

Betrayal in "death of a salesman"

Literature, Russian Literature



Rachel Jurina WLISA Senior 8-15-12 period 2 Campagna Death of a Salesman Essay Play writer, Arthur Miller, in his play " Death of a Salesman" tells about the life of a salesman named Willy Loman, whose life is filled with betrayal. Miller's purpose is to portray a man's life in which his sons, the pride and joys of his life, betray him at his darkest hour. Miller depicts the treachery and inner evil of the two boys and their father. He emphasizes the effects that inner family betrayal can have on not only the ones committing the betrayal, but also other people who must witness it. The text opens to a man named Willy coming home depressed. Willy would best be described as the main character of the story. He has lived an average life as a salesman with two kids and a loving wife. What is learned about Willy from the get go is that he has a passion for success. He has pushed his boys to be their very best their whole life, especially his eldest son, Biff Loman. He treasures those times when life was full of hope and happiness. He treasures it so much that he often flashes back to moments in the past when he is struggling or is caught in a moment of chaos. His flashes back and forth to past and present are what create the conflict inside of Willy. That conflict and chaos is always caused by betrayal. Both Happy and Biff betrayed Willy's confidence. Biff especially betrayed his father when he refused to make anything of himself. He flat out told his father that he was a worthless human being and that all his father's hopes and dreams were wasted on a loser. This broke Willy's heart completely. Happy also betrayed his father in a less direct way. Happy simply never cared for his father at all. When he was young he gave up hope of getting any attention from his father so he returned the feeling and gave up. Biff feels slightly betrayed by Happy as well for not caring about his

father. Biff's feelings are shown in the quote " Yeah but he doesn't mean anything to you. You could help him -- I can't! Don't you understand what I'm talking about? He's going to kill himself, don't you know that?" (Miller 115). Willy was also betrayed by Howard, his boss. He had worked at the company as a salesman for years so he had built up a strong confidence that he would always be welcomed and have a job at the firm. His hopes are dashed when Howard not only denies his request to stop traveling, but fires him completely. The big turning point in the text is the reason as to why Biff became such a failure. The flashbacks constantly build up to Biff's shining moment. The reader is often left to wonder why such a successful football star never grew into a great man? The reason why is made clear in a flashback to Biff's senior year, right after his big game. Biff realizes that his huge plans have failed because he flunked a class. He goes all the way to Boston to inform his father that he has failed him, but still thinks that his father can help. At this point Biff admires his father and still has confidence that he can succeed. Everything changes when Biff arrives at his father's hotel room because he catches him cheating on his wife with another woman. Biff feels completely betrayed in the way that the one person he has always looked up to is so good for nothing that he would stoop to cheating on his own wife. Any hope for success that Biff had for the future is broken along with his heart. From then on Biff blames his father for making him such a loser, not only due to his affair but also due to his impossible expectations. Biff finally expresses his frustrations in the quote " And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That's whose fault it is!" (Miller 131) Willy and his sons are not the

only ones who are affected by each other's betrayal. Linda Loman, Willy's wife is also deeply betrayed. Linda was most betrayed by her husband when he cheated on her, although it is not made clear if she ever found out about that betrayal. She is also betrayed by both of her sons. She expected them to look after and care for their father. She feels betrayed when both sons basically turn their backs on Willy and destroy all his hopes. The largest betrayal of all is at the very end of the text. Willy betrays everyone who ever cared about him by purposely crashing his car and therefore ending his own life. Being a father and being a salesman were the two things he lived for. When both of those things were taken away from him, he had nothing left so he decided to just stop living altogether. Linda feels most betrayed by Willy's act of suicide because she really cared for him and can't believe that he would just leave her all alone like that, especially when they had finally paid off the house and things were starting to come together a bit. Her frustration is expressed in the quote " I can't understand it. At this time especially. First time in thirty-five years we were just about free and clear. He only needed a little salary. He was even finished with the dentist." (Miller 137) Betrayal is a delicate thing that can set off all sorts of conflict within a family or even a whole society. In " The Death of a Salesman" the slippery slope of betrayal is witnessed first hand within the Loman family. Willy and his sons display their inner evil through their acts of betrayal which break apart their family; break apart their family even to the extent of death.