

# Arthur miller and the american dream

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As Voltaire once said, " Each player must accept the cards life deals him or her: but once they are in hand, he or she alone must decide how to play the cards in order to win the game. " Similarly, my grandfather compares people to decks of cards. He believes that for each person, different cards are missing from the deck, accordingly giving each person different abilities. In this example, fate is literally in the cards. Though an unsuccessful salesman, Willy Loman's infallible belief in his dream shows that he never considered the salesman card was " missing" from his deck.

The notion of the American dream falls back on the blind optimism and faith of Americans. In *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller, Willy Loman futilely chases the American dream, which is an unattainable, impossible fantasy to Miller, used to show the blind faith in Americans, and depicted as a character flaw rather than attribute in the protagonists of the play. To begin, the tone of the novel set by Arthur Miller is a critical and cynical attitude towards the idea of the American dream.

A widely accepted definition of the American dream is the perception that through hard work, one can achieve a life of personal and material happiness. Moreover, the representation of the American dream in the play is at odds with the general belief that hard work generates success. Willy tells his sons, " Be liked and you will never want" (33). If this were actually the case, his hard work combined with being well-liked would have been the recipe for personal and materialistic happiness.

Though Willy Loman is constantly working, his obsession with the superficial qualities of being liked contrasts with the more tenacious and rewarding understanding of the American dream. Miller shows us just how unbelieving

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he is in the American dream when he wrote the plot of Death of a Salesman, in which the protagonists chase unattainable desires. Through Miller's critical take on the American dream, he is trying to portray that Americans are blindly faithful and optimistic; Miller openly criticized such a principle. Happy says on page 23, " You're a poet, you know that Biff?

You're a—you're an idealist! " Making Biff an idealistic, underachieving son of a daydreaming failure adds to the irony of the American dream in the play. Another example of the author's perspective was the way in which Miller suggests that the idea of the American dream hinders people from enjoying the success they have already achieved, in Willy's case, having a loving family. The Lomans were optimistic during situations where it was unwarranted; their expectant approach to failure and disappointment is more proof of Arthur Miller's disapproval of the American Dream.

Because Arthur Miller believed the American Dream was chased in vain, he portrayed it as a character flaw rather than an attribute in the protagonists in the play. Willy Loman, the protagonist (as well as his own antagonist), brought himself to his own demise when he could not discern his own life from his Dream. Miller's antagonistic approach towards the various get-rich-quick dreams Biff, Happy, and Willy entertained also shined through at the impossibility of their execution. His hostility towards facets of the American mentality comes through in the self-destruction of Willy because of his all-consuming dream.

For the same reason, Biff's longing for the symbolically free West showed that Willy instilled his blind faith and materialistic desires in his son's dream as well. Biff asked Happy with enthusiasm, " Listen why don't you come out  
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West with me? " (23). Although intending to come to terms with his own life, Biff's longing for the West is glorified by his father's undying faith in his own Dream. Biff and Willy Loman's dependency on their fantasies show another, more negative, aspect to having dreams.

Death of a Salesman is one of the foundational texts describing the American dream. Arthur Miller wrote the play in the mindset of an adversary to the American dream. Death of a Salesman displays Miller's disapproval for the American dream and blind optimism, and displays chasing a dream as a weakness rather than a strength. In the play, Arthur Miller shows us that although it is important to teach of success, it is equally important to prepare for failure. In a game of cards, you can have all the strategy in the world, but fate is in the draw.