

# Death of a salesman (plus 2 related texts) – journeys essay

[Business](#), [Career](#)



Although, literally, a journey is a progression, either physically, psychologically or emotionally, the detours that are encountered can vary from person to person. Further it is the response of the individual to the challenges of the detours that provide lessons that may be learnt. Differing representations of journeys and their challenges are explored in *Death of a Salesman* a play written in the context of the disillusionment of post war America by Arthur Miller, through the character of Willy Loman who confronts disappointment as he wastes his time consuming himself in his unachievable dream of 'the perfect world', ultimately causing his own destruction. Loman represents an American archetype a victim of the American dream, suffering from his delusions and obsession with success, which haunt him with a sense of failure.

In the modernist poem "Mirror", written by Sylvia Plath, she represents a woman's response to the sudden realisation of loss and ageing. In a tone similar to *Death of a Salesman*, of depression and fear, Plath's subject is an archetype of inevitability of death. *The Scream*, a futuristic painting by Edvard Munch, embodies the individual facing choices on the path of fear, angst and alienation which has become an iconic motif for the plight of contemporary individuals. The individuals portrayed show responses and repercussions to the inevitable unexpected situations that occur in life's journey that challenge and inspire. Willy Loman's "journey" was a combination of physical and psychological, but mentally he wasn't moving forward, he seemed to be going in the opposite direction. Willy's lack of journey showed as his final act was selfish. Willy struggles to survive in a world where time is against him, he is engulfed in his materialistic views

which lead him to push everyone away. Miller's use of literary techniques exposes Willy's distorted state develops into his motives of suicide.

A major unexpected detour for Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* was Willy losing his job as a travelling salesman. This detour pushed Willy over the edge to insanity. Loman took pride in this image that he played himself out to be, that he thought this image of himself was a successful man which gained him respects from his family and friends. But really Willy wasn't the symbol of success; he was blinded by the pressure of living a perfect life.

He was surrounded by people trying to lead him back onto the right path, for him to continue and move forwards, but Willy neglected these gestures as unnecessary and, what he thought, detours, but Willy was own detour. Willy suffers flashbacks and hallucinations of he and his brother Ben, successful and rich at a young age, his fractured state of mind is shown through the hallucinations, ' I don't want change! I want Swiss cheese. ' Willy is going insane, not able to comprehend his sentences and what he says was nonsense.

The delusions create empathy in the audience as they witness his descent. It also dramatically contrasts with the repetition of his hopes and dreams ' I always knew we one way or another we were going to make it. which underlines his failure and hopelessness. " Mirror" by Sylvia Plath shows similar links to *Death of a Salesman* as both individuals have a fear of the future. For them, not knowing the inevitability of what comes next was

shown through their responses of these detours, and their struggle with the polarities of life and death.

The woman's response to her own reflection showed how disgusted she was with herself, her fear of the image that was so desperately wanted by society of beauty and youth. Like Willy Loman, this woman was so superficial to think that society was unaccepting of the people who weren't successful, perfect or beautiful. Like Willy thinking he is important in the world of salesman ' I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England', the mirror seems to have the opinion that it is of importance to the woman ' She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands. I am important to her. ' Willy Loman's failures did not only affect himself but also his family, his son Biff was a thirty something year old nobody who is unable to hold down a steady career.

After witnessing his father have an affair, Biff's plans for the future ceased, his relationship with his father became estranged and he bitterly resented him. This crisis had hit Biff hard and he hadn't recovered, unable to move forward. In his father's eyes Biff was also the symbol of success, but Willy was so delusional he could not see past the faults he had made as a father which caused his son to repress himself from society. Even though Willy thought of Biff as a successful man, he contradicted himself at times, criticising Biff's ethics ' Biff is such a lazy bum.... And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff - he's not lazy. ' All this said in one conversation to his wife Linda. Similarly to Death of a Salesman, The Scream, an

expressionist artwork by Edvard Munch, shows the individual in the foreground to be having some sort of crisis.

Set out on a journey and, like most journeys, encountered an unexpected detour. Unable to accept this detour, like Willy was unable to accept any obstacles, he was unable to move forward from this crisis and questioned his existence, had an existential crisis. Munch's use of violent colour and brushstrokes suggest fear and dread for the individual and imagery symbolising negative emotional reactions. After this crisis there is a loss of certainty for the future like Biff. Like Willy Loman, who could not return to his job, Munch's image portrays the individual who cannot re-make his past, it exemplifies the longings and anxiety of the individual represented by the brushstrokes which cause the scene to swirl.

The abstract image conveys inner feelings that are intimate and terrifying, the beautiful sunset has been transformed into an expression of violence and anguish. Like Miller, Munch portrays the individual at the climax prior to the entropic inevitability. Munch has created an existential icon that represents the individual who struggles with full responsibility for themselves - exactly like Willy Loman - and society. Through each of the composer's techniques shown in these texts they have represented the unexpected detour differently with each character.

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* conveys the unexpected detour not as a resolution but a pitiful ending achieving this by the characters lack of understanding of his mistakes. Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" conveys a woman

drowning in her sorrows from her loneliness, similar to Willy Loman's unhappiness. The Scream by Edvard Munch expresses an image of anxiety and a fear of the future. These texts show each individual's reaction with their unexpected detour and how they respond to this arduous journey.