

Arthur Miller's *Death of A Salesman*: A Harsh Confrontation between Dream and Reality



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ABSTRACT: This paper explores how unrealistic drive of expectations leads to a tragic end of a travelling salesman in the anvil of harsh reality. The research is framed through a Marxist perspective, which critiques capitalism and examines its impact on social hierarchies and personal development in the middle-class American society. The confrontation of Willy Loman's dream with the harsh reality in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) reflects the disillusionment of the American Dream. The dramatic narrative begins by providing imaginative context, highlighting how dreams can collapse by holding on to unrealistic expectations with a wrong idea of being successful. As the protagonist, Willy Loman struggles to reconcile his aspirations with his failures, intensifies his delusions that blurs the line between dream and reality. As the mundane world values tangible results over charisma and dreams, the play portrays how Willy's realization of life, driven by misguided ambitions, lacks substantive meaning and danger of upholding unrealistic dreams. This awareness leads him to a tragic conclusion, believing his death might offer his family financial security—a final but futile attempt to attain the success he could never achieve. Willy's fragmentation of aspiring hope serves as a critique of societal confrontation between dream and reality challenges the American Dream, exposing the human cost of chasing illusions in a harsh and indifferent world.

KEYWORDS: American Dream, harsh and indifferent world, fragmentation of aspiring hope, confrontation between dream and reality, disillusionment, vulnerability, and self-destruction.

INTRODUCTION

Arthur Miller (1915–2005) was an influential American playwright, best known for his exploration of social, moral, and political themes in modern American life. Miller's works often explore the themes of social responsibility, morality, and the American Dream. His plays remain a cornerstone of American theater and are celebrated for their incisive examination of human character and society. Arthur Miller was born on October 17, 1915, in Harlem, New York City, to a moderately affluent Jewish family. His father, Isidore, owned a successful coat manufacturing business, while his mother, Augusta, was a teacher and an avid reader. The family faced financial hardship during the Great Depression, an experience that significantly shaped Miller's worldview and artistic themes. Miller attended the University of Michigan, where he studied journalism and developed an interest in playwriting.

Miller's personal life often drew public attention. He married three times, including a highly publicized marriage to actress Marilyn Monroe (1956–1961). Their relationship was turbulent and inspired some of his later works. He was also politically active and resisted the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) during the McCarthy era, which led to his conviction for contempt of Congress (later overturned).

He began his writing career in the 1930s and gained early success with *All My Sons* (1947), a play critiquing greed and moral compromise. His most famous work, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), earns him the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and is considered a landmark in American theater for its poignant depiction of the flawed pursuit of the American Dream. Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), set during the Salem witch trials, is an allegory for the McCarthy-era Red Scare, highlighting themes of mass hysteria and

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the danger of political repression. Other notable works include *A View from the Bridge* (1955) and *After the Fall* (1964), which reflect his personal experiences, including his tumultuous marriage to actress Marilyn Monroe.

Throughout his career, Miller is celebrated for his ability to dramatize human struggles against societal pressures and moral dilemmas. At the age of 89, Arthur Miller died on February 10, 2005. His works continue to be celebrated for its moral seriousness, emotional depth, and enduring relevance. Miller's plays have been translated into numerous languages and remain staples in theater and literature courses worldwide. His legacy endures as one of the greatest voices in American theater, whose works remain relevant and thought-provoking.

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is a fabricated story framed on the American Drama that refers to theatrical works created in the United States exploring its cultural, social, and political dynamics. It is a distinctive form of dramatic art that looks at the evolving experiences of American society, ranging from personal struggles to broader national concerns. Literature is a fictional representation of life and culture of human experiences. It provides a better understanding of countries, their institutions, and ways of life, developing a mutual interest in the cycle of livelihood. Its function is to humanize life and harmonize the different interests of human civilization. It gives the glimpses of realities, complexities, and truths of life. Miller's play is one such form of literature that tells a story of both the internal and external states of mind of a middle-class American salesman who spends his whole life to bring success in his family through unrealistic dream and vision without confronting the reality of the harsh competitive world.

