



**A Study from a New Historicist Approach of Arthur Miller's
*Death of a Salesman***

دراسة من منظور المدرسة التاريخية الجديدة لمسرحية موت بائع متجول لأرثر ميلر

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Authorization

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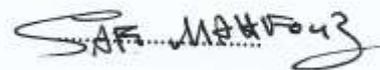
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This thesis "A Study from a New Historicist Approach of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman" was discussed and certified on 23/5/2016.

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Dedication

To my two beloved sons, Yousef and Yara

To my dear parents who made me what I am today

To my wife for her patience and support

To my supportive brothers and sisters

To my friends and colleagues

To every person who taught me a letter

To the candle which burns to light the others

I dedicate this work....

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Abstract

This study aims at probing into Arthur Miller's greatest tragedy *Death of a Salesman*, utilizing the new historicist approach as a main methodology and the cultural approach as a secondary methodology. The study examines the outside contexts regarding the biographical, historical, political, social and cultural contexts, making special reference to the characters, themes and events of the play. The findings of the study show that Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is a product of its time, place, circumstances and the playwright's biography. The play is a social commentary on certain values, beliefs and morals that were common in the American society in the 1930s. Despite Miller's artistic creativity, he was affected by certain social, political and economic factors in writing the play. He was affected by particular historical events which were the Great Depression (1929-1939), World War II, The Cold War, the wide spread of capitalism and the economic boom of the late 1940s. Finally, the themes of the play are drawn from his society such as the failure of the American dream, the family theme, father-son relationship and mother-son relationship.

Keywords: Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, New Historicism, Great Depression, Capitalism.

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الملخص

تهدف الدراسة إلى التحقيق في أعظم تراجميات آرثر ميلر موت بائع متجول معتمدة على التاريخية الحديثة كمنهجية بحث أساسية وكذلك على المنهجية الثقافية كمنهجية بحث ثانوية. تركز الدراسة بشكل أساسي على العوامل الخارجية كالعوامل البيوغرافية والتاريخية والسياسية والاجتماعية والثقافية، ومن ثم ربطها بتطوير الشخصيات والمواضيع والأحداث في المسرحية. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة بأن مسرحية موت بائع متجول ما هي إلا نتاج الوقت والمكان والظروف المحيطة بها بالإضافة إلى سيرة الكاتب. وتعتبر المسرحية نقدا إجتماعيا لبعض القيم والمعتقدات والأخلاقيات التي كانت منتشرة في المجتمع الأمريكي آنذاك. وبالرغم من إبداعه في الكتابة إلا أن ميلر في كتابته لهذه المسرحية قد تأثر بالعديد من العوامل، فقد تأثر ببعض الأحداث التاريخية وأهمها الكساد الإقتصادي العظيم في الثلاثينيات والحرب العالمية الثانية والحرب الباردة والنظام الرأسمالي وأخيرا النهضة الإقتصادية في أواخر الأربعينيات. في النهاية فإن المواضيع التي قدمت في المسرحية مقتبسة من مجتمع الكاتب وأهمها فشل الحلم الأمريكي وموضوع العائلة وعلاقة الأب والإبن وأيضا علاقة الأم والإبن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: آرثر ميلر، مسرحية موت بائع متجول، التاريخية الحديثة، الكساد الإقتصادي العظيم، الرأسمالية.

Chapter one

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

New historicism is a school of literary criticism that is concerned with the historical, social and cultural contexts of the author in the period of time his literary work is produced. It believes that literature should be considered as a product of the time, place and historical circumstances of the author. Therefore, a literary work should be looked at as a reflection of the life and the time of its author. Guerin and others (2005) see a literary text chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author's life and times. In addition, this school of criticism assumes that the main task of a critic is to understand the history of the writer in addition to analyzing the literary text, since history is an integral part of the text. Advocates of new historicism believe that themes and characterizations developed in any text are those which were common in that given society in a given period of time. Moreover, it is said that because literature is the creation of man as well as history, it is no more objective but subjective.

Arthur Miller is one of the most important figures of American drama. He was born in Harlem in New York City in 1915. His Jewish father Isidore was an Austrian immigrant, and his mother was an educator. His father, who owned a woman's clothing manufacturing business, was damaged financially because of the Great Depression.

This period was significant in Miller's life for he did many jobs such as truck driver, warehouse clerk and other jobs. These jobs actually brought Miller closer to the masses whom he depicted in his later plays. Miller wrote many plays during his life the most popular of which are *All My Sons* (1947), *The Crucible* (1953), and *A View from the Bridge* (1955). *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is Miller's most sophisticated play both in terms of dramaturgy and content. It won many awards like the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award for best play. Miller died in February 10, 2005 at the age of eighty-nine leaving behind him works of extraordinary literary quality.

Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is the most prominent play in American contemporary drama. This play which was written in 1949 addresses the conflicts in only one American family. It has been argued that the playwright depends on his historical and social experiences in writing the play's many details. In fact Miller's memories of his family during his Brooklyn boyhood serve as sources for many of his fictional characters. First of all, it is known that Miller designed Willy Loman's character based on the character of his uncle Manny Newman who was a salesman. He also represented the character of Biff Loman as a likable character who is more of an athlete than a scholar. This representation is basically based on Miller's cousin who was also an athlete. However, what is more important is that the characterization of Willy Loman, Biff Loman and Happy Loman is intended to represent the lowest-paid people in the American society throughout the Great Depression era. These lowest-paid people who did not benefit from the economic prosperity of America after World War II chose to await the material comforts offered by the modern America as they thought. The themes

abstracted from the events of the play especially the failure of the American dream are drawn from the American culture of that period. This study searches for the historical, biographical, cultural and social background in which *Death of a Salesman* was written, linking it to the related details of the play. Thus, it offers an interpretation of the play in light of the new historicism theory.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The major problem the present study deals with is that Arthur Miller was notably influenced by historical and cultural aspects in his life which inspired him to write his most successful play *Death of a Salesman*. New historicism is a literary school concerned with the historical and biographical contexts of the author. Accordingly, the problem of the study is mainly related to certain details in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* making special reference to the new historicist approach.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The current study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To discuss Miller's biography and in the context of American history in the aftermath of World-War II which influenced writing *Death of a Salesman*.
2. To analyze the cultural, social, and political circumstances in which *Death of a Salesman* was written and staged.
3. To discuss the main elements of *Death of a Salesman* from a new historicist perspective.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study concentrates on analyzing Miller's *Death of a Salesman* from a specific perspective, namely "New Historicism." In fact, no one can deny the greatness of Arthur Miller as one of the most prominent figures in American Drama, that is why his plays have been long studied especially his masterpiece *Death of a Salesman*. However, what makes this study significant and fruitful is that *Death of a Salesman* has not yet been studied in light of new historicist approaches. Thus, the study deals with the play from a new approach that will expectedly add new perceptions to the play.

1.5 Questions of the Study

The current study will answer the following questions:

1. What is the biographical and historical background that inspired Arthur Miller to write *Death of a Salesman*?
2. What are the social, cultural, and political factors that influenced Miller in writing *Death of a Salesman*?
3. To what extent does Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* relate to the main principles of new historicism?

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The research is based primarily on only one of the plays of the playwright. The results, therefore, cannot be generalized or applied to his other plays.

1.6 Definition of Terms

New historicism: a method of literary criticism that emphasizes the historicity of a text by relating it to the culture, society, or ideology in a given time. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Cultural Criticism: An approach of criticism "that grounds literature in a larger framework which can include the economic institutions of literary production, ideology, and broad political issues of class, race, gender, and power. Hence cultural analysis tends to stress what is specific or unique – in terms of time, place, and ideology – to a given cultural and literary moment (Habib, 2005: 276)

Great Depression: was a severe worldwide economic depression that took place during the 1930s. The timing of the Great Depression varied across nations; however, in most countries it started in 1929 and lasted until the late 1930s.

