

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Work Alienation of Characters in Miller's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman***

**A Thesis Submitted to**  
**The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University**  
**in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of**  
**Master of Arts in English**

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**December 2007**

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**APPROVAL LETTER**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my respected teachers and friends. First of all, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Beerendra Pandey who guided me in every step with constructive techniques and machines of research and valuable suggestions that catered me the necessary energy and confidence to make this thesis possible.

I am highly indebted to Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Head, Central Department of English for his kind approval of the proposal that materialized in the form of this thesis today.

I would love to remember my friends, Madhav Acharya, Saroj Poudel, Bhim Shrestha, Binod Dahal, Mahesh Poudel, Naryan Kharel and my lovely brothers Deepak Raj Tiwari and Gangadhar Tiwari and sister Jasmine for their regular help during the preparation of this thesis.

I am also thankful to my lovely friend Geeta Sharma who always stood by me and encouraged me to move ahead.

Last but not the least, I extend my sincere gratitude from the bottom of my heart to my father Shree Chakradhar Tiwari, mother Chandra Kala Tiwari and aunt Bhagwati Gaire who always loved, inspired, favoured and supported me in the time of need.

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December 2007

### Abstract

Miller's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* are plays which have such characters who are alienated from a sense of community or relatedness to others and to themselves. They are subject to meaninglessness, powerlessness, normlessness – distrust, widespread deviance and unrestrained individual competition in the society. Keller, protagonist of *All My Sons* tries to succeed in the competitive corporate world. He achieves the materialistic height but is doomed. He also suffers from a sense of guilt, for whatever he has done; he is estranged from himself.

Similarly, Lowman, protagonist in *Death of a Salesman* too is the victim of this capitalistic economic system which evaluates human beings as machines and it ignores emotion, sentiment and relations. As Lowman becomes old, he is not salable. He cannot continue to serve in Howard's firm. Further, Biff and Happy are also the victims of this deceptive system of economy. They are never satisfied with their work. They only hanker after work.

Almost all the characters are deceived by the system in these two plays. However, characters still aspire for success and satisfaction. But sense of meaninglessness, powerlessness, dissatisfaction and alienation overtake their life.

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## Introduction

Arthur Miller was one of the leading American playwrights of the twentieth century. He was born in October 1915 in New York City. He was the son of a women's clothing manufacturer who was ruined during the economic collapse of the 1930s. Living through young adulthood during the Great Depression, Miller was shaped by the poverty that surrounded him. The Depression demonstrated to the playwright the fragility and vulnerability of human existence in the modern era. After graduating from high school, Miller worked in a warehouse so that he could earn enough money to attend the University of Michigan, where he began to write plays.

Miller's first play to make it to Broadway, *The Man Who Had All in the Luck* (1944), was a dismal failure, closing after only four performances. This early setback almost discouraged Miller from writing at all, but, luckily for American theater, he gave himself one more try. Three years later, *All My Sons* won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award as the best play of 1947, launching Miller into theatrical stardom. *All My Sons*, a drama about a manufacturer of faulty war materials, was strongly influenced by the naturalist drama of Henrik Ibsen. Along with *Death of a Salesman* (his most enduring success), *All My Sons* and *The Man Who Had All the Luck* form a thematic trilogy of plays about love triangles involving fathers and sons. The drama of the family is at the core of all of Miller's major plays, but nowhere is it more prominent than in the realism of *All My Sons* and the impressionism of *Death of a Salesman*.

It was by writing his masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), that Miller secured his reputation as one of the nation's foremost playwrights. *Death of a Salesman* mixes the tradition of social realism that informs most of Miller's work with a more experimental structure that includes fluid leaps in time as the protagonist,

Willy Loman, drifts into memories of his sons as teenagers. Loman represents an American archetype, a victim of his own delusions of grandeur and obsession with success, which haunt him with a sense of failure.

Miller won a Tony Award for *Death of a Salesman* as well as a Pulitzer Prize. The play has been frequently revived in film, television, and stage versions that have included actors such as Dustin Hoffman, George C. Scott and, most recently, Brian Dennehy in the part of Willy Loman.

Miller followed *Death of a Salesman* with his most politically significant work. *The Crucible* (1953), a tale of the Salem witch trials that contains obvious analogies to the McCarthy anti-communist hearings in 1950s America. Three years later, in 1956, Miller found himself persecuted by the very force that he was warning against when he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Miller refused to name people he allegedly saw at a Communist writers' meeting a decade before, and he was convicted of contempt. He sought further action and later won an appeal.

Also in 1956, Miller married actress Marilyn Monroe. The two divorced in 1961, the year of her death. That year Monroe appeared in her last film, *The Misfits*, which is based on an original screenplay by Miller. After divorcing Monroe, Miller wed Ingeborg Morath, to whom he remained married until his death in 2005. The pair had a son and a daughter.

Miller also wrote the plays *A Memory of Two Mondays* and the short *A view from the Bridge*, which were both staged in 1955. His other works include *After the Fall* (1964), a thinly veiled account of his marriage to Monroe, as well as *The Price* (1967), *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1977), and *The American Clock* (1980). His most

recent works include the plays *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* (1991), *The Last Yankee* (1993), and *Broken Glass* (1993), which won the Olivier Award for best play.

Although Miller did not write frequently for film, he did pen an adaptation for the 1996 film, version of *The Crucible* starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Winona Ryder, which garnered him an Academy Award nomination. Miller's daughter Rebecca married Day-Lewis in 1996.

In the meantime, Tennessee Williams had met great success with *The Glass Menagerie* in 1945, a very personal and psychological play with poetic overtones. Miller's plays, on the other hand, are public works, with straightforward (though not unpoetic) language, and which address issues of the individual's public persona and how people act. But he learned from Williams's success and set out to write a more commercial play, a drama that would "land" with audiences, in the language of the Broadway business. He also chose to write a play in a realistic style, a problem play in the manner of Henrik Ibsen, evoking a style he had not used in many years. The work of Ibsen influenced *All My Sons* structurally as well, for Ibsen had liberally applied the principle of Greek theater that stresses the influence of the past on the present.

When the play was finished after five years of work, Miller asked his agent to send it to the director Elia Kazan. A former member of the Communist Party, Kazan had directed Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, and he would later direct the genre-redefining *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman* (and would win Academy Awards for *Gentleman's Agreement* and *On the Waterfront*). Kazan's career was tarnished in memory, however, and his relationship with Miller was permanently severed when he chose to name names for the House Un-American Activities Commission during the Red Scare, But at the time, as a successful director with a talent for eliciting monumental performances from his actors, and as someone



who shared Miller's leftist politics, Kazan was the perfect choice for *All My Sons*. The cast included such rising stars as Ed Begley (as Keller, later of *Inherit the Wind*), Arthur Kennedy (as Chris, later creator of the roles of Biff Loman and John Proctor), and Karl Malden (as George, later of *Streetcar*, *Tea and Sympathy*, and *On The Waterfront*).

Luckily for Miller and for the American stage, *All My Sons* was a success. Opening at the Coronet Theatre on January 29, 1947, the first night's notices were mixed with the crucial exception of the "New York Times", whose Brooks Atkinson admired Miller as a genuine new talent. As usual, the *Times* review swayed all the others, and *All My Sons* ran for 328 performances (quite respectable at that time) and won the New York Drama Critics' Circle award for best play of 1947, beating out Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (which at the time had been coolly received and would only become a landmark of American drama in retrospect).

