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Tragedy of the Common Man in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and Abdelkader Alloula's *Al Adjouad* (1985)

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To

My beloved parents

My brothers Ahcene and Mourad and to my little sister Ania

My mate Dyhia and her respected family

All my friends and relatives

Rezika.

To

My family, friends and relatives

Dyhia.

To

Our mates (Lyes,Lissia and Tina)

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Abstract

*This dissertation is a comparative study between American playwright Arthur Miller's **Death of a Salesman** (1949) and Algerian playwright Abdelkader Alloula's **Al Adjouad** (1985). Our main interest in this research paper is to explore the affinities between the selected plays and investigate the ways into which they apply modern tragedy on the common man. We have borrowed Arthur Miller's **Tragedy and the Common Man**. Throughout our study of the two works, we have reached the conclusion that, both Miller and Alloula focus on the depiction of the tragic fate of the common man. Our discussion is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, deals with common man's normal life before tragedy, whereas the second chapter discusses struggle for dignity. The third chapter is about the tragic down fall of the modern hero.*

I. Introduction :

This piece of research is a comparative study between American playwright Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and Algerian playwright Abdelkader Alloula's *Al Adjouad* (1985). We intend to explore the ways both playwrights use tragedy to denounce the economic frustration, political unrest and ordinary people's suffering at the periods of upheavals in American and Algerian histories.

To start with, Arthur Miller is considered one of the most prominent American playwrights of the twentieth century. He has an outstanding writing career extended over sixty years. His well-known plays include *The Crucible* (1953), *A View From the Bridge* (1955) and the Pulitzer Prize winning *Death of a Salesman* which becomes Miller's most acknowledged play.¹ The latter depicts realistically a man's mental instability and loss of identity. It also portrays vividly the internal conflicts and disagreements within one family.²

Similar to Arthur Miller's recognition in the American theatre, Abdelkader Alloula has also gained a remarkable status in the Algerian theatre as most of his plays provide a powerful insight into the life of ordinary people. In fact, Alloula has a rich experience with storytelling, festivals and rituals since his childhood.³ In addition, he acquired a strong taste for performing arts and acting.⁴ He emerged at first as an actor and a director, subsequently during the seventies, he started to write his own plays which include *El Khobza* (*The Bread*) (1970), *El Lithem* (*The Veil*) (1989) and *Al Adjouad* (*The Generous*) (1985).⁵ Alloula's *Al Adjouad* is regarded as a tribute to the workers' generosity and solidarity, to their integrity and their constant fight and revolt against corrupt bureaucratic system.⁶ Furthermore, the play calls for justice and equality and reflects common people's tragedy in Algeria of the 80s as well as 90s.

a. Review of the Literature:

Both Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Abdelkader Alloula's *Al Adjouad* received a wide range of criticism. To begin with, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) has received a number of interesting critical responses, and has been studied from different angles. In his book *A Theatre in Your Head* (2000), Elia Kazan provides a moral and social examination of the play. He affirms that Willy Loman represents a tragic victim of the American capitalist system, because of his ambivalent tendency towards pride and admiration.⁷ Kazan adds that Miller lacks moral standards which permit him to accomplish his life goals and achieve cheerfulness.⁸ The same critic maintains that Willy Loman's pride makes him unable to accept reality.⁹ He perceives himself essential in New England and simultaneously sees himself as a failure.¹⁰

In addition, in his *Marxism and literary criticism* (2001), Terry Eagleton argues that in his plays Arthur Miller tackles different social issues of his own time, and this is reflected in *Death of a Salesman*, which attracted a lot of attention and critical debate.¹¹ Eagleton also suggests that right from the beginning Miller's play depicts the American capitalist system, in which the individuals' status and their earnings are determined by their jobs.¹² He adds that Marxists believed in the revolutionary art that demonstrates the comings of bourgeois system.¹³ This art serves as a means to make the audience react against that system by making necessary changes.¹⁴

Another critic that extends Miller's scope of criticism is Harold Clurman. In his book *Lies Like Truth* (1958), he believes that Miller does not give the necessary focus to the individual self-conception or to salesmanship. As a result, Willy Loman, who is portrayed as a representative of American society, is caught in a trap by moral rules and fundamental beliefs.¹⁵ In addition to this, Clurman criticizes the American society

and denounces the inaccurate belief and assumption of the American dream, which according to him, ruined the life of Middle-class workers and led to its distortion.¹⁶Harold Clurman affirms that Willy Loman is a typical victim of the American dream, from the initial moral convictions of primitive Americans till the current 20th century propaganda.¹⁷He also states that Willy never admits or learns from the error of his ways. consequently he faced destruction at the end, and his strong devotion caused his downfall.¹⁸

As far as Alloula's *Al Adjouad* is concerned, it has been studied from several standpoints. In his memoir *Modern Algerian Theatre: Translation and Critical Analysis of Three Plays KatebYacine, Abdelkader Alloula and SlimanBenaissa* (1989), Moussa Salmane notes that Alloula's *Al Adjouad* can be regarded as a social and political piece of art.¹⁹He maintains that the play serves as a powerful attack and it stands against unfairness, tyrannical injustice and a system filled with corruption.²⁰He also adds that the play's title refers to the integrity and generosity of Alloula's characters.²¹The latter show great care and affection towards their work as well as society, in spite of the fact that they are ruled by a deficient corrupted system.²²Yet what we noticed is that Salmane Moussa's piece of criticism does not provide us with a deeper and more significant analysis of the themes developed in the play, although it is one of Algerian masterpieces in modern drama.

Furthermore, in his *Les fonctions narratives dans le théâtre de AbdelkaderAlloula* (2006), the art critic Abdelmalek Benkhellaf focuses on on the representation of the working class. He maintains that the ordinary workers as Jallul Le fhaimi and Allal Zebbal are struggling enormously and keep fighting ceaselessly to gain their rights within their company as well as their community.²³Benkhellaf quotes Alloula's statement about the characters. Alloula affirms that his characters “ are drawn from the

life of our people. It is in its social strata that society is reflected best in its concerns, in its struggles, in its contradiction, in the hopes of the poorest".²⁴ Starting from Alloula's statement, Benkhellaf suggests that the Algerian playwright made clear reference to the political theatre.²⁵ According to the German stage director Ervin Piscator, the aim of theatre is to attract audience and invite them to be part of the political field.²⁶ He adds that Alloula is not only a political activist, but a great committed intellectual and social awakener, therefore it is offending if one limits Alloula's theatre to politics only.²⁷

In addition to these critics, Gilbert Grandguillaume in his book *Abdelkader Alloula, un homme de culture Algérienne* (2008) notes that through his play *Al Adjouad*, Alloula demonstrates that he is aware of the importance of starring at the popular public.²⁸ Grandguillaume adds that Alloula succeeds to take profit of this reminder of a culture of morality, because he basically desires to have his art at the core of social struggles, and thus meet the criteria of a Brechtian theatre.²⁹

In sum, it is clear from the above review of the literature that both Miller and Alloula's selected plays have been subject to considerable criticism. Most of criticism on the playwrights agrees that both are deeply committed to the depiction of the American and Algerian societies in two critical periods of their histories. What we noticed is that critics miss to give importance to Alloula's and Miller's concern with the ordinary people precisely.

b. Issue and Working Hypothesis

From the above, it becomes clear that both Alloula's *Al Adjouad* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* are two very re-known pieces of literature whose importance has drawn a lot of critical attention. To our best knowledge, no previous study so far has

undertaken the task to compare the works. It is our task to conduct a comparative study of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Alloula's *AlAdjouad*. As a contribution to the existing criticism, our main concern in this dissertation is basically to focus on the affinities we suppose the selected plays and playwrights share by applying Arthur Miller's theory on *Tragedy and the Common Man*. Our interest in the issue stems from the fact that neither the geographical distance nor the cultural or language barriers prevented these authors from dealing with the same issues of oppression, tragedy and the economic difficulties of ordinary people in America of the 50s and Algeria of the 80s and 90s. Throughout our investigation, we will try to analyze the social and political context in which Alloula and Miller produced their plays, and answer the subsequent questions; which affinities appear in their plays? How do the two plays show the suffering of the American and the Algerian ordinary people? And finally to what extent do both playwrights commit themselves to the defense of the oppressed and at what level do their works apply to tragedy?