American Dream: is a national ethos of the United States, the set of ideals (democracy, human rights, liberty, opportunity, and equality) in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success, and an upward social mobility for the family and children, achieved through hard work in a society with few barriers.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Literature

This chapter includes a review of the theoretical literature to show the biographical, social, cultural and political contexts of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, as well as to discuss the main theories of New Historicism. In fact, many scholars from all over the world have argued that Miller was affected by his real life, and that he depended on some real details to develop characters, themes and other dramatic elements in his plays.

Panesar (2007) discusses the biographical, historical, social and religious contexts of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Panesar argues that Willy Loman is a figure of modern times; the model for Willy is Miller's uncle Manny Newman. Newman used to compare Miller to his two sons Buddy and Abby. Miller revealed in later days that Willy is like Manny in the sense that they both have big plans for themselves and for their families, which never came to fruition. He states, "the family theme is central to Miller's plays as a whole, as to twentieth century American dramas more generally from Eugene O'Neill onwards." (8) Panesar asserts that Willy's main problem is that he succumbs entirely to the lure of the American Capitalist dream. In the religious part, he assures that none of the Lomans and other characters adhere to any kind of religious belief, that is why the post world-war society appears to have pinned all its faith on material success.

Last but not least, he talks about the historical context of *Death of a Salesman* arguing that the play was written immediately after World War II, a time of hope and prosperity for America.

In an article entitled “*Death of a Salesman*” (2001), the writer observes that the Loman household closely resembles the household of Miller's uncle and his cousins. “Miller himself is most like the character of Bernard, the unpopular, bookish, next-door neighbor who grows up to meet with great success.”(20) The play premiered at a time the Americans were expecting a more prosperous life as advertised on televisions and other sources of media. Willy Loman was actually devastated by his inability to get success in this supposedly shiny new world. Accordingly, Willy's tragedy is that of a man who believed that he only did not match the qualifications of successful people advertised by the Americans.

Nienhuis (2010) states, “Miller focuses on the relationship between society and the individual's concept of self.”(12) He adds that as a consequence of living in a Capitalist society that emphasizes materialistic values, Willy appears in the play as having an obsession not only with financial success, but also with appearances and impressions of being considered well-liked by others.

Rollyson (2003) studied *Death of a Salesman* in light of reading Miller's biography. He discusses the influence of the Great Depression on Miller's early life and its strong impact on his career as a playwright. During this period of time, Miller drove trucks, unloaded cargoes, waited on tables and worked as a clerk in a warehouse. These jobs brought him close to the kind of working-class characters who appear in his plays. Furthermore, the fall of his father from financial security and seeing people struggling around him for the sake of dignity, placed him in a position to probe into individuals and society. As Miller believes, the American society had to be changed and made fair for the common people. In *Death of a salesman* Miller portrays the conflicts between individuals and society.

Commenting on the audiences' response to the play's premier, Sickels (2010) states, "Miller's realistic, tragic portrayal of Willy Loman struck an emotional chord with American audiences, and many people, including Kazan, felt as if Miller had written about their own fathers."(77) Sickels elaborates that Miller "was responding to the new postwar American affluence."(76) Despite the country's newly acquired wealth, Miller felt the Depression was still looming and Americans were still afraid that everything would disappear. Willy is worried about his two sons not benefiting from the material success offered by the new America. (76-91)

To study a literary text making special references to the historical, biographical, social and cultural background of the author means that this text is dealt with from a New Historicist perspective. New Historicism is a literary movement was theoretically defined by many scholars. Wayne (1990) argues that New Historicism deals principally with the importance of local, political and social contexts for the understanding of literary texts.

Pietruszynski (2006) points out that “New historical theories maintain that it is not the text itself, but the social and historical context in which the work is created that determine the importance and meaning of a literary work.”(20) He also adds that New Historicism is a way to explore how literature can bring some understanding to current social problems. The context of a text interprets the meaning of the text and the society in which it is written.

In an online article entitled *New Historicism* (2008), the writer argues that new historicism made it important for literary critics to talk about politics, class and power, and to take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature. In an online article entitled *General Introduction on New Historicism*, it is stated that new historicists claim that all cultural activities might be considered as equally important texts for historical analysis.

Tugulan (2012) defines the biographical and historical criticism as a form of literary criticism which analyzes a writer's biography to show the relationship between his/her life as well as time and his literary works of art. He elaborates that the idea of biographical criticism is not necessarily related to the author only. It is also applicable to the tones, attitudes and other elements in the literary work.

Hays and Nicholson (2008) argue that throughout the play Willy Loman is called Willy, and this name is diminutive for kid to show that his dreams are those of an immature person. The only one who called him William is his brother, Ben. The waiter in the restaurant only calls him as Mr. Loman. This is perhaps a comment by Miller on Willy's incomplete maturity. Some critics interpret the name Loman as a low man alluding to the man's low economic stature.

2.2 Empirical Studies

Many studies have been conducted to probe into Arthur Miller's most famous plays from different perspectives. Flanagan (1969) writes, "Despite his objections to criticism which reads an author's works closely in terms of his life, Miller's own writing makes such an approach valid" and "Arthur Miller, creates reality from his own experience." (10) Flanagan actually talks about Miller's short story "In Memoriam" as the first formal step toward the development of the world's most famous salesman Willy Loman. In the short story, Miller records his sympathy for the difficult life of a salesman.

Cardullo (2005) argues that the main idea in *Death of a Salesman* is the idea of the mid-century man who has sold things without making any of them. He remarks that Willy Loman "exists as an insulated extrusion of commercial society battling for some sliver of authenticity before he slips into the great dark." (1)

Esfahani (2007) contends that *Death of a Salesman* can be studied from different approaches. It can be considered as a historical play about the post-World War II era in America. It can also be a social play that focuses on an ordinary real sample taken from the American society. He concludes that the play is also a social one that narrates social characteristics of its time in the American society. (3)

Eric J. (2008) argues that Miller complains about some facets of Capitalism. Miller believes that the better alternative is Marxism. The failure of Willy Loman resulted from the capitalist society in which he lives; he is destroyed by Capitalism. The Lomans' failure and psychological problems are the result of Willy's decision to pursue the capitalist materialistic values such as the obsession with the success formula of being well-liked

and respected by others. It is also stated that Miller admitted in an interview that *Death of a Salesman* was intended as a criticism of Capitalism.

Eisinger (2010) describes the structural principle of *Death of a Salesman* as the antithesis between dream and reality. He claims that the protagonist of the play, Willy Loman, is a man who is stuck in his dream, because he is not able to tolerate the troubles of his reality.

Tugulan (2012) argues that the characters of *Death of a Salesman* are developed from the family of Miller's uncle Manny Newman. Willy refers to Manny Newman who always tries to prove the success of his sons. In addition, Biff is like Buddy Newman, an athlete in high school. And as a result of being careless at school, he was unable to succeed in college. Moreover, Happy Loman is like Abby Newman. The two are womanizers. And they always want to appear as successful in the eyes of others. Miller sees himself playing the role of Bernard who was unattractive compared to his cousins. However, Miller and Bernard do very well at school and end up truly realizing the American Dream. Tugulan points out that the character of Linda Loman might be a reflection of Annie Newman who kept supporting her husband and tried her best not to upset him.

Sarkar (2014) studied *Death of a Salesman* in the context of the American Dream. He states, “the play deals with many contemporary themes of the twentieth-century like the American Dream, abandonment, betrayal, consumerism and expanding American influence.”(2) He adds that Miller's decision to make Willy Loman a worker broken by vague, unfeeling industry stems from the playwright's social learning.

This study is different from the above empirical studies in the sense that it looks at all the outside contexts of the play including the biographical, historical, social,

political and cultural contexts. It also makes special reference to the themes, characterization and events of the play by relating them to the new historicist theories.