Miller's success gave him financial stability, confidence, and the confirmation of Miller's identity as a playwright. This success was necessary for him to take a risk with his next work, *Death of a Salesman*.

Regarded by critics as Arthur Miller's first successful play, *All My Sons* presents a narrow slice of American middle-class life. The play's context is limited: A manufacturer sells defective parts to the military and then covers up the crime by forcing his partner to take the blame. The ensuing situation, however, is where the scope of the play enlarges, culminating in the moment when the American Everyman must take a moral stand.

The drama's spatial confines underscore the theme of the play. The Kellers' backyard is enclosed by hedges and arbors and offers only a glimpse into the

adjoining neighbors' yards. The focus is on the individual family and its moral limitations. While the story's premise is specific, the everyday, down-home setting of a backyard in a middle-class neighborhood in a nameless American town offers the audience a common ground of experience and relatedness.

A major theme of *All My Sons* is that of responsibility. Before the play's action begins, Joe Keller had ducked moral responsibility by allowing cracked cylinder heads to be shipped out of his factory. He covers up and blames his partner, but he is able to justify his actions as a consequence of his obligation to his family. At the end of the play, he accepts responsibility for his crime only after his dead son Larry's letter has indicated him.

Kate Keller, too bears responsibility for the cover-up, but she participated in it primarily as a way to keep Larry alive in her mind. If she had acknowledged Joe's guilt, she would have acknowledged that Larry had actually crashed. Kate represents the intuitive and the irrational. Her responsibility to her family defies and defines moral obligation.

The son Chris is the idealist who must come to grips with his parents' human weaknesses. It could be said that in idolizing his father he set up a barrier to the truth and to exploring the notion of his father's guilt, a possibility that must have occurred to him. Chris feels a larger responsibility. Where Joe had his family in mind, Chris sees something bigger than family. It is Chris's responsibility to make his father see that larger arena. In doing so, he brings about his father's ultimate acceptance of responsibility and his father's decision to take his own life in expiation for his crime.

*All My Sons* also addresses the material aspect of the American Dream and its effects on the soul. When Joe Keller says that he acted as he did for Chris and his

family, he represents the tension between the need to succeed materially and the responsibility of behaving ethically. Because the American economy flourished as a result of World War II, a sense of guilt could be overpowering. Chris lives this tension, and by the end of the play Keller, too, is forced to confront it. The sentiments of the play are rooted in a prewar era, but the emotional power defines the angst of postwar American society.

*Death of a Salesman* (1949) was a hit from its first performances and has remained at the center of modern American drama ever since. It has been successful in China, where there were no salesmen, and in Europe, where many salesmen dominate certain industries. Everywhere this play has touched the hearts and minds of its audiences. Its success is a phenomenon of American drama.

The play was first performed in an experimental environment. Miller had originally conceived of a model of a man's head as the stage setting. He has said: "The first image that occurred to me which was to result in *Death of a Salesman* was of an enormous face 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 (. . .)." This technique was not used, but when Miller worked with the director and producer of the first production, he helped develop a setting that became a model for the "American style" in drama. The multilevel set permitted the play to shift from Willy Loman and his wife, Linda, having a conversation in their kitchen to their son's bedroom on the second level of the house. The set permitted portions of the stage to be reserved for Willy's visions of his brother, Ben, and for scenes out-side the house such as Willy's interlude with the woman in Boston.

In a way, the setup of the stage respected Miller's original plan, but instead of portraying a cross-section of Willy's head, it presented a metaphor for a cross-section

of his life. The audience was not looking in on just a living room, as in the nineteenth-century Ibsenist approach, but on an entire house and an entire life.

Using a cross-section of a house as a metaphor was an especially important device in this play because of the play's allusions to Greek tragedy. The great Greek tragedies usually portray the destruction of a house- such as the house of Atreus – in which “house” stands for a whole family, not a building. When Shakespeare's Hamlet dies, for example, his entire line dies with him. The death in *Death of a Salesman* implies the destruction of a family holding certain beliefs that have been wrong from the start.

The life of the salesman has given Willy a sense of dignity and worth, and he imagines that the modern world has corrupted that sense by robbing salesmen of the value of their personality. He thinks that the modern world has failed him, but he is wrong. His original belief- that what counts is not what you know but whom you know and how well you are liked – lies at the heart of his failure. When the play opens, he already has failed at the traveling salesmans job because he can no longer drive to his assigned territory. He cannot sell what he needs to sell.

Willy has inculcated his beliefs in his sons, Happy and Biff, and both are as ineffectual as their father. Willy doted on Biff and encouraged him to become a high school football star at the expense of his studies. But when Biff can not pass an important course, and his plans to make up the work are subverted by his disillusionment in his father, his dreams of a college football career vanish. He can not change and recover from this defeat. Happy, like his father, builds castles in the air and assumes somehow that he will be successful, though he has nothing to back himself up with. He wants the glory – and he spends time in fanciful imaginings, as Willy does – but he can not do the basic work that makes it possible to achieve glory.

Ironically, it is the “anemic” Bernard – who studies hard, stresses personal honesty and diligence, and never brags – who is successful.

Linda supports Willy’s illusions, allowing him to be a fraud by sharing – or pretending to believe – in his dream. Willy has permitted himself to feel that integrity, honesty, and fidelity are not as important as being well liked.

The play ends with Willy still unable to face the deceptions he has perpetuated. He commits suicide, believing that his sons will be able to follow in his footsteps and succeed where he did not; he thinks that his insurance money will save the house and the family. What he does not realize is that his sons are no more capable than he is. They have been corrupted by his thinking, his values, his beliefs. And they can not solve the problems that overwhelmed him.

*Death of a Salesman* has been given a privileged position in American drama because it is a modern tragedy. Aristotle felt that only characters of noble birth could be tragic heroes, but Miller confounds this theory, as Eugene O’Neill did, by showing the human integrity in even the most humble characters. Miller’s Willy Loman is not a peasant, nor is he noble. In fact, Miller took a frightening risk in producing a figure that we find hard to like. Willy wants to be well liked, but as an audience we find it difficult to like a person who whines, complains, and accepts petty immorality as a normal way of life. Despite his character, we are awed by his fate.

Once Chinese commentator said, after the Chinese production, that China is filled with such dreamers as Willy. Certainly America has been filled with them. Willy stands as an aspect of our culture, commercial and otherwise, that is at the center of our reflection of ourselves. Perhaps we react so strongly to Willy because we are afraid that we might easily become a Willy Loman if we are not vigilant about

our moral views, our psychological well-being, and the limits of our commitment to success. Willy Loman has mesmerized audiences in America in many different economic circumstances: prosperity, recession, rapid growth, and cautious development. No matter what those circumstances, we have looked at the play as if looking in a mirror. What we have seen has always involved us, although it has not always made us pleased with ourselves.

## **II. Alienation**

### **II.I A Brief Introduction of Alienation**

Alienation is a popular term to analyze the contemporary life. But the idea of alienation remains an ambiguous concept with elusive meaning. Normally it refers to a feeling of separateness, of being alone and apart from others. It has however many variants and definitions. The most common and popular variants and definition are the following:

#### **Powerlessness**

The feeling that one's destiny is not in one's control but that is determined by external agents like fate, luck, institutional arrangement, etc.