Methodological Outline

Our memoire is undertaken following the IMRAD system. Our work begins with an Introduction that states our main purpose. It includes a review of the literature on Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* and Alloula's play *Al Adjouad*. It also contains the issues and working hypothesis. The Method and Materials section provide a short summary of the modern tragedy, borrowing from Arthur Miller's theory *Tragedy and the Common Man* (1949) that we are going to apply in our analysis. It also includes brief summaries of the two plays, their historical backgrounds and settings, as well as short biographies of the playwrights. In the Results section, we will give our findings. The Discussion section will consist of three chapters. In the first one, we apply Arthur

Miller's Tragedy on both plays by drawing parallels between the major characters. In the second chapter, we intend to analyze the characters' struggle for dignity in both plays. Finally, in the third chapter, we will try to show the final ending of the modern tragic heroes. Our dissertation ends with a general conclusion that sums up the main issues dealt within this piece of research.

Endnotes

- ¹Susan, C.W. Abbotson. *Critical Companion To Arthur Miller: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work.*(New York,2007),05.
- ²Ibid,06
- ³Moussa,selmane. *Modern Algerian Theatre: Translations and Critical Analysis of Three Plays by KatebYacine, AbdelkaderAlloula and SlimaneBenaissa.* (University of Leeds, 1989),94.
- ⁴Ibid,95.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Ibid.
- ⁷Elia,Kazan.Notebook.New York, 1960.A *Theatre in Your Head.* Ed. Liza McAllister, Williams.Oct.2000,27.
- ⁸Ibid.
- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹Terry, Eagleton. *Marxism and Literary Criticism.* (London: Rutledge,2001), 4.
- ¹²Ibid,05.
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Ibid.
- ¹⁵Harold, Clurman. *Lies Like Truth.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958,69.
- ¹⁶Ibid,70.
- ¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹⁹Moussa, Selmane. *Modern Algerian Theatre : Translations and Critical Analysis of Three Plays by KatebYacine, AbdelkaderAlloula and SlimaneBenissa.* (University of Leeds, 1989).96.
- ²⁰Ibid,97.
- ²¹Ibid.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³Abdelmalek, Benkhellaf. *Les fonctions narratives dans le théâtre*d'AbdelkaderAlloula. (University of Annaba, 2008), 115.
- ²⁴Ibid,116.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Ibid.
- ²⁸Gilbert,Grandguillaume. *Abdelkader Alloula,un homme de culture Algérienne.* (University of Toulouse, 2008),10.
- ²⁹Ibid,11.

II. Method and Materials:

This section of our research paper aims to explore the methodological elements and materials that will be applied in our study of tragedy in both Miller's and Alloula's mentioned plays. The method section will include the summary and the explanation of the theoretical approach that will be used in our analysis. The materials section will provide the biographies of the two dramatists, in addition to the summary of their selected plays, as well as the historical context of America during 1950s and Algeria during 1980s. The aim of this chapter is to draw parallels between the socio-historical context of the two selected plays.

1. Method:

As we intend to deal with the issue of tragedy, particularly that of ordinary people in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and Alloula's *Al Adjouad* (1985), and for the sake of relevance, we will borrow from Arthur Miller's Theoretical auspices on tragedy.

Tragedy and the Common Man is an essay written by American playwright and essayist Arthur Miller. It was published on February 27, 1949 in the New York Times. It is also the preface prepared for his play *Death of a Salesman*, which had been rejected by some critics since it does not comply with the principles of the Aristotelian tragedy. *Tragedy and the Common Man* is Miller's defense for his strong opinions and beliefs about tragedy.

Arthur Miller is regarded as one of the pioneers of American drama and modern tragedy. Miller wanted to detach himself from the Aristotelian tragedy, which is restricted only for characters that belong to the royalty and nobility. According to Aristotle, tragedy is "a representation of an action that is serious"¹; that is to say a representation of a complete coherent plot which embodies moral values and universal

themes.² This dramatic performance addressed only the upper class audience. In addition, Aristotle states that tragedy should arouse intensely strong emotions such as, fear, terror and pity within the audience.³ Furthermore, Aristotle defines the tragic hero in this ancient tragedy as follows:

He is the sort of man who is not conspicuous for virtue and justice, and whose fall into misery is not due to vice and depravity, but rather to some error, a man who enjoys prosperity and high reputation like Oedipus and Thyestes and other members of families like theirs.⁴

In modern tragedy however, Miller defines the tragic hero as follows:

The tragic hero can and should include the common man. A tragic hero is one who attempts to gain his rightful position in his society and in doing so, struggles for his dignity. Considering the noble's hardships does not seem to excite the modern audience. Perhaps better understanding a true tragic hero would soon make up for the lack of tragedies written in this age⁵.

In his essay, Miller notes that the Greek dramatists lived in a hierarchical society, hence in their works they depicted characters from high societal status. Miller rejected Aristotle's view that real tragedy should be concerned only with high figure characters. He believed that the common man is able to face and experience tragedy just as kings did⁶.

In *Tragedy and the Common Man*, Miller expresses strong opinions about the common man's appropriateness for tragedy. He affirms that the common man is the one who truthfully understands fear and feels it deeply, therefore is apt and best suited in its highest sense for tragedy.⁷ For Miller, men who don't belong to lower classes are unable to achieve common men's sense of thinking.⁸ He states that: "the common man knows fear best."⁹

Through his essay, Miller analyses the traditional view and conception of tragedy which is only limited to powerful and high ranked characters. Miller maintains that tragedy

can be applied to ordinary people, and goes further to define the essence of tragedy.

He states:

General rule, to which there may be expectations unknown for him, he thinks the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, the underlying attempting to gain his “rightful” position in his society.¹⁰

Moreover, Miller’s play *Death of a Salesman* depicts successfully his major ideas and perception of modern tragic hero, through the portrayal of one of its main characters; Willy Loman. On this basis, Miller says:

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as the Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instance which were enacted by royal being, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations.¹¹

It is clear from the above review of Miller’s theory that it suits best our work as our task is to investigate tragedy of ordinary people in the works under study.

2. Materials:

a. Biographies:

➤ Arthur Miller’s Biography:

Born on October 17th, 1915 in Harlem in New York. Arthur Asher Miller is an American playwright who emerged as one of the most successful and prominent figure in twentieth century.¹² His father Isidore Miller was an owner of coat manufacturing, and his mother Augusta worked at school.¹³ His parents were polish Jewish. The business of Miller’s father failed in 1930s because of the Great Depression which pushed him to do a variety of jobs as waiter, truck driver, and factory worker.¹⁴

After studying journalism at school, he began his professional in theatre.¹⁵ Miller did not write only drama works but also novels and short stories including non-

fiction works. In 1936, he wrote his first play named *No Villain* which brought him fame and public attention and sparked his outstanding career.¹⁶ Moreover Miller's play named *The Man Who had all the Luck* (1944) was his first play that reached Broadway.¹⁷ Miller's major works are: *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953) and *A View From the Bridge* (1955).¹⁸

In 1949, after the publication of his famous play *Death of a Salesman*, Miller won three major works awards: Tony Award for best Author, The New York Drama Circle Critics' and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.¹⁹ He is also well-known for his famous essay *Tragedy and the Common Man* published in 1949 which is the preface of his play *Death of a Salesman*.²⁰

Arthur Miller died at the age of eighty-nine years, on February 10, 2005.²¹ Miller was a brave fighter and was trying persistently to achieve his goals and overcome life barriers. Miller suffered for a long time and had a deep extended fight against pneumonia, cancer and heart deficiency.²² He left behind him a valuable heritage of precious works including outstanding and memorable plays that are still performed throughout the world. Miller died of heart failure at his home in Roxbury, New York.²³

➤ **Abdelkader Alloula's Biography:**

Abdelkader Alloula is an Algerian playwright, dramatist, manager of theatre and a president of an Algerian company.²⁴ Alloula was born on July 8th, 1939 in Ghazaouet (Western Algeria).²⁵ He studied at the primary school in Ain El-Berd, the secondary school of Sidi Bel-Abbès, then in the lycée of Ardaillon in Oran.²⁶ Alloula's father worked in the French police as a gendarme then as a public letter writer. His mother was a housewife.²⁷

After several years of working and performing in a youth theatre group called 'Al Shabab' and Madrassat Al Fateh which he joined in 1955, Alloula succeeded to

organize his own group named ‘Ensemble théâtral Oranais’.²⁸ A year later, he becomes a professional actor in the capital. His success in acting earned him to the advancement to the post of director.²⁹ However, after his disagreement with the ‘Théâtre national Algérien’ (TNA) in 1968, Alloula left his job. Despite his unemployment that lasted one year, he did not miss the opportunity to write and produce his own plays after his coming back to Oran where he joined the ‘Théâtre régional d’Oran’ (TRO).³⁰ Alloula’s contribution to the development and flourishing of the contemporary Algerian theatre added great importance to the TNO, his contribution was not limited to acting and directing but also he was a teacher and a trainer of the young actors.³¹

In 1969, Alloula wrote and directed his first play called *AL-Alag* (The Leeches) which deals with the oppressed people, *Al Khoubza* (Loaf of Bread) in 1970 that illustrates the bad living conditions of the society. He wrote also *Homq Salim* (Salim’s Madness) in 1975, and *Al Litham* (The Veil) in 1989.³²

Alloula was assassinated at the age of fifty five, on March 14th, 1994.³³ Since Alloula was a social and a political awakener, he was assassinated by terrorists for political reasons in his way to the palace of culture for debate. After the sudden attack, he was transferred to Vale de Grace hospital where he died for days later.³⁴ Even dead, Alloula is still one of the Algerian major heroes who sacrificed himself for his country.