Chapter Three

Methods and Procedures

3.1 Methodology

The methodology used in the current study is both descriptive and analytical. It seeks to explore the outside contexts behind the development of the characters, themes and other elements of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Moreover, reading and analyzing the play in the context of the tenets of New Historicist theory is utilized as a major method in this study. The cultural perspective which has mutual theories with the new historic approach is considered to be a secondary methodology as well.

3.2 Sample of the Study

The sample of the study is one of Arthur Miller's plays *Death of a Salesman*. It is investigated from the perspective of New Historicism.

3.3 Procedures of the Study

- Reading the biography of Arthur Miller.
- Reading the full text of *Death of a salesman*.
- Drawing comparisons between Miller's biography and the play.
- Reading previous studies related to the main topic of the study.
- Analyzing the characters, the themes and the events then associating them with the main theories of new historicism.
- Discussing the findings.
- Drawing the conclusions and recommendations.

3.4 New Historicist Perspective

New Historicism is one of the methodologies used to study literary texts specially those which have links to their outside contexts. It is a theory proposed by Stephen Greenblatt in the twentieth-century and its main tenet is the interpretation of literature in terms of the milieu from which it emerged. Greenblatt (1982) outlines the following four tenets of New Historicism:

First, literature is history-oriented which means that all literary works are the products of many social and cultural circumstances and forces.

Second, literature constitutes another vision of history.

Third, literature cannot transcend history and is continually shaped by social and political forces. Literary texts are the products of the ideology of the age in which they are written.

Fourth, literature should be interpreted in terms of its historicity since history shapes all literature. (3-6)

Historicism is defined as "literary works can help us to understand the time in which they are set – realist texts in particular provide imaginative representations of specific historical moments, events or periods; however, fictional texts are subordinate to historical records." While new historicism is defined as "literary texts are bound up with other discourses and rhetorical structures; they are part of a history that is still being written." (Muller, 2013:2)

Muller (2013) outlines the main principles of the new historicist approach as:

1- New historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations.

2- New historicists see texts as agents and makers of history.

3- History is textual: distinction between literature and history is artificial and flawed.

4- For New historicists literature is history, and history is literature.

5- Historians as authors who employ literature and literary strategies to relate events.

6- New historicists contextualize literature within other cultural texts.

7- Diversity and disagreement within new historicism and its practices.

8- Cultural materialism as particular (and mainly British) mode of new historicist criticism.

9- New Historicism is also interested in the contextualization of literary production and consumption, and the ideologies that govern these acts.

10- Who produces, circulates, polices, and consumes literature.

11- The aim of new historicism is to examine how literature contributes to, replicates, and/or challenges other cultural discourses, of the same or other periods.

12- New historicist critics are supposed to examine the implications and significance of the material production and consumption of literature (who is allowed/ able to produce and possess literature, who is allowed to circulate it, and to whom). (3-4)

Giddens (1986) contends that a text must be interpreted in its social, cultural and political contexts: "To grasp the meanings of a text as they might have been understood by those who produced it involves investigating the conditions of their knowledge ability." (530)

Ferguson (2010) states, "literature was seen as a (mimetic) reflection of the historical world in which it was produced. Further, history was viewed as stable, linear, and

recoverable—a narrative of fact.(1) Additional evidence of new historicism's differentiation from other critical theories is the integration and consideration of cultural, social, political, and anthropological discourses at work in any given age. This inclusive approach of other disciplines also closely links and intertwines New historicism with cultural materialism and cultural Studies." (1)

Collette (2012) defines new historicism as a modern literary theory that concentrates on how events, places, and culture within a society affect a written work. New historicists often look at allusions to characteristics of the time period a literary work was written in. (3)

Wiedenmann (2007) perceives the aim of new historicism as revealing power relations that are reflected but hidden in a text. She also argues that all texts are considered as products of certain historical conditions and therefore imbued with cultural, political and social elements. (3)

3.5 Cultural Perspective

The cultural approach is a field of study that is concerned with the cultural analysis of meaning and practices of everyday life. Cultural practices comprise the ways people do particular things (such as watching television, or eating out) in a given culture. It emerged in the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Many scholars have discussed the cultural perspective as a methodology of research. Cultural studies have influenced other disciplines like literary criticism by encouraging a more inclusive approach of the range of texts studied and greater attention to theory, context and the institutions that constitute the literary discursive field. Bauerlein (1997) argues that cultural studies cover everyday life including cultural practices, economics, politics, geography, history, race, class, ethnicity, theory and practice, gender, sexuality and power.

According to Milner (2002), cultural studies are considered as an interdisciplinary field which recruits scholars already trained in the social sciences, history, anthropology, psychology and literary study.

Kharbe (2009) defines cultural studies as an academic discipline which combines political economy, communication, sociology, social theory, literary theory, film-video studies and art history criticism to study cultural phenomena in various societies. (412)

Chapter Four

Discussion

New historicism looks at any literary work focusing on its time, circumstances and history. This school which emerged then spread in the 1980s is applicable to Arthur Miller's plays, because of the crucial fact that Miller is one of the many writers who was affected by certain historical events in his career as a playwright. Colebrook (1997) argues that New Historicism studies "the relation between text and history. However, the interaction between the text and the world, between the materiality of the text and its produced meaning and between art and history should be the object of investigation in any critical practice. The relation between the text and its historical context is described as dynamic, since not only is history itself accessible as a text, but the text itself is also the result of certain non-discursive forces. Greenblatt, the founder of new historicism, sees that this critical practice should concentrate on the negotiation and exchange by which the representation of history becomes possible. Advocates of new historicism focuses on the material effects and circumstances produced by the text and in which the text is produced. This critical practice is against any theory of meaning in which the text determinates its semantic context and moves toward the idea of the text itself.

According to Gallagher (1989), The process of reading a literary text in light of new historicist theories entails reading both literary and nonliterary texts as constituents of historical discourses that are inside and outside the text. Practitioners of new historicism

trace the connections between texts, history, culture and the author's biography. Additionally, Vesser (1989) thinks that new historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature and economics.

New historical criticism makes two assumptions. First, the notion that man is a construct. Second, the historical investigator is likewise a product of his history and is never able to recognize otherness in its pure form, but always in part through the framework of the present. He defines new historicism as "a realm of retrievable fact or a construct made up of textualized traces assembled in various configurations by the historian interpreter". (13) Howard describes the literary text as a context for other material and cultural aspects as they are for it.

As the study deals with Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* from new historicist angles, or from its historical, biographical, cultural, social and political contexts, the discussion concentrates on the contexts of the play linking them to the new historicist principles. It probes into the outside factors that contributed to writing the play.

Historical Context

Abraham (2008) studied the chronological events that happened in America since the birth of Arthur Miller in 1915 in Manhattan until he wrote *Death of a Salesman* in 1949. He refers to the important events and their effect on Miller as a playwright. One of the important events in the history of the new America which Miller lived in was the Great Depression. It started in 1929 and continued throughout the 1930s, while Miller and his family had a change in life that transformed them from a bourgeois family into a middle class one. This period of time was of great significance on Miller's views that inspired him not only in writing *Death of a Salesman*, but also in writing other plays as well. Abraham stated that the early depression started at the same year Miller's family moved to Brooklyn because his father's business had been damaged. In 1931, Miller's father had a successful coat-manufacturing factory. Miller used to help his father in his business. This experience made Miller realize the disrespectful way customers treated salesmen. Miller came closer to the nature of the life of salesmen and other low-paid jobs. His short story entitled "In Memoriam" deals with the life of a salesman. In the aftermath of the Depression America enjoyed one of the largest economic booms in history. At the time Miller was writing his play, America was not sure of its expectedly upcoming success of a long-term recovery. Miller is still stuck in the mentality of the Depression; therefore, he depicts the failure of Willy Loman as a result of the Depression. In this respect, Abraham (2008) quotes Miller's memorable statement about the influence of the Depression on him and his career as a playwright, "I wrote salesman at the beginning of the greatest boom in world history

but I felt that the reality was Depression, the whole thing coming down in a heap of ashes. There was still the feel of Depression, the fear that everything would disappear" (3). Moreover, Abraham remarks that the specter of the Great Depression Miller and his family experienced was still affecting the economic boom in America. Although the play was written in 1949, its characters Willy, Linda, Ben, Charley and Howard's father all grew up during the period of the Depression.