#### **Meaninglessness**

It refers to the lack of comprehensibility in any domain of action or lack of consistent meaning in any action like world affairs, interpersonal relations etc. Likewise s/he generalizes sense of purposelessness in life. One finds no reasonable purpose in life.

#### **Normlessness**

It refers to the lack of shared social values and norms to follow by the members of society so that people can maintain their behaviors and characters. Society lacks common commitment. It results with widespread deviance, distrust, and unrestrained individual competition in the society.

#### **Cultural Estrangement**

It is the sense of removal from established values in society. It is expressed for example, in intellectual or student rebellions against conventional institutions.

### **Social Isolation**

It is a sense of loneliness or exclusion in social relations. Such sense of social isolation may have in members of minority group in society.

### **Self-estrangement**

It is the sense of an individual who feels out of touch with himself/herself. The above modern variations and definitions of alienation-powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation and self-estrangement-have been developed from the old roots. But recognition of the concept in western thoughts has been similarly elusive. Although entries on alienation did not appear in major reference books of social sciences until 1935, the concept had existed implicitly or explicitly in different classical works.

The first expression of alienation can be found in western thought in the Old Testament in the concept of idolatry. It does not mean that man worship many gods instead of only One. Idolatry is always the worship of something into which man has put his own creative power and to which he now submits, instead of experiencing himself/herself in creative act. He/she has become estranged from his own life forces: Erich Fromm, the American psychoanalyst, supports it in his work *Marx's Concept of Man*. He writes:

. . . the essence of what the prophets call "idolatry is not that the idols are the work of man's own hands-they are things, and man bows down and worship, things; worships what which he has created himself. In doing so, he transforms himself into a thing. He transfers to the things of his creation the attributes of his own life, instead of experiencing



himself as the creating person; he is in touch with himself only by the worship of the idol. (44)

Thus, when a person cannot experience himself in his labour, he becomes weak since what he believed more is the power of an idol which is his own creation after all.

Fromm writes, “The more man transfers his own power to the idols, the poorer he himself becomes . . .” (45). As the result he becomes alien to his own creation.

Idols can be every man-made object. They can be a god like figure, the state, the temple, person’s possessions, art, language ideas etc. For example, language is one of the most precious human achievements but it cannot express our feeling. But one has to surrender to it in expressing oneself. The same holds true for all other achievement of human beings. Likewise, the idea of alienation can be found in the work of Plotinus, the neo-platonic philosopher and in the theology of Saint Augustine and Martin Luther. They believed that it is expressed in the struggle to dissociate or alienate-oneself from one’s own imperfection by identifying with transcendental perfect Being.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the German philosopher, coined the concept of alienation. For him, alienation was an ontological fact. It was rooted in nature of man’s existence in the world. There was an inherent dissociation between man as subject and man as object. Man as a creative subject seeks to be and to realize himself, and man as object is influenced and manipulated by others. In *The Philosophy of History*, he wrote that “what mind really strives for is realization of its notion. But in doing so it hides that goal from its own vision and is proved and well satisfied in this alienation from its own essence” (47). Therefore Hegel’s concept of alienation is based on distinction between existence and essence. Man's existence is alienated from his/her essence. To put it differently, man is not that what he

potentially is. Man can realize his/her essence while retuning towards God. The God within himself. But man is now satisfied with the object outside. Thus, for Hegel dissociation of man as subject and object or his/her existence and essence is on alienation.

This view of Hegel is rooted in German idealism and metaphysical perspective became the basis for a radical critique of society and its institutions. Some philosophers of the time influenced and received Hegel's ideas and gave them a socialistic interpretation. Among them the German philosophers Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx, in particular, transformed the concept of alienation into a secular and materialistic idea. Now, the alienation was not abstract idea and metaphysical perspective. It was a product of specific forms of social organizations.

For Ludwig Feuerbach, the source of alienation lay in the institution of religion. The myths of divine power were merely ways in which man projected his own humanity outside himself, locating his own capacities and sensibilities elsewhere.

It was Marx who then completed the secularization process. He even corrected Feuerbach who believed that the source of alienation lay in religious essence. Marx criticized it in his book *Thesis on Feuerbach*. He writes that, "Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relation (122).

Thus for Marx, man's essence came out of social relationship. It was not abstraction as Hegel and Feuerbach believed. Man's essence lies in social relations, so alienation was the result of certain of social relations in which man could not

realize his own human essence in his labour. He claimed that it was man's nature to realize in the creative work. But especially under capitalism man couldn't realize himself/herself in the work, since the work for man was compelled rather than spontaneous and creative. "And had little control over the work process. In this capitalist mode of relations, the product of labor was expropriated by capitalists; it went against the worker, and the worker became himself/herself commodity in the labour market. So, the man didn't realize his/her essence. It is alienation of man.

This Marxist concept of alienation is continuous in the thought of most of the contemporary Marxist critics. Among them George Lukacs, the Hungarian critic is well known for reinvigorating and applying the idea to contemporary institutions. He sees division of humanity in the bourgeois society.

The Marxian tradition however represents only one stream of thought concerning alienation. The second stream developed observing the dislocation brought about by industrialization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The socialists, Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tonnies, Max Weber and George Simmel were in this school. They were collectively known under 'mass society'. Those socialists lamented the passing of traditional society and the consequent loss of the sense of community. Modern man was isolated as he had never been before. He/she was anonymous and impersonal in an urbanizing mass. He was uprooted from old values, yet without faith in new rational and bureaucratic order. So the modern man is alienated whereas both Marx and Mass society theorists secularized alienation by focusing on the mundane world of work and social organizations.

The third stream was influenced from existential emphasis of Hegel. Thus, Soren Kierkegaard stressed the importance of subjective knowledge over objective knowledge, since it was difficult to attain an adequate sense of self in a world

dominated by purposelessness and despair. This difficulty to attain the sense of self became the central problem of alienation. Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and other existentialist, gave continuity to the same theme.

The given definitions and variants in the beginning of this work are drawn from the above history. Those definitions and variants only provide a rough guideline because the contemporary writers often develop radically different conceptions within any one of the categories. But this study is based on Marxist concept of alienation. So this study discusses and focuses on Marxist's concept of alienation rather than other categories.

## **II.II Marx and Alienation**

Towards the middle of nineteenth century Karl Marx (1818-1883) in association with Frederic Engels (1820-1895) invented the radical humanistic social, economical and political theories, which spread rapidly throughout the world heralding the dawn of new era.

The same theories which are known as Marxism today have been capable of influencing the whole world by furnishing strong ideological basis for political movement as well as for analyzing the contemporary society. Marx was the most advanced economist, sociologist and supreme ideologist who formulated the most practical, revolutionary and scientific theories in the time of tremendous socio-economic changes and domination of ideal philosophy of Hegel. Those socio-economic changes were resulted from the new scientific discoveries, triumph of the industrial revolution establishment of large-scale production industries, and capitalistic method of production brought many kinds of experiences in the people. The people experienced fragmentation of man through the division of labour,

mechanization, exploitation, miseries etc. The longing for unity with one's self, with one's kind, with nature from which man had become alienated, was common to all those who entertained humanist feelings and ideas.

