Death Of A Salesman Log Essay, Research Paper

Arthur Miller s tragedy is not simply detailing the failure of poor Willy Loman, a broken down salesman, but of middle-class America. Miller uses the Lomans as a vehicle to show precisely what can and does go wrong with the American Dream.

Miller uses many characters to contrast the difference between success and failure within the system. Willy is the dreamy salesman whose imagination is much larger than his sales ability, while Linda is Willy’s wife who stands by her husband even in his absence of realism. Biff and Happy are the two blind mice that follow in their father’s fallacy of life, while Ben is the only member of the Loman family with that special something needed to achieve. Charlie and his son Bernard, on the other hand, enjoy better success in life compared to the Lomans.

The play romanticizes the rural-agrarian dream, but does not allow the Lomans to attain it. Miller seems to hold ambiguous feelings toward this dream. At first one believes that Miller is telling us that we should abandon the common business ethic, and run away to the west, however, the only successful people in the play are those who have followed it to the letter. In the end the play does not make a final judgment on America simply because Willy Loman cannot be viewed as tragic hero. Willy is a foolish and ineffectual man for which I can only feel pity. I cannot see Willy s failure equate those of America. Within the play there is a lot of room for success and failure. Willy can only blame himself for not succeeding.

Miller departed from the accepted norm for a tragedy by making his flawed hero a simple salesman. Some find it hard to raise Willy Loman to the level of Oedipus or Medea; however, Miller could not make portray Middle America, through such a great character. What makes Miller brilliant, is that he can makes us pity, a born loser, and show us how our own system is flawed through his failures.

With Linda, Miller moves from the business aspect of the American Dream, to that of the family. Linda is the near perfect American housewife. She is the nucleus of the family, the point at which love is given, and received, the woman who suffers and endures, and in her ironic complexity, the destroyer of both Willy and Biff. She accepts Willy s greatness and dream, but does not allow him to leave with Ben to fulfill it. She attempts to bring father, and son together, but does so under Willy s corrupted values. This keeps Biff from gaining the maturity to deny these values. She loves Willy so much that she lets his lies and masquerades continue in front of her. Linda even goes so far as to stop Willy from facing his own problems. She constantly pushes the blame from Willy. This is highlighted in the opening seen of the play. When Willy returns from the road unable to drive, she blames the car s steering, and Willy s glasses.

Also, Biff the oldest son, continues to search for his purpose in life. At age thirty-four, Biff still does not know what career he wishes to pursue. This is due to all the hot air Willy constantly feeds him. Biff never can hold down a job long enough to be successful. Biff is constantly being fired for stealing. This stems from his father. Willy always thought that his children were just brave souls, and daredevils. In his world his children could never be thieves.

Biff seems to be an amplification or reflection of Willy s problems. He was nurtured on Willy s dreams, but was forced to see them for the lies and illusions they truly are. And is the truth (his father s cheap philandering) that paralyzes him. I believe that Willy, and Biff are one in the same. They are both completely inadequate in every respect due to their dreams. Biff was crippled by the effects of disillusionment, Willy by the effects of the illusions themselves. At the end of the play, just before Willy s suicide, they sum themselves up:

Biff: I m a dime a dozen, and so are you!

Willy: I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

The tragedy is that they are both right.

In addition, Happy, the youngest son, never realizes his father’s fallacy of “be well liked and you shall never want”. Happy tried to make it in the city with a similar sales career like his father. He also lives a lie in the fact he claims to have a certain position with his company when in reality he is in the lower bracket of the company. Happy is not able to see himself for what he is, unlike his brother, who finally has an epiphany of who he is and what he stands for.

Happy, by not being as close to Willy as Biff, escapes the aura of social failure surrounding their father. However, due to the lack of closeness, Happy never fully realizes the phony part of his father s dreams. In the end Happy vows to prove his father s dreams can be achieved. It is likely that he will suffer the death of a salesman.

In contrast, Ben has become extremely successful in life compared to his brother Willy. Ben is the only member of the Loman family to achieve greatness. He is the example of the true entrepreneur in every sense, “Never fight fair with a stranger” was Ben’s wisdom and his faith “When I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich!” Although, this information was never enough for a blueprint for Willy to follow, Willy always sought his brother Ben’s advice to reach the pot of gold under the rainbow.

Charlie is also Willy s opposite in the play. Charlie stands for completely different beliefs, and is quite successful. Charlie attempts to help Willy; however, he will not listen to his advice. In the end Charlie offers Willy the job in New York he so desperately needed. Willy s refusal seems to stem more from pride, then from insanity. Willy seems to have too much pride to admit that Charlie s beliefs are superior to his. Charlie tries to lead Willy to the fountain of knowledge but Willy refuses to take in this precious liquid.

Bernard, like his father, is extremely successful. He is not well liked at school, and Willy states that he will never be successful in the business world. Bernard, however, uses his intelligence to become a prominent lawyer, and pleas a case before the Supreme Court. That Mr. Miller chose to contrast Willy’s and Biff’s failures with an obvious example of how one can succeed in this country makes it difficult to interpret the play as an attack upon the American system, either as constituted or as popularly imagined. Bernard is, in fact, living proof of the system’s effectiveness, an affirmation of the proposition that persistent application of one’s talents, small though they may be, pays off.

Death of a Salesman not only is a reflection of the American Dream gone awry, but a look at the changes in America at that time. Death of a Salesman was first performed in 1949. The years immediately following World War II distorted and antiquated Willy s beliefs. This is even apparent in the settings. The Loman house is surrounded by sprawling apartment buildings. His house symbolizes his own pride and stubbornness. He refuses to realize the changes that are happening around him. His hero Dave Singleman, an eighty-one year old salesman, is the epitome of Willy s dream. Singleman was able to make a living by simply calling his clients. Willy fancied himself another Singleman, being extremely well liked, and successful due to personality. What Willy does not realize is the days of knowing personally, and respecting your business associates has passed. No one remembers or respects Willy Loman. With the influx of veterans from World War II, all areas of business are extremely competitive. Willy Loman represents a dying breed. As Charley eloquently stated: He s a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back,that s an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and you re finished. Gone forever are the days when you can make a living on how well others like you.

The title Death of a Salesman has two meanings within the play. Willy s idle, Singleman, is said to have suffered the death of a salesman. He died in transit while selling his product. He was deeply respected, and was successful. All his business associates turned put for his funeral. People were deeply sad at his death. When Willy Loman killed himself for the insurance money, no one but family, and Charlie appeared at the funeral. No one noticed the passing of Willy Loman. He was not the well-liked and respected businessman vital to the New England area. He was simply Willy Loman, salesman. They both suffered the Death of a Salesman, just in different eras.

Middle America, and it s Willy Lomans, will always exist in some form as long as we chase the American Dream. If only we knew if we are fools or level headed businessmen. It s a pity we don t know our future.