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Exploitation of the “American Dream” in Death of a Salesman:

A Thematic investigation of Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman

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Abstract

Arthur Miller's reputation as a brilliant dramatist was cemented with his most famous work, "Death of a Salesman," (1949). Willy Loman, the play's principal character (protagonist), is a classic American figure, and the play itself has become a staple of American literature. Many critics consider this play to be the perfect representation of modern American theatre, having won multiple prizes for its literary value, including the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Willy Loman is enthralled by the "American Dream," which is defined as a sincere and resolute belief that in America, anything is achievable for all men, regardless of birth or riches. Anything is possible if you put forth enough effort. On the other hand, Miller believes that people have been misled, and his play, Death of a Salesman, is a powerful destruction of the entire concept. For the first time in his career, Miller was able to find a balance between his assessment of individual personality and social influences.

Key words: American Dream; *Death of a salesman*; corruption; exploitation; tragedy

An overview of Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller was born in the city of New York on October 17, 1915. He began writing at a young age and was recognised as a dramatist by the time he graduated from the University of Michigan. After returning to New York in 1949, he released "Death of a Salesman," a critique of the city's industry-driven society. This play won multiple literary awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Many commentators consider *Death of a Salesman* to be the epitome of modern American drama. Miller's decidedly modern plays continue to be praised by students, instructors, and dramatists, despite occasional criticism for his colloquial tone and commonplace visuals. He went on to write *The Crucible*, a book on the Salem Witch Trials that is considered second only to *The Death of a Salesman* in terms of popularity. Miller is most known for his thematic plays, which frequently comment on the dismal aspects of contemporary American culture. Though he has recently tried his hand at novel writing, he is best known for his thematic plays.

The Novel "Death of a Salesman" at a Glance

The *Death of a Salesman* takes place in both New York City and Boston. We first meet Willy Loman, an old salesman who has just returned from a road trip, in his own living room. Willy is having a difficult time remembering events and distinguishing between the present and his recollections of the past. As an alternative to making weekly trips to New York, his wife Linda suggests that he seek a job there instead. When it comes to their eldest son, Biff, Willy and Linda can't agree.

Willy is conversing with himself, and Biff and Happy overhear him. Biff realises that Willy is typically speaking with Biff during these hidden reveries. Happy and Biff discuss the future of women. Both are dissatisfied with their employment: Biff is uncomfortable working for someone else, and Happy cannot advance until the merchandising manager dies. They consider purchasing a ranch and working together on it.

Willy recalls a day in high school when Biff admitted to taking a football and promised to toss him a pass during the game. Willy recounts his boyhood hope that the lads would pay him a visit en route to Boston. Finally, during his daydream, he recalls Bernard, son of next-door neighbour Charley, alerting Willy that Biff was failing arithmetic and would not be able to graduate until he improved his grades. Willy hears but disregards the crucial news in this last scene since Biff is "popular" and Bernard is not.

Willy admits having a conversation with Linda in which he exaggerates his earnings, only to be forced to admit it when Linda calculates his commission. Willy remembers Linda assuring him that he was lovely when he complained about his appearance. Willy's recollections start to jumble together at this point. He starts to remember his talk with the woman while replaying his conversation with Linda (a woman with whom he had an affair). He can't tell the woman from Linda's memories.

His neighbor, Charley, arrives to play cards with him, and the action continues in the present. Willy and Charley are playing cards, and Willy recalls an old discussion with Ben while speaking with Charley. Willy becomes confused and accuses Charley of cheating as a result of the two distinct "discussions" he is having, one in the present and one in the past. Willy recalls Ben's visit after Charley has departed and asks Ben for assistance since he feels embarrassed not knowing his own father well. Willy remembers telling Biff and Happy to clear the building site of materials so he could rebuild the porch and impress Ben.

As Biff and Happy talk to Linda about Willy, the play shifts to the present. It turns out, thanks to Happy and Biff, that Willy has been paying his expenses with Charley's credit card while also working for a commission. Biff is given the choice to stay at home or respect his father, and Linda tells him that if he doesn't, he'll be forced to go. When Willy kicks Biff out of the mansion, Biff decides to stay in New York with Linda. He also asserts that Willy is a "fake" to Linda, according to his version of events. Her sons now know that their father, Willy, is considering suicide.

