

**The Ideology of Marx and
the American dream death
of a salesman a case study**

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Abstract:

The American play *Death of a Salesman*, when premiered in 1949 brought Arthur Miller much more fame and had his name established as a renowned playwright. The main character of the play Willy Loman, whose job as a salesman, recently has difficulties with his job for he no longer able to live up to his motto "be well liked ", and it will "open sesame" to you. Willy Loman is living up according to what has been rightly called 'the American Dream' that which anyone who works hard can succeed. Nevertheless, this ideology, the concept of the American Dream, doesn't work out for Willy Loman, who fails at the very role of being a provider and a role model to his family. Marxism, a theory which originates in theories developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, shows the hollowness of the American Dream and its devastated influence on the proletariats. The object of the current paper is to reflect critically on the role of ideology of the American Dream in A Death of a Salesman according to the Marxist critical Theory .

Keywords: The American Dream, Marxism, A Death of A Salesman, Willy Loman

خلاصة البحث باللغة العربية

جلبت المسرحية الامريكية وفاة البائع عندما عرضت لأول مرة في عام 1949 شهرة اكبر لارثر ميلر واثبت اسمه ككاتب مسرحي مشهور واجه الشخصية الرئيسية في المسرحية ويلي لومان والذي يعمل بائعا صعوبات في وظيفته مؤخرا لانه لم يعد قادرا على الارتقاء الى مستوى شعاره كن محبوبا وسيكون بمثابة افتح ياسمسم يعيش ويلي لومان وفقا لما يسمى بحق الحلم الامريكي والذي يعني اي شخص يعمل بجد يمكن ان ينجح ومع ذلك فان هذه الايدولوجية مفهوم الحلم الامريكي لا تتجح مع ويلي لومان الذي يفشل في دور كونه معيلا ونموذجا يحتذي به لعائلته تظهر الماركسية وهي نظرية نشأت في نظريات وضعها كارل ماركس وفريدريك انجلز عمق الحلم الامريكي وتأثيره المدمر على طبقة العمال الهدف من ورقة الحالية هو التفكير بشكل نقدي في دور ايدولوجية الحلم الامريكي في موت بائع متجول وفقا للنظرية النقدية الماركسية

الكلمات المفتاحية : الحلم الامريكي , الماركسية , موت بائع متجول , ويلي لومان

Introduction:

The American Dream and the feeling of being let down are two of the recurring ideas that Arthur Miller explores in his play "Death of a Salesman." From a Marxist point of view, Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman" is a critique of the capitalist American society as well as the

materialistic fallacies that are embedded in the "American Dream." Willy Loman, the main character in the play, is a prime example of a diligent middle-class man seeking the prosperity that comes with the American Dream. However, when he discovers that hard work alone is not sufficient to achieve success, he becomes disillusioned and distraught. The play was written by Arthur Miller. The play *Death of a Salesman* is illustrative of the influence that the American Dream and the power of money have on the average American family, and it highlights important questions that we need to consider when determining our own personal level of success in a market-based economy. In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller proves that money has power, displays the proletariat's dependent on the work and salary provided by the bourgeoisie, and reveals the classist beliefs that inspire the labour force. All of these things are revealed in the play.

• **Review of literature:**

Many articles have been addressed the influence of ideology of which "The Collapse of a Low Man's Great Dream: Reading the Fusion of Traditional Marxism in *Death of a Salesman*", (2022) in which Mei Sun proclaims that In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman is placed in an unique social context by Arthur Miller. Willy's difficulty is that he has implicit trust in his society's established ideals, which prevents him from accurately assessing himself. The fatally misguided character is ultimately destroyed by the culture in which he resides. Willy Loman is, in one word, a typical figure under typical circumstances, meeting the Marxist requirement for realism.

In "The Capitalized society subjugates the weak: Perspectives; *Death of Salesman*" (2014), Azam remarks that, *Death of a Salesman* is a paradigmatic depiction of a man who fails to realize his aspirations until his death, and who is compelled to be ruthless by choosing death as the ultimate answer to everything, his issue, his family's future, and his whole life on earth .

