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The Power of Self-delusion in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

Síla sebeklamu v divadelních hrách *Cesta dlouhým dnem do noci* Eugena O'Neilla a *Smrt obchodního cestujícího* Artura Millera

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objection to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Arthur Miller and Eugene Gladstone O'Neill both established themselves as major theatrical icons in America, also earning an international prestige as influential playwrights. While O'Neill is one of the most prominent playwrights America has seen at the turn of the 19th century, Miller markedly stands out from the generation that immediately followed. Their dramatic achievements were recognized both by the audience and the critics, resulting in the highest critical acclaim both in the form of various prestigious awards, O'Neill becoming the first American dramatist to receive the Nobel Prize, as well as causing remarkable controversy. The two plays that are to be examined, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, have both been praised as the authors' finest pieces of writing, and both received the Pulitzer Prize, O'Neill's fourth one, only this time awarded posthumously. Miller himself expressed his admiration to O'Neill's work, as he marked him his "favorite playwright" in an 1957 interview, referring to *Long Day's Journey* as to a "masterpiece." Even though it might seem that Miller's work draws richly upon the legacy of O'Neill, he refuses any influence of his upon his own writing.¹ A similar respect can be seen with T.S. Eliot, who paid tribute to O'Neill by claiming *Long Day's Journey into Night* to be "one of the most moving plays I have ever seen."²

While the purpose of *Death of a Salesman* might predominantly be "the discrediting of the 'American Dream,'"³ as for instance suggested by Dorothy Parker in her "Introduction" to *Essays on Modern American Drama*, for through his lifelong work

¹ Matthew C. Roudané, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* (Jackson: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 1987) 273-4.

² T.S.Eliot, "All God's Chillun Got Wings" *O'Neill: Four Decades of Criticism*, ed. O. Cargill (London: Peter Owen Ltd, 1964) 169.

³ Dorothy Parker, "Introduction," *Essays on Modern American Drama: Williams, Miller, Albee, and Sheppard*, ed. Dorothy Parker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) xi.

Miller distinctly demonstrates that he represents a generation of authors immediately affected by such events as the Stock Market crash of 1929 followed by the Great Depression, the Second World War, the birth of the nuclear age, the heightened fear of the growing influence of communism and its McCarthy era response of anti-communist pursuits, or the rise of industrialism and organized labor, no less attention should be paid to his treatment of the concept of the modern American family and the principles by which it is bound. Although many of the above mentioned events do project into *Death of a Salesman*, Miller's 1949 portrayal of the American society, family as well as of the role that is assigned to the individual within these entities is analogous to that of O'Neill, who in *Long Day's Journey into Night* invested all his effort into portraying his own family drama, writing this almost purely autobiographical "play of old sorrow" in "tears and blood."⁴ The thought of writing an autobiographical play first crossed O'Neill's mind in 1920, but he returned to the idea and his notes almost 20 years later, finishing the play in 1941, though never seeing its production on stage, as it was both published and staged posthumously.⁵

Concerned, as they both are, with the status and condition of the American family, the authors offer open accounts of family life in crisis. Although the linear part of the plot spans only in the time of one day, the characters perpetually lapse into their own memories, dreams and fantasies, through which their life failures and dysfunctional relationships are revealed. These escapes out of the immediate reality then serve as means of relief or consolation, as it is in their delusions where they seek protection. Eric Mottram summarized *Death of a Salesman* as "an expressionist play of degradation,"⁶ a label equally well applicable to *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Through manipulation of time

⁴ Louis Sheaffer, *O'Neill Son and Artist* (London: The Gresham Press, 1973) 323.

⁵ Christine Dymkowski, "Introduction to the Play," *Long Day's Journey into Night* (London: Nick Hern Books Limited, 2007) xiv.

⁶ Eric Mottram, "Arthur Miller: The Development of a Political Dramatist in America," *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 29.

and space, a practice mastered especially by Miller, the authors demonstrate to what degree the lives of their characters are ruled by their pasts, which they persistently try to deny. In support of this claim, Mary, during one of her morphine induced epiphanies, observes that “[t]he past is the present, isn’t it? It’s the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won’t let us.”⁷

Even though the ventures into the world of illusion and reinvented past are substantially supported by consumption of addictive substances, such as morphine and alcohol, it is the crisis of identity that remains the source of the characters’ downfall. Such view is supported by the critic Robert W. Corrigan, who claims that the reason is

[...] their lack of self-understanding. [...] [T]his blindness is in large measure due to their failure to have resolved the question of identity at an earlier and more appropriate time of life. Miller presents this crisis as a conflict between the uncomprehending self and a solid social or economic structure - the family, the community, the system. The drama emerges either when the protagonist breaks his connection with society or when unexpected pressures reveal that such a connection has in fact never even existed. Miller sees the need for such connection as absolute, and the failure to achieve and/or maintain it is bound to result in a catastrophe.⁸

In addition, he further expands that such work “is a judgment of a man’s failure to maintain a viable connection with his surrounding world because he does not know himself.”⁹ The self-deluded characters then struggle not only as members of the particular family, where new tensions arise which would otherwise perhaps never have come into existence, but also as individuals in their relation to the immediate world outside their families, that is, their wider communities and society.

Both Miller’s and O’Neill’s characters are far from being only sketched roles, instead, they are written with great care and humanity. By the time it becomes apparent, though it is foreshadowed in the very beginning of both plays, that Willy Loman and Mary

⁷ Eugene O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (London: Nick Hern Books Ltd., 2007) 50.

⁸ Arthur Miller, *A Collection of Critical Essays* 2.

⁹ Arthur Miller, *A Collection of Critical Essays* 3.

Tyrone escaped too far from their real condition for the process to be reverted, the audience feels great compassion for them, no matter whether they hold them responsible or not. The authors reveal the complex conflicts of the past and the present, of the individual and the society, the reciprocal influence of the separate family members and the various expectations each of the characters has to deal with as the source of their downfall. That is, when all these factors combine, they result in a distinct need to hide from the hostile reality and escape into an alternative one, be it the happy and to a large degree reinvented past, the self-defined vision of the present, or the hopeful prospect of the future. An atmosphere of nervous tension is established in the meantime, gradually materializing in the ever-present fog, an explicit symbol and evidence of the pretense actually present on stage in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The destructive nature of self-delusion is then brought to light once the veil of illusion lifts and the false pretense betrays their users to suicide in the case of Willy, and a hopeless morphine addiction in that of Mary's.

This thesis proposes to establish the power of self-delusion as the main destructive element in the plays, through examining its dismal influence upon the individual, the family and finally the society. As both plays share a similar formal structure as well as the scheme of the central families, the Ibsen-like setting, immense emotional depth, imaginative quality, and melancholic tone and style of dialogue along with the sense of existential isolation, I believe them to be apt for such analysis. Also, through the theme of delusion, these plays are evidently representative of a distinct tendency in American Drama. Titles based on comparable basis, that is employing the abusive treatment of facts by their characters, include Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) or *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), and its echoes can also be found in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962). This tradition finds support even in the current production, an obvious

example being Tracy Letts' Pulitzer-winning *August: Osage County* (2007), openly following O'Neill's pattern of writing.

Chapter Two

Conflict of the Self

In the outset of the play, the protagonist of *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman, is introduced as an ordinary, if slightly pitiable aging salesman who has lost respect with his buyers and therefore cannot sell effectively anymore. As the drama progresses, it is revealed that, in reality, he is a self-centered man whose life slipped through his fingers while hunting for success; a father-husband figure who has cheated on his wife and even lost the esteem of his sons. Similarly, the pleasant manners and cultivated behavior of O'Neill's Mary Tyrone of Act I gradually transform into extreme nervousness and the biting character of a morphine user, a spoiled middle class lady who refuses to acknowledge her addiction and unhesitatingly accuses other members of her family of her own failure.

