

Death of a Salesman
A Study of its Attitudinal Structure

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ABSTRACT

The structure and theme of Death of a Salesman have been separately studied by many critics. The structure's various aspects such as events, time, plot, etc., have been identified and described by different but related terms. The themes, too, have been identified and described. This study, however, takes a new approach to Death of a Salesman and reads it to show how its structural elements interact to reveal the themes, i.e. to express the dramatist's perspective of the drama of the principal protagonist.

As there are two events in the play: present events and past events, or the past time switches as we can also call them, we apply a reading strategy that involves evaluating the significance of each type of event separately, and then evaluating their significance together as a whole.

In our interpretation of events and situations of the play, we use the linguistic concept of 'context of situation,' as it shows the dramatic function of the past time switches. More specifically, our study understands the past time switches as the 'context of situation' for a proper perspective of present events. We should mention, however, that we apply the concept of 'context of situation' without using the technical jargon of field, tenor, and mode of discourse, because using the technical jargon would take the study's focus to a linguistic level that would be distracting.

We first examine the structure of the play. Then, we read the present events alone, i.e. without the past time switches or the 'context of situation.' When we do so, we find that the present events of the play make an ineffective dramatic and thematic presentation though they chronologically present the last twenty-four hours of Willy's life, i.e. the protagonist's life. In a similar way, we read the past events by themselves. When we do so, we find them episodic. That is, we cannot impose a time order on them, because the play provides little or no clue for deducing a strict sequence. Then, we read the play as a whole, i.e. present and past events together. When we do so, we find that the play's dramatic and thematic significance becomes evident.

The interaction between the present and past events, finally, paves the way for us to observe the impact of Willy's value system on his own life ultimately leading to his death. That is, it makes clear the thematic issues of the play. All of Willy's ideas about success and parenthood are found in the past time switches. We observe that the dialectical sequencing of Willy's past in his present determines the attitudinal rubric of Death of a Salesman. The sum total of Willy's value-system, as it is laid bare in the past time switches, unleashes forces that work against Willy himself and ultimately leads him to self-destruction. We identify these attitudinal underpinnings to be Willy's self-defeating dream of success, his sense of possession, his sense of achievement, his agonizing guilt, his oversized self-image, and reality vs. illusion.

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Dedication

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1 Introduction

1.1. The Signification of the Phrase “Attitudinal Structure”

1.2. Objectives

1.2.1. Broad Objective

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1.3. Literature Review

1.3.1. Regarding the Structure

1.3.2. Regarding the American Dream

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1.1. THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE PHRASE “ATTITUDINAL STRUCTURE”

We first consider the definitions of the two words *attitude* and *structure* separately, and then we interpret their meaning as a phrase.

The word *attitude* is defined as “settled behaviour, as representing . . . opinion; (also attitude of mind) settled mode of thinking” (*Oxford Talking Dictionary*). The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it as “mental position with regard to a fact or state.” *Macmillan Dictionary* defines it as “someone’s opinions . . . about something, especially as shown by their behaviour.” It is also defined as “Settled behaviour or manner of acting, as representative of . . . opinion” (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*). And the *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary* defines it as “state of mind, behavior, or conduct regarding some matter, as indicating opinion. . . .”

We notice that all definitions make it clear that the word *attitude* implies the existence of “someone,” “opinion,” and “something.” The “someone” is the person who expresses the “opinion,” and the “something” is the thing about which the “opinion” is expressed.

The word *structure* in literary study may be defined as “the organization of a literary work as influenced by its plot in fictional works. . . .” It is also defined as “the pattern of emotions in the literary work.” Some other manifestation of structure is the chronological position of parts, scenes, episodes, and acts. The logical relationship among ideas, images, or other divisions and the relationship among time and events are also some aspects of structure. The geographical location(s) is also an element of structure as it lends its own mood and color to the various parts of the story. One characteristic of the constituents of structure is that they are introduced with great care (Roberts 119-21).

In this regard, Aristotle in his *Poetics* suggests, “the plot [of any work], being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and

disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole” (qtd. in Roberts 121).

If we now interpret the word *attitude* in relation to the word *structure* as it is used in literature, we can logically say that the “someone” is the writer, the “opinion” is the writer’s opinion, and the “something” is the person or thing about whom or which the writer expresses his opinion through many modes or aspects of presentation in the literary work, among which are plot, emotions, ideas or themes, time, etc. Hence, the phrase “attitudinal structure” can be taken to mean how the organizational aspects of the literary work interact to express the writer’s perspective of the human condition through the particulars of the principal character and his life. In the light of this interpretation of the phrase “attitudinal structure,” the broad and specific objectives can be set out as stated below.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Broad Objective

To show how the structural elements of Death of a Salesman interact to express the dramatist's perspective of the drama of the principal protagonist.

1.2.2. Specific Objectives

1. To review the various elements in the structure of the play.
2. To review some thematic studies of the play.
3. To evaluate the significance of the present events in the play by themselves.
4. To evaluate the significance of the past time switches in the play by themselves.
5. To evaluate the significance of the plot structure to the play as a whole.

1.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following sections, we review the main elements of Death of a Salesman: the structure and the thematic interpretations. It is most commonly understandable that the play critiques the American Dream. The play highlights the powerlessness of this dream to give meaning and direction to human life. It also highlights the theme of ‘neglecting instincts.’

1.3.1. Regarding the Structure

The structure of Death of a Salesman has been described by Miller and other critics. Its various aspects such as events, time, plot, etc., have been identified and described by different but related terms. Below, we provide a review of what has been written about this structure and its aspects.

Miller, in his introduction to The Collected Plays, states that the structure of Death of a Salesman was intentionally designed as a mirror so as to reflect Willy’s way of thinking. To him, this design necessitates the elimination of any structural device that may not serve the content. He states that “the structure of the play was determined by what was needed to draw up his [Willy’s] memories like a mass of tangled roots without end or beginning.” He goes on to say that “the structure of events and the nature of its form are also the direct reflection of Willy Loman’s way of thinking at this moment of his life.” He makes it clear that the structure of this play would not apply to other characters other than Willy, because “it would be false to a more integrated—or less disintegrating— personality to pretend that the past and the present are so openly and vocally intermingled in his mind. The ability of people to down their past is normal, and without it we could have no comprehensible communication among men.” He also mentions that he made the play without transitional scenes to save stage time for the sake of the content: “There was a resolution . . . not to write an unmeant word for the sake of the form but to make the form give and stretch and contract for the sake of the thing to be said. To cling to the process of Willy’s mind as the form the story would take” (25-31).

Goyal identifies Willy's past to be "the chief narrative method" and prefers to call this past a "dramatized memory." He considers this narrative method "a subjective approach to delayed exposition." Talking about the function of this dramatized memory, he observes that it "is to bring to light two things: crucial past events and the emotional charges associated with them." He considers Willy's present as a stimulus to his past:

Thus, after he is fired by Howard, Willy remembers his refusal of a vocational opportunity that might have led to magnificent accomplishment instead of the present ignominy. And Biff's unfavourable report on an attempt to acquire financial backing for a business turns Willy's mind back to the hotel room in which Biff discovered him with his mistress—a discovery that the father fears has initiated his son's failures.

He also merits Miller's manipulation of the shifts in place and time between present and past events. He states that "Transitions in place and time are cleverly implemented by ingenious stage effects, a skeletonized house-set, multiple playing areas (apron, forestage, and two levels of the house), and the repetition of key words, or topics before, during, and after each recollection" (140-41).

Like Goyal, Roberts and Jacobs observe that Willy's present stimulates him to remember his past. They call this present and past of Willy real and remembered times respectively: "The play contains two types of time and action: real and remembered. Present events are enacted and described realistically. Such action, however, often triggers Willy's memory of the past" (1207).

Spalding observes that the structure of Death of a Salesman is distinctive in its plot structure. First, the play has two different levels of storytelling. He comments that "there is the 'public' storyline which begins late one night and ends twenty-four hours late. Parallel with this, there is the 'private' storyline inside Willy's mind, which like our own minds, does

not always work logically and chronologically but mixes up memories and imaginings with what is actually taking place in the present” (64). Second, the play has a main plot and sub-plots. He emphasizes that each of the sub-plots has “its own chain of causation in which one action leads to another.” To give an example, he states that “One such chain begins in Act I . . . when Biff first has the idea of approaching Bill Oliver and ends in Act II . . . when he realizes that he can never again approach him with a business proposition.” He continues to say that “Even so, his failure to make a deal has an effect on the main plot in his argument with Willy in Act II . . . There is another chain which could be called the ‘job in New York’ chain, beginning in Act I, . . . and joining the main plot towards the end of Act II.” To conclude, Spalding comments that “All these chains of causation interconnect with each other and with the main plot” (66).

To describe the past events or Willy’s past in the play, critics usually use the term ‘flashback.’ In this regard, however, Spalding prefers the term ‘timeswitch’ to the ‘flashback’ for a genuine reason. That is, the timeswitch is more suitable to describe Willy’s psychological case than the term flashback. He observes that:

The flashback is a cinematic device which lacks the psychological subtlety and flexibility needed [in Death of a Salesman]. The term ‘timeswitch,’ although not altogether perfect, indicates the effect Miller is trying to achieve in [the play] . . .

