

Imprisonment in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the theme of imprisonment in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. This play demonstrates persons who are crushed and stifled by society which filled its citizens' minds with certain myths, values, and systems that may contrast with honour and ethics. As a result, they appear to be formed of a number of contradicting selves, and sometimes torn between two worlds: the internal world of fantasies of a lost past and the external reality of an unwelcoming present world. The clash, between these two worlds, grows unstable and volatile till pushing its victim to submersion or even death.

As *Death of a Salesman* begins, the audience would notice the existence of two time lines or plots. The first is that of the present time during the year 1948 which moves on through a series of scenes that ends with Willy Loman's suicide. The second is the 1931 action which moves on through a series of scenes that ends with Biff's discovery of his father with a woman at a hotel in Boston. This play is concerned with the tension between the external reality and the protagonist's private inner world. The original title chosen by Arthur Miller for this play is *The Inside of His Head*. Under his friends request, he changed it to the present title with a subtitle, "Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem". Taking into consideration the play's three titles, one would guess how far



Miller relies on memories and present events to reveal not only what his protagonist, Willy Loman, suffers from but the American society as well.

One can easily notice the fluid dramatic form of “mobile concurrency of past and present”¹. Such a style – where frontiers between past and present are removed – exploded the traditional distinction between realism and expressionism. Thus, the spectators are able to see the events which are taking place on the stage and the events taking place within the mind of a single character as well. As the play unfolds itself showing the present events in Willy Loman’s house, past events “intrude over more insistently upon the audience’s consciousness as well as Willy’s”² through memories or dreams that are demonstrated on stage and, consequently, enable the audience to “experience the disintegration of Willy Loman’s mind as Willy experiences it.”³

Willy’s memories assist in exposing the Loman family’s past which is accomplished on stage through Willy’s conversation with his dead brother, Ben, the exemplar and embodiment of success whom Willy aspires to emulate. From their conversation, we realize that Willy’s knowledge and memories of his father is so shallow since he was only “three years and eleven months”⁴ when his father left home heading for Alaska. However vague these memories seem, they do not miss the fact that his father’s image is still resounding as it is linked with warmth and music. He tells Ben “[a]ll I remember is a man with big beard, and I was in Mum’s lap, sitting around a fire, and some kind of high music.” (p.32) In contrast to this, Ben vividly describes their father as:

Father was a very great and very wild-hearted man. We would start in Boston, and he’d toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he’d drive the team right across the country; through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western States. And we’d stop in the towns and sell the



flutes that he'd made on the way. Great inventor, Father. With one gadget he made more in a week than a man like [Willy] could make in a lifetime. (pp. 32-3)

Ben's description of his father is coming in the form of gods' prophecy that foretells Willy's future as he is doomed to be deprived of enjoying such abilities experienced by his father. This might possibly be his punishment for imprisoning himself in the city and not touring the horizon as his father and brother have done. These lines clearly improvise "the untamed natural man and the westward-bound pioneer; the great inventor, and the successful entrepreneur."⁵

The family's myth does not end with the father's quest of the West as he turns north, later, to Alaska; Ben, his elder son, is no less journeyer and adventurer. In his quest for richness, he abandons his search of his father in Alaska and pursues diamond wealth in Africa. Ben sees that his five-year story in Africa is not as great as his father's and this is why he makes it so short. In his first appearance in Willy's dreams, he tells his brother, "when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich!" (p.35). Compared with these two great myths, Willy perceives his life as an empty and infertile waste, "Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground." (p.93) Thus, in his search for unity linking him and his sons with his father and brother, he appeals for Ben, whom he works hard to invoke, saying: "You're just what I need, Ben, because ...Dad left when I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel— kind of temporary about myself" (p.35).

