in the play, give a striking contrast to Willy and his family. They symbolize all "average" men who live their lives in accordance with reality. Apparently, they are both practical-minded and successful. Their ideals are obviously those which would make them more important and better individuals, according to our society's standards. However, they lack the intensity, the courage and the indomitable spirit of which the

Willy Loman's of the world are composed.

There is realism in the written drama, itself, which is vibrant and alive and which adds contrast and understanding to the idealism of Willy. The symbolic fan-belt on the refrigerator makes the audience wonder how many dreams of Willy's future were broken as was that belt on the electrical appliance. Were they replaced as easily, or more easily than this? Did they cause a brief interruption in the efficient functioning of the man, as the belt's breakage did in the operation of the machine? Also, should not Willy have lived in the lofty apartment buildings which were crowding Willy's little house? Were not his dreams of such a stature that they belonged in such high buildings? Would it not bother a man of Willy's nature to be hemmed in by anything, or were these buildings merely representations of reality coming closer to Willy and overpowering him? Willy's pitiful garden also symbolized Willy's life. The seeds of the plants were seeds of hope. How barren this garden had become in later years. As Willy's unhappiness grew, and his hopes faded, so also did his garden cease to produce. These elements in the surrounding matter encompassed Willy's entire

life.

Charley represented the other element of society, that element which lives in accordance with reality. Ben, his brother, who was painted in an expressionistic manner, was the symbol of the character Willy might have been had he not been a "good" man. Ben, although monetarily successful, had achieved his goal in a manner which may have left much to be desired. Ben had gone through life ruthlessly grasping for himself. This, Willy would be incapable of doing.

Thus finished the life and death of a man of whom his younger son had stated, "Dad is never so happy as when he's looking forward to something." Each member of society has some of Willy Loman's idealism within him. Therefore, anyone who has had the experience of suffering with Willy through his many trials and through the final test of his life cannot help but wonder, "Can we be similar?" Willy Loman's death may not profit his family but all who have met him will learn from his experience.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Project 62", March 18, 1962.

<sup>2</sup>Harold Clurman, Lies Like Truth, (New York: MacMillan Company, 1958), p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1954), p. 745.

<sup>4</sup>Clurman, op. cit.

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