Among those humanists, Karl Marx was an extraordinary and influential in the whole history. Marxist theory of alienation had lasting effect in this field. It was the fact that Marxist thought underwent many variations but what it had served, as his starting point remained intact: the possibility of the total man. Marxist philosophy begins with man and ended in the emancipation of man from alienation. Marx wrote in the Critique of Hegel's State Law:

Hegel proceeds from the state and makes man the state subjected; democracy proceeds from man and makes the state objectified. Man doesn't exist for law's sake, law exists for man's sake; it is human existence, whereas (for) the others. Man is legal existence. That is fundamental difference of democracy. (qtd. in Ernst 17)

Here, Marx puts the man prior to the state, law and so on whereas in Hegel's philosophical thought state is prior to man. Marx believes that every social product are for man not vise versa.

Similarly, Marx's concept of socialism is a condition in which man can develop his freedom and inherent potentialities. Socialism is the condition which permits the actualization of man's essence by overcoming his/her alienation. Marx describes socialism in his important work in the third volume of Capital:

. . . with his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only

consists in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regularity their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature, But it nonetheless remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom . . . (799-800)

Socialism, the realm of freedom beyond narrow sphere of material production as the true realm of man in which man can flourish his inherent potentialities. Besides that Marx fully believed in human capacities potentialities and activities through which he can liberate himself from degradation. So he realizes human capacities to put a man superior to other beings.

Thus, Marx was a great humanist who devoted all his writings and life for human beings. His object was a total man, in other words, he wanted emancipation of human beings from alienation. But, this very basic, Marxist humanistic concept has been overshadowed for many years. It has many reasons. Marx was engaged to analysis of economic terms; like surplus value, capital, profit etc. in his latter work. Besides, his work, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* translated and published in English only in 1932 A.D., which mainly described many humanistic concepts like, alienation. However, this humanistic concept centers in every writings of Marx, this study is mainly based on his early writings; *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *German Ideology*.

For Marx, man is a communal being. Man needs the community in order to develop into a free individual. Individual who behaves as if s/he was independent is in

actual fact conditioned not only by the whole social development but also-by language, tradition, upbringing, etc., his or her personality is conditioned and determined by quite definite social relationship. As Marx claims:

It is not only the material of my activity-such as language itself which the thinker uses-which is given to me as a social product. My own existence is a social activity. For this reason, what I myself produce I produce of society, and with the consciousness of acting as a social being. (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts 13)

Here, the point is the social nature of individual. His/her existence lies in the social interaction between individual and society. It determines the person's personality. And Marx further clarifies:

Though man is a unique individual and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual communal being he is equally the whole, the ideal whole, the subjective-existence of society as thought and experience, he exist in reality as the representation and the real mind of social existence, and as the sum of human manifestations of life. (Manuscripts 130)

Man is an individual and represents the society at the same time man is also the totality as proclaimed by Marx. It is humanity in man's nature. Therefore, the more a man is able to take possession of the outside world, through his/her sense, spirit, and intelligence, the greater is his/her chances of becoming a whole man.

Thus, there must be interaction between man and society for the real existence. Labour is a medium through which man interacts with the society. Therefore, the man is the result of his own labour. It is an act of self-creating. Besides, man makes his/her

activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. S/he has a conscious life activity. This conscious life activity distinguishes man from animals. As Marx presents:

Of course, animals also produce (. . .) But they only produces what is strictly necessary for themselves of their young. They produce only in a single direction, while man produces universally. They produce only under the compulsion of direct physical need, while man produces in freedom from such need. Animals produce only themselves, while man produces the whole of nature. The products of animal production belong directly to their physical bodies, while man is free in face of his product. (Manuscripts 102)

Now it becomes clear that the essence of man is conscious and creative labour. Man proves himself as species being in his work. So man produces himself in the object which he has consciously, actively and creatively produced, i.e. “objectification of man’s species-life” (Manuscripts 102).

In principle, labour is conceived as a whole, as man’s species nature, the collective creative of mankind. But when labour is destructive, not creative, undertaken under coercion, not as free play of force, not flowering man’s physical and intellectual potential, when labour is divided, then labour is denial of its own principle; it becomes alienated labour, therefore lost the principle of man; man loses his/her unity. Furthermore, division of labour “not only destroyed unity: by introducing inequality among the various occupations it created and reinforced social inequality. Labour was not, and still is not divided up into equal parts, but is divided for the profit of the stronger and the disadvantage of the weaker” writes Ernest Fischer. (Marx in His Own Words 37)



As the result, division of labour leads to the creation of private property. It splits society into haves and have nots, property owners and propertyless workers, bourgeoisies and proletariats and so on.

In short, Marx claims, “Private property is therefore the product, the necessary result of alienated labour” (Manuscripts 105-106). This alienated labour especially intensified in capitalism, has many effects, consequences and relations. This system of labour mainly displays the given relations:

### **Man’s relation with the product of his/her labour**

The object produced by labour becomes alien to his producer. It even stands opposed to him. It becomes more powerful than the worker. It exists independently outside the worker. So an objectification of labour into object is lost. Marx supports: “. . . the object produced by labour, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a powerful independent of the producer” (Manuscripts 95).

The product of labour is the labour which has been embodied in an object and turned into a physical thing; this product is an objectification of labor. When objectification appears as loss of that object, the worker is deprived of the most essential things not only of life but also of work.

The more the worker works, the more powerful becomes the object which he creates. In opposition, the worker becomes poorer in his inner life and the less he belongs to himself/herself because the worker puts his life in the object but object no longer belongs to himself and herself. Marx expresses this relation in this way:

Labour certainly produces marvels for the rich but produces privation for the workers. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It produces beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labour by

machinery, but it casts some of the workers lack into a barbarous in of work and turns the others into machines. It produces intelligence, but also stupidity and cretinism of the workers. (Manuscripts 97)

Thus, the life, which he/she has given to the object, sets itself against him/her as an alien and hostile force. It dominates him/her. This relationship of the worker to the product is at the same time relationship to the sensuous external world, and to natural objects, since, s/he has to interact with them for producing objects).

### **Relationship of labour to the act of production**

Alienation appears not only in the product, but it also appears in the process of production, within productive activity itself. The product is indeed the resume of activity of production. Consequently, if the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be activity of alienation. So the work is external to the worker; it is not a part of his work; it is not a part of his nature. The work is not spontaneous, voluntary, and creative but that is imposed and forced labour. Then the worker denies himself in the work. S/he has feeling of misery rather than well being. Besides the work doesn't satisfy the need of the worker, but it is only a means for satisfying other needs. Marx clarifies it:

External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification Finally, the external character of work for the worker is shown by the fact that it is not his own work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person. (Manuscripts 99)

Then, the worker feels himself freely active only in his animal functions, eating, drinking, procreating, dwelling and in personal adornment-while in his human functions he is reduced to the status of an animal.

To conclude, this is the relationship of the worker to his activity, as something alien to him, activity as suffering or passivity, strength as powerlessness, creation as emasculation the personal physical and mental energy of the worker, his personal life an activity which is directed against himself, independent of him and no belonging to him. In a word, this is self-alienation.