The timeswitch differs from the flashback in one important way. Not only is it more psychologically convincing but in this play it is more than a storyteller’s device.

The tendency to live in a confused mental state, half-dream, half-memory, is an essential part of the character of Willy Loman, especially at this time in his life.

Reality has become too hard for him to face, so he retreats into a happier past. (8-9)

Jackson holds the view that “Death of a Salesman, as vision, follows an aesthetic, rather than a logical, mode of development. For it represents the protagonist’s attempt to reconstitute

the progression of his experience.” She goes on to say that “We may describe this kind of structure as a theatrical realization of the ‘stream-of-consciousness¹’” (33).

Abbotson supports the view made by Miller as well as that of Spalding, quoted above, that there are no flashbacks in Death of a Salesman. She, however, does not use a specific term. Instead, she describes Willy’s past as “immediate experiences in which time has been dis-located” (36).

1.3.2. Regarding the American Dream

The main theme of the play is the American dream of success through entrepreneurship. This idea depends on the notion that if a person is well liked and has an attractive personality, they will be successful in business. Nearly all critics agree that the play shows the idea is a false one, and consequently the American dream is a false dream.

Brooke Atkinson in a review in The New York Times, talks about the success theme in Death of a Salesman emphasizing the dream’s helplessness to the play’s protagonist, Willy Loman. To him, Willy’s idea that success can be obtained through personality is not logical, for what seems logical in pursuing success, in this regard, is to sell a product of a good quality. He observes that “Willy has always believed in something that is unsound. He has assumed that success comes to those who are ‘well liked,’ as he puts it. He does not seem to be much concerned about the quality of the product he is selling. His customers buy, he thinks, because they like him—because he is hale and hearty and a good man with jokes.” He goes on to say that Willy has lost his usefulness to the business world because he has founded a career on things that are ephemeral (qtd. in Bentley 730).

Pradhan considers Death of a Salesman a play about dreams. He comments that Willy dreams two versions of the American dream, i.e. the business-success dream and the rural-

¹ In literature the ‘stream of consciousness’ is a “technique that records the multifarious thoughts and feelings of a character without regard to logical argument or narrative sequence. The writer attempts by the stream of consciousness to reflect all the forces, external and internal, influencing the psychology of a character at a single moment” (“Encarta”).

agrarian dream. To Pradhan, Willy does not only fail to achieve the business-success dream, but he also fails the substitute of this dream, that is, to maintain his job, which is even harder, in effect, on Willy. He states that:

The strongest emphasis on the pursuit of dreams is in Death of a Salesman which is a play about dreams . . . The dream as a quest for paradise is embodied in Willy Loman who dreams two versions of the American dream: ‘the business-urban success dream’ in which Willy sees himself as a successful tycoon, and ‘the rural-agrarian dream’ which brings forth Willy’s romantic-escapist notions of a life of communion with nature. For the success dream, Willy’s models are Dave Singleman (the perfect ex-salesman), Charley (the friendly neighbor), and Uncle Ben . . . Even Howard (Willy’s boss), whom the singleminded pursuit of ‘success’ has turned into a monster, is Willy’s ideal. One cause of Willy’s remorse is that he is a failure in the pursuit of this substitute of a dream—a failure in his own, as well as in his family’s eyes. (119-20)

Pradhan also comments that the two dreams, i.e. the business-success dream and the rural-agrarian dream, are used to highlight the inner life of Willy “who aspires to be greater than himself” (121). He also states that “Willy’s rural-agrarian dream is a sort of safety valve to withdraw from the harsh realities of failure in the pursuit of the success dream.” He holds the view that if the two dreams are considered separately, they will be “equally hopeless as far as Willy is concerned. They provide meaning in his life because he can balance one dream against the other” (120).

He also speaks of the success theme in terms of the guilt it causes to Willy. The two sources of Willy’s guilt Pradhan tells about are two effects of the success dream, one is direct, i.e. his own failure, and the other is indirect, i.e. Biff’s failure. He states that “Willy Loman’s guilt has two sources. One is the failure of his ‘success’ dream. Over a long life of illusions,

Willy makes one false move after another in pursuit of easy success . . . The second, and perhaps the more painful, cause of his guilt is his feeling that he has failed his children . . . [A]s Willy sees his son go down in the world over the years, his burden and his responsibility in his son's failure become almost unbearable." (67-68).

High believes that the American dream of financial success Willy seeks is a false dream. He comments that this dream destroys Willy and his son, Biff. He goes on to say that "In order to succeed he [Willy] must 'sell' himself . . . But Willy cannot succeed in 'selling himself.' This failure means to him that he is a failure in life" (230).

Roberts and Jacobs talking about the American dream mention the impact of the false notion on which the dream seems to depend, i.e. on being well liked and personality. They observe that "The central dream (and illusion) is the American dream of success and wealth through selling the self." They comment that this dream of success is presented "in a series of smaller dreams (illusions, lies) that Willy and his sons build out of thin air." They conclude that the extent to which Willy realizes the illusory nature of the American dream is not clear at the end of the play (1207).

Goyal comments that "Miller is deeply concerned with social realities." He confirms that Miller studies the impact of these realities on human beings while they seek to find a meaningful existence. In this regard, he considers Death of a Salesman "a challenge to the American dream" in that "The death of Miller's salesman is symbolic of the breakdown of the whole concept of salesmanship inherent in the American society." He clarifies that there are two versions of the American dream: the historical and the modern. The historical dream is the promise of a land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all while the modern one is the dream of business success. The original promise of this modern dream was that enterprise, courage, and hard work were the keys to success. Since the end of World War I, this dream has even changed. Instead of the ideals of hard work and courage, there is salesmanship

which the play challenges. Salesmanship was the means toward success, as salesmen used all possible means to get big profits. They would sell commodities regardless of their usefulness, since the goal was to make a profit and the accumulation of profit was unquestioned end in itself (135-36).

Murphy and Abbotson hold the view that the American dream of success is a success myth. They state that:

For more than forty years he [Willy] has striven to be a success and has tried to pass on his beliefs to his sons. However, his struggles have not been influenced entirely by the mores and beliefs of the 1940s, although they have certainly been affected by them. Willy's direction in life has been determined by beliefs to which he has been exposed throughout his life, from the end of the last century up until this moment.

They, therefore, discuss this success myth by providing real-life documents "taken," they state, "from magazines, advertisements, and essays or speeches by notable figures" (13-14).

Abbotson states that "A central thematic issue in this play [Death of a Salesman] is Miller's consideration of the problematic and elusive 'American dream' of success, and how it tends to be interpreted by society." She goes on to say that "Miller sees many people's lives [like the Lomans'] poisoned by their desire to be successful," and therefore he presents the characters of Charley and Bernard as opposed to Ben and Howard to "offer us a potential solution to this social problem" (46).

Regarding the nature of Willy's dreams in general, Abbotson takes Pradhan's idea that Willy's dreams 'provide meaning in his life because he can balance one dream against the other' a bit further. She agrees that the Loman family has been able to survive for years through their dreams, but, she continues, "Such dreams are highly ambivalent, especially when they turn out to be so patently false." She also agrees that Willy and his family can

balance their dreams against a harsh reality, but, she adds that these dreams “are usually more destructive in the long run.” She clarifies that “while the dream is maintained it may grant strength, but as soon as reality intrudes, the dream is shattered and lays the dreamer open to harsh disillusionment,” as, for example, in Biff’s attempt to borrow from Bill Oliver (47).

Jeffares speaks of the historical version of the American dream. He comments that Willy’s simplistic notions of success are shown by Miller to be indefinite in value, that is, these notions are subject to change. He observes that “One of Willy’s basic beliefs is in the ‘land of opportunity,’ a land where men were created equal, with equal opportunity to become rich and successful.” He continues to say that “Miller is trying to show how such simplistic notions can break down: in other words, they are not absolute in value.” He goes on to say that for Willy, personality is necessary for success. To Jeffares, Willy’s mistake is his failure to realize Biff’s individuality, hopes, fears, and ambitions as different from those of Ben (149-50).

1.3.3. Regarding Willy’s Neglect of his Natural Abilities

Miller himself, as well as other critics, considers Willy’s neglect of his natural talent of working with his hands one of the themes of the play, as it is placed in contrast to his dream of business success. In his introduction to The Collected Plays, Miller comments that when Linda, Willy’s wife, says, over his grave, that ‘He [Willy] was so wonderful with his hands,’ he [Miller] “laughed . . . laughed with the artist-devil’s laugh, for it had all come together in this line . . . Only rank, height of power, the sense of having won he believed was real” (30).

Gould comments about this very theme in terms of its cause and effect on Willy. She thinks that Willy’s negligence of his own natural ability of working with his hands is partly the responsibility of the society. For, the American society encourages the pursuit of material success at the cost of one’s humanity. She observes that one thing Miller did, among others, is that he “placed on trial . . . a society that by competition compels its individuals to forsake

native talents in favor of achieving material success, at the price of human dignity.” She clarifies that “Willy Loman might have been a superb craftsman, but he is forced by the demands of a mechanized world to run pantingly in search of the will-o’-the-wisp, financial wealth” (252-53).