What is more, Holcscher (2013) explains why Willy Loman is a direct victim of society and its ideals in *A Death of a Salesman*, and that he takes his own life in an attempt to defeat the system at its own game. Willy Loman, having lived a mediocre and unfulfilled life, dies as a victim of the American Dream. Willy Loman is discarded like a worthless

orange peel once his usefulness has been exhausted, after being crushed and devoured like a dime in a dozen and reduced to the value of a piece of fruit.

- **Theoretical framework :**
- **Marxism**

Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels developed the theories that became known as Marxism in the middle of the nineteenth century. Marx believed that human history began with the need for food and shelter. Marx adopted a materialist viewpoint, in contrast to the idealism viewpoint of conventional European philosophy from Plato to Hegel (Parker, 2019). However, he shed light on the essential role played by ideology in shaping the life of people .

According to Marxism, an ideology is a set of beliefs, and all sets of beliefs are products of cultural indoctrination. Ideologies include socialism, communism, Marxism, patriotism, religion, ethics, humanism, the ecological movement, astrology, and karate. In this book, every critical theory is an ideology. An ideology can even be something as simple as the idea that the world works according to scientific principles. All experiences and academic fields have an ideological component, but not all ideologies are equally beneficial or desirable. Repressive political aims are promoted by unwelcome ideologies, which pretend to be natural ways of perceiving the world in order to gain public support (Tyson, 2006).

It is Marxism's goal for us to be continually reminded that we are the product of our environment and the oppressive beliefs that seek to keep us submissive to the ruling power structure. Although Marxist scholars disagree in their judgment of the degree to which humans are "trained" by ideology, all agree that the most successful ideologies are not recognized as ideologies but are regarded to be natural ways of perceiving the world by those who belong to them. Even though it could be argued that a political alliance with the poor would better serve the economic interests of the middle class in order to achieve a more equitable distribution of America's immense wealth between the middle and lower classes, the middle class typically sides with the wealthy against the poor in political matters.

As for a superficial look at the history of how Marxism came to be and how it developed along the years, but before that, an important note to be addressed is that Karl Marx was inspired by the political system in the world around him more than within Germany, and especially, the political system that was being argued and ruled over on the United States of America which at the time, was a politically aggressive ring that had the federalists led by alexander Hamilton up until his death in 1804 up against the democratic republicans led by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Off course, the Marxist theories only showed up after the publication of “the manifesto of the communist party” in 1848. A political pamphlet at the time which got commissioned by the Communist League and published in London, just as the revolutions of 1848 began to erupt. The text is now recognized as one of the world’s most influential political manuscripts, presenting an analytical approach to the class struggle and the problems of capitalism and the capitalist mode of production, rather than a prediction of communism’s potential future forms.

- **Discussion:**

The story is a classic failure story and the wisdom behind covering it up while still lingering on with the nature of humans and how this cover up affected the Loman family and how willy’s mentality has led him to the many suicide attempts made at the beginning of the play. It is a denial story, a beautiful mesmerizing epitome of classical America, one which is for the ages. As willy loses himself in the midst of all the chaos that is happening around him, he is a failed business man at best but he tries to cover this up, and his closed one know his mask, they indulge in his self-denial and his masked identity, for sentential purposes, as they remember the man he was before, the man Linda married and she does not want to lose her marriage. Or the man happy loved and he also does not want to lose his father. But the most delicate and emotional part of the play is revolving around the son and father relationship which is between Willy and his son biff.

The play *Death of a Salesman* casts doubt on the "American Dream," which is the idea that if one works hard enough in the United States, they would be rewarded with money and success provided they put in the required amount of effort. Ben Loman, Willy's brother, brags to

Willy's sons about his meteoric climb to fortune in Miller's play. He says the following: "Why, boys when I was seventeen, I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one, I walked out. He laughs. And by God I was rich" (Miller, 1958: 37) nowhere in the book does Ben specify what he was doing in the forest, but he implies that he was effortlessly accumulating riches. This produces an almost condescending tone toward Willy and his ineffective labour as a travelling salesman who seldom, if ever, receives a return for his efforts.