The principal crime of these two protagonists, Willy and Mary respectively, and to a varying degree also of most of the other characters of the plays, is "vanity" in the sense as Friedrich Nietzsche understands it, a philosopher who has been of great influence and significance to O'Neill. That is, they rejected their own individuality in an "attempt to create oneself according to an impossible, untrue self-image."¹ Approaching these problematics from the point of view of psychoanalysis, Doris Falk maintains that once the process of self-delusion progresses,

The sick and swollen ego cannot differentiate between humility and humiliation, and therefore cannot face the reality of its falseness without complete destruction. The Victim of this neurotic pride, like the classic tragic hero, has unconsciously rejected his humanity – his real, imperfect self – for aspiration to Godlike perfection. His desperate, unconscious urge to achieve this divinity may drive him forward with the compulsive monomania of a Napoleon or a Hitler; the shame of his

¹ As cited in Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1958) 8.

inevitable failure to achieve it may cause him willfully to punish or destroy himself, or to seek asylum from the struggle in apathy [Mary] or death [Willy, potentially also Mary].²

To apply this concept on the plays in question, what remains once the mask of the better self is removed is in Willy's case a suicidal solitary figure, and in the case of Mary a weak character of little willpower, also likely to be eventually consumed by the process of self-destruction. Miller confirms the psychoanalytical approach, as in his own words "[e]very man [...] has an image of himself which fails in one way or another to correspond with reality. It's the size of the discrepancy between illusion and reality that matters. The closer a man get to knowing himself, the less likely he is to trip up on his own illusions."³ A clear example of such a 'stumbling' is Willy's final confrontation with Biff, who decides to open his father's eyes:

Biff: Pop! I'm half a dozen, and so are you!

Willy (*turning to him in an uncontrolled outburst*): I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!⁴

The problem here is that for each of them the label "Willy Loman" carries an entirely different connotation. While Willy believes in the illusionistic self-portrait he has created and learned to accept as his real self, Biff, now stripped of all illusion, sees the wreck of his father in the naked truth. Willy thus finds himself in a complete state of shock and non-understanding, as the meaning he has attached to his name is not conveyed as he has hoped for. No matter how much they would both wish their opposite to adopt their particular vision, the two can never agree.

Apart from creating a far more successful and prosperous alter-ego, Willy and Mary further hide from the pathetic condition of the present time in their happy memories of the past, Mary essentially triggering such experience through her morphine haze. This

² Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1958) 8.

³ Murray Schumach, "Arthur Miller Grew in Brooklyn" *Conversations with Arthur Miller*, ed. Matthew C. Roudané (Jackson: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 1987) 7.

⁴ Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (England: Clays Ltd, 2000) 105.

requires both authors to create a form that would allow their characters to lapse into their memories. The classical unity of time is adhered to in *Long Day's Journey into Night* only in the sense that it covers the period of one day, beginning in the morning and concluding with the night. Past is as much part of the present to the extent that Louise Sheaffer, the author of O'Neill's detailed biography, perceives it as a sixth character present to the play, maintaining that "[t]he past is invoked so often it becomes almost visible."⁵ Yet, that is perhaps an exaggerated claim, as one way of understanding the presence of the past on stage is the symbolic meaning of the fog, progressively thickening outside the Tyrone summer house, encompassing also the tension and delusion as a whole, as will be suggested later.

For Mary, her youth is the ultimate retreat. Defending her use of morphine, she "*dreamily*" argues: "It kills pain. You go back until at last you are beyond its reach. Only the past when you were happy is real."⁶ With every dose of the drug she becomes more of the convent-brought up girl she used to be, spoiled by her father, dreaming of becoming a nun or a concert pianist. She thus manages to disguise her trauma from a restless life spent moving from one hotel to another in pursuit of her husband's next performance, the loneliness she experienced with the theatre circle she never integrated herself in, the guilt of her baby Eugene's death caused by Jamie infecting him with measles once left alone, and finally the addiction itself, initiated by a "quack" doctor who prescribed her morphine as a medicine to alleviate the immense pain she suffered after giving birth to Edmund. Yet, she finds a strange peace during one of her hallucinatory states,

None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever.⁷

⁵ Sheaffer, *O'Neill Son and Artist* 513.

⁶ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 61.

⁷ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 33.

By the end of the play, Mary remains “nothing but a ghost haunting the past.”⁸ The repeatedly reinvented past that has so far only shaped the present, now becomes accepted as the real present, the factual past being forgotten. Her lost glasses, persistently searched for throughout the course of the play and left undiscovered, may then be seen as figurative of her inability to see the world clearly anymore, lost in her distorted vision through her delusion. Once blinded by her self-made portrayal and consequently consumed by the past, a tragedy seems inevitable and the chances of Mary curing herself from her addiction diminish radically: “How thick the fog is. I can’t see the road. All the people in the world could pass by and I would never know. I wish it was always that way. It’s getting dark already. It will soon be night, thank goodness.”⁹ The climax of the process develops in the final scene, poetically introduced by Jamie as “The Mad Scene. Enter Ophelia!”¹⁰ Mary, now a ghost-like apparition, carries her old wedding dress; fallen back in the past, she delivers her final soliloquy, for now she is not capable of leading a dialogue, having become utterly oblivious of anyone around herself. When the curtain falls, Mary, accompanied by her speechless family, is left “*star[ing] before her in a sad dream.*”¹¹

Miller too agrees with O’Neill’s organic understanding of the self in terms of time, as “[t]he past [...] is a formality, merely a dimmer present, for everything we are is at every moment alive in us.”¹² However, what is merely hinted at in O’Neill becomes a part of the formal structure in the far more expressionistic play by Miller. Indeed, the original title of the play was to be “The Inside of his Head,”¹³ an apt title for a play that was not to “still the mind’s simultaneity,” nor to “allow a man to ‘forget,’” but to enable him “to see

⁸ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 82.

⁹ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 59.

¹⁰ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 106.

¹¹ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 110.

¹² Arthur Miller, *Timebends* (London: Methuen Ltd, 1987) 131.

¹³ Tom F. Driver, “Strength and Weakness in Arthur Miller,” *A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Prentice-Hall International, 1969) 62.

present through past and past through present.”¹⁴ Striving to take the theatrical practice one step ahead, Miller wanted to create a play with the power to “cut through time like a knife through a layer cake or a road through a mountain revealing its geologic layers, and instead of one incident in one time-frame succeeding another, display past and present concurrently, with neither one ever coming to a stop.”¹⁵ The key idea, the direct reciprocal influence of the past upon the present, one shaping the other, is then reflected in the very form of the play.

The conflict between reality and the world of illusion is hinted at already in the stage notes of Act I, describing the Loman home in sharp contrast to the surrounding hostile and unsympathetic city: “[a]n air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality.” As much as the boundaries of the “imaginary wall-lines”¹⁶ of the house are broken by the characters from the past, so is for Willy the thin line between the past and the present. Memories, dreams, ambitions, lost and kept, are as much part of Willy as is the pure factual world around him. Miller again explains Willy’s confusion of fancy and reality in his autobiography, *Timebends*: “in Willy the past was as alive as what was happening at the moment, sometimes even crashing in to completely overwhelm his mind.”¹⁷ Through the effective manipulation of time and space on stage the author displays the motivation of Willy’s action in its complexity. Unlike the other characters of the play who understand his deranged state of mind often accompanied by frequent self-talk in the better case as fatigue, in the worse as first symptoms of insanity, the audience is literally invited to sneak into Willy’s mind and to explore his rich inner life. As a result, a more intimate relationship between Willy and the audience is established, providing a better chance of understanding of his perplexing behavior.

¹⁴ Miller, *Timebends*, 131.

¹⁵ Miller, *Timebends*, 131.

¹⁶ Miller, *Salesman* 7.

¹⁷ Miller, *Timebends* 182.

The “Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem” reveal that seeing the fact that he failed in his role of a successful breadwinner and never achieved the longed-for respect of an exceptionally prosperous salesman as the heart of the crisis of Willy’s self would be an oversimplification. Instead, it is the guilt of a former love-affair during his numerous business trips to Boston, directly resulting in the complicated love-hate relationship with his first-born son Biff, that both emerge as the cause of his troubled mind. Even though his adultery escapes everyone else’s attention, the contempt he sees in Biff’s eyes as a silent accusation is an ever-present reminder of him causing a collapse of what seems to have been a thoroughly happy family. He simply does not have the strength to be confronted by his disillusioned son who has learnt to understand that they “never told the truth for ten minutes in this house.”¹⁸ An instance of perfect self-deceit and a proof of how far Willy has drifted is the final apparition of Ben. A figure present on stage only through Willy’s reminiscences now progresses from being a mere memory into a character with whom Willy leads a dialogue, notably his final one before he crashes his car.