Ben's appearance on the stage is made so massive since Miller demonstrates him as "a solid man, in his sixties, with a moustache and an authoritative air. He is certain of his destiny, and there is an aura of far places about him" (p.29). This description is necessary to show the contrast



between the stay-at-home Willy and his adventurous brother. Willy Loman lost a chance of being at unity with his father and brother when he agreed not to join Ben in business. In his speech with Howard, in Act Two, Willy refers, with great remorse, to this lost chance by saying:

my father lived in Alaska. He was an adventurous man. We've got quite a little streak of self-reliance in our family. I thought I'd go out with my older brother and try to locate him and may be settle in the North with the old man. And I was almost decided to go, when I met a salesman in the Parker House. His name was Dave Singleman...And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. (p.58)

Both, his father and Ben, did not give way to family sentiment to hinder them from questing the open road and horizon. Willy's caution as well as "humane sense of responsibility"⁶ confront with his father's and Ben's simplicability, unscrupulousness and toughness. Thus, compared with these three persons, Willy is seen as an outcast from paradise because he did not comprehend the formula to build his identity with or utter the right spell to work with. Moreover, he is depicted as a falsified Icarus for not flying too high to ignore family ties which become his labyrinth.

In fact, family ties are not the only obstacles in Willy's way for he suffers too much from ups and downs in the American society. Through Willy's dreams, Arthur Miller dramatizes stages of American economy during his protagonist's dramatic life on stage. Willy has witnessed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a sense of hope and possibility. It is during this period when Ben left home and followed his father to grasp the fortunes of the West and the world as well. When Willy first dives into the world of dream in Act One, it was, truly, the time of the wild prosperity that the Americans enjoyed during the 1920s. We find, in the play,



references to this period when not only prosperity but also harmony are noticed in his relation with his two sons, especially Biff.

WILLY: ...Someday I'll have my own business, and I'll never have to leave home any more.

BIFF: Where did you go on this time, Dad?

WILLY: Well, I got on the road, and I went north to Providence. Met the Mayor.

BIFF: The Mayor Providence! (Pp.17-8)

BIFF: Did you knock them dead, Pop?

WILLY: Knocked 'em cold in Providence, slaughtered 'em in Boston. (p.20)

WILLY: I was thinking of the Chevvy. (*Slight pause.*) Nineteen twenty-eight...

when I had that red Chevvy—(*Breaks off.*) That funny? I coulda sworn I was

driving that Chevvy today. (p.7)

It is no wonder why Willy Loman refers to this specific year, 1928, and also the old “Chevvy”, the red Chevrolet, as it reminds him of the last year of a period of love and optimism. A year later, everything turned upside down as Wall Street Crash in 1929 signalled the beginning of the

GreatDepression. It was such a harsh time for Willy as he found products hard to sell:

WILLY: The trouble was that three of the stores were half-closed for inventory in

Boston... (p.21)

Historically speaking, this economic crisis continued till December 1941 when the United States entered World War II and, consequently, industry recovered and the economy truly turned around. During this period, Willy might have created a hope that his sons might make it in such a promising market, if not, then, there must surely be something wrong with them. This could be the reason why he keeps on saying:

In the beginning, when he was young, I thought, well, a young man, it's good for him to

tramp around, take a lot of different jobs. But it's more than ten years now and he has

yetto make thirty-five dollars a week! ... Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in

the world... (p.5)

However, World War II did not put an end to the whole problem as American factories were pushed to satisfy demands of war material. Salesmen like Willy Loman found difficulty to support their living as "the manufacture of consumer goods was severely restricted."⁷Willy, in a reference to this period, emphasizes his fears when he tells Linda, his wife, "if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!"(p.22) Seducing the buyer's secretary and bribing her with stockings could be examples of the things that Willy says he might do.



Competition, after war, became so fierce with the return of young men who were energetic to pursue their former hopes that had been interrupted by war. Bosses and business men would eagerly seize such an opportunity. As a result, “men, like Willy Loman, sixty-three years old in 1948, were being displaced by the younger generation everywhere.”⁸ Willy talks much, in his dreams, to both, Ben and Linda, about this period and business as in “I’m getting awfully tired, Ben” (p.29) and “Business is bad, it’s murderous” (p.35). As he was living in the same period Willy Loman supposedly lived, Arthur Miller commented on this period and explained how getting a job was so difficult and so desired by saying that “the postman became an envied character because he could not lose his job and even had a paid vacation. ...the star football player [in high school] became a shipping clerk, and was glad to have the job.”⁹