Spalding considers the impact of Willy’s neglect of his talent of working with his hands on Willy himself. He thinks that Willy’s indifference toward his talent is a trivial weakness. In the play, however, Spalding continues, its negative impact is shown to be as equal as that of a major crime. Like Gould, Spalding observes that “Perhaps Willy would never have become a salesman if he had been true to his own nature . . . The strength of this play is that it shows how trivial weaknesses can destroy a man as surely as the committing of any major crime” (40-41).

1.4. THE CONCEPT OF “CONTEXT OF SITUATION” AS USED IN THIS STUDY

It has been mentioned above that this study attempts to show how the play’s structural elements interact to express the writer’s perspective of the drama of Willy Loman. The demonstration that this is so depends crucially on the concept of ‘context of situation.’ The concept is briefly reviewed, and then it is shown how it is used to study the events of the play.

The term ‘context of situation’ was first coined by Bronislaw Malinowski, an anthropologist in the 1920s, who defines it as the environment of the text. While trying to explain the meaning of texts from the language of the Australian Trobriand islanders into English, Malinowski felt the need to include notes about the cultural background, i.e. context of culture, and about the immediate environment in which the text was produced, i.e. context of situation, if the language was to be translated intelligibly (Bloor; Kleifgen; Pishwa; Lund; “Context of Situation;” “Context, Context and Text”). We observe that, for Malinowski, ‘context of situation’ is one of the necessary elements for determining the meaning of a text.

Based on this early framework of context, J. R. Firth adapted and elaborated on it (“Co-text, Context and Text”). Thakur observes that “Among the referential approaches to meaning, Firth’s approach is certainly one of the well-known approaches to the study of meaning” (129). For Firth, meaning happens at every level: (1) at the phonetic and phonological level, (2) lexical level, (3) grammatical or syntactic level, and (4) contextual level (“Co-text, context and Text;” Thakur 128). Regarding the contextual level, Firth holds the view that the following are the aspects of the context of situation:

- A. Relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.
 - i. The verbal action of the participants.
 - ii. The non-verbal action of the participants.
- B. Relevant objects.
- C. Effect of the verbal action. (qtd. in “Co-text, Context and Text;”
 “Extended Notion of Context;” Norrick; Thakur 128)

Summarizing Firth, Thakur observes, “For Firth, the word *Context* means not only the linguistic context but also the non-linguistic context of situation in which an utterance is used” (128). To put it differently, “Firth emphasizes both modes or aspects of context, both the relational [i.e. when the meaning of a linguistic sign is considered a function of its relation to other linguistic signs in its context] and the situational [i.e. when the meaning is defined as a function of the situational context] (“Extended Notion of Context”). Thus, one can observe that, like Malinowski, Firth considers ‘context of situation’ one of the determining factors of text meaning.

As Firth adapted Malinowski’s concept of context, Halliday and others, in turn, adapted and elaborated on Firth’s concept of context. Matthiessen and Halliday, for instance, define context as “a higher-level semiotic system in which language is ‘embedded.’ More specifically, language is embedded in a context of culture or social system and any instantiation of

language as text is embedded in its own context of situation.” Lantolf and Thorne quote Halliday to indicate that ‘context of situation’ obtains “through a systematic relationship between the social environment on the one hand, and the functional organization of language on the other.” Matthiessen and Halliday propose three aspects or modes as constituting ‘context of situation,’ that is, *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*. They define these aspects as follows:

Field concerns what's going on: the social processes and the domains of subject matter created by language in the realization of these social processes. Tenor concerns who's taking part: the social roles and relations of those taking part in the interaction and the speech roles and relations created by language in the realization of these social roles and relations. Mode concerns what role language is playing in context: its distance to those involved according to medium (spoken, written and various more complex categories) and channel (face to face, telephonic, etc.), its complementarity with other social processes (from ancillary to constitutive), and its rhetorical contribution (didactic, instructive, persuasive, and so on).

It is noticed that, as Chapelle observes, “Field refers to the topics and actions which language is used to express. Tenor denotes the language users, their relationships to each other, and their purposes. Mode refers to the channel through which communication is carried out.” One can then conclude that, like their predecessors, Matthiessen and Halliday place value and emphasis on the ‘context of situation’ as a determining factor for text meanings. Chapelle manages to appropriately summarize the advantages of the three contextual variables for deciding meanings in communication when she states that “By understanding the semiotic properties of a situation (i.e. the values for field, tenor, and mode), language users can predict the meanings that are likely to be exchanged and the language likely to be used.”

It is now necessary to demonstrate how the concept of ‘context of situation’ applies to a study of the attitudinal structure of Miller’s Death of a Salesman.

It will be recalled that Death of a Salesman dramatizes the last twenty four hours of Willy Loman's life. It will also be recalled that the play dramatizes events from Willy's past as remembrances in time present. These shifts from scenes in the present to the past have been referred to as past time switches. An insightful understanding of the dramatic function of these past time switches can be obtained by using the concept of 'context of situation.' More exactly, this study understands the past events as the 'context of situation' for a proper perspective of present events. In a sense, the entire play focuses on the behavior of as well as the conflict between the principal protagonist of the play, Willy Loman and his older son, Biff. Willy's family, that is, Linda, his wife, and Happy, his younger son; and his friends and/or neighbors, Charley and Bernard, do not know anything about incidents in Willy's past that impinge on his and his family's present state of affairs. For example, they remain unaware as to why Willy and Biff treat each other in an unpleasant way and why Willy commits suicide. On the contrary, Willy's mind is made accessible to us: audience-readers, through the past time switches.

When we leave out the play's 'context of situation,' i.e. the past time switches, and read the play with just the present events, as will be done in Chapter 2, we become as ignorant as Willy's family and friends are toward Willy's and Biff's behavior toward each other. If we consider the situation in Act I, for instance, in which Willy and Charley talk while playing cards and in which Willy simultaneously talks to his brother, Ben, we notice that Charley does not know what Willy is talking about: "CHARLEY, *taking a pot*: What're you talkin' about?" (46; Act I). The reason is that the context of situation of Willy and Ben's conversation is not accessible to Charley. That is, the subject matter of Willy and Ben's conversation: their mother (field of discourse), Ben and his talking to Willy: as brothers (tenor of discourse), and the spoken communication: (mode of discourse), are all missing to Charley. Charley hears only Willy's part in the conversation with Ben, that is, he [Charley] neither hears nor sees

Ben. That is simply because Ben is only present in Willy's memory. Due to this lack of context of situation, therefore, Charley is not able to figure out that Willy's memory of Ben is still as vivid as it was at the time it happened years ago.

To give another example in which the context of situation is crucial in understanding the play, we consider Biff's accusation to Willy that he is a fake and not clean (58-63; Act I). The reason why Biff can accuse his parent is never clearly stated in the present events and situations. This reason is also not known to his family. We are also no more insightful as to why Biff behaves in such unpleasant way with his father than Linda and Happy are when the past time switches, i.e. context of situation, are left out. The context of situation, in the light of which Biff's behavior toward Willy can be interpreted, is only made clear through the past time switches that are available to the audience-readers. The context of situation is Biff accidentally discovering that his father was having an affair with a woman when he [Biff] was in high school.

In our analysis of the events and situations of the play in this study, we will be applying the concept of 'context of situation,' as demonstrated in the two examples above, without using the technical jargon of field, tenor, and mode of discourse. As stated above, the objective of the thesis is to show how the structural elements of the play interact to express the writer's perspective of the drama of the play's protagonist; and using the technical jargon would take the study's focus to a linguistic level that would be distracting.

1.5. OUTLINE OF STUDY

This study proceeds in the way stated below.

In the next chapter, i.e. Chapter 2, the play will be read without the past time switches. That is, the play will be read with the present events alone to evaluate their significance. It will be noticed that the present events alone make an ineffective dramatic and thematic presentation. In other words, they are not coherent in the sense that they lack the thematic connectedness that is due to the lack of the context of situation though they are chronologically continuous. In Chapter 3, we will notice that the past time switches alone are episodic and therefore make no sense when considered alone. However, when the play is considered as a whole: present and past events together, the plot structure of the play becomes coherent as the past time switches make available the parameters which provide a completion of the context of situation the present events are lacking. This dynamic interaction between the present and past events shows Willy's value-system and its falsity. In this chapter, the falsity of Willy's value-system is discussed in terms of its negative effect on the lives of Willy's boys, Biff and Happy. The impact of Willy's value-system on Willy himself, however, is discussed in Chapter 4. It will be shown that the sum total of Willy's value-system, as it is laid bare in the past time switches, unleashes forces that work against Willy himself and ultimately leads him to self-destruction. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusion of the whole study.

2 Death of a Salesman Without Past Time Switches

2.1. A Description of the Play's Structure

2.2. Summary of Present Events in Textual Form

2.3. The Loman Family Story Read with Present Events by Themselves

2.3.1. Conflict between Willy and Biff

2.3.1.1. Apparent Reasons for Conflict

2.3.1.2. Allusions to Hidden Reason for Conflict

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2.3.2. Willy's Suicide

2.3.3. Some Negative Aspects in Biff's and Happy's Personalities

2.3.4. Biff's Accusation of Willy

2.3.5. Willy's Behavior With Bernard

2.4. Lack of Coherence in the Present Events

2.5. Table of Present Events Summarizing Chapter Argument

Henry James emphasized the deliberate craftsmanship a dramatist exercises when he said that a drama is not a collection of dialogues in acts and scenes but a highly structured artifact enacted by combining and assigning, interpolating and eliminating them (qtd. in Mathews 177). Death of a Salesman conforms to this Jamesian view of dramatic structure. This fact can be confirmed by reading the play without past time switches.