When viewed through the lens of Marxism, the "American Dream" is now more accurately described as a widespread fallacy than a meaningful goal to strive toward. The American Dream is responsible for the miseducation of the working class. Willy Loman is a symbol of the average American who is working toward the fulfilment of the "American Dream," while the bourgeoisie benefits from these workers' efforts. The working class strives for an easy life, while the upper class relaxes and reaps the rewards of the proletariat's labour. Willy never attains the money he desired, but his efforts benefit people who are already prosperous. Willy Loman is not the only representation of The American Dream's failure in Miller's work. Willy's two kids, Happy and Biff, are fighting to achieve their own achievement. Happy lives a life that is focused on financial possessions, whereas Biff aspires to lead a life that is less complex and more spiritual. The Lomans portray the harsh realities of life for families in the working class in the United States, which is an ambitious work ethic that ultimately leads to dreary failure.

The fact, which applies to both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, is that the bourgeoisie benefits from economic expansion, while the proletariat is subjected to oppression as a direct consequence of this expansion. In their 2014 book *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels state: "Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class." (15) In *Death of a Salesman*, this is demonstrated when Willy is dismissed. Willy informs his boss Howard that he is sick of travelling and would want to work in New York. In response, Howard fires him. Willy has apparently never made an average of \$170 a week in commissions, at least not according to Howard. Willy is fired when he makes a request for a better wage and a position that is located closer to his home. Howard is the one who benefits from Willy's termination.

Willy's profession as a salesperson stands in stark contrast to his son Biff's profession. Biff's aspirations diverge greatly from those of his father, and he prefers manual labour. Willy disapproves of his son's decision and argues that working on a farm does not constitute "a life." The contrast is evident in Biff's enjoyment at the mere prospect of exercising in nature. In the meantime, Willy's career as a salesperson leads to emptiness and failure in his life. Willy has grown so engaged in the heartless business of selling that he has lost sight of the actual satisfaction that might be provided by job, something that Biff seems to find. A concept coined by Karl Marx, "alienation" describes this state of being. In Karl Marx's *The Concept of Man*, Erich Fromm provides a definition for this statement. A person is said to be alienated if they do not see themselves as having any kind of agency in the world, but rather if they feel as though the world continues to be foreign to them (Fromm, 2021). Because Willy has no connection to the actual items that he is selling, the act of selling no longer holds any importance for him. This is interestingly demonstrated by Arthur Miller's omission of the goods that Willy offers. Miller may be attempting to imply that the product is unimportant to Willy by failing to explain it, despite the fact that the product should be a crucial aspect of selling.

Willy Loman exemplifies the typical middle-class American who is caught up in a fruitless effort to sell without the money essential to support the bills and costs of a middle-class lifestyle. Willy is unable to comprehend Biff's yearning to be in the wilderness, where he may express his independence, because he works for wealth and comfort. Willy is attempting to provide happiness to his family while simultaneously putting Biff into the same type of alienated labour that he himself is forced to perform. Biff is uncertain about his career decision, despite the fact that it brings him satisfaction, due to his father's capitalist rationale. When Biff confides in his brother happy remarks, "What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old, I ought to be making' my future. That's when I come running home. And now, I get here, and I don't know what to do with myself (Miller, 1958: 16). Biff is confused and is aware that his father is not happy with him for some reason. On the other hand, he is cognizant of the fact that it affords him pleasure and is appreciative of the

farm's attractiveness, two qualities that his father is no longer in a position to value.

In many literary works relationships are the key to the plot. Through a family's interaction with one another, the reader is able to decipher the conflict of the story. Within a literary family, various characters play different roles in each other's lives. These are usually people that are emotionally and physically connected in one way or another. They can be brother and sister, mother and daughter, or in this case, father and son. In the Arthur Miller's novel, *Death of A salesman*, the interaction between Willy Loman and his sons, Happy and Biff, allows Miller to comment on father –son relationships and the conflicts that arise from them.

During most father –son relationships, there are certain times where the father wants to become more of a player in his son's life than his son believes is necessary. The reasons for this are numerous and can be demonstrated in different ways. Miller is able to give an example of this behavior through the actions of Willy Loman. When he perceives it as failure. Since Willy desperately wants his oldest son, Biff, to succeed in every way possible, he tries to take matters into his own hands. I'll get him a job selling. He could be big in no time. The reason that Biff came home is to find out what he wants in life. Because Willy gets in the way, matters become more complicated. Partly due to Willy's persistence in Biff's life, they have conflicting ideas as to what the American dream is. Willy believes that working on the road by selling is the greatest job a man could have. Biff, however, feels the most inspiring job a man could have is working outdoors. When their two dreams collide, it becomes frustrating to Willy because he believes that his way is the right way. If a father becomes too involved in his son's life, Miller believes friction will be the resultant factor. As unfortunate as it is, there are many instances where a father favors one son over another, which leads to social conflict within the less favored son. In most cases it is the oldest son that is being favored while the younger son is ignored. Usually the father doesn't even realize what is happening. He simply gets too caught up in the successes of his eldest son and he may even try to live out his life through his son's experiences.

