Tragedy and social drama in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of genre classification in *Death of a Salesman* by focusing on the dialectic relation at the heart of the play's structure between tragedy and social drama. It argues that the tragic resolution brought to the theme of social protest and the characterization of the protagonist is what gives the play its unique place as the quintessential modern tragedy. It is concluded that tragedy and the social theme are not mutually destructive in *Death of a Salesman* as some critics stated. Rather, they are combined to make an intense dramatic treatment of the modern American individual's most pressing issues. Without being constrained by prescriptive standardized rules, Miller produced a dramatic form that rightly claims the status of what can be labeled a modern tragedy, appealing to modern audiences as rarely any other modern play did.

Keywords: Arthur Miller, catharsis, dramatic structure, social drama, tragedy.

Cites as: Bayouli, T., & Sammali, I. (2019). Tragedy and social drama in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 3 (2) 37-48.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol3no2.4>