2.1. A DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAY'S STRUCTURE

Death of a Salesman consists of two acts and a requiem. Its story introduces broadly two times: the past in Willy's mind and the present as it appears to the people around Willy, who do not know what is going on in his mind. Spalding (66-67) constructs the following chart: fig. 1, depicting the sequence of episodes as they are presented in the play:

| <p>'PUBLIC' ACTION</p> <p>IN PRESENT TIME</p> <p>(more or less continuous over twenty-four hours in chronolo- gical order)</p> <p>The audience sees <i>objectively</i> from outside Willy's mind.</p> | <p>'PRIVATE' ACTION OR</p> <p>REMEMBERED ACTION</p> <p>(ranging backwards in time, but not chronologically)</p> <p>The audience sees 'from inside Willy's mind.'</p> |
|---|--|
| Act I | |
| <p><i>Sequence</i></p> <p>1. Willy comes back to Brooklyn</p> <p>2. Biff and Happy discuss their lives</p> | <p><i>Sequence</i></p> <p>3. Willy remembers the past in Brooklyn</p> <p>4. He is reminded of the woman in Boston</p> <p>5. He returns to Brooklyn in the past</p> |
| <p>6. Willy and Happy are joined by Charley</p> <p>7.</p> <p>Charley and Willy play cards</p> | <p>Private and public worlds overlap</p> <p>Ben appears to Willy</p> <p>8. Ben visits Brooklyn</p> |

9. Willy takes a walk. Linda tells the boys
how things are. Biff tells Willy about his
idea of approaching Bill Oliver

Act II

Sequence

1. Brooklyn next morning. Willy goes off to
New York

2. Howard's Office. Willy is fired

Sequence

3. Ben visits Brooklyn. Willy and the
boys go to the Ebbets Field game

4. Charley's office. Willy meets the adult Bernard and
borrows his insurance premium from Charley

5. New York restaurant. Happy dates Miss Forsythe.
Willy and Biff begin to argue

Private and public worlds begin to overlap

6. Bernard tells Linda that Biff has
'flunked math'

7. Willy continues disagreement with Biff

Private and public worlds overlap with switching
from present to past and back

8. Boston hotel bedroom. Biff discovers
Willy's affair with the Woman

9. Restaurant: Stanley helps Willy

10. Boys return home. Willy plants seeds

Public and private worlds overlap

11. Final confrontation between Willy and Biff Willy and Ben discuss the \$20,000
death deal

12. Willy goes to his death

Fig. 1. Spalding's chart of sequences in Death of a Salesman

Spalding presents the events chronologically as they occur in the play, referring to sequences in the present as “‘Public’ Action in Present Time” and sequences in the past as “‘Private’ Action or Remembered Action.” In other words, Spalding’s chart structures the play along two dimensions: that of time and sequences.

However, the play is seen to be structured in a highly symmetrical time dimension when Spalding’s chart is reformatted to exclude all details of sequences and all contiguous present or past sequences are conflated. The outcome of the reformatting and conflating is shown as fig. 2.

| Act I² | | Page nos. |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| S1 → | present | 11 to 27 |
| S2 → | past | 28 to 40 |
| S3 → | overlap (present & past) | 41 to 47 |
| S4 → | past | 47 to 52 |
| S5 → | present | 52 to 69 |
| Act II | | |
| S1 → | present | 71 to 84 |
| S2 → | past | 84 to 89 |
| S3 → | overlap (present & past) | 90 to 116 |
| S4 → | past | 116 to 121 |
| S5 → | present | 121 to 136 |

Fig. 2. The structure of Death of a Salesman according to time

Each Act contains five sequences. In each Act, the events of the first and fifth sequences happen in the present time; those of the second and fourth ones take place in the past; and in the third sequence, the present and past events overlap. In other words, both acts contain the same number of sequences: five sequences each, and the same chronological distribution of present and past events: time switches.

Miller builds time switches into the structure of the play and marks them out by using a variety of techniques, namely lighting and sound. To mark the end of A1S2 and beginning of A1S3, for instance, he writes:

² Hereafter, Act I and Act II will be referred to as A1 and A2 respectively; and the sequences in both acts will be referred to as S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5. Thus, A1S1 stands for Act I sequence 1, and A2S1 means Act II sequence 1, and so on.

As he [Willy] speaks, Linda, almost in tears, exits into the living-room. Willy is alone in the kitchen, wilting and staring. The leaves are gone. It is night again, and the apartment houses look down from behind [Technique of light]. (40; Act I)

To give another example in which sound is used, Miller writes, “*The Woman enters, laughing. Willy follows her. She is in a black slip; he is buttoning his shirt. Raw, sensuous music accompanies their speech*” (116; Act II), to indicate the beginning of A2S4 and end of A2S3.

The perceptive reader will note that some of the sequences designated as ‘present’ in fig 2. contain utterances which could be interpreted as past-in-the-present utterances. The utterances made by Willy within A1S1 (where Biff and Happy discuss their lives), the utterance in A1S5 (where Linda tells the boys how things are with Willy) as well as the ones at the beginning of A2S3 (where Bernard and Jenny, Charley’s secretary, talk about Willy) are not considered past time switches by themselves, because there are no light and sound signals to indicate a switch to the past in these sequences as in A1S3 (where Ben is presented) and in the middle of A2S3 (where the young Bernard is presented). These past-in-the-present utterances have two features that set them off from the past time switches. There are, as stated above, no lighting and sound effects to introduce them. Second, they are presented as being overheard by the other characters in the play. They indicate Willy’s state of mind to his family as well as to us: audience-readers. These utterances powerfully communicate the fact that Willy is disturbed and confused. As the play progresses, Willy talks to himself more and more, until in A2S5, he talks to himself alone. His and Ben’s conversation in A2S5 is also not considered a past time switch but a state of hallucination³ for three reasons. First, Ben is dead as indicated by Willy when he replies to Charley’s query about him in A1S3: “Didn’t Linda tell you? Couple of weeks ago we got a letter from his wife in Africa. He died” (45; Act I). Second, when Willy

³ MedicineNet’s Medical Dictionary defines ‘Hallucination’ as “a profound distortion in a person’s perception of reality, typically accompanied by a powerful sense of reality.” It also adds that an ‘auditory hallucination’ is “a hallucination involving the sense of hearing” and a ‘visual hallucination’ is “a hallucination involving the sense of sight.” This definition fits Willy’s state, described above, in which he talks to Ben.

talks to Ben, he tells him “Did you see how he [Biff] cried to me? Oh, if I could kiss him, Ben!” (135; Act II). If Ben died some time ago, how could he know about Biff’s crying to Willy: an event which has happened just a few minutes before Willy tells Ben this? Furthermore, the topic of their conversation is of a present nature: Willy discusses with Ben the feasibility of his idea of committing suicide by crashing his car with the hope that the insurance company will give Biff twenty thousand dollars. These reasons make it clear that Willy and Ben exchange in A2S5 is to be considered a part of a present sequence, i.e. A2S5.

In the rest of the chapter we propose to read the play as a textual whole without the sequences which switch to and dramatize a past event. This reading strategy involves examining present events to find out what they reveal about past and present contexts as well as the degree of coherence between them.

First, we provide a summary of the present events in a textual form.

2.2. SUMMARY OF PRESENT EVENTS IN TEXTUAL FORM

Willy Loman, a salesman in his sixties, comes back home unexpectedly on a Monday evening, having left for New England only in the morning. He tells his wife, Linda, that he just cannot seem to keep his mind on driving anymore. He asks about his son, Biff, the older of his two sons, who has just come home for a visit after being away for a long time. They talk about how Biff seems to be unable to settle down at the age of thirty-four. Too annoyed to go to bed, Willy goes to the kitchen to calm down.

After a long separation, Biff has returned home. Upstairs in their old room in their father’s home, he and his younger brother, Happy, talk about Willy’s relationship with Biff. They also talk about their past with girls and discuss their personal problems. In the course of their conversation, Biff thinks of borrowing ten thousand dollars from an old employer of his named Bill Oliver to begin a business of his own.

Willy is still downstairs in the kitchen talking to himself. Happy comes down to calm him. Willy expresses his regret for not going to Alaska with his brother, Ben, when Ben once asked him to do so. Hearing Willy, Charley, their neighbor, also comes to calm Willy with a game of cards. During the game, Charley offers Willy a job, but Willy is too proud to accept it. Meanwhile, Willy tells Charley that he is unable to financially help his son, Biff. In their conversation, Willy boasts to Charley about a ceiling he has constructed in the living room, for which Charley expresses his admiration. While they are playing cards, Willy utters his brother’s name, Ben. When Charley asks whether Willy called him Ben, Willy tells Charley that he [Charley] reminded him of his brother Ben. But while they are playing and talking about Ben, Willy becomes confused; and both disagree about whose turn it

is in the card game. Charley feels insulted and confused about Willy's behavior and decides to leave. Willy then goes for a walk.