Elliott (2010) pays attention to the effect of the Depression on Arthur Miller. He argues that Miller was marginalized by the economics of the Depression which was his politics rather than anything else. Miller himself considered the Depression as "a moral catastrophe, a violent revelation of the hypocrisies behind the facade of American society" (42). Elliott describes Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* as universally revered American classics that both offer searing critiques of the normative value systems of midcentury America. Rollyson (2003) sheds light on the effect of the Depression on Miller. He argues that Miller believed that the American society had to be fair to the masses who had been ruined by the Depression as the case of Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. Many scholars believe that Miller's "In Memoriam" was the first attempt that inspired him to write about a salesman. It is thought that the story was written while Miller was at the age of seventeen, exactly while the Great Depression was affecting the economy of the country. The story is about a salesman who seems a romantic figure, but he is not. Although the story did not achieve great success, but what is important in it is that it was the first attempt for Miller to figure out his own perception of the life of

a salesman. Later in his career as a dramatist Miller developed his ideas about the salesman in his best ever play *Death of a Salesman*. In Miller's short story a salesman who does not seem to sell anything, must borrow change for the subway from the narrator.

Abraham(2008) refers to another important event Miller witnessed before writing *Death of a Salesman*. In 1945, World War II ended and the American service men returned home. The family therefore became very important in the American society. *Death of a Salesman* highlights the importance of the family in advancing society. The period that falls between the first premiere of the play and the victory of America in the war is of great importance in the context of the play. The United States of America witnessed a time of economic prosperity in the industrial markets which offered a huge amount of goods and services. Unlike the richest class who benefited from the new economic situation, the low-paid workers were not financially improved from this prosperity. They faced, to some degrees, hard times in America. Those who did underpay jobs like a salesman, a clerk, or a farm worker were not able to afford the cost of the development of the new America. The Loman family including Willy, Biff and Happy are represented by Arthur Miller as samples from the working class in the American society after World War II.

Biographical Context

The biographical context of *Death of a Salesman* is not very different from the historical one. However, the difference is that the biographical context deals with people and places that inspired Miller to write his Pulitzer Award winning play. The protagonist in the play Willy Loman is modeled relying on Miller's uncle Manny Newman who worked as a salesman. Sinclair (2011) argues that Miller is a dramatist who exposes the contradictions in his society while appealing to its values. Willy Loman resembles his uncle in the sense that Newman insisted on maintaining the appearance of complete confidence coupled with a complete refusal of failure of any kind. Miller compiled the qualities of his uncle who is an ordinary American man with the myth principle drawn from the ancient Greek theatre in which myth governs the society by claiming the lives of its common people. In the play, Willy describes his feeling toward the physical appearance as the key to success in his society. Willy believes that the popularity and the attractiveness of his two sons will bring them financial success.

WILLY: That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, 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. (21)

Abbotson (2000) is concerned with Arthur Miller's biography and its effect on *Death of a Salesman*. He highlights the influence of contemporary American writers on Arthur Miller. Miller feels an affinity to Tennessee Williams because they both suffer from the same sense of alienation. While Williams felt alienated by his homosexuality as is represented in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Miller felt alienated by a sense of morality which was apparently at odds with a materialistic society. In his autobiography, Miller demonstrates that his *Death of a Salesman* which came after two years from the success of Tennessee's *A Streetcar Named Desire* was affected by this play in the sense that Williams' play is amazing because of its liberated and liberating use of words. Miller saw Williams' use of language which had a lyrical quality, as a kind of poeticized realism that produced an everyday speech for his characters. Similarly, Cardullo (2007) argues that Miller's *Salesman* and other most important plays in the 1940s like Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* draw on the cultural archetype of a salesman in the time America was emerging as the most powerful and richest country in the world. Miller, O'Neill and Williams intended to expose the contradictions underlying the success of America. In those days, it was most vague as to what the salesmen were actually selling.

The vagueness of Willy's products underlines the allegorical nature of their selling; Willy is an American everyman in an America where what was produced became ever less tangible, ever more removed from reality. Willy does not sell stuff, but he sells illusion. Moreover, Abbotson (2000) points out that the events in Miller's plays have come from real stories Miller had heard. For instance, the protagonist of his play *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, David Beeves came from Miller's first wife Helene who told Miller about how her husband had hung himself; this well-liked and successful man whose whole

personality suddenly changed as he turned introverted, paranoid and finally psychotic. Abbotson also observes that many of Miller's characters are composites of people Miller knew. The Lomans are based on Miller's Manny Newman and his two sons Buddy and Abby. These are not the only characters who came from Miller's biography, but rather there many of such characters also appear in different plays as well. For example, Miller's mother is reflected not only in Rose Baum in *American Clock*, but also in Sylvia Gellburg in *Broken Glass*, with her sense of a wasted life in a time when women faced certain social restrictions. Abbotson argues that Miller's uncle Manny Newman is a prototype for Willy.

Like Willy, Manny liked working with his hands, and his main job was a salesman who had a wild imagination and tendency to brag. Manny was obsessed with fame and fortune, a man who would manipulate the truth to his advantage and saw everything as a competition which he and his family had to win. In a meeting with uncle Manny in a performance of Miller's *All My Sons*, Manny was asked about how Miler was doing. Instead of replying, he went straight into saying how well his sons were doing as if they were in a competition against Miller. Bernard seems very close to Miller's character in the relationship between him and his uncle. When Charley talks to Willy about his son and the success he gained Willy starts praising his two sons and how Biff is popular as a footballer. Like Manny who is jealous of Miller's success, Willy is also jealous of Bernard's success as a lawyer. Both Willy and Manny feel that their sons are in a competition with Miller in reality and Bernard in the play.

CHARLEY (*an arm on Bernard's shoulder*): How do you like this kid? Gonna argue a case in front of the Supreme Court.

BERNARD (*protesting*): Pop!

WILLY (*genuinely shocked, pained, and happy*): No! The Supreme Court!

BERNARD: I gotta run. 'By, Dad!

CHARLEY: Knock 'em dead, Bernard!(69)

As a result of the Great Depression, Miller's family moved to live in Brooklyn. In that period of time the financial and economic state of the family was getting worse. Therefore, in Brooklyn Miller lived the hardest period of time in his life. He was obliged to work many menial jobs to afford the requirements of life. It was not very easy for Miller to attend the University of Michigan where he studied English and started his life as a playwright. Brooklyn serves as the setting for many of Miller's plays including his greatest play, the American tragedy *Death of a Salesman*.

It is a fact that Miller was influenced by the classical tragedy and Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. Aristotle's *Poetics* introduced to the world to the features of a tragedy and the tragic hero. After writing *Death of a Salesman*, it became obvious that although Miller was affected by the classical mood of writing a tragedy, he wanted to propose his own theory of a tragedy and a tragic hero. Miller believes that a common man like Willy can be a tragic hero, and the tragedy is not only devoted to high stature people. Miller expressed his view in his famous article entitled "Tragedy and the Common Man" published in *The New York Times* on February 27, 1949. Miller writes:

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as the Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for

instance, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations. (1)

Even though Miller breaks one of the rules of the tragic hero who must be noble, but it cannot be denied that he was affected by this mood of writing in the case that he makes the failure of the American dream an error (hamartia) in the personality of his tragic hero Willy Loman, which causes his ultimate ruin. In fact, Willy Loman is ready to lie and cheat on his wife to achieve the American dream. He has an illicit relationship with a prostitute in the Boston hotel to help him sell his commodities. This love affair with a prostitute seems to be the cause of Biff's failure in high school. Having seen his the prostitute with his father in the hotel, Biff gives away his studies and flunks the math exam. Willy is aware that his infidelity has ruined Biff's future. Nienhuis (2010) comments on this issue asserting that Miller was influenced by the Aristotelian concept of tragedy which dominated literature until the nineteenth-century. Although Aristotle's concept insists that only characters of noble stature qualify as tragic heroes. However, unlike Aristotle in his *Poetics*, Miller wanted his tragic hero to be a common man. Miller argued all that is required for a tragic stature is a hero willing to lay down his life and to secure his rightful position in society.

