

# Arthur miller's death of a salesman

Literature



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THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN " Whoever is writing in the United s is using the American Dream as an ironical pole of his story. People elsewhere tend to accept, to a far greater degree anyway, that the conditions of life are hostile to man's pretensions.

- Arthur Miller"(1)

In unequivocal words this is an admission that when man pursues his pretensions the same will fail since the conditions of life will not allow and cannot accommodate the same. The American Dream is a mere pretention. Miller exemplifies this in the persona of Willy Loman, a salesman.

Miller grew in the environment of trade and marketing. He knew the life of a salesman for his father used to own a clothing company and dealt with a few salesmen. Unfortunately, it closed down during the depression.(2) But after World War II and the business of trade and marketing was in an all time high, Miller did not succumb to join the ranks of the ever increasing salesmen.(3) Instead he " worked jobs ranging from radio singer to truck driver to clerk in an automobile-parts warehouse and eventually to writing plays."(4) Although he had the opportunity and connections to be a salesman, his actions showed that for him it was not a very reliable job even if people talked of instant success achieved upon making that " big sale" this idea is the driving force behind salesmen to continuously and persistently knock on doors and offices to sell one's merchandise.

This concept of continually working, selling and hoping for the ultimate sale that would bring one from " rags to riches" is a mere myth. Success stories of people like Willy's father (Miller, 49), Ben (Miller, 52) and Dave Singleman (Miller, 81) were mere stories. Willy considered his father as making his mark for selling flutes he made as he journeyed with his family from one state to

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the next. His brother Ben who just went into the jungle and came out a rich man was for him truly successful. Dave Singleman who made so many sales that at his funeral many people came. All these men exist in Willy's memories and dreams. There is no single proof of their success. Truly, epitomizing lives of men filled with mere stories would yield nothing concrete. It is all a myth and a dream. But to Willy this was real. His dream crumbles as the play progresses. After working for 30 years he is demoted from a salaried man to a per commission basis (Miller, 57); his wife could not buy new stockings and continually mended old ones (Miller, 75); and, he was deeply in debt to Charley (Miller, 98). Upon realizing this, he staged his own death. He thought that upon his death his failure will be redeemed. The insurance money will support his wife and people will acknowledge his worth when they see his customers come to his burial (Miller, 137). Ironically, the money was not sufficient and neither did any of his customer come. This tragedy of Loman is also the tragedy of the American Society's pursuit of the American Dream (Stanton 131).

Although Miller significantly shows his biased feelings against the elusive American Dream, he does not admit this. The tragic death of his main character is the very proof of this feeling. Instead he masks this and instead claims in an interview:

" I was trying neither to condemn a profession nor particularly to improve it, and, I will admit, I was little better ignorant of Freud's teachings when I wrote it. There was no attempt to bring down the American edifice nor to raise it higher, to show up family relations or to cure the ills afflicting that inevitable institution. The truth, at least of my aim - which is all I can speak of authoritatively-is much simpler and more complex."(5)

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- (1) Galvin, Rachel. Arthur Miller: A Biography. Retrieved on 3/25/2010 at <http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/miller/biography.html>
- (2) Ibid
- (3) 100 years of U. S. Consumer Spending. Retrieved on 3/22/10 at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/uscs/1950.pdf>
- (4) Op. cit., Galvin, R.
- (5) Siebold, Thomas. " Arthur Miller: The Author Reflects on Death of a Salesman." Readings on Death of A Salesman. The Greenhaven Press: California, 1999, p. 41.
- (6) Miller, Arthur. Death of a Salesman. New York: Viking Press, 1950.
- (7) Santon, Kay. " Women in Death of a Salesman." Readings on Arthur Miller: Death of Salesman. Thomas Siebold, Editor. 1st Edition. Literary Companion Series. The Greenhaven Press. San Diego CA: David L. Bender, 1999. 130-137.