

Consider the importance of time in "death of a salesman"

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



In this essay, I hope to analyse Millars use of time and how he represents it in the play " Death of a Salesman. " The first thing to realise when looking at this play is how Millar conveys the thought that everything you do in the past has a consequence in the future. The way Millar does this is to squash 10 years of the Loman family's life into the space of 24 hours using flashbacks and memories. In this essay I will be looking more closely at how he does this and what effect it has on the story.

In the play, we see the Lomans as a family who have been left in the past and therefore not succeeded in the present. This is shown by the changing scenery and people around them. The Loman's house used to be an average suburb house surrounded by others like it, when we see it in the present though; it is dwarfed by the new tower blocks which suffocate.

Willies friends also advance in life where he fails to, Howard for instance has become head of the company whilst Willy has stayed in the same job for years, and he could even be seen as going backwards by the way that he is only paid with commission nowadays.

Biff as well has also failed to make anything substantial while the " boffin" Bernard has become a high flyer in the business world. The whole of the Loman's world has become stagnated with things going from bad to worse because they wont move to the future. We also see in the play, the consequence of actions that may have happened years ago surfacing to result in the eventual death of Willy. The two main things which haunt and eventually take over Willy are the fact that he didn't gop with Ben to Alaska

which could have made him rich and successful and his affair with the woman in Boston.

As Willy comes to realise that he isn't as successful as he makes himself think, the fact that he didn't take the chance to be as rich as his brother starts to eat away at him. The memory of Biff finding him with the woman also reappears when hostilities between Willy and Biff break out again and Biff uses it to try and make Willy see what's happening. The regret and guilt at what he did to Linda also starts to eat at him. Such things as Biff's early stealing, although small, reappear when he takes the pen. These small things could be counted as the straws that break the camel back.

Willy, being already overloaded with the realisation that he himself is a failure and a fake, cannot take the fact that his sons are also failure. The main way that Miller shows the change of time in the play is the way he uses Willy's flashbacks. These flashbacks not only tell us what happened to the Loman family years ago, it also gives us more of an insight into the characters and who they really are. In the first flashback, Willy tells the family outside that he's doing brilliantly and that the boys are going to be just like him when they grow up, great businessmen or successful sports stars.

This has some irony in it as he says they will be just like him who we can see later on they are, but not successful but failures who have made the wrong choices and refuse to change who they are in order to succeed. This is their downfall as Willy refuses to give up the belief that if you are "well liked,"

you will succeed. Biff tries but can't let go of the fact that he doesn't like business and want to be in the country. The thing that makes him want to stay is the thought of his family even though there is so much argument when the family is together.

Linda refuses to believe that Willy is anything other than a perfect husband whose failure can be blamed on others. As I said before, the most important aspects of time in the play are the flashbacks that Willy has. These are used to show how life was and how it has changed (or not as the case may be). Some of the time switches are obvious with a drastic change in the presentation of the set and the actors whilst some are more subtle and difficult to understand. In the first time switch for instance, the change is drastic as it goes from nighttimes when Willy is remembering the past to bright daytime when he starts to relive it.

The backgrounds change from tower flats, to a spacious landscape. The actors themselves not only change their appearance (Biff wears the old sports jackets and Linda has more youthful hair), their attitudes also change. Biff is much more confident and hopeful instead of being downcast and surly like in real time. Linda, although she acts much the same, creates a happier feeling in the house rather than the scolding she gives Biff and Hap for undermining their father. This all makes the first time switch easy to understand and follow.

Because this prepares the audience as to how the play is constructed (the use of Willy's flashbacks) Miller can now afford to be a bit more adventurous

with how he uses the flashbacks. This is shown evidently in the second time switch which moulds past and present together in a quite confusing manner. With Willy trying to speak with two people at once and no discernable set change to tell the audience what is happening. The rest of the time switches are relatively simple compared to that one.

They clearly show the change in time which makes it easier to watch. Looking closely at the flashbacks, we can see how they are carefully juxtaposed to the situation in real time. The woman's laughter at the beginnings is placed next to Willy's conversation with Linda to accent the difference of the two. The scene where Willy relives the time when Biff discovers his affair is placed next to the restaurant scene where Biff argues with Willy. This gives the audience an insight as to why Biff acts the way he does towards Willy.

Overall, in this play, I think that Millar although mainly trying to make the point that the American dream doesn't work, he is also making the more subtle point that any action you make in the past or present, will catch up with you and affect you in the future. It is a story about the " chickens coming home to roost. " The main thing the Miller tries to illustrate the Lomans doing in the past is the fact that they did nothing, that is the reason their family has fallen into disrepair and why the American dream didn't work.