Political Context

After the victory America gained in the Second World War, the ideology of capitalism which was strongly adopted by Americans prevailed in the American society and the world. Democratic capitalism is a political, economic and social system that is primarily based on the free market, the private ownership of means of production, the production of commodities for sale, wage labor, and private property. In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller hints his critical attitude toward the materialistic capitalism. Sterling (2008) discusses capitalism and business as integral thematic concerns in *Death of a Salesman*. He remarks that the impersonal nature of capitalism is obviously revealed in various parts of the play. (5) He considers Willy's being fired from the Wagner Company as a result of the capitalist society which Willy lives in. Because Willy is not able to bring money to the company, he is fired. Sterling argues that Miller shows the impersonal inhumane nature of capitalism when Willy tells Howard that: "you can't eat the orange and throw the peel away a man is not a piece of fruit" (58) It seems that Miller implicitly criticizes the capitalistic private ownership which relies on the workers to work as long as they are fit. Once they get older or become physically unable to bring money for the owners, they are simply replaced with others without being awarded or provided with financial security. Willy Loman becomes unable to sell at the age of 63, so he is simply fired to be replaced by another salesman who is physically and mentally fitter. What Miller wants to criticize is that it is not Howard who is unfair with Willy, but the capitalistic system which does not make any consideration to Willy's 34 years as a worker in the Wagner Company.

In Act One, Linda suggests that Willy asks the manager of his job company for a non-travelling job in New York City. That is why Willy is at the age of sixty-three, and he is not able to travel for selling. In one of selling trips, Willy was about to hit a boy. He also made many accidents as a result of his deteriorating psychological state of mind. He was driving while in a trance. Willy declares that his employer Howard is totally different from his father whom Willy describes as a prince and a masterful man. On the contrary his son Howard is a person who does not appreciate the hard work of his employees. In this distinction, it can be seen the big transformations in the American business society after the economic boom that changed the employers' vision toward their employees. They only seek profit without appreciating their employees regardless of the time and effort these employees exerted for the advantage of their employers. Willy Loman is making a distinction in which he shows the circumstances before the boom represented in the case of Wagner, compared to the new circumstances after the boom represented by Howard.

LINDA (*taking the jacket from him*): Why don't you go down to the place tomorrow and tell Howard you've simply got to work in New York? You're too accommodating, dear.

WILLY: If old man Wagner was alive I'd a been in charge of New York now! That man was a prince, he was a masterful man.

But that boy of his, that Howard, he don't appreciate. When I went north the first time, the Wagner Company didn't know where New England was! (6)

Happy's suggestion that the family starts a new business of selling sporting goods using the money of the loan Biff intends to take is a strong evidence of free market and private property in America. Having heard the suggestion, the Loman family is amazed of the idea, simply because they live in time the country is changing into a big market. Those who can make a success are the ones who have private business.

At the beginning of the Act Two, it can be seen that promoting the goods in America was increasing as a result of the turning change in America. People preferred to buy the well-advertised products. Brands were also invading the T.V by their advertisements. These aspects are the new features that come after the economic boom in the American market. Panesar (2007) links the increase of promoting goods to technology, He argues that the technological advancement causes more troubles for Willy because his ordinary households have more gadgets than ever before. For Willy technology contributed little to human happiness. Additionally, mortgages and loans were brought by the capitalistic system. Willy Loman complains that he spent twenty- five years paying installments for his house. The loan the family is enthusiastic to gain from Bill Oliver is expectedly to be ten to fifteen thousand dollars. By this, Miller discloses that people in his time started getting a long term payment of mortgages and loans with more profit for the lenders.

WILLY: I could build two guest houses, so they'd both come. Did he decide how much he's going to ask Oliver for?

LINDA (*getting him into the jacket*): He didn't mention it, but I imagine ten or fifteen thousand. You going to talk to Howard today? (51)

From another point of view, Abraham (2008) discusses to the third stage of capitalism, in which the American working class for the first time was incorporated into the mass market for consumer durables and home ownership. He describes Willy as a representative of the new middle class that was emerging in post war America. The production of Miller's *Salesman*, *The Crucible* and *All My Sons* referred to a period of time America was experiencing the Cold War against the Soviet Union. The Cold War was not a war of fighting between the two sides. It was a war of tension, a war of prevailing the political and economic dominance, or a war of imposing the superpower of a nation's ideology. The tension that resulted from the Cold War definitely influenced Miller as a playwright in particular, and the American society in general. In a study guide for Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1984) it is argued that the Cold War made Americans feel the need to prove that capitalism was better than communism. Americans were obliged to achieve financial success as a way of defeating the Soviets as well as a way to show their privilege for freedom and democracy.

Social Context

Like his predecessors, Henrik Ibsen, Eugene O'Neal, Tennessee Williams and other contemporary playwrights, Miller was concerned with portraying the social life in his community. Miller wrote his greatest tragedy *Death of a Salesman* to tackle social morals and values in the American society in the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II. The play is actually a social commentary that reflects the society and its problems. Although the play depicts problems and conflicts in one family, yet it seeks to depict the whole society. The family theme is central to *Death of a Salesman*. Willy Loman is an aging man who represents the common man from the middle class in the American society during the Depression era. In this respect, Abbotson (2000) argues that in writing the play Miller aimed to write a social drama confronting the problems of an ordinary man in a capitalistic social system. Miller wanted his play to be a modern tragedy which adapted older tragic theories to allow for a common man as an ill-fated protagonist. Rollyson (2003) states that *Death of a Salesman* represents the conflict between the individuals and society.

The conflicts in the play mirror the large conflicts in society, and characters are to be seen as prototypes rather than particular individuals. Rollyson describes Willy as solid as the society in which he tries to sell himself. (1-8) He also remarks that the play is a drama about how the American society misled Willy Loman and stuffed him within unrealizable dreams until a conflict between social structures and individual desires become inevitable. (1-8) The family theme can be notable in the father-son relationship, and also in the mother-son relationship. In the case of father-son relationship, it appears in many parts in the play represented by Willy's relationship with his two sons Biff and Happy. Throughout Act One, the audience becomes aware of the fights between Willy and Biff.

Willy is not satisfied with what Biff has done for his future. Willy is not content that his son is working in a farm. Like fathers of his time, Willy is worried about his sons since the country is under the tension of the Cold War, which makes Americans worried about the future of the country. Willy as a father is a man who witnessed the social life in America before and after the World War. First, he witnessed the economic crisis caused by the Depression. He also witnessed the country experiencing this Depression and participating in the World War II. Therefore, he is worried about his sons who have not yet benefited from the material prosperity the country is experiencing.

