

# Modernism versus postmodernism

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Modernism vs. Postmodernism Post-modernism follows and shares many of the same ideas as modernism. Though, at the same time, they differ in many ways. These distinctions can be seen in the two works of literature, “ Death of a Salesman” by Arthur Miller and “ Glengarry Glen Ross” by David Mamet. “ Death of a Salesman” represents the modernist literature. Modernism is a style of literature that came about after World War I in Europe. It emerged in the United States in the late 1920s. Modernism was the response to the commotion, which occurred during World War I.

The narrator in the play is limited and omniscient; he or she observes the thoughts and actions of Willy, Biff, and other central characters in the story, a type of narration that was new to literature. Instead of writing literature objectively, many authors started to use a subjective writing style. Miller captures this in the character of Willy. The readers are able to see the world through the eyes of this one character and what is going on inside of his head in many instances such as when he imagines seeing his brother and says “ Ben, I’ve go to talk to you. ”

The idea of rejection of tradition but trying to find answers is one of the central themes throughout the play. The setting is captured around the American Dream. Willy, like the rest of men around him, only wish to have a perfect job to provide for a perfect family in a perfect home. Though, Willy’s job, family, and home are nowhere near perfect. Throughout the story, Willy struggles to live up to this materialistic society but is unable to and this is what leads to his downfall. Throughout the story he is looking for an answer, and he believes the answer is if he dies, his son, Biff, will be successful and rich.

This leads to Willie's death. Miller also shows the clear distinction between high and low popularculture. High culture, being the elite, and low culture, being the one's less well off. It is evident there are people who are better off than others in the play. Charlie is very well off and so is his son. Throughout the story, Willy collects money from him in order to support his family. He also tells him, " I offered you a job. You can make fifty dollars a week. And I won't send you on the road" (Miller 96). There is a difference between Charlie and Willy's well being, in that Charlie is able to provide jobs and Willy does not have a job.

Modernism embraces the idea of a high culture. This is clearly evident because Willy is striving to become part of it. The idea of a low brawl is also evident, in which money is beauty. Because this play is subjective, and we see it through Willy's eyes, money representing beauty and priority becomes a central idea throughout the play. In the play, it becomes evident that Willy does not know himself. Willy dies because of his inability to be happy and to be happy would mean he would to know himself. Death of a Salesman also has a very ambiguous ending, which is another characteristic of modernist writing.

It is left for the readers to identify and interpret that Willy has died and that not many people showed up to his funeral because he was not a well-liked person, even though he said he was. " Glengarry Glen Ross" represents postmodernism literature. Postmodernism emerged during the late years of WWII and started to appear more during the mid 1980s. Instead of having a grand narrative, postmodernism has many narratives. Post-modernists ideas

had a large affect on economy, politics, and the way people. These aspects can be seen in the play through the idea of capitalism and consumption.

In “ Glengarry Glen Ross,” the idea of consumption is wrong, which is contrary to “ Death of a Salesman. ” The want to make money leads to stealing, with Shelley breaking into the office and later becoming arrested for it. In the play, it is seen that money drives people to do crazy things and only leads to their downfall. Postmodernism proves to embrace the low culture, where the idea of elite, power, and money is not as important. Trying to make meaning becomes impossible and repressive and millions die in desire to create a great collective. Postmodernism is more accepting in regards to chaos.

The idea of being okay in a world where there are no universal truths had become accepted. This can be seen in the play, because no characters are represented as true. They are living in a false world. This false world is made up of a false business with false leads and false people trying to sell them. When Shelly steals the leads, he is not doing anything different, because the leads are non-existent, imaginary properties that he stole to steal the money of other people, so in reality he is not stealing something of value and can relate to the rest of the characters.

With this example, it is also seen that sympathy flows around. Mamet allows reader’s to like and relate to Shelley in some instances, like when he needs the money for his daughter, but at the same time Marnet allows us to dislike Shelley at some instances, because of his lying, scamming, and stealing. Our sympathy moves for different characters at different moments throughout the play, not only Shelley.