DEATH OF A SALESMAN - "The Success Story"
Nothing to look backward to with pride; And Nothing to look forward to with hope, He never did a thing so very bad, He don't know why he isn't so good. As anyone, he won't be made ashamed, to please his brother, worthless though he is.

(Death of a Hired Man by Robert Frost)

Directed by Elia Kazan, with a marvellous prop of setting and lighting devised by Jo Mielziner, _Death of a Salesman_ created a sensational impact when it was first produced in February 1949. It won the 'Pulitzer' prize and was turned into a film. Later it met with a world-wide reception, and was translated into almost all the major languages. Rated as the best play in the Miller cannon and as one of the best American plays written in the present Century, _Death of a Salesman_ still provides the basis for Miller's international reputation.

The writing of _Death of a Salesman_ marked a milestone in Miller's artistic career, and the general tendency of critics has been to explain the difference between _Death of a Salesman_ and Miller's earlier works in the terms of its technical sophistication. While _Death of a Salesman_ surely derived its exotic brilliance from Miller's conscious striving after a new expressive idiom, this, in itself might not explain the play's unique place in the Miller canon. At the centre of the play is a character,

Who is so complex, and contradictory, so sad and yet so stupid, so proud and still meanly evasive, who almost
steps out of the Frame of the play to acquire a larger than life reality. 1

The entire play is structured around the point of view of Willy Loman and in one sense, Willy's mind is on the stage. Miller tells us some interesting facts about the genesis of the play in his *INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTED PLAYS* -

The first image that occurred to me, which was to result in *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* was an enormous face to the height of the proscenium arch which would appear and then open up and we would see the inside of a man's head. In fact, *The Inside of His Head* was the first title. It was conceived half in laughter, for the inside of his head was a mass of contradictions. (C.P, P.23).

The basis of the play is a series of scenes relating chronologically what is happening to Willy Loman at the age of sixty during one late evening and the next day. This is interwoven with events of the past or fantasies outside time which sometimes overlap with the present. Arthur Miller has explained that this unusual structure arises directly from what he wants to say about his hero. This accounts for the treatment of time in the play; for the concept that -

Nothing in life comes next, but that everything exists together and at the same time within us; that there is no past to be brought forward in a human being, but that he is his past at every moment and that the present is merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to. (C.P, P.23).

Hence we are less concerned than in conventional plays with the question, what happens next? The end is already half-realised in the beginning. Miller writes -
The play was begun with only one firm piece of knowledge, and this was that Loman was to destroy himself. How it would wander before it got to that point I did not know. I was convinced only that if I could make him remember enough he would kill himself, and the structure of the play was determined by what was needed to draw up his memories like a mass of tangled roots without end or beginning. (C.P, P.25).

The play, is not then, merely a series of chronological events originating in Willy's past, nor a set of revelations of the past show how it created the present. It is primarily a progress towards a deeper understanding of Willy's predicament; this is achieved by seperating what Willy says from the real truth; by distinguishing Willy's view of the other characters from what they really are. The form of the play reflects its subject, Willy Loman. It suits a disintegrating character like Willy.

As in ALL MY SONS, in DEATH OF A SALESMAN too, we have a world of illusion and reality. We have the hero Willy Loman, a salesman who is unable to come to terms with his own limitations and who is desperatly clinging to his illusion of "being liked and well loved". When we meet Willy, he, like Joe Keller, is past the point of choice. From the conflicting success images that wander through his troubled brain comes Willy's double ambition to be rich and to be loved. As he tells Ben -

The wonder of this country is that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked. (D.S, P. 184).

Willy's faith in the magic of 'personal attractiveness' as a way to success carries him beyond cause and effect to necessity. He assumes that success
falls inevitably to the man with the "right smile, the best line, the most charm", the man who is not only liked but well-liked. He has completely embraced the American myth; for this reason, the brand names that turn up in Willy's speeches are more than narrow realism. He regularly confuses labels with reality. In his last scene with his son Biff, Willy cries out - "I am not dime a dozen, I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman" (D.S, P.217). The strength and pathos of that cry lies in the fact that Willy still thinks that the "name" should mean something, it is effective within the play because we have heard him imply that a punching bag is good because, as he says, "its got Gene Turney's signature on it". (D.S, P.144).

"Any play of character," says Miller, "must show characters who are somewhat self-deluded or less than fully aware". (C.P, P. 32). Miller believes that "tragedy springs from the underlying fear of being displaced. The disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world". (C.P, P.32).

These words aptly sum up the character of Willy Loman, the salesman - hero of the play. Willy with his endless capacity for self-deception has chosen to live in a make-believe world, lying to himself and his family about matters ranging from details regarding the size of his sales to the crucial facts about his true station in life. The play is about the situation of 'Little Men' in our society, but in particular about one individual, Willy Loman, at the end of his tether, the other principal characters are seen much of the time through his eyes and tend to represent aspects of his personality or to be set against him for contrast. He and his sons are dreamers of
wrong dreams, dreams which allow them to escape from facing their own inadequacies, to shrug off their load of guilt. Willy Loman struggles with lies and dreams because his motive is to belong. He has built up a wonderful image of himself as a successful man; as a salesman, as a father as a husband and as a friend.