Synopsis:

➤ Synopsis of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*:

Death of a Salesman is set in two acts play divided into scenes.³⁵ The play is about the story of a sixty three years old salesman named Willy Loman who wants to be rich and well-

liked. The play starts with the description of Willy Loman's house. Then, Willy comes back home exhausted after his car was crashed. His wife Linda suggests to him that he should ask his boss Howard Wagner to work in New York office.³⁶ Loman sees himself as an important valuable salesman, thus he believes that he has great chances to get a new work easily. The following scene portrays Willy's sons; Biff and Happy sitting upstairs talking about their lives. Biff is a thirty four-years old hand farming man.³⁷ He is two years older than Happy who works at department store. The two brothers talk about their past failure and their dream to go to the West and to succeed in business. Biff wants to ask his employer Bill Oliver for a loan to buy a ranch and start his own business. This scene ends with the brothers listening to their father's numbling in his flash back.³⁸

In the third and the fourth scenes, both Willy and his son Biff try to get a new job from their bosses, but they fail. After this disappointment, Willy starts to feel lost and mentally distressed. He talks to his brother Ben; a successful businessman. Unfortunately, the latter exists only in Willy's imagination.³⁹

In the next scene, Willy is informed that Biff fails in the math exam, and he does not graduate to high school. Therefore, Willy is very disappointed and considers his son as a failure.

In the last scene, Willy commits suicide. He was thinking that by killing himself, he might help his son Biff to succeed in his life. They would get his pension. Linda loves Willy deeply and for her, he is a well-liked person and highly admired by others. Linda is astonished by the fact that no one came to Willy's funeral. Biff wants to be a better man by being honest with himself, while Happy wants to be just like his father.⁴⁰

➤ **Synopsis of Alloula's *Al Adjouad*:**

Al Adjouad is a play written in three main tableaux divided into seven episodes which deal with different stories.⁴¹ The play starts with the story of Allal, a road sweeper who

suffers from impoverished life conditions. He is a hard working man, he puts a lot of care and energy in doing his work properly. Despite the challenges he meets in his way, Allal fights every day morally and physically to gain his loaf.⁴² The second episode narrates the story of Ribuhi, a sixty years old blacksmith who works in one of the municipal workshops. He is considered a concilor of the poor. When he has visited the poor animals in the zoo, he has taken a firm decision to help them and feed them secretly. At first Ribuhi had a slight misunderstanding and did not get on well with the keeper. At the end, they get close with each other and became friends.⁴³ The third episode tells the story of a builder named Qaddur. He always goes at home on Fridays to see his family. One day, Qaddur finds his family going through bad times; his wife is sick and they are facing financial problems. With a strong determination to solve all his family's difficulties, Qaddur invest his whole time and decides to work harder to find out appropriate solutions.⁴⁴ The fourth episode deals with the story of Akli and Manawwar. The former is a cook while the latter is a porter. They used to work together for a long time at high school. Since the Algerian schools at that time had not got enough materials for teaching, Akli was determined to donate his skelton after his death to be used in natural science classes.⁴⁵ The fifth episode tells the story of Mansour, a retired man. In his last day in the factory where he works, he speaks to the machines: "I shall give the youth every information and trick to ride you like a horse. The young man will be your master."⁴⁶ The sixth episode tells the story of the clever man Jallul who works at a hospital. Jallul loses his temper quite easily because he is unable to control situations. One day, as he is at the mortuary, he comes across a patient in one of the mortuary drawers transferred there by mistake. Jallul was very disturbed and his temper erupted. Thus, he decides to run away in order to calm down.⁴⁷ The last episode narrates the story of Sakina, an impoverished woman who works at a shoe factory. The narrator sings lamentably since Sakina is harmed by the glue used in the factory and cannot stand the odour.⁴⁸

C. Historical Background:

➤ America of the 40s and 50s:

America in the period after World War two, from 1945 onwards witnessed a time of high economic growth. It was filled with confidence and prosperity, and characterized by the fact that anyone could ultimately achieve success.⁴⁹ During the 50s, consumerism dominated the American society. It was apparent in its economy and culture. Comfort and well-being were available for most Americans. At that time, the American Dream meant to own a big house, fill it with the latest appliances, and park a beautiful car in its garage.⁵⁰ However, the economic situation was not appreciated for the poorest Americans during that period. While some lived in prosperity, others remained in poverty.⁵¹

Although America witnessed a period of growth and development in different life spheres, the lower-classes were enduring harsh living conditions and financial hardships. America had become a political and military world force.⁵² Eventually, America became a consumer culture, because the manufacturing and the acquisition stocks and prosperities were the basic of its society. Despite this wealth and peacefulness, the working-class did not acquire much benefits. Although, women during that time gained some rights as men, the cultural notions were restricted and this is reflected through Miller's female character Linda Loman.⁵³

Among the prominent playwrights that dominated theatre during that time is Arthur Miller. Throughout his plays, he offers a glance into the life of the American people and society of the postwar period. In one of his major play *Death of a Salesman*, Miller shows his rejection of the capitalist system through his portrayal of the main character Willy Loman. He also depicts the hidden suffering of the lower-classes in a period of high economic and social growth. Miller feels the pain and the

hardships of poor people since his family experienced harsh living conditions during the great depression which caused the loss of his father's ownership.

➤ **Algeria of the 80s and 90s :**

Algeria is the largest country in the African continent with a wonderful natural beauty. Algeria had lived a long colonial experience. The French colonizer was the last (1830-1962). The period between the 80s and the 90s was the most remarkable in the Algerian post independence history.

During the 80s, Algeria witnessed many economical and political events which led to lot of changes in the Algerian society. The major economic event was the decline of oil prices in 1986 which obliged the government to get loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, the economic problems were not solved since the Algerian citizens were affected by house shortages and unemployment. More than 70 percent of Algerian youths remained jobless,⁵⁴ in addition to the majority of peasants who moved to towns searching for better paid-work. Consequently, the urbanization caused a demographic explosion which made the socioeconomic situation of the country worse.

In addition to the above economic problems, the political ones were more difficult. In March 1980, the kabyle students went on a general strike for the officialization of the Berber language and identity.⁵⁵ Subsequently, in 1988, Algeria underwent a serious political crisis, thousands of Algerians organized themselves in masses to call for democracy, justice as well as fair society. However, many violent acts cost the lives of five hundreds persons and more than two thousands injuries.⁵⁶ In fact, within the October riots there was a positive thing, that was multipartism. It privileged a group of Islamists to be organized into a political party named the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) in 1989. In December 1991, the Islamists candidates won the first round

parliamentary elections. However, the second round of elections was abolished by the army which then caused the beginning of an armed conflict causing more than 200,000 deaths.⁵⁷

Theatre in that period was the only way to mirror and denounce the political unrest and economic frustration, as Abdelkader Alloula did in his play *Al Adjouad*. the latter reflects the real image of the Algerian society during the 80s and the eve of the Black Decade since it tackles the major issues faced by Algerians during that period. Its seven episodes portray clearly the absence of democracy, social injustice and discrimination in Algeria.

Our review of the background of both America of the postwar era and Algeria of the 80s show that both Miller and Alloula were committed to the reflection of their countries and peoples' suffering during very critical periods of their histories. Their commitment will be discussed further in the discussion section.

Endnotes

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² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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⁶ Amar, Guendouzi. *Tragedy in the Modern Age: The Case of Arthur Miller* (university of TiziOuzou-Algeria),02.