Miller's *Death of a Salesman* shows the clash between the hard reality and dreams of modern American life. The play discusses human failure, broken dreams, and the futility of the American dream. It shows how harsh reality breaks peoples' dreams and how a person cannot find the purpose of his life. The play clearly highlights the discrepancy between peoples' needs and aspirations. The conflict between the dreams of the main character of the play, Willy Loman, and reality is analyzed very deeply. Although Willy tries to advance his dream at every step of his life, in the end, his dream does not become a reality, and he fails. The play, thus, tells the story of the erosion of American dream and the struggle in the anvil of reality. By looking deeply at the scenes in the play, an attempt is made to understand how the characters struggle between their dreams and reality. In addition, by reviewing the various stage productions of the play, it is seen how effective the message of the playwright becomes readable to the peoples of the literary world. It has been shown that the director, actors, and the producer have portrayed the reality of society and the dreams of American people on the stage. Willy's inner conflict and his emotional struggle with dream and vision is analyzed through Freudian and Marxist theories. Finally, an in-depth analysis of Marxist criticism is inherently reflected in the play that how class distinctions and economic pressures force the working people to surrender to the harsh reality of life.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research aims to analyze the confrontation of dream with the harsh reality of life reflected in *Death of a Salesman*. The symbolic representation of the American dream in the play will be analyzed. It will be explored how it affects Willy's downfall. The research aims to examine social expectations and capitalist reality. Here it will be analyzed how Miller portrays the tension between personal ambition and social constraints through the character of Willy. This paper aims to show the impact of the fragmented dream on the Loman family and their middle-class American society which accelerates the sense of isolation in those dream oriented people like Willy Loman. Willy's unrealistic aspirations and inability to adapt to change will be examined in this paper. The research, that will examine the psychological impact of the dream on Willy and his family, will show how the confrontation between dream and reality affects the casual relationship between different peoples in the realistic society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Willy Loman's dreams and struggles are intertwined with a harsh reality in his life, where his failures and the challenges of society combine to constantly trouble him. His tragic life story, as portrayed in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, teaches us that the dreams we have cannot always materialize, especially when we live in a society that opposes and hinders the usual struggle. In that sense, the play is a poignant critique of the American dream, showing its fragmentation and collapse due to external pressures and personal flaws (Bigsby, 1997).

The idea of the American dream has long created a great hope in the minds of people. Willy Loman believes that being "well-liked" and attractive will inevitably lead to success. He tells his sons, "Be liked and you will never want" (Miller, 1949, p. 33). However, this belief proves to be a misconception. Despite his relentless efforts, Willy does not succeed. His dream is not just a reflection of his own struggles but also the flaws and inconsistencies of the larger society. As the novelist and professor

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Christopher Bigsby notes, "Willy Loman's dreams are driven by the very society that defeats him" (Bigsby, 1997, p. 89). His belief in popularity as a path to success creates a false hope that reveals the unrealistic nature of his aspirations.

Willy's wife, Linda Loman, offers unwavering support, but this support also contributes to his downfall. Linda believes in Willy's dreams as much as he does, often comforting him with words like, "You're doing wonderful, dear" (Miller, 1949, p. 45). However, this encouragement blinds her to the reality that Willy's dreams are unattainable, intensifying his confusion and despair. As critic and professor Terry Otten says, "Linda's love, while genuine, traps Willy in his illusions" (Otten, 2002, p. 67).

Through Willy's struggles, we observe, the seeds Willy plants in his garden represent his desire to leave behind a legacy and achieve something tangible. However, these seeds never grow, symbolizing the futility of his efforts. Similarly, the flute music in the play recalls Willy's happier memories, contrasting starkly with his current failures. As Miller describes it, the music "tells us about a man's yearning for something beyond the mechanical" (Miller, 1949, p. 7). These symbols highlight the gap between Willy's dreams and the harsh realities of his life in a society that prioritizes material success over human connection. Thus the failure reflects the inherent flaws of society, which prioritizes material achievement over human relationships (Abbotson, 2007).

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Willy is, in many ways, a victim of a capitalist society. In a system where an individual's worth is tied to their productivity, Willy finds himself unprepared for the success he always expects. His failures exposes the deep flaws within this system. His struggles echo Miller's critique of capitalism: "The tragic hero's flaw is his inability to negotiate between his inner dreams and the brutal reality of his society" (Miller, 1949). Willy's life and career becomes a reflection of a world where success depends on factors beyond individual efforts.

Willy's identity is deeply divided. On one side, there are his aspirations and self-image, and on the other, there remain the harsh realities of his failures. This division leads to a loss of self-confidence. His conversations with his deceased brother Ben are manifestations of his inner turmoil, as Ben symbolizes the success Willy longs for but cannot achieve. Willy famously asks, "Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be?" (Miller, 1949, p. 105), highlighting his internal conflict and the clash between societal expectations and personal desires. Willy's dream not only impacts him but also deeply affects his family. He projects his aspirations onto his sons, particularly Biff, hoping they would achieve the success he cannot. However, Biff rebels against these unrealistic expectations, telling his father, "I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you" (Miller, 1949, p. 132). This generational conflict symbolizes a shift in values, where Biff rejects the flawed ideals of his father. Biff's decision intensifies Willy's despair and feelings of failure.

Dreams hold a profound connection to the essence of being human, representing a mysterious and intimate aspect of our lives. They transcend the boundaries of time, culture, and geography, offering a window into the complexities of the human mind and spirit. Within dreams, the line between reality and imagination blurs, allowing us to explore desires, fears, and memories that might otherwise remain concealed in the waking world. Human beings often find solace, inspiration, or even discomfort in their dreams. They serve as an avenue for the unconscious mind to communicate, creating a narrative space where logic and reason take a back seat to emotion and symbolism. This unique experience reveals the depth of human creativity, as dreams craft stories, landscapes, and scenarios that feel both foreign and familiar. Dreams, in their enigmatic beauty, are a mirror of what it means to be human. They reflect our deepest emotions, our unspoken fears, and our most cherished hopes, reminding us that the realm of dreams is as much a part of life as our waking reality.