The British literary analyst Christopher Bigsby examines another aspect of the fallacy in his commentary about *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, observing the characters to be “all self-conscious performers seeking protection in the artifice of theatre, playing roles which deflect the pain of the real,”¹⁹ and he further expands:

[They] seek oblivion through alcohol, through memory or through narrative, repeating the story of their lives as though thereby to create those lives. They hold the real at bay. Their capacity for self-deceit is matched only by their need to be believed, to be taken for what they present themselves as being. To perform is to be.²⁰

The analogy finds obvious support in O’Neill’s play, as the account of the Tyrones is built on theatrical background. Again, it is already in the stage notes that the importance of

¹⁸ Miller, *Salesman* 104.

¹⁹ C.W.E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 20.

²⁰ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* 21.

theatre and literature is foreshadowed. Great emphasis is put on the canonical works displayed in Tyrone's "large, glassed-in bookcase with sets of Dumas, Victor Hugo, Charles Lever, three sets of Shakespeare, *The World's Best Literature in fifty large volumes [...]*" not only as an evidence of the cultural sophistication of the family ("*[t]he astonishing thing about these sets is that all the volumes have the look of having been read and reread*")²¹ but also as a suggestion of the role-playing happening in the family. It is also worth noting that O'Neill distinctly distinguishes between literature belonging to Tyrone and that of Edmund, the later one being assigned a choice of decadent writers mirroring his desperate outlook on life.

The figure of James Tyrone is not made a performer by profession accidentally. It is as if he was not able to step out of his role even in his real life, as "*the actor shows in all his unconscious habits of speech, movement, and gesture,*" these having "*the quality of belonging to a studied technique.*"²² Over and over he "*summon[s] his actor's heartiness*"²³ to stubbornly keep playing the role of a patient father and husband to his corrupt sons and narcotized wife, leaving his suspicions concealed, and once confirmed, ignoring them fully. He ceaselessly performs a show, yet this time of much a more serious consequence, even if not judged by the critics. His family becomes his audience and co-acting partners at the same time, and are well aware of it too: Mary, after one of Tyrone's countless fake compliments about her apparel observes "[h]e isn't a great actor for nothing, is he?"²⁴ and Jamie waves away his words of comfort about Edmund's illness not being life-threatening by "[y]ou don't believe that! I can tell when you're acting!"²⁵ Nevertheless, even the best acting performance cannot hold back the condition of Mary's addiction and Edmund's illness.

²¹ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 3.

²² O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 2.

²³ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 73.

²⁴ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 12.

²⁵ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 73.

Despite the different settings of *Death of a Salesman*, The Loman's house witnesses a significant portion of theatricality as well, even if here in the figurative meaning solely. Willy of course excels in the leading role of a "well-liked" salesman sharing his prosperity with his flourishing family, Linda supports his effort as a satisfied wife, and Biff and Happy join in to perform the parts of vigorous sons who will one day make their parents proud. In support of this attitude, Willy frequently demonstrates the degree to which he mastered the ignoring of voices that do not subscribe to his fantasies. In particular, during the final restaurant scene conversation with his sons, he is utterly oblivious of Biff's negative remarks about his worthless meeting with Bill Oliver. Again and again does he ask Biff "[*as though BIFF has been interrupting*] well, what happened?," dismissing the unsatisfactory answers, each time hoping for a more flattering response to come. For the few seconds of spare time in which Biff tries to gather enough courage to face him with the disappointing truth he actually becomes an actor, delivering Happy his lines, written according to his own dubious scenario: "Imagine, man doesn't see him for ten, twelve years and gives him that kind of welcome!"²⁶

Willy's final suicidal act turns into a sad proof that this small actor has followed his role too far. He dies convinced that his funeral will be "massive," certain that "[t]hey'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates [...] I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey – I am known, [...]."²⁷ This last illusion based on his view of himself as of a bigger success than he has ever been is shattered to pieces when no one but his closest family and Charlie comes to the funeral. The Requiem bears witness to the sad disillusionment that Willy Loman irrevocably lost his audience, if ever he had had any.

²⁶ Miller, *Salesman* 85.

²⁷ Miller, *Salesman* 100.

Apart from the masks of better selves, the psychedelic substances, the conflicting perception of the past and present, and the roleplaying, delusion is embodied in the very language of the plays. Both *Death of a Salesman* and *Long Day's Journey into Night* are representative of the characters' power to conceal their suppressed thoughts in the dialogue, especially once these start to surface. Many utterances are left unfinished, as the characters do not dare to find the strength to articulate their opinions or feel them to be pointless. The two families often do not engage in a dialogue; instead they maintain separate monologues. The repetitiveness of certain lines is highlighted, suggesting the futile nature of what has now turned into empty phrases, "a routine of family conversation."²⁸ In an attempt to avoid the responsibility of speaking their minds, the Tyrone's also frequently rather quote and misquote the canonical works that are constantly present in the background,

Tyrone: ([...] *quotes mechanically*) 'Ingratitude, the vilest weed that grows'!

Jamie: I could see that line coming! God, how many thousand times - ²⁹

The conflict of what is permissible to be said aloud and what already crosses the imaginative line can also repeatedly be observed within the same speech of only one character. In this respect, Harold Clurman refers to "moral schizophrenia," where "every character speaks in two voices, two moods - one of rage, the other of apology."³⁰ Reproving of James for letting the sickly Edmund drink, Mary exposes the two conflicting sides of her self,

How could you let him? Do you want to kill him? Don't you remember my father? He wouldn't stop after he was stricken. He said doctors were fools! He thought, like you, that whiskey is a good tonic! (*A look of terror comes into her eyes and she stammers.*)

Realizing what she just said, she continues:

²⁸ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 40.

²⁹ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 15.

³⁰ Harold Clurman, "Long Day's Journey into Night," *Eugene O'Neill and His Plays*, ed. by Cargill, et al., (Peter Owen: London, 1964) 216.

But, of course, there's no comparison at all. I don't know why I - Forgive me for scolding you, James. One small drink won't hurt Edmund. It might be good for him, if it gives him an appetite."³¹

Similar contradictions can be found in Miller, such as the case of Willy's disappointment over Biff not having a stable job. In a conversation with Linda he refers to him as to a "lazy bum," yet, aware he too is partially to blame, he dives farther to the past where Biff still showed great potential and contradicts himself in the very same dialogue as he states, "[...] such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff – he's not lazy."³²

That conversation is habitually governed by dishonesty in *Long Day's Journey into Night* is defined in O'Neill's carefully drafted stage notes. He pays close attention to the tone and attitude in which his characters speak and gives implicit instruction as to how the individual lines are to be delivered. On the one hand, reassuring remarks are given "hastily" [22] with "heartly confidence," [18] and while "putting on a false heartiness" [36]. On the other hand, the problematic issues are approached only "hesitantly" [19] "with an awkward, uneasy tenderness" [21], while "forcing a smile" [22], "evading [the other's] eyes" or the character "looks away guiltily" altogether, usually muttering some remark "in a merry tone that is a bit forced" [7]. The traumatizing truth is then "mechanically rebuked" [23]. Language thus paradoxically becomes a barrier in communication, almost pointless and futile, instead of bringing the characters closer together, it draws them further apart, highlighting their isolation and solitude. Nevertheless, all the accumulated energy from holding back words that should have been said a long time ago eventually explodes and inevitably results in the most emotional speeches, often also the most hurtful.

³¹ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 38.

³² Miller, *Salesman* 11.