Willy and Biff argue when Willy overhears his wife and sons conversing. When Happy tells Willy that Biff wants to start his own company, Willy tells Biff what to say and do when he meets with Bill Oliver. Willy recalls Biff watching football. Before going to bed with Willy, Linda asks him a question, but Willy declines to say what Biff has against him. Willy hid some rubber tubing under the heater, which Biff removed.

The following morning, Willy gets ready to go see his boss, Howard, and beg him for a position in New York. Willy is told by Howard at the meeting that there are no open vacancies in New York. Willy reminds Howard that he gave him that name and that, when he worked for Howard's father, he was a very successful salesperson. Howard doesn't move and instead fires him.

After being let go, Willy starts to slip into his recollections of the past. Willy recalls Ben's visit once more. Willy seeks help again, since things are not turning out the way he had hoped. He recalls Ben presenting him with an Alaskan employment opportunity. He agrees, but Linda steps in and compares him to Dave Singleman. Willy switches his focus from Biff's final football game to his memory of Ben. Willy remembers Charley acting as though he was clueless about Biff's prank, which enrages Willy. When Willy enters Charley's workplace, his daydream comes to an end.

Bernard is waiting for Charley in his office. Willy and Bernard discuss Biff and consider possible reasons for his lack of motivation and success. Bernard says Biff changed right after high school when he visited Willy in Boston. Bernard questions Willy about what happened when Biff went to visit him. Willy becomes defensive. Bernard is on his way to present a case before the Supreme Court. Bernard's success both pleases and upsets Willy. Charley gives Willy money for his insurance payment and offers him a job, an offer that Willy refuses.

Happy flirts with a young prostitute at a restaurant where Willy, Biff, and Happy are supposed to meet, and Biff gets upset because Oliver forgot him. Biff then understands that he was actually a shipping clerk for Oliver rather than a salesman, never having worked in sales. Willy informs his sons of his dismissal. Biff tries to explain what happened with Oliver (after seeing Oliver, Biff sneaked back into his office and

stole Oliver's pen), but Willy is living in the past and remembers Bernard telling Linda that Biff has failed math and will not graduate. Then, Willy recalls Bernard informing her that Biff had boarded a train for Boston.

Willy revives the moment. Biff discovers that he has been having an affair with the woman: He shows up at Willy's hotel room in Boston to inform him that he will not be able to graduate unless he can persuade Mr. Birnbaum to pass him. Willy remembers his own futile efforts to conceal the woman in the restroom. Willy's scheme to hide the affair is foiled when the woman exits the bathroom while Biff is still in the space. Willy's final recollection of Biff is of him calling him a "fake" and then leaving..

When Stanley reappears and Willy discovers he's still inside the restaurant, the play shifts to the present. Even though it is late at night, Willy arrives home and starts to create a garden. Happy and Biff are expelled from the house by Linda. Willy sees Ben when he is sowing seeds. As he does multiple times before in the play, Willy does not recall a previous conversation he had with Ben at this point. He instead talks to Ben about his suicide strategy. While Willy and Ben are speaking in the present, they are discussing the future. Willy receives a warning from Ben that Biff would never forgive him and that the insurance company might decline to pay compensation.

Biff meets Willy in the garden and lets him know that he is permanently departing. When Willy and Biff quarrel, Biff threatens him with the rubber hose and declares that he won't feel sorry for him if he kills himself. Biff claims that the Lomans have never been honest with one another or with themselves. Biff thinks that he and Willy are just regular folks who can be replaced with ease. Willy and Biff get along again. Willy sees Ben again, and he reminds him about the insurance. Willy departs by car. Charley, Bernard, and the Lomans assemble at Willy's grave.