When Willy comes back, he asks Linda about a diamond watch job Ben once gave him. When Linda reminds him that he pawned it years ago to pay for a radio correspondence course for Biff, Willy, talking to himself, goes for a walk again. Biff and Happy come down from their room and join Linda. When Biff asks about Willy's mumbles, their conversation shifts to and centers on Willy and Biff's disagreement. Linda then accuses Biff and Happy of abandoning their father and mentions his suicide attempts by crashing his car as well as by inhaling gas (through using the water heater's pipe). When Willy returns, the two boys think of a sporting goods business and say they will borrow money from Bill Oliver. Willy becomes excited about the plan and starts instructing Biff as to how to behave and what to wear when he meets Oliver. Then, when Willy and Linda are alone in their bedroom, he tells her how Biff was successful when he was in high school.

The next day: Tuesday morning, Willy gets up at ten and asks Linda about how Biff looked when he left to meet Oliver. He then hopes to be able to have a little place in the country in which to grow vegetables and raise some chickens, as well as to construct a guest house. Linda tells him that he is to meet the boys for dinner in a restaurant at six o'clock that day. He is so pleased to have his boys with him that he decides to ask Howard Wagner, his boss, for an office job instead of a road job. After Willy leaves, Linda learns through a phone call from Biff that it is Biff who has taken the gas heater and not Willy as she had thought. Then, the scene shifts to Howard's office. Willy cannot manage to talk to Howard immediately as Howard is too busy with a new recorder he has bought. When at last Willy manages to talk to Howard about his position in the firm, Howard tells him there is no room for him in New York. Willy tries to convince him by telling him why he had become a salesman. Instead of getting inspired by Willy's story as Willy expected, Howard explains that Willy cannot represent the firm in New England anymore, because he has been doing harm for the firm. Thus, suddenly Willy's day reverses.

Willy is now without a job and has to go to his old friend and neighbor, Charley, to borrow enough money to pay for his insurance premium. He meets the adult Bernard, Charley's son. He is surprised to learn that Bernard is now married, with two boys, and has rich friends in Washington. Willy tries to know from Bernard, since he was Biff's school friend, why Biff quit after high school, but his attempt ends up with his getting furious with Bernard because of Bernard's enquiry about a visit Biff paid to Willy in Boston when Biff was in high school. When Charley comes, Bernard goes leaving Willy and Charley alone. When Charley offers Willy a job in his office, Willy refuses, because he says he simply cannot work for him. He then tells Charley about losing his job at Howard's firm and expresses his annoyance that Howard did not appreciate that Willy named him Howard. Charley tries to convince him that what matters is what a person can sell, not the influence of personality that Willy believes in. After Willy gets some money from Charley, he leaves to meet his boys in the restaurant Linda has told him about.

Biff and Happy meet in the restaurant. Happy introduces Biff to a girl called Miss Forsythe whom he had met before Biff's arrival and asks the girl to find another girl for Biff. Then, Biff explains that he had been living in a dream as his visit to Oliver made him realize. He tells Happy that he had stolen himself out of every job that he has ever had, and he wants Happy to help him to say so to Willy. When Willy arrives, he tells the boys that he has been fired and he refuses to listen

to the outcome of Biff's visit to Oliver when Biff tries to tell him to forget about the idea of borrowing from Oliver. Willy simply pretends that Biff has another appointment with Oliver the following day. When Biff insists on telling him the truth, Willy gets furious and goes in to the bathroom. Biff, out of frustration, leaves the restaurant leaving Willy in the restaurant's bathroom. Happy takes the two girls and follows him.

Later that night, Biff and Happy come back home and find Linda very angry with them for leaving Willy alone in the restaurant. Biff insists on talking to Willy despite Linda's objection. Willy is seen out in the back yard planting seeds and talking to the imaginary Ben. He discusses with Ben the feasibility of a decision he had made: to commit suicide by crashing his car expecting Biff to receive the twenty thousand dollar claim. Biff convinces Willy to come inside as he wants to talk to him. He explains to Willy that it would be best if they broke with each other and never saw each other again. He confesses that he was an ordinary person who had no outstanding qualities. But Willy refuses to admit the truth and tells Biff how great Biff would be. Biff becomes frustrated, because Willy refuses to see the truth. He finally breaks down and sobs in Willy's arms. In this sentimental moment, Willy realizes that Biff still loves and needs him. He then resolves to commit suicide, because with twenty thousand dollars Biff could be such a magnificent person. Thus, Willy commits suicide.

2.3. THE LOMAN FAMILY STORY READ WITH PRESENT EVENTS BY THEMSELVES

In the analysis that follows, it is shown that the present events of the play alone make an ineffective dramatic and thematic presentation. The presentation of the drama containing only the present events reveals a static conflict between Willy and Biff. The fact of Willy's attempts to commit suicide is also presented although we have no clue as to why he wants to do so. Third, we realize that Biff and Happy are yet unsettled in life even though they are in their thirties. Fourth, we observe that Biff's accusation of Willy of being responsible for spoiling his life is not substantiated. Finally, there is the curious exchange between Willy and Bernard in which we are left wondering about what happened in Boston.

2.3.1. Conflict between Willy and Biff

The conflict between Willy and Biff has two reasons: apparent and hidden, which are neither convincing nor sufficient for an understanding of the play. In addition, it creates some suspense that turns out to be boring due to its [the conflict's] repetition, and consequently we lose the interest in reading. The apparent reasons for the conflict are those which Linda and

Happy can think of out of their familiarity with the daily interaction between Willy and Biff whereas the hidden reason is what only Willy and Biff silently share. The apparent reasons are made clear in A1S1 and A1S5.

2.3.1.1. Apparent Reasons for Conflict

In A1S1, Happy and Biff talk about Willy and Biff's problem:

BIFF: Why does Dad mock me all the time?

HAPPY: He's not mocking you, he— [Biff interrupts]

BIFF: Everything I say there's a twist of mockery on his face. I can't get near him.

HAPPY: He just wants you to make good, that's all. (21; Act I)

Happy's reply indicates that all he knows about Willy and Biff's disagreement is that Willy just wants Biff to be successful in life. In other words, Happy does not think that there is a big problem between Willy and Biff as indicated by his reply 'that's all.' Linda, on the other hand, observes that both share the responsibility for their disagreement. She thinks that Willy and Biff are angry with each other, because Willy criticizes Biff. She tells Willy:

You shouldn't have criticized him, Willy, especially after he just got off the train.

You mustn't lose your temper with him. (15; Act I)

It is then that Linda thinks, like Happy, that Willy's concern about Biff's unsettledness is what sours Willy and Biff's relationship with each other. Linda tries to justify Willy's stand to Biff while she talks to the boys in A1S5. She tells Biff:

When you write you're coming, he's all smiles, and talks about the future, and— he's just wonderful. And then the closer you seem to come, the more shaky he gets, and then, by the time you get here, he's arguing, and he seems angry at you. I think it's just that maybe he can't bring himself to—to open up for you. Why are you so hateful to each other? Why is that? (56; Act I)

One can observe that Linda realizes that there is a serious problem between Willy and Biff, but she does not know its reason. Moreover, she thinks that Biff is also responsible for what is going on between him and his father. She realizes that Biff does not respect his father. When he compliments her saying that she is not even sixty, she knows that he will not say such nice words to his father. She then tells him:

LINDA: But what about your father?

BIFF, *lamely*, Well, I meant him too.

. . .

LINDA: Biff, dear, if you don't have any feeling for him, then you can't have any feeling for me.

BIFF: Sure I can, Mom.

LINDA: No. you can't just come to see me, because I love him. *With a threat, but only a threat, of tears: . . .* You've got to make up your mind now, darling, there's no leeway any more. Either he's your father and you pay him that respect, or else you're not to come here. (55; Act I)

What Linda can understand is, as observed, that Biff has no feelings for Willy. When he assures her that he also has feelings for his father, she objects and emphasizes that he does not. She warns him to either have respect for his father or he should not come home again.

2.3.1.2 Allusions to Hidden Reason for Conflict

While the apparent reasons for Willy and Biff's conflict are made clear, the hidden reason for the conflict is only alluded to by both Biff and Willy as well as Bernard, who does so unintentionally.

When Happy, in A1S1, tells Biff that Willy considers him "not settled . . . still kind of up in the air," Biff responds saying:

BIFF: There's one or two other things depressing him, Happy.

HAPPY: What do you mean?