Chapter Three

Influence of Self-Delusion upon the Family

Long Day's Journey into Night and *Death of a Salesman* both follow the Ibsenian tradition of playwriting and as such are predominantly social dramas. The development of Willy Loman's and Mary Tyrone's accounts is restricted to a very limited domestic setting; what the audience sees on stage quite aptly represents the dimensions of both Mary and Willy's world. It is within these boundaries that they nourish their illusions of their better selves and it is also within these boundaries that these illusions are accepted and significantly supported by their immediate families - avoiding the pain of having to deal with the sensitive topics is only a way of succumbing to the strategy of denial generally embraced by each member of the family. The mutual relationships then prove to be vital for the plot of the plays, as the interaction of the characters is the primary catalyst of the crisis. As the delusion of permanency of the family has been kept under the cost of rejecting the reality, the unavoidable clash of views and opinions eventually leads to an irremediable dysfunction of the family, revealing the degree to which the characters are to be regarded as victims and/or the ones to blame.

One of the causes of the sudden crisis in the plays is the lack of space, both physical and figurative, triggering a sense of claustrophobia. The sense of a confined space is indicated in *Death of a Salesman* as soon as in the description of the Loman's house, revealing that "[w]e are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home."¹ Comparably, the final scene of *Long Day's Journey into Night* shrinks to a little pond of light distributed by a single

¹ Miller, *Salesman* 7.

lamp bulb. The effect of such theatrical devices is indeed much intensified once the play is staged, for the audience, compared to the reader, has the advantage of being constantly reminded of the disproportion. Nevertheless, numerous references to the resulting anxiety are mentioned in the dialogue too, for instance in Act I:

Willy: "Why don't you open a window in here, for God's sake? [...] The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks. [...] There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighbourhood."²

Such uneasiness is in both plays compensated for by a relaxing car ride. Tyrone buys Mary a second-hand car, by his standards still a very excessive expense, so that she can enjoy the countryside, hoping it will replace morphine in soothing her nerves. Linda similarly relies on the power of fresh air, such as when she suggests after one of Willy's breakdowns: "And Willy - if it's warm Sunday we'll drive in the country. And we'll open the windshield [...]"³

All the characters also suffer from claustrophobia in the figurative sense, as they suffocate in the constantly tense atmosphere. Their respective houses can no longer embrace the four grown-up individuals. The families are brought together after a considerable period of separation; James is by definition of his profession accustomed to traveling, Mary has recently returned from a sanatorium and Edmund's life has lately been devoted to sea voyages. Parallel to that are Willy's habitual business trips, Biff's homecoming from the West, where he tried to establish himself as a farmer, and even Happy, who now lives alone in his own apartment. What is first celebrated as a cheerful reunion soon transforms into a disaster.

In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the effect of claustrophobia falls the hardest on Mary, who becomes paranoid due to the uncommon amount of attention she receives from

² Miller, *Salesman* 12.

³ Miller, *Salesman* 13.

the other family members. She suddenly finds herself held captive by their poorly disguised suspicions about which she rightly complains, “You really must not watch me all the time, James. I mean, it makes me self-conscious.”⁴ Such domestic environment further provokes Mary’s weary sigh, “I’ve never felt it was my home. [...] Everything was done the cheapest way. Your father never spend the money to make it right”⁵ and she concludes “You forget I know from experience what a home is like. I gave up one to marry you - my father’s home.”⁶

Yet, the constant feeling of non-belonging is not rooted only in purely materialistic reasons. The lack of having a home is frequently drawn upon by each of the Tyrones, especially in times when sympathy and words of comfort would be needed instead of the commonplace pretension of serenity. The necessity of sharing their deepest fears and sorrows is never met with understanding and therefore the family disintegrates further. Miller contemplates this yearning in his essay “The Family in Modern Drama” where he asks:

How may a man make of the outside world a home? How and in what ways must he struggle, what must he strive to change and overcome within himself and outside himself if he is to find the safety, the surrounding of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honor which, evidently, all men have connected in their memories with the idea of family?⁷

These are the questions that the Tyrones might have asked themselves countless times yet never found the answer to. Once Mary falls back into her addiction, the idea of a home becomes evermore utopic, as is reflected by Edmund: “As it is, I will always be a stranger

⁴ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 24.

⁵ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 23.

⁶ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 41.

⁷ Arthur Miller, “The Family in Modern Drama,” *Modern Drama Essays in Criticism*, ed. Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 223.

who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death!”⁸

Unfavorably for everyone involved, the resulting awareness of alienation is subsequently encountered with an escapist approach. After few rather feeble attempts to persuade Mary to give up her drug for she just started and is not yet beyond reach, they resolve to “play our game. Pretend not to notice and she’ll soon go up again.”⁹ Seizing they are unable to change the current conditions, the Tyrones each find their own way of breaking away from it, be it morphine addiction, alcoholism, brothel visits, poetry writing, cynicism or the pretense. So Tyrone, once alone with Mary, “*with dull anger*” dismisses his wife: “I understand that I’ve been a God-damned fool to believe in you!” and he defeatedly “*walks away to pour himself a big drink.*”¹⁰ The unbearable hopelessness also produces numerous sharp accusations that for a moment uncontrollably fill the air before they are again hushed by the character himself or by another. Unable to accept the problem - Mary’s addiction and Edmund’s illness - the characters resolve to find comfort in suggesting blame of the other characters, desperately trying to identify the cause and find a target for their anger and despair. At the same time they are conscious of the hurt feelings caused, and embarrassedly try to take back the just pronounced words.

Instead of a bold attempt to face the fear that has become a part of their everyday life they are then in their self-delusion sidetracked to playing yet another game, that of blame and guilt, the reins of which are tightly held by Mary. Although extremely vulnerable and frail on the outside, she is highly manipulative of the others to the extent that the critic Kenneth Tynan finds her to be a “subtler case” as compared to the rest of the family: “On the surface a pathetic victim, she is at heart an emotional vampire, as

⁸ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 95.

⁹ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 85.

¹⁰ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 39.

dexterous at reopening old wounds as she is at inflicting new ones.”¹¹ Aware of her family’s fears, she exposes them to her psychological torment ruled by emotions. Mary uses her addiction both as her defense and a threatening weapon. Assured that their own consciousness will prevent them from following their suspicions, both due to guilt feelings and fear of confirmation, she victimizes herself: “It makes it so much harder, living in this atmosphere of constant suspicion, knowing everyone is spying on me, and none of you believe in me, or trust me.”¹² Mocking their doubts, “*with a quick, strange, calculating, almost sly glance*” she deviously remarks “It would only serve all of you right if it was true!”¹³ The circle then never stops, as the direct outcome is only more guilt. Ashamed of their distrust towards Mary, they now all feel responsible for leaving her alone, thus allowing her to take an injection.

Even though the guilt in the family may be at best described as collective, each character nourishes antipathy towards its other members that they struggle to overcome. Mary is generally deplored for lack of will in her morphine fight, but is equally pitied as her husband and sons do not feel that they have the right to judge her. Edmund drowns in self-reproach for ever being born, as in Tyrone’s words the drug “would be like a curse [Mary] can’t escape if worry over Edmund - It was in her long sickness after bringing him into the world that she first -”¹⁴, identifying Edmund as the cause, an opinion recognized and recurrently hinted at by the whole family, Mary included. A similarly absurd is Mary’s contempt for Jamie, whom she holds responsible for consciously infecting Eugene and consequently causing his death, even though he was a boy of only 7 years. Further, Tyrone has to face Jamie’s anger for relying on a “cheap quack” instead of investing his money to hire a first class doctor for Edmund’s birth, and is condemned by both his sons for ruining

¹¹ Sheaffer, 515.

¹² O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 20.

¹³ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 25.

¹⁴ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 19.

Mary's life through imposing his unsettled lifestyle upon her, often leaving her alone in the world of theatre that is so hostile to her. The list could go on in length, for the roots of Mary's addiction are numerous and the characters seem to find atonement in their futile accusations.