⁷ Arthur ,Miller. *Tragedy and the Common Man*.1949,01.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Susan, C.W. Abbotson. *Critical Companion To Arthur Miller: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work.* (New York,2007),03.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid,04.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid,22.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Moussa selmane. *Modern Algerian Theatre: Translations and Critical Analysis of Three Plays by KatebYacine, AbdelkaderAlloula and SlimaneBenaissa.* (University of Leeds, 1989),92.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid,93.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid,94.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Susan, C.W. Abbotson. *Critical Companion To Arthur Miller: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work.* (New York,2007),130.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid,131.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹Moussa selmane. Modern Algerian Theatre: Translations and Critical Analysis of Three Plays by KatebYacine, AbdelkaderAlloula and SlimaneBenaissa. (University of Leeds, 1989),139.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid,140.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹<http://study.com/academy/lesson/post-war-american-life-culture-of-the-late-1940s-1950s.html>

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid,08.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴James, Fearon and David, Laitin. “Algeria”.(Standford University,2006),16.

⁵⁵ Library of Congress-Federal Research Devision: Country Profile: Algeria May 2008,07.

⁵⁶Ibid,08.

⁵⁷Ibid.

III. Results :

In this part of our research paper, we will shed light on the findings reached through our comparative study on the issue of tragedy of the common man in the American and Algerian literature through Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and Abdelkader Alloula's *Al Adjouad* (1985). In order to explore the issue of modern tragedy in both selected works and also find the analogies between them, we have relied on Arthur Miller's theory *Tragedy and the Common Man* (1949), and borrowed its concepts to focus mainly on the description of the characters.

Our examination of the two works under study has shown that both *Death of a Salesman* and *Al Adjouad* depict the tragedy of ordinary people that is to say common men. Both playwrights tried to report the facts in form of plays. They mirror all the tragedies and the oppression that people have witnessed. Arthur Miller in his play *Death of a Salesman* (1949) depicts the failure of the American Dream by shedding light on the American modern tragedy, which portrays the living conditions of common Americans. Abdelkader Alloula on the other hand, throughout *Al Adjouad* (1985) succeeds to portray misery and harsh living conditions that the Algerian citizens lived during the late of the 80s and the eve of the Black Decade.

Throughout our study of both plays we have deduced that both playwrights bridged the gap of language, geography, time, culture and produced similar tragedies. Indeed, we have also learnt that the Aristotelian tragic noble hero is no longer possible in modern times. Miller in his essay *Tragedy and the Common Man* (1949). re-explained the tragic hero as coming from ordinary people.

In addition, our analysis has drawn that Algerian literature has value and can

easily be grounded within world literature. As we have demonstrated through our comparison of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Alloula's *Al Adjouad*, the Algerian literature deals with universal themes and discusses most debated issues throughout history such as discrimination and corruption.

After all these findings we can therefore discuss the issue of tragedy in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Alloula's *Al Adjouad*. The works share some common aspects at the level of issues and characters.

IV. Discussion

In this section of our work, we will investigate Alloula's and Miller's depiction of tragedy in their respective plays *Al Adjouad* and *Death of a Salesman*. The first chapter focuses on the way both Alloula and Miller create their characters as modern tragic heroes. In the second chapter, we have opted for the study the characters' struggle for dignity. The last chapter discusses the tragic heroes' death.

Chapter one : Common People's Normal Life before Tragedy

Arthur Miller develops this stage in his *Tragedy and the Common Man* saying that before becoming tragic heroes ordinary people tend to lead a normal life. Therefore in order to discuss this stage in depth, we will focus on the study of Willy Loman's and a set of characters' lives in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and in Alloula's *Al Adjouad* as the latter does not use individual characters but social groups of ordinary people in Algeria of the 1980s and 1990s.

a- Willy Loman and Ribuhi the Friend:

Willy Loman and Ribuhi the Friend are two characters who lead a simple life. They are poor workers. Both spend their lives working hard to gain some money. However, Willy always dreams of success. He wants to be very rich and well-liked. Unlike Ribuhi who wants just to help the poor animals in the zoo, Ribuhi is described as the councilor of the poor people.

Willy Loman is the main character. He is a sixty years old salesman. He is a hard working man who searches for success in the business world. He lives an ordinary life with his sons and his obedient wife. This is shown in the play:

From the right, Willy Loman, the salesman, enters, carrying two large sample cases. The flute plays on. He hears but is not aware of it. He is past sixty years of age, dressed quietly.¹

In fact, Willy is a pitiful and tragic hero of *Death of a Salesman*. All his life's problems are caused by his misconception and illusion. It is important to remind that many American modernist writers like Arthur Miller convey the story of everyday people in American society. Willy is not from the nobility. He is rather a common man. He endeavors to survive and be remarkable just as other ordinary men in society. This is shown in the play:

...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 finally be paid to such a person.²

Willy tries unceasingly to be as successful as his brother Ben who succeeds in achieving the American Dream. Willy longs to be respected and admired. He also wants to dismiss his status as a common man and be wealthy.³ He valorizes one's personality and character as well as one's recognition and admiration by others. While Willy gives too much importance to physical appearance, Ben deliberately pays no attention to style and form. Willy is searching for others' guidance in order to figure out the appropriate way to act to achieve wealth, respect and success. This is depicted in the play:

Willy: I got an awful scare. Nearly hit a kid in Yonkers. God! Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time! Ben! That man was a genius, that man was success incarnate! What a mistake! He begged me to go⁴

Willy: ... Because the man who makes an appearance in business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want.⁵

In fact, Willy Loman stands for the majority of American workers who work harder, unfortunately their professional career ends with rejection as they get older. At an early age, most of them start with strong will and determination as well as high hopes and big dreams. However, they are eventually thrown away by their own children just as is the case Willy Loman.⁶ His defeat and inability to pay back his loans

is a symbol of the hardship of the American capitalist society and of ordinary people's suffering during that time. The struggles he is facing and the society in which he lives lead to his downfall. For Willy, success is always related to money; therefore, being poor for him means failure. As it is demonstrated in the play:

Willy: what do we owe?

Linda: well, on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator .

Willy: why sixteen?

Linda: well, the fan belt broke, so it was a dollar eighty. There is nine-sixty for the washing machine. And for the vacuum cleaner there's three and half due on the fifteenth. Then the roof, you got twenty one dollars remaining.⁷

Like Willy, Ribuhi is one of the main characters in *Al Adjouad*. He is a sixty years old blacksmith tradesman. He represents every ordinary man of the 80s and 90s. Ribuhi is a councilor of the poor and spends most of his time in assisting and helping them. He is also respected and admired by all the workers. His wife Mariam says: " the poor man is tired as usual; well he carries the heavy burden of our problems and worries."⁸. Alloula portrays Ribuhi in a particular way. He is an intermediate between the deaf officials and the mute animals which suffer from hunger and harsh living conditions just like the Algerian during that period:

The first told him: I'm sorry, there is nothing I can do for these animals. I have no power and no authority, you might say I'm as idle as someone wasting his time in a café. The second one told him: First, change the trade union committee then we can discuss general matters. The third said: we're stuck with people's problems and mischief and you come here to add those of the animals of the zoo.⁹

With reference to Miller's theory *Tragedy and the Common Man*: " it is the common man who knows this fear best."¹⁰Through the character of Ribuhi, Alloula shows the solidarity between poor people since they are all under oppression and social injustice. "He also organizes a group of solidarity with youths of the neighborhood."¹¹Ribuhi is a representative of the Algerian society which is ruled by depraved incompetent officials. As it is stated in the play: " I'm far from that. I'm not the type to have hard currency or to corrupt people. Come on Mr, Al Hashimi, that's far fetched."¹²

In addition, Miller focuses in his essay on the common man's position in society. He states that: "a tragic hero is one who attempts to gain his rightful position in his society."¹³ Alloula demonstrates this in the episode of Ribuhi by comparing the Algerian ordinary people to the animals living in the zoo. The Algerian people always lack the freedom of speech. In short, Alloula chooses the poor animals to mirror the life of the Algerian common men and their everyday suffering:

Look at the poor animals, look how they're following our discussion, it's as if they want to speak, as if they want to give their opinion...you see? They too are asking for democracy.¹⁴

b. Linda Loman and Zohra as Supportive Wives:

Women in both plays *Death of a salesman* and *Al Adjouad* are described as being the wives of ordinary men. They are passive and always obey their husbands. Yet their passivity is never synonymous of submission. It instead is a sustaining force for their families. In fact, respect and love are the most important qualities they have and this is relevant in both plays. Even though Linda and Zohra live in different countries and periods, they play the same positive role in their families.