Though Willy is trying his best to survive, his efforts are fruitless in a society that changes its formula without prior notice. Due to the influence of capitalism, new bosses appeared with their zeal for money disregarding the notions of honour and ethics that guided many bosses in the past. As a result, many systems designed to share wealth were prohibited for the fear of containing the "dangerous seeds of communism".¹⁰

Willy’s father, as described by Ben, was a peddler.¹¹ It is interesting to know that what Willy remembers of his father is his “big beard... and some kind of high music” (p.32) of this flute which is described, at the beginning of the play, as “small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon” (p.1). The father's independence, as a salesman of his own products, the flutes he made on the way, is felt in this music which recites a lost time when the travelling salesman was independent and free as he lived by his own skill and hard work.



Later, the peddler was replaced by the drummer, a person serving the interests of larger manufacturers. Drummers, by the end of the 19th century, were employed by large manufacturing firms to satisfy the needs of retail merchants who came from towns and cities to industrial centres to buy what they need.¹² It was ordinary for these drummers to use trains and boats and to stay at hotels. While moving from one place to another, they would meet merchants and offer them free entertainment hoping to secure their orders for bosses. An example of drummer is Dave Singleman, Willy's tangible example of success.

Singleman is mentioned twice in the play. The first is in Howard's office before Willy is fired and consequently deprived of any hope to attain that success enjoyed by him. In Willy's story, Singleman appears as a myth of success that transcends time, place and death. Willy is determined to force Howard, his boss, to listen to his story, the story of a salesman, as the Ancient Mariner, in Coleridge's poem, did but he does not have that spell to hold his boss, Howard, as a wedding guest and force him to believe his story.

WILLY: ... His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he'd drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y' understand, put on his green velvet slippers—I'll never forget—and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without even leaving his room at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. (p.58)

It is this man whom Willy decided to emulate and neglect the idea of joining his father in Alaska. The second time is in Act One, when Linda, in one of Willy's dream, reminds him of Dave and partly persuades him not to follow Ben to Alaska.



LINDA: Why? (*To Ben*) There is a man eighty –four years old–

WILLY: That's right, Ben, that's right. When I look at that man I say, what is there to

worry about. (Pp.62-3)

Willy Loman is the third generation of salesmen. He has a great faith in a myth that people can win and succeed. But in the business world, which is confused with the machine principle, no place is left for morality and in the crazy race for fortune, no concern is paid for those who are left behind or trampled upon. The Scene inside Howard's office clearly depicts a man, Howard, enchanted by a machine, the recorder. The sound of this machine has deafened him and he is no longer able to comprehend Willy's miseries. In a society where machinery is regarded as a 'New Messiah' that would lead its followers to the land of promise, Howard would surely hold such a 'god' lest he goes astray.¹³ Where money values are applied in every part of life even human personality, Willy – believing that love matters in the world of business as it matters within family – would surely fail in any attempt to implant himself. However, he, at his funeral, enjoys a kind of success in the love his sons show to their father, their comprehension that "Willy Loman did not die in vain" and also how they end as "The Loman Brothers"(p.107).

The play, in general, and dreams, in particular, clearly show a man at a crisis with his society or, in fact, depict the suppression of the individual by placing him below the domineering needs of society. Such a theme can easily be noticed in Miller's plays and life as well. During those horrible days where threats of being accused and labelled as anti-American, Arthur Miller reported a strange incident of a person he was summoned to see the McCarthy Committee.

I knew of one person who had been summoned to the office of a network executive and, on explaining that he had no Left connections at all, despite the then current attack upon him, was told that this was precisely the trouble,' "You have nothing

to give them," he was told, meaning he had no confession to make, and so he was fired from his job and for more than a year could not recover the will to leave his house.¹⁴

Willy, at the beginning of Act One, talks about his former boss saying that "If old man Wagner was alive I'd a been in charge of New York now!" (p.4) In contrast to that glorious past and the lost hopes, the present can be seen in his reference, a line after, to the new boss "But that boy of his, that Howard, he don't appreciate" (Ibid.). Willy's crisis is that he finds that the present is not as welcoming as the past. He misses respect, gratitude and comradeship which had been so vital in the business relationship of his youth. He is aware of this fact at home, work and everywhere. As the play begins, we see Willy Loman feeling suffocated in his house. The omnipresence of the towering structures of brick and mortar are dwarfing him and his world to nothing:

