

To society almost be
entirely to blame for



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Capitalism: the continual encouragement of wants and desires. This definition utterly epitomises the mental psyche of our unwilling protagonist, Willy Loman. Thrust into a constant strive for materialistic and unnecessary items; so typical of an individual embroiled within the prevailing consumerist attitudes of American society. Miller skilfully manipulates the character of Willy Loman into the embodiment of the archetypal white collar American, allowing the audience to fully immerse themselves in the play and completely connect with Willy Loman.

Miller is desperately holding up a mirror to the society which surrounds him through his anti-hero, allowing the audience to gain a sudden realisation their dreams are indeed false, predominately that of the ' American Dream' which is just that: simply a dream. Willy Loman himself exasperatedly confers to his son ' Its the only dream you can have'. The dream is simply a twisted example of propaganda which is avidly encouraged as part of the shared value consensus of the middle class American suburbia and is therefore a status greatly admired and sought after. Willy falls foul of the system, relentlessly striving for a futile goal, his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity is ultimately his undoing. One of Willy's symptoms of Harmatia is that he rejects his own family possibly self-consciously, or through the impulse to come together eventually drives the family apart. His general air of the classic eponymous salesman links to the destruction of his family as he instils his boys with delusional grandeur as he is far too upbeat and charismatic to seriously consider underlying problems within his family nucleus.

Consequently, his utter blindness to the merits of the family combined with his often unsympathetic cold, unsociable attitude can attribute to his eventual sense of alienation within not only those close to him but within the monstrous system which surrounds him. Biff, his son, is therefore the most affected by his father's false encouragement and absenteeism. The lack of permanence which Willy displays and his introvert inconsistency merely shows how the Capitalist society is flawed in taking away the proper astute guidance which Biff craves and instead replaces this hunger with wanton prophetic fantasy, so typical of Willy's muddled and misguided mind. He infuses his most prominent and 'valued' ideal of being well liked desperately into Biff's consciousness. This false glorification of Biff by Willy is summed up by Biff's line 'You blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anyone! That's whose fault it is'.

A combination of Capitalism and the core ideals of the typical salesman are predominately to blame for Willy Loman's misguided upbringing of Biff; it goes far beyond that of an individual level and is much more appropriate to blame the society which has moulded the norms and values of Willy.

Granted, the system of Capitalism is, on the whole, a just mechanism of self empowerment allowing upward mobility and achievement. However, this will ultimately produce an underclass of individuals who are disenfranchised and have to use other means to obtain power and self-esteem. This point leads me on too Willy's low self-esteem generated by the egregious machine of capitalism. Willy Loman's low opinion of himself is undoubtedly due to the many complications which he experiences in his life most notably his distressed finances which culminates in the over-riding factor in his decision

making. Most eminently his many material possessions are all derived from 'hire purchase', in essence Willy never truly owns any of his possessions outright which causes illusions of grandeur and empowerment all fuelled by the competitive desire of capitalism.

One of the ultimate decisions for Willy choosing to commit suicide was to show his sons the unadulterated popularity which his customers held for him from all over the country; of course this was just a wild assumption that on Willy's half. However, it is the dream that causes these drastic disillusionments of his avid popularity. This ultimate corruption of Willy's irrational 'clear thought' lends itself to the complete undermining of the capitalist society which they are within and depicts the ultimate tragedy and evokes untold sadness with the audience who empathise with Willy's to position. Linda I feel degrades Willy's predicament and his situation further by positioning herself as the traditional supporting 1950s housewife, deemed by society at the time to be morally correct and just.

However, I feel her constant reassurances and mollycoddling of the senile Willy only reinforces her (whether subconsciously or not) the confusion of Willy's prerogative. The expressionistic theatrical devices used by Miller such as the recurring motif of the flute reminds Willy of his frailness and inability to continue with his current employment and is perhaps a constant reminder to give up on the dream and surrender his constant strive for more, to that of his family's needs (as the flute was an instrument his father played, is therefore symbolic of the importance of the family unit and perhaps creating a blissful ignorance of what is going on around him and harking back to simpler times with his parents.). Willy also indulged in an illicit, extra-marital

affair with one simply known as the elusive 'Woman'. During his most testing times (when facing confirmation of his ideals being corrupt from his own son Biff), Willy then looks for solace and comfort in his memories of the woman, but, ironically, is consumed utterly by the guilt of the affair.

These contradicting emotions elicited by the same memory of the desirable, seductive allure of the American Dream, whilst coupled with its destructive nature. This conflict between father and son is by far the most crucial, heart-rending climax of the play. Willy is almost trying to live his life through Biff; an ever-present theme relevant to capitalist system, Willy craves this after his utter failure in life. Biff wishes to break free of his father restraint however he is morally and emotionally bound to his father, similar to that of characters in Modern Domestic Tragedy's vying and manoeuvring for respect and control.

Ultimately Willy's need for self-validation is a critical point for explaining not only his affair but his other imaginings. Not only that but his feeling of failure in his upbringing of his sons and how they don't fit into the archetypal sons of the 'American Dream'. Miller uses this to show the humanity of the situation and how one man can't be expected to achieve a capitalist perfection; this relates to Modern Domestic Tragedy in that the protagonists are merely common, ordinary people, to convey the universality of the themes which the tragedy explores. As opposed to that of Aristotelian Tragedies of old, which, despite handling epic, age old themes, become less relevant to those under the upper class, propelling Miller's creation into the public domain and effectively dealing with the capitalist system of the time.