

## WILLY LOMAN & THE DECEPTIONS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

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### **Abstract**

This research intends to show Miller's main character Willy Loman as an American dream – haunted figure. It also shows how Willy sought his death without a bit of thinking that he was on the wrong way. It also centers on how his dreams were so tiny but they were not accomplished because the nature of imperialism is not to serve people and fulfill their dreams, but to exploit them and throw their peels. It also concentrates on Miller's creativity in making of the play a masterpiece, elevating it up to the level of classical dramas. It shows how Miller is able to make his audience sympathize with Willy and fear for him to have catharsis although he is not decent of nobility or superiority. He makes of his representative of the whole generation contaminated with American dream culture.

**Keywords:** The American Dream, Conflict, The American Individual, The Imperialism

### Introduction

This paper consists of list of contents, abstract, introduction, Brief biography of Arthur Miller, Summaries of both Act 1 and 2, then discussion of Willy's concept of the American dream and finally conclusion.

It emphasizes on Willy's faithfulness to the American dream as being a representative of a whole generation being deceived by such culture of capitalism. It is colorful, fruitful culture as it seems but it is in fact hypocrisy, exploiting. In the discussion of Willy's concept of the American dream, I pinpoint Willy's miscalculations, which lead to his downfall. I also the structure of the play briefly and put a hand on the points of differentiation with classical tragedies and Miller's scholarly hit in making both setting and time although they are so restricted spacious to accumulate the play events.

### Arthur Miller's Biography in Brief

Miller was a New Yorker, born 17<sup>th</sup> of October of the year 1915 to a rich father; Isadore Miller. Due to the economic crisis of 1929 – depression-, Miller, the father was broke. Therefore, Arthur lived in poverty. It was difficult for him to complete the study. He had to work, here and there to provide his living when he became a young man. One of his jobs was a hand on a farm, similar to one of his character in "Death of a salesman" Biff Willy (a hand in a ranch). Years of poverty hardened his personality and made him know about the society at close hand; social differences, the concept of social justice, social discrimination. It also provided him with deep insights into the human soul.

Later on, he joined Michigan University after his living condition improved. He made use of the university newspaper. He wrote plays. Due to his early creativity, he achieved success as a playwright. He was awarded prizes for his plays: All My Sons, Death of the Salesman, the Crucible. Then he won the Kennedy Center Award for his works of arts, followed by President Clinton's Prize – the National Medal of the Arts. The last prize he won was Oliver Award of 1995.

Miller took interests in politics. He was an activist. His activities caused him many troubles in life. He was summoned by the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1959 to give testimony against his friends and political associates but he rejected the idea. After release, he continued his activities. Then he became the president of an international organization, which fights for world peace and free express: PEN ORGANIZATION. The theatre of ideas headed by Ibsen, Shaw, Chekov, and Brecht influenced him. Miller married three times. His wives were Mary Grace Slattery, Marilyn Monroe, and Inge Morath. He had three children, two from Mary Grace Slattery: Robert, Jane, and Rebecca from Inge Morath. Miller died at his home city on 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2005, of heart failure, aged 84.

## Death of a salesman theme

Above all, let us start by the declaration made by the American President Thomas Jefferson, concerning individual rights:

This declaration left its imprint on every American. It became a dream for all Americans. Willy Loman, Miller's main character in his play *The Death of a Salesman*, like all other Americans, tries his best to attain his dream; "the dream that has haunted the American history from its beginning." (1); money, power, and luxury as a well-established ideology are its representations. The declaration states that every American can attain success through hard work and skill whatever his social background is since America is in its virginity age, offering limitless chances for all those who are like Willy Loman despite his being inferior in social class. Since the American dream becomes a legitimate culture, Willy Loman is entitled to follow up his dreams. However, he adopts a wrong perspective: being well-liked is enough to bring money, power, and luxury. Eric Mottram had remarked that Arthur Miller's plays were written for and largely "from the point of view of a man" (p-127).

This dominating ideology leads him to deceptions, which his wife Linda Loman reinforces it by taking it for granted. She should have asked him how money came without hard work, skill, and seizing opportunities. Willy Loman until his catastrophic end does not recognize that he has been deceived by the American dream. He refuses to consider the fact that it is mere deception. Similarly, he exaggerates it, thinking that if he commits suicide, the money of insurance will go to his son and build the family life and attain what his father failed to achieve. This is the dramatic flaw, which causes his downfall. Willy Loman stems his thoughts from three resources: his father's experience of the "Gold Rush" (2), his brother Ben who made himself from nothing and finally David Singleman who invested his personality and personal relationships. Willy follows up the trace of his three models randomly. He does not take into his account that every time has its own orders.