The reality of life in the ordinary world is very different from our childhood fantasies or teenage dreams. While we dream of freedom, joy, and happiness as children, those dreams are often crushed in reality. As we grow older, we find that daily life is much harder and more complex. It not only conflicts with our hobbies or ambitions but also questions the meaning of our existence and purpose (Frankl, 1946). This harsh reality often forces us to struggle internally, learn, and discover the true beauty of life (Becker, 1973). As children, we dreamed of becoming adults. The dream was of a life where we could make our own choices. But adulthood brings many responsibilities. We do not have financial freedom, societal expectations weigh on us, and professional demands take up our time and energy. The freedom we once dreamed of is now largely lost. The routine of life, the pressure of work, the thought of monthly bills, and the need for financial security in the future burden us in ways we never imagined (Bourdieu, 1984). The desire for freedom, which seemed like a vibrant dream in childhood, becomes an invisible boundary in reality (Hochschild, 1995).

Another difficult truth in life is the burden of expectations. Society places many expectations on us—about our careers, relationships, and personal lives. The image we had as children, which we imagined as we grew, becomes distorted. A stable job,

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marriage, family, and financial prosperity seem to be life's main goals. Yet, not everyone can reach these milestones. Some move forward according to their choice, while others are driven by circumstances. Many who fall outside these expectations feel isolated, lonely, and hopeless. In this situation, many experience a conflict between their desires and society's expectations, leading to dissatisfaction (Cohen, 1996). The pursuit of success is another tough reality. In society, success is often linked to financial wealth, power, and status. As a result, people become obsessed with achieving success at the expense of their health, relationships, and mental well-being (Schwartz, 2011). The standards for success have become stricter in modern society, where competition is constant and pressure overwhelming. Yet, even after achieving success, many wonder if this achievement has truly fulfilled their lives. Many face this question and struggle to find their purpose (Sandel, 2020). Everyone knows that sorrow and hardship are part of life. Loss of a loved one, financial crisis, health issues, and mental stress bring sorrow (Neimeyer, 2001). Life constantly presents challenges. These hardships teach us how to grow stronger, though they are not always easy to bear. While hardships cannot be avoided, they offer valuable lessons and help us navigate life with greater resolve (Kübler-Ross, 1969).

The struggle for money is another harsh reality. In modern life, people must often do work they don't enjoy to earn money (Kalleberg, 2011). Many people living in monotonous routines and doing work they don't love feel they have lost their purpose. This can lead them to view their lives as empty. These struggles also raise existential questions: Why am I here? Why is life so difficult? (Frankl, 1946). Another difficult truth is the fragility of human relationships. Relationships are one of life's most important parts, yet they often break down. Betrayal, misunderstanding, and unmet expectations create discord (Bowlby, 1988). In the fast-paced modern world, the depth of relationships can decrease, leading to feelings of loneliness and difficulty maintaining genuine connections (Putnam, 2000). Inequalities in the world make life harder for some. Some suffer because they lack opportunities, while others achieve success easily due to the advantages of birth. Economic and social inequalities prevent many from reaching their goals, despite their efforts (Piketty, 2014). These inequalities create frustration and make life more challenging (Wilentz, 2008).

Despite the harsh and unpredictable nature of the world, there are also beautiful moments. Amid life's difficulties, we sometimes find small moments of joy that bring peace to our hearts (Seligman, 2002). A smile, a joyful moment, or a beautiful scene can bring true happiness. In those moments, we realize that life's struggles help us become strong and resilient. Even in life's complexities, we can find our strength and purpose. The harshness of the world brings challenges, but it also builds our confidence and adaptability. These challenges teach us to change our perspectives, making life more meaningful (Frankl, 1946).

The tension between dreams and reality has been explored by philosophers, poets, and psychologists alike. Dreams, both literal and metaphorical, represent our aspirations, desires, and imaginative ideals. They reflect our vision of an ideal world, where we can fulfill our deepest desires without the constraints of reality. In contrast, reality is the tangible and often harsh world we navigate daily, shaped by external limitations such as time, society, and our own capabilities. The conflict between these two realms is central to the human experience, often leaving individuals in a state of frustration, disillusionment, or, at its most extreme, despair (Sartre, 1943; Camus, 1942).

