

# Conscious Mind of Individual Human Leads the Society with an Example Through His Life: Arthur Miller's *Death Of A Salesman*

**S. Aravindh babu**

**M.Phil. English**

**Department of English and Comparative Literature**

**Madurai Kamaraj University**

**Madurai**

---

## Introduction

In Arthur Miller's *Death of a salesman* we can see how the life man called Willy Loman has a dramatic change over the time period which makes him commit suicide and his value over his family and friends and even in work keeps changing because of the need of the society and the people. Throughout the play we can see the protagonist Willy Loman remains the same from the start but the people along with him expects a modification over his character where he fails to understand the growth of society and makes him alienated from them.

Through this play we can see the moral configuration of each human which makes him to stand on a particular place but the society expects him to outgrow his own identity and want him to copy and modify the world's need to adopt rather than accept him as himself. This society has made the man to create a different identity where he has to show different faces and has to accept, upgrade, evolve, sacrifice his own, modify, play diplomatic, try to find a place himself within the society and then run along with them. Where people like Willy Loman fails to understand and they have become the victim of the society, and the irony is people never care about them anymore and they move on to do their work to stay in the run of the society and try to hold on their places as much as possible and we the people of the society will give or frame a moral values and configuration to each depending on their values and position in the society rather than a normal equal human being.

In "death of a salesman" the protagonist Willy Loman fails to understand that the world is changing and he fails the reality of people's mind which made him believe that his name will be remembered by all like old days when he used to deliver the orders through marketing technique. This made him believe that he has the great name he once had but the truth is people keeps changing and the marketing network has developed more and people started doing the marketing work in large amount. Once there were only few and people remember their name and Willy Loman is one of them but now people of his age are death and only few left which made him to forgot among people only few were left and they also keep changes themselves to situation.

---

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 20:3 March 2020

**Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on  
*Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature* -- VOLUME 2**

S. Aravindh babu, *Conscious Mind of Individual Human Leads the Society with an Example Through His Life: Arthur Miller's Death Of A Salesman* 155

The postmodern conditions make the lives of the people like Willy Loman a dream in itself. Miller by choosing a salesman for his central character identifies an icon of the consumer society, because a salesman always trades in hope, a brighter future. Willy Loman sells a dream of tomorrow, he sells what a salesman always has to sell, himself.

Willy Loman is a man who never finds out who he is. He believes that the image he sees reflected in the eyes of those before whom he performs is real. Willy as a salesman like an actor speaks the thoughts of other men and thinks they are real. Willy plays the role for buyers and even for his family. He gradually loses his audience, first the buyers, then his son, then his boss. He loses his confidence to perform the role he believes is synonymous to his self. Willy oscillates between awareness and denial. He discounts what he has but has no clear idea what he wants. He does not have any clear description of success and fame, also Willy has to deny the basic points of reality in order to believe in the dream. Willy tries desperately to deny that his sons were failures and that he is failing as a salesman. The entire play is basically a struggle within Willy's mind between his vision of himself and the painful reality of facts intruding upon his "dream." Perhaps the most painful and poignant moment in the play comes when his son Biff tries to tell Willy that he's not now and will never be the "success" Willy imagines for him. Willy cannot hear him. Actually, in denying basic facts each man was trying to create himself from myth. One was of course more successful at doing this than the other. Willy continually fantasizes about the farm in the west. This idea allows Willy to have the freedom of love and will allow him to break free from the restrictions and inhibitions that he has working as a salesman. Willy in one flashback says to both Biff and Happy, "You see what I been talking about? The greatest things can happen" The problem in *Death of a Salesman* is the inability of human beings to accept the changed reality and develop new attitudes compatible with one's changed circumstances of life. The problem of isolation arises in the play because of the protagonist's insensitivity to the inevitability of change. This study has tried to dramatize a situation in which the personal motives of the characters are in conflict with the arbitrary norms of society. Society forces man to put on false faces and live his life through inherently contradictory and false values. The study has made an attempt to show the individuals stuck in the limbo of modern and postmodern values. He has to encounter the dilemma of creating an image of himself out of the illusory social life he is compelled to live. In order to succeed in public life, the individual desperately attempts to put on a socially acceptable mask and performs a role before the society. In this process, he becomes isolated from his own self.