### **Relation to Man's Species-being**

First, species life for man has physical basis that is like an animal living from inorganic nature. And since man is more universal than an animal, the range of inorganic nature from which he lives is more universal. Plants, animals, minerals, air, light etc. Constitute a part of human consciousness from theoretical aspect. They are man's spiritual organic nature. In practice, nature is a direct means of life and object and instrument of his activity. So, it becomes organic body of man.

But alienated labour alienates nature from man so; it makes "Species life into a means of individual life" as Marx states (Manuscripts 101).

Secondly, Man has a conscious life activity. It distinguishes man from animals. Animal doesn't distinguish the activity from itself. But man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. This productive life, however, is his species life. Marx remarks that "In this type of life activity resides the whole character of a species, its species characters; and free conscious activity is the species character of human being" (Manuscripts 101).

And through the activity man produce object. The object of labour is, therefore, the objectification of man's species life. But alienated labour reverses the life activity. It appears to man only as a means for the satisfaction of need, the need to maintain his physical existence. In this way, alienated labour takes his species life.

As a whole, alienated labour turns the species life of man into alien being, and into a means for his individual existence. It alienates from man his own body, external nature, his mental life and his human life.

Furthermore, man's alienation from his species life alienates man from other men. Marx remarks that, "What is true of man's relationship to his work, to the product of his work and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men (. . .) (Manuscripts 103).

In general, alienated from species life means that each man is alienated from others men and each of others also alienated from human life. This alienation of species life is realized and expressed in their interactions. Marx clarifies that, ". . . everyman regards other men according to the standards and relationship, in which he finds himself . . ." (Manuscripts 103).

In short, there is the alienated relationship among men. It gradually loses their ability to develop their finer qualities, which belong to them as member of human species.

### **To whom Alienated Laobour Belongs ?**

The product of labour does not belong to the worker. It confronts him as an alien power. Then, it must belong to other man than the worker. Similarly, when the activity of labour is a torment to the worker, it must be source of enjoyment and

pleasure to another man. Marx argues that, “As he alienates his own activity, so he bestows upon the stranger an activity which is not his own” (Manuscripts 105).

Now it is needless to say that, the alienated labour of man creates relation with the non-producer who doesn't work and outside the process to this labour. Consequently, non-producer is hostile, alien, independent powerful etc. against the producer since his product is so. And this non-producer is the capitalist in the contemporary world who grasps the alienated labour. Therefore, private property is the result of alienated labour, through which, however, the labour becomes alienated.

To sum up, the worker has constructed the necessary conditions for reproducing his/her alienation. The product that the worker has made and lost in alienated labour reappears as someone else's private property.

Alienation is the root cause of human being's sufferings. It dehumanizes man. It dismisses man as an individual, makes physically weak, mentally confused and mystified, isolated and virtually powerless. To overcome it, revolution for socialism is necessary.

### **Emancipation of Human Beings**

Alienation of labour ultimately dehumanizes man. It cripples man physically and mentally. It splits unity of man. Man loses his/her species being, product, productive activity, self etc.

To emancipate man from alienated labour, there must be creative labour. One must have freedom to work as his/her wishes and willing. As Marx declares in *The Communist Manifesto* the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all” (33). Such free development of individual is possible in the socialism. Since, it is in Marx's view.

. . . the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification, and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. (Manuscripts 127).

Marx's ideas on alienation, which had been ignored for a long time, have become quite fashionable in recent years. Frequently they are even overemphasized at the expense of other concepts of Marx, in particular, his economic concepts. This trend is sometimes due to the attempt to make Marx respectable and to win new supporters for him, especially in intellectual circles which show some interest in socialism but are still reluctant to accept the Marxian analysis of our society. These people are often told; do not worry about the later Marx, who wrote the Critique of Political Economy and Capital, and who was so tactless as to develop the theory of exploitation. Concentrate on the early Marx, whose Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, for instance, were concerned mainly with human values and the sublime things in human life, and who developed the concept of alienation.

I personally believe it is a mistake to separate Marx's theory of alienation from his theory of exploitation. Alienation and exploitation condition each other; they are linked to each other. It is the very essence of Marx's insight not to isolate man's alienation from economic conditions and trends – as Hegel and the followers of philosophical idealism had done – but to trace alienation to the basic structure and development of capitalist economy and society.

Thus, deceptive capitalistic system of economy leads the workers to the suicidal state. This theoretical tool is therefore applied to explore the plight of characters in Miller's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*.

### III. Work Alienation of Characters

#### Alienation of Joe Keller

Joe Keller's work alienation is perhaps the most important theme of Miller's *All My Sons*. The central subject of my reading, is actually a sub theme in Miller's overall treatment of the alienation of contemporary man from a sense of community or relatedness to others. Although this play illustrates well the concept of work alienation, he has spilled it out for us. A deep-rooted, disgusting sense of work alienation is spilled out through Keller in his dialogue:

KELLER. [. . .] what the hell did I work for? (Act I, 215)

The meaninglessness of his work and the absurdity of its consequences are reflected in this sentence. Probably, this might be the plight of contemporary worker.

Joe Keller, manufacturer, and central figure in *All My Sons*, has a moral perspective no larger than the fence that surrounds his factory or the grass growing evenly around his own house. Joe Keller is not a selfish, disagreeable or greedy industrialist; he is, really, an ignorant, good-natured and kindly fool, whose love for his wife and family is genuine and unselfish. Yet, in a very thorough going sense, he is deeply antisocial, alienated both from his work and from the larger society around him. Keller's alienation, however, stems not from personal inadequacy or from a unique flaw in his character, but from the larger influence upon him of a society built round the values of rugged individualism and a total absence of any sense of social or community responsibility. The social milieu which created a Joe Keller is the same milieu, Miller might tell us, that created the fallout shelter fad some fifteen years later, where men stocked their family shelters with guns in order to shoot a hapless neighbor who might desperately, though presumptuously, attempt to enter; or a milieu

which creates a climate where persons on a city street indifferently observe a fellow citizen being assaulted or murdered.

Keller's especial sin in *All My Sons* involves the fact that during the just-completed Second World War, he was a manufacturer of engines for fighter aircraft. Keller's factory was responsible for turning out more than one hundred defective cylinder heads which led to the tragic deaths of more than twenty American pilots who flew the P 40s with the faulty engines. We discover, through the action of the play, that although Keller denies any complicity or responsibility for shipping out the damaged parts, and has succeeded in having the entire episode blamed on his partner who lands in jail, that Keller was, in fact, a knowing party to the scandal. The play is, in fact, built around the growing awareness of Joe Keller's guilt, on the part of Keller himself and of his family. This situation of guilt is created by the economic system.

The hatred towards the present capitalistic system of economy and the glorifying of the past systems is reflected in the following dialogue:

KELLER. We used to shoot a man who acted like a dog, but honour was real these [. . .] but here? This is the land of the great big dogs, you do not love a man here, you eat him. That's the principle; the only one we live by it just happened to kill a few people this time, that's all. The world's that way [. . .] (Act I, 217)

Keller here valorizes the past through human beings were shot like a dog, saying that it was done to the deserving and was justifiable. Certain dignity and honour used to be maintained, he says. On the contrary, at present, contemporary time when this play was written, one lives at the cost of others lives. Man is not loved, he is exploited and with this exploitation other manges for his survival. Here we do not



have the sense of eliminating this system but are glad if we exploit and kill people less in number this time. This is what the way of the world is, says Joe Keller.