Dreams represent the boundless human imagination. They are reflections of personal ambitions, ideals, and aspirations. On the other hand, reality imposes constraints—be they physical, social, or temporal—that prevent these dreams from being fully realized (Sartre, 1943). This gap between the idealized world of dreams and the often disappointing world of reality is at the heart of existential philosophy. Camus, in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), uses the metaphor of Sisyphus to symbolize the futility of human efforts to achieve permanence or lasting satisfaction, highlighting how the pursuit of dreams in a world resistant to change can result in existential frustration. At the individual level, the tension between dreams and reality is often experienced as a personal tragedy. People set high expectations for themselves, but their dreams frequently clash with the practicalities of life. For instance, a person may dream of changing the world through their profession, only to be stifled by bureaucracy, societal expectations, or personal limitations. Similarly, in relationships, dreams of idealized love and harmony often conflict with the complexity of human emotions and real-world challenges (Nietzsche, 1889). This conflict leads many to question their priorities and may result in feelings of dissatisfaction.

Finally, literature often explores the consequences of the collision between dreams and reality. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the protagonist's ambition blinds him to the moral consequences of his actions. Macbeth's overwhelming desire for power leads to his eventual downfall, illustrating the danger of allowing dreams to overshadow the reality of human limitations (Shakespeare, 1623). Similarly, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a poignant depiction of the failure of the American Dream. Gatsby's pursuit of an idealized past with Daisy Buchanan ends tragically, as the reality of her character and the societal structures of the

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time render his dreams unattainable (Fitzgerald, 1925). The philosophical exploration of dreams versus reality is a central theme in existential thought. Both Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus have emphasized the absurdity of human existence. Sartre's concept of bad faith describes how people deceive themselves to avoid facing the painful truth about their limitations, while Camus suggests that recognizing the absurdity of life allows individuals to embrace it fully (Camus, 1942). In contrast, Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism teach detachment from worldly desires, asserting that attachment to dreams leads to suffering. The Buddhist concept of dukkha suggests that peace can be attained by relinquishing the pursuit of idealized futures and accepting the present moment (Rahula, 1974).

Additionally, despite the inherent tension between dreams and reality, individuals can find ways to navigate this dichotomy. One approach is to cultivate resilience and adaptability, accepting that setbacks and failures are an integral part of life's journey. By reframing failure as an opportunity for growth, individuals can better align their aspirations with reality. Nietzsche's concept of amor fati (the love of one's fate) encourages individuals to embrace the hardships of life and find fulfillment in accepting life as it is (Nietzsche, 1889). Art and creativity also offer a way to transcend the limitations of reality, allowing individuals to explore and express their dreams despite the constraints they face. The tragedy of dreams versus reality is a constant theme in human existence. While dreams fuel progress and offer hope, their collision with the reality of human limitations can lead to disillusionment and despair. However, by embracing both the ideal and the real, individuals can find meaning, creativity, and growth. The tension between these realms is not only a source of frustration but also of potential, as it drives individuals to adapt, innovate, and find new ways to navigate the complexities of life. The tension between dreams and reality is not limited to the individual but extends to society as well. In capitalist societies, the idea of the American Dream promises prosperity through hard work. However, this ideal often ignores the social and economic inequalities that hinder many from realizing such dreams. The societal pursuit of material success clashes with environmental sustainability, leading to ecological crises and social inequalities (Hochschild, 1995). Moreover, the rise of social media has exacerbated the dream-reality conflict, as curated online personas create unrealistic expectations and fuel dissatisfaction (Marwick, 2013).

In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's dream is deeply flawed because it is based on shallow metrics of success—popularity and appearances—rather than genuine skill, passion, or fulfillment. He equates being well-liked with professional achievement, failing to recognize that substance and ability are equally important. This misconception leads him to overlook opportunities for self-improvement and genuine happiness. Willy's obsession with being liked overshadows his capacity to achieve real accomplishment. Willy's reliance on the approval of others is evident in his interactions with his family and peers. He pressures his sons, particularly Biff, to embody his ideals, even when those ideals are misaligned with their abilities and desires. This creates tension within the family, as Biff resents the unrealistic expectations placed on him. Despite his failures, Willy remains steadfast in his belief that he is on the verge of a breakthrough, clinging to the hope that his hard work will eventually be rewarded. As Godfrey notes, "Willy is unable to let go of his dreams, even as they lead to his downfall." (Godfrey, 1991).

The critique of the American Dream in Miller's works extends beyond *Death of a Salesman*. In *The Crucible*, Miller explores the destructive consequences of ambition and the pursuit of power, offering an allegory for McCarthyism and broader societal corruption. John Proctor, the play's tragic hero, proclaims, "Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life!" (Miller, 1953). This line underscores the moral compromises often required to achieve societal validation, a distorted version of the American Dream. The American Dream is a complex and evolving concept that has been central to the narrative of American society, shaping the country's values and ideals. It is traditionally understood as the belief that anyone, regardless of their background or social standing, can achieve prosperity and success through hard work, determination, and initiative. The origins of the American Dream can be traced to the founding ideals of the United States. The notion that anyone can start anew and achieve success through effort and ingenuity was particularly appealing to immigrants who came to America seeking better opportunities. In the early years of the nation, the American Dream was closely tied to the pursuit of land, freedom, and self-reliance. F. Scott Fitzgerald, the renowned novelist, captured the allure of this ideal in his work *The Great Gatsby*, describing it as "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person" (Fitzgerald, 1925). For settlers, the promise of new opportunities and a fresh start symbolize both personal freedom and the possibility of economic success.

