

# An analysis of the dramatic impact of the restaurant scene in death of a salesman...

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



Death of a Salesman was first performed in 1949 and was seen to be a powerful and moving piece of drama. I will now be going through the appeal and the impact of the play.

First of all, the book of Death of a Salesman can be said to be a universal book, in the sense that it has broad range of themes and is a book for everybody. It has all sorts of aspects, and real life situations that one has to take in mind.

Lets first look at the characters. Willy Loman is an insecure and self-deluding travelling salesman. Despite him desperately searching through his past, he is not the typical tragic hero that we have come to depict. He is rather a man who doesn't achieve self-realization and self-knowledge.

He fails to realize his personal failure, and an emotional and spiritual understanding of himself. Willy's crucial problem is the failure to understand the anguished love that is offered to him.

This is the real problem, and tragedy of the play. In the end, he is forced to making the most extreme sacrifice to allow Biff to follow the American Dream. In the end, we remember him by his quote that he made to Charley, " after all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you're worth more dead than alive".

Biff Loman essentially wants to seek the truth about himself. While the father and brother alike, are in their self-delusional selves, and are unable to accept the miserable lives that they have, Biff accepts failure and confronts it. Essentially, Biff's discovery of Willy's affair drains him of all the faith he had

in Willy. Willy sees Biff as an underachiever, and a person that could rise to the top, but Biff on the other hand sees himself trapped in his father's unrealistic ambitions. Biff's general identity crisis is a major aspect in the drama. In order to find it, he must expose his father's delusions.

Happy Loman is seen as Willy's incarnation but with all his worst aspects. He is a difficult character to emphasize. He is a one-dimensional and emotionless character in the play. His empty vow at the end, which says he will "beat this racket", is the full embodiment of the lie in which is the American Dream. He has blind ambitions, and is swallowed up by his lies that he is the assistant buyer, when in fact he is just an assistant to the assistant buyer, and is a no body. He is also depicted in this quote, "My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women, and still, goddamit, I'm lonely". This idea represents that in fact, Happy has not got such a delightful life, as we have come to conclude, but in fact, he has an inner-emptiness. He feels as though he is a failure, and knows it, just like Willy, but never admits it.

Linda Loman is one of the more reasonable characters in the play. She symbolises the need for patience and reason, as well as being the most realistic. She is practically the emotional core of the play.

Well, the analysis of these characters should give an idea of what the play portrays. Here is the impact and the appeal, along with the major themes. The play is very much a mix of all sorts of different things, tragedy, social commentary and family drama. The American Dream is one of the most talked about issues in the entire play. Essentially, Willy depicts the American Dream very well. He believes wholeheartedly in what he considers its

promise. He believes that a “ well liked” and “ personally attractive” man in business will indubitably possess all the material wealth and possessions that the world has to offer.

However, his constant obsession with the vision of a superficial man with the qualities of being well liked and personally attractive is farfetched. Rather, a more understandable man would have depicted the American Dream as being identified as, hard working and positive approaching that leads to success. Eventually it is this very denial of how life works that destroys Willy. He approaches Bernard as a nerd because he studies hard and tries for success.

Yet when he finds that Bernard reaches promise and success, and when he looks at his own life, he is left in a disparity, as he realises what a blind and fake kind of vision he lived for. It is actually this very idea that can be very appealing. It teaches a lesson about life, success and failure. How a man, fixed on a blind vision, realises that it is not superficial values that create a successful man, it is the desire to be the best, to want to learn, to strive for success, rather than wait for it. It is this very concept, in which we see a man crumble to a grinding halt. It is actually a truly remarkable aspect, as in it makes you think about life’s goals, and it is the educated people that prosper, not the fake.

Another major issue in the play is betrayal. In the play, Willy constantly believes that Biff has betrayed him, in the sense that Biff hasn’t followed his ambitions and dreams that he had for him. Willy believes Biff has to follow his dreams and his path, and the moment Biff tries to reject this, he takes it

personally, and says it's spite. Overall, Willy fails as a salesman, to ultimately, sell the American Dream to his son. Then, Willy assumes that Biff has betrayed him because of his discovery of his affair with The Women.

