

The Tragedy of the Common Man: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman

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By

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Abstract:

In the tumultuous landscape of 20th-century America, the disintegration of the idealized American family portrait emerged as a profound tragedy. This transformation was catalyzed by the seismic shockwaves of two world wars, each accompanied by a litany of political, economic, and social crises. As society grappled with these cataclysms, the corrosive force of materialistic greed and an unrelenting pursuit of success cast a sinister shadow upon individuals and communities alike. The moral compass of American society faltered, threatening values once held sacred—integrity, empathy, and family sanctity.

Amid this backdrop of turmoil and moral erosion, Arthur Miller's seminal work, "Death of a Salesman," took center stage as a poignant exploration of the tragic consequences of the distorted American Dream. Miller's narrative delved deep into the human tragedy, unraveling the lives of characters entrapped in the relentless pursuit of success, often at the cost of personal lives and family unity.

This research paper meticulously examines the play's multifaceted themes and characters, shedding light on the enduring significance of tragedy in Miller's portrayal of the American Dream. As the curtains fall, it weaves together the play's themes, drawing connections that transcend the stage's confines, revealing the profound implications of "Death of a Salesman" as a tragedy that echoes the broader American experience.

In the crucible of war and moral decay, "Death of a Salesman" stands as a timeless tragedy, offering a powerful reflection on the human condition, the elusive American Dream, and the ultimate price paid for its distortion.

chapter one:

ARTHUR MILLER'S

Life and Style

Arthur Asher Miller Arthur Asher Miller (October 17, 1915 – February 10, 2005) stood as a prominent American playwright, essayist, and iconic figure within the tapestry of twentieth-century American theater. His repertoire boasts some of the most beloved plays in American drama, including "All My Sons" (1947), "Death of a Salesman" (1949), "The Crucible" (1953), and "A View from the Bridge" (1955, revised 1956). Miller's talents extended beyond the stage, encompassing several notable screenplays, with his work on "The Misfits" (1961) being a standout achievement. The enduring legacy of "Death of a Salesman" has firmly etched it into the pantheon of the finest American plays of the 20th century, sharing its pedestal with classics like "Long Day's Journey into Night" and "A Streetcar Named Desire." Miller's public life unfolded during the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, marking an era when he frequently occupied the public's gaze (Bigsby, 1997, pp. 1-19). It was during this period that he achieved several significant milestones that would shape his legacy:

- **Pulitzer Prize for Drama:** Miller's mastery in the theatrical realm was celebrated with the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, a resounding testament to his artistry.

- **Testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee:** In the midst of a politically charged era, Miller displayed unwavering commitment to principles of justice and artistic freedom by testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee (Ratcliffe, 2005).
- **Marriage to Marilyn Monroe:** Miller's personal life intersected with his public persona through his union with the iconic Marilyn Monroe, captivating the imaginations of people worldwide.

Miller's contributions transcended geographical boundaries, earning him international recognition and honors:

- **St. Louis Literary Award:** In 1980, Miller received the prestigious St. Louis Literary Award from the Saint Louis University Library Associates, underscoring his enduring literary legacy.
- **Prince of Asturias Award and Praemium Imperiale Prize (2002):** Miller's profound influence on the arts resonated far beyond American shores, as evidenced by the Prince of Asturias Award and the Praemium Imperiale prize in 2002.
- **Jerusalem Prize (2003):** The Jerusalem Prize in 2003 further solidified Miller's stature as a literary luminary with a global reach.
- **Dorothy and Lillian Gish Lifetime Achievement Award:** Miller's indelible contributions to the realms of entertainment and the arts were celebrated with the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Lifetime Achievement Award, a testament to his enduring impact.

As we embark on this comprehensive exploration of Arthur Miller's life and artistic journey, we delve deeply into the world of "Death of a Salesman" and the enduring themes that continue to resonate with audiences worldwide

Early Life: Arthur Miller was born on October 17, 1915, in Harlem, in the New York City borough of Manhattan. He was the second of three children born to Augusta (Barnett) and Isidore Miller. Miller's family was of Polish Jewish descent. His father, Isidore, was born in Radomyśl Wielki, Galicia (then part of Austria-Hungary, now Poland), and his mother was a Isidore was a successful native of New York whose parents also arrived from that town. businessman who owned a women's clothing manufacturing business employing 400 people, earning him respect and wealth within the community. The Miller family, which included Arthur's younger sister Joan Copeland, lived comfortably on West 110th Street in Manhattan. They even owned a summer house in Far Rockaway, Queens, and employed a chauffeur. However, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 had a profound impact on the family's fortunes, leading to significant losses. As a teenager, Arthur Miller began delivering bread every morning before school to help support his family through this challenging period. After graduating in 1932 from Abraham Lincoln High School, Miller worked at various menial jobs to pay for his college tuition (Miller, 2012).