In contrast to Mary's dependency is Edmund's tuberculosis, an illness which would seem to be of natural cause, free of human influence. Still, Tyrone feels the need to blame Jamie for having a deadly influence upon his younger brother, suggesting he brought him to alcohol and life spent in bars, which inevitably weakened his already poor health and made him vulnerable to the disease. In return, Jamie, in his typical cynical tone reminds his father that it was him who introduced alcohol to his sons as they were exposed to it in their very childhood. Dismissing Tyrone's charge he offendedly again condemns him for his fondness of low-quality doctors and argues that "[i]t might never have happened if you'd sent him to a real doctor when he first got sick." [...] Even in this hick burg he's ["the cheap old quack"] rated third class!¹⁵ Nevertheless, in his drunkenness Jamie eventually reveals to Edmund what he has denied to Tyrone and perhaps even to himself:

Did it on purpose to make a bum of you. Or part of me did. A big part. That part that's been dead so long. That hates life. My putting you wise so you'd learn from my mistakes. Believed that myself at times, but it's a fake. Made my mistakes look good. Made getting drunk romantic. Made whores fascinating vampires instead of poor, stupid, diseased slobs they really are. Made fun of work as sucker's game. Never wanted you succeed and make me look even worse by comparison. Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you. Mama's baby, Papa's pet! (*He stares at EDMUND with increased enmity.*) And it was your being born that started Mama on dope. I know that's not your fault, but all the same, God damn you, I can't help hating your guts - ! [...] But don't get wrong idea, Kid. I love you more than I hate you. [...] The dead part of me hopes you won't get well. Maybe

¹⁵ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 13.

he's even glad the game has got Mama again! He wants company, he doesn't want to be the only corpse around the house.¹⁶

Ironically, it is Edmund who is in the end conscience-stricken, realizing the fatal effect his condition has had on his mother. The respective medical problems of Edmund and Mary are of a reciprocal influence, seeing that Edmund's psyche also breaks down upon recognizing Mary's indisposition, and he suddenly "*looks sick and hopeless*,"¹⁷ finding a new excuse for heavy drinking. His sensitive nature, a heritage from his mother, which already led them both to several suicidal attempts, comes to the surface again.

Once Edmund's final effort to bring his mother to senses through a direct confrontation ultimately fails,

Edmund: Please Mama! I'm trying to help. Because it's bad for you to forget. The right way is to remember. So you'll always be on your guard. You know what's happened before.

Mary: Don't. I can't bear you remind me.¹⁸

the remaining members of the family all ally in the shielding delusion of Mary, for the time being forgetting their own personal animosities and quarrels. Their desperate determination is brought to light when Tyrone urges his son "We have to help her, Jamie, in every way we can!,"¹⁹ and so even he succumbs to his father's strategy. With his own doubts, Jamie too agrees not to distress Mary with Edmund's sickness:

Jamie: All right. Have it your way. I think it's the wrong idea to let Mama go on kidding herself. It will only make the shock worse when she has to face it. Anyway, you can see she's deliberately fooling herself with that summer-cold talk. She knows better.²⁰

Besides, the men all cling to the hopeful prospect that they are mistaken in their suspicions. Such mollifying vision is expressed by Tyrone:

¹⁶ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 102-103.

¹⁷ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 35.

¹⁸ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 23.

¹⁹ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 23.

²⁰ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 13.

Yes, this time you can see how strong and sure of herself she is. She's a different woman entirely from the other times. She has control of her nerves - or she had until Edmund got sick. [...] I wish we could keep the truth from her [...]. Yes, it will be hard for her. But she can do it! She has the will-power now!²¹

This process is hopeful and disastrous at the same time; not only are all the previous times recalled, but this logic can lead to repeating the same pattern over and over ad infinitum, always hoping that "this time" will be different. Not surprisingly then, true to Jamie's words, the price of protecting Mary at the cost of pretense and lying emerges as too high. Their delusions of Mary's condition become as addictive and no less harmful than her morphine and she is easily allowed to slip back to her life-threatening custom. What might have seemed as a positive effect bringing the family together at the outset eventually proves to be a grave mistake.

The same cyclical pattern of guilt, blame, hurt feelings and delusion may be observed in *Death of a Salesman*, only this time it is Willy who rules the 'game.' At the centre of the crisis stands the father-son relationship. Willy himself is deceived by the myth of his father, a successful flute salesman who, as described through Ben's words, "with one gadget had made more in a week than a man like you can make in a lifetime."²² Imbued with this vision he devotes his life to seeking effortless success. Perhaps more importantly though, he has the same deadening effect on his own sons, as he implants the very illusion into their minds, proudly declaring "That's just the way I'm bringing them up, Ben!"²³ The failing of such philosophy strikes him twice. First, in Howard's office, when he calls for his promised New York position. His boss humiliates Willy by having him quietly listening not only to his children reciting the capital cities of the individual States from a record, but also to Howard boasting about the cost of the tape recorder, in his

²¹ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 18.

²² Miller, *Salesman* 38.

²³ Miller, *Salesman* 38.

view a proof of a better social standing, only to later dismiss him, suggesting “to pull [him]self together”²⁴ and eventually giving him notice to leave the job entirely. With false affection he then advises Willy to take “a good long rest,” but also as one of the few characters rationally defines his problem, proclaiming there is no time for “false pride.”²⁵

The second slap comes when Biff rejects Willy as his role model and cuts their connection, bearing testimony to his broken illusions and aspirations. Both Biff and Happy used to have the highest esteem for their father, admiring his profession, eagerly listening to the often fictitious accounts of his business trips and wishing to take part in one of them. In his delusive dreams Willy often recalls Biff in his high school years when he excelled as a football team captain. He almost mythologizes the final game, as he recalls his son being “like a young god. Hercules - or something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him.”²⁶ Illustrating the mutual respect, Biff in this memory pays his father a compliment, addressing him “[t]his Saturday, Pop, this Saturday – just for you, I’m going to break through for a touch down.”²⁷ The pleased Willy then proudly reassures himself that “[a] star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!,”²⁸ unaware of how short-lived his words will be. A sudden twist comes when Biff, failing his senior math exams and at risk of not being allowed to graduate despite three university scholarship offers, immediately decides to reach Willy in Boston. Convinced of his boundless influence, he urges him “You gotta talk to [the teacher] [...] because if he saw the kind of man you are, and you just talked to him in your way, I’m sure he’d come through for me. [...] He’d like you, Pop. You know the way you could talk.”²⁹ It only takes a few laughs of an anonymous

²⁴ Miller, *Salesman* 64.

²⁵ Miller, *Salesman* 64.

²⁶ Miller, *Salesman* 54.

²⁷ Miller, *Salesman* 24.

²⁸ Miller, *Salesman* 54.

²⁹ Miller, *Salesman* 93.

woman to shatter the idealized vision of his father, as he learns about Willy's love affair, and repudiates him as a "phony little fake."³⁰

Comparably to the Tyrones, Biff, despite his contempt for his father, still maintains the illusive understanding of home. Once his attempt to start a new life in the West does not bring the sought-for results, he returns to seek its protection:

Biff: I suddenly get the feeling, my God, Im not gettin' anywhere. What the hell am I doing, playing with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty four years old, I oughta be makin' my future.

That's when I come running home. And now, I get here, and I don't know what to do with myself.³¹

Struggling to admit his own defeat, and unable to forgive his father's infidelity, he refuses to pity or to succumb to his philosophy of conceit again and confronts him frequently. Accusing Willy by "[...] I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody,"³² he also upbraids him for not recognizing authorities and encouraging his mischievous behavior, such as when Willy praised him for initiative when he stole a football. Nonetheless, Biff becomes the only character in the play capable of self-analysis. When Bill Oliver does not as much as spare a word with him, not to speak about borrowing him several thousand dollars, Biff finally realizes "what a ridiculous lie [his] whole life has been,"³³ trying to live up to the image his father preferred.

Biff's epiphany stands in sharp contrast to the stubborn denial of the other Lomans. Happy, never challenged by anything that would gravely harm the idealized picture of Willy, refuses to accept his brother's revelation and clings to his own improved perception of reality. He draws on the same strategy of 'help' as James Tyrone, and instead of confronting Willy with the fact of Biff's unfulfilled potential, Happy implores him to say

³⁰ Miller, *Salesman* 95.

³¹ Miller, *Salesman* 16-17.

