

Arthur millers life and influences

Literature, American Literature



Arthur Miller has been one of Americas best known play writers who emerged in the United States since World War II. He has been writing since the age of seventeen and bases his work on personal experiences while attacking political views. One of his best known works is *The Death of a Salesman* which is about a man named Willy Loman who tries to emerge in the business industry and present a better image of him in society. Another important play is *The Crucible* which is about the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts where people blame one another of being witches to save themselves.

Through his plays, *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller expresses his own personal life and criticizes the events of the second Red Scare after World War II. As a young adult, Arthur Miller worked in his father's textile mill and would observe the behaviors of the employees. Miller would analyze his father, relatives or other hired business men working for his father, and saw how these men tried so hard to become successful because some couldn't even sell anything.

He would recognize how fast they would age because of so much work they went through just to try and rise economically.

During the 1920s people felt that if they had money they would be accepted by society. If not then no one would care. Like many people Arthur Miller realized that the people in his father's factory are disillusioned by the fact of becoming rich, successful and beating everyone else at the business game. While working there Miller started writing a short story in which he was influenced by the salesman in the factory. Manny Newman was one of Arthur

Miller's uncles that worked as a salesman in his father's textile factory and after writing the short story his uncle's life influenced Miller even more.

Newman was often very competitive with the other salesman in the industry, even his own sons Buddy and Abby Loman. Buddy was the oldest son of Newman who was very athletic and popular with the girls but didn't end up graduating from high school. Abby was his youngest son who was well on his way but still wasn't sure about his life career. Miller said that " The Newman house hold was one in which you dared not lose hope and I would later think of it as a perfection of America for that reason...

It was a house trembling with resolution and shouts of victories that had not yet taken place but surely would tomorrow. "(Arthur Miller 3) It describes the disillusionment of the Newman family which later caused Arthur Miller to rewrite his short story, turn into a play and name it The Death of a Salesman. In Arthur Miller's play, The Death of Salesman, he reflects upon the society he observed and their determination to succeed even when their dream was not going anywhere they wanted it to be.

In the play, Miller asserts that " the underlying struggle of all such dramas is that of the individual attempting to gain his rightful position in society. "(Thompson 1). He compares Willy Loman to Manny Newman, his uncle, and tells the story of the family and his struggle to achieve his American dream of wealth. Like Newman, the character, Willy Loman tries to fit into society because society would not accept him as a failure. " He has based his own identity and self-worth on social acceptance—on how " well-liked" he is" (Thompson 2).

Willy Loman constantly tried to find ways to sell things or become wealthy but he never succeeded. This causes Willy to feel out of place in society just like Newman and other people who weren't wealthy in the 1920s because society would not care for the common man. Willy Loman is the biggest symbol in *The Death of a Salesman*; he is an important figure of society and commits himself to a fake society which blinds him from the values of human experience. In addition through his whole life and career, he has wanted to be wealthy but never succeeded his "American Dream".

Willy Loman "...Has completely sold himself to what is at best an anachronistic dream—that anyone can get ahead. This is what he has been brought up to believe, the promise of his mythic (salesman) heroes. " (Gordon 3). This shows how he always compared himself to other wealthy people like his brother and complained how his brother became wealthy but yet he never did when he had the same choice as his brother. He was disillusioned by the fact that he wanted a successful family so he even tried to push his own sons into the business industry because he believed it was the best choice for them.

His two sons didn't want to be salesmen and weren't even good at it especially his son Biff. Willy worried about who Biff was going to be because he was the oldest and still didn't have a manageable career or life. " He commits suicide to give his sons the only thing his society respects—cash. "(Gordon 2). Willy believed that he was more valuable dead than alive and was the only way he could give money to his sons. He wanted them to be recognized in the civilization so killing himself was the only alternative.

Using his life insurance he would give money to his family making them wealthy and cceptable in society just like in his “ American Dream”. Miller was also influenced by McCarthyism an important event in history and his life during the 1940s and 50s after world war two. Ever since the end of WWII the United States citizens have been blaming the social unrest on communist. Many people were afraid that the communists would take over and no one knew what communist looked like so they easily blamed people for the smallest things. “ Communist rhetoric became common among displaced workers as well as artist and intellectuals” (McCarthyism 2009).