At the University of Michigan, Miller initially pursued a major in journalism and was actively involved with the student paper, the Michigan Daily. It was during this time that he wrote his first play, titled "No Villain." Miller's interest soon shifted to English, and his talent as a playwright began to emerge. His play "No Villain" received the prestigious Avery Hopwood Award, marking his first significant recognition and encouraging him to consider a career as a playwright. Miller's journey into playwriting gained momentum when he enrolled in a playwriting seminar taught by the influential Professor Kenneth Rowe. Under Rowe's guidance,

The Tragedy of the Common Man: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman

Zulfiqar Hussein

Miller learned the intricacies of play construction and storytelling dynamics, which would become crucial elements of his future works. Rowe not only provided valuable feedback but also became a lifelong friend to Miller. Throughout his life, Miller maintained strong ties to the University of Michigan, establishing the Arthur Miller Award in 1985 and the Arthur Miller Award for Dramatic Writing in 1999. In 2000, the university honored him by naming a theater after him—the Arthur Miller Theatre. I also enrolled in a playwriting seminar taught by "after him—Professor Kenneth Rowe. Rowe was a brilliant teacher, and he taught me everything I know (Miller, 1987, p. 43)."about play construction and storytelling dynamics.

In 1937, Miller wrote "Honors at Dawn," another play that received the Avery Hopwood Award. After graduating in 1938, he faced a career choice: to join the Federal Theatre Project, a New Deal agency created to provide jobs in the theater, or accept a more lucrative offer to work as a scriptwriter for 20th Century Fox. Miller's commitment to the theater led him to choose the Federal Theatre Project, despite Congress closing the project in 1939 due to concerns about Communist infiltration. While working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Miller continued to write radio plays, some of which were broadcast on CBS. (Miller, 1987)

Later Life and Legacy: In the latter years of his life, Arthur Miller faced health challenges that eventually led to his passing. On the evening of February 10, 2005, he succumbed to bladder cancer and heart failure at his residence in Roxbury, Connecticut. His final days were spent in hospice care at his sister's apartment in New York, following his release from the hospital the previous month. Significantly, Miller's death occurred on the 56th anniversary of the Broadway debut of "Death of a Salesman," the iconic play that solidified his status as one of the most influential American playwrights of the 20th century. In his last moments, he was surrounded by family and friends, marking the end of a life rich in artistic achievements and personal connections. Today, Arthur Miller's legacy endures through his profound contributions to American theater and literature. He is interred at Roxbury Center Cemetery in Roxbury, a place (Centola, 2000) that commemorates the lasting impact of his work on the cultural landscape.

Society's Influence on Miller's Style: The mid-20th century was a transformative period for American society, marked by profound upheavals that left an enduring imprint on the nation's psyche and its artistic expressions. The United States grappled with the aftermath of two World Wars, the trauma of the Great Depression, overpopulation, and a generational clash between traditional conservatism and youthful liberalism. Additionally, the era witnessed political instability, which cast a pervasive shadow over nearly every facet of life, leaving its indelible mark on society (Brinkley, 2010).

While the semblance of peace returned in 1945 following the end of World War II, deep-seated societal issues persisted beneath the surface. These lingering problems prevented Americans from fully savoring the fruits of their hard-won victory. As they looked back nostalgically to the past, they felt a disconnection from their cherished American Dream, a dream that now seemed elusive and distant (Peter, 1986).

In this tumultuous environment, American playwrights recognized the urgent need to engage with the pressing social issues of their time. They used their works as a powerful platform to comment on societal matters and to express their profound opinions. The popularity of socially conscious plays continued to grow, prompting dramatists to sharpen their views through the medium of satirical drama, often blending protest with propaganda. Notably, playwrights began to shift their focus inward, emphasizing the inner realities of individuals on the stage more than the external world (Travis, 1977).

Despite the dark and somber realities of the post-war era, it emerged as a remarkably fertile period in American literary history. Numerous plays born during this time vividly portrayed the anguish of the American individual, who grappled with the weight of societal expectations and

the disintegration of long-held beliefs. The era cultivated and nurtured many notable dramatists, among whom Arthur Miller stands as a prominent figure. His works, including the iconic "Death of a Salesman," reflect the profound impact of this era's challenges on the American psyche. Miller's plays serve as poignant mirrors that reflect the struggles and aspirations of a society coming to terms with its past while striving to define its future (Adler, 1994).