I can park my car", says Willy, "on any street in New England and the cops protect it like their own" (D.S, P. 145). "Be liked and you will never want", he tells his sons. "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 . (D.S, P. 146).

But there are poignant moments in the play when harsh reality exposes the phony illusions of Willy's success myths. The moments of self-realisations are painful and cruelly intrude into Willy's make-believe world of success and fame. Biff rightly tells his father towards the end that "we never told the truth for ten minutes in this house" (D.S, P. 216). The tragedy of Willy is that though he lies and concocts dreams about himself, there is also a sharp and painful awareness of his self-deceit and self-delusion. When Willy declares that he is one of the best salesman who can sell anything, he knows it isn't true, even of his younger days. He admits to Linda,

If business don't pick up, I don't know what I'm going to do. You know, the trouble is Linda, people don't seem to take to me......I know it when I walk in. They seem to laugh at me". (D.S, P. 148).
He goes on to reflect that he talks too much, jokes too much, (though elsewhere he claims that a couple of jokes establishes the right basis for business deals). "I'm fat", he says, "I'm foolish to look at, Linda". (D.S, P.149). The Loman receipe for success deceives Willy and his sons only part of the time. But we can see why Willy is attracted by another woman on his travels. She encourages his dream of himself. She thinks he is wonderful, or she says so; she likes him because "he is such a kidder".

The distance between the actual Willy and the Willy as image is so great that when the play opens, he can no longer lie to himself with conviction; what the play gives us is the final disintegration of a man who has never even approached his idea of what by rights he ought to have been.

We only see a world which is mutually infected by Willy's helplessly perverted dreams and codes. His self-building only develops the ground for his latest paronia, when he decides the world has treated him badly in the light of his greatness as he imagined it. 2

The only development in the play to add suspense is about the outcome of the illusion of the possibility of Biff and Happy going into the sporting goods business together, sponsored by big businessman Bill Oliver. But the idea of Oliver's starting the two boys in business is only another of Willy's inventions. Willy rarely thinks; he concocts, dreams, imagines; when he does stop to think, it is a pessimism, born of continuous defeat. Although Miller
points out that Willy goes to his death happily, doing something he believes will solve Biff's problems and thereby of the whole family; Willy dies in joy because

in terms of his character, he has achieved a very powerful piece of knowledge, namely that he is loved by his son and forgiven. (C.P, P.34).

The effect is not one of hope for the audience or the rest of the people in the play. Biff does not change; the crowds in Willy's dream donot come to the funeral, Willy's family does not glorify him for what he has done - twenty thousand dollars which he has given them by his death. The cycle will only continue. The Loman men feed on each others' empty values, resulting in the eventual cynicism about modern life in the city. Willy though that the surest way to success in a consumer society was selling himself - his character, his smiles, his winning ways, his confidence in others. Willy is an excessively material creature. His philosophy is the personality cult of Dave Carnegie, the 'win friends and influence people' theory which exploits human relations for purposes of gain. "Be liked and you will never want " and being "well-liked" seems to rest on whether or not the liking can be exploited for practical ends. Such using of friendliness personifies it and invokes a 'law of diminishing returns', as Willy's lonely funeral shows. The attitude also encourages empty dreams, reflected economically in advertising and time payments, it is essentially parasitic; producing, building, planting nothing and the logical extension of its unrestrained competition is Biff's downright theft of the
fountain-pen. The psychologists explain theft as a form of love substitute and it is true that Biff's stealing only becomes obsessive after his disillusionment with Willy, but much more important is the fact that in the past Willy not only condoned but tacitly encouraged Biff's stealing of a football and lumber from a building lot. Proved by Willy's bluffing advice to Biff. "Remember, start big and you will end big". (D.S, P. 146). Willy has brought up his two sons on the "Loman theory of exclusive immorality", stealing is all right for Biff, because he is going to 'charm' people. To cultivate an athletic personality is better than studying because appearances are what counts. Willy's love for his boys stresses their exterior attractions - "one must act one's way into being noticed, through sham". Willy has got a poignant dream and we can sympathise, but his means to the object seems immoral or amoral. Willy's dangerous thinking forced on him by society is also somewhat inherited and Willy in turn will pass this on to Biff and Biff would pass on to his children. Willy's main idea in bringing up his two sons Happy and Biff was to teach them to cash in their personal attractiveness. He spoiled them from their very childhood with inflated ideas of success. As Biff aptly cries out -

I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody. (D.S, P. 216).

So Willy is destroyed by his values, situational and material codes not moral or ethical. He is unable to rise above his meaningless existence.
Willy's ideal may have been the old salesman, Dave Singleman, who at the age of eighty four, could through the strength of his personality, sit in a hotel room and command buyers but his model is that American 'mythic' figure, "the travelling salesman of the dirty Joke".  

Willy shares his culture's conviction that personality is a matter of mannerism and in the sharing develops a style that is compounded by falseness, the mock assurance of what his son Happy calls "the old humour, the old confidence". (D.S, P. 169). His act, however is as much for himself, as it is for his customers. The play shows quite clearly that from the beginning of his career, Willy has lied about the size of his sales, the warmth of his reception, the number of his friends. It is true that he occasionally doubts himself, but usually he rationalises his failure. His continuing self-delusion and his occasional self-awareness serve the same purpose, they keep him from questioning the assumptions that lie beneath the failure and his pretenses of success.  