Miller by his drama conveys the necessity of a humanistic response to the contemporary world. Which all becomes identical and exists without individual identity, choice, or spirit. Miller carefully criticizes the consumer society and its capitalist logic. In fact Willy himself as salesman uses the language of advertisement to earn money. But this consumer world has harsh rules; it exploits everybody and as Willy affirms "eat the orange and throw the peel away" although "a man is not a piece of fruit" In fact man must struggle

=====

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 20:3 March 2020

**Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on  
*Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature* -- VOLUME 2**

S. Aravindh babu, Conscious Mind of Individual Human Leads the Society with an Example  
Through His Life: Arthur Miller's *Death Of A Salesman* 156

for survival in a consumer society, which is like a consumer industry produces not things, but dreams disguised as things. Willy by the harsh machinery of the contemporary consumer world is beaten down. He cannot get up back. Linda exhorts “But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid”. Willy is the victim of the American Dream and materialistic condition. Willy Loman’s condition is so close to everybody in the consumer world that develops a sense of kinship to each person. He makes the audience aware of a common fatality and vulnerability.

Death of a Salesman does not simply show the predicaments of the modern man stuck in a postmodern world, but also displays the conflicting views of these two worlds. Bigsby, suggests Willy Loman’s American dream is drained of transcendence. It is a faith in the supremacy of the material over the spiritual. There is, though, another side to Willy, a side represented by the sense of insufficiency that sends him searching through his memories looking for the origin of failure, looking for expiation. It is a side, too, represented by his son Biff, who has inherited this aspect of his sensibility, as Happy has inherited the other. Biff is drawn to nature, to working with his hands. He has a sense of poetry, an awareness that life means more than the dollars he earns. Willy has that, too. The problem is that he thinks it is irrelevant to the imperatives of his society and hence of his life which, to him, derives its meaning from that society. The Loman family is caught up in mindless consumerism, “whipped cheese” and that these new products disrupt attempts at meaningful human interaction. Shockley states Miller shows the power of advertising and consumerism, and the contradictions of attitudes toward products in the Loman family by having Willy call his Chevrolet both “the greatest car ever built” and “that goddamn Chevrolet” in the space of only a few minutes, and in Willy’s remark that “Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it’s broken!” But while Willy utters these remarks, he still is completely caught up in the pursuit of the dream.

In Death of Salesman the Becoming of man is weighed through his bank balance. It is the strength of his bank account, which accordingly mirrors the importance of his existence as a being. The alienation that the industrial era brought upon men is witnessed in the character of Willy Loman. Through this alienation, Willy’s connectivity to society is severed and his tie to moral responsibility on behalf of mankind is weakened greatly. He brushes with the uglier side of capitalism, and yet seemed unable to recognize or condemn this brutal side. In competitive society the rewards of being successful for Willy is to be well liked and to be rich. To be rich also means to be “free” in the two senses above, with the added self-confidence of being admired, a model for others Miller in Death of a Salesman gives the bitterest satire on human condition in contemporary century. He writes about dehumanization result from Enlightenment. Miller criticizes the universal values of Enlightenment humanism. In the capitalism society, consumer culture shows the end of Grand narratives and western metaphysics, which bring tremendous rifts and disintegration among people. Willy represents the reduction of human existence as portrait of man crushed into nonentity, for Willy, is like

=====

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 20:3 March 2020

**Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature -- VOLUME 2**

S. Aravindh babu, Conscious Mind of Individual Human Leads the Society with an Example Through His Life: Arthur Miller’s *Death Of A Salesman* 157

the sea, advancing and retreating, with concealed currents, disturbing eddies that threaten his equanimity. That transiency is a vital element of *Death of a Salesman* and the competitive