BIFF: Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me. (21-22; Act I)

Here, Biff asserts that the matter is not that Willy is concerned for him as Happy thinks, but that it is something different. It is not the case that Biff does not know why Willy treats him in an unkind way as he tells Happy: 'Why does Dad mock me all the time? . . . Everything I say there's a twist of mockery on his face. I can't get near him;' the fact is that he knows why and tries to pretend he does not. Here, we understand clearly that Biff knows something about Willy which he does not want to tell Happy about. Furthermore, in an exchange with Linda, Biff makes the same allusion. In A1S5, he responds to Linda when she asks him why he quarrels with Willy saying:

He threw me out of this house, remember that . . . Because I know he's a fake and he doesn't like anybody around who knows! . . . Just don't lay it all at my feet. It's between me and him—that's all I have to say. (57-58; Act I)

One can notice that Biff's response emphasizes that he holds something against Willy. It is observed that he realizes that his family holds him responsible for his father's abnormal behavior. It is also noticed that Biff uses two variants of the same utterance; first when he tells Happy 'Just don't lay it all to me,' and now he says to Linda 'Just don't lay it all at my feet.' This is so to accept no responsibility for Willy's erratic behavior.

In addition, when Willy asks Biff, in the same sequence: A1S5, not to curse in the house, Biff replies "Since when did you get so clean?" (63; Act I). This utterance presupposes that Willy has done something unethical or immoral, and consequently Biff shows no respect to him, otherwise he would not dare say so. To further the series of allusions to the hidden reason for Willy and Biff's conflict, this immoral thing Biff holds against his father is alluded to, in this same sequence, through the word 'woman' which occurs in the exchange between

Biff and Linda. It is normal to ask why Biff reacts sharply when Linda says “It seems there’s a woman . . .” while talking about Willy’s attempts to kill himself:

LINDA: It seems there’s a woman . . . *she takes a breath as* BIFF, *sharply but contained*: What woman?

LINDA: *Simultaneously*: . . . and this woman . . .

LINDA: What?

BIFF: Nothing. Go ahead.

LINDA: What did you say?

BIFF: Nothing, I just said what woman? [Ellipses are the writer’s]. (58-59; Act I)

The word ‘woman’ immediately in this dialog catches our attention. When they speak simultaneously, Linda asks Biff ‘What?’ to make sure what he had said, but when Biff answers ‘Nothing. Go ahead,’ she insists ‘What did you say?’ The question why Linda insists to know what Biff says when they speak simultaneously is likely to be asked here. For, in normal situations, a person, in Linda’s place, would be satisfied with the answer ‘Nothing. Go ahead.’ The two utterances ‘Nothing. Go ahead’ show that the person is sorry for the interruption; and that he has changed his mind. But to confirm her insistence to know what has been said, Linda repeats using the full form ‘What did you say?’ Meanwhile it is reasonable to ask why Biff reacts ‘*sharply but contained*’ when he hears the word ‘woman.’ The stage direction ‘*sharply but contained*,’ here, justifies the question asked above. For, this phrase implies that Biff does not expect the word ‘woman’ to be uttered and, at the same time, he puts his feelings under control, otherwise he could ask normally without straining himself. Here, Linda’s reaction is justified, for as she does not hear what Biff says, as both speak at the same time, his way of reaction to the word ‘woman’ provokes her. However, Biff’s reaction is not justified, and therefore it may be taken to indicate an existence of a woman in his conflict

with Willy, otherwise he will not accuse Willy of being not clean and will not noticeably react to the word woman the way he does.

Biff and Willy's determination not to say anything about their problem continues the line of allusions to the hidden reason for their problem. As has been mentioned above, Biff, in A1S5, tells Linda 'It's between me and him—that's all I have to say.' This indicates that Biff is determined not to disclose what is between him and his father. It is not only Biff who is determined not to speak out the hidden reason of his conflict with Willy, Willy himself is determined not even to comment on it, let alone deny it. When Linda, at the end of A1S5, tries to know from Willy, as she does before with Biff, why he and Biff treat each other in such an unpleasant way, Willy, as Biff does, avoids answering her question:

LINDA: Willy dear, what has he got against you?

WILLY: I'm so tired. Don't talk anymore. (68; Act I)

Willy's refusal to state what is between him and Biff reinforces the existence of a hidden reason to their soured relationship, a reason that is different from the apparent reasons Linda and Happy know about.

Another allusion to the hidden reason for Willy and Biff's conflict is made in Willy and Bernard exchange in A2S3. Having seen that Bernard has become successful, Willy asks Bernard, Biff's high school friend, whether he knew what happened to Biff since high school:

WILLY: Why did he [Biff] lay down? What is the story there? You were his friend!

...

BERNARD: . . . I got the idea that he'd gone up to New England to see you. Did he have a talk with you, then?

Willy stares in silence

BERNARD: Willy?

WILLY, *with a strong edge of resentment in his voice*: Yeah, he came to Boston.

What about it?

BERNARD: . . . What happened in Boston, Willy?

Willy looks at him as at an intruder.

BERNARD: I just bring it up because you asked me.

WILLY, *angrily*: Nothing. What do you mean, “what happened?” What’s that got to do with anything?

BERNARD: Well, don’t get sore.

WILLY: What are you trying to do, blame it on me? If a boy lays down is that my fault?

BERNARD: Now, Willy, don’t get— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY: Well, don’t—don’t talk to me that way! What does that mean, “What happened?” (93-94; Act II)

Willy’s reaction to Bernard’s question about the Boston visit merits attention. It indicates that Willy and Biff’s conflict may be traced back to when Biff visited Willy in Boston, otherwise Willy would not be uncomfortable if nothing had happened during the Boston visit as he assures Bernard. It also indicates that Willy did not expect Bernard to have known about Biff’s visit to him in Boston. It is also evident that had Willy known that Bernard knew about the Boston visit, he would not discuss Biff’s problem with him.

Put together, these pieces of allusion to a hidden reason between Willy and Biff along with the apparent reasons Linda and Happy know about are neither convincing nor sufficient for an understanding of the play. We want to clearly know what really happened between Willy and Biff instead of just being provided with allusions to it. These reasons: apparent and hidden, are not enough to provide us with the necessary background information about Willy and Biff’s conflict. Biff’s accusation of Willy to be not clean, his abrupt reaction to the word

‘woman,’ his denying responsibility for Willy’s erratic behavior, Willy avoiding to answer Linda’s question regarding what Biff holds against him as well as his resentful reaction to Bernard’s question about the Boston visit—all these arouse our curiosity without satisfying it. In other words, we do not know why Willy and Biff behave and treat each other the way they do.

2.3.1.3. Suspense

The repeated allusions to a conflict between Willy and Biff throughout the present events in A1 create some suspense that soon becomes boring as the reason for Willy and Biff’s conflict is never revealed. The following exchanges between the characters from A1 highlight this point.

Willy and Linda’s talk, at the beginning of the play: A1S1, regarding Willy’s behavior with Biff establishes the fact of a conflict between Willy and Biff:

LINDA: You shouldn’t have criticized him [Biff], Willy, especially after he just got off the train. You mustn’t lose your temper with him.

WILLY: When the hell did I lose my temper? I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism? (15; Act I)

This conflict seems to be about Biff’s inability to make money. Money, however, is not the only thing that worries Willy about Biff as it is observed from his conversation with Linda:

WILLY: How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farmland?

...

Not finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace!

...

The trouble is he’s lazy, goddammit!

...

Biff is a Lazy bum!

...

Why did he come home? I would like to know what brought him home.

LINDA: I don't know. I think he's still lost, Willy. I think he's very lost.

WILLY: Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such—personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff—he's not lazy. (16; Act I)

It is obvious that Biff's kind of work does not also appeal to Willy. Willy also contradicts himself regarding Biff's unsettledness at the age of thirty-four, whether it is due to Biff's laziness. He also asserts that he does not want Biff home. This information continues the reference to the conflict between Willy and Biff. Moreover, the talk between Biff and Happy concerning Biff and Willy's relationship in A1S1 is another reference to the conflict:

HAPPY: You're not still sour on Dad, are you, Biff?

...

BIFF: Why does Dad mock me all the time?

HAPPY: He's not mocking you, he— [Biff interrupts]

BIFF: Everything I say there's a twist of mockery on his face. I can't get near him.

HAPPY: He just wants you to make good, that's all. (20-21; Act I)

What is noticed in this exchange is that Willy and Biff's relationship is sour. This information shows that it is merely a repetition as it does not add anything but just continues stating the conflict. Furthermore, Linda's talk to Biff is also a mere reference to the conflict and nothing more:

LINDA: When you write you're coming, he's all smiles, and talks about the future, and—he's just wonderful. And then the closer you seem to come, the more shaky he gets, and then, by the time you get here, he's arguing, and he seems

angry at you. I think it's just that maybe he can't bring himself to—to open up for you. Why are you so hateful to each other? Why is that?

BIFF, *evasively*: I'm not hateful Mom.

LINDA: But you no sooner come in the door than you're fighting! (56; Act I)

It is quite apparent that Linda's talk does not add anything to what has been demonstrated before in that there is a conflict between Willy and Biff. However, Biff's reaction to Linda's insistence that his disagreement with Willy should stop only accentuates this series of references to the conflict:

LINDA: No, Biff. You can't stay here and fight all the time.

BIFF: He threw me out of this house, remember that.

LINDA: Why did he do that? I never knew why.

BIFF: Because I know he's fake and he doesn't like anybody around who knows!

. . . Just don't lay it all at my feet. It's between me and him—that's all I have to say. (57–58; Act I)

We observe that Biff's reaction confirms that Biff holds something against Willy. What this thing exactly is, however, is not clarified. Biff behaves ambiguously with Happy before in A1S1 when Happy tries to know what is between him and Willy:

BIFF: There's one or two other things depressing him [Willy], Happy.