By the time we get to him, his struggle to hold on to his dream has become so intense that all control is gone. Past and present have become one, and so have fact and fiction. When the action of the play begins, Willy's tragic course towards self-loss has come to a terminal point, Willy has touched the heart of his bankruptcy, as there is less and less of him to be sold. When the play starts, Willy is past the point of choice, he has exhausted or emptied himself through long years of futile search for the elusive goal of personal success. His intense feeling of guilt over his failure as a salesman, and as a father has set his mind cracking up, and the
technique of the play, with its fusion of 'Realism' and 'Expressionism', is designed to convey to the audience the concentrated horror of the self-trial which marks his last days.

We watch him standing against the darkness of the commercial milieu groping his way through the maze of illusion and reality, signalling distress, with a persistent cry, "The woods are burning".4

DEATH OF A SALESMAN takes up the battle of fathers and sons and removes the argument from the clearcut war case of ALL MY SONS to the every day case of Willy Loman destroying himself for business and family. Here, once again, Miller leaves the conflict between a man and his society hanging fire between 'suicide' and an intolerably unchaging world. Where ALL MY SONS concentrated its retributive action into fifteen hours, DEATH OF A SALESMAN uses flashbacks within an expressionist set in order to present the contents of the sixty year old hero's mind as he draws towards suicide, after a self-perceived wasted life. Again, like in ALL MY SONS, the waste is not countered with any suggestion of radical change in society's ethic which caused it. We are offered only the wife's cry of warning to her two sons -

I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the papers. He's not the first 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. (D.S, P. 162).
But what terrible thing has happened to Loman? What attention must be paid? What has exhausted him and what kind of balance has he lost? He is not a murderer like Joe Keller but he too reaches the shocking realisation that his life has been work and for nothing. As in ALL MY SONS, Miller adopts Ibsen's technique of retrospective structure in DEATH OF A SALESMAN, in which an explosive situation in the present is both explained and brought to a crisis by the gradual revelation of something which has happened in the past; in DEATH OF A SALESMAN, this is, of course, Willy Loman's adultery, which by alienating his son Biff, has destroyed the strongest value in Willy's life. The blending of the realistic and the expressionistic technique is used by Miller as a means of revealing the character of Willy Loman, the values Willy holds and particularly, the way his mind works. Miller's reason for blending realism and expressionism in DEATH OF A SALESMAN is that this combination reflects the protagonist's actual way of thinking.

It is Willy Loman's character, therefore, which is the chief link between the two dramatic modes; and this is possible because technically Willy is a schizophrenic—overwork, worry and particularly, repressed guilt have resulted in a mental breakdown in which present and past mingle for him inextricably, where in Miller's own phrase, "time is exploded".5

This technique is not exactly a 'flashback technique', what it does is to present a past distorted by the rememberer's mind - a subjective not objective record; and the memories have an extra tension because they may occur simultaneously with events in the present.
The form of the play, then depends on the gradual admission by Willy to himself of his own guilt, it differs from the public expose's of Ibsen's form in that Willy's adultery is never openly discussed between him and Biff, and Linda and Happy never learn of it at all. Certain things always 'trigger' a kind of mental relapse in Willy's mind because they are associated with his guilt; silk stockings for instance or the sound of women laughing. The play's technique thus forces the audience to become Willy Loman and for the whole duration of the play, to sympathise with his predicament in a way they could not do in real life. It allows them to see more than he might have seen, they are expected to criticise Willy, but the technique forces them to criticise him from within as Willy criticises and condones himself. The author intends us to feel

The horror in the spectacle of a man losing consciousness of his immediate surroundings to the point where he engages in conversation with unseen persons. (C.P, P.30).

Willy's tragedy springs from some deep-seated flaws in his personality - his misjudgement, dishonesty, evasiveness, and comic stupidity. Working on an internal plane, the playwright tries to show some of the glaring defects of Willy's personality, stemming chiefly from his pathological immaturity, as contributing to his gradual destruction. The note of moral condemnation is clearly struck in scenes showing the effects of Willy's adultery on his family.

He fails because of his incorrigible inability to tell the truth even to himself, his emotional, non-logical mode of thought, which allows him flatly to contradict himself and of which schizophrenia is merely an intensification. Where once he confused reality and wish-fulfillment, he now confuses reality and an idealised past.
Willy is not aware enough to be a fighter. This explains Willy's perennial defensiveness. Willy can never accept the truth of his self, that he is a professional failure and hence can never stop lying to himself. When Biff tries to give him peace by making him aware that there is no crime in being a failure and a mediocrity, Willy hears only what he wants to hear. He takes Biff's tears not only as evidence of love, which they are, but as a kind of testimonial, as assurance that Willy's way has been the right one all along. Once again, secure in his dreams, Willy goes to his suicidal death, convinced that when Biff gets the insurance money, "that boy is going to be magnificent". (D.S, P.213).

Using as the focal point, the idea of the individual's loss of identity, Miller builds up a massive indictment of the hollow American dream which fosters false images of success through the pseudomagic of advertising and propaganda. Admittedly Miller does not blame the society squarely for Willy's ills. John Gassner said long ago that Miller had -

Split his play between social causation and individual responsibility for Willy's fate.