As the nation industrialized in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the American Dream began to take on new forms. The rapid economic expansion and the growth of cities provided opportunities for those seeking employment in factories, businesses, and new industries. Jennifer Hochschild noted, "The Dream increasingly became associated with material wealth and consumerism as society shifted toward an industrial economy" (Hochschild, 1995). The idea of achieving financial independence and social status became an integral part of the American Dream, and the notion of upward mobility gained prominence.

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By the mid-20th century, however, the American Dream began to face serious scrutiny. Following World War II, the country experienced significant economic prosperity, but this period also saw increasing concerns about the societal and psychological costs of consumerism. Arthur Miller, the celebrated playwright, remarked, "The trouble with the American Dream is that it makes promises it cannot keep" (Miller, 1949). His critique of the Dream is particularly evident in *Death of a Salesman*, where Willy Loman's relentless pursuit of material success and social status ends in personal and familial tragedy. Miller's portrayal of Willy as an everyman struggling with societal pressures reflects a broader critique of the American Dream, suggesting that success defined by external validation and material wealth is ultimately hollow. This disillusionment with the American Dream was further highlighted by Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist, who argued, "The American Dream is a cultural myth that fuels consumption and obscures inequality" (Baudrillard, 1981). For many, the Dream became synonymous with a consumer-driven society, where success was measured by the accumulation of material goods. However, systemic inequalities—rooted in race, class, and gender—often determined who could access the opportunities promised by the American Dream. Historian Elizabeth Marwick pointed out, "The historical legacy of segregation and discrimination means that not everyone starts on an equal footing" (Marwick, 2013).

Even in contemporary times, the American Dream remains a contentious subject. Nietzsche, the philosopher, observed, "The American Dream has become a ghostly pursuit, chasing shadows of wealth and fame" (Nietzsche, 1889). While it continues to inspire many, the rising costs of education, healthcare, and housing have made financial independence and security increasingly elusive. Arthur Miller's works remind us that the American Dream's promise must be reimagined to align with values of integrity, community, and equality. Willy Loman's dream revolves around achieving financial success, popularity, and personal validation. He envisions a life where he is not just well-off but admired and respected. For Willy, success is defined by being "well-liked," which he believes is the key to prosperity and happiness. This belief becomes a central tenet of his identity and is reinforced by his admiration for figures like Dave Singleman, an old salesman whose success and charm serve as Willy's ideal. As Arthur Miller states, "Willy Loman is a salesman, and his identity is deeply rooted in the notion of being well-liked" (Miller, 1949, p. 34).

From his young age, Willy internalizes the notion that personal charisma and connections outweigh hard work and integrity. He dismisses his brother Ben's suggestion to venture into the wilderness for wealth and instead chooses a path that aligns with his vision of respectability and urban sophistication. This decision becomes a pivotal moment in Willy's life, as it locks him into a trajectory of unfulfilled aspirations (Miller, 1949; Bigsby, 1997). According to Kolb, "Willy's belief in superficial qualities like charm and popularity reflects a misunderstanding of what true success involves" (Kolb, 2005). Willy's interpretation of the American Dream is fundamentally flawed. He equates being "well-liked" with achieving success, failing to recognize that success also requires skill, perseverance, and adaptability. This narrow view blinds him to the realities of his abilities and the changes in the world around him (Miller, 1949; Kolb, 2005). As Kolb says "Success, in Willy's eyes, is a matter of charm and connection, rather than competence and hard work." (Kolb, 2005). Willy places immense value on superficial qualities like appearance and charm. He dismisses the importance of hard work and integrity, as seen in his advice to his sons, Biff and Happy. He teaches them that personality and popularity are more important than diligence or honesty. This philosophy ultimately leads to their struggles and disillusionment, mirroring Willy's failures. Bigsby writes, "Willy's fixation on being liked undermines his ability to truly connect with others." (Bigsby, 1997).

Willy Loman is the embodiment of the flawed American Dream. Aged and exhausted, Willy clings to the belief that personal charisma and popularity are the keys to success. He idolizes figures like his brother Ben, who achieved wealth through adventurous means, and Dave Singleman, a salesman who was reputedly admired even in death. These role models fuel Willy's conviction that he too can achieve greatness, even as reality contradicts his expectations. As Miller writes, "Willy's dream is a fragile illusion, sustained only by his inability to accept reality" (Miller, 1949). Willy's dreams are grand but misguided. He aspires to be not just successful but well-liked, equating popularity with success. His inability to adapt to changing business dynamics renders him ineffective in his profession, yet he refuses to acknowledge this. Willy's delusions are compounded by his tendency to romanticize the past, as he constantly reminisces about better days when he was supposedly admired and his sons had limitless potential. Bigsby argues, "Willy's nostalgia for the past blinds him to the fact that the world around him has changed" (Bigsby, 1997). This idealization blinds him to the present. He denies his professional failures, his strained relationships with his sons, and his mental decline. His dreams, far from being a source of inspiration, become a source of torment, leading to his eventual decision to end his life in the hope that his death will provide financial security for his family through life insurance. Willy's tragedy lies in his inability to reconcile his aspirations with reality. As Kolb suggests, "Willy's dream is not just a personal failure but a symbol of the destructive power of unattainable ideals" (Kolb, 2005).