From another point of view, father-son relationship is also figured out in the confrontation in the restaurant between Willy and Biff. Biff and Happy leave Willy in the washing room seeming carelessly cold-hearted while their father is desperately depressed because of Biff's failure to get a loan from Bill Oliver in order to start new business. Before that, this relationship is demonstrated at the end of Act One. As Willy is worried about his son's achievements, Biff pays less respect to his father. In his conversation with Linda and Happy, Biff appears angry at his father describing him as a man who has got no personality in comparison with Charley. The less respect from a guy who gets older toward his father is not inevitably intended to depict all sons and fathers in society. Linda reproaches Biff for being disrespectful in treating his father and asks him to pay attention to him since he attempted to commit suicide:

LINDA: 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...(39)

It is clear in this scene that Linda has become Miller's spokesperson. She informs Biff that Willy Loman is not a man of a noble stature but he is rather a common man and something terrible is happening to him. She asks Biff to show some concern for his father and help support him financially and to pay attention to his deteriorating mental state. Linda seems to reiterate Miller's words in his newspaper article "Tragedy and the Common Man." Miller writes, "I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were." (1) Miller believes that a layman experiencing a tragedy, just like an Aristotelian tragic hero, can evoke in the audience sad feelings. Miller elaborates, "I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when 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." (1)

Charley and Bernard represent the good relationship between a father and a son. However, in the case of Biff and Willy, their relationship is awkward in that it is based on spite and hatred. That is to say, once a guy becomes mature, he tends to become liberated from his family. Happy at first expresses his willingness to live in his own an apartment. Furthermore, the conversation between Linda, Biff and Happy reveals that Biff comes as a visitor to the house of his family, because he lives where he works on a farm. Loos (2010) refers to the days when *Death of a Salesman* and *All my sons* were written. He points out the relationship between fathers and sons were important in these two plays since they emphasize the entire family dynamic as fathers near the end of their working lives and look to their sons to take up their work and become successful business men.

Another social aspect in the play appears in the mother-son relationship represented by Linda Loman and her two sons Biff and Happy. Linda loves her sons, she is worried about Biff's toughness with girls. She expresses her worry that mothers are afraid of Biff since he is reckless with their daughters and he might tarnish their reputation. Bernard says that Biff is driving the car without a license. Willy is more outraged and promises to whip Biff. In fact, Willy as a father, and Linda as a mother show the audience certain social aspects related to the family life in America in their time. Mothers and fathers were always worried about their sons' future. They are worried that they might go astray from their dreams, and at the same time they seriously think of the finances of their sons. Linda Loman who seems as the caring woman is represented as the positive side of the family whose duty is only to support her husband and sons.

WILLY: Biff! Where is he? Why is he taking everything?

LINDA: He's too rough with the girls, Willy. All the mothers are afraid of him!

WILLY: I'll whip him!

BERNARD: He's driving the car without a license! (27)

This evidence proves the assumption that *Death of a Salesman* is a social drama intended to reflect the real society of its time, the main conflict between fathers and sons. This conflict is caused by the worries Willy feels about the failure of his son. Those who watched the play in the Broadway's premiers shared a feeling of sympathy with Willy's tragedy because they saw themselves, their fathers or even the ones they know in Willy's personality, and in Willy's conflicts with Biff. In this respect, Panesar (2007) argues that the audiences' reaction to the play's Broadway premiere showed that it showed concerns that were already beginning to emerge in that new age of consumerism and wealth.

Sinclair (2011) points out that the social life in America and the growth in the aftermath of World War II and the Great Depression brought about a surplus of goods, from food stuffs to electronics to cars and a good deal of money. What he describes is the boom of the late 1940s which did not bring the prosperity to everyone. Common people with moderate wages found themselves unable to afford buying a lot of products. The lowest-paid workers like field laborers, shop clerks, cleaners, waiters and salesmen were shocked by the new social lifestyle. Biff is a field laborer for a small scale farmer, Happy is an assistant clerk in a clothing store, and Willy is a salesman working without a salary and he gains little money from the commission he gets when he sells the commodities in his suitcase. Sinclair (2011) remarks that the use of a credit card was another significant change in the social life in that period of time. People started using credit cards to buy commodity items like cars and houses. Willy depends on the credit card which shows his inability to afford buying basic commodities. At the beginning of Act Two of the play, Linda asks Willy to request the boss for a pay rise to pay the insurance premium. Linda tells Willy that they have recently finished the payment of the car, and there is still one payment for the refrigerator and the house. This is the strong evidence that supports the fact that commodities such as cars and houses became easy to buy through installments. By showing how Miller is unable to cover his payments, it is obvious that Miller criticizes the new social aspects brought to the new America. Willy's inability to adapt with the new societal life represents the financial difficulties the low-paid class face.

LINDA: And Willy, don't forget to ask for a little advance, because we've got the insurance premium. It's the grace period now.

WILLY: That's a hundred... ?

LINDA: A hundred and eight, sixty-eight. Because we're a little

short again.

WILLY: Why are we short?

LINDA: Well, you had the motor job on the car...

WILLY: That goddam Studebaker!

LINDA: And you got one more payment on the refrigerator...

WILLY: But it just broke again!

LINDA: Well, it's old, dear.

WILLY: I told you we should've bought a well-advertised machine.

Charley bought a General Electric and it's twenty years old

and it's still good, that son-of-a-bitch. (51)

Crow (2011) remarks that the social context of the play makes references to Ebbets field, Hackensack and Brooklyn. Financial services such as mortgages, time payments, and life insurance are also spotlighted. Brand names like Chevrolet, Studebaker, Simonize, Hastings and general electronics are mentioned throughout the play. Crow points out that salesmen always held a special place in the American society since those products were widely televised or advertised in order to create markets for them.

Cultural Context

One of the main themes in *Death of a Salesman* is the failure of the American dream. The perception of the American dream which was coined in the 1930s by the historian James Truslow Adams is related to American cultural beliefs. The American Dream was manifested in the people's aspiration for a life of success, happiness, and material prosperity. The ideals of opportunity, freedom, liberty and equality will be brought for every American according to achievement, and ability with few obstacles regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. The other version of the American dream is the nineteenth century version in which Americans were obsessed to invest in land in the frontier searching for gold. Both versions of the American dream are revealed in the play as the main theme.

In Act One, Willy converses with Linda about Biff who is lost at the age of thirty-four. Willy criticizes Biff for being a lazy bum. In fact, Willy contradicts himself when he describes Biff as a good guy and a hard worker, but still he is lost. Willy is astonished that his son Biff is lost in the greatest country in the world in spite of Biff's his personal attractiveness. Contrary to the assumption that America is the land of opportunities where dreams of success and material prosperity come true, Willy Loman and his sons are baffled by their failure to achieve this dream. Nevertheless, this fallacious cultural belief leads to failure in the business world. Clinging to the outward appearance of the American dream and the success formula based on physical attractiveness constitute Willy's main error of judgment that ultimately cause his ruin. Astonished, Willy complains:

WILLY: Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such — personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff — he's not lazy. (8)

In one of the conversations between Happy and Biff, the American dream is again defined. Biff talks about the period of time before the war when he has had twenty or thirty different kinds of jobs, the result however was the same that he did not find these jobs productive. Happy reveals that he is making good money and is a close friend to his merchandise manager. In spite of this fact, Happy expresses his dissatisfaction, asserting that he is looking forward to having his own apartment, a car and plenty of women. In fact, what he wishes to have is based on cultural beliefs. The American dream for a young guy who thought that the luxuries of life offered by the economic boom in the land of opportunity were to have an apartment with a planted yard, a beautiful car, plenty of girlfriends and a lot of money. Happy says:

HAPPY (*moving about with energy, expressiveness*): All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die. And suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He's a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he's building another one. He can't enjoy it once it's finished. And I know that's just what I would do. I don't know what the hell I'm workin' for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment — all alone. And

I think of the rent I'm paying. And it's crazy. But then, it's what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I'm lonely. (13)

The setting of the play shows Willy's house in Brooklyn surrounded by huge apartment buildings from all sides. This setting represents Willy's hope and future. His hope to achieve material comfort gets reduced like the image of his small house among the huge apartment buildings constructed around his house. This image asserts the fact that life was changing rapidly in America in those days and Willy is still stuck in his fake dreams. Miller intelligently hints for the growth of the American society, but those whose cultural background relies on myths and dreams like Willy are only the losers. Once Willy is shocked by the failure of his dream, he goes in his imagination to the past. The shift between past and present is a technique used to show how Willy is unable to live in the new social life brought by the new America. Willy prefers to live in his past to escape from the shocking reality. He lives in illusion because he cannot tolerate the fact that he has reached the age of 63 with no successful achievement for him or for his family. In Act One Willy goes back to his memories with young Biff and Happy. They were happy before the changes in the American capitalistic society, but now Biff does not have a steady job at the age of 34 as a result of this system.