Willy's tragedy is seen both as the consequence of the system of values which was forced upon him by a society which worships the Mammon God, and as springing from some deep-seated flaws in his personality. While Willy's share of responsibility in his disaster should not be minimised, it is equally important not to lose sight of the fact that the false standards by which he shaped his life were mostly derived from outside, as part of a readymade ideology which ruled his social environment. Willy wants to be rich and to be loved, for society will not accept failure. Thus, Willy
spends his whole life trying to fit himself into one of the pigeon-holes of society, for "Society measures the esteem of each of its members by what each has and not by what each is." 8

Willy Loman is a social product and whose personal values and family relationships are alike conditioned by social forces.

The characters in DEATH OF A SALESMAN find themselves enmeshed in a world which manufactures cheap fantasies of success and whose governing preferences unconsciously seep into their inmost dreams and beliefs.9

The structure of the play is filled out with a detailed evocation of modern, urban, lower middle class life.

Miller documents a world of arch-supports, aspirin, spectacles, subways, time-payments, advertising, Chevrolets, faulty refrigerators, life insurance, mortgages and the adulation of high school football heroes - all giving us a highly realistic picture of American life.10

A key to the underlying theme of the play is given by Arthur Miller's description of the images from which the play grew in his mind.

A little frame house on a street of little frame houses, which had once been loud with the noise of growing boys and then was empty and silent and finally occupied by strangers who would not know with what conquistatorial joy Willy and his boys had once reshingled the roof. Now it was quiet in the house, and the wrong people in the beds.
It grew from images of futility - the cavernous Sunday afternoons polishing the car; where is the car now? And the chamois clothes carefully washed and put up to dry, where are the chamois clothes?

And the endless, convoluted discussions, wonderments, arguments...... and all in the kitchen now occupied by strangers who cannot hear what the walls are saying.

The image of aging and so many of your friends already gone and strangers in the seats of the mighty who do not know you or your triumphs or your incredible value.

The image of the son's hard, public eye upon you, no longer swept by your myth, no longer rousable from his seperateness, no longer knowing you have lived for him and wept for him.

The image of ferocity when love has turned to something else and yet is there, is somewhere in the room if one could only find it.

The image of people turning into strangers who only evaluate one another. Above all, perhaps the image of a need greater than hunger or sex or thirst, a need to leave a thumb print somewhere on the world; a need for immorality, and by admitting it, the knowing that one has carefully inscribed one's name on a cake of ice on a hot July day. (C.P, P.29).

So far none of these images refer particularly to the American dream, or to capitalism or salesmanship rather they are concerned with human life and what time does to our youthful hopes of it. Disillusionment and the sense of futility will be most painful where a man recognizes himself to be a failure and this recognition will be stark where the failure can be assessed in figures - that is, the world of business. Here, we are coming closer to Willy Loman. Out of the complex web of images used by the playwright to capture the impressions of Willy
Loman's loneliness, there emerges a suitable visual suggestion which has proved quite effective on the stage. We are shown at the beginning of the play Willy Loman's little apartment hemmed in by huge skyscrapers. Thus, before a single word is spoken in the play, Miller has conveyed to the audience the substance of his theme - the entrapment of his salesman hero in the inhuman surroundings of the industrial city -

The image of a private man in a world full of strangers, a world that is not home nor even an open battleground but only galaxies of high promise over a fear of falling. (C.P, P. 30).

Willy Loman is certainly the victim of the capitalist system, exploited and then cast aside.

He works for a company thirty years", says his wife Linda, "opens up unheard of territories to their trademark and now in his old age they take his salary away. (D.S., P. 163)

Against this view is set the realism of the businessman. "When a man gets old you fire him. You have to, he can't do the work". (D.S., P. 180). Miller says that he meant (among other things) to "celebrate the common sense of businessmen, who love the personality that wins the day, but know that you've got to have the right goods at the right price". (C.P, P. 31).

To the extent that their success depends on the salesman it is in the life of the salesman that the harsher aspects of the capitalist machine are most apparent. One of the experimental devices in the play relates to Miller's symbolic use of the salesman's profession. The playwright is deliberately vague about the name of the product which Willy is selling. He writes in the "Introduction"
That I have not the slightest interest in the selling profession is probably unbelievable to most people, and I very early gave up trying to say so-. And when asked what Willy was selling, what was in his bags, I could only reply 'Himself'. (C.P., P.28)

Nevertheless, the whole flavour of the play would have been different if Willy Loman had been a school teacher or a musician.

"Willy was a salesman", says Charley at the end, "and for a salesman there is no rock bottom to life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He is a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. When they start not smiling back - that's an earthquake". (D.S, P.220, 221).

Advertising, mass production values, worship of gadgetry, narrow love of family and mystical faith in commercial success; Willy being a salesman must represent these values to the consumers. Miller defending Willy says - "Willy is a victim, he didn't originate the thing. He believes that selling is the greatest thing anybody can do".