³² Miller, *Salesman* 104.

³³ Miller, *Salesman* 82.

“something nice.”³⁴ Nevertheless, his devotion to Willy is incomparably weaker than Biff’s has ever been, as is demonstrated in the restaurant. After inviting Willy, who was just fired and is in the lowest point of his life, for a dinner, he and Biff exchange his company for a female one, Happy abandoning and denying his father, “No, that’s not my father. He’s just a guy.”³⁵ In trying to prevent Biff from confronting Willy Happy then protects himself, for destroying his father’s fantasies would also mean to significantly undermine his own. The cause of Willy’s mental crisis then is in his eyes clearly Biff’s lack of success: “I think the fact that you’re not settled, that you’re still kind of up in the air...”³⁶ As in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, the jealousy-provoked silent tension between the brothers gradually develops into a physical fight, still leaving Happy blindly insisting “We always told the truth!”³⁷

The delusive quality is not only inherited, but keeps spreading through the most ordinary dialogues like an infection, especially among the immediate members of the family. So Linda, in her role of a protective wife, analogously to Mary, holds on to her idealized vision of her husband as “the handsomest man in the world.”³⁸ Disproving of her sons’ disrespectful behavior, she encourages them to “be loving to him. Because he’s only a little boat looking for a harbour.”³⁹ When Biff loses his temper and argues back “[s]top making excuses for him! He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you,” she cannot possibly understand, as neither Biff nor Willy have, in Biff’s case the heart, in Willy’s the courage, to tell her the truth. The most mellow of Miller’s characters, Linda is then a certain sacrifice to Willy, who does not appreciate her in public and criticizes her openly, not until alone showing any respect and attachment.

³⁴ Miller, *Salesman* 83.

³⁵ Miller, *Salesman* 91.

³⁶ Miller, *Salesman* 16.

³⁷ Miller, *Salesman* 104.

³⁸ Miller, *Salesman* 29.

³⁹ Miller, *Salesman* 59.

Meanwhile, the dramatic irony reveals the consuming effect of Willy's guilt. Upon coming home from his last worthless trip, Linda meets him with open arms. Reminded of his mistress, and unable to admit what has happened, Willy only manages to offer the unsuspecting Linda a compliment and slips into yet another lie: "You're the best there is, Linda, you're a pal, you know that? On the road - on the road I want to grab you sometimes and just kiss the life outa you."⁴⁰ In the meantime, the figure of the Woman appears, the sound of her laughter growing in intensity. The self-reproach also comes through repeatedly whenever the penny-pinching Linda starts mending her stockings, Willy's frequent gift to The Woman, resulting in Willy's outburst of anger. Left in her oblivion, Linda remains protective of her husband, who to her remains a man who only "lost his balance" and who is "exhausted."⁴¹ Even at the cost of losing her sons, she declares in one of the most famously quoted speeches of the American theatre,

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.⁴²

Unaware of Willy's adultery, she perceives him as the true victim of the unfair modern world, and he remains misunderstood by her even in the Requiem:

Linda: Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. We're free. We're free... We're free...⁴³

⁴⁰ Miller, *Salesman* 28.

⁴¹ Miller, *Salesman* 44.

⁴² Miller, *Salesman* 44.

⁴³ Miller, *Salesman* 112.

The funeral is a direct evidence of Willy trying to sell his illusion until the bitter end. Sadly, it is in Happy that he finds his buyer. The conflicting views of Biff and Happy are again confronted and Happy uncritically defends his father's decisions:

Biff: [T]he man didn't know who he was.

Happy [infuriated]: Don't say that!⁴⁴

Miller defines tragedy as "the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly."⁴⁵ The final argument confirms Happy's dependency on delusion, the manipulating of facts and creating false impressions that he demonstrates throughout the play. Biff can only observe with a "hopeless glance" that Happy is on his best way to follow his father's life-story and another tragedy may happen:

Happy: "All right, boy. I'm gonna show you an everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have - to come out number-one man. He fought it out there, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Miller, *Salesman* 110-111.

⁴⁵ Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man." *The New York Times*, 27 Feb. 1949. 2 Jan. 2010.
< <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html> >.

⁴⁶ Miller, *Salesman* 111.

Chapter Four

Self-delusion, the Concept of American Dream and the Influence of Society

Conversations with Arthur Miller reveal his perception of a man as a “social animal,” insisting on his metaphor that “the fish is in the water and the water is in the fish,”¹ or in other words that “society is inside man and man is inside society.”² Through this claim Miller imparts immense power to society that is around the individual and from which he can never fully separate himself. The individual’s values and identity are then unavoidably determined and shaped by the given society, its expectations and conventions. *Death of a Salesman* raises the question of the degree of moral responsibility of the general public toward the individual, provoking a debate whether the play is a demonstration of the vast influence a society has on an individual, capable of compelling him to commit suicide, or not. Miller himself does not try to conceal how highly critical of the American society he is as he for instance reflects the situation of his period claiming “I knew that the Depression was only incidentally a matter of money, rather, it was a moral catastrophe, a violent revelation of the hypocrisies behind the facade of American society.”³ It is in *Salesman* that he questions “the whole American money ethos”⁴ and examines the deterioration of the American dream.

For Willy Loman, the United States are “the greatest country in the world,”⁵ where “[t]he greatest things can happen!”⁶ He fully embraces the American dream, seeing its fulfillment in Ben’s glorious and strikingly easily gained wealth in Africa. Ben, to Willy

¹ Roudané, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* 154.

² Robert A. Martin (ed.), “Introduction,” *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* (Harmondsworth, 1978) xix.

³ Miller, *Timebends* 115.

⁴ Robert W. Corrigan, “Introduction: The Achievement of Arthur Miller,” *Arthur Miller, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 16.

⁵ Miller, *Salesman* 11.

⁶ Miller, *Salesman* 37.

“success incarnate,”⁷ is a caricature of the myth of rising from rags to riches. Willy regrets the missed opportunity to join his brother on his journey to Alaska and invents a simplified idol of Ben, who halfway realizes he travels in the wrong direction and untroubled continues only to eventually find a diamond mine in Africa. For Willy, the principles of the dream are very straightforward, “[w]hat’s the mystery? The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, at the age of twenty-one, and he’s rich!”⁸ Seduced by the idea of effortless life triumph, he deludes himself into believing that “a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked!”⁹ Willy is accordingly blinded by first impressions and popular esteem as prerequisite criteria for possible success and as such is the perfect target for the booming advertisement. The superficiality of his values is revealed by the amount of attention he pays to trademarks. Linda only needs to mention that their broken fridge had the biggest “ads of any of them” to sooth Willy’s anger into automatically agreeing “I know, it’s a fine machine,”¹⁰ and, likewise, a punching bag is approved of merely on the basis of carrying a signature of the famous boxer Gene Tunney.

Once the dream emerges as a false one, the formerly secure world shows its hostile face. As much as the city shrinks on Willy’s little house, symbolically forcing him to cut down two large elms in his garden, as much the society closes on Willy. His whole career he nourished a romantic vision of the prestigious travelling salesman living in an old-fashioned world governed by principles of ethics, esteem and reliability. Nostalgically he fantasized of the old days when “there was personality in it [...], [t]here was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude [...].”¹¹ Regardless the verity of such picture, in Willy’s case it remains only a poor alibi, for if he did possess the qualities of his mythical salesman, he

⁷ Miller, *Salesman* 32.

⁸ Miller, *Salesman* 32.

⁹ Miller, *Salesman* 68.

¹⁰ Miller, *Salesman* 27.