1. Mizener, Arthur (1951) .F.ScottFitz Gerard's *The Great Gatsby* Boston: Houghton Mifflin (: p8)

2. <http://www.123HelMe.corn/view.asp?>

## Conflict

There is no confrontation in the *Death of a Salesman*. There is the only miscalculation by the hero, Willy Loman. It is this miscalculation, which constitutes his tragic flaw. He, unlike Oedipus, King Lear, or any other classical hero, interprets the American dream as being attractive and well-liked and nothing else. People sympathize with him, not because of his noble descent but because he is the representative of their dreams. They, like Willy, are haunted by the American dream, each on one's own term. His violent death comes not as a protest against his dismissal from Wagner Company but as a penetration too deep down in his misconception of the American dream; if he commits suicide, his elder son will get the life insurance money and improve his family living conditions. Willy Loman, until his downfall,

does not acknowledge his mistake. He stays loyally faithful to his dream. His three models of the American dream, as bygone reign, conflict with his present reign: truth and imagination

Summary of Act 1: Willy Loman, unexpectedly embarks on the stage, tired and anxious, utters:

"I am tired to death". (1)

He tells his wife Linda Loman who is surprised by his unexpected home return that he has already survived an accident. However, he tells her the news in a dreamer's manner;

Therefore, his car deviated from the road, due to his being obsessed with looking at the scenery.

The first thing that strikes the audience is that he is a dreamer because no, sooner than he survived the accident, he returns to his dreams. The second thing is that his wife Linda is the foundation of his life for her compliance with his dreams:

Willy has two sons Happy and Biff. He is waiting for too much of them, especially Biff. On the contrary, Biff after a long absence, returned home, empty-handed, jobless. Therefore, his return becomes a source of conflict in the family, a conflict in which Linda stands with her husband Willy against her Son Biff although she plays the role of conflict settler:

Then comes the conversation between his two sons after a long absence in their bedroom where they refer that nothing

It also comes to know that both sons are frustrated with their life due to their pursuit of their father false dreams.

The act also contains a reference to their father's tendency to commit suicide, discovered by their mother, Linda when she found the rubber hose near the heater. It also refers to his obsession with the past. His top ambition is to have his own business and never goes on trips anymore.

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(1,2,3, 4, 5,6 from the play: Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller)

Summary of Act 2: Willy, highly spirited, appears on the stage after the accident yesterday. He is intending to see Howard, the owner of Wagner Company, to transfer him to New Yorker, on one hand, and to borrow some money on the other. He has due bills to pay; life insurance, house mortgage, besides repairs of the car and refrigerator. He is also waiting for his son Biff's loan, which his friend Oliver promised him. However, his disappointment, neither he is transferred to New York nor his son gets the loan. Instead, he is dismissed from Wagner Company by Howard without being rewarded for his long service. At this point, all his dreams crumble down. He gets fits of hallucinations. He slips into past where his brother phantom appears before his eyes, blaming him for not taking his advice and accompanying

him for Alaska where he made himself of nothing. Willy blames his wife Linda of preventing him from going with his brother to work on his farm. She disappointed him. She told him that staying here was Better than going there. Then how can he pay the due bills? There is no other way before but to go to Charlie his friend to borrow. Charlie and his Bernard are both practical businesspersons. They make themselves, depending on hard work and skills. Willy goes to Charlie to borrow and when he reports to him Howard's decision. Charlie offers him a The second act also shows that Willy is not faithful to his wife because he developed a relationship with another woman. It also shows his brother's Biff's protest against Willy's false dreams.