The same interpretation of the play, but with a different emphasis, is suggested by the American critic Mary McCarthy - "What is the matter with Willy Loman", she asks and goes on, "America is what is wrong with him". 12 Arthur Miller would answer and to some extent this is true. The conception of the salesman's house, as a house of shabby lies and competitive boosts is sadly close to the American life. She thinks that the play is saying to the advertising men, "This is your pretty picture from the inside". 13
America is the country where the values of capitalism, free enterprise, big business are seen at their most rewarding and their most destructive.

Willy Loman experiences both aspects. Although he is a victim of the system, he is its devoted adherent. One side of Willy Loman is completely absorbed in these American dreams; he is very much a conformer, wanting to be in the swim. At the same time he is bewildered; he cannot understand why it has all gone wrong for him.14

Arthur Miller says explicitly, "There was no attempt to bring down the American edifice, nor to raise it higher, however American values are powerfully questioned in the play". (C.P, P.33).

In a conversation in Act One, Happy tells Biff how he seduced the financer of one of the executives of the firm where he is employed. Happy says that he did this out of an "overdeveloped sense of competition" (D.S,P.141). Willy who feels that his life has been "boxed into" the mechanical surrounding of the teeming city, voices the emotional insecurity of the lonely crowd.

There is more people: That's what ruining this country, population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening. (D.S, P.135).

Uncle Ben gives a piece of advice to young Biff in the scene of their mock fighting - "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy, you will never get out of the Jungle that way". (D.S, P.148).

The implicit idea of competition here, which is built into the acquisitive philosophy of the business society, is again echoed in a chance remark made by the

Obviously, DEATH OF A SALESMAN is a criticism of the moral and social standards of contemporary America, not merely a record of the particular plight of one man. And also, obviously it presents Willy, as a victim of the deterioration of the 'American Dream', the belief in the untrammelled individualism is traced through the Loman generations in a descending scale; from Whitman like exhuberance of Willy's father, the American pioneer ideal.

Father was a great and very wild-hearted man", says Ben, "He would start in Boston, and he'd toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he'd drive the whole team right across the country, through Ohio and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois and all the western states. And he'd made on the way. (D.S, P.157).

This is a romantic dream of the 'great outdoors'. Willy Loman's brother Ben is the next stage: the man self-made outside America'.

Why, boys, when I was seventeen, I walked into the jungle and when I was twenty one, I walked out (He laughs); And by God I was rich. (D.S, P.157).

This all-American business adventurer is aggressive and unscrupulous. He is Willy's idea of success. He and Willy agree about the ideal of the American boy, 'keen on games, rugged, well liked, all-round' (D.S, P.157). In stage three, the jungle is New York, the American city, where Willy Loman stays, burdened by a house overtopped by skyscrapers, household payments on equipments with mortgage
and insurance worries and a built-in belief that the competitive society is life itself at its best. His second son is also a salesman already lost to Booze and sex, obsessed with the empty word 'future' always on his lips. Like his father, he is locked in the national myth of youthfulness. Like Willy, he too is a dreamer but more contemptible because he deceives himself more successfully or more insistently. The name 'Happy' suggests a superficial brightness resulting from insensitiveness. He wants to smooth over all unpleasantness instead of facing it. If he is not a success, others are to blame.

"I can outbox, outrun and outfit anybody in that store and I have to take orders from these common, petty son of bitches, till I can't stand any more ....Everybody around me is so false that I am lowering my ideals". (D.S, P.139,140).

He claims that he is the assistant buyer, but he is one of the two assistants to the assistant. He devotes his energies to chasing girls. He tells lies to impress the waiter at the restaurant and the girl he picks up there and he is not aware of the realities even at the end;

"Willy Loman did not die in vain", he says, "He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have; to come out number one man". (D.S, P.222).

He is a lesser man than Biff, whose concern for his father will not let him rest. Happy's anxiety seems at times genuine, but he finds no difficulty in walking away from it. He can even desert his father for a casual girl, telling her, "That's not my father. He's just a guy". (D.S, P.205).
As in *ALL MY SONS*, the son penetrates some of his father's illusions. Biff Loman tried life on a Texas ranch but remained inhibited by his father's standard. In a flashback technique, Miller presents the father-son relationship as - "A maniac cult of youthful athletic prowess operated at the expense of maturity with Dad as the great pal and Mother the source of blinding love".  

Like his father and his brother, Biff too is a dreamer, but he is much more the product of his father's dream of him. Right to the end, "that boy is going to be magnificent" (D.S, P.218). The collapse of the first dream - Biff the hero of thousands, the star of Ebbets field - dates from the occasion when Biff found his father out as a 'phoney little fake' (D.S, P.215). The hotel room scene, which is at the root of the estrangement between Biff and his father, occupies an important place within the structure of the play. This scene is carefully prepared for. The constant reference to 'Stockings' and the growing tension around the question of what had happened to Biff after he had gone to ask his father's advice in Boston serves to highlight this scene. The mysterious laughter and the glimpse of a strange woman quite early in the first Act make a striking impression on the audience. Biff's discovery of his father's adultery is shown through Willy's recollections in the present, as he sits in the restaurant abandoned by his two sons who had promised to treat him to a dinner.