At the end of play Willy Loman commits suicide because he realized that his dream will not come true. He realized though too late in his life that he has not been able to achieve success, prosperity, and happiness as promised by the American dream. But still he keeps pursuing this dream in order to forget his disappointments. Willy, Biff and Happy stressed the failure of their beliefs when they build their dreams on a false idea that Bill Oliver will give Biff a loan, once he remembers Biff. They think that because Biff is well-liked and he has an attractive appearance, Oliver will offer him the loan. Here the Loman males seem failures in the sense that they base their success on illusion, mythical dreams and false pride. Willy clings to the last hope of Biff getting the loan to start the sports goods business. Willy commits suicide in vain believing that the money his son Biff will get from the insurance company will enable him to start his own business. Willy excludes the important conditions to achieve the American dream which are hard work and skill. Though he is working in the company on a commission without a fixed salary, his pride prevents him from accepting the job his close friend Charley offers him. His refusal is strong evidence that Willy's dream is fake. He looks forward to fulfilling the dream of prosperity by the easiest way and the least cost which is illusion.

CHARLEY: What're you doin' home?

WILLY: A little trouble with the car.

CHARLEY: Oh. *(Pause.)* I'd like to take a trip to California.

WILLY: Don't say.

CHARLEY: You want a job?

WILLY: I got a job, I told you that. *(After a slight pause.)* What the hell are you offering me a job for?

CHARLEY: Don't get insulted.

WILLY: Don't insult me.

CHARLEY: I don't see no sense in it. You don't have to go on this way.(29)

Willy believes in appearances and popularity rather than innovation and work. Unfortunately, his beliefs are as fake as the American dream. Willy pretends that he is well-liked, but when he tried to use his attractive physical appearance to request an advance from his boss, he is fired. Furthermore, Willy does not have friends except Charley, so he is not well-liked or popular among customers at all. Willy was abandoned by his brother Ben, and thus he became alone struggling against the difficult life. Willy's failure in life leads him to pursue the American dream which drives him to commit suicide. Willy passes on his perception of the American dream to his two sons Biff and Happy. Biff reaches the age of thirty-four with no steady job. Despite the fact that he is a talented athlete, but he does not manage to get a job, and this leads him to become a drifter.

Death of a Salesman examines the realities of achieving the myth of the American dream and the cost for pursuing it. Miller fails to realize that this dream is merely a manifestation brought on by consumerism and greed in the wake of wartime tragedy. For Abraham (2008) the American dream constitutes hard work, success, money, happy family and freedom. The American constitution had tabled the right of each American to pursue the myth of the American dream. The play shows Willy's fallacious perception of the American dream. Miller presents a tragedy of a man who believes in the comfortable life

brought by a myth or a dream. Willy lives in illusion between the past and the present. He spends his life pursuing a dream which causes his tragic end. The cost of believing in a fake dream causes the tragic death of a salesman. Willy's choice of being a salesman is based on the myth of a successful salesman Dave Singleman. This is the other myth Willy believes in. Willy keeps telling his family that he chose to follow the footsteps of Dave Singleman; a famous old salesman who made a living from the profession until the age of eighty-four. Willy was not convinced to follow Ben who went to the jungle in Africa and achieved a great success there. Willy here chooses the version of the American dream which is represented by Singleman's fame and success as a hardworking old salesman. Willy did not choose the other version of the American dream which is represented by his brother Ben. Although Willy does not follow the nineteenth-century version of the American dream, he seems convinced like many other people in his society with this mythical American dream of success and prosperity. He proudly says:

WILLY (*angrily*): Business is definitely business, but just listen for a minute. You don't understand this. When I was a boy — eighteen, nineteen — I was already on the road. And there was a question in my mind as to whether selling had a future for me. Because in those days I had a yearning to go to Alaska. See, there were three gold strikes in one month in Alaska, and I felt like going out. Just for the ride, you might say.(57)

However, Willy's choice of pursuing the version of the American dream represented by the mythical salesman Dave Singelman can be seen in his memorable quotation:

Willy: And I was almost decided to go, when 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 old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on his green velvet slippers — I'll never forget — and pick 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... Do you know? When he died — and by the way he died the death of a salesman... when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. (57-58)

Although Miller shows us the cost of the blind pursuit of the American dream in his presentation of the protagonist Willy Loman, his portrayal of Charley and his son Bernard as honest, successful people provides a contradictory version of the American dream. Charley and Bernard are samples from the society who get success and prosperity from hard work rather than popularity and physical appearance. Hard work and ability are the missing formula of the American dream in Willy's perception. Nevertheless, Willy insists on achieving the American dream without exerting the least effort to achieve it. Linda expresses her regret that her husband has attempted to kill himself many times in the purposive accidents he made, and in the rubber pipe of the gas heater. These attempts are the consequences of Biff's failure to make good business. In his speech, it becomes

obvious that Biff has never tried to make good business, and this is what always sparks the conflict between him and his father. In fact, the cause of this failure is that Biff is influenced by his father's way of thinking. They both do not care about ability and hard work, but rather they care about their attractiveness. What they believe in is well-likeness as the best path toward success and prosperity.

Generally speaking, what makes *Death of a Salesman* the greatest American tragedy that brought Miller to prominence and fame is the fact that the play tackles a cultural belief that was pursued blindly by the Americans of that period of time. Miller is aware, though Willy is not, of the cost of pursuing a mythical dream without exerting the least effort to achieve it.

Death of a Salesman: New Historicist Approach

The primary methodology used in this study of Arthur Miller's *Death of a salesman* is the new historicist methodology which is basically based on the outside context of a literary text in analyzing it. Since new historicism deals with a literary text by focusing on its historical, biographical, social, political and cultural contexts, the cultural methodology which is principally integrated with new historicists theories will be used as a secondary methodology as well. One of the main tenets of new historicism is that a literary text is a reflection of the material and cultural context in which it was written. Miller's *Death of a Salesman* has been hailed as the first modern tragedy that criticizes the fatal consequences of pursuing the fake American dream. Miller acquaints the audience with certain beliefs, morals and values Americans witness in their daily life.

Another principle of new historicism is that there is a relation between the text and history, and between the text and the world. The text is the fruit of certain circumstances. In fact, the relation between *Death of a Salesman* and the history of America can be proved by the nature of the play as a reflection of the economic boom which followed World War II. The Great Depression is the play's core historical event. Miller's family was badly affected by the crisis of the Depression which brought him close to the middle class in his society. Miller depicts the problems the middle class suffered as a result of the Great Depression, and later as a result of the economic boom that was only fruitful to

high class in society. In Addition, new historicism asserts that circumstances influence the production of texts. The audiences who watched the tragedy of Willy Loman, his conflict with his son Biff, his attitude toward keys of success, and his dismissal from the company after thirty-six years of hard work as a salesman, felt excessively sympathetic toward this tragedy. They felt that they were watching themselves or ones they knew. Miller reflects many aspects of life in America in his play, and his play reflects the same aspects presenting them in a tragedy of a salesman. Miller mirrors the circumstances of life in America in that period of time in conflicts within one family in his play.