We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind [Willy's house] on all sides. Only the

blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an

angry glow of orange. As more light appears we see a solid vault of apartment houses

around the small, fragile-seeming home. (p.1)

These lines vividly show how society, at the present time, responds with cruelty to the individual regardless of his hopes and needs driving him

to death. As Richard I. Evans states, Arthur Miller often presents a protagonist at a crisis with his society. Miller's own sense of drama, he adds, "resides in the emotional tension within a person drawn to the past in order to orient himself to the present."¹⁵In Act Two, Willy, while discussing Biff's feeling of lost after the meeting between them in Boston, tells Bernard "that question has been trailing me like a ghost for the last fifteen years" (p.69). Sometimes this trial of investigating the past seems so disturbing that Willy loses the thread of events and we come to see not only a dream within reality but also a dream within a dream; while complaining to Linda that life has become so difficult with him, Willy succumbs within his daydream to an image of the Woman, a buyer's secretary with whom he had an affair in Boston.

LINDA: To me you are. (*Slight pause*) The handsomest.

From the darkness is heard the laughter of a woman. Willy doesn't turn to it,

But it continues through LINDA's lines.

. . .

WILLY: 'Cause I get so lonely – especially when business is bad and there's nobody

to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't

make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys. (*He talks through*

the Woman's subsiding laughter. The Woman primps at the 'mirror'.)

There's so much I want to make for–



THE WOMAN: Me? You didn't make me, Willy I picked you.
(Pp.23-4)

This clearly shows that even in his dreams Willy Loman is unable to find happiness, for he is continuously being influenced by conflicting issues and memories that never allow him to feel satisfaction. This incident underlines the fact that he is suffering from suffocation in the external world as well as his private inner world. Other examples can be seen in dreams when Willy is enjoying his sons' company or Ben's company and we see Bernard rushes in to tell Willy that Biff should study hard for the math exam (p.25) or that the watchman is chasing Biff (p.34).

Bewildered by his present situation as a salesman working on straight commissions and his sons' failure to establish themselves in life, Willy Loman goes back in his mind, about fourteen years ago, to find himself—though in a dream—telling his boys about his friends like the mayor of Providence, whom he had coffee with, and the New England policemen who protected his car wherever he parked it (p.18). Moreover, while driving his car, he continuously dreams as if he is driving his first car, the 1928 red Chevy. Dreaming of driving that car helps him to retain the relation with the neighbourhood and nature, which was pure and uninfected before it is 'massacred'.

WILLY: You can imagine me looking at scenery, on the road every week of life.

But it's so beautiful, Linda', the trees are so thick, and the sun is warm.

I opened the windshield and just let the warm air bathe over me. (p.2)

It is worth noting that all his memories of that past are warm and full of beautiful scenery whereas what he has in the present time is a secluded



backyard where there is no sunshine to raise a carrot. Instead of the odour of the lilac, the wistaria, the peonies and the daffodils, Willy, now, smells the stink from the apartment houses. Even the memories that he had with Biff are cut as the builder cut the two beautiful elms where he and Biff hung the swing between them (p.6). Ben, in one of the dreams cries loudly at his brother, “Get out of these cities, they’re full of talk and time payments and courts of law”(p.62). But, how can Willy transcend this world and join his brother Ben and father who left him behind in this labyrinth without making wings for his son to fly with as Daedalus did with his son Icarus? Ben's words clearly show that his world was one in which there were still frontiers to cross, fresh opportunities to be grasped, and territories where people could earn with their fists. Willy's age, on the other hand, is one in which every corner is covered and, unless you please others and be 'well-liked', you cannot earn your living. But when will "those clean-shaven frontiersmen who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices... [and] those forests of canned goods high up the sky"¹⁶ turn down a little bit their command for work and success, and lean down and listen to him.