The most powerful, positive value that the play offers is the value of family loyalty. There is no
doubt of Willy's love for his family, particularly for his son, Biff. It is the betrayal of this loyalty which ruins Willy's life, rather than a commercial failure, and it is in the name of family love that he finally kills himself, dying "as a father, not as a salesman".\textsuperscript{16}

But, perhaps because he romanticizes his own father, whom he never knew, Willy has a false ideal of fatherhood, exposed most blatantly at the very moment when he decides to sacrifice himself for Biff, "Ben, he will worship me for it" (D.S, P.219). The shock of discovering the truth about his father, whom he had worshipped, is a cruel blow for young Biff. Biff achieves nothing further, he remains like a boy. But this shock does not entirely account for the flaws in Biff. There is evidence much earlier that he was not so 'well liked' as the family wished to believe: Clearly, the staff of the school, the parents of the neighbourhood girls, the watchman on the building site, Bill Oliver, all had their reservations about him. Nor does the shock cure Biff of dreams which are mainly excuses of failure, especially the dreams (like his father's) of the great open spaces.

Men built like we are should be working out in the open", he says, "with a ranch I would do the work I like and still be something..... we don't belong in this nut house of a city : we should be mixing cement on some open plain . (D.S, P.138).

He is a more contemptible failure than his father, who has atleast worked hard; of course, some of this is his father's dream of him; the scorn of the city, the fantasy
of the open, even the interest in cement, recall his father. But in the end he breaks away from his father's dreams of him and from his self-justifying dreams of himself; he comes to see through himself more pitilessly than he has seen through his father. After the theft of the pen, he says,

I realised what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been, we've been talking in a dream for fifteen years. (D.S, P. 217).

In the poignant confrontation with his father he shatters the Loman myth.

We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house.... I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air, I could never stand taking orders from anyone..... I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hardworking drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them. I'm one dollar an hour, Willy: ....I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you are going to stop waiting for me to bring them home. (D.S, P.216, 217).

Such merciless honesty has its nobility. It goes much further than Willy's progress towards self-realization, for Willy is still deluding himself, both about himself and about Biff, to the end. He still clings to the illusion that he will count for something in the salesman's world when he is dead, and he still believes in Biff's 'magnificence', which only needs the backing of money to set him ahead of Bernard. Biff has gone deeper and learnt more. He sees all his father's weaknesses and is enraged by them and yet he loves him: and - "His love is not measured by reason, to be given in reward for virtue, nor fed by mirages of virtues that will never be there".
It has been said that *Death of a Salesman* offers no sure values. Arthur Miller appears to recognize this when he says it is a contribution to the "steady year by year documentation of the frustration of man". But even in *Death of a Salesman*, there is one positive gain: Biff at least comes out of the experience with enhanced self-knowledge "I know who I am, kid" (D.S, P. 217). It is not a proud knowledge, rather an admission of limitation and weakness. Biff admits he will never be a big success in the eyes of the world, but such an admission is the beginning of truth. It has been objected and admitted by Miller, that Willy's stature as a tragic hero is questionable because he dies self-deceived. But the new truth is there in Biff.

Lost honour and comradeship permeate Miller's work. His men live on a vision they cannot make work. Loman lives in a world where his sons are -

Adonises with Biff on the football field in a golden helmet, like a young God, something like that, and the sun, the sun all around him. (D.S, P.179).

Like Keller, Loman perceives that he has 'accomplished nothing' but America is still "the greatest country in the world even if personal attractiveness gets you nowhere". Once Loman's energy is drained by his society, he is thrown aside, in this case, casually sacked by the son of the man who has been his boss for thirty four years. Willy protests -

You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away, a man is not a piece of fruit. (D.S, P.181).
The troubled echo of this speech points at a social system which treats human beings as expendable and demands from Willy his final sacrifice.

It is into this world that Willy is cast adrift chasing the will of the wisp of material success. A measure of his displacement of perspectives is suggested by his desperate concern for his identity, his 'name'.

Willy Loman has been unable to learn the business ethics, the morality of his work-community. "He speaks the very language of that acquisitive society, without hypocrisy, the terminology of the world which throws him off balance". 20

In his climactic encounter with Biff, Willy cries out,

I am not dime a dozen: I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman. (D.S, P.217).

There is both pride and pain in this assertion made by a person who, broken by the external world, tries to cling fast to his self-image. The terrible pathos of Willy's near-heroic effort to preserve his integrity is concentrated in the tape-recorder scene in Act Two, where Willy confronts his young employer, Howard, with his request for a hike in salary. At the imagistic level, this scene carries a potent hint. Willy's panic over his hysterical inability to switch off the tape-recorder symbolizes his pathetic inability to switch off his recorded past, his bewilderment before a life that has careened out of control. This is a point in the play at which the spectator is made joltingly aware of Willy's obsessive preoccupation with time which finds its reflection in his speech to Linda...
More and more I think of those days, Linda: This time of the year, it was Lilac and Wisteria. And then the peonies would come out and the daffodils. What fragrance in the room. (D.S, P.135).

