

# The Views of Arthur Miller about the American Dream

Amol Singh<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Joya Chakravarty<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, University of Rajasthan

<sup>2</sup>Professor, University of Rajasthan

## Abstract

This study aims to portray Willy Loman, Miller's primary character, as a haunted American dream figure. It also demonstrates how Willy pursued his death without even considering that he was on the wrong track. It also focuses on how his aspirations were so small yet were never realised since imperialism's nature is to exploit people and toss their peels, not to serve them and fulfil their ambitions. It also focuses on Miller's inventiveness in lifting the play to the level of traditional plays by turning it into a masterpiece. It demonstrates how Miller can make his audience empathise with Willy and fear for his catharsis, despite the fact that he is devoid of dignity or greatness. He portrays himself as a representation of the entire generation infected by the American dream culture.

**Keywords:** *American dream; realism; salesman; character.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was a time of enormous change and development for American drama, and this progress mirrored the nation's growth and affluence. Meanwhile, hundreds of new theatres were erected as a result of the country's poor economic state, and Americans turned to the theatre for enjoyment; as a result, writers did not produce high-quality plays during this time. Dramatizations of books and melodrama plays, on the other hand, were immensely popular in the twentieth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, a new tendency had emerged in Europe, which had begun some twenty years earlier. This was Realism, which was a trend distinct from the 1700s' traditional melodramas and sentimental comedies. Symbolism and character development are used in theatre to express it.

In general, realistic authors' works show the basic premise of Realism, which is that writers must record their observations fairly and impartially. They centred on an accurate depiction of life; it focused on middle-class living and realism, eschewing high-class life and fantasy. One of those generations is dramatist Arthur Miller (1915-2005). When he was a student at the University of Michigan, he began creating plays. Miller investigated the problem of individuals suffering in an artificial society in his works. In addition, he merged realistic people with current sorrow in his work. His plays jamp from his social conscience and regard for people who are vulnerable to the misleading values implanted in them by society, and his plays jamp from his social conscience and consideration for those who are vulnerable to the deceitful values imposed in them by society. The drama "Death of a Salesman" was Miller's crowning work (1949). It received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1949, the Tony Award for Best Play in 1949, and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play in 1949. It is regarded as a watershed moment in American drama (Wainscot).

"Death of a Salesman" portrays the tragic narrative of Willy Loman, a regular man who is quite similar to Miller's father and is a travelling salesman who has dedicated his life to the pursuit of prosperity and happiness. His erroneous mindset is to blame for his family's predicament. Willy Loman relives his experiences in a sequence of events vividly depicted by the playwright. In the end, he kills himself because the American ideal, the goal of achievement, is a lie (Ronald).

## II. THE HISTORY AND THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American Dream can be defined in a variety of ways. The American Dream, according to Collins English Dictionary, is "the United States ideal in which equal opportunity allows every American to aspire to great accomplishment and monetary prosperity" ("American Dream"). Puritans, or Calvinists who came to America, are said to have invented the term. Except for a minority known as "The Elect," who were chosen by God, Calvinists believed that "mankind is bound to eternal damnation" (Pidgeon 178). The Puritans sought to know who the chosen ones were, and they came to feel that "ownership of tangible goods would be a sign," according to Pidgeon (Pidgeon 178). It wasn't long before people began to associate prosperity with God's kindness, and that the only way to attain wealth was through hard labour and prayer. Puritans also thought that everyone had an equal chance of success and that all of their faults would be forgiven if they worked hard enough. As a result, achieving money became a goal, and the notion of the American Dream was born.

Other elements influenced the creation of the American Dream. The Declaration of Independence, for example, declares that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among those are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" (Cullen 38). Because it embraced individuality in the Dream and mitigated the Puritan belief that prosperity is only dependent on God, transcendentalism was also known as the American Dream. It demonstrated to males that "as individuals, they were to lead the way" (Pidgeon 179). As a result, "the phrase 'rugged individualism' evolved from the mix of puritanism, democracy, and transcendentalism to represent an inner-directed, individualistic approach to the pursuit of worldly prosperity, an approach that every man is free to pursue" (Pidgeon 179). Because everyone has an equal opportunity of succeeding, the American Dream has become a dream that anybody can realise.

With individuality as a cornerstone of the American Dream, there was a focus on competitiveness, which became a way of life in a world where there is no such thing as teamwork and where one's possibility of success is totally dependent on oneself. It was clear at this point that not everyone can succeed, just the better ones. As soon as riches, rather than redemption from God, became the objective, the Dream began to deteriorate and corrupt. On the one hand, the wealthy became wealthier, while many of the poor found it nearly difficult to accomplish the American Dream by beginning from the bottom. Thus, the people who already had the wealth and success that came with the Dream started to run the society while the less fortunate were left disillusioned. The Dream and its principles had been tainted and had lost their meaning.