There is a big portrayal of the American Dream in the film *Death of a Salesman*. If you put in the effort, there is a chance that it may come

true, but there is also a chance that your efforts will help another person achieve their goals. Willy's work was an important factor in the proprietors of the Wagner Company achieving their goals. Therefore, from a Marxist point of view, Willy was exploited because the results of his hard labour benefited only a small number of bourgeois individuals rather than either Willy or his family. The assumption that the American Dream depicts a classless society in which a person's history has no influence on their achievement is debunked by the film *Death of a Salesman*. It is ludicrous to consider the Lomans and the Wagners to be on similar footing. Willy has to put in more hours and work harder than his employer Howard does, yet Howard is the one who gets the credit for Willy's termination and the financial advantages of it. If helping people who are less fortunate is an essential part of the American Dream, then why doesn't Howard help Willy when the latter complains that his hard work ethic and level of energy are being taken advantage of? Willy ultimately committed himself due to a mental health condition in order to ensure that his family would receive a last payment from his health insurance policy. This was despite the fact that Howard, the Wagner Company, and even Willy's own kids did not care about him.

Throughout the duration of the play, Willy's mental state has been readily apparent; nevertheless, as the play draws to a close, it becomes increasingly problematic. After Willy's two sons abandon him at a restaurant while he is intoxicated and preoccupied with his delusions, he feels an unexpected urge to go out and buy some seeds, "I've got to get some seeds right away. Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground." (Miller, 1958: 96) There are a few different ways that one might view Miller's usage of seeds as a metaphor for Willy. When viewed through the lens of Marxism, seeds might stand for things like a prosperous business, a lasting legacy, or prosperity. Willy does not have any of these things. Willy will not have anything to show for his life when he dies away, and neither of his kids has much of value to contribute. The fact that Willy felt compelled to plant seeds while having a poor supper with his sons drove him to the edge of insanity, and this portends the end of his life. Willy is left with nothing to do but reflect on the legacy he is leaving behind. Willy is left with very few alternatives when he discovers that he hasn't left much of a legacy despite having spent his whole life pursuing one. Only when Willy has a hallucination in

which his brother appears to him and tells him about the money from his health insurance policy does he finally feel content with the legacy he will leave behind. Willy smiles as he says goodbye to his family and heads out of the house, convinced that his departure will usher in a period of riches and happiness for his loved ones.

Willy's suicide might be understood from a Marxist point of view as a kind of protest against the dehumanizing structure of a capitalist society, which views individuals as "pennies on the dollar." Willy believes that by taking his own life, he would prove to his family that he can still have an impact on their lives. Even if his life has not turned out the way he wanted it to and he has not been able to provide for his family, he may at least be able to make sure that the insurance company pays them the \$20,000 that they are entitled to. Willy is able to get out of his humdrum and unsatisfying existence in the end by giving it one final shot to improve the quality of life for his loved ones. Willy's wife, Linda, comes to the conclusion of the play by saying that they are safe, despite the fact that she does not entirely get why her husband did what he did, "I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home... We're free and clear" (Miller, 1958: 112). Linda does not want Willy's passing to have been in vain for any reason. She is aware that there must have been a reason for his absence, but she gets the sense that he is just on another business trip from their conversation. This mistake might be seen as a correlation when viewed from a Marxist point of view. It is almost as if Willy is still working hard to sell his products to his family even after he has passed away. It was almost as if the capitalist link between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat had totally consumed Willy and reduced him to the status of a pawn or fruit.