Whereas, Biff, who called Willy “ a phoney little fake” believes Willy, with his unending ego-stroking lies, betrays him. What interests here, is the relationship between father and son. Here we have, a son dying for the truth and being realistic about what and who he is, confronting a father, surrounded by his own self-delusions about the American Dream, and to force it upon his son. This is a very interesting concept, which puts up the idea that Willy has really betrayed Biff, firstly because of his affair, which hurt Biff so much, as he loved his father and mother dearly, and also the fact that Biff is not given the chance to be realistic about himself and his family. I think it is the relations between father and son that are most interesting here.

Another issue in the play, that the audience will notice, is abandonment. When Willy is a child, his father, leaving him and Ben alone, abandons him. Ben eventually leaves for Alaska, and Willy is left pondering over his warped vision of the American Dream. Thus, he tries desperately to prove it to his family, and Biff, who Willy loves dearly and has great ambitions for, drops Willy with his dreams when he finds out his betrayal to Linda. Finally, in the restaurant scene, which will be mentioned later, Willy finally believes his American Dream is coming to light, but all his illusions are shattered, and he is left babbling in the washroom.

It seems that every abandonment causes great despair over Willy. It actually quite saddens the audience when they see this lonely figure of a man, living up to his fake dreams, to be shattered and let down by those dearest to him. What is interesting, is that how we come about seeing this. His abandonment by his sons can be seen to be his incapability of being realistic about life, and that is one of the main reasons why Biff is uneasy towards Willy. The fact that he is always in unrealistic dreams. So generally, it can be interpreted in different ways.

One interesting point I would like to make is that Willy has this tendency to mythologize figures. In the play he has a very important quote, “ And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up the phone, and to be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people?” Willy speaks of Dave Singleman here, as a legend and the embodiment of the American Dream.

Here is his mistake. His failure to understand his own life, leads to his demise. Willy fails to realise the loneliness, and hopelessness of Singleman’s job. It is that very failure to realise this, that sees both his sons abandon his fake Dream. It is also the fact that he mythologizes Biff and Happy. He is quoted as saying Biff is like Adonis and Happy like Hercules. This is because he believes Biff and Happy to be the absolute embodiment of the American Dream. He sees them as being perfect in every way required, but the reality is extremely different.

Moreover, the fact that there includes many different types of symbols also makes you think. It can be said that the rubber hose is an important symbol in itself, as it constantly reminds us of Willy's desperate attempts to commit suicide. Here, the rubber hose represents the attempts at killing himself with gas, which is, the supplier of his families basic needs. This very idea of inhaling gas is the concept that Willy thinks, is a crucial battle to afford such simple necessities.

Diamonds are what I find, extremely puzzling. These diamonds represent two things to Willy. They are, the validation of ones labour, and the ability to pass actual material goods to children. They are both what Willy is craving for. On the other hand however, they are a representation of the discovery of Ben in Alaska, and Willy's desperate failure as a Salesman. The mistake of Willy, essentially what he feels as well, is that he didn't go with Ben to Alaska and peruse the American Dream for which he craved so much. Instead, he stayed for what the Dream promised, financial security. So, at the end Ben encourages Willy to enter the Jungle and obtain the diamond, thus, to kill himself for the insurance money to make his life meaningful in at least one sense.

So, these ideas were the key concepts of the play. This is exactly what makes it a fantastically interesting and complicated piece of drama. The fact, that so many lessons are learned, so many ideas are played, so many themes and genres are come across. These are what make Death of a Salesman, a truly magnificent piece of writing. It is the fact that it takes the audience into a whole bundle of new ideas and aspects to consider that

makes it remarkable. The fact also, that it is set in the 1980's makes it even more interesting.