In his last dream with Ben in the backyard, Willy seeks his brother's approval for his decision to commit suicide. Willy is tempted to do so to achieve reconciliation with life and family and to enjoy the satisfaction he seeks all his life. It is his last trial to reassemble the moments of life and consequently to fit the jagged pieces of his relationship with Biff together. Such a thing would label him as the greater salesman since he “sold his own life and thereby retrospectively redeemed it, while purging himself of guilt and leaving an inheritance of hope to those whose evident despair has been a dagger pointing at his heart.”¹⁷ Linda – the only person left for Willy to nurse and drag to the present time whenever he is lost in the memories of the past – tells Biff that his father is "a little boat

looking for a harbour"(p.54) and may be only Biff's love would grant this lost 'Ulysses' a forgiveness that would lead him home. It is Biff's declaration of love that encourages Willy to make his last big sale to trade his life for an insurance life. Willy might have had the wrong dreams as Biff believes (p.107), but he, as Charley believes, is not to be blamed for this. As part of his job, a salesman has to smile and to dream and hope that people will smile back; and when he starts "not smiling back– that's an earthquake" (ibid).

In America, sociological studies show a belief among families that their children will be better than them.¹⁸ Moreover, the American people, in particular, idolize 'success' regardless of the way by which it is achieved. The play underlines with deep irony Willy's faith in athletics as a means to better life as he expresses by telling Ben "without a penny to [Biff's] name, three great universities are begging for him, and from there the sky's limit"(p.63). Such an opportunity cannot be equated with any skill and quality others, like Bernard, may acquire. Willy is sure that his son's fame will last for a long time. He describes Biff's appearance on the football field "like a young god. Hercules –something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him...A star like that, magnificent, can never fade away!"(p.49) Unfortunately, Birnbaum, the math teacher – injured by Biff's imitation of his lisp in front of his students – refused to grant Biff the needed four marks to pass math and graduate. Consequently, Biff's star faded before it reached its sphere to be called "another Red Grange" and get "Twenty-five thousand a year" (p.65). Such a climate frustrates Willy's and his sons' attempts to rise up and deepens their feeling of emptiness. In addition to this, there was a belief, as Ashley Montague states, that to "be over forty in the United States is a sin against both flesh and the spirit".¹⁹ Being old, unable to gain his living, unprofitable like Ben, Singleman, and Charley who are, in fact, over forty, and a breeder of sons who are lost

causes society to watch him with disgust. As a result Willy is pushed down so hard to the extent that made him a dwarf. This could be why he considers others' achievements as mysteries and his revelation of their works, especially his father and Ben, have "more the tone of hagiography than family anecdote".²⁰

A point needs to be clarified here, in the image of the so called 'successful' characters or men. It is true they look successful, but they never appear happy, satisfied or even enjoying peace of mind. This is obvious in Willy's father and brother. Willy's father took his family and travelled west in his tour, and then, finding that they were impeding his speed to conquer the horizon, he cut all family ties and pursued his way to Alaska, the last frontier for the country. No reference is made of any achievement by him in Alaska. No matter how hard Willy tries to remember him, he is no more than a 'beard' and a remote music no longer able to exist in the present time of 'bricks' and 'windows'. Those 'apartment houses' frustrate all Willy's trials to contact with his father. Moreover, Ben appears as a babbling shape of a person operating as a recorder –sometimes repeating the same words – unable to change the words or even the intonation. His appearance might be employed to utter the words Willy wants to hear especially those which he repeats as ending 'rich', or his offer of a work in Alaska and, thus, to put all the blame on Linda who cajoled him to stay and turn down this offer. Thus, he appears to play the role Ion did with Aristotle in Plato's *Republic*. He is, in fact, a prisoner of a code of life he worked hard to learn by heart, and, when this is done, he becomes unable to modify. The concept 'screw your fist and you can fight' has blinded him to the extent that he sees creatures in the forest and his nephew, Biff, alike. He appears as a stranger and is, consequently, unable to 'fight fair' with each of them. Life for him has become a jungle which he expires his youth to conquer but conquered him at the end, two weeks ago, as Willy tells Charley of his death, as an

expatriate in Africa. Ben is a pioneer in the world of finance and indifferent to social relationships and, thus, his sphere of action is related to things and quantities rather than people. He epitomizes a person free from the need to human warmth and his seven sons "seemed more like commodities than members of a family".²¹

Dave Singleman – Willy's tangible example of success which is cut to his size– enjoyed a uniqueness emphasised by his name which implies lack of dependence on women. However, ending alone with no one to inherit his legacy explains the reason why Singleman comes alive through words rather than action. Willy speaks of him as a person wearing his green velvet slippers laid in a hotel bedroom which may seem as a housearrest for those who trespassed age and time. Once he left this place, he was found dead in the smoking car of a train.