Though he was a successful businessman, a corporate – he was not satisfied with his work. He has a sense of guilt for whatever he has done to earn for his family. Even if he is a respected man in the society and also has a respectable profession but he doesn't experience the greatness of his profession and his status. Because of the system through which he earns and has his status he has become the victim of sense of guilt:

KELLER. Listen, you do like I did and you'll be all right. The day I come home, I got out of my car;- but not in front of the house...on the corner.

You should've been here, Annie, and you too, Chris; you'd –a seen something. Everybody knew I was getting out that day; the porches were loaded. Picture it now; none of them believed I was innocent. The story was, I pulled a fast one getting myself exonerated. So I get out of my car, and I walk down the street, But very slow. And with smile. The beast! I was the beast; the guy who sold cracked cylinder heads to the Army Air Force; the guy who made twenty-one P-40's crash in Australia. Kid, walkin' down the street that day I was guilty as hell. Except I wasn't, and there was a court paper in my pocket to prove I wasn't, and I walked [. . .] past [. . .] the porches. Result? Fourteen months later I had one of the best shops in the state again, a respected man again, bigger than ever. (Act I, 230)

Now he has the one of the best shops in his state, he has honour and dignity, he is now bigger than ever but he feels he is alienated. He is not only frustrated but also has sense of hatred towards his profession.

Keller further says that if one does things opposing this system, it is not going to flourish. The business only progresses under this trend otherwise it is not going to be operated. Keller dictates to his son Chris this way:

KELLER. You are a boy, what could I do ! I'm in business, a man is in business; you don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good, they close you up, they tear up your contracts, what the hell's to them? You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in fine minutes [. . .] (Act II, 273)

The working system doesn't understand or evaluate the sentiments or emotions. There is no attachment with the work. Even the workers have worked for a very long period they are not attached to their work. They can be fired at any moment. Who ever goes against this system will not be able to operate the system. Hence, one has to give continuity to this frustrating and alienating system.

In a confrontation between the two men, when Joe's guilt and complicity is finally apparent, Chris and his father argue with each other, but they do not connect. For Joe's sense of alienation from anything beyond his home prevents him from comprehending Chris' feelings of a broader responsibility. Joe struggles with the arguments of a trapped man: that he had no other choice but to ship out the cracked cylinder heads, that his forty-year-old business would have been ruined in a day had he interfered, that he intended to notify the authorities in due time to prevent the use

of the faulty parts, that he did it all only for his family, for his wife and to save the business for Chris.

Keller never feels that he works for himself. Work never gives him satisfaction. He undergoes a pang of alienation, for his work has nothing to do with his lives, but he works for his family generally and his son, Chris specifically:

KELLER [. . .] Chris [. . .]

Chris,

I did it for you,

it was a chance and

I took it for you [. . .] (Act II, 274)

He would have got satisfaction how he worked for him but he did it for his son. Thus he feels estranged from his work and expresses discontentment. Had he worked in terms of a wider responsibility; that there is something larger than the family, a human commitment that goes further. Nevertheless, the system is responsible for this plight.

Chris is yet not involved in income generating activities, hence, his thoughts are not corrupted by the deceptive system, so he speaks of idealism:

CHRIS. What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world. (Act II, 275).

This idealism lasts, according to Keller, till one doesn't involve in this economic system:

KELLER. [. . .] you don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good.

(Act II, 273)

The play reaches its climax when it is discovered that Keller was himself responsible for his elder son's death: that Larry killed himself when he discovered his father's incredible responsibility in the defective engine scandal. Chris, trying to explain the significance of it all to his mother, exclaims:

CHRIS. Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people  
 outside any you're responsible to it, and unless you know that, you  
 threw away your son because that's why he died. (Act II, 275)

Keller's alienation, once again, his sense of estrangement from every one outside his immediate family was traceable in part to his relationship to his work, which encouraged an unrestrained and boundless individualism, a social indifference and a measuring of value in terms of personal profit and loss, rather than in terms of any wider or more general social values.

Joe Keller's trouble, in a word, is not that he cannot tell right from wrong but that his cast of mind cannot admit that he, personally, has any viable connection with his world, his universe, or his society. He is not a partner in society, but an incorporated member, so to speak, and you cannot sue personally the officers of a corporation. I hasten to make clear here that I am not merely speaking of a literal corporation but the concept of a man's becoming a function of production or distribution to the point where his personality becomes divorced from the actions it peoples.

What makes this play a social (or a sociologically relevant) play is not the fact that a man sold defective parts to the armed forces during wartime, that incident, in itself, could form the plot of the most common detective or crime story. Rather, what

is important and socio-logically pertinent with respect to the theme of social alienation, estrangement, unrelatedness or “loneliness” in Miller’s plays is that the crime is seen as having roots in a certain relationship of the individual to society, and to a certain indoctrination he embodies, which, if dominant, can mean a jungle existence for all of us no matter how high our buildings soar.

Miller wants to show that Keller’s crimes derive from the amoral natural of competition capitalist. This man has acted according to the laws of the competitive economic environment that he is familiar with and is largely unaware, during the major part of the play, of how his conscience has been corrupted. His guilt, however, like that of David Frierber, will not let him alone and emerges, half consciously, in various ways. For example, he reveals it by telling Deever’s daughter Ann that he is ready to give her father a job once he gets out of prison. Ann is engaged to Joe’s son Larry. Keller is also worried to learn that George, Ann’s brother, is coming to visit and fears, with good reason, that his crimes will be exposed by this man. It is also suggested that Kate, Keller’s wife, knows the truth about her husband and is ready to collaborate with him in a cover-up. She is an accessory to his misdeeds, and their other son, Chris, eventually accuses both of his parents of moral failure.

In the last part of the play, Keller’s secret is finally brought to light, and he has to confess to Chris that he was the one who told Deever to ship out the faulty engine parts. In keeping with Miller’s effort to present Keller as a victim of capitalist conditions, he regards himself as one who was forced to do what he did. He knows too well that there is no mercy in the market-place and that ruin means disaster, pure and simple. Because he has been compelled to fight all his life for a place in the sun, economically speaking, he has lost his moral bearings and can think only of himself. Capitalism, the free play of economic forces, is responsible for Keller’s extreme

individualism and abdication of all responsibility for anyone but himself and his family.