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As Willy grows older, the gap between his dream and reality becomes impossible to ignore. His career as a salesman is in decline, his financial situation is precarious, and his relationships are fraught with tension. The world around him has changed, and Willy has failed to adapt. The personal charm and connections he once relied on are no longer enough to sustain his career in an increasingly competitive and impersonal business environment (Miller, 1949; Kolb, 2005). Kolb continues, "Willy's failure to adapt to a changing world is a key factor in his downfall" (Kolb, 2005). Willy's inability to accept his limitations exacerbates his struggles. He clings to the belief that success is just around the corner, refusing to acknowledge the reality of his situation. This denial manifests in his hallucinations and flashbacks, where he revisits moments of perceived triumph and relives conversations with his brother Ben, who represents the success Willy wishes he had achieved (Bigsby, 1997). As he observes, "Willy's hallucinations are a manifestation of his refusal to face the truth about his life" (Bigsby, 1997). Willy's delusions also lead to erratic and self-destructive behavior. He borrows money from his neighbor, Charley, to maintain the illusion of financial stability, and he frequently lies to Linda and his sons about his earnings. These actions reflect his desperation to preserve his dream, even as it crumbles around him. Godfrey notes, "Willy's actions reveal his deep fear of losing the dream he has so long clung to" (Godfrey, 1991).

Not only Willy's, but also Biff's journey is central to the play's exploration of Willy's dream. Once the golden child who embodied Willy's aspirations, Biff becomes disillusioned with his father's values and the American Dream itself. His failure to achieve success in the conventional sense is a source of tension and disappointment for Willy, but it also serves as a wake-up call for Biff. "Biff's realization that he is not destined for greatness is the catalyst for the play's dramatic shift" (Bigsby, 1997). Biff's realization that he does not want to live a life defined by materialism and superficial success is a turning point in the play. He confronts Willy with the truth about their lives, rejecting the lies and delusions that have perpetuated their dysfunction. In one of the play's most powerful moments, Biff declares, "I am not a leader of men, and neither are you," forcing Willy to confront the reality of their situation. As Miller writes, "Biff's rejection of Willy's dream is the ultimate act of self-liberation" (Miller, 1949). While this confrontation is painful, it also represents a moment of liberation for Biff. He chooses to forge his path, free from the expectations and pressures of his father's dream. In doing so, he highlights the importance of authenticity and self-awareness, offering a stark contrast to Willy's tragic inability to let go of his illusions.

Thus, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* stands as a defining work of American drama, offering a poignant critique of the American Dream and its promises. At the heart of the play is Willy Loman, a salesman who clings to an outdated and destructive version of success, resulting in his ultimate downfall. Through Willy's failure, Miller critiques the myths of material success and personal charisma, exposing the illusions that undermine the American Dream for many. This essay examines the failure of Willy Loman's dream through three main lenses: the unattainable nature of his aspirations, his flawed character, and the societal pressures that contribute to his demise. Willy Loman's dream is rooted in the idea of achieving material success and social status through personal charm and connections rather than hard work or skill. For Willy, success is not just about financial security but about being well-liked, respected, and remembered. This conception of success aligns with the idealized vision of the American Dream, promising that anyone can rise to prosperity through determination and charisma. Willy explains, "Be liked and you will never want" (Miller, 1949, p. 35). Even so, Willy misinterprets this dream. His version is superficial, emphasizing appearances over substance. While the American Dream suggests upward mobility and self-reliance, Willy's fixation on being "well-liked" blinds him to the realities of his profession and personal life (Miller, 1949).

Willy's understanding of success is fundamentally flawed. He idolizes figures like Dave Singleman, a legendary salesman who achieved wealth and admiration late into his life. For Willy, Singleman represents the epitome of success: a man loved by his clients and revered by his peers. Willy says, "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!" (Miller, 1949, p. 41). Even so, Willy fails to recognize the uniqueness of Singleman's story and instead projects it onto himself. Throughout the play, Willy insists that being well-liked is the key to success, dismissing the importance of hard work, adaptability, or genuine talent. This belief leads him to discourage his son, Biff, from pursuing practical goals, instead urging him to focus on popularity. As a result, Willy fosters unrealistic expectations in himself and his family, setting them up for disappointment. Willy's dream is also unattainable because it is rooted in a nostalgic longing for the past. He frequently reminisces about his "glory days," when he believed he was on the cusp of success. These memories are often distorted, painting a picture of a life that was never as prosperous as Willy remembers. He exclaims, "I had a great time with him... He's just a boy. He's a fine boy, a good boy. You're a great boy, a good boy, and you're going to be great, I tell you" (Miller, 1949, p. 63). His refusal to confront the realities of his present situation exacerbates his failures, as he continually tries to recreate a past that no longer exists.