Linda Loman is Willy's wife. She is a warm-hearted woman who helps her husband, and always stands by his side. Linda backs him up during the harsh times. She stands for the ordinary American housewives of the 40s. She is a model of a loving and caring wife as Willy says: "you're my foundation and support, Linda."¹⁵ She adores Willy and loves him deeply in spite of his failures and deficiency. She never blames Willy for being an ordinary man with insufficient properties. She speaks with him with much attention as it is stated in the play:

Linda: what, darling?
Willy: that is the most remarkable thing.
Linda: what, dear.¹⁶

Furthermore, Linda is sometimes very serious and determined as she speaks to her sons Biff and Happy: “ Biff, dear, if you don’t have feeling for him, then you can’t have any feeling for me.”¹⁷She also gives all her attention and care to her husband. Linda is a good listener, when she speaks with her husband, she listens attentively and with too much interest. When there is a slight misunderstanding between Willy and her sons, Linda tries to relieve the tension. As it is written in the play:

Willy: hey, hey, Biff!

Biff: what the hell is the matter with him? (Happy stops him).

Linda: don’t – don’t go near him!

Biff: stop making excuses for him! He always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you.

Happy: he’s always had respect for...

Biff: what the hell do you know about it?

Happy: (surlily). just don’t call him crazy!

Biff: he’s got no character- Charley wouldn’t do this. Not in his own house- swiping out that vomit from his mind.

Happy: Charley never had to cope with that he’s got to.

Linda: then make Charley your father, Biff. You can’t do that, can you? I don’t say that he’s a great man ... but he’s human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention attention must be paid to such a person. You called him crazy.¹⁸

From the above quotation, we notice that Linda protects and defends Willy although her sons give her evidence that he is becoming insane. Linda is ready to make great sacrifices to defend Willy’s dreams and illusions.

Like Linda, Zohra also is the wife of an ordinary man. Jallul’s wife Zohra represents the Algerian housewife during the 80s. She is trustworthy and loyal to her husband. She respects Jallul and loves him very much. Even though he loses his temper quickly, she always tries to calm him down. Zohra looks up to her husband and she sees him as a model to follow. He is a tender and sweet father:

When he calms down, Zohra his wife kisses him and says to her children: “ your father Jallul just stands for right against wrong. I wish you resemble him”, then she adds a smile. If it wasn’t for the poor and their trouble he would be an important personality in the capital.¹⁹

c. The Role of Mothers in Both Plays:

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *Al Adjoua* are composed of two different families and depict the relationship between its members. The mother-child relationship in these two plays is interesting to study since mothers in both plays share similarities. In this part, we are going to show the way they are portrayed as heroes who sustain their families. It is of great importance to remind women's position; particularly wives and mothers in America of the 1950s and Algeria of the 1980s. In fact, both Miller and Alloula reflect in their plays the events of their eras. Actually, the Algerian society constructed women's role. They were taught from an early age that they should be silent and obedient, and should stay at home and take care of the household. From the beginning of the 80s upward, women's status started to change. They began to gain few rights and held some responsibilities.²⁰ They were allowed to have access to education and training.²¹ In Alloula's *Al Adjouad*, Sakina and her daughter represent the typical example of Algerian women during the 80s.

On what concerns the 50s, it was in America a period that was marked by traditional gender roles. Although, it experienced certain changes, there was still some American women attached to traditional living conditions. This is shown through the description of Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. She is a sensitive and tender wife. She is able to do whatever is necessary to protect her family. Miller depicts her as a warm-hearted and loving mother: "Linda (calling after Biff): sleep well, darling!".²⁴ She is described in the stage directions as a sustaining wife: (she sits down at the table and mends the lining of Willy's jacket)²⁵, (buttoning up his jacket as he unbuttons it).²⁶

In *Al Adjouad*, Sakina is depicted as a powerful courageous wife and mother. She always motivates and supports her husband and children. Despite the challenges she faces, she holds on and never gives up. As it is mentioned in the play: " she is abandoned but she is smiling and comforting her children and also joking to encourage her

husband”.²⁷Because of her illness, Sakina’s return to work at the factory shoe becomes almost impossible, but she made the decision to work at home in order to assist her husband to overcome life’s obstacles and tries to improve their living conditions through gaining money. “I shall find a boss who will bring me work home”²⁸. Sakina remains hopeful, powerful and ensures her husband that she will get better. Despite her physical disability, the obstacles she faces and the barriers she encounters along her way, Sakina was and is still a model of the brave woman who never despairs. She succeeds to surmount all the difficulties that she had to go through in her life. As it is stated in the play: “Sakina’s job and her tragic fate were discussed at home. Do not despair she said since my hands are spared”²⁹.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Linda’s behaviour and attitudes towards her family remain unchangeable throughout the play. She always tries to get Willy closer to his sons Biff and Happy. Linda wants to strengthen their relationship and makes it deeper. One can notice that she is proud of the achievements of her sons and their dreams. She sometimes feels insecure and worried about their professional career, but she tries insistently to convince them to work harder in order to be successful and have a bright future. Most importantly, Linda wants to make her sons believe that working is the key of success and happiness since it is the appropriate way to behave in front of others. When she finds out that Biff has stolen a ball, she says: “he’d better give back that foot ball... it’s not nice”.³⁰She also feels upset and distressed when Biff does not get a good mark in his math exam, thus, she asks Willy to discuss the matter. This echoes Sakina in Alloula’s *Al Adjouad* who wants her daughter to succeed in her studies: “No darling success in your studies is more important”.³¹ Linda does not only encourage her sons but also tries to improve her sons’ relationship with their father. Moreover, Linda and her husband dream of their sons’ success. They feel overwhelmed

to think that one day their sons will achieve their goals and fulfill their dreams. For a long time, they are longing to see them successful in their personal as well as professional careers:

Linda: He'll find his way.

Willy: Sure. Certain men just don't get started till later in life. Like Thomas Edison, I think. Or B.F Goodrich. One of them was deaf. (He starts for the bedroom doorway). I'll put my money on Biff.³²

Both Linda's and Sakina's husbands are striving financially and enduring hard moments through their lives. All their struggles come out from the lack of money. However, these challenges strengthen their relationships and bring them together. Linda supports her husband as well as their children morally and psychologically. As she is conventional and attached to the old traditions. In spite of the fact that America during the 50s witnessed great changes, including women's emancipation, most of them worked outside their households and were financially independent. In contrast, Linda is a house wife and looks after her family's well-being:

Linda(resigned): well, you'll just have to take a rest, Willy, you can't continue this way.

Willy: I just got back from Florida.

Linda: But you didn't rest your mind. Your mind is overactive, and the mind is what counts, dear.

Willy: I'll start out in the morning. Maybe I'll feel better in the morning. (she is taking off his shoes.) These goddam arch supports are killing me.

Linda: Take an aspirin. Should I get you an aspirin? It'll soothe you.³³

Unlike Linda, Sakina provides financial help to her husband. She works in a shoe factory and tries to make her family comfortable by supplying them with the basic needs: "I shall work sitting and earn our daily bread".³⁴ She strives along her life to make her daughter an intellectual person. It is due to poverty that Sakina works harder outside the household. Even when she is ill, she is determined to do whatever is necessary to help her family. However, it is important to remind, as we have mentioned

it before, that during the 80s the Algerian women had traditional values since the Algerian society was strict and limited to traditional behaviors, attitudes and beliefs as well. As Caroline Rohloff states:

In spite of women's military participation during the war of independence and the equality of gender roles they experienced, women were expected to return to the traditional roles of wife and mother in the post-war era.³⁵

Another family bond that binds more Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Alloula's *Al Adjouad* is the playwrights' use of the mother-son and mother-daughter relationship. Happy, Linda's son and Sakina's daughter incarnate optimism and hope for a better future. Both characters are committed to support their families. In Alloula's *Al Adjouad*, Sakina's daughter is portrayed as willful and courageous like her mother. When her mother Sakina is suffering, her daughter suggests to help her : "I shall work for you said her little daughter. I shall bake bread and sell it in the street."³⁶

Similarly, Happy who though there are ups and downs in his relation with his parents, he always tries to help them and make them happy. He wants to fulfill his father's dream of success. Happy's plan to be a successful son is revealed in the play, as he says:

Happy: we form two basketball teams, see? Two water-polo teams .we play each other. It's a million dollars' worth of publicity. Two brothers, see?..³⁷