EXPLOITATION OF THE "AMERICAN DREAM" IN THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN

The "American Dream" is based on the "Declaration of Independence," which asserts that "all men are born with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." (1776, Thomas Jefferson) The "dream" is the true and unyielding belief that, in America, everything is possible for any man, regardless of birth or wealth; if you work hard enough, you can do anything. Miller, however, believes that humans have been "ultimately misguided," and his play

The Death of a Salesman is an effective refutation of the entire notion. The pioneering spirit of immigrants in the 18th and 19th centuries seems to have been the foundation of the American Dream. The bulk of them immigrated to the United States in quest of a better life, specifically the ability to own property. However, as the term implies, when land was rented, cities flourished, and substantial regional differences emerged, the "American Fantasy" ceased to be a potential reality and became a dream. The American Dream is a significant motif in the bulk of Arthur Miller's plays, as it was ultimately doomed to fail despite the hopes of many. The 1949 book The Death of a Salesman debunks the entire notion.

Fulfilling the American Dream demands tenacity, honesty, and a strong sense of purpose. This leads to success, wealth, and, ultimately, power. Although the objective of equality for all people expands and fosters selfishness and greed, so does this desire. As a result of the way individuals conduct themselves, feel, and engage in competition,

Willy Loman's American Dream has caught up to him. It aids in the expansion of worldwide corporations. Capitalism, the need for profit, and the desire to compete undermine Willy's uniqueness. This deficiency was caused by a variety of business pressures. It's a tragedy for Willy's personal and professional lives to break apart when he fails in his goal of being a well-known salesperson.

"I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England."

"Never leave a job until your sixty."

The remarks from Willy above reveal that he lacks confidence and is not the successful businessman he claims to be. Willy was modelled after Miller's own uncle, Manny Newman.

That homely, ridiculous little man had, after all, never ceased to struggle for a certain victory, the only kind open to him in society – selling to achieve his lost self as a man with his name and his son's name in a business of his own. This explains exactly what he has in mind for Willy to be – as he was, "trying to achieve his lost self."

Success, money, and respect are the outcomes that are intended to occur in business. Ben has accomplished and done this. Miller highlights Ben as his accomplishment and material reward. Ben repeatedly saying, "I walked into the jungle, and when I came out, I was rich," is how he accomplishes this. Despite his achievements, Ben still feels empty. He appears to have no genuine happiness in the audience's eyes.

We only have Willy's testimony because, as far as we know, Willy may have made up Dave Singleman when he was trying to describe to Howard what it used to be like to be a salesman. But Willy has a lot of admiration for this man. He was 84 years old and had performed as a drummer in 31 states. Willy also fervently desires a burial that is comparable to Dave's because "when he died, hundreds of salesmen and purchasers were at his funeral." This is because Willy is not as regarded or loved as Dave is. Howard isn't interested in the tale of Dave Singleman, preferring the traditional way of his era.

Being effective, and occasionally being brutal, is necessary for a successful business. Consumers no longer purchase goods based on their personality or dreams. "There was thankfulness, comradeship, and respect in it," Willy remarked. There's no opportunity to bring personality or friendship to bear now because everything is predetermined. Willy has been extremely devoted to the company and is not being treated well by Howard Wagner, despite his long-standing loyalty.

"They don't even know me anymore." He has the feeling of being used by the firm and has no gratitude. "I put thirty-four years into this firm..." You can't eat the orange and throw away the peel—a man is not a piece of fruit! " He needs to believe he is "vital in New England", but he knows he is not; he is just

kidding himself. Biff said about Willy, "He had all the wrong dreams." all all wrong and he never knew who he was. " Being a salesman is very unpredictable and precarious as a living.

Charley is now aware of how profoundly faulty Willy's definition of success is. According to Charley, in this world, all you have is what you can sell. Willy has nothing, and he can't sell anything. Willy no longer respects himself at all. Broadway's first production director, Eliza Kazan, remarked, "Willy made the terrible mistake of erecting his life and self-worth on a foundation that was wholly untrue." Our entire civilization has committed this fallacy." Due to his unpopularity, Willy is unable to function as a salesman and as a person. According to others, Willy is liked but not loved much. Willy has failed in his life. But the idea that anyone may achieve success in the American Dream makes him feel this way much more. His family, especially his sons, has been negatively impacted by this individual. In many ways, Biff is just as helpless as Willy.