Charley, the only example of success that Willy envies and never wishes to emulate, appears in Willy's fantasy and reality as person tied to work, unable to have fun by joining them in Ebbets Field or to spend time with his son, Bernard. His salvation, as he tells Willy in his own firm, is that he "never took interest in anything" as he "got an accountant inside"(p.71). The accountant has become as a jailor that Charley should work hard to guarantee his satisfaction. Miller depicts this thought very clearly as Charley, in most of the scenes, is seen as a person opening a door for a few minutes – as if to enjoy the company of people and to smell a fresh air– and then getting back to his secluded room with his 'accountant'. By not stating, precisely, this accountant's place, the word 'inside' may mean even inside his mind and heart. Charley, sometimes, seems as a strange sage with a strange philosophy which is beyond Willy's comprehension. The following lines, very clearly, demonstrate a striking difference in beliefs regarding the upbringing and care for children between these two persons:



WILLY: I got nothin' to give [Biff], Charley, I'm clean, I'm clean.

CHARLEY: He won't starve. None of them starve. Forget about him.

WILLY: Then what have I got to remember?

CHARLEY: You take it too hard. To hell with it. When a deposit bottle is broken

You don't get your nickel back. (p. 28)

Bernard, Charley's son, seems to be a successful lawyer, but he is still moving around in the shadow of another friend. In the past, he quarrelled with Happy about who would carry Biff's helmet and the shoulder guards (p.64). Now, he is staying with a friend who has a tennis court to play with (p.67). Moreover, as a member of the business world, he cannot sit and enjoy the dazzling past and questioning things, for once he does this with Willy, his father, suddenly, appears to tell him that his 'time-out' credit card has expired and the train is ready to take him back to business. Even in Willy's dreams, he appears, always, rushing and afraid to arrive late. Trains, for Bernard and Ben, have become clocks to measure time of their rest. Ben, as well, suffers from this problem as he keeps on telling Willy that he has a train to catch.

The recorder, as another sample of machinery, in Howard's office Scene, clearly, depicts a man under a spell. Howard cannot sense his son's genius unless it is played on a recorder. His family's voices seem to be far more real than their original voices, and so high in pitch to obliterate any understanding of Willy's plight. The strange thing, in this scene, is that Howard is not depicted as a heartless, greedy and selfish capitalist, but "merely an understandable victim"²² of a code of work called "business isbusiness"(p.58) that deformed him so much. Man, according to this ideology is measured according to cents and dollars. Moreover, according



to the machinery values, if s/he is incapable of getting money and, consequently, giving blood to the machine, s/he is no more than a stone.

However, Willy's sons are not an exception. Biff – filled from top to toe with his father's idea of being 'well-liked' – was unable to adjust himself with the idea of accepting orders from others as he was, as we notice in his father's recollections, a captain of his friends enjoying giving orders to them. Thus, Biff comes to be an amalgamated mixture of two contrastive concepts that his father failed in installing them properly: comradeship, as an expression of polite sociability, and walking into the jungle, as an expression of tough aggressiveness.²³ Biff, as he later confesses, lived with such athletic superiority that prevented him from having a fixed job or accepting orders from others whom he regarded as inferior to him. He ends up an aimless drifter, incapable of finding a job that provides him with the dreamed wages. In the play, we notice an affinity between him and his father, as he appears torn between rural nostalgia and his wish to establish himself. He seems to be happy there on the ranch, but when he comes home, near the world of business, he discovers that all he has done is to waste his life (p.11). Moreover, Brooklyn, with its life race, cannot tempt him to stay and "suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation" (p.10). But this 'bird' that comes with springtime wants to fly high and cannot do this as his father's 'phoney dream' of being 'well-liked' is tying his wings. If the world of business betrays his father and causes his failure, he is also a failure, as his father "blew [him] so full of hot air that [he] could never stand taking orders from anybody!" (p.101). It is Biff's failure to live up to his father's expectation that grieves Willy the most as it is from Biff that he had expected the most.