Style: Arthur Miller's writing style is a skillful blend of various dramatic influences. He believed that a successful play should strike a delicate balance between the individual and society, exploring the tension between the singular personality and the collective forces of life (Centola, 2000).

1- *Synthesizing Dramatic Styles:* In "Death of a Salesman," Miller seamlessly synthesizes elements of realism and symbolism. The character of Willy Loman represents the disillusioned American Dream, a symbol of the individual's struggle against societal expectations. While the play's setting and dialogue are grounded in realism, Willy's hallucinatory conversations with his dead brother Ben introduce a symbolic layer that delves into his psyche. This blend of realism and symbolism allows Miller to convey Willy's internal turmoil and the broader societal pressures that lead to his tragic downfall (Bigsby, 1997, pp. 101-102).

2- *Borrowing from Dramatic Traditions:* Miller borrowed techniques from playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Bertolt Brecht. In "The Crucible," he draws on Ibsen's tradition of exploring the individual's conflict with society. The Salem witch trials become a metaphor for the McCarthy era's witch hunts, where individual liberties were sacrificed for collective paranoia. This blend of historical realism with contemporary symbolism highlights Miller's mastery of merging diverse styles. The character of John Proctor, for example, embodies the individual's resistance against societal injustice, drawing parallels to Ibsen's strong-willed protagonists (Miller, 1996).

Analysis: Miller's style allows him to explore the complexities of the human experience while addressing broader societal issues. By combining realism with symbolism and drawing from multiple dramatic traditions, he crafts narratives that resonate with audiences on personal and societal levels. His characters grapple with the weight of their individual choices within the context of a society that molds them, creating a rich and immersive theatrical experience. This Miller's dramas are "nuanced approach to style enhances the depth and universality of his plays. realistic in the sense that they are grounded in the everyday world of ordinary people. However, they also transcend realism by exploring the symbolic dimensions of human experience. Miller's characters are often caught in a struggle between their individual desires and the societal forces . (Adler, 1994, p.34)"that shape their lives.

Themes: Arthur Miller's works are marked by recurring themes that delve into the depths of human existence, societal responsibilities, and the struggle to find meaning in life.

1- *The All American Family:* In "All My Sons," Miller masterfully portrays the American family (Carson, 1983). Joe Keller's pursuit of the American Dream and his tragic choices, which lead to the deaths of American servicemen, exemplify the theme of familial responsibility. The conventions of the family play, set by playwrights like Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Miller, provide a canvas for Miller to explore the intersection of personal and social responsibilities (Lenke, 2005). The character of Joe Keller serves as a tragic figure whose actions reflect the moral dilemmas faced by ordinary individuals in the pursuit of their version of the American Dream.

2- *Social Responsibility:* John Proctor in "The Crucible" embodies the theme of social responsibility. He confronts the banality of conformity and societal expectations, refusing to

The Tragedy of the Common Man: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman

Zulfiqar Hussein

compromise his principles by falsely confessing to witchcraft. His internal struggle highlights the consequences of ignoring or violating social responsibilities in the face of moral dilemmas (Popkin, 1960). Proctor's ultimate sacrifice underscores the theme of individual integrity against the backdrop of a society gripped by fear and hysteria.

3- *Life, Death, and Human Purpose*: Willy Loman's journey in "Death of a Salesman" encapsulates Miller's exploration of life, death, and human purpose. Willy's obsession with providing for his family and his belief that his death would leave a legacy symbolize the eternal human quest for meaning. Even as he grapples with the harsh realities of his life, his character reflects the universal struggle to find significance in one's existence (Broderick, 1983). Willy's tragic demise is a poignant commentary on the fragility of the American Dream and the toll it takes. Willy Loman's journey in 'Death of a Salesman' is a tragic one, but it "can take on the individual. is also a universal one. Willy represents the common man who is struggling to find meaning in a world that is often cruel and unforgiving. His obsession with the American Dream and his belief that his death will leave a legacy symbolize the eternal human quest for significance. However, Willy's tragic demise is a reminder that the American Dream is often elusive and that the pursuit of material success can come at a great cost. (Adler, 1994, p. 31)"

Analysis: Miller's thematic exploration extends beyond the surface, delving into the complexities of human relationships, moral obligations, and existential questions. His characters are conduits for these themes, embodying the inner conflicts and external pressures that define the human condition. Miller's plays serve as mirrors that compel audiences to contemplate their own lives, choices, and societal responsibilities. His nuanced portrayal of these themes adds depth to his narratives, making them timeless and universally relevant. By infusing his works with a distinctive style and thought-provoking themes, Arthur Miller has left an indelible mark on American theater, offering enduring narratives that continue to resonate with audiences. Miller's plays are not just about individuals and their personal struggles. They are "worldwide. also about larger social and existential issues. Miller's characters are not just symbols of themselves; they are also symbols of the human condition. This is why Miller's plays continue to . (Centola, 2000, p.10)"resonate with audiences today.

