

# Reconciliation with the past in arthur miller's death of a salesman

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Have you ever felt compelled to reconcile your past uncertainties and worries with new or present situations in the pursuit of a meaningful life? Or in the case of Death of a Salesman, a pursuit of the American Dream. In Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman", Willy Loman, the protagonist, is a salesman blindsided by his constructed ideals of society. The self-delusion indirectly affects him and his surroundings including the people around him. Willy's misconception affects the standards of a meaningful life that he has created throughout his life. These norms guide him towards his accentuated view of who he is and what he wants to achieve, subsequently negatively influencing his eldest son Biff Loman, and adding stress towards himself. In this play, the distinctness between the two characters and their contrasted sense of reassurance describes how past uncertainties in their lives are comprehended and this in result drives the story. Arthur Miller depicts that individuals indeed birth ideals when faced with the exigency to reconcile their past, and that causes further uncertainties that one must find a solution to.

Willy Loman was an unsuccessful salesman who was once revered by the people around him. At the beginning of the play it is evident that he is unable to dictate the way his life progresses, and so he consistently rebuts himself to establish that no matter what, he is correct and his opinion is accepted. These multiple contradictions portray that Willy is indeed fretful of the possibility that he will receive negative comments and judgments. Willy has consciously constructed ideals that suggest looks go a long way to determine the success of your future and advises his sons that they should be "well liked" and "liked and (they) will never want". Willy recalls the time

when his sons, Biff Loman and Happy Loman were outside cleaning his car, the Chevy. Willy enlightens Biff and Happy on how financially successful his business trips have been. He elaborates that due to the admiration towards him he does not have to wait in lines. Willy interprets having people “remember” him as the ultimate satisfaction, as he claims to his sons “they know me up and down New England” and “I have friends” Ultimately, teaching his sons that being liked by others is the way to fulfilling one’s life and removing all worries. Albeit Willy is a hardworking man, these ideals, that one does not need to work for success demonstrate Willy’s deluded belief of achieving a meaningful life from the admiration and acceptance of others and is proven false when no one except the members of his family arrive at his funeral. Willy constantly attempts to gain other people’s acceptance through hypocritical and mendacious stories which portray him in a bright light. Willy’s high lack of integrity seems to be influenced by Uncle Ben who “never fights fair”. In the past, he lies to his wife, Linda about his gross earnings of that week but in reality he receives the weekly sum from Charlie and Linda being aware of his financial issues keeps his caught lie to herself. Linda serves as protection from the harsh realities of modern day world through constantly lying to him and maintaining his pride in himself. Willy Loman is portrayed as a protagonist who inevitably destroys himself figuratively and literally to maintain his sense of dignity and to gain his “rightful” place in society.

Biff Loman, on the other hand highly contrasts Willy’s Ideology of a purposeful and meaningful life and that is because Biff is certain on his

morals and values to maintain a meaningful life and understands that he is indeed a “dime a dozen”. Biff, priorly, immersed in his father’s ideals, comes to a revelation that his father is lying about the events in Boston. He arrives in Boston to consult his father only to find Willy Loman with another woman indulging himself in an unsanctioned romance. Biff is heartbroken and exclaims and describes his father of being a “fake” and a “phony”. From the point forward, Biff is a persistent disappointment to his father, switching from job to job and ending up in jail. Biff being nurtured to receive consistent compliments, and being a popular football player brimming with confidence, he is conditioned to believe that he was capable of anything and the world was his. This gradually increased and then suddenly deteriorated when he failed his math class and came to realize that his father had been filling him with false hope. He then becomes uncertain of his identity and decides to return home inevitably realizing “what a whole lie (his) life has been”. This affects him in such an extreme way that he falls back on his father’s ideals.

Biff, unlike Willy comes to self-realization that his happiness comes from being outside, working with his hands, and he is not bothered that no money comes out of it. When Biff decides to partake in attaining immediate success he plans to talk with Bill Oliver and ask him for fifteen thousand dollars. Willy assures him that he was “well liked” by Bill and that there’s no possibility of getting rejected. When Biff arrives at the restaurant, he discloses that he stole Bill Oliver’s fountain pen. He comes to the realization that he was not made for business; “men like (him) are meant to work outside” with their hands. This incident reminds Biff that the only acceptance he needs is his

own acceptance. Biff reconciles with his past by taking action which then brings him prosperity and a sense of pride.

Biff and Willy Loman's contradicting ideologies to gain acceptance from the people around him demonstrates that only when the individual truly commits to himself will he be able to reconcile his past with a new or present situation. Arthur Miller's utilization of this character foil and the end result that are produced due to each of their opposite actions portray how one may reconcile with their past. Human nature and its strong desire to gain acceptance from their surroundings leads to the individual constructing ideals and standards whether it be societal norms or a perceived view of one person. One can come to the conclusion that the importance of accepting one's reality or making a decision to reconcile is grave. Ultimately, *Death of a Salesman* demonstrates to the reader that the only way to reconcile their pasts in the pursuit of a meaningful life is to accept the situation for what it is and make a choice on how to counteract it.