Commenting on the scene of Willy's brutal sacking, there is a view expressed by Eleanor Clark who saw Miller as a marxist -

It is of course the capitalist system that has done Willy in: the scene in which he is brutally fired after some forty years with the firm comes straight from the party-line literature of the thirties and the idea emerges lucidly enough through all the confused motivations of the play: that it is our particular form of money economy that has bred the absurdly false ideals of both father and son.21

Although to some extent, the play does present a rather conventional expression of left-wing attitudes to capitalism, DEATH OF A SALESMAN cannot be simplified into mere propaganda. The naive interpretation of Willy Loman's plight as a result of exploitation of workers by capitalists is qualified in the play in several important ways. In the first place, Willy's employer, Howard, is not presented as a 'conscious monster' but as a man very like Willy himself, with the same narrow love of family, the same empty friendliness, the same love of gadgetry. The resemblance of the two men suggests that the basic error must be sought in human nature, not just in a particular economic system. Secondly, Willy's plight is shown to be at least, partly, the result of his own character. Thirdly, the play balances the failure of Willy and his children with the success of Charlie and his son Bernard, who thrive in the same system. Charlie and his son don't cheat, they merely work hard; they prosper, yet remain kindly, unpretentious, sensitive, helpful. They are not dreamers. They achieve the success which eludes their
neighbours, but they donot exult in it or boast about it. In the early days, the contrast is not in their favour: 'they are liked but not well-liked' and between them "can't hammer a nail"; even Charley's trousers are a subject of laughter which is not kindly. Charley disapproves of the Loman boys stealing from the building site and Bernard lets out that Biff is driving the car illegally and is in danger of 'flunking Math'. When Linda says that Bernard is right about Biff, Willy explodes, 'you want to be a worm like Bernard?' (D.S, P.151).

But Bernard turns into something more than a worm. Not only does he achieve the distinction of pleading a case before the Supreme Court, but he is modest and tactful enough not to tell the neighbours about it. Charley sees through Willy's phoney talk, tolerates his jealous hostility; and gives help without expecting gratitude. Willy is grateful to Charley - "Charley, you're the only friend I got. Isn't it a remarkable thing?" (D.S, P.193). Thus, the presence of Charley and Bernard destroys any interpretation of DEATH OF A SALESMAN as left-wing propaganda.

The futile philosophy of Willy Loman is opposed by three main alternatives in DEATH OF A SALESMAN: the pioneering adventurousness of Ben, the sensible practicality of Charlie and the loyalty of Linda. But all of them are limited and inadequate. Miller's work as a whole does reflect a certain admiration for the pioneer virtues of courage and self-reliance, but this is matched by an awareness that such an attitude is dangerous in modern society; the aggressiveness which is admirable in
combating raw nature becomes immoral when turned against one's fellowmen. It is the latter critical attitude which predominates in Miller's picture of Ben, who advices Biff to 'Never fight fair with a stranger'. Clearly, if Willy had gone to Alaska with Ben, he might have been a richer, but he would not have been a better man.

The values represented by Charlie are more important. Charlie is presented as an almost sympathetic figure, but Miller includes a few details, which prevent any acceptance of Charlie's career as ideal. In the first place, it is suggested by Charlie himself that he had to pay a certain price for his business success; the price of not caring; "my only salvation is that I never took an interest in anything". (D.S, P.191). In human terms, Willy's ideal of business represented by Dave Singleman though it is disastrously inaccurate, is more generous than Charlie's calm assurance that "the only thing you got in this world is what you can sell". (D.S, P.192).

The difference in human warmth between Willy and Charlie comes out in Charlie's tight-lipped reticence, remarked on by Willy as a contrast to his own inability to refrain from chatter. However, the conclusive rebuffal of Charlie's acceptance of the business world comes in the 'requeim' scene : his defence of Willy in the "Nobody dare blame this man" (D.S, P.221, 222) speech which romanticizes the salesman whose job requires him to dream great things, is immediately rejected by Biff, who maintains, that Willy was to blame because he lacked self-knowledge, because his "dreams were all the wrong dreams" (D.S, P.221) because he let himself be caught in an inhuman system, for all his sympathetic qualities, therefore, Charlie's position is
shown to be a compromise; he has succeeded by fitting his character into the existing system, meeting business on its own cold terms.

Linda is the most sympathetic character in the play. Her famous "Attention, attention must be paid" (D.S, P.162) speech is terribly moving: perhaps, too moving Miller has said that his greatest temptation as an artist is that he finds it too easy to create pathos. And Linda is so sympathetic not only because she is the loyal, downtrodden wife, but also because her attitude seems to sum up many traditional American values. Her appeal to these traditional values and her downtrodden, loving loyalty are however apt to blind the essential stupidity of Linda's behaviour. Surely, it is both stupid and immoral to encourage the man you love in self-deceit and lies. We are told in the stage directions that Linda has the same values as Willy, but that she lacks his energy in pursuing them; it was she who persuaded him not to risk Alaska. Linda does not really believe his dreams - atleast not at the point where we meet her. She humours him to keep things going after thirty-five years of marriage. Linda is apparently unable to comprehend her husband - her pathetic cry at the funeral emphasises this fact,

Willy dear, I can't cry, why did you do it ? I reach 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 will be nobody at home. (D.S, P.222).