## III. THE CONCEPT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN DEATH OF A SALESMAN

In *Death of a Salesman*, the American Dream is a major subject. "An air of the dream clings to the location, a dream emerging out of reality," it is mentioned right at the start of Act One (Miller 11). The play *Death of a Salesman* is intriguing because Willy's journey from the past to the present demonstrates how the Dream has changed over time. *Death of a Salesman*, according to Abbotson, "may be viewed as an example of the historical economic interests and forces working on American society from the turn of the century until the time the play was written."

Willy was a tiny child when his father and brother departed to seek the American Dream's prospects, and he observed the changes that accompanied the "pioneers' feeling of optimism and opportunity at the turn of the millennium." Willy too benefited from the prosperity of the 1920s, and he pursued his fortune in sales. This was the era when a guy could make a career as a salesman. The Great Depression, unfortunately for Willy, changed everything. "Willy apparently found his wares difficult to market in an age when nobody had money to buy anything but basics," Abbotson writes. After WWII, things changed, but it became "a young man's world," and Willy, now in his fifties, is quickly becoming obsolete, as is his sales method. Willy struggled to adjust to his new environment since his American Fantasy was an ideal of prosperity, and he didn't realise that this dream did not come true for everyone. He couldn't accept the idea that not everyone will be able to realise their ambition of "coming out number one guy" (Miller 139). Willy couldn't believe that he and Biff are "a dime a dozen," and that "although his forefathers were giants, the modern-day American is intellectually and spiritually a very tiny guy – like Willy Loman."

Willy's job as a salesman "in the United States during the 1940s was an occupation as typical of its time and place as a priest would be in mediaeval Europe," according to Spalding, and Willy "can thus be seen as a representative

American accepting current American beliefs, especially that success is open equally to all citizens" (41). "Individuals like the Lomans are bound to aim for success but fail, with all the remorse that failure entails," Abbotson wrote, "but there are people like Charlie and Bernard who are successful but do not let their desire for riches to govern their life." Hard effort and determination are the keys to Charlie and Bernard's success. They didn't rely on charisma or popularity to reach where they are; instead, they worked hard to get there. Bernard is a lawyer and Charlie is a businessman. Willy Loman, on the other hand, has dreamed of success his entire life, but his misunderstanding of how to accomplish it is evident throughout *Death of a Salesman*. In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller interprets this fantasy of success, and it is clear that Willy's life, as well as his family's, has been wrecked by his illusions and compulsive drive for success.

#### IV. WILLY'S CONCEPT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Willy Loman is the protagonist of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Willy is a haunting American dream. However, he lacks the dream's most prominent feature. Hard work and expertise are required to achieve the dream. Willy misunderstands the dream notion and substitutes popularity and attractiveness for it. He transmits all of his delusions and deceptions about his dream to his family members, who are also living in a continual dream. Linda, his wife, assists him in the situation. She is unconcerned with his illusory ambitions, despite the fact that she recognises that they have not improved their living standards since what he makes does not cover their monthly expenses, and they also have debts to pay, such as life insurance and a house mortgage. Unlike his mother and sibling Happy, Biff rejects his father's ambitions to be worthless.

Willy's aspirations are so huge that they bring the family to its knees. It is based on systems that do not require root access. Willy, as a tragic hero, elicits compassion from the audience not because he faces a major power or Olympian gods, as a Classical hero would, but because he is the embodiment of their desires. Like Willy, they're all haunted by the American dream, especially after Thomas Jefferson's statement. By his proclamation, Jefferson.

In some ways, it legitimises the American ideal, making it a shared culture. As a result, they are scared of Willy since his demise signals the demise of their own aspirations. Despite the fact that the play is based on classical drama, it lacks many of its elements. It has a unified structure and narrative, yet it differs in time. It lasts no more than 24 hours, or one day. Miller bridges this gap by extending flashbacks for long periods of time as a technique to make the past and present as elements of conflict in the play flow one into the other, on the one hand, and to make the past dominate the present since Willy lives with his forefathers; his father, Brother Ben, and David Single man. There is no discernible movement between the past and the present. It's as though it's one continuous course. Miller blurs lines and makes characters show no emotion to time travel from present to past and back again. Miller prefers a single current. Such mingling is intended to make the past, as represented by Willy's hallucinations and dreams, the only power that governs the family's destiny and leads to its destruction on the one hand, and to make presentations, with all their setbacks, an impetus to penetrate into the past as a harbour, as Linda describes Willy: "He's a little boat looking for a harbour." (1)

To recapitulate, the distinction between a traditional hero and Miller's hero is found in his hero's collapse. Willy is not compelled to face a major force or make an unintentional error that leads to his demise, as Oedipus learned when he unintentionally killed his father "Laius" (2) and married his mother, or as King Lear did when his miscalculations led to his demise. Willy is a neophyte. He is a victim of the wrong culture's scapegoat.