Chapter Two:

Death of a Salesman

Overview and summary:

"Death of a Salesman," penned by acclaimed American playwright Arthur Miller in 1949, stands as a cornerstone of American theater, earning accolades such as the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and multiple Tony Awards for Best Play. The play's Broadway premiere in February 1949 ran for an impressive 742 performances, and it has since experienced several successful revivals on the Broadway stage, further cementing its status as one of the most significant and enduring plays of the 20th century.

The narrative unfolds around Willy Loman, a middle-aged traveling salesman who returns home, his spirit and body battered by exhaustion and a series of unsettling car accidents. Concerned about her husband's fragile mental state and desperate for him to find respite from his

relentless travel, Willy's devoted wife, Linda, suggests that he approach his boss, Howard Wagner, with a request for a local job assignment. Linda's hopes are rooted in a desire to ease Willy's burdens and to safeguard his well-being, as she keenly senses that her husband is at a breaking point.

Amidst this backdrop of domestic concern, Willy's sons, Biff and Happy, engage in a poignant reflection on their shared childhood memories. Their reminiscences reveal a stark contrast between their father's present-day mental decline and his past as a proud and ambitious man. In the high school years of his sons, Willy was a figure of inspiration, encouraging them to pursue their dreams and embody the essence of the American Dream—a life of success, wealth, and boundless opportunity. However, the intervening years have witnessed a disheartening transformation in Willy's character, marked by indecisiveness and persistent daydreams about the past.

The pivotal moment arrives when Willy confronts his sons about their lack of achievement in life, a source of deep disappointment for him. Seeking to soothe their father's anger and anxiety, Biff and Happy assure him that Biff has a promising business proposition to present the following day. This assertion is not only an attempt to alleviate Willy's emotional turmoil but also a reflection of their own desire to live up to the expectations that their father has for them.

The subsequent day sees Willy approaching Howard Wagner, his employer, with the hope of securing a local job assignment that would relieve him of the arduous and unyielding demands of constant travel. Regrettably, his request is met with rejection, and instead, he receives a notice of termination. This dismissal further shatters Willy's already fragile sense of self-worth, as his identity has been intricately woven into the fabric of his career.

Meanwhile, Biff embarks on a mission to propose a business endeavor to a former employer, but his efforts end in disappointment. Frustrated and disillusioned, Biff impulsively steals a fountain pen, symbolizing the weight of his unfulfilled potential and the moral quandary he faces.

In a pivotal turn of events, Willy visits his neighbor Charley, whose son Bernard has achieved success as a lawyer. Bernard's presence serves as a stark reminder of Biff's own journey, which has deviated significantly from the path of success once envisioned by his father. During this encounter, Charley offers Willy financial assistance to cover his life-insurance premium. Willy's response, that a man is "worth more dead than alive," encapsulates the depths of his despair and foreshadows the tragic resolution that awaits.

Later, the family convenes for a dinner at a restaurant, a gathering fraught with tension and unspoken truths. Willy, desperate to cling to his vision of his sons' prosperity, refuses to entertain any negative news from Biff. Happy, ever the peacemaker, encourages Biff to fabricate a tale that would appease their father's expectations. However, Biff is determined to confront the painful truth of their lives.

As Biff attempts to reveal the reality of his failures and confront Willy about his lies, the atmosphere becomes charged with emotion. Biff recounts a searing memory from a visit to Boston, where he unexpectedly discovered Willy's infidelity during a business trip. This revelation fundamentally shattered Biff's perception of his father and marked a turning point in their relationship.

Amidst the rising tension, Biff leaves the restaurant in frustration, accompanied by Happy and two women he has met. Linda, the ever-suffering wife and mother, admonishes her sons for abandoning their father, but Willy remains outside, engaged in a heart-wrenching monologue

The Tragedy of the Common Man: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman

Zulfiqar Hussein

with himself. This poignant moment encapsulates the depths of his isolation and his inability to bridge the chasm that has grown between him and his family.

In the aftermath of this tumultuous evening, Biff makes a final attempt to reconcile with his father. Their conversation evolves into a poignant and emotionally charged exchange. Biff, with unwavering honesty, asserts that he and Willy are ordinary men destined for ordinary lives. He implores his father to release him from the weight of unattainable expectations. Linda, in a heartbreaking scene, urges Willy to follow her upstairs to bed, seeking to protect him from the painful reality that looms.

