

# Explore the significance of the Ivanhoe house to the tragedy of the

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Explore the significance of the Loman house to the tragedy of the play.

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* presents a critical portrayal of mid-20th century America, exploring the impacts of society, the American Dream, and the tragedy of the common man. The play revolves around the Lomans and their house, where the majority of the play occurs. Miller uses the Loman house among dramatic devices to enhance the tragedy of the play. Miller demonstrates the significance of tragedy within the Loman house in *Death of a Salesman* by opening with a depiction of the Loman household, showing the small, fragile-seeming home surrounded by a solid vault of apartment houses.

The towering buildings encasing the home evoke a sense of imprisonment and convey the idea that Willy perhaps feels trapped within this domestic setting, the growing pressures of capitalism, and society's expectations. Additionally, this sense of imprisonment continues throughout the play, Miller often shows Willy complaining that they boxed us in here as well as lined [the street] with cars.

Miller highlights how Willy feels caged by these expectations of a man in 1949 America; while the capitalist world and high-rise apartments around him are growing and improving, the Loman house mimics Willy's output on the world: small and fragile. Moreover, Miller shows an ethereal blue light that falls on the Loman house compared to the angry glow of orange that encompasses the surrounding apartments. The otherworldly light juxtaposes the orange as to reflect the harsh realities of life that dramatically contrasts Willy's delusion and the dream-like state that frequently lives in. The blue

light may also represent the optimism Willy sometimes demonstrates. Miller uses the juxtaposition of how the houses and apartments are presented to demonstrate how far removed Willy is from society and how his state of mind is so fragile, he must cower within his world of delusions in order to cope. An audience could interpret the fantasy world Willy lives in to represent his hope (and perhaps delusions) of a better future that Willy shows causing a feeling pity towards him as we know of the inevitable downfall that Willy is destined to face. By beginning the play with this description of the house, Miller shows the audience of the everyday tragedies that Willy experiences - feeling trapped in his own home or suppressed by the expectations that society has thrown upon him- and heightens the overall sense of tragedy in the play. Furthermore, the juxtaposition between Willy and the rest of the city could highlight his hamartia (fatal flaw) which is his inability and reluctance to change, resulting in his tragic demise. In the opening of the play, Miller uses the Loman house to present the idea of tragedy within a domestic setting. The kitchen contains no other fixtures other than a table, three chairs and a refrigerator while the bedroom is furnished only with a brass bed and a chair; this clearly conveys the basic foundations of a house, but not a home. The kitchen specifically symbolises the heart of the home and by demonstrating the breakdown of appliances in this room, Miller creates a parallel to the Loman family as their relationships slowly begin to fall apart and the family drifts away from each other. Additionally, a home is often depicted as a safe place for families, yet the Loman household is the place where the suicide revelation and the arguments take place. Miller shows that Willy feels unstable in his own home, demonstrating how his

deepest regrets (the affair, not following Ben to Alaska, his thoughts of suicide) all take place in this house. The contrast between the Loman house and the audience's perceived idea of a home enable Miller to convey the dismantling of the world around Willy (the breakdown of his relationships, his job) and highlight the ruthless tragedy that can strike the common man. Furthermore, Miller portrays a sense of artificiality and false nature to the Loman household as well as a dream-like atmosphere. In the opening of the play, the house is shown as wholly or, in some places, partially transparent; this could reflect the superficial nature of the Lomans, including acting parallel to Willy's consistent lying (about his popularity, the affair, and denial in his role in the twisted upbringing of his sons) as well as Happy's falsehood regarding his seemingly good life and Biff's lying about his whereabouts when he left home. All of the Lomans are evidently deluded in some way about their lives and responsibilities, therefore by present the house as transparent, Miller shows how their factitious nature is are clear to all around them. In addition, the transparency of the house reinforces the dream-like state that Willy lives in, surrounding himself in delusions and hallucinations into the past. The sense of tragedy arises from the fact that the Lomans are either unaware or complicit in their false lives; Happy, for example, is completely oblivious to the fact that he is following in his father's footsteps and may face the same unfortunate fate as him. We as the audience may feel a sense of pity for the Lomans if it is that the delusion is simply a product of the Willy and boys' upbringing; it is then plausible to suggest that the tragedy is predetermined and unavoidable, thus heightening the sense of tragedy. Willy's unstable and fragile state of mind is further shown with

Miller's use of dramatic devices within the Loman house. Often, we see characters move through the wall and physically address points off-stage which demonstrates the gradual shift to Willy's delusions and happenings of the past. Miller uses the house in this way to show the dismantling of reality and the breakdown of clear thinking, highlighting how Willy is beginning to fade and his deteriorating mental state. Furthermore, Miller enables us as an audience experience the confusion that Willy feels, often feeling unsure of if an event is of the past or the present and, as a result, Miller evokes sympathy within the audience. In conclusion, Arthur Miller uses the Loman house to highlight the misbelief, feelings of imprisonment, and sense of hopelessness that the Lomans experience which, in turn, enhances the feeling of tragedy. Importantly, *Death of a Salesman* is set in a domestic setting, bringing to light Miller's idea of the tragedy of the common man and going against Aristotle's idea of the tragic hero, showing that tragedy does not discriminate against the rich and noble. Willy Loman is a common man, yet he possesses qualities of a tragic hero, a hamartia, hubris, and a moment of catharsis, to name but a few. Using the backdrop of this domestic setting, Miller allows Willy's emotions and breakdowns to mirror the structure of the house and contrast the surrounding world, enhancing the sense of tragedy in the play as a whole.