Against these callous attitudes Miller marshals his attack, showing us that murder and betrayal of the worst sort can result from them. Using Chris Keller as his mouthpiece, but without presenting him as a Marxist, he voices his criticism of the existing capitalist order and hints at a socialist alternative, a world based on collective ownership and the brotherhood of man. Chris had found such a community when at the front, among soldiers whose extreme situation had taught them the true values of love and fellowship. The revelation of his father's crimes sharpens Chris's insight into the amorality of the capitalist 'rat race', as he calls it. Shocked and furious, he castigates his father for the criminal narrowness of his perceptions:

CHRIS. Is that as far as you can see, the business? What is that, the world – the business? What the hell do you mean, you did it for me ? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? What the hell are you?' (Act II, 275)

This rejection of *laissez-faire* individualism and its fixation on economic achievement to the exclusion of all else is the same as that expressed by Ben Simon in *No Villain*. Keller, however, true to his outlook and experience, insists that his committing them for the family has got to excuse his offences and that he had to act as he did:

KELLER. [. . .] Who worked for nothin' in that war? When they work for notin', I'll work for nothin'. Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? It's dollars and cents,

nickels and dimes, what's clean? Half the Goddam country s gotta go if I go?' (Act III, 285)

But when he learns that Larry has committed suicide out of grief and shame over his father's conduct, Keller has to face the fact that his actions have had terrible consequences. He can no longer disregard his guilt and is so overwhelmed by remorse that he shoots himself. Both the death of the innocent fliers and the suicide of Keller and Larry are portrayed as direct results of a capitalist economy merciless enough to drive a man like Keller to his abominable acts.

Miller's emphasis on a socialist, collectivist morality also emerges in Chris's final chastisement of a parental generation corrupted by mindless economic egoism:

CHRIS. You can be better! Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it. [. . .] (Act III, 288)

Keller's death is also a step in this direction, showing his recognition of guilt and thus of a wider responsibility. Notions of a socialist future are also suggested in what Kate Keller says at the end. She admonishes Chris to put the past behind him and start to live life to the full; for him a new society may come into being where the values of life and love will assume their rightful place.

Keller's extreme estrangement and discontent is noticed when he accepts his misdeed and expresses his sense of guilt. No where he is satisfied and does have contentment. His guilty expression is seen in this dialogue:

KELLER. Then what is this if it isn't telling me? Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I

guess they were [. . .] (Act III, 287)

Those who were killed are all like his sons. His work compels him to take their lives. This system of work has made him totally alienated and dislocated from his family, society and country. Above all, work has detached him from himself.

### **Work Alienation of Willy Loman**

*Death of a Salesman* is perhaps even more effective in its anti-capitalist thrust than *All My Sons*, and it, too, is rooted in the playwright's Miller's early, agonized reactions to the depression. Marxism had taught him that this disaster was one of the vagaries of capitalism. Things which cannot be redeemed into cash have no worth and they are ignored in this system. This sense is expressed by Charley in his conversation with Willy:

CHARLEY. Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean any thing? You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman [. . .] (Act II, 795)

Willy being frustrated as Howard ignored him tells 'Charley about what he, Willy, has done for Howard's family and his business. Despite this, he is fired from his job because he cannot further sell his labour.

As in the other plays, victimization by the free play of economic forces is the main theme of *Death of a Salesman*. The people in the house are threatened and overwhelmed by the tall buildings, symbols and the crushing power of those who win out in a capitalist struggle that has no room for failures and losers. Restlessness of Willy as a loser is portrayed extensively in this play. Willy being failed to accomplish the



height of materialistic pole is extremely frustrated and alienated of his work. Still his restless heart staggers to seek financial stability and peace of mind:

WILLY. And they'll (his sons) get married and come for a weekend.

I'd build a little guest house. Cause I got so many fine tools, all I'd need would be a little lumber and some peace of mind. (Act II, 788)

Peace of mind becomes his ultimate resort and even after completely discontent with his work and its returns, he hankers after it.

Willy Loman, the social figure, sums up the theme referred to as alienation, for this is a man who from selling things has passed to selling himself, and has become, in effect, a commodity which like other commodities will at a certain point be economically discarded. As Willy becomes unable to sell himself, Howard discarded him:

HOWARD [. . .] but there is no spot here for you. If I had a spot I'd slam you right in, but I just don't have a single solitary spot. (Act II, 791)

The persuasive atmosphere of the play is one of the false consciousness- the conditioned attitudes in which Willy trains his sons – being broken into by real consciousness, in actual life and relationships.

Willy Lowman, the ageing salesman, is worn out to the point of breakdown by his many years on the road. But he remains a firm believer in capitalist values and has transferred his hope of success to his son Biff. Willy is a dreamer, and the play contrasts his dreams with the harsh realities of failure and mediocrity that he tries to shut out of his mind. Corrupted, or brain washed by the system, Willy is blind to its destructiveness and is obsessed by his plans for Biff. Though, Willy is completely

stripped off by the work and its system yet his hope to achieve success compels him to defend for himself with Howard: which can be seen in the following dialogue:

WILLY [. . .] there were promises made (between Willy and Howard's father) across this desk! [. . .] 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 ! (Act II, 791)

Willy's disagreement to this system of exploiting one till he has energy and completely discarding out of one becomes older and weaker. Despite his refute, he ultimately becomes the victim of this system. He is alienated in such a way by his work and finally leads to self destruction.

In Willy Loman, Marx's concept of work alienation is extended. For Marx, the modern wage worker's labor was alienated in the sense that his work was repetitive, routine, fragmented and dull, that the worker was merely "an appendage to the machine", that work was for someone else and under someone else's jurisdiction, not one's own; that in his work the worker was separated or alienated from ownership of the factory, the tools with which he works, the product of his labor and so on. But at least the modern wage worker retained spiritual autonomy from the system, retained the means of hating it and withholding commitment to it. But in Willy Loman, as prototype of the alienated white collar worker, both body and soul are thrown into the industrial cauldron, and both are consumed. Willy, a poor victim of a single minded allegiance to false and hollow values of material success, allows what is most uniquely his, his personality, to be molded, transformed and vulgarized in accordance with what he believes others expect of him. Worse yet, the self-hatred eating at his soul because of his failure to achieve these goals leads him to destroy his precious and

once warm relationship with his sons, and finally leads to his own self-destruction. Long before Willy's physical suicide, his self-hatred has brought him to spiritual suicide, and he is only temporarily sustained in his growing madness by his transparent self-deception and dreams of successes past and false illusions of successes future. Willy Loman is, in short, the tragic personification of the other directed, success seeking new middle-class man of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century corporate America. The incredible impact of this play on American audiences, its reception and acclaim are apt testimony to the fact that Miller captured the emerging social character of the American new middle class.

One of the persistently recurring themes in Miller's plays is the struggle to realize primary group of *Gemeinschaft* values in a world increasingly dominated by the impersonality of secondary or *Gesellschaft* values, with the ensuing isolation and privatization of life, and the alienation of the individual from his fellows. This clash between "family relations" and "social relations," as Miller calls them, probably finds its most powerful dramatic illustration in *Death of a Salesman* when Willy confronts his young boss, Howard.

Willy, sixty-three years of age, is exhausted by his decades of service to the company. He is gradually going mad because of this exhaustion and his self-evident failure to realize the values of material success which he holds so dear, made infinitely worse by the knowledge that his sons, upon whom he has transferred his desperate quest for success, are also both "failures." Willy goes to Howard now to say that he is too ill to travel any more, that Howard must find a place for him in the office. The conversation between Willy and Howard represents the struggle of *Gemeinschaft* with *Gesellschaft* values and the ultimate triumph of the latter. This is not party-line writing, as a few critics once asserted. Howard is not portrayed as the

greedy, selfish, heartless capitalist, but merely an understandable victim of the ideology of “business is business,” an ideology which has clearly estranged him from any deeper human values. Howard bears Willy no malice, but simply has no place for him in the office; it’s simply a matter of dollars and cents: “Kid, I can’t take blood from a stone, I [. . .].” (Act II, 789). Not only doesn’t Howard have a job for Willy in the office, but, later in the scene, is forced to tell Willy that he has been reluctantly putting off telling him that he can no longer represent the firm at all.