The play reaches its heart-wrenching climax as Willy succumbs to his inner demons. In a hallucinatory state, he envisions the presence of his long-deceased brother Ben, a figure of reverence and success in his life. Willy believes that Ben endorses his plan to end his life, a tragic act that would provide Biff with insurance money—a final, desperate attempt to secure his son's future.

Willy exits the stage, leaving a trail of despair in his wake. Biff, Linda, and Happy are left behind, their cries of anguish punctuating the silence.

The play concludes with a poignant funeral scene, attended solely by the Loman family, Bernard, and Charley. In this moment of closure, the audience grapples with the ambiguities of mixed emotions and unresolved conflicts. Biff reaffirms his determination not to tread the path of business that his father had envisioned, choosing instead to forge his own destiny. Happy, on the other hand, elects to follow in his father's footsteps, an embodiment of the persistent allure of the American Dream. Linda, in a moment of poignant reflection, laments the choices made by her husband just before she makes the final payment on their home—a symbol of their shattered dreams.

In this tragic and emotionally charged narrative, Arthur Miller masterfully weaves a tale of the American Dream, familial responsibilities, disillusionment, and the relentless pursuit of success. "Death of a Salesman" stands as a timeless exploration of the human condition and the complexities that shape our lives, resonating with audiences and earning its rightful place as a masterpiece of American theater.

Characters:

William "Willy" Loman: The salesman, 62 years old, is unstable, insecure, and self-deluded. Willy tends to re-imagine events from the past as if they were real. He vacillates between different perceptions of his life. Willy seems childlike and relies on others for support, coupled with his recurring flashbacks to World War 2. His first name, Willy, reflects this childlike aspect as well as sounding like the question "Will he?" His last name gives the feel of Willy's being a In Later years I found it discouraging to observe "'low man," someone who wouldn't succeed. smirked at the heavy-"death of a salesman"the confidence with which some commentators of . What the name really meant to me was a terror-stricken man "low-man" handed symbolism of (Timebends, 1987, p. 179) "calling into the void for help that will never come

Linda Loman: Willy's loyal and loving wife. Linda is passively supportive and docile when Willy talks unrealistically about hopes for the future, although she seems to have a good knowledge of what is really going on. She chides her sons, particularly Biff, for not helping Willy more, and supports Willy lovingly even though Willy sometimes treats her poorly, ignoring her opinions over those of others. She is the first to realize that Willy is contemplating suicide at the beginning of the play, and urges Biff to make something of himself, while expecting Willy to help Biff do so.

Biff Loman: Willy's elder son. Biff was a football star with a lot of potential in high school, but failed math his senior year and dropped out of summer school when he saw Willy with another woman while visiting him in Boston. He wavers between going home to try to fulfill Willy's dream for him as a businessman or ignoring his father by going out West to be a farmhand where he feels happy. He likes being outdoors and working with his hands, yet wants to do something worthwhile so Willy will be proud of him. Biff steals because he wants evidence of success, even if it is false evidence, but overall Biff remains a realist and informs Willy that he is just a normal guy and will not be a great man.

Harold "Happy" Loman: Willy's younger son. He has lived in the shadow of his older brother Biff most of his life and seems to be almost ignored, but he still tries to be supportive towards his family. He has a restless lifestyle as a womanizer and dreams of moving beyond his current job as an assistant to the assistant buyer at the local store, but he is willing to cheat a little in order to do so, by taking bribes. He is always looking for approval from his parents, but he rarely gets any, and he even goes as far as to make things up just for attention, such as telling his parents he is going to get married. He tries often to keep his family's perceptions of each other positive or "happy" by defending each of them during their many arguments, but still has the most turbulent relationship with Linda, who looks down on him for his lifestyle and apparent cheapness, despite his giving them money.

Charley: Willy's somewhat wise-cracking yet kind and understanding neighbor. He pities Willy and frequently lends him money and comes over to play cards with him, although Willy often treats him poorly. Willy is jealous of him because his son is more successful than Willy's. Charley offers Willy a job many times during visits to his office, yet Willy declines every time, even after he loses his job as a salesman.

Bernard: Charley's son. In Willy's flashbacks, he is a nerd, and Willy forces him to give Biff test answers. He worships Biff and does anything for him. Later, he is a very successful lawyer, married, and expecting a second son – the same successes that Willy wants for his sons, in particular Biff. Bernard makes Willy contemplate where he has gone wrong as a father.

Uncle Ben: Willy's older brother who became a diamond tycoon after a detour to Africa. He is dead, but Willy frequently speaks to him in his hallucinations of the past. He is Willy's role model, although he is much older and has no real relationship with Willy, preferring to assert his superiority over his younger brother. He represents Willy's idea of the American Dream success story, and is shown coming by the Loman's house while on business trips to share stories.