Family relationship plays an enormous role in both *Death of a Salesman* and *Al Adjouad*. Its importance lies in its suggestive portrayal of mother's child closest, strongest and deepest relation. Their heart touching connection is felt throughout the plays. It evokes the most sincere and long-lasting emotions. Both mothers make great sacrifices and huge efforts for the sake of their children's prosperity and happiness.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Arthur Miller. Death of a Salesman.1949,03.
- ² Ibid,38.
- ³ Ayça ÜlkerErkam, A Modern Tragic Hero in Arthur Miller's Play Death of a Salesman,2012,104.
- ⁴ Arthur Miller. Death of a Salesman.1949,26.
- ⁵ Ibid,20.
- ⁶ <http://-enotes.com/topics/death of a salesman/>.
- ⁷ Arthur Miller. Death of a Salesman.1949,22.
- ⁸ AbdelkaderAlloula. Al Adjouad.1985,04.
- ⁹ Ibid,05.
- ¹⁰ Arthur Miller. Tragedy and the Common Man.1949.
- ¹¹ AbdelkaderAlloula. Al Adjouad.1985,06.
- ¹² Ibid,08.
- ¹³ European Academic Research-Vol.II,Issue 2/May 2014,1944.
- ¹⁴ AbdelkaderAlloula. Al Adjouad.1985,11.
- ¹⁵ Arthur Miller.Death of a Salesman.1949,09.
- ¹⁶ Ibid,10.
- ¹⁷ Ibid,37.
- ¹⁸ Ibid,39.
- ¹⁹ AbdelkaderAlloula. Al Adjouad.1985,28.
- ²⁰ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314402981_Social_Change_and_Women_Entrepreneurship_in_Algeria
- ²¹ http://www.jus.unitn.it/download/gestione/moussa.abouramadan/20090512_1555organizing%20women%20in%20algeria.pdf
- ²² <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-us-history/period-8/apush-1950s-america/a/women-in-the-1950s>
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Arthur Miller. Death of a Salesman.1949,47.
- ²⁵ Ibid,36.
- ²⁶ Ibid,50.
- ²⁷ AbdelkaderAlloula. Al Adjouad.1985,41.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Arthur Miller. Death of a Salesman.1949,25.
- ³¹ AbdelkaderAlloula. Al Adjouad.1985,41.
- ³² Arthur Miller. Death of a Salesman.1949,08.
- ³³ Ibid,05.
- ³⁴ AbdelkaderAlloula. Al Adjouad.1985,41.
- ³⁵ Caroline Rohloff. Reality and Representation of Algeria Women: The Complex Dynamic of Heroines and Repressed Women, Honors Research Project_French and Francophone Studies,211-2012.03.
- ³⁶ AbdelkaderAlloula. Al Adjouad. 1985,41.
- ³⁷ Arthur Miller. Death of a Salesman. 1949,44.

Chapter two: Struggle For Dignity

Struggle for dignity is recurrent throughout Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Alloula's *Al Adjouad*. It is represented through the characters' personal and life experiences. One can notice that most of the characters are facing all sorts of challenges and different kinds of difficulties. Basically, they are longing to have their own voice and are enduring to preserve their pride and self-respect within their own societies. It is this struggle in both plays that makes of these ordinary people tragic.

Arthur Miller defines the "common man" as being a tragic hero who struggles for dignity. In his essay *Tragedy and the Common Man*, Miller insists on common man's position in society. Indeed, this is apparent in his definition of the modern tragic hero: The tragic hero can and should include the common man. He defines a tragic hero as one who attempts to gain his rightful position in his society and in doing so, struggles for his dignity.¹ Hence, the quest for dignity in *Death of a Salesman* through the male characters; Willy Loman and Biff. It is also portrayed through Allal, Qaddur and Jallul in *Al Adjouad*. In fact, each of them fights against social injustice and inequalities.

a. Willy Loman's, Biff's, Qaddur's, Allal's and Jallul's Struggle for Dignity:

In *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller depicts the disagreement within one family as well as the particular conflict between the protagonist Willy Loman and the society in which he lives. Willy Loman is portrayed as a victim of his capitalistic society, which led to his decline. For nearly thirty six years, he has been working in a company longing that one day he would become a successful salesman just as his role model Dave Singleman. Dave is a well-liked and admired salesman. He is eighty four years old. At his funeral, all his costumers were mourning his death. They felt so much grief over his loss. That day, Willy Loman was deeply touched and affected since he was astonished by the kindness and the great love shown by thousands of

people. Although Willy desires greatly to be as Dave, he remains stagnant and unable to achieve success or make any progress.

Willy is unable to attain his expectations because he lives in a society in which the poor has less opportunities and little chances. Life for poor people seems harsh, and the possibility to achieve one's goals seems almost unrealizable. Willy strives financially because he is incapable to pay his installment of insurance. In order to pay back his debts, Willy was obliged to borrow some money from Charley. Though the former has great financial concerns, he still sees himself as an important employer in the company, and has huge expectations that he will be graded for his hard work and contributions. Eventually, Willy is fired from his job because of his incapability, lack of professional training and the required skills as well as his old age. Willy is unable to accept his dismissal from the company. Thus, speaking to his boss Howard, Willy says:

Willy: ...I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat an orange and throw the peel away- a man is not a piece of fruit!²

A common man is a tragic hero, thus he has to manifest for his dignity. This is the case of Willy Loman, a representative of humanity who struggles against financial and social issues. Willy's suffering is caused by his refusal to surrender to reality and accept it the way it is. He still holds on to his dreams and false beliefs. Despite that, he tries to ignore the truth, he feels deep disappointment inside him. All his life's goals have not been accomplished neither by himself nor by his sons. Willy lives in the American society of the forties, material and wealth as well as popularity is most important than anything else. In fact, money cannot buy happiness. All along his way, Willy suffers to make sense of his life because of his persistent pursuit of wealth and success.

Like Willy, Qaddur also struggles for his dignity. However, Qaddur is not looking for a social position or being rich, but rather to secure his family. He spends all his time and energy working hard at least to feed them and provide his wife with medicines. As the narrator says: “here is the housekeeping money, he said, I’m going to have a bath. And get you some medicine”.³Qaddur, the builder who works far from his home, he always longs to see his wife and children on Fridays. As it is stated in the play:

Qaddur wants to see his children to forget the hard work
Qaddur wants to see his children and be happy
Warm family atmosphere that’s what he wants.⁴

It is important to remind that Algeria during the eighties witnessed an economic crisis. Most of the Algerian heads of the families endured and struggled for better living conditions. Hence, one can notice that Qaddur is the representative of the poors during that time. During all the week, Qaddur works outdoors and even on Fridays, the day that is supposed to be his rest day, he spends it in fixing and repairing the roof of his house as his wife says : “ today, is Friday, he leaves the site to travel home”⁵ and “ repair the roof before it falls down and buries us”.⁶

Despite the miserable life caused by the crisis and social injustice, Qaddur and his family remain hopeful. Even though his wife Fatima is ill, she still hopes that one day things will be better. In spite of the harsh conditions in which they are living, they keep smiling and looking cheerful. They never give up or despair. The lack of money is never an obstacle for being joyous and contented in a family tied with love and respect. As it shown in the play:

Though tired he puts on a happy face to cheer Fatima
We missed you she said with a sigh wiping in her eyes
He leant and kissed her on her forehead then went out
He pulled a packet of henna and put it on her chest
His wife looked at him with a smile wished him well

Hoping and praying next Friday he would rest
Hoping and praying things won't get worse.⁷

Willy's sense of dignity is particularly perceived through his family, specifically his son Biff. Since his childhood, he struggles for his personal dignity. Arthur Miller maintains in his essay *Tragedy and the Common Man*:

...A tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be to secure one thing _his sense of personal dignity.⁸

Biff's search for something of value becomes very apparent when he is at high school. He steals basketballs in addition to a fountain pen while waiting for a job interview. However, even if Willy is aware of his son's thievery, he never blames him. Biff follows the path of his father and is extremely longing to gain money in order to be financially independent and to assist his family. He works in many different jobs. As it is illustrated in the play:

Biff: well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly manner of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still that's how you build a future.⁹

We can deduce that Biff is also affected by his society. People who were living in the American capitalist society of the 50s were much concerned with getting a big car, a huge house and a great business. This is the case of Biff who is dreaming of success and even goes to Bill Oliver to borrow him money to buy a beautiful ranch. As it is mentioned in the play:

Biff: I think I'll go to see him. If I could get ten thousand or even seven or eight thousand dollars I could buy a beautiful ranch.¹⁰

Allal the road sweeper is another character who struggles for dignity in Alloula's *Al Adjouad*. He represents the workers of the public sectors. He describes the suffering and the bad working conditions that they everyday face. In Allal's episode,