Happy, his younger son, is imprisoned with a dream of becoming 'number-one man', a merchandise manager. While waiting for this dream to come true, he either pleases himself by waiting for his 'good friend', the company's merchandise manager, to die to take his position or confirm his virility by seducing the fiancées of those who are in the list to succeed the present merchandise manager. He appears to be obsessed with, what he himself calls, an "over-developed sense of competition" (p.13). But he is such a villain—being unable to face these men—to seek vengeance by seducing or ruining their women. This over-developed sense of competition has blinded him to over-generalize the values of business to include women where he feels pleased to keep "knockin' them over" (Ibid.). Part of his wish to be number one is the fact that he has lived all the time, even to the present time, unnoticed in the shadow of his elder brother, Biff. This could be the reason why he insists on telling Biff that he is, now, so confident with women whereas Biff grows more bashful. Sexual confidence makes Happy feel superior over his brother, Biff as well as everyone in the store. Happy's character, in this way, is suffering from the same amalgamated composition; he wants to 'rip' his clothes in the middle of the store and outbox not only the merchandise manager but also everyone in the same store where he hopes to be number one and enjoy watching the waves of fame 'parting' in front of him. Women, for Happy, like the Woman, the buyer's secretary, for his father, are 'access givers' for self-esteem and self-confidence over their superiors. Moreover, women for happy are things not human beings like him; he begins by calling them as a 'pig' with a dog (p.9) and ends with 'gorgeous creatures'. (p.13)

Another victim of imprisonment is the woman in the American society. It is worth noting that, in the late 1940s, male and female roles remained the same as they were drawn strictly by "a society that still largely felt that the male should be the guiding head of the household,

providing the cash and moral rectitude, with the female being the subservient housekeeper and a nursemaid, quietly supporting all of her husband's decisions."24The word 'still' means that what was before 1940sis the same during and after1940s and Linda is a striking example of this image. In the play, we see Willy playing the role of the family provider and leader whereas Linda, obediently, takes a subservient back seat.

In contrast to the 'Great inventor father', Willy's mother is remembered only as a 'Mamma's lap', serving as a chair where she appears behind every male even her little son. Moreover, no mentioning is made of the father's death so that his memory and myth would continue forever whereas the mother's death is mentioned twice. The same is made with Ben whose presence continues along several pageswhereas his wife is mentioned only once as the communication ofhis death. Having women attached to death is made intentionally by the playwright to emphasize their inferiority as living under their great husbands' shades. Ben's myth is further emphasized as a father of seven sons and one couldguess why this great number of sons is linked with Ben but not with his wife.Ben's wife's inadequacy to be mingled inthe production of the boys is further increased as neither she nor Willy's mother and Linda are able to immortalize themselves or to be remembered, later, as breeders of female offspring.Howard's wife is unable to talk to the tape-recorder; her daughter only whistles as if having no definite voice though she is seven years old whereas her five-year oldbrotherrecites the capitals of the American states.Charley, Willy's only friend and neighbour, is seen as a man enjoying business successandthis might be due to the fact of being without a living wife as no reference is ever made to a woman as Bernard's mother. Moreover, Bernard appears with the news that he has two boys and, still, no mentioning is made of the two boys' mother.Thus, one may regard

males, in this play, as enjoying an Edenic birth as coming, directly, from a father's side with no mingling with a mother.25

Leaving females behind has become a legacy to be transmitted from one generation of males to another. Father Loman abandoned his wife and sons and travelled to Alaska. Then, Ben left his mother and Willy when the latter was about four years old. At seventeen, Willy decided to break from his mother and follow his father and brother in Alaska. It was during this journey that he met Dave Singleman, his surrogate father. Thus, it is no wonder why Willy is so ungrateful since no reference is made to the mother who served once as a 'lap' for him though he stayed with her till he was seventeen. This intention of deserting women or leaving them behind is made—though unconsciously—by Willy himself while discussing Ben's offer of a job in Alaska: "God, timberland! Me and my boys in those grand outdoors!" (p.62). It is evident that Linda is not welcomed in Alaska, an all-male realm. Although she persuades her husband to stay and establish himself in Brooklyn rather than tempting him to go out, Linda, is seen, however, as a falsified 'Eve' who kept her 'Adam' at 'hell' of women and not encouraging him to quest the 'paradise' of men with his father, Ben, and Singleman.