The world is changing. Willy's memories no longer mean anything to his employer. The past seemingly exists to mock him. Willy lives a temporary life, a life of cars, trains, offices, hotel rooms. The rhythm of his existence is determined by timetables, appointments, and sales targets. Death lies at the end of tragedy like the ultimate promise of form. It offers a retrospective grace, flooding contingency with a meaning that can only come from its apparent dissolution. Willy dies with a smile, not relishing an irony or accepting a fate but driving to redemption. He died with the conviction that he has completed the ultimate deal with the consumer world. Willy Loman dies in the machine that has carried him daily deeper into despair and yet which is the ambiguous symbol of his culture, on the move into the future yet itself always in thrall to entropy. Willy, it seems, is defeated in his very self. There is almost no subjectivity not compromised by internalizing the assumptions of the world he believes himself to be seizing, the world he imagines to contain the meaning of his life. When he calls out his name there is no echo because there is no longer any substantial reality to reflect it back to him. Willy cannot live in a world not energized by the imagination. He goes gently into the night precisely because his death is drained of the tragic, no matter what Miller may have chosen to believe. Willy dies in hope. He dies radiant with unexamined optimism, almost an absurd hero finding meaning in his conspiracy with death, purpose in the purposeless. Willy attempts to resist by succumbing to the time, dying while still denying the finality of death. Even in the face of death, he insists, there is still a tomorrow. This situation is resulted from capitalistic condition which always promises better future. What Willy Loman finally seeks is not success but, he wants to find immortality. He wishes to pass something more than an inheritance to his sons. He wants to live in and through them, which is why he offers a death with such calmness. Willy Loman's last ride takes him out of time and into myth, where he will be immune to decay. The future, to which he had looked for resolution, but that so tormented him, will now be dissolved. He never does close the gap between what he wishes to be and what he is. Willy had always thought of Time as his friend until he suddenly finds it as enemy which causes his isolation and decay.

Throughout the play we can see Willy as man who never wants to face the world in reality so he tries himself to avoid others and think so much of his mind about the past and imagines the things which he never achieved, which finally made him to become a tragic hero of his own imagination which leads to commit suicide, similarly in "Mrs. Dalloway" we can see the characters who does not want the bitter reality and they live in the dream, Septimus character shows us the thoughts of death lurk constantly of everyday work and action and this makes even mundane events and interaction of meaningful where death is predominant chapter and sometimes even more threatening

We can see the human praxis used in their own way but ultimately they use it to express the inner truth lies in the peoples heart where they cannot explain to others through this we can see their real feelings and love towards their each and every action which was slowly killed by the society because of its changes which cannot be stopped rather can go in a very mature passion without hurting the individuals. Throughout the play we can see the human values keeps changing and this is because of the people of the society who tends to forget everything easily and this leads the people even to forget the people's value and their important in the society this makes the human value reduces and they never think of the impact that has made in their life. They never understand how the human margins can change even with a slight mistakes of a society over a single person and they continues to do so even knowing the consequences to their own this makes them to fail in their real life not by analyzing the wealth rather the health of their own family and friends.

---

### Works Cited

Alice Griffin. *Understanding Arthur Miller*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.

Darlingham, William B. "Arthur Miller and the Loss of Conscience." *The Emory University Quarterly* 16 (1960).

Hadoni, Leah. "Fantasy and Reality: Dramatic Rythym in *Death of a Salesman*." *Modern Drama* 31.2(1998).

Humphrey, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Berkeley: University of California P, 1965.

Jacobson, Irving. "Family Dreams in *Death of a Salesman*." *Critical essays on Arthur Miller*. Ed. James Martine. Boston: G.K. Hall and Company 1979.

Koon, Helen Wickham, ed. *Twentieth Century Views of *Death of a Salesman**. Englewood Cliffs, NF: Prentice Hall, 1983.