That is why the audience empathises with him since they are all going through what Willy is going through. He is not a member of any superiority. He does, however, have the right to fantasise, just like anybody else. Willy created his ambitions in the past, when opportunities were many, rather than in the present, when cities are overcrowded and besieged by high structures.

Willy chooses to go to Howard for a transfer to New York following the road accident and with Linda's permission. He is also awaiting the loan from his brother, Biff. However, neither of these events occurs. Rather than being relocated to New York, he is fired, and Biff's request is denied. As a result, they are bankrupt. Willy sees at this time the cruelty, brutality, and hypocrisy of the capitalist system, which takes the fruits of people's youth and throws

away their peels when they get older. Willy does not return to his senses because he is too tormented by the American ideal; instead, he falls more and deeper into his fantasies. He considers suicide, not as a protest and criticism of Howard's action as a symbol of capitalism, but as a dreamer who wishes to provide for his family. By committing suicide, he implies that the money from his life insurance will go to his son, allowing him to do what he has previously failed to do. Despite the fact that his hero is from a lower social level, Miller has succeeded in making his play *Death of a Salesman* a masterpiece. All that is necessary for tragic grandeur, he argues in his essay "Tragedy and the Common Man," is a hero prepared to "laid down his life:" to establish "his proper position in his society."

As a result, Willy's collapse does not occur as a result of a mistake he has made or a challenging force he is not capable of, as it did in traditional tragedies. He has given his entire life to Wagner Company, yet he is discarded as garbage since he is no longer valuable. This is the capitalist system's philosophy, which is based on profit and private enterprise. Finally, Willy kills himself so that his family might benefit from his death. His friends, on the other hand, do not attend his funeral. All of his ideas are based on fallacies.

## V. CONCLUSION

The American Dream is one of the most ancient principles upon which the United States of America was founded. The American Dream was pure in the beginning. The Dream was born out of religion, and its morals were based on God, but it has since faded. When individuals began to seek primarily for material prosperity and success, the Dream became tainted. As a result, the American Dream, which was founded on the notion that all men are created equal and given the same chance to thrive, began to be favoured. As a result, the Dream is not achievable by everyone, and some individuals may spend their whole lives attempting to accomplish it, only to fail.

This research has gotten its paws on the heart of the game. Miller was able to turn a layman into a tragic hero who was much admired. Willy Loman became his model. Willy has none of the typical hero attributes, opting instead to "laid down his life," as Miller put it. It also demonstrates certain features of the American dream culture, as well as the extent to which it is based on error. It is a deceptive and delusory civilization. Its goal is to smear the impoverished classes' eyes with ash owing to the nature of their system, which is built on private enterprise. Willy portrays himself as a devout follower of this culture. This misunderstanding even led to his death.

## VI. REFERENCES: -

1. Unnati, Datar. "Psychoanalytic Study of the Plays of Arthur Miller." *International Journal on English Language and Literature*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, pp. 23-29, [iairs.org/PAPERS\\_V1-11/PAGE%2023%20-%2029.pdf](http://iairs.org/PAPERS_V1-11/PAGE%2023%20-%2029.pdf). Accessed 25 June 2019.
2. Spalding, Peter. *Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller*. Macmillan Education LTD, 1987. Library Genesis, <http://93.174.95.29/ads/7142B19E5E9E7FFAC103C79EDF0D7F69>. Accessed 25 June 2019.
3. Abu Elhawa, H.(2018,July 30) . Desire and American Dream in the death of a salesman. Retrieved from *Angloamericanae Journal*.
4. Nahvi, A. (2016,November 11). The illusion of American Dream in Arthur Miller's *Death of a salesman*. Retrieved from ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312594922\\_The\\_Illusion\\_of\\_American\\_Dream\\_in\\_Arthur\\_Miller's\\_Death\\_of\\_a\\_Salesman/citation/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312594922_The_Illusion_of_American_Dream_in_Arthur_Miller's_Death_of_a_Salesman/citation/download) ).
5. "American Drama. E. O'Niell, A. Miller." *Usvetspace*. n. p, n.d.Web.15 Apr.2012
6. "American Literature –Drama, American Themes, Forms of Melodramas, A shift Toward Realism drama." *Referatele.n.p.n.d.Web*.18 Mar.2012.
7. Sinclair, Iian. *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman Text Guide*. Australia: Insight Publications, 2009.Print.
8. Cortina, M. & Lenkerd, B. (2009,March 1). Willy Loman' s American dreams: A sociopschoanalytic interpretation of Arthur Miller's *Death of a salesman*. Retrieved from (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2925484> ).
9. Sterling, Ericj. *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. New York: Rodopi B.V, 2008. Print