Anybody who questioned or protested against laws in the United States would easily be blamed as a communist because they would be going against their own country. There was a growing paranoia as the time went on and many people wanted to stop communism from spreading which became the central theme of American policy both at home and work. Even then the people had already been losing their rights and privacy “ Smith Act was passed, making it illegal to advocate the violent overthrow of government. Various loyalty programs designed to weed out communist from jobs in the federal government were put into place... (McCarthyism 2009).

The United States was coming into full chaos because even at one point they were blaming European immigrants of being communist because that is where it first emerged. Even many Russians were being deported to keep communism away according to some people and make the United States citizens feel safe and secure. McCarthyism first started with the senator Joseph McCarthy accusing others of being communist to only make himself

look better. Joseph McCarthy was not the best senator and had many problems like temperance.

Many people did not like him and he was afraid of losing his position so his only alternative was to seem like a hero. “ McCarthy and his allies claimed that communist had infiltrated the government and other institutions...the attacks were baseless but nevertheless destroyed the careers of thousands of individuals. ”(McCarthyism 2009). Calming others were communist made it look like he was saving the world. Many people were intimidated by McCarthy and some told the truth but McCarthy took the alternative of not believing them because it was more reasonable for some Americans to believe they told a lie instead of the truth.

As a result the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was created which attacked anybody who was blamed of being communist and Joseph McCarthy was a member of this Committee because he was the first to raise this paranoia even more. He took the advantage of the second Red Scare to make himself seem like a more productive senator. “ HUAC members would browbeat their prey-some of whom were there on the basis of the flimsiest of evidence. Admitting their own past ties to the communist party...others who participated with them. (McCarthyism 2009). HUAC had the right to question anybody for any suspicion and invade their privacy.

It showed how much America has changed because of some hysteria that people fell into because of a man wanting to be a hero. Arthur Miller was one of the targets of the HUAC members who was committed of being a communist by Joseph McCarthy. Joseph McCarthy often went against artist

and other media arts members because they were the ones who often criticized the society in the United States through their media works.

Arthur Miller was a playwright and had plays to show his work live during this time and they felt that he projected communism at his own plays. “ He admitted that he had attended a meeting of communist writers, he refused to identify anyone he had met there and denied ever having been a member of the communist party” (Baughman 3). This made Arthur miller realize that the society then was like the society during the Puritan Era when people blamed each other of being witches.

This later influenced him to write his book *The Crucible* a year later after his conviction. Millers *The Crucible* first started because of the accusations in United States which reflected upon the Salem witch trials in 1692. “ Millers play employs these historical events to criticize the moments in human kinds history when reason and fact became clouded by irrational fears and the desire to place blame for society’s problems on others. ”(DISCovering Authross, 2003). Puritans accepted accusations and anything that might seem unreal so people could easily tell lies.

They wouldn’t take reason into consideration and it involved hunting down and exposing of people suspected of being witches exactly like HUAC hunting down communist. Arthur miller wrote *The Crucible* as a commentary on McCarthyism then the actual Salem witch trials. Although the book does take place in Massachusetts during the Salem witch trials he wrote the book to show what was wrong with the American society. “ Miller illustrates his conviction that one can assert his “ personality dignity” and “ act against the scheme of things that degrades. ” (Gordon 2).

Miller expresses that idea through John proctor who won't cooperate with the court on the witch trails and has his own opinion on what to believe. He doesn't fall into the ideas that witchcraft is taking over just like Miller doesn't cooperate with HUAC or falls into the chaos going on in his time period. As a result of this book miller was accused of being a communist again and later left the U. S. because he felt that everything in the society has gone too far and became a British citizen. Through his works we can see how Miller attacks the society that supposedly “ rewards” the people with freedom because it is their right.

Miller creates allusions through real life experiences that he has been through which is one of the reasons why his works have been so influential and prestigious. McCarthyism played a big role on The Crucible reflecting a modern society with the old Puritan era society saying that society has and never will change. As for The Death of a Salesman we can see how much the American dream has blinded people to try and achieve something they most likely never will and try to be fake to achieve it. People need to learn to face reality and accept it how it is because many people are lost only because they won't accept their own.