The values of the city are power and money. Willy has never liked the city and prefers the country, because there is not so much pressure. He is attracted to the wild, free, and open countryside. "The way they boxed us in here "Bricks and windows, windows and bricks." Willy finds the city very claustrophobic. The American dream has been centrally built around the idea of the family. This is the spiritual side. Biff sums it up, "We've never told the truth for ten minutes in this house." The man doesn't know who we are! The man is gonna know! "

It is Willy's fault the way Biff feels, "And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That's whose fault it is!"

Willy's affair with another lady in Boston is the result of his loneliness, being unfaithful to Linda, and insecurity. Linda fixes his own worn-out stockings while Willy goes out and gets new ones for the Boston woman. Linda, on the other hand, genuinely cares for Willy and makes an effort to both understand him and speak up for him whenever necessary.

Willy says, "That's funny. I could have sworn I was driving that Chevy today." He is forgetting things, but Linda covers this up by saying, "Well, that's nothing." "Something must have reminded you." Should Linda have questioned his behaviour more?

Since Biff would have been seriously traumatised by Willy's affair, which he is aware of, Willy feels awful for Biff. Adversely devastating, as a result, Biff received a prison sentence for "stealing a suit" . Biff persisted in stealing in an effort to suppress his underlying emotions.

Unfortunately, Happy will unavoidably make the same mistakes as his father because of the way he views women. He has a casual relationship. In the end, he isn't as reliable as Biff.

CONCLUSION

To start, this play is a modern tragedy. A tragic character, Willy. He doesn't put a bolt on a nut, he doesn't lecture you on the law or give you medicine, is how one person described him throughout his

entire life. He's a man who rides on a smile and a shining job, out in the blue. And that's an earthquake when they stop grinning in return. The spectator feels for Willy even though he is constantly "falling." Miller's play is a tragedy that is "contemporary and personal, not classic and epic; its major role is a small man destined to learn his smallness rather than a giant man undone by his greatness," according to John Mason Brow. "Miller's play is a tragedy, modern and personal, not classic and heroic; its central figure is a little man sentenced to discover his smallness rather than a big man undone by his greatness."

Second, a relationship is the subject of the drama *Death of a Salesman*. In the case of Willy and Linda, Willy

doesn't care for Linda as much as he should or act in her best interests as much as Linda does. She more than loves him; she admires him, as though his mercurial character, his fury, his gigantic dreams and petty cruelties were all part of him. "Linda has formed an iron repression of her expectations of Willy's behaviour."

Additionally, the failure of Willy and Biff and the triumph of Charley and Bernard are in complete contrast. While Bernard obtained all the necessary results for college, Biff "failed" arithmetic. Now, Biff is unemployed. Bernard is a top-tier lawyer. Bernard says, "I've got a case in front of the Supreme Court." Willy can't understand why Biff isn't as good or powerful in life as Bernard. "What... what's the secret?" asked Willy. "Why didn't he ever catch on?" "After the age of seventeen, nothing good ever happened to Biff." Bernard replied, "He never trained himself for anything."

Thirdly, this drama has a unique structure. This drama was originally supposed to be called "Inside His Mind" by Miller. We can see why Willy frequently has visions of his "dreams" in his head. It is a very clever way to explain to the audience what happened in the past and why things are the way they are in the present. Biff's friendship with Willy serves as one illustration of this. Miller aimed for smooth transitions between scenes. In the play, Miller stated that "there are no flashbacks in the play, only a movable concurrency of past and present, since in his attempt to justify his existence, Willy Loman has demolished the borders between now and then."

The novel *Death of a Salesman* is very critical of contemporary American culture. The play shows how Willy mistook his failure in life for success. He feels as though he has failed because neither he nor his son have amassed any wealth. His marriage and family are where he has genuinely failed. That is how the genuine "American Dream" has been exploited.

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