### Discussion of Willy's Concept of the American Dream

Arthur Miller, in *Death of a Salesman*, makes Willy Loman, his protagonist. Willy is an American dream – haunted. However, he lacks the main characteristic of the dream. The dream depends on hard work and skill. Willy misinterprets the dream concept and takes being well-liked and attractive as a substitute. He radiates all his illusions and deceptions about his dream to the members of his family, which lives in a continuous dream. Linda, his wife helps him in the context. She does not object to his false dreams although she realizes that his dreams have not improved their living because what he earns does not meet their monthly living, besides, they have to pay due bills; life insurance and house mortgage. Biff, unlike his mother and his brother Happy, rejects his father's dreams of being useless;

BIFF: Yeah, lotto dreams and Plans. (1)

Willy's dreams are so big that it leads to the family collapse. It relies on rootless platforms. Willy as the tragic hero gets his audience sympathy not because he confronts majeure force or Olympian gods as Classical hero do but because he is the representative of their dreams. All of them are like Willy in being haunted by the American dream, particularly after Thomas Jefferson's declaration. Jefferson by his declaration

Legitimizes the American dream in a way it becomes a common culture. Therefore, they are afraid of Willy because his collapse represents a collapse of their dreams, too. Although the play is modeled on classical drama, it lacks a lot of its qualities. As regards structure, it has unity, plot but it differs in time. Its time is no more than 24 hours, a one day only. Miller tackles this gap by lengthening the time of the flashbacks for long periods as a technique to make the past and present as elements of conflict in the play to flow one in the other, on one hand, and make the past dominate the present since Willy lives with his forerunners; his father, Brother Ben and David Single man. The movement of the past and present is not perceived. It flows as naturally as one course. Miller cancels boundaries and makes characters display no reaction for the changing from present to past and vice versa. Miller wants it to be one current. Such mingling is intended to make past, represented by Willy's

Hallucinations and dreams, the only power that governs the destiny of the family and leads to its destruction on one hand, and makes presentations with all its setbacks an impetus to penetrate into the past as a harbor as Linda describes Willy:

LINDA : he's a little boat looking for a harbor."(1)

To summarize, the difference between a classical hero and Miller's lies in his hero and its downfall. Willy is not forced to confront a majeure force or to commit innocently a mistake that causes his collapse as it occurred to Oedipus who discovered that he, unknowingly, killed his father " Laius"(2) and married his mother or as it occurred to King Lear whose miscalculations led to his downfall. Willy is a layman. He is a scapegoat of the wrong culture.

That is why the audience sympathizes with him because all of them suffer to Willy suffers. He does not belong to any superiority. However, he is entitled to dream like anyone. Willy built his dreams on past when there are abundant opportunities, not on the present where cities are overpopulated and besieged by high buildings.

Willy, after the road accident and with an agreement with Linda, decides to go to Howard to transfer him to New York. He is also waiting for his brother Biff's loan. However, none of these two things take place. He, instead of getting transferred to New York, gets dismissed and Biff's request is rejected. Therefore, they are broke. At this point, Willy realizes the savagery and brutality and hypocrisy of the capitalist system which sucks the fruits of people's youth and throws their peels when growing older. Being too haunted by the American dream, Willy does not return to his senses, he sinks deeper and deeper into his dreams. He thinks of suicide, then, not as a protest and condemnation against Howard's decision as representative of capitalism, but a dreamer who wants to avail his family. By committing suicide, he means the money of life insurance to go to his son so that he will achieve what he has already failed to achieve. Miller, here, has successfully made of his play Death of a Salesman a masterpiece although his hero belongs to an inferior class. He writes in his essay: "Tragedy and the Common man" all that is required for tragic stature is a hero willing to "lay down his life:" to secure "his rightful position in his society."

Therefore, Willy's downfall comes not because of a mistake he has committed or from a challenging force that he is not up to as it was in the classical tragedies. He has exhausted his life serving Wagner Company but the Wagner throws him like trash because he is no longer useful. This is the ideology of the capitalist system, which depends on profit and private enterprise. Finally, Willy commits his suicide ending his life so that his family can avail from it. However, none of his friends comes to the funeral. All of his conceptions are a mere fallacy.

Conclusion:

This study has put hands on the very essence of the play. Miller was able to make of a layman highly appreciated tragic hero. He found his model in Willy Loman. Willy does not have any of the classical hero qualities, but only his readiness, as Miller said, to "lay down his life. It also shows some aspects of the American dream culture and how much fallacy it has. It is a culture of deceptions and illusions. Its aim is to throw ash in the eyes of poor classes due to the nature of their system which is based on the private enterprise. Willy acts as a loyal believer of this culture. Even his death was a result of this misconception.

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