

Death of a Salesman

Arther Miller

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Content Introduction	<p>In “Death of a Salesman” by Arthur Miller, Willy Loman, who is sixty years old, is at the twilight of his career life as a salesman. He is mulling on retirement but his present career does not permit him. He has been recently demoted to a strictly commissions salesman, a position he holds at the start of his career as a young man. Due to his predicament, he looks back at his past life to answer the questions which baffled him. How did he come to this? Where did he go wrong? His brain racks back and forth as he searches for answers. In the end, the truth strikes him like a blow and wakes him up to harsh realities. He knows he is a dismal failure. And at the same time, Willy leads himself to the road to the broken American dream and death.</p>

Abstract

Willy Loman, a sixty-year-old traveling salesman, is having trouble lately because he can't to keep his mind on the present. Having been demoted to a strictly commissions salesman, as he was in the beginning of his career, Willy begins to wonder what missed opportunity or wrong turn led his life to this dismal existence.

Willy always believes that being well liked was the key to success. Throughout his life, Willy attempts to show his sons the keys to success and pretends to be an important, successful, and respected salesman to win the love and respect of his family.

However, in the end, Willy realizes that he is a failure and he wastes his life. Not only that, but he teaches his sons the wrong things. At the end of this play, Will plans to sacrifice himself to get the insurance for his son, but it doesn't work out that way. The insurance doesn't cover suicide and only Willy's family and their two neighbors attend the funeral. In the end, Willy's legacy is one of a broken man, whose life had become a sad failure.

Analysis of Major Characters

Willy Loman

Though Willy's desperately searches his past, he does not become the typical tragic hero. In the end of the story, he commits suicide and tries to get the insurance for his sons, Biff and Happy. However, all he does only makes everyone, including him, to discover the miserable truth. The self-knowledge, self-realization and quasi-revolution, the characteristics that tragic hero normally has to have, do not appear on Willy.

Living in the past, Willy refuses to face the truth and he cannot realize the emotional, personal, and spiritual understanding of himself. He can only believe that he is still the "successful, legend, Willy Loman," but not the literal "low" man. He keeps on living in his fantastic American dream.

The "willy"-ness or "willfulness" drives Willy crazy. He recognizes the crucial reality that his desperate mind has forged. Furthermore, many critics, focusing on Willy's entrenchment in a quagmire of lies and self-deceptions, ignore the significant accomplishment of his partial self-realization.

Willy's failure to recognize the love offered to him by his family is crucial to the climax of his torturous day, and the play presents this incapacity as the real tragedy. Despite this failure, Willy makes the most extreme sacrifice in his attempt to leave an inheritance that will allow his beloved son, Biff, to fulfill the American.

Willy is influenced by his brother, Ben, a lot. Ben's final mantra—"The jungle is dark, but full of diamonds"—turns Willy's suicide into a metaphorical moral struggle, a final skewed ambition to realize his full commercial and material capacity. According to Ben, his final act is "not like an appointment at all, but like a "diamond . . . rough and hard to the touch." In the absence of any real degree of self-knowledge or truth, Willy is able to achieve a terrible result. In some respect, Willy does experience a sort of revelation, as he finally comes to understand that the product he sells is himself. Through the imaginary advice of Ben, Willy ends up fully believing his earlier assertion to Charley that "after all the trains, and the highways, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive."

Biff Loman

Unlike his father and brother, Willy and Happy, Biff feels compelled to seek the truth about himself. While his father and brother cannot accept the miserable truth and reality of their respective lives, Biff knows his failure and eventually manages to confront it. Consequently, Willy sees Biff as an underachiever, while Biff sees himself as trapped in Willy's grandiose fantasies.

Happy Loman

He is the stunted incarnation of Willy's worst traits and the embodiment of the lie of the happy American Dream. Because of that, he is one-dimensional and static throughout the play. His empty vow to avenge Willy's death by finally "beating this racket" provides evidence of his critical condition that makes Happy, who has lived in the shadow of the inflated expectations of his brother; there is no escape from the Dream's indoctrinated lies.

Themes and Symbols

The American Dream

Willy believes in what he considers the promise of the American Dream—that a "personally attractive" and "well liked" man in business will indubitably and deservedly acquire the material comforts offered by modern American life. Oddly, his fixation with the superficial qualities of likeability attractiveness and is at odds with a more gritty, more rewarding understanding of the American Dream that identifies hard work without complaint as the key to success. Willy's interpretation of likeability is superficial—he childishly dislikes Bernard because he considers Bernard a nerd. Willy's blind faith in his stunted version of the American Dream leads to his rapid psychological decline when he is unable to accept the disparity between the Dream and his own life.

Betrayal

Willy's primary obsession throughout the play is what he considers to be Biff's betrayal of his ambitions for him. Willy believes that he has every right to expect Biff to fulfill the promise inherent in him. When Biff walks out on Willy's ambitions for him, Willy takes this rejection as a personal affront (he associates it with "insult" and "spite"). Willy, after all, is a salesman, and Biff's ego-crushing rebuff ultimately reflects Willy's inability to sell him on the American Dream—the product in which Willy himself believes most faithfully. Willy assumes that Biff's betrayal stems from Biff's discovery of Willy's affair with The Woman—a betrayal of Linda's love. Whereas Willy feels that Biff has betrayed him, Biff feels that Willy, a "phony little fake," has betrayed *him* with his unending stream of

ego-stroking lies.

Diamonds

To Willy, diamonds represent tangible wealth and, hence, both validation of one's labor (and life) and the ability to pass material goods on to one's offspring, two things that Willy desperately craves. Correlatively, diamonds, the discovery of which made Ben becomes rich, symbolize Willy's failure as a salesman. Despite Willy's belief in the American Dream, a belief unwavering to the extent that he passed up the opportunity to go with Ben to Alaska, the Dream's promise of financial security has eluded Willy. At the end of the play, Ben encourages Willy to enter the "jungle" finally and retrieve this elusive diamond—that is, to kill himself for insurance money in order to make his life meaningful.