Moreover, one of the principles of new historicism applicable to *Death of a Salesman* is that themes and characterizations developed in any text are those which were common in that given society in a given period of time. The escapist characters who prefer to live in illusion rather than face reality serve Miller's purposes of reflect integral issues that concern almost every individual in society. Willy, Biff and Happy are common people who work in low-paid jobs. They represent how this middle class was treated in America in their time. They are the ones who are not financially improved by the prosperity, so they keep pursuing a false dream that causes more troubles for them. Willy and his sons are victimized by the capitalistic system that dominated social life and business in America after the war. Charley and Bernard represent honest and rich people who did not pursue the fake American dream but rather became successful through work hard. These two characters represent successful, rich Americans who achieved material

prosperity and success in a highly capitalist country through hard work, ability and achievement. Besides, Howard and Wagner as characterized in the play are two different persons belonging to two different generations. Howard represents the economic boom in the American market showing the change in the employer's vision toward more profit and less appreciation to social relations. He is a pragmatic person who makes no consideration to anything except his company. His father Wagner was totally different from his son Howard in that the son has become a ruthless capitalist during the Depression. When Willy's sales figures become less, he does not hesitate to cut off his livelihood and give him only a commission. Wagner promised Willy a better position because he served in the company for many years. This indicates that the social relations between employers and employees were stronger before the Depression and they only changed because of the Capitalistic system.

As for the themes in the play, they are also drawn from the American society in that given period of time. The disintegration of the family, the father-son relationship and mother-son relationship, consumerism, the American dream and many other themes in the play are meant to show the importance of the family after the World War II. Fathers and mothers are always worried about the future of their sons, while their sons are busy in their dreams of having the luxuries of life and getting more liberation from the restrictions of the family. The American dream which is central in *Death of a Salesman* and many other twentieth-century literary works is without doubt drawn from the cultural life in

America of the people in that period of time. The Lomans and many others like them believed in the American dream in which it is thought that the new America will bring prosperity and materialistic comfort to every man.

Finally, new historicism is considered to be a method of exploring how literature brings some understanding to current social problems, and it makes critics talk about politics, power and class divisions while talking about the text. Actually, once a critic analyzes *Death of a Salesman*, he will get closer to the social problems in the American society. He will realize the tension the country was under as a result of the Cold War which made Americans more interested in practicing democracy and principles of capitalism. He will see how Americans were trying to make use of the new economic boom when the American market became free and open. Brands and advertisements were invading the T.V, and the use of the credit card is increasing to buy commodities like houses and cars. These facts show that *Death of a Salesman* tackles politics, economy, family, and social classes in the American society in general. That is why the play is rich with references to American politics like the law of the apartment houses which allowed extending the constructions that transformed Brooklyn from a rural city into an industrial one.

As for the cultural perspective which is the secondary methodology in studying *Death of a Salesman* in this study, one of the main principles is that it is concerned with the meaning and practices of everyday life. Cultural practices comprise how people do

particular things in a given a culture. It is notably important that *Death of a Salesman* can be seen as a cultural play since it shows many cultural aspects of everyday American life. The everyday financial problems the Loman family faces are the same as the ones most Americans of that era faced. Another important principle of the cultural perspective is that this discipline pays attention to political, ideological, social and historical factors. The ideologies that are discussed in the play are capitalism and communism. Americans wanted to prove that capitalism was better than communism, so they strongly embraced capitalism. This is manifested in the fact that most Americans started living in apartment buildings in big cities and how they bought such apartments by taking loans from construction companies and banks. The apartments would remain in mortgage for the bank until all premiums on the apartment were paid. Willy spent twenty-five years paying for his house, and he is still paying for the car and the refrigerator.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

After the analytical discussion of particular issues in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, this chapter will provide some notes, conclusions and findings. The answers to the three questions raised at the beginning of the study will also be covered in this chapter.

5.1 Conclusions

Starting with the first question which pertains to the biographical and historical contexts of *Death of a Salesman*, the discussion indicates that the Great Depression affected the life of all Americans in general and Miller as a playwright in particular. The Depression had damaged the business of his father. Therefore, Miller was obliged to do many menial jobs that brought him close to the low-paid workers and to the problems they faced. This experience made Miller realize how those workers including salesmen were treated in his society. In addition, the main characters in the play including Linda, Willy, Ben, Charley and Howard's father have all grown up in the period of Depression. In the period of Depression, Miller wrote a short story entitled "In Memoriam". This story is considered to be the first attempt to figure out the life of a salesman since the story deals with a salesman who sells nothing.

World War II is another historical event in Miller's life as a playwright. This war that preceded the writing of *Death of a Salesman* changed the lifestyle of all Americans. After the war America became the greatest country in the world; therefore Americans reacted against communism by practicing the capitalistic principles more and more. The period after the war created a boom in the American market which transformed the country into a private ownership market. This boom brought prosperity for the high class, while the middle class, the Loman family belongs to, did not benefit from this richness. Furthermore, the discussion indicates that Miller depended on real characters from his biography in developing the characters of his plays. Willy Loman is modeled on Miller's uncle Manny Newman who like Willy insisted on attractive physical appearances. Manny's two sons Buddy and Abby are also a main source to develop Happy and Biff Loman. As it has been argued, Manny always kept looking to his two sons as if they are competing with Miller himself. Like Bernard, Miller was a studious successful person.

Not only was Miller affected by real persons in his biography, but he was also affected by many writers including Eugene O'Neill, Henrik Ibsen, Tennessee Williams and others. All of them tackled social issues in their plays. Miller is affected by the Aristotelian concept of tragedy and Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. Although *Death of a Salesman* is a social commentary on certain values in society, but still it is a tragedy of a common man caused by a myth belief similar to that in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The second question of the study deals with the political, social and cultural contexts of *Death of a Salesman*. The discussion of the political contexts indicates that the play is intended,

to some degrees, to criticize capitalism. Miller depicts the dismissal and the failure of Willy Loman as a result of the unfair capitalistic system which does not appreciate the long time Willy served in the Wagner Company. Once Willy reveals that he is not able to travel to sell, he is fired.

The Cold War is another political context that affected Miller in writing *Death of a Salesman*. This war as discussed was not a war of fighting, but it was a war of tension, and a war of imposing the power of a nation's ideology. Thus, Americans were obliged to achieve financial success to assure their privilege for freedom and democracy. The social context of the play indicates that *Death of a Salesman* is a reflection of the American society, and a depiction of its morals and values. The play which was originally entitled as *The Inside of his Head* is a social drama represented in the conflicts within one American family. The social aspects of the play can be seen in its themes including the family theme, father-son relationship, and mother-son relationship.

The country's economy, the technological advancements, and the lifestyles of characters are also important social aspects in the play. The play shows how people are obsessed with brands that are well-advertised. The play discloses the tendency to loans and mortgages which were widespread in that period. The cultural context of the play indicates that there are many cultural aspects in the American society which are reflected in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. The most important one is the pursuit of the American dream. Miller criticizes this mythical dream by showing the tragedy of his protagonist as the result of a false dream. Willy believes in appearances and physical attractiveness

rather than hard work and skill, and this is his error that causes his failure. The play shows us two versions of the American dream and the cost of pursuing them.

The most important question raised in this study is that "to what extent are the main theories of new historicism applicable to *Death of a Salesman*?" The findings of the discussion show that the play is a product of Miller's biographical life. It is a product of the circumstances Miller witnessed including the Depression, World War II, economic boom and Cold War. It can be concluded that the play is a context of the cultural aspects of the American society, and it is a reflection of the effects and circumstances in which it was written. The play shows that its themes and characterizations are the same as those which were common in its society. The family theme, the failure of the American dream, father-son relationship and mother-son relationship are all clearly shown in the play. Furthermore, relating *Death of a Salesman* to new historicist principles shows that reading the play is a path to understand the politics, class and power of the country in which the events take place. The reader of *Death of a salesman* can enrich his knowledge about the United States of America, its history, its culture, its economy , its politics and its social life.

5.2 Recommendations

This study deals with *Death of a Salesman* from a new historicist approach. Although this play has been universally studied from the time it was written until now, there is still more to be added since the fact that it is one of the greatest tragedies in literature. Moreover, I recommend conducting more studies that analyze to more literary works by Miller and other contemporary writers in light of the new historicism school.

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