Alloula tends to demonstrate the social injustice and the exploitation of the workers without providing them with security or given them their rights : “Their jobs are not secure and their labour is just hired”.¹¹ However, they look very patient just to feed their families: “the workers of the public sector are struggling to secure their bread.”¹² and “the workers have no right to speak their mouths are shut.”¹³ The author is also criticizing the government for not helping the poor. Indeed there is no social security for the unemployed or the poor. As he says: “ Oh take care of the poor and make sure they have something to eat.”¹⁴ Alloula also refers to the poor quality goods produced in Algeria and sold to common people. Goods of good quality are often sold and distributed among officials. As it is mentioned in the play: “ I wonder why goods of quality have disappeared. Why did you hide them?”.¹⁵ The author takes Allal as a best example of ordinary people struggling for dignity. He describes Allal’s sad life and suffering within his society. Allal wants just to be at least respected, however he is underestimated as it is shown in the play:

He adds a smile people shy away they are afraid of him.
Some of them hold their noses and say he stinks
Some others feel sorry for him and wish him fast recovery.¹⁶

In Alloula’s *Al Adjouad*, the sixth episode is about the story of Jallul. Since it is the longest episode, one can say that it summarizes all the problems and struggles that the Algerian common people face in their lives. In this episode, Alloula makes reference to social injustice, corruption, bureaucracy and incompetence which surrounds the Algerian administration and working spaces. Alloula chooses to add the adjective ‘clever’ to the character Jallul because the latter is aware of things going on in the country. Being intelligent and educated means to have the ability of criticizing the Algerian government. However, despite all what happens in front of Jallul’s eyes, he

remains hopeful and dreams that one day Algeria will be better. As the narrator says in the play:

Jallul El Fhaimi is a clever man and he strongly believes in social justice. He loves his country dearly and wishes it develops quickly to give a better life for the majority.¹⁷

In the story of Clever Jallul, Alloula takes the character Jallul as an example to demonstrate the good qualities of the Algerian people. He is generous and affectionate man, he likes helping people in need. He is well liked by his family and the others, as his wife says to her children: “if it wasn’t for the poor and their trouble he would be an important personality in the capital”.¹⁸ He is eloquent and clever, he knows how to confront difficult situations that he faces in his daily life. He speaks to his children with love and affection, and when they discuss about any subject, he tries to express himself according to their level of understanding. However when he speaks in public, he always persuades people. As it is illustrated in the play:

He is a very deep man, a man holding numerous principles and values...Clever Jallul can’t fall... he is strong, intelligent and his mind is deep like a sea... like a mountain... like an acroplane...¹⁹

Despite all the good qualities that we have cited above, Jallul has one weakness, he loses his temper quickly. However this is not synonymous of a flaw since he gets angry just to express his rejection of social injustice and corrupted system.

Jallul’s struggles started when he was working at the hospital. His transfer from one unit to another is very symbolic. Jallul’s transfer is caused by his nervousity, however, it is for good reasons that he loses his temper. In a way, Jallul’s anger is an advantage that stands for the benefits of poor people and the country as a whole. His rejection of the unethical and illegal behavior of the workers causes his madness. Therefore, we can say that Jallul does not struggle for his own dignity only but also for the dignity of all the Algerian people. Through the character Jallul, Alloula

denounces the effects of free health care. In the beginning of the episode, he refers to the incompetence related to connections. As he says: “do you think he’s like your doctor who would cut off ears for patients who suffer from their gall-bladder?”.²⁰ In other words, he makes reference to the workers who have connections in higher circles and who are therefore, protected in case of misbehavior or incompetence. As it is stated in the play:

Jallul cannot use connections to get something but he knows for sure and he saw for himself how unthinkable and unbelievable things do happen and how impossible things to do are achieved through connections.²¹

Furthermore, social injustice is also depicted in this episode. Alloula criticizes the chaos that exists in hospitals and health care system in general. He gives the real image of the worst situation of the Algerian hospitals where the poor struggle for their health and well being. Unfortunately, stealing, discrimination and dishonesty are present. This gives bad working atmosphere for Jallul, since he rejects all kinds of misbehavior. As it is shown in the play:

You don’t let anybody get away with anything, doctors, workers...the lot...now you’ve ended up running not knowing where to go...you see? People steal medicine, meat, glasses, bottles, sheets, fruit, sugar, coffee, anything they can lay their hand hands on ...and you ? You nag at them, you fight them.²²

Injustice appears clearly as there is a category of patients who have all the necessary things for their fast recovery, while the others don’t find even the minimum equipments. As it is explained in the following passage:

He also wrote about a unit saying it is organized like a palace and the patients are like kings and princes and their court...about confusion in management and the distribution of medicine...that there is a shortage of something every day, one day it’s the stitching thread missing, the next day it’s the syringes and another day there is no water.²³

Alloula also claims the qualification of some doctors through corruption. Jallul confesses that there are only some nationalistic doctors who work seriously and do their best in order to save the lives of patients. Being a doctor means having a noble

job. However, in Algeria those who work straightly and are afraid of not accomplishing their mission in the best way are very few. Indeed he describes the other category who are corrupted as being charlatans. As Jallul says in this episode:

I have proofs...There is only a tiny minority of doctors who love their country, who love their people and who work conscientiously...Those who sympathize with the poor are very few...Most doctors are what we may call ...Charlatans.²⁴

By the end of the episode, Jallul finds himself in the mortuary unit. He spends several days working in calm and tranquility since the dead don't disturb him. However, this period does not last long and soon Jallul faces a problem bigger than those he meets in the other units. The finding of a living person drawers for the dead has shocked him and he almost loses his temper again. But he remembers that this job is his last chance. Therefore, the only solution he finds to calm down himself is going out and running. Jallul runs and speaks to himself thinking that he deserves beating. Alloula chooses the act of running to symbolize people who spend their time trying to solve their problems but without success. From the beginning, Jallul could not stay in one unit because he always fights the workers and tries to protect the rights of the poor and improve social justice. That is why the last trouble in the mortuary unit causes his down fall. As he says:

Leave us in our darkness and go on with your ideas... You say we are corrupt? Well suppose we are corrupt...But what about you what are you doing? Well go on then...Hell is not enough for you Jallul....Even if they sentence you twice it won't be enough... Run...Come on, Run.²⁵

After dealing with the characters and analyzing their struggles in both plays, we have noticed that every character struggles for his own dignity in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, while AbdelkaderAlloula's characters in *Al Adjouad*, do not struggle only for their own dignity but for the dignity of all the Algerians. As the title of the play suggests it 'The Generous' refers to brotherhood, solidarity and generosity of the

characters. They all dream of a better life for all the population and the welfare of their country.

Endnotes

- ¹ Arthur Miller. *Tragedy and the Common Man*. 1949.
- ² Arthur Miller. *Death of a Salesman*. 1949, 18.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Abdelkader Alloula. *Al Adjouad*. 1985, 14.
- ⁵ Ibid, 15.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Arthur Miller. *Tragedy and the Common Man*. 1949.
- ⁹ Arthur Miller. *Death of Salesman*. 1949, 11.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 14.
- ¹¹ Abdelkader Alloula. *Al Adjouad*. 1985, 03
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 02.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 03.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 28.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, 33.
- ²⁰ Ibid, 32.
- ²¹ Ibid, 30.
- ²² Ibid, 32.
- ²³ Ibid, 35.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 33.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 34.

Chapter Three: Death

In this chapter, we will explore the modern tragic hero that is the common man in Miller's theory on tragedy. We will deal with the protagonist Willy Loman in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Akli in Alloula's *Al Adjouad*. The last pages of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* center on the death of Willy Loman, a Sixty three years old salesman in the American society of the 1940s. Willy has dedicated all his life to be successful in business. In Alloula's *Al Adjouad*, we will shed light on the character Akli. One of the very striking affinities is in fact the names of the ordinary men and women heroes. One can pay attention to Willy meaning full of will and Loman that can be understood as 'low' man that is modest, little, humble man. in *Al Adjouad*, one of the ordinary men heroes' name is Akli that is a man coming from the lowest class in society. It can also be understood as slave or exploited. What comes then in our discussion of the final stage is the tragic death of these heroes.

To begin with the title of Miller's play, one can notice that the use of the word 'death' in the title refers to the tragic ending of the protagonist. After our reading and analysis of Willy in depth, we have noticed that many flaws cause his death.