Discussion of DEATH OF A SALESMAN has always been bedevilled by the question, is it a tragedy? The presentation of the play invited a certain hostility from
critics. Eric Bently attacked it when it opened in February 1949, directing his onslaught particularly at what he saw as the play's conflicting aims:

The tragedy destroys the social drama, the social drama keeps the tragedy from having a genuinely tragic stature. By this last remark I mean that the theme of this social drama as of most others, is the 'little man' as victim. The theme arouses pity but no terror. Man is here too little and too passive to play the tragic hero.22

At about the time of the play's opening, Miller himself, interviewed by the New York Times, stressed the tragic intention:

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. 23

But critics were quick to point out what the play itself demonstrated - "That Willy Loman's sense of personal dignity was too precariously based to give heroic stature".

The title of the play was first to have been THE INSIDE OF HIS HEAD and this in itself is an admission that this is not tragedy in the usual sense of the word for tragedy postulates some external criteria, criteria which this conception deliberately precludes. It has often been pointed out, too,

"That tragedy requires of its hero a final recognition, of which by his very nature, as well as by the nature of the play Willy Loman is incapable".24

Tragedy implies values and to the repeated complaint that Willy has no values, Miller has replied to these terms
The trouble with Willy Loman is that he has tremendous powerful ideals. We are not accustomed to speaking of ideals in his terms; but if Willy Loman, for instance, had not had a very profound sense, that his life as lived had left him hollow, he would have died contentedly polishing his car on some Sunday afternoon at a ripe old age. The fact is he has values. The fact that they cannot be realised is what is driving him mad: - just as unfortunately, its driving a lot of other people mad. The truly valueless man, a man without ideals is always perfectly at home anywhere. 25

Later, in the same broadcast, however, Miller defined his aim in the play as being "to set forth what happens when a man does not have a grip on the forces of life and has no sense of values which will lead him to that kind of grip". 26

So Willy dreamed because he failed on both levels. The two statements are not, as some critics argue, contradictory. They are in fact reconciled by Biff's epitaph on his father - "He had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong". (D.S, P.221).

The phrase that Miller used in his broadcast - "A man without ideals is always perfectly at home anywhere". Taken in conjunction with another already quoted - "How many a man make of the outside world a home ?" 27 is revelatory. To be at home in the world is Willy's greatest desire and it is not an unworthy one. In some respects, DEATH OF A SALESMAN is more important, to its generation than if it had been the tragedy it is sometimes censured for not being. Miller himself made an observation in a letter in 1949.

However, it is obvious that I write out of life as I know it, rather than construct plays out of a theatrical imagination, as it were. The remembered thing about 'salesman', is really the basic
situation in which these people find themselves - a situation which I have seen repeated throughout my life. 28

Miller has observed for himself the truth that Thoreau enunciated at the beginning of Walden - "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation". To this extent, Willy is 'Everyman'. Again, quoting from Thoreau - "We see one of ourselves fighting, struggling and finally fainting in this inescapable American situation".

Miller presents a fairly fully context for the suicide of Willy Loman, but he cannot show his hero attaining any profound, understanding in the end. Charley, Loman's old friend, points out to Willy that personal relations and codes of honour are meaningless now.

"Why must everybody like you? Who liked J.P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was well liked." (D.S, P.192).

But Loman is beyond advice and change. In fact he is dead already, believing that, through his insurance, he is worth more in cash, dead than alive and this at least would atone for his cruelty to his wife and betrayal of his sons.

"We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house", says Biff.

They were all victims of a phoney dream and it is the 'American dream'. Miller wants - "Theatre to present a balanced concept of life, in which there is the hero's need to wholly realize himself." 29

But Willy Loman is betrayed by the myths and ethics of his society. He is seen primarily as the victim; his
warped values, the illusions concerning the self he projects reflect those of his society. His moments of clear, self-knowledge are few and even fewer are the moments when he asserts with strength and dignity his worthwhileness; that of a common man; as he does when he angrily rejects Biff's estimate of himself and his father (Pop, I am dime a dozen and so are you) with his cry "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman". Though there are occasions too, when Willy emerges from the fog of self-deception and illusion, when he sees himself clearly and at the end he does realise that Biff loves him for himself alone, he goes to his death clinging to his illusions. Perhaps the best summing up of Willy's character and his tremendous impact on the audience has been stated by Gerald Weales:

It is Willy's vitality, in his perverse commitment to a pointless dream, in his inability simply to walk away, what I am saying about DEATH OF A SALESMAN, I suppose, is that Willy Loman is a character, so complex, so contradictory so vulnerable, so insensitive, so trusting, so distrustful, so blind, so aware - in short, so human that he forces man on us being one.

It is this real, naked human quality of Willy that makes him so important and appealing. It does not matter whether Willy is a tragic character or whether he is a spokesman for anti-capitalist sentiments. What matters is he is so real that anyone from any part of the world can identity himself with him. He is the kind of man you would see muttering to himself on a subway, decently dressed, on his way home or to the office, perfectly integrated with his surroundings. Hence, DEATH OF A SALESMAN is still regarded as one of Miller's most controversial plays and continues to attract interest even today.
END NOTES

1. Rajakrishnan, P. 7.


4. Rajakrishnan, P. 89.


6. Ibid., P. 102.


13. Ibid., P. 95.


17. Ibid., P. 109


20. Ibid., P. 93,94.


24. Welland, P. 57.

26. Ibid., P. 67.