HAPPY: What do you mean?

BIFF: Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me. (21-22; Act I)

This repetitive allusion to the existence of a conflict between Willy and Biff signals a conflict that is static. Egri states that “In static conflict the conflict remains on an even keel, rising only momentarily . . . Static conflict is found in bad writing.” This view applies, as demonstrated above, to the conflict between Willy and Biff within the present events alone. In other words, this conflict is static as it does not keep rising toward a resolving climax. Rather,

it only rises momentarily and unconvincingly when the allusions to the hidden reason for Willy and Biff's conflict in A1S1, A1S5, and A2S3 are demonstrated, as shown above. Such allusions, in general, with the amount of suspense they produce create a lack of interest in us as the reason for Willy and Biff's treatment to each other is not revealed at all throughout the present events in the play. In this regard, Johnson states, "Engaging the interest of an audience around an issue of human need invests them in the story's outcome. They want to know how it will turn out. They have to know how it will turn out." But this is not the case in the present events as shown above.

2.3.2. Willy's Suicide

On a reading of present events, Willy's suicide is unjustified, because his erratic and abnormal behavior ultimately leading him to commit suicide is given more predominance than the causative factors underlying such behavior. Willy's inability to concentrate on driving is a result of whatever Willy is suffering from, not a reason for his suffering. At the outset of the play: A1S1, we are faced with an old troubled salesman, Willy by name. Describing his problem, he tells Linda:

. . . I absolutely forgot I was driving. If I'd've gone the other way over the white line I might've killed somebody. So I went on again—and five minutes later I'm dreamin' again, and I nearly—*He presses two fingers against his eyes.* I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts. (14; Act I)

Willy's speech indicates that Willy's mind is overactive with something or things he cannot forget. When Linda comments that it may be something wrong with the car that made him not able to control it, Willy asserts:

No, it's me, it's me—Suddenly I realize I'm goin' six miles an hour and I don't remember the last five minutes. I'm—I can't seem to—keep my mind to it. (13; Act I)

So, Willy knows his problem but does not talk about it. In other words, the reason for such behavior is not mentioned.

Willy's regret for not going to Alaska with his brother, Ben, is also a result of, not a reason for his suffering. In A1S3, he makes a connection between what happened to him in Yonkers and not going to Alaska with Ben. He tells Happy:

I got an awful scare. Nearly hit a kid in Yonders. God! Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time! Ben! That man was a genius, that man was success incarnate! What a mistake! He begged me to go. (41; Act I)

It seems he wants to say that if he had gone to Alaska with Ben, he would not have been in such a terrible situation. Actually, he says so directly to Charley in this same sequence: A1S3, "If I'd gone with him to Alaska that time, everything would've been totally different" (45). The reason for Willy's suffering cannot be his inability to concentrate on driving as it seems to be here. Though he does not tell Linda what his problem is, in A1S1, as shown above, he asserts to her that the problem is not with the car but with him: 'No, it's me, it's me.' Besides, his saying here that 'I got an awful scare. Nearly hit a kid in Yonkers' does not seem strong enough to make him wish to have gone to Alaska with his brother. So, his regret for not going to Alaska with Ben is a result of whatever he suffers from, not a reason for it. In this sequence, Willy is also seen to be totally confused. He utters the following utterances while talking to Charley "Sure, sure! . . . Sure tremendous . . . Fine, fine . . . No, she died a long time ago . . . Long ago" (45-46; Act I). This indicates that Willy seems to lose control over himself. This piece of information may seem building toward Willy's suicide, but it is not heightened as no further information, in this regard, is mentioned. That is, why Willy behaves in such a way is not clarified.

Depicting what Willy did and does and not showing why also reveals the effect of, not the cause for Willy's behavior. When Linda tells Biff in A1S5 that "a terrible thing is happening

to him [Willy],” she gives the impression that she realizes Willy is undergoing a serious problem. She thinks that Willy has become too tired to overcome life’s problems. She tells Biff “you don’t have to be very smart to know what his trouble is. The man is exhausted” (56; Act I). It is observed that she talks in a general way, which indicates that she does not know what Willy is exactly suffering from. Her knowledge and observation that Willy has been and is trying to kill himself, however, shows that she does not know the reason for Willy’s behavior as she claims to know. She tells Biff:

LINDA: He’s dying, Biff.

Happy turns quickly to her, shocked.

BIFF, *after a pause*: Why is he dying?

LINDA: He’s been trying to kill himself.

BIFF, *with great horror*: How?

LINDA: I live from day to day.

BIFF: What’re you talking about? (58; Act I)

We know from her speech to Biff in A1S5 that Willy has been and is trying to kill himself, but why Willy tries to do so is not indicated. When Biff asks why Willy is dying as it is observed here, Linda replies ‘He’s been trying to kill himself’ which is a tautological answer. While she states, in this same exchange with Biff, that “I know every thought in his mind” (60), her answer to why Willy is dying shows the opposite. Actually, she does not know why Willy is trying to kill himself otherwise she could at least relevantly answer the question, if not explain. She keeps on talking about what Willy did and does, but she never mentions why Willy tries to kill himself. This highlights the point that the force behind Willy’s behavior which may propel Willy toward his suicide, that is, why Willy tries to kill himself, is missing.

2.3.3. Some Negative Aspects in Biff's and Happy's Personalities

Biff's and Happy's aimlessness and their having such character flaws as contradiction, jealousy, self-deception, and stealing are also unjustified on a reading of present events. In other words, it is manifested that they are aimless and have some character flaws, but how they came to be the way they are is not clarified.

It is observed that Biff and Happy are aimless. They do not know what they want. In A1S1, Biff, "*with rising agitation,*" explains his own problem to Happy saying that:

. . . This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring—more beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt. And it's cool there now see? Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I am not gettin' anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future. That's when I come running home. And now, I get here, and I don't know what to do with myself. *After a pause:* I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and every time I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life.

(22-23; Act I)

Biff enjoys working with horses very much, but working as a farmhand is not his idea of a career and this realization generates a feeling of emptiness in his life, for even though the farm is the place he likes, he thinks he should be working in a more lucrative place than a farm. It is also noticed that Biff feels lost when he is home, for this makes him feel that he has failed to achieve something in life. Happy is not luckier than Biff in this regard though he seems more settled than Biff. He tells Biff that:

. . . I don't know what the hell I'm working for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment—all alone. And I think of the rent I'm paying. And it's crazy. But then, it's what I

always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit I'm lonely. (23; Act I)

Happy's speech shows that he is aimless even though he has a job, an apartment, a car and plenty of women, i.e. everything he has always wanted. Happy also asserts that he feels lonely. Thus, both Biff and Happy are not satisfied with the lives they lead and do not know what they exactly want in life. Why they are so unfulfilled is not clear to us. In other words, the significance of this much of information about Biff and Happy to an understanding of the play's story as a whole cannot be appreciated.

Not only are Biff and Happy aimless, they also have some character flaws. While Happy is jealous, Biff both contradicts and deceives himself, and has the habit of stealing. The following four paragraphs shed light on these aspects of their personalities.

Happy tells Biff that:

. . . I can outbox, outrun, and outlift anybody in that store, and I have to take orders from those common, petty sons-of-bitches till I can't stand it any more.

. . .

See, Biff, everybody around me is so false that I'm constantly lowering my ideal.

. . .

. . . I got more in my pinky finger than he's [Happy's merchandize manager] got in his head.

. . .

I gotta show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade. I want to walk into the store the way he walks in. (24; Act I)

We can observe that Happy considers himself better than his bosses both physically and mentally. He considers physical power a sign of social superiority. He considers his bosses' orders

insulting to his character. His speech indicates that he has great aspirations to achieve, but the problem is that he is being negatively affected by the people he works with. He also thinks he deserves to be the merchandize manager more than the merchandize manager of the store he works for. All this shows that he generally has an undercurrent of competition with his bosses, and that he is specifically jealous of his boss, otherwise he would not describe them as ‘common, petty sons-of-bitches’ and at the same time he wants ‘to walk into the store the way he [the merchandize manager, his boss] walks in.’ Moreover, in the course of the conversation with Biff, Happy says about the merchandize manager of the store that “when he walks into the store the waves part in front of him. That’s fifty-two thousand dollars a year coming through the revolving door . . .” (24; Act I), which indicates that he is jealous of his boss, or else he would not use figurative language in his description which reveals his admiration.

The contradictions in Biff’s personality are evident in his speech with Happy. He, in his turn, tells Happy:

BIFF: I just got one idea that I think I’m going to try.

HAPPY: What’s that?

BIFF: Remember Bill Oliver?

HAPPY: Sure, Oliver is very big now. You want to work for him again?

BIFF: No, but when I quit he said something to me. He put his arm on my shoulder, and he said, “Biff, if you need anything, come to me.”

HAPPY: I remember that. That sounds good.

BIFF: I think I’ll go to see him. If I could get ten thousand or even seven or eight thousand dollars I could buy a beautiful ranch.

HAPPY: I bet he’d back you. ‘Cause he thought highly of you, Biff. I mean, they all do. You’re well liked, Biff. That’s why I say to come back here, and we both have the apartment. And I’m tellin’ you, Biff, any babe you want . . .