It depicts the typical nature of the American Dream. Arthur Miller (the author) tries to get the idea across that the American Dream is nothing but an illusion; it is hard working that really matters. Maybe some time ago it was the case, but not now. This idea is clearly implied throughout the book. For example there is Biff's struggle to get the concept of realism across to his father, there is Happy's lies and failure, also Bernard's excellent success, and also Charley's success even when he was not well liked, and finally, Willy's failure in life. It is all these ideas that make the play truly astonishing.

Now, after describing the play as a whole, I will move on to the restaurant scene, one of the most important scenes in the entire play. It is the climax of the whole Drama. I will first describe the scene then explain and comment on it with quotes.

It starts of with the scene in Frank's Chop House. After Happy meets a particular girl, Miss Forsythe, Biff explains to Happy that he waited six hours to see Bill Oliver, and Oliver didn't even remember him. He quotes after that, " I even believed myself that I'd been a salesman for him! And then he gave me one look and- I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been. We've been talking in a dream for fifteen years, I was a shipping clerk." Biff asks where he ever got the idea that he was a salesman for Oliver, he was only a shipping clerk. However, it was Willy's lies and exaggerations that led him to believe he was a salesman when he actually wasn't. Then Biff



accounts how he stole Bill Oliver's fountain pen and was disgusted with himself.

Happy tells Biff to go tell Willy lies, and say he is thinking about the proposition and then Willy will eventually forget the whole matter. When Willy arrives, he reveals the shocking news, " I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around. I was fired today". After that he states he needs some good news to go back to Linda with, because he is essentially in disparity, and his life is wrecked. Then everything goes off. Willy says to Biff that he can't blame him because he is the one who failed math. Young Bernard appears in Willy's flashback, telling the news to Linda, that Birnbaum flunked Biff. Biff gets completely confused at his father's crazy statements, and tries to calm him down and explain the truth to him, but it reaches a stage where Willy refuses to listen to Biff's story. In an absolute frenzy,

Willy goes into a state of delirium and has a semi-daydream about the discovery of The Woman in the Boston hotel. Biff backs down, and then desperately starts to lie in an attempt to save his father, " Oliver talked to his partner about the Florida idea. You listening? He-he talked to his partner, and came to me... I'm going to be all right, you hear? Dad, listen to me, he said it was a question of amount!" Then, when Biff can't lie anymore, because he is afraid that Willy will get hurt, Willy is insulted by Biff, thinking it is spite and lashes out at his son, he quotes " You rotten little louse, are

you spiting me?” whereas Biff would never do that, because he loves his father and only wants to help him.

Then Willy goes off into the washroom and talks to himself. Biff returns to Happy in the Chop House, and accuses Happy of not caring about his father. Essentially Biff reveals the real character that Happy is. Biff tells him in a crucial quote, “ I sense it, you don’t give a goddam about him.” Happy says he should go out with the ladies. Biff leaves in guilt and anguish. Happy claims to the ladies that Willy is not his father, “ he’s just a guy” and then he frantically asks for the bill, Stanley doesn’t respond, so they all leave, and Willy is left babbling in the washroom alone.

So, before I get on to the scene with The Woman, I want to explain this. First of all, as Willy has encountered Howard, Bernard and Charley, and has seen their success, his dreams are seriously dented. His illusions and constructed reality is falling apart. Biff wants to essentially leave behind all the lies and fake illusions and start a new beginning, one with his father relating to honesty. Willy, however, wants his sons to aid him in constructing a false truth. One that includes reliving the American Dream for him. Willy takes Biff so far, as to produce a false report of the interview with Bill Oliver and Happy is very willing to accept. When Biff starts to produce a negative report, Happy jumps in with positive remarks to keep the talk going, he quotes, “ Sure pop, sure, he told him my Florida idea”. He comes up with false information about the interview, and here, it is absolutely clear that he has only his own interests in mind, however the damning evidence comes later.