The Woman: A woman, whom Willy calls "Miss Harvey," with whom Willy cheated on Linda.

Howard Wagner: Willy's boss. Willy worked originally for Howard's father and claims to have suggested the name Howard for the newborn son. He, however, sees Willy as a liability for the company and fires him, ignoring all the years that Willy has given to the company. Howard is extremely proud of his wealth, which is manifested in his new wire recorder, and of his family.

Jenny: Charley's secretary.

Stanley: A waiter at the restaurant who seems to be friends or acquainted with Happy.

Miss Forsythe: A girl whom Happy picks up at the restaurant. She is very pretty and claims she was on several magazine covers. Happy lies to her, making himself and Biff look like they are important and successful. (Happy claims that he attended West Point and that Biff is a star football player.)

Letta: Miss Forsythe's friend.

The Tragedy of the Common Man: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman

Zulfiqar Hussein

Themes

Reality and Illusion: "Death of a Salesman" skillfully employs flashbacks to portray Willy Loman's memories as part of the reality. These flashbacks also serve to reveal the lost pastoral life that Willy yearns for. Throughout the play, Willy indulges in a self-constructed illusion where he dreams of success and fabricates lies about his and Biff's achievements. The more he immerses himself in this illusion, the harder it becomes for him to confront the harsh reality. Biff stands out as the character who recognizes the family's entanglement in these lies and strives to confront the truth. "Miller's use of flashbacks and illusions in 'Death of a Salesman' creates a sense of ambiguity that forces the audience to question what is real and what is not. Willy's illusions are a way for him to cope with the harsh realities of life, but they also ultimately lead to his downfall. The play shows how the American Dream can be an illusion and how the pursuit of .material success can come at a great cost." (Reinhold, 1980, p. 44)

The American Dream: At the heart of the play lies the theme of the American Dream, with Loman Willy each character possessing their unique interpretation of this elusive aspiration. envisions the American Dream as emulating the success of Dave Singleman, a figure characterized by both wealth and personal freedom. In Willy's perspective, being well-liked is the key to success, and his frequent flashbacks underscore his measurement of happiness in terms of wealth and popularity. However, one analysis suggests that society's teachings about wealth and popularity equating to happiness misled Willy. He incessantly chased wealth, failing Additionally, he believed that success hinged .to appreciate what he already had (Barter, 1975) on possessing a likable personality, yet lacked the necessary character traits to win people over.

For Willy, his older brother Ben embodies a different facet of the American Dream: seizing opportunities, conquering nature, and amassing wealth. Ben's mantra of venturing into the jungle and emerging rich symbolizes this interpretation. Biff, after discovering his father's true nature, rejects this vision because he recognizes that Willy's way of envisioning the future is .fundamentally flawed (Bloom, 1987)

"Death of a Salesman" also showcases the hard work and dedication of characters like Charley and Bernard, who serve as counterpoints to Willy's beliefs. Despite Willy's criticisms, his jealousy toward their success becomes apparent. Charley, Willy's neighbor and seemingly his only friend, challenges Willy's business theories. Charley, while providing for his family, offers Willy a job, highlighting the disparity between their successes. By examining the models of business success presented in the play, it becomes evident that Willy's "personality theory" lacks substance. Charley, Bernard, and others illustrate alternative paths to success, ultimately challenging Willy's beliefs about the American Dream. "Charley and Bernard represent different paths to success than Willy. Charley is a successful businessman who has built his business from the ground up. Bernard is a successful doctor who has achieved his success through hard work and education. Willy's jealousy of Charley and Bernard's success highlights his own flawed .beliefs about the American Dream." (Reinhold, 1980, p. 43)

Thoughts and Discussion:

Tragedy Unfolds: In "Death of a Salesman," we encounter a compelling exploration of the tragic genre within American theater. The very title of the play serves as a harbinger, signifying the inexorable arrival of a profoundly disheartening denouement. Arthur Miller, the playwright, adroitly escorts the audience through the gradual unraveling of the life of Willy Loman, .inexorably guiding him towards a tragic demise (Mitchell, 1993)

At its core, this narrative encapsulates a quintessential tragic hero in the form of Willy Loman. He is a man driven by noble intentions, steadfastly committed to the relentless pursuit of the American Dream. However, as the play inexorably unfurls, we are privy to the tragic flaw

that seals his destiny—an unwavering belief in the artifice of success and an innate inability to confront the unvarnished reality of his existence. His tragic flaw is thus discerned in his deeply entrenched delusion, wherein he entertains the false premise that popularity and the cultivation of a pleasing personality constitute the sine qua non of success. This very delusion serves as the veritable blindfold that obscures from his sight the genuine affection and support that emanate from a man who neither is eminently good "from his familial milieu. Aristotle defines a tragic hero as one who is neither just, nor meets with a miserable fate through vice and depravity, falls from a high state of prosperity through some error or frailty. (Aristotle, 1974, p. 25). Willy Loman fits all of Aristotle's criteria for a tragic hero. He is a man of good intentions, but he is flawed by his belief in the American Dream and his inability to confront reality. His tragic flaw leads to his downfall, but he ultimately evokes pity and fear from the audience.

