
Dangerous Consequences Of Committing The Life Towards An Idealistic Goal In Death Of A Salesman

Considered to be one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century, Arthur Miller was known for many plays, to include the popular *Death of a Salesman* (Miller, 2016). The drama follows Willy Loman, an aging Brooklyn salesman whose career is in decline and who finds the values that he so doggedly pursued have become his undoing. With Willy returning from a business trip, he begins to have memory lapses and having difficulty telling the difference from things in the past and things happening currently. Seeing how her husband's mental state is declining, she requests a new job that does not require much travel (Unknown, n.d.). This 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Award for Best Play show the audience a loss of identity and an inability to accept change.

Many who revisit their past do it for the sake of the happy memories, but not Willy. Willy wanted to analyze himself and understand where his life went wrong, but his past memories are not the wonderful pastimes that he wished were there. Rather, they are harrowing journeys that get to the heart of his dysfunction (Miller, 2016). When Willy thinks about the old days, he remembers making light of Biff's thieving. Furthermore, Willy is barking at Linda about the state of her stockings, ignoring Biff's mistreatment of young women, and sidelining Happy. Each of these memories uncovers some of Willy's shortcomings; his failure to instill strong morals in his sons, his guilt over his adultery, his inability to see Biff objectively, and his unequal love for Biff and Happy (Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 2019). If Willy's dips into the past satisfaction, he would focus on the happy moments in his life. Instead, he tends to be drawn to the times at which he behaved in revealingly unpleasant ways. This tendency suggests that Willy longs for self-knowledge. He wants to figure out how he got into his present mess, and he knows that the answers lie in the past.

The very strength of Willy's impulse to understand himself drives his efforts at gaining self-knowledge. In his ineffectual desperation to understand what went wrong, he becomes subsumed by the past. Instead of remaining firmly rooted in the present and thinking about how the past applies to the life he is now living, he pulls his memories over his head like a blanket. Willy's actions are causing him to hide his past from what is current. Miller brings this absorption to life by fully dramatizing Willy's flashbacks. By dramatizing Willy's memories, Miller makes them as vivid for us as they are for Willy. Miller suggests that while Willy might benefit from thinking about the memories of the past, he begins to lose his grip on sanity when he plunges in those emotional thoughts completely.

Willy's efforts at self-analysis are doomed not just because he gives himself wholly to his memories, but also because his passionate emotions are not balanced by cool critical thinking. Willy is totally incapable of analyzing his own behavior, understanding his character, and comprehending the mistakes he has made. Over and over, Miller shows how Willy plunges back into the past, stares uncomprehendingly at the errors he made, and then makes those identical errors in the present (Unknown, n.d.). He remembers idealizing Ben as a boy; then he describes Ben in outsized, glowing terms to his sons (Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 2016). He remembers implying that Biff did not need to work hard in order to attend a good college; then he bristles at the implication that his parenting has something to do with Biff's failure. Willy dimly senses that

his past missteps have a bearing on the present, but he cannot bring himself to make the connections explicit.

Death of a Salesman is a tragedy in the sense that it displays the dangerous consequences of committing one's life towards an idealistic goal such as the American Dream. Willy Loman fails to see that he is an unsuccessful salesman and to escape that reality, he constantly revisits his past. He is blinded by the greed and wants to achieve the American Dream and so, he forces that onto his son, Biff. Willy could not realize that true happiness comes with emotional attachments and not materialistic possessions. He could not appreciate his son for who he actually is. Willy's death is not necessarily the tragedy of this play. It is the fact that he could not recognize what made him or his family happy. And that he died chasing a materialistic possession which is temporary and his death is permanent.