Death Of A Salesman: Symbols Essay, Research Paper

Death of a Salesman: Symbols

Many symbols are incorporated into the play “Death of a Sales man” and they in

turn relate to both character and theme. The hose, tape recorder and the seeds

are some of these symbols.

The hose in Miller’s drama directly relates to the theme of d eath. The hose is

a line attached to the gas main in Willy’s house which allows him to snif f the

gas. This action can be seen as Willy’s suicide wish, and escape from the

realities of life. As seen in the loss of his job and his failure to succeed.

The hose also represents grief and deception. For when Linda, Willy’s wife,

finds the hose, she is distraught over its in tended purpose. The deceptive

nature of the hose is apparent when Willy is confronted about it by Biff his son

and Willy denies its existence. A similar denial is also evident when Willy is

confronted with the tape recorder in Howard’s office.

The tape recorder signifies the change in Willy’s life throug h the advancement

of technology. It also represents the end of Willy’s career. This is brought

about when Howard, Willy’s boss and godson, shows the tape recorder to Willy and

appe ars to be more interested in the sound and technology of the machine

instead of Willy, who i s fighting for his job. Howard no longer need s Willy’s

services and without concern fires him. This , to Willy, was like, “eating the

orange and throwing away the peel”. However, Willy is partly to blame, as he

does not accept change and wants to remain in the pas t. This is foreshadowed in

the scene where Willy is left alone with the tape recorder and is unable to shut

it off. Willy believes in using his old techniques and style to succeed.

Nevertheless, in his job, it is not what you know, but it is who you know. Willy

is not up to date with the business nor technology. Yet, Willy still has hope,

and wishes to leave some fo rm of support behind for his family as illustrated

in his planting of the seeds.

Willy feels that he must leave something behind something for Biff. In Willy’s

imaginary world he wants Biff to be magnificent and he symbolically plants seeds

in his garden. In spite of such an action he is doomed to fail. Willy sta rts

planting the seeds at night, but at night there is no sun shining and this seems

very od d as seeds require light to grow. What else is strange is the fact that

Willy’s house is boxed in between large apartment buildings and is covered by

the shadows cast by them. It is evident that no light will fall on Willy’s

garden. Willy’s attempt to plant and grow seeds is futile, but he persist in his

attempt to seek reconciliation and forgiveness. Thus the hose, tape record er

and the seeds are all symbolic of Willy’s dreams gone sour, and his inability to

live in the present. His death is inevitable and is mirrored by his life.