

WILLY LOMAN

WILLY LOMAN is the HERO or the ANTI-HERO of the play, 'Death of a Salesman'. In Willy the playwright, Arthur Miller, has depicted an ordinary American a common man. Willy Loman belongs to the lower middle class. He is average and so typical that he has been called Mr. Everyman. Understandably, there is nothing outstanding or remarkable about his life. Like any other life, it is dull and insecure, and the pressures and tensions of the modern materialistic, highly competitive commercial society are manifest in his day to day business.

Willy Loman is a travelling salesman. He is more than sixty years of age. Linda Loman is his wife and Biff Loman and Happy Loman are two grown up sons. Willy is simple and innocent. Like any ordinary, simple-hearted person Willy also wishes to be rich and wishes to be loved. It must be noted, as it is very significant, that all Willy's attention is focussed on his favourite elder son, Biff Loman. Willy Loman is ambitious, not for himself, but for Biff. Willy wishes to be loved and admired, most particularly, by Biff.

It has been pointed out that the most salient feature of Arthur Miller's tragedy, 'Death of a Salesman', is its Americanism. If this feature is ignored proper appreciation and evaluation of the play and the character of the chief protagonist, Willy Loman, is not possible. Thus the American context is vital.

When the literary critics view 'Death of a Salesman' against Greek and Elizabethan drama, the hero, Willy Loman, seems inadequate. He lacks stature, his view of reality is narrow, his obvious character defects diminish the scope of action and the possibilities of universal application.

Against a large historical perspective and without the American context, Willy Loman is a "Small man" who fails to cope with his environment. But Willy Loman is Not simply an individual who has determined on an objective and who strives desperately to attain it. He is also representative of an American type, the salesman, who has accepted an ideal shaped for him and pressed on him by forces in his culture. This ideal is the matrix from which Willy Loman emerges and by which his destiny is determined. For Arthur Miller, Willy, the salesman, is a Personification of the Success Myth. Willy is committed to its objectives and defined by its characteristics. The Success Myth is the Rags-To-Riches Romance Of The American Dream.

Willy Loman's Quest For Secret Of Success is Central To The Drama. By choosing this focus for his play, Arthur Miller, the playwright

is drawing on the popular mind and a popular formula from which he shapes his dramatic form.

The name of the hero is descriptive—LOMAN = "Lowman". It is on the economic and social totem-pole. His wife Linda who knows him inside out and sees him elderly and sympathetically, calls him a "small man". Willy is a white collar worker who works on salary and/or commission for a company. His economic future is at the mercy of his employer. Willy does not show any marked intellectual capacity or training, and his wisdom, in platitudes, is garnered from common sense authorities when he is away from home. His moral life functions according to the "travelling salesman" tradition, not excluding clandestine affair or the blue joke. He does not consider himself dissolute. According to his lights he is honest enough. He is intended to represent the average lower middle-class American.

Willy Loman's antecedents are typical. Willy Loman's father, a big-bearded man who played flute, was also a salesman, a travelling salesman. Following the Yukon gold-strike his father disappeared one day when Willy was a baby, in the lap of his mother. His elder brother Ben went to join his father in Alaska but landed in the diamond mines of Gold Coast in the western side of Africa. Thus Willy sprang from this stock—American stock with a penchant for travelling and selling. Thus Willy envisions his origin in terms of the American experience.

Willy Loman is a product of a producer-consumer society in which the go-between is a pivotal figure. Society has labelled him and Willy has accepted that label. The society has offered Willy a set of values and an objective and Willy has committed himself to those values and that objective. He becomes THE SALESMAN—he cannot be defined in any other terms. Willy has been shaped by a society that believed steadily and optimistically in the Myth of Success and he has become the agent and the representative of that society.

To Willy his elder brother, Ben, is the palpable proof of his doctrine: the Success Myth. Though he admires his brother he does not accept Ben's method. Willy relies on personality. Willy accepts Dale Carnegie's approach to success : Winning Friends and Influencing People.

In the play, 'Death of a Salesman,' Willy's fortunes are at a low ebb. His faith in the success myth is tested by harsh realities which he alternately faces and flees. He fights to hold on to his Identity.

We find that Willy LIES constantly : about gross sales; about the reaction of businessmen to his personality; about his boys' success and importance; about his own prospects. These lies echo, not the drab reality about him, but the shining hope he has. These lies are pathetic efforts to protect his identity. Willy is unfaithful to his long-suffering wife, Linda, but this infidelity is an assuagement of his loveliness on the road, a restorative to his flagging spirits, and a provision against the rebuffs of the day. When he momentarily faces reality—his inability to drive to

Boston, the mounting bills and the dwindling resources to meet the financial emergencies—he flees to the past and projects the future. The Salesman Willy, cannot abandon the myth without reducing himself to ZERO. Thus he must hope.

The common man found himself at the mercy of the powers—the economic crisis and political imperatives. The Success Myth holds these powers at bay, overcomes them, puts the successful man out of their reach. As **Anti-Hero** Willy, the Salesman (and his family) is at the mercy of these powers. Time-installment buying, the enclosure of the house by apartments, the impersonal attitude of the executive illustrate these external forces. If these “hidden gods” decide to doom a generation they can grind exceedingly small. When the stock market crashed, once safe and happy millionaires left by the window. Willy’s faith in the Success Myth leaves him vulnerable to the big gods.

Willy is not to tally unsympathetic. His goodness is demonstrated in his devotion to his wife, Linda. Despite his occasional curtness he is deeply concerned about her.

Willy Loman, the hero (or the anti-hero) of ‘Death of a Salesman’ represents the American caught in the web of the Success Myth and the moral pressures it generates. As a type, Willy is a product of social and economic forces outside himself. But in the struggle with these forces Willy is a suffering human being. He battles to rekindle his faith. He is shaken by doubts about his ability to live according to his belief, humiliates himself to discover the secret that lies at its heart. His total and blind commitment to his ideal is whole-hearted, and if the salesman, Willy, is destroyed by that commitment, the audience feels that Willy the person is worth saving.

Thus when Willy Loman goes to his death, by suicide, without knowing why he has lived or why he is dying, he fulfils his destiny of the type, but as an individual who has suffered, he remains unfulfilled. The salesman can neither suffer nor be converted (because, then, he would cease to be salesman), but the family man—and father and friend—does suffer, and by virtue of it, can change.

Willy’s plight draws from the audience both recognition of his illusion and sympathy for the visionary. Willy’s suffering is real and deep. America cannot accept the Success Myth but there is no substitute for it. Arthur Miller, the playwright, has built his play around an American dream, he strikes deep into the consciousness of the audience. The contemporary American, because he cannot solve the dilemma either, becomes involved in the sufferings of Willy the person as he watches the death of Willy the Salesman.

Willy is a man of many illusions—his innocent faith in the goodness and uprightness of people. He is a misfit in the environment in which he lives. His alteration from nature, his fervent love next only to his love for success, is evident from his/tirades against apartment houses and loss of flowers etc. The pressures and tensions of the life of reality unbalance

Willy and then the past impinges on the present to the great distress of his sons but many secrets are revealed through such journeys into the past.

Willy's fabrications camouflage his own and Biff's incapacities. His failure as a father is at the root of the ruin of his sons. Willy's inability to distinguish contributes to his undoing—does not distinguish between people, values and methods, between criminality and initiative. He seeks to achieve in his death what he could not achieve in his life—success for Biff and Biff's love for himself.