The themes and background of the play takes several hits at the American dream, the dream of making anything you want come true, and what is the cause of that, and what does it take to reach those dreams, especially since we are living in an age where America exists, the world largest country containing the concept of capitalism. Well, as the story have showed, Willy died chasing that dream, he also lived thinking that dream is everything, and it only takes hard work, it only takes the guts of someone who is determined to do anything, it only takes the brains and time and money, well sufficient amount of it at least, but alas, Willy has fell into the ploy like everyone else, the ploy of living in the outside of a

system that runs on pure power and monopoly. What Willy seemed to forget or really, judging from his actions, lacked even knowing, and I would go as far as saying, most of the world lack in knowing this next information, is that meritocracy, which is the system that is advertised in America, the system that is so alluring it makes America the land of dreams for refugees, because as long as you work hard enough, you can do anything, right? Well, no, not really. Willy found out the hard way, his family found out the hard way, and I hope, actual people can learn from this play and know before they find out the truth behind the American dream, the hard way.

In Arthur Miller's play "Death of a Salesman," the power comes from financial wealth. The proletariat's dependence on the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie's toxic relationship of taking without providing is what ultimately leads to the destruction of the Loman family. However, neither the negative effects of capitalism nor the unfulfilled promises of the American Dream are the only factors that contributed to the Lomans' financial demise. Individuals must also take responsibility for their actions because if they interfere with the capitalistic nature of industry and trade, the bourgeoisie will be able to use them as puppets for their own gain. The classist ideals that motivate the work force are always money and achievement, even at the expense of those under them.

All in all, Arthur Miller pitched the perfect example for what Marxism entails, pure chaos, and not to say that he has explored the whole idea of Marxism, not at all, but he unveiled it in a very simple and delicate way, an everyday life way, a way that can make someone as simple as a normal person understand that hard work, is not, the answer to everything, this also was depicted in 2005 movie by the name "American psycho". And gladly, the subject of communism remained far away from this play as the polar opposite to capitalism but still, the subject of chasing and failing and working but not getting is a human history tale, Arthur only told his story in a more modern way, a way that we can relate too, and that is the beauty behind looking at Arthur Miller's masterpiece, from a Marxist point view, I think, because it so much liable for that.

No version of the American dream could ever exist in absence of religious freedom. Without this first freedom, all other ingredients (liberties) we consider so central to the American dream would vanish.

While the bible emphasizes on the principle that materials way of living only makes us live a lonely and unhappy lives. The American dream tries to persuade us in the other direction with the opportunity of a lifetime to have total freedom and have everything you want in life which is essence will drain the person of his or her emotions and turn him or her into a shallow materialistic person, which is what the Marxist theory relies on, the principle that people will become too materialistic and then consider equalizing the freedom and shareholdings of others.

Biblical expression of the death of a salesman is important side of the story on which we can add more depth and clearance as to how the story manifest in a religious and moral way. Perhaps one of the pervasive biblical allusions found in the story is the theme of betrayal. Arthur Miller play covers the disloyalty of Willy towards his family where his unfaithful affair creates a lasting dent in Biffs trust and his love for Linda .Relating all this to the bible, in the 14th chapter of Marks gospel, Jesus was consumed with doubt and anguish at the garden of gethsemane as he prophesized his disciples betrayal and likewise ,Willys accusation that Biff is spiteful, his own son has betrayed him .Now later on when Willy dies, his death is more like a protest to the dehumanizing system of a capitalistic world that dwindles down individuals into nothing but a " dime in dozen ".

Conclusion:

- To Marxism, there is no difference between the top class and the middle class due to the fact that both classes exploit the people in the classes below them. Willy spends his life chasing the prosperity that the American Dream has to offer, but in the end, he realizes that he is nothing more than a piece of fruit discarded by his employers because they do not compensate him for the work that he does as a travelling salesman. This realization causes Willy to reevaluate his life and decide to pursue a different path. When doing an analysis of the totality of Arthur Miller's play Death of a Salesman, it is important to take into account the impact that money has on conventional families and the lengths to which we are prepared to go in order to provide for the people who are important to us. Nevertheless, we can't deny the fact that getting out of the capitalist system in which we live is extremely challenging. One would be deemed an outsider if they were located outside of it. Miller presents a lot of ideas

to the general population in the United States, but one of the most essential ones is for viewers to reflect on the degree to which they have control over the decisions they make when pursuing the unattainable American Dream.

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