¹¹ Miller, *Salesman* 63.

would have secured a better position in the company when he was in his most prosperous years. The pivotal disillusionment occurs in Howard's office once he is announced the loss of his job. Bewildered, Willy protests against the ruthless society: "There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening!"¹² Once he regains his composure, he passionately strives for recognition: "[t]here were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see - I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away - a man is not a piece of fruit!"¹³

Uncomprehending of the principles of modern market, Willy is a misplaced character in his role. Even when definitively rejected from the jungle of the business world, he again reaches for the protective veil of delusion, facing the external world with the undefeated mask, "[b]usiness is bad, it's murderous. But not for me, of course."¹⁴ Still, Miller defends Willy as a victim of the corrupt morals of the society,

[...] [S]ome critics do not see that Willy Loman has broken a law without whose protection life is insupportable if not incomprehensible to him and to many others; it is the law which says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live. Unlike the law against incest, the law of success is not administered by statute or church, but it is very nearly as powerful in its grip upon men. The confusion increases because, while it is a law, it is by no means a wholly agreeable one even as it is slavishly obeyed, for to fail is no longer to belong to society, in his estimate.¹⁵

Despite his powerful rhetorics, claiming the existence of such 'law' remains a blunt overstatement, as if pronounced by Willy himself. What does exist though is the illusion of

¹² Miller, *Salesman* 12.

¹³ Miller, *Salesman* 64.

¹⁴ Miller, *Salesman* 40.

¹⁵ Arthur Miller, "Death of a Salesman: A Modern Tragedy?," *Modern Theories of Drama: A Selection of Writings on Drama and Theatre 1850-1990*, ed. George W. Brandt (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2003) 111.

the law, binding for those who wish to be ruled by it, and that is the case of Willy who becomes eventually consumed by the idea that “you end up worth more dead than alive.”¹⁶

One possible approach to Willy’s suicide is to regard his death as a yet another form of escapism of a character who is swallowed by his own self-delusion, unable to face his immediate family and friends with the embarrassing truths and too ashamed to live even in the illusion he now knows no longer holds together. Miller offers another view, significantly more favorable for Willy, as he claims:

Had Willy been unaware of his separation from values that endure he would have died contentedly while polishing his car, probably on a Sunday afternoon with the ball game coming over the radio. But he was agonized by his awareness of being in a false position, so constantly haunted by the hollowness of all he had placed his faith in, so aware, in short, that he must somehow be filled in his spirit or fly apart, that he staked his very life on the ultimate assertion. That he had not the intellectual fluency to verbalize his situation is not the same thing as saying that he lacked awareness, even an overly intensified consciousness that the life he had made was without form and inner meaning.¹⁷

After the funeral, it is surprisingly Charlie who defends Willy to Biff, sympathetically maintaining that “a Salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.”¹⁸ Minor characters of the play rise in significance when it comes to the question of the American Dream. Despite Willy’s illusion of his superior standing, “[b]ecause Charlie is not-liked, he’s liked, but he’s not well-liked,”¹⁹ Bernard and his father prove that through honesty and effort an individual really can attain his goal. Bernard has advanced to the prestigious position of an attorney defending a case at the Supreme Court and Charley finds himself in a condition capable of supporting Willy financially, also offering him a job. As such they are both at once admired and loathed by the unsuccessful

¹⁶ Miller, *Salesman* 77.

¹⁷ Miller, “Death of a Salesman: A Modern Tragedy?” 110.

¹⁸ Miller, *Salesman* 111.

¹⁹ Miller, *Salesman* 23.

salesman. Consequently, Willy cholericly rejects Charley's helping hand; acceptance would be a statement of his failure to someone he has always felt to be his lifelong competition. Yet, he secretly goes to this only friend to borrow fifty dollars each week, promising to repay it to the last penny. Bernard and Charlie unconsciously shed poor light on Willy, for they succeed where he fails, demonstrating that even in the impersonal material world a balance can be found between the demands of the society and the goals of the individual.

This principle is finally recognized by Biff, who instead of becoming another tragic character figuratively triumphs over his own illusions and the corrupt society and manages to liberate himself from its destructive influence. Coming back to his 'fish and water' metaphor, Miller explains that

To trace the lines of each [individual] as they wind around together is one of my preoccupations. In order to arrive at some leverage by the man of his own fate so that he can find a way to swim or he can find a way to control that part of his psyche which is already predetermined so to speak by his society. It happens in *Death of a Salesman* when Biff opts out. He sees that his father is driven not merely by psychological forces but by what he believes socially, by what he strives for.²⁰

Bigsby aptly points out that it is in the refusing of the sheer determinism, in the sense of proportion he imparts in the mutual influence of the society and the individual, that he surpasses Ibsen and Shaw's concern with "social causation."²¹

If the problem in *Death of a Salesman* lies in the too strong influence of society, in *Long Day's Journey into Night* it is, to the contrary, in the almost absolute lack of it. The fog that has been gradually thickening outside of the summer house by the time of the denouement materializes into a "white curtain drawn down outside the windows,"²² highlighting the isolation of the domestic drama of the Tyrones. Its symbolism ranges in

²⁰ Roudané, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* 154.

²¹ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* 75.

²² O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 56.

the scope of several meanings. Firstly, like the sound of flute in *Salesman*, it testifies to the growing intensity of delusion, which, in connection to Mary is only scarcely separable from the haze of her morphine addiction. The metaphor, though, is not only an artificial instrument for the purpose of the author and his audience. Instead, the characters themselves eagerly seize its figurative meaning, for it serves their purpose of denial. This is clearly exposed in Act II, once all the characters grow conscious of Mary's failure to resist the drug, yet still remain intentionally dedicated to avoiding explicit language,

Mary: You're not much of a weather prophet, dear. See how hazy it's getting. I can hardly see the other shore.

Tyrone (*trying to speak naturally*): Yes, I spoke too soon. We're in for another night of fog, I'm afraid.²³

In another sense, it encompasses the segregation of Mary as an individual from the society. Loosing her touch with reality, Mary ever more becomes a prisoner of her house, regardless of her pretentious attempts to disguise her condition as a matter of her personal choice. Once repudiated by her associates because of a socially unacceptable scandal involving James Tyrone's former mistress, and later being in a deplorable disposition to befriend new acquaintances due to her addiction, she herself too well knows the price of not satisfying the expectations of society. When ultimately detached from the outside world and even her family, it is in a conversation with their servant that she plainly declares,

Mary (*dreamily*): It wasn't the fog I minded, Cathleen. I really love fog. [...] It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you anymore.²⁴

Nevertheless, as much as Mary welcomes the dimness of the fog, she is equally worried about and afraid of the foghorn, for "[i]t won't let you alone. It keeps reminding you, and

²³ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 47.

²⁴ O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 57

warning you, and calling you back.” Its noise, that of “a mournful whale in labour,”²⁵ functions as a sharp reminder of her loneliness, forcing her out from the anonymity of the protective darkness to awakening into an agonizingly contrasting reality.

Society plays only a small role in the current time of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, but its importance lies in the past. Tyrone emerges as a former immigrant whose extremely distressing childhood experience imparted him with a strong concern for money. As opposed to Willy and the rest of his own family, Tyrone, to the deep disappointment of Mary, represents a character with but a little interest in the common meaning of his surrounding community. His frugal behavior provokes both serious charges of “stinginess” at the cost of Mary and Edmund’s declining health as well as far less severe incidents, such as Mary’s impatience with his fondness for shabby clothes worn in public. It is of far more serious consequence that Tyrone’s fear of poverty drove him into abandoning his dream of becoming a leading actor, for which he believes he has had a great opportunity. All his initial effort was instead wasted in what seemed an endless repetition of a “great box office success”²⁶ of a questionable quality, nevertheless securing the sought-for financial independency.

In one of the play’s most moving speeches Tyrone comes to the conclusion that he may have sacrificed too much in his blind pursue of the materialistic American dream,

That God-damned play I bought for a song and made such a great success in - a great money success - it ruined me with its promise of an easy fortune. I didn’t want to do anything else, and by the time I woke up to the fact I’d become a slave to the damned thing and try other plays, it was too late. [...] What the hell was it I wanted to buy, I wonder, that was worth - Well, no matter. It’s a late day for regrets.²⁷

²⁵ O’Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 56.

²⁶ O’Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 92.

²⁷ O’Neill, *Long Day's Journey* 91.