After a moment of weakness and defeat, Willy's ultimate fear is lived in the restaurant. He is in an emotional breakdown, and needs Biff and Happy to give him confidence, as he knows he is not liked anymore, and he knows it better than anybody. Eventually we see the state of abandonment as before, when Biff and Happy reject him. Willy's dream is coming apart, and Happy and Biff have dented it more than any other. For Biff, the experience of finding out the truth about himself and the fact that he is not a salesman for Bill Oliver, makes him even more determined to crack the lies that surround him, at any cost. Willy refuses to hear out Biff because he wants to stay in delusions.

He doesn't want the truth, because he realises how bitter it is, and he knows it. Essentially it can be said that he can't handle the truth. On top of that Biff doesn't want to hear Willy's lies because he is tired of them, he doesn't want them repeated and repeated. He wants his Dad to realise him. Biff believes, that he must conquer the heavy lies put on him, and realise the truth about his personal degradation. Both Willy and Biff know the differences between the death of a salesman in *Singleman* and Willy's own pathetic vision of death. The basis here is that Biff understands that behind the American Dream lies a lonely, and terrible death, one that *Singleman* himself had. Happy and Linda want Willy to die as he is, in delusions and false truth, but Biff is determined to reach the real truth.

Now, this is essentially what is going on in this scene. Biff tries desperately to uncover the lies about himself and Willy, but Willy won't let him explain. It's as almost if Willy doesn't want to hear. Another point to add is that

before Biff tries to explain things, we find out he is slightly on alcohol and nervous, and it is essentially because he wants to say he is worthless, a nobody, and a bum, something that his father will not accept. Biff tries to explain but Willy won't let him.

This implies Willy is saying, I want to stay in illusions, I'm empty, I don't want to know the truth. Biff then quotes, ' His answer was- Dad you're not letting me tell you what I want you to hear!' This is very interesting, because Biff is about to tell a half lie, but that's not what he wants to do, because he wants to get straight. He wants to come out with the truth, and he also loves his father, and doesn't want to hurt him. With the key line of ' he's just a guy' Happy shows himself as a distorted, thinner image of Willy. However, Willy has a good side to him, his love for his family, and his sense of humour are his good sides. Overall, this scene where we see Biff and Happy, can be said to be the emotional climax of the whole play, as many different ideas and concepts are revealed.

Now, I will be describing the scene where Willy is left alone in the rest room, and is in a flashback.

When his sons have departed from the Chop House, Willy is left alone in his daydreams and flashbacks about Biff's visit to Boston. In his daydream he is in a hotel room in Boston with his mistress. After telephoning repeatedly, Biff is knocking on the door. The Woman pesters Willy to go answer. We learn something new about her, as she quotes, " You know you ruined me, Willy? From now on, whenever you come to the office, I'll see that you go right through to the buyers. No waiting at my desk any more, Willy. You ruined

me.” She doesn’t ‘ t actually mean Willy ruined her, but it is just a sort of joke. However, this means, that Willy met her in a buyer’s office and she was presumably, the secretary. Willy is clearly nervous about the surprise visitor, and he orders her to stay in the washroom because it might be a clerk investigating their affair.

Willy answers the door and Biff is there. He tells Willy he flunked maths and asks Willy to persuade the teacher, Mr. Birnbaum, to pass him. Then Willy quotes, “ Come on, let’s go downstairs and get you a malted.” Willy is clearly trying to get Biff out of the room quickly. When Biff imitates the maths teacher, The Woman laughs in the bathroom. Willy insists that it is nothing. The Woman suddenly enters the room.

Willy quickly pushes her out into the hall way and says that she is a buyer staying in a room next door who needed to shower in Willy’s room, because her room was being painted. Biff then, astonished, sits on his suitcase, crying silently, and not buying his father’s lies at all. Willy says he will go talk to the math teacher, but in tears, Biff says he should forget it. The most harmful blow was when he quoted, “ You-you gave her Mamas stockings!” Then he quotes, “ You fake! You phoney little fake! You fake!” Biff leaves in tears, and Willy is left on the floor quoting, “ I gave you an order! Biff, come back here or I’ll beat you! Come back here! I’ll whip you!”