Willy Loman is a tragic hero. His main weakness is that he is always preoccupied with his own dreams and desires. Willy believes that success is related to wealth and popularity. That means, he thinks that the most important things in life are money and being popular. Therefore, he never enjoys and valorizes his time with his family. As it is shown in the play:

The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates a personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want.¹

Willy gives too much importance to others' love and attention rather than to his family mainly his wife Linda. For him, being popular can lead to success and this eventually leads to his down fall. As Miller states in his essay:

The last appeal of tragedy is due to our need to face the fact of death in order to strengthen ourselves for life. And that over and above this foundation of the tragic view point, there are and will be a great number of formal variation, which no single definition will ever embrace.²

Miller describes Willy Loman as being loyal, hard working and hopeful man. Despite, the latter's attributed qualities, Willy is not satisfied in his life which is full of deceptions and lies. He refuses to face reality so he lies to his wife Linda about his debts since he wants to appear better than he is. At the end, Willy believes more in his false illusions, therefore, he sacrifices himself to offer his insurance money for his sons. In fact, he chooses death rather than to face reality.

Willy commits suicide due to his extreme feelings of failure. Willy begins to have the idea of suicide when he is fired, so he thinks that his insurance money will secure his family better than being alive without job. *Death of a Salesman* is a tragedy because of the sad ending of Willy Loman's life that results from his failure not only as husband and father but also as a citizen. Willy wants at least to have a massive funeral, however, even the latter is not realized, as it is shown in the play:

Willy: Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the oldtime with the strange license plates- that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized-I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey- I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben! He's in for a shock, that boy!³

Willy realizes that he has failed as a salesman. This causes him a mental disorder. He pictures images from the past of his brother Ben giving him advice on how to be successful. He regrets his refusal to go to Alaska when he was young.

Willy thinks that his life would be different if he went to Alaska with his brother Ben. This is well illustrated in the play:

Ben: I must make a tram, William. There are several properties. I'm looking at in Alaska.

Willy: Sure, sure! If I'd gone with him to Alaska that time, everything would've been totally different.⁴

Another weakness of Willy Loman that causes his downfall is when his son Biff knows that he is betraying his mother with another woman in a hotel. Biff comes to tell his father that he had failed in maths, but surprisingly he was shocked when he sees a naked woman in his father's hotel room. Willy tries to deny his relation and wants to justify his action by the fact that the woman is just borrowing his bathroom. Then, he immediately orders her to leave, however she refuses until she has her stockings. Indeed, the presence of the stockings is just a proof of his illegal relation with her. From this fact, Biff considers his father as a liar, because he is unfaithful and violates the confidence of his loving wife and sons. He is really disappointed by his father's behavior, therefore, he does not respect him anymore.

Willy (grabbing for Biff): I gave you an order!

Biff: Don't touch me, you- liar!

Willy: Apologize for that!

Biff: You fake! You phony little fake! You fake.⁵

Willy's age too can be considered as a weakness. In relating his age to capitalism, one can say that its effects can clearly be seen in the old age of the American citizens, since, their youth is always covered by their dreams. Willy Loman can be considered as the best example of the poor American workers who suffered from the capitalist system. Willy is described as a simple worker of the 50s who is full of will and hopes. However, his dreams exist just in his youth since, in his old age he is fired by his boss Howard Wagner. Willy realizes that he cannot even dream anymore, because both his age and financial situation do not allow him to achieve his goals. He has been working for thirty four years for the Wagner firm and instead of

being rewarded for the efforts he made, he is fired. This event is the major cause of his mental illness which pushes him to commit suicide. We can notice that Willy Loman sees himself useless not only for the firm but also for his family mainly his sons.

Willy : I'll go to Boston
Howard : Willy, you can't go to Boston for us
Willy : Why can't I go?
Howard : I don't want you to represent us. I've been meaning to tell you a long time now.
Willy : Howard, are you firing me?
Howard : I think you need a good long rest, Willy.
Willy : Howard...
Howard : And when you feel better, come back, and we'll see if we can work something out.⁶

One can say that death covers Willy's imperfections. For him, death becomes the only solution to secure his sons' future. After losing the most important things in his life including his family's confidence, his youth and his job, Willy feels lonely and disappointed. Indeed, his last wish is to have a massive funeral but no one comes even the people he knows. As it is shown in the play:

Biff: Come along, Mom.
Linda: Why didn't anyone come?
Charley: it was a very nice funeral.
Linda: But where all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him.
Charley: Naa. It's a rough world, Linda. They wouldn't blame him.⁷

Sacrifice is also relevant in Alloula's *Al Ajouad*. In the fourth episode, the story of Akli and Mnawar shows clearly Akli's sacrifice for the pupils of natural science classes as Willy sacrifices for his sons. Akli dreams a better future for his country. The notion of love of the others is depicted in this episode. Akli who can be considered as the protagonist, is described as a man who loves his country and who is ready to sacrifice himself for it.

It is worth to mention that Akli was arrested by the French Police during the war of independence. His experience in prison taught him many things and pushed him to be more nationalistic. After the Independence, Akli wishes to see his country,

Algeria, as one of the greatest and developed countries in the African continent. Being intellectual and educated, Akli is aware that knowledge is the source of power, growth and development of his country. He sees the latter as a weapon for emergence. This is clearly stated in the play:

I want to be more useful to the school, the school where we worked most of our life...I want to be of some use in the teaching and training of the youth.⁸

Akli is aware that good teaching needs good training, which needs sufficient teaching materials. Thus, Akli feels sorry for the pupils of the natural science classes, since they don't have any teaching materials. For Akli, the absence of the latter causes a slow understanding of the courses in spite of teachers' great efforts. So, the lack of tools undermines the quality of education. As it is illustrated in the play:

... it will be used in natural science classes...as our school lacks teaching materials my skelton will be useful for our children and it's better for the country.⁹

As we have noticed, at the end of the episode, Akil's last words are about the donation of his skelton. He does not speak about his family or children but rather he speaks about the bad teaching conditions in the school where he worked for several years. Even though he is a cook, he is sure that good education is the key for development. Thus, he speaks about the donation of his own corps to his best friend Mnawwar to be responsible about the collection of his bones after his death. As it is mentioned in the play:

I want to offer my body, I mean my skelton to the school and I want you to be in charge of the execution of this will.¹⁰

To conclude, both Willy and Akli have a tragic ending, they sacrifice themselves, Willy for his sons and Akli for the pupils whom he considers as his sons too. We can say that both characters are tragic heroes eventhough they are not from the nobility. It follows from this that Alloula's *Al Adjouad* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* portray the modern tragic heroes through their characters.

Endnotes

¹ Arthur Miller. *Death of a Salesman*. 1949, 21.

² Amar Guendouzi. *Tragedy in the Modern Age the Case of Arthur Miller*.

³ Arthur Miller. *Death of a Salesman*. 1949, 93.

⁴ Ibid, 30.

⁵ Ibid, 88.

⁶ Ibid, 58.

⁷ Abdelkader Alloula. *Al Adjouad*. 1985, 17.

⁸ Ibid, 16.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

VI. Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, we have attempted a comparative study between Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and Abdelkader Alloula's *Al Adjouad* (1985). We have explored the ways into which Miller and Alloula deal with the theme of the tragedy of the 'Common Man' relying on the theoretical approach of Arthur Miller's modern tragedy. This theory allowed us to study in depth the life and the struggles of the characters and show the way they are depicted as tragic ordinary people through three stages.

Our dissertation is divided into three chapters. In the first, We have focused on the way Miller and Alloula portrayed ordinary people's normal life before tragedy. In addition, we have shown that in spite of the fact that *Death of a Salesman* and *AlAdjouad* were written in different periods and belong to different countries, both playwrights were committed to the portrayal of the harsh conditions of their societies through their characters' self representation and life experiences. All of the characters seek to improve their social status, but eventually fail, since they are living in deteriorating circumstances surrounded by injustice, corruption and poverty. This makes of them tragic heroes as they show bravery and courage before their downfall.

Besides, We have demonstrated that both authors' backgrounds influenced their literary productions. They both succeed to construct the same representation of the characters' long-lasting endurance within their societies. Furthermore, both Miller and Alloula reflect the same issues of social injustice and financial pressures on ordinary people's lives be they American or Algerian.

Our undertaking of this work using Miller's theory on *Tragedy and the Common Man* has allowed us to discuss tragedy from a new perspective, that is a

deconstruction of the Aristotelian hero as coming from the nobility. In the light of this we have shown the ways into which both Miller and Alloula use ordinary people or common men as heroes.

Though very modest, the major contribution of this piece of research is its handling for the first time, in our department, of Algerian playwright Abdelkader Alloula's work. We have tried our best to ground Algerian theatre within world literature though to a small extent.

The scope of this memoir did not allow us to deal with all the issues depicted in Alloula's *Al Adjouad* which remains a favorable terrain for investigation. Therefore, coming students can discuss other issues like the representation of women in the plays or Brechtian influence on Alloula's *Al Adjouad* or too many other topics.

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