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Willy's pride prevents him from accepting help or acknowledging his limitations. Despite his declining sales performance and mental health, he refuses to consider a different career path or accept financial support from his friend Charley. Willy retorts, "I don't need a penny. I'm just not getting the break" (Miller, 1949, p. 47). This stubbornness stems from his belief that admitting failure would diminish his self-worth and undermine his vision of success. Also, Willy is in denial about his reality. He refuses to acknowledge that his methods are outdated and that the world has changed. His insistence on selling through personal charm, rather than adapting to modern business practices, leaves him unable to compete in a rapidly evolving economy. Willy cannot critically examine his life and choices. Throughout the play, he blames external factors—his boss, his sons, or societal changes—for his failures, rather than taking responsibility. He says, "I am not a failure! I am not a failure!" (Miller, 1949, p. 90). This inability to self-reflect not only prevents personal growth but also alienates him from those who care about him.

Willy's relationships with his family reveal the emotional toll of his dream. His wife, Linda, is supportive yet trapped in the role of enabling his delusions. She says, "I am not saying that he's a bad person, but you can't take the whole thing so personally" (Miller, 1949, p. 58). His sons, Biff and Happy, struggle under the weight of his expectations, leading to tension and resentment. Biff, in particular, serves as a foil to Willy, recognizing the futility of his father's dream and seeking a more authentic life. Even so, Willy's refusal to accept Biff's perspective drives a wedge between them. Willy's age further compounds his struggles. As an older salesman, he finds himself increasingly irrelevant in a market that prioritizes youth and innovation. His inability to adapt to these changes reflects a broader societal trend, wherein older workers are marginalized and undervalued.

Miller uses Willy Loman's failure to critique the broader concept of the American Dream. While the dream promises opportunity and prosperity, it often neglects the systemic barriers and inequalities that prevent individuals from achieving success. Willy's belief in the dream blinds him to these realities, making him a victim of a system that prioritizes profit over people. Willy laments, "The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a bed of it" (Miller, 1949, p. 92). The play highlights the dehumanizing nature of capitalism, which reduces individuals to their economic output. Willy's employer, Howard, represents this dynamic, dismissing Willy despite his decades of service. This interaction underscores the harsh realities of a system that values efficiency over loyalty or human connection (Miller, 1949).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Willy Loman is the central figure of the play, and his dreams define his entire life. Willy believes in the American Dream—that being well-liked and charismatic will lead to success. He thinks that if people admire him, he will make money and gain respect. Unfortunately, Willy's dream is unrealistic. He is no longer a successful salesman, and his career is failing. He cannot accept that times have changed, and his old-fashioned ideas about success no longer work. He is also unable to see his own mistakes, such as focusing too much on appearances and not enough on hard work or personal growth (Adams, 1931; Trilling, 1950).

Willy's biggest flaw is his refusal to face reality. He constantly lies to himself and his family about his achievements, pretending that he is more successful than he is. He keeps saying that he's about to close a big deal or that his bosses admire him, but these things aren't true. His inability to admit failure causes him great pain and drives him into depression. Willy's refusal to acknowledge his failures is evident when he says, "I am not a failure!" (Miller, 1949). This self-deception drives much of his tragic journey. At the same time, Willy's dream of success isn't just for himself. He wants his family, especially his sons, to achieve greatness. He believes they can become wealthy and famous, but he puts too much pressure on them, particularly Biff. In the end, Willy becomes so desperate to leave a legacy for his family that he decides to take his own life, thinking the insurance money will provide them with financial security. Tragically, this final act only shows how deeply Willy was trapped by his dreams (Miller, 1949; Fitzgerald, 1925).

Linda Loman is Willy's wife and mother of Biff and Happy. She is the glue that holds the family together. She is a kind, patient, and supportive woman who loves Willy despite his flaws. Linda's dream is simple: she wants her family to be happy, and she wants stability in their lives. She doesn't care about fame or wealth; she just wants them to have a peaceful home and enough money to live comfortably. Linda is deeply aware of Willy's struggles and tries her best to protect him. She knows he is not as successful as he pretends to be, but she doesn't criticize him for it. Instead, she defends him, especially when their sons become frustrated with him. For example, when Biff and Happy dismiss Willy's ideas or make fun of him, Linda reminds them that their father has worked hard his entire life to provide for them. She says, "He's a good man. He's just not a great one" (Miller, 1949). Linda's loyalty to Willy sometimes prevents her from addressing the family's problems. She avoids confronting him about his unrealistic dreams or his growing mental health issues. Instead, she tries to keep the peace by supporting his fantasies. This

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makes her both a strength and a weakness in the family dynamic—her love for Willy is admirable, but it also enables his destructive behavior (Miller, 1949; Trilling, 1950).