Who was once “wild with ambition” to strive for perfection in the end settled for “[t]hirty-five to forty thousand dollars net profit a season like snapping your fingers.”²⁸ Even though portrayed as a character replete with negative traits at the outset of the play, he now transforms into the possibly most sympathetic one. Tyrone’s condition may be argued to be the most desperate; his sacrifice appears to be fruitless, for not only did he never benefit from his savings and instead tried to multiply his resources further through investing in property, but the financial security proved to be insufficient for creating a functioning home for his family. Disillusioned, he too now finds himself disconnected from the world outside of their pain-filled summer house, unable to escape the evidence of their fragmented familial life in crisis.

²⁸ O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey* 92.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Long Day's Journey into Night and *Death of a Salesman* both recreate the universal conflict between illusion and reality. What is essentially a private experience of an individual is exposed to and shared by not only the other characters of the plays, but indeed also by their audience. The themes of human alienation, self-delusion and the subsequent unavoidable disillusionment provoke very urgent questions, such as what is the role of the society in the modern world and to what degree is it responsible over the individual's life. Concepts like materialism, individualism, the idea of the American Dream or the notion of the American family are brought to attention and the American national values are to be re-considered. Bigsby maintains that "Miller is, beyond everything else, a moralist,"¹ and the same has been countless times said about O'Neill. The tone of their plays is nevertheless not that of severe authoritative social critics. Instead of a black and white vision of the world where a strict line between 'right' and 'wrong' could be drawn both the authors offer a full picture of the dilemmas that are dealt with in their complex form. Miller reflects upon the importance and fundamental role of theatre, both ancient and modern, as he understands it: "[t]he job is to ask questions – it always was – and to ask them as inexorably as I can. And to face the absence of precise answers with a certain humility."²

Despite the fact that both the plays are testimonies of deluded characters absorbed by their own self-invented images of their better selves leading to tragic consequences, the audience is not discouraged from sympathetic feelings. Nevertheless, there is one aspect in which the plays differ significantly and that is the idea of hope. Louis Broussard provides a

¹ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* 82.

² *Discovering Literature: Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. Ed. Hans Paul Guth and Gabriele L. Rico. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993) 843.

grim summary of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, observing that the play only reveals that “until death comes there can be no solace except through alcohol and narcotics, not for James Tyrone or for any of the others as they wait for the night that will end the long day’s journey.”³ The hopeless paralysis of O’Neill’s haunting play, rooted in its autobiographical nature and governed by the author’s wretched family life, is surpassed in *Death of a Salesman* in the Requiem.

Even though Miller was repeatedly prompted to exclude the Requiem from the play or to at least consider various alternations about the text either for the sake of greater dramatic effect or for propelling the action, he unyielding refused, defending the final scene,

They said the audience were never going to stay there because Willy Loman is dead; there’s nothing more to say. Of course they did want to stay there [for] what is the point of a funeral? You want to think over the life of the departed and it’s in there, really, that [the central point] is nailed down.⁴

Without the Requiem, the audience would not witness Biff’s epiphany. It is in the final few pages that the binary opposition of Willy’s sons that has been persistently suggested throughout the whole play is fully exposed, and Happy’s stubbornly defensive reaction to his father’s suicide is contrasted to that of his disillusioned brother. Biff’s decision to reject all delusion and regard his life with the sober eye partially counterbalances Willy’s failing by giving it meaning, thus allowing for a far more positive interpretation of the play.

In words of Martin Gottfried, “[i]n O’Neill’s play the truth is destructive and hope a delusion. In Miller’s play sanity depends on facing the truth and there is always hope, for

³ Louis Broussard, *American Drama - Contemporary Allegory from Eugene O’Neill to Tennessee Williams* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962) 35.

⁴ As cited in *Arthur Miller: His Life and Work* 138.

the future is humankind's to make; indeed, making a better future is the obligation of being alive."⁵ Through forcing his characters to face the harsh reality in *Death of a Salesman* Miller prompts also his audience to do the same. The decline of the American dream and the subsequently connected corruption of the moral values mirror the situation in America of the play's first performance in 1949. Miller's answer to the search for values in the chaotic world is his belief that even a tragedy needs be optimistic,⁶ an idea materialized in Biff's acceptance of his real self in the Requiem.

⁵ Martin Gottfried, *Arthur Miller: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003) 118.

⁶ Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man." *The New York Times*, 27 Feb. 1949. 2 Jan. 2010.
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Abstrakt

Arthur Miller a Eugene Gladstone O'Neill oba patří k předním americkým dramatikům, kteří si vydobyli věhlas a slávu nejen ve Spojených státech, ale i na mezinárodním poli. Zatímco O'Neill představuje klíčovou postavu amerického divadla na přelomu devatenáctého a dvacátého století, Miller exceluje mezi generací autorů, která bezprostředně následovala. Tato práce je komparativní studií dvou jejich snad nejznámějších her a zásadních textů amerického divadla. O'Neillova „Cesta dlouhým dnem do noci“ i Millerova „Smrt obchodního cestujícího“ zobrazují téma rozpadající se americké rodiny a neschopnost jejích členů této tragické skutečnosti čelit.

Je to právě síla sebeklamu, co vyvstává jako důvod vzniku této krize a je to opět jeho síla, co onu krizi neustále prohlubuje. Hlavní představitelé obou děl, Mary Tyronová a Willy Loman, ustavičně unikají palčivé skutečnosti svých reálných životů do světa iluzí, lží a vzpomínek. I když se v obou případech děj her odehrává v rozmezí jednoho jediného dne, životní příběhy jednotlivých postav vyplynou na povrch právě díky těmto výjevům z minulosti a konfrontaci skutečného se smyšleným. Zatímco O'Neill nechává své postavy užívat omamné látky jako morfium a alkohol coby prostředek úniku a uklidnění, Miller zachází ve své technice mnohem dál. „Smrt obchodního cestujícího“ nese znatelné prvky expresionismu, a tak divák jako by byl vyzýván nahlédnout do Willyho podvědomí a vnímat svět jeho očima. Willyho mysl jen těžce rozlišuje minulost od přítomnosti a sen od reality, a takový je i prožitek divákův, neboť Miller mistrně ovládá divadelní praktiky nutně spojené s takovým zobrazením. Jevištní čas a prostor je záměrně manipulován a míra Willyho pohlcení jeho vlastním chápáním jeho bezprostředního světa je tak nepokrytě odhalena.

Willy a Mary, bezesporu hlavní postavy obou dramát, svým chováním a svévolným přizpůsobováním si skutečnosti neodvratně ovlivňují svou rodinu, i když se

nesporně jedná o vliv vzájemný. Dalším faktorem působícím na tyto postavy jako na jedince je vliv společnosti, jejích hodnot a kritérií, a s ním spojený fenomén amerického snu. Díky těmto faktorům vznikají četné varianty skutečnosti závislé na vnímání té které postavy na straně jedné – a reálný svět na straně druhé. Skutečnosti však uniknout nelze, a tak místo vysněné alternativy hrdinové obou her nevyhnutelně směřují ke konfrontaci a s ní spojenému tragickému osudu. „Cesta dlouhým dnem do noci“ zůstává bezvýchodnou tragédií, naznačující jen malou naději pro lepší budoucnost pro všechny zúčastněné, ale příběh Willyho Lomana nabízí i jisté východisko. Přestože se Willy skutečně dobrovolně vzdá svého života v bláhové vidině peněz spojené s jeho životní pojistkou, jeho starší syn Biff eventuelně odmítne otcovu životní filozofii založenou na klamání skutečnosti, a symbolicky tak alespoň částečně vyváží Willyho selhání, jež již není zcela nesmyslným.

Pro své téma konfliktu reality s iluzí a jednoduché ibsenovské prostředí rodinné tragédie se díky těmto hrám oba autoři stávají reprezentanty zřetelné směru amerického rodinného dramatu. Tituly založené na podobné bázi zahrnují „Tramvaj do stanice Touha“ „Skleněný zvěřinec“ Tennessee Williamse, nebo „Kdopak by se Kafky bál“ Edwarda Albeeho. V současné tvorbě nachází O'Neill přímého následovníka v Tracy Lettsovi, jehož „Srpen v zemi Indiánů“ otevřeně čerpá jak z tématu, tak formy „Cesty dlouhým dnem do noci.“