Stanley pulls Willy out of his daydream. Willy is still on his knees yelling and ordering Biff. Stanley pulls him back up, and Willy attempts to tip him, but Stanley sneakily puts it back into Willy’s pocket. Willy asks him frantically

where a seed store is, he must plant something, he quotes, and “ Nothing’s planted I don’t have a thing in the ground”

So, what did this all mean? Well, Biff discovers the affair of Willy and calls him “ phoney little fake”, so, this means that he suddenly, at that moment, realises what’s beneath Willy’s facade and despises the man behind it. This is what saddens Willy the most, to be exposed in that way. From then on, Willy decides that the reason for Biff rejecting his illusions and the reason for his failure in life is because of what he found out. Of course, in logic, Biff hated Willy for his affair, and therefore hated his ambitions and dreams as well.

In this way, Willy mixes up professional with personal. Willy, in his understanding of the American Dream, believes that it has no need for professional success; rather, he thinks that one can derive happiness without these things. Essentially, he thinks success derives from immaterial and ephemeral concepts, of being “ well liked” and having “ personal attractiveness”. Willy believes, that because Biff doesn’t respect him anymore, as a father or person, he automatically rejects the American Dream. However, Willy is correct. This knowledge of the crime that Willy has committed tarnishes any emotional aspects, so therefore Biff rejects the whole idea of the fake American Dream, that Willy is so desperate to sell.

Another aspect is the symbol of Linda’s stockings. Earlier in the play, Willy was preoccupied with the state of Linda’s stockings and her mending them. Until the restaurant scene, which is the most climatic scene where Biff tries to uncover all the lies surrounding the Loman household, the only

subconscious trace of Willy's adultery is the complete and utter persistence to throw away Linda's stockings. These stockings are the ultimate symbol of betrayal and guilt, which overpowers Willy. When Biff then rejects his ambitions for him and the American Dream, his Dream also starts to crack.

Willy's delirious interest in the seed shop and the end reveals a lot about him. At that moment Willy is a failure. He is poor, unemployed and has nothing to give to his sons. He tries to give Stanley a dollar to portray to him at least that he does own something. However, it was a pretty pathetic and feeble attempt. Stanley though doesn't accept it, because at that time he feels dear to Willy since both sons have left him. In addition, the failure to raise Biff the way he wanted means he has to plant some vegetables at least, to prove his labour and to raise something successfully. The quote at the end, " Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground", is implying how Biff was able to break free of his American Dream, and the traditions of his family. Finally, the metaphor represents Willy's natural preferences to do manual labour, and that being a salesman, was definitely the wrong choice to go with.

So, I have come to an end and the only conclusion that I can make of the play, is that it is a fantastically good idea. The themes have an extraordinary range. These include betrayal, the American Dream, material success, commerce, truth vs. lies/fantasy, family, instinct, work, death and ' dying well'.

I'll end with a quote made by Biff, which summed up Willy very well, " He had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong."

### Background Information:

The whole play addresses many painful conflicts regarding the American national values. It offers a post war personal tragedy reading. I think mostly; Miller is concerned with America revolving around the false myth that is based on capitalism and materialism constructed by the post war economy. A type of view, which was held highly by the founders of America. The challenge of the American Dream was very radical at the time of World War II. Radical as it was, many of the artists and philosophers took up the idea of realistic views and personal meaning. At that time this was unusual, and the government didn't like the idea, they had confusion already in the country.

However, many people, even then, had so many conflicts, which included racial and economical, that they couldn't take up the idea of a social reformation. Many people still kept their ideological interests in hand. However in this day and age, it is obvious that the ideas of people like Arthur Miller have been put into practise, and now, the emphasis is of the American Dream is that it only works if you want to succeed and get to the top by working hard and being positive that you will do well. So, as a final comment, I think that Arthur Miller's ideas and concepts managed to change the way people think about how society and families work, and what are the values to keep in mind.