The American Dream and Its Betrayal: The play, in profound contemplation, delves into the theme of the American Dream and its heart-rending betrayal. Willy's interpretation of the American Dream, notably encapsulated in the persona of Dave Singleman—a well-liked and prospering salesman—compels him towards a relentless odyssey. Nonetheless, his misconstrued apprehension of the dream, anchored in the superficial trappings of affluence and image, ensnares him in an inexorable quagmire (Elfenbein, 2003).

In counterpoint, Biff, Willy's son, emerges as a harbinger of a disparate interpretation. Biff's odyssey is fraught with tragedy as well, punctuated by the shattering of his once-elevated perception of his father. The revelation of Willy's infidelity, a pivotal juncture in his journey, catalyzes a transformative process. Biff's dawning awareness that he is, in his own introspective Miller's "words, "just a normal guy" stands as a testament to the tragedy of shattered illusions. The play shows how the American Dream can lead to greed, materialism, and disillusionment. Willy Loman is a man who is obsessed with success, but he ultimately realizes that success does not guarantee happiness. Willy's tragic downfall is a reminder of the human cost of the American Dream. (Trachtenberg, 1982, p. 109)

The End of Illusion: In the continuum of the play, Willy's innermost world undergoes inexorable dissolution, affording us the privilege of witnessing his fevered endeavors to clutch desperately to the vestiges of his illusions. The tragic element in his narrative resides in the futility of his endeavors. His hallucinatory dialogues with his departed brother Ben, as well as his conviction that his self-immolation will secure Biff's future, resonate as deeply poignant. The apogee of Willy's tragic voyage unveils itself in the act of his own suicide—a denouement that mirrors the classical trajectory of the tragic hero's downfall. His demise begets a wake of despair, particularly poignant for Linda, who steadfastly bolstered him through every vicissitude. (Murray, 1972)

Resonance and Reflection: In encapsulation, "Death of a Salesman" transcends its status as a mere theatrical composition; it emerges as a profoundly poignant and contemplative tragedy that entices its audience to ruminate on the nature of the American Dream and the attendant toll exacted for clinging to illusions in the face of inexorable actuality. Arthur Miller's consummate narrative craftsmanship ensures that the tragic odyssey of Willy Loman remains an enduring source of fascination and introspection for theatergoers, thereby underscoring the perennial potency of a meticulously crafted tragedy (Fuchs, 1965).

Chapter Three:

Tragedy in Death of a salesman

The Tragedy in Miller's Masterpiece: Death of a Salesman

Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" stands as both his masterpiece and a cornerstone of contemporary American drama. It offers a poignant exploration of the tragic life of Willy Loman, an American salesman. Willy, a traveling salesman, finds himself struggling with age, unable to meet the demanding requirements of his job. Desperate for relief from constant travel, he approaches his employer, but instead of support, he faces termination. This leaves Willy unemployed and burdened with a family to support. Tragically, Willy sees his insurance money as the solution, choosing to end his life. In doing so, he becomes a victim of his own misguided interpretation of the American Dream (Dennis, 1980)

Willy's unwavering belief in the American Dream centers around the idea that a well-liked and personally attractive man in business will inevitably achieve the material comfort promised by modern American life. However, his fixation on superficial qualities like attractiveness and likability clashes with a more robust understanding of the American Dream, which emphasizes hard work without complaint as the key to success. Willy's obsession with these surface attributes blinds him to the deeper aspects of success (Biggsby, 1967)

In the midst of his despair, two individuals stand by Willy's side: his wife, Linda, and his neighbor, Charley. Linda, the patient and loyal wife, pleads with Willy's sons, Biff and Happy, to show their father the respect he deserves. She recognizes him as a victim of societal illusions, shattered by the gap between his dreams and reality (Roland, 1970)

Despite his numerous efforts to provide for his family, Willy comes to a painful realization: he has toiled his entire life in pursuit of a lie he created. Confronted with this harsh truth, he contemplates suicide as a way to not only escape but also to restore his own confidence and his family's integrity. He mistakes those he loves, and chaos reigns in his affairs, both inside and outside of his home. This overwhelming sense of isolation leads him to feel detached from Willy's suicide is a way for him to escape the pain of "society, unable to conform to its norms. his own failure and to restore his confidence and his family's integrity. Willy believes that his death will make him a better man and that it will provide his family with the financial security that they need. However, Willy's suicide is ultimately a tragedy because it is a solution that is . (Biggsby, 1967, p. 77)"based on a lie.