Willy’s appeal – so strange and incongruous for a hard-headed salesman – is an appeal to “family relations,” to “particularism” in the framework of sociologist Talcott Parsons.

WILLY. God knows, Howard, I never asked a favor of any man. But I was with the firm when your father used to carry you in here in his arms.

HOWARD. I know that, Willy, but [. . .]

WILLY. Your father came to me the day you were born and asked me what I thought of the name of Howard, may he rest in peace. (Act II, 790)

But all of this is simply irrelevant now. Howard is a stranger and Willy is alone, and the only pertinent point is that Willy is unable to sell any more, Later, as the argument heightens:

WILLY. I’m talking about your father! There 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! (Act II, 791)

And so Willy hammers away helplessly at the invincible doctrine of economic efficiency.

Later, Willy tells Charley that he's been fired "That snotnose. Imagine that? I named him. I named him Howard." (Act II, 795). But Charley only chides him for his naivete:

CHARLEY. Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that. (Act II, 795)

The above scene in which Willy is fired by his young boss Howard is a perfect illustration of the logic of the capitalist economic mechanism. Willy has been with the firm since before Howard was born, but the almost familial relationship between these two still counts for nothing. Mortally afraid of ruin, like Keller, Willy appeals to Howard's conscience, reminding him how long and faithfully he has worked for the company, but to no avail. Howard is not evil, however; he is even able to sympathize with Willy's plight, but this in no way interferes with his decision to fire an ageing employee who can no longer ring up any sales. Howard, Like Ben or Charley, a businessman who is Willy's friend and neighbor, abides by the law of profitability first that is supreme in the world of capitalist business. He is impersonal about it, again like Charley or Ben, regarding it as a law of nature.

Wanting to help Willy, Charley offers him a job, but the former refuses to take it, feeling that it would be a kind of charity and would violate the image he has of himself as a self-reliant, honorable individual who does not depend on others. Rugged individualism is the ideology of the laissez-faire capitalism that he believes in so deeply. But the facts are that Willy's failure is alienating and destroying him and that Biff's similar fate makes his father reject him. The all-important success ideal prevents Willy from perceiving Biff as a person and an individual. Capitalist values distort and destroy what should have been a rewarding human relationship between father and son. The horrifying consequences of a blind adherence to these capitalistic values emerge in Willy's decision leads him to alienation to commit suicide at last.

Willy's labour becomes destructive, not creative, undertaken under coercion, not as a free play of force, not flowering his physical and intellectual potential, his labour is divided so it is denial of its own principle and hence it becomes alienated labour. Willy ultimately is brought to dislocation by the nineteenth and early twentieth century's industrialization or the business system. As stressed by Soren Kierkegaard the importance of subjective knowledge over objective knowledge, since it has difficult to attain an adequate sense in a dominated by purposelessness and despair, Miller her vividly presented the victim, Willy, as an apt example:

WILLY. I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning . . . there is a big blaze going on all around [me] [. . .] (Act II, 798)

A fire of meaninglessness, purposelessness and an abyss of extreme despair is reflected in these above lines.

Willy Loman is not only alienated and culturally estranged but also is powerless and bewildered. He becomes completely amazed and is in the position of indecisive anvil:

WILLY. Charley, I'm strapped. I'm strapped. I don't know what to do  
(Act II, 795).

This hopelessness of Willy is very much dominant in this play. This is not only the plight of characters in literary works but also was the predicament of majority of the people of the contemporary society. Self-estrangement of Willy, who feels out of touch with himself is portrayed in this play. The so-called capitalistic civilization leads a man to nowhere, void or almost to death:

WILLY. Funny, y'know? After all the highways, and the trains, and  
the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than  
alive. (Act II, 796)

Willy infers that It is not able to make an individual energetic, enthusiastic or active rather it leads to a passive situation which cripples the people resembling almost to death. All these infrastructural development is ridiculous. It is not able to make an individual energetic, enthusiastic or active rather it leads to a passive situation which cripples the people resembling almost to death. This system, growth or progress makes individual less alive than death.

### **Work Alienation of Biff and Happy**

Despair and dissatisfaction is also dominant in another character, Biff, of *Death of a Salesman*. In this conversation with Happy, he gives the description of an affluent person, despite during an estate is yet unhappy.

BIFF. But look at your friend. Builds an estate and then hasn't the

peace of mind to live in it. (Act I, 775)

Though the development of infrastructure is seen, their friend has an estate, which everyman aspires to get, but still he doesn't have the peace of mind.

Restlessness and anxiety is very much together with the material acquisition. The more material is accumulated the more one loses peace of mind. Even though this material is for mental appeasement but the one who possesses is estranged from peace and hence Biff conformed it in this dialogue above.

This sense of alienation and a completely lonely and a detached mentality is found in other characters of this play too. Despite owning an estate, an apartment, a car and plenty of women one feels alienated and extremely lonely. Happy's hopelessness and frustrating life is reflected in this dialogue:

HAPPY. All I can do now is wait for merchandise managers to die . . .

He just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he is building another one. He can't enjoy it once it is finished . . . I don't know what the hell I am working for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment all alone. And I think of the rent I am paying. And it's crazy. But then it is what I always wanted. My own apartment a car, and plenty of women. And still,

Goldsmith, I'm lonely. (Act I, 775)



#### IV. Conclusion

In the form of different characters, Arthur Miller, in his plays *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, presents estrangement of every individual from society, work and oneself. Work alienation of characters like Keller, Loman, Happy and Biff is the dominant theme of these plays.

The meaninglessness of Lowman's work and its detrimental consequences are worth noticing in *Death of a Salesman*. Lowman's work does not make him powerful rather the firm (object) in which he works becomes more powerful. In opposition, Lowman becomes poorer in his inner life and the less belongs to himself because he puts his life in the object – the firm he works – but object no longer belongs to himself. Thus, the life which he has given to the object, sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force: Howard, the son of firm owner, has discarded Lowman from his job. This makes Lowman a broken man. Consequently it leads him to his self destruction.

Similarly Biff and Happy too are in the miserable condition because of this deceptive capitalistic economic system. Happy, despite possessing an estate, an apartment and plenty of women, is still hapless and frustrated. He does not have the mission for what he is living. Similar is the plight of Biff for he also is a dissatisfied man.

Alienation appears not only in the product, but it also appears in the process of production, within productive activity itself. Keller in *All My Sons* becomes economically a successful man. He has one of the best shops in his state, he has honour and dignity. He is now bigger than ever. However, simultaneously he is a man alienated from himself and his family. Despite all the possessions he is restless and

frustrated. This is all because of the process of production through which he makes this material acquisition and accomplishes his fame.

To conclude, this existing system of production attaches the workers with the object and gives them the impetus to collect, accumulate, possess and ignites for the acquisition of materials for making life happy, meaningful and for our sense gratification. Nevertheless, the flaw in this system leads us to the void, meaninglessness and makes the workers desperately alone - a worker becomes a lonely being being separated from society, relations, happiness and also from the self.

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