Though society gradually welcomed the emergence of the 'working woman', she was, often, belittled and discredited and whenever and wherever possible. One can easily find various proofs of this in the role these working women such as The Woman, Charlotte, Jenny, and Miss Forsythe demonstrate in the play and the way they are presented and mentioned. These characters as well as other female characters who are either meaningfully absent or briefly mentioned show the playwright's enthusiasm to document this era in the American society and also to denounce it. A prominent figure from the working women that emerges



from Willy's dream is the buyer's secretary whom Willy had an adulterous affair with in Boston. Her laugh and figure haunt him along the play.

Although no mentioning is made of him meeting her again, but her laugh is resounding in Willy's ears to remind him of his guilt and us, as audience, of her role as a working woman. Although he tries to convince Biff that he had this affair out of his feeling of loneliness and sense of inadequacy as a salesman, Willy's efforts are not fruitful:

WILLY: ...she's just a buyer. She sees merchandise in her room...Biff, when you grow

up you'll understand about these things...She's nothing to me, Biff, I was feel-

ing lonely, I was terribly lonely. (p.91)

The Woman's response to Willy as she leaves the room, tells us much about her feeling concerning her role in society at that time and could be taken as a cry against this society who sent her out 'naked': "But my clothes, I can't go out naked in the hall." (p.90)

Having women in the present time like Forsythe and Letta acting as cover girls or call girls shows clearly that the woman-figure in the past and the present are alike. Although, Letta has got a jury duty, she cannot go outside the role assigned to her by society. Moreover, while in Charley's firm, Willy, harping on the same matter, asks Jenny, the secretary, "How're ya? Workin'? Or still honest?" (p.67) Though Charlotte is engaged to a guy in the line for the vice-president of the store and expected to be married in five weeks; she cannot break the formula and resist Happy's temptation. Miller, through presenting the play from Willy's perspective, unveils a male world America which is, actually, a locker room where women are



voiceless, trivialized, and marginalized. They are either wives who mediate between a father and his sons, or whores: objects of sexual exploitation.

Notes

1 Arthur Miller, *Collected Plays*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p.25

2 Brenda Murphy and Susan C.W. Abboston, "Introduction"

in *Understanding Death of a Salesman*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.xiv

3 Ibid.

4 Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*. (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981), p.3 Further references to this edition will be noted in the text by page number.

5 Harold Bloom, ed., "Introduction" in *Willy Loman*. (Philadelphia: Chelsea House publishers, 2005), p. 36

6 Murphy, p.14

7 Ibid. p.90

8 Ibid.

9 Paul Blumberg "Work as Alienation in the Plays of Arthur Miller" in *Willy Loman*. Edited by Harold Bloom. (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005). p.8

10 Murphy, p.19

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid. p.88

13 Ibid. p.65. Henry Ford, in 1928, "declared machinery to be the 'New Messiah' which could lead all Americans to their land of promise, as long as they embrace it without compunction."

14 Kay Stanton "Women and the American Dream" in Robert A. Martin and Steven R. Centola, ed., *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), p.154

15 Richard I. Evan. *Psychology and Arthur Miller*. (New York: 1969), p.56

16 Bloom, p.2

17 Christopher Bigsby. *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*. Cambridge: University Press, 2005. p.114



18Murphy, p.125

19Ibid. p.45

20IrvingJacobson."Family Dreams in *Death of a Salesman*".

<http://www.jstor.org>. An article of twelve pages, retrieved in February the 20th, 2010..p.251

21Ibid. p.250

22Blumberg. p.14

23LeonardMoss.*Arthur Miller*. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 30

24Murphy, p.126

25Stanton, p.122

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