Willy's funeral, like his other unfulfilled dreams, falls short of his expectations. He had envisioned a grand event like that of Dave Singleman, attended by countless salesmen from across America. However, the reality is starkly different, as only his family, Charley, and Bernard pay their respects at Willy's funeral. His supposed friends remain conspicuously absent.

The play serves as a direct critique of the deteriorating social standards in contemporary America, where individuals easily become prey to the illusions of the American Dream. It documents a year of frustration and disillusionment in American society. Willy's tragedy embodies both a personal and social dimension. Personally, he becomes a victim of his own misguided dreams, as "wrong dreams bring tragedy down on himself not by opposing the lie but Socially, his demise partly results from the pressures of a . (Dennis, 1980, p.44)"by living it cynical and impersonal business world, where the less fortunate are callously crushed (Porter, 1969)

Willy represents the American everyman, caught between a bleak present and a guilt-ridden past. Miller himself noted that Willy Loman cannot be an average American, as he takes his own life. The play vividly portrays how the past enslaves the present, a recurring theme in Miller's

works, where the destiny of the protagonist is inexorably determined. In conclusion, Miller's "Death of a Salesman" reflects the profound impact of war on American society. The younger generation, more socially conscious and united, differs from the older generation, scarred by the shocks of World Wars and the Great Depression. Miller's exploration of varying interpretations of societal norms and humanity's essential values present relatable situations that resonate with modern individuals, particularly Americans. His plays shed light on the errors of social, political, and religious institutions, where individuals are victimized and wearied by evil and defeat, becoming characteristic of American life. In this rapidly changing world, people grapple with uncertainty, unsure of what is right or wrong. The sanctity of family unity is jeopardized, threatened by society's encroachment. Miller, the thoughtful playwright, suggests a solution to these societal challenges (Miller, 1961).

The interplay of social and political dilemmas ultimately clouds individuals' judgment and can lead to a loss of sight, igniting a conflict between the will to live and the will to succumb to death. In Willy's case, the latter prevails, ultimately defeating him. Miller's play navigates the murky waters of doubt, leading to faith, despair, culminating in hope, and hesitation giving way to resolution. It is a profound journey of self-discovery.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 20th century is an era marked by technological advancement and destruction, Americans bore witness to both. Technological revolutions and economic growth coexisted with the horrors of two world wars. However, it was during this turbulent period that American drama truly emerged. Works addressing critical societal issues found their place on Broadway, with dramatists like Arthur Miller serving as spokespersons for the nation's struggles. Through his plays, Miller sought to expand Americans' understanding of the political, social, and economic crises impacting their lives.

Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" stands as a masterwork that not only encapsulates the societal challenges of the 20th century but also continues to resonate deeply with contemporary audiences. Miller's profound exploration of the American Dream, the tragedy of Willy Loman, and the disillusionment that ensues remains a powerful lens through which we examine our own lives and society at large. His work transcends its historical context and remains an enduring testament to the human condition.

Miller's contribution to American theater cannot be overstated. His ability to depict the complexities of the human psyche and the harsh realities of the American Dream has left an indelible mark on the world of drama. The character of Willy Loman, with his unwavering pursuit of an elusive success, continues to be a touchstone for understanding the fragility of human aspirations.

Moreover, "Death of a Salesman" does not confine itself to the past. The themes explored in the play—individual identity, the quest for success, the consequences of disillusionment—speak to the heart of contemporary society. The American Dream, with all its promises and pitfalls, is still very much a part of the national discourse. The resonance of Willy Loman's tragic journey extends beyond the mid-20th century to confront us with critical questions about the human condition.

Miller's impact on theater and the arts at large is immeasurable. His legacy lives on, influencing subsequent playwrights and artists who grapple with similar themes of identity, ambition, and the search for meaning in a complex world.

In closing, the study of "Death of a Salesman" offers us an opportunity to reflect on our own lives, our dreams, and our struggles. It invites us to question the society we live in and the values

The Tragedy of the Common Man: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman
Zulfiqar Hussein

we hold dear. As we partake in the enduring conversation sparked by Miller's work, we are encouraged to consider the trajectory of our own American Dream and the impact of our choices on our individual destinies.

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