Biff Loman is the elder son of Willy and Linda. During his youth, Biff was the star of the family. He was a high school football hero, and Willy believed he was destined for greatness. Willy constantly told Biff that he was special and that success would come easily to him because he was good-looking and popular. However, Biff's life did not turn out as Willy had hoped. After discovering his father's affair during his teenage years, Biff's trust in Willy is shattered. He dropped out of school and wandered for years, taking low-paying jobs and struggling to find a sense of purpose. Biff's disillusionment is clear when he declares, "I am not a leader of men. I am not a dime a dozen! I am Biff Loman!" (Miller, 1949). Biff's dream is very different from Willy's. He doesn't care about wealth or being well-liked. Instead, he wants to live a simple and honest life. He loves working outdoors and dreams of owning a farm or a ranch, where he can be free from the pressures of modern society. This dream clashes with Willy's vision for him. Willy sees Biff's desire for a modest life as a failure and cannot accept it. Biff's main struggle is finding his own identity. He feels torn between his father's expectations and his desires. Throughout the play, Biff realizes that he has been lying to himself and his family about who he is. He decides to confront the truth and reject Willy's unrealistic dreams. This moment of self-awareness sets Biff apart from the other characters, as he is the only one who manages to break free from the family's cycle of denial (Miller, 1949; Steinbeck, 1939).

Happy Loman, the younger son of the Lomans, is often overlooked by both his family and the audience. While Biff is the focus of Willy's attention, Happy tries to gain recognition in his way. He has adopted Willy's belief in the American Dream and strives to achieve success in the business world. However, Happy's methods are shallow and self-serving. Happy is a womanizer who uses his charm to manipulate others. He constantly brags about his achievements, but much like his father, he exaggerates the truth. While he claims to be successful, he is stuck in a low-level job and has no real prospects for advancement. Happy's dream is to prove his worth and gain the admiration of others, but he lacks the ambition and discipline to achieve anything meaningful. Despite his flaws, Happy is loyal to his father's ideals. At the end of the play, he vows to continue pursuing Willy's dream, even though it has already destroyed their family. This decision suggests that Happy has not learned from Willy's mistakes and will likely face the same disappointments in his own life (Miller, 1949; Fitzgerald, 1925).

The Loman family's dreams are deeply connected, yet they are also a source of conflict. Willy's unrealistic expectations put enormous pressure on his sons, leading to frustration and rebellion. Linda's unconditional support enables Willy's delusions, while Biff's search for truth exposes the lies that have shaped their lives. Happy's desire for attention and success reflects the empty pursuit of the American Dream, which values superficial achievements over genuine fulfillment. Each character's dream ultimately ends in disappointment, highlighting the flaws of a system that prizes material success above all else.

Willy's society is deeply rooted in capitalism, where a person's worth is measured by their ability to produce and earn. As a traveling salesman, Willy's identity is tied to his job, which is inherently unstable and increasingly obsolete in a changing economy. The emphasis on productivity and competition leaves no room for the aging, the vulnerable, or those who do not fit the mold of relentless ambition. Willy's decline reflects the ruthless nature of a system that discards individuals when they are no longer "useful" (Miller, 1949; Steinbeck, 1939). In Willy's world, relationships are often transactional, based on what one can gain rather than genuine connection. Willy's obsession with success leads him to neglect meaningful relationships, especially with his wife, Linda, and his sons, Biff and Happy. His longing for approval from his boss and clients underscores the superficial nature of connections in a society that prioritizes image over substance (Miller, 1949; Fitzgerald, 1925). Willy's society also highlights a generational clash between traditional values and modern realities. Willy clings to outdated ideals of charm and likability as pathways to success, while his son Biff recognizes the emptiness of these pursuits and yearns for a more authentic life. This conflict exposes the flaws in societal norms that perpetuate unrealistic expectations across generations (Miller, 1949; Fitzgerald, 1925). The society in *Death of a Salesman* stigmatizes vulnerability and mental health struggles. Willy's internal battles with self-doubt, regret, and failure are exacerbated by societal pressure to maintain an image of success. Instead of seeking help, Willy suppresses his emotions, leading to a tragic end. His plight reflects a broader societal failure to acknowledge and support mental health (Miller, 1949; Steinbeck, 1939). Women in Willy's society are confined to traditional roles and often portrayed as subservient and supportive. Linda, Willy's wife, epitomizes this dynamic, as she constantly defends and supports him, despite his flaws and failures. Women's voices are marginalized, reinforcing a patriarchal structure that limits their agency and contributions (Miller, 1949; Fitzgerald, 1925). Finally, the society in the play encourages individuals to live in illusions rather than face harsh realities. Willy frequently retreats into memories of a more prosperous past or dreams of a successful future, unable to accept his current failures. This societal tendency to prioritize appearance over substance traps individuals in cycles of denial and self-destruction (Miller, 1949; Steinbeck, 1939).

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