BIFF: No, with a ranch I could do the work I like and still be something. I just wonder though. I wonder if Oliver still thinks I stole that carton of basketballs.

HAPPY: Oh, he probably forgot that long ago. It's almost ten years. You're too sensitive. Anyway, he didn't really fire you.

BIFF: Well, I think he was going to. I think that's why I quit. I was never sure whether he knew or not. I know he thought the world of me, though. I was the only one he'd let lock up the place [Ellipsis is the writer's]. (25-26; Act I)

One can notice that Biff contradicts himself here. First, he says that 'I wonder if Oliver still thinks I stole that carton of basketballs' which indicates that a carton of basketballs was stolen and that Oliver thought that Biff had stolen that carton of basketballs. It also means that Biff did not steal that carton, otherwise Biff would use the verb 'remember' instead of 'think' in his statement. Meanwhile, as he responds to Happy's comment, he says 'well, I think he was going to. I think that's why I quit' which denotes that Biff stole that carton of basketballs, otherwise he would not have quit especially if Oliver trusted him as he asserts: 'I know he thought the world of me.' His speech here also implies that he quit because he was afraid the theft would have been discovered, otherwise he would not have quit. It is also noticed that Biff's two statements 'I wonder if Oliver still thinks I stole that carton of basketballs' and 'I was never sure whether he knew or not' contradict each other. The first statement asserts that Biff knows that Oliver knew about the theft and suspected him; and the second one asserts that Biff did not know at all whether Oliver knew or not about the theft, and this assertion is emphasized by the use of the adverb 'never.' If Oliver thought that Biff had stolen the carton, he would have either fired him or reported him to the police. He would not have waited for Biff to quit by himself. Why it is then that Biff asserts that he quit and that he contradicts himself is not clarified.

After Biff comes back from his visit to Bill Oliver, the following exchange takes place between him and Happy, in which his self-deception, with which he is disillusioned, as well as his stealing habit becomes apparent:

BIFF, *strangely unnerved*: [To Happy] cut it out [Happy's talking about the girl he met in the restaurant], will ya? I want to say something to you.

HAPPY: Did you see Oliver?

BIFF: I saw him all right. Now look, I want to tell Dad a couple of things and I want you to help me.

HAPPY: What? Is he going to back you?

BIFF: Are you crazy? You're out of your goddam head, you know that?

HAPPY: Why? What happened?

BIFF, *breathlessly*: I did a terrible thing today, Hap. It's been the strangest day I ever went through. I'm all numb, I swear.

HAPPY: You mean he wouldn't see you?

BIFF: Well, I waited six hours for him, see? All day. Kept sending my name in. Even tried to date his secretary so she'd get me to him, but no soap.

HAPPY: Because you're not showin' the old confidence, Biff. He remembered you, didn't he?

BIFF, *stopping Happy with a gesture*: Finally, about five o'clock, he comes out. Didn't remember who I was or anything. I felt like such an idiot, Hap.

HAPPY: Did you tell him my Florida idea?

BIFF: He walked away. I saw him for one minute. I got so mad I could've torn the walls down! How the hell did I ever get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I'd been a salesman for him! And then he gave me one look

and—I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been! We’ve been talking in a dream for fifteen years. I was a shipping clerk.

HAPPY: What’d you do?

BIFF, *with great tension and wonder*: Well, he left, see. And the secretary went out. I was all alone in the waiting-room. I don’t know what came over me, Hap. The next thing I know I’m in his office—paneled walls, everything. I can’t explain it. I—Hap, I took his fountain pen.

HAPPY: Geez, did he catch you?

BIFF: I ran out. I ran down all eleven flights. I ran and ran and ran.

HAPPY: That was an awful dumb—what’d you do that for?

BIFF, *agonized*: I don’t know, I just—wanted to take something, I don’t know.

You gotta help me, Hap, I’m gonna tell Pop. (103-04; Act II)

It is noticed that Biff narrates the details of what happened out of his bitterness that he did not realize the fact that his family and he lived in an illusory world; he was dreaming, that is, he mistook reality for dream. One should notice the irony represented by the big difference between the effort Biff made and its outcome. Biff had waited for six continuous hours to see Oliver and the outcome was that he saw him for one minute. It is significant to notice that it is Biff who saw Oliver for one minute not vice versa. Oliver only, says Biff, ‘gave me one look.’ The significance of this is that it made Biff realize that his life was ‘a ridiculous lie’ which denotes that Biff is disillusioned now. Oliver’s one look at Biff made Biff realize that he was a shipping clerk, not a salesman for Oliver as he had led himself to believe for fifteen years. Biff and Oliver, as it is observed, did not talk to each other; Biff says about Oliver that ‘at five o’clock, he comes out . . . He walked away . . . he gave me one look.’ Biff is honest when he says ‘How the hell did I ever get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I’d been a salesman for him!’ which indicates that he neither was a salesman for Oliver nor

does he remember the time he began imagining that he worked for Oliver. If Biff had ever been a salesman for Oliver, he would have had the courage to talk to Oliver and remind him about it if Oliver had forgotten. But due to the fact that Biff was never a salesman for Oliver once, he got convinced by one look from Oliver that he had been dreaming. He also got embarrassed and insulted when Oliver ignored him and walked away, as it is signaled by his speech: 'I got so mad I could've torn the walls down.' What Biff cannot explain is what he did in Oliver's office.

Biff asserts to Happy that he did a terrible thing; and his statement 'I'm all numb I swear' makes it clear that he cannot believe he has taken Oliver's fountain pen. We notice that Biff describes, 'with great tension and wonder,' the incident in which he took the pen. The phrase '*with great tension and wonder*' implies that Biff is neither at ease talking about the theft nor can he explain why he did so. His saying 'I don't know what came over me, Hap. The next thing I know I'm in his office' emphasizes that his taking the pen was something out of his control. The desire to take the pen was not a logical outcome of what Oliver did with Biff, because Oliver's behavior made Biff realize that he was wrong, and consequently he would not do something wrong just at the moment he is disillusioned. It is important to observe here that this is the second time Biff steals something from Oliver. The first time is alluded to in A1S1 when Biff discusses with Happy the idea of borrowing some money from Oliver, which has been mentioned above. In his last confrontation with Willy in A2S5, Biff confesses that he had stolen a suit in Kansas City: "You know why I had no address for three months? I stole a suit in Kansas City and I was in jail" (131; Act II). All of this information about Biff makes it quite clear that stealing is a habit with Biff. The question is why Biff steals and what significance this stealing habit has on the play's story as a whole. This question is unanswered within the context of present events.

2.3.4. Biff's Accusation of Willy

Biff's accusing Willy, in his last confrontation with him in A2S5, of being responsible for spoiling his life, and Willy and Biff exchanges in A1S5 in which Willy is shown instructing Biff as to how to behave when meeting Oliver do not sufficiently demonstrate that Willy is responsible for Biff's and Happy's aimlessness and character flaws. Biff's and Happy's negative qualities are serious ones. These aspects of their personality really wreck the boys' lives as they make them unable to know what to do in life and as they prevent them to see reality as it is. Thus, too serious as they are, it is not convincing that the cause of these negative personal aspects is briefly demonstrated. Similarly, it is not convincing to just know that Biff's and Happy's problems are only because of Willy's instructions to Biff in A1S5. While those instructions can be considered as an indication of Willy's responsibility, they cannot be a reason by themselves for the boys' problems. For, the impact of those instructions cannot take place overnight. Thus, Biff's accusation of Willy to be responsible for his [Biff's] problems is not substantiated.

2.3.5. Willy's Behavior with Bernard

Willy's reaction, in A2S3, to the fact of Bernard's success is also not justified, and therefore its relevance to an understanding of the play's story cannot be estimated. In the course of their conversation, Willy is surprised when Bernard talks about his success, not of his own volition, but as answers to Willy's queries about him:

WILLY, *sitting down*: What're you going to do in Washington?

BERNARD: Oh, just a case I've got there, Willy.

WILLY: That so? *Indicating the rackets*: You going to play tennis there?

BERNARD: I'm staying with a friend who's got a court.

WILLY: Don't say. His own tennis court. Must be fine people, I bet.

BERNARD: They are, very nice.

WILLY: . . . Did I hear your wife had a boy?

BERNARD: That's right. Our second.

WILLY: Two boys! What do you know!

. . .

WILLY: . . . Your friends have their own private tennis court?

This exchange highlights the fact that Bernard is married and has two boys. It also denotes that he has rich friends who have their own tennis court in Washington. The reason this much of information about Bernard surprises Willy is not demonstrated though it is necessary to clarify why Willy breaks off the conversation with Bernard in this same exchange:

BERNARD: You still with the old firm, Willy?

WILLY, *after a pause*, I'm—I'm overjoyed to see how you made the grade, Bernard, overjoyed. It's an encouraging thing to see a young man really—really—looks very good for Biff—very—*He breaks off, then: Bernard—He is so full of emotion, he breaks off again.* (91-92; Act II)

The significance of Bernard's personal news to Willy here as well as to an understanding of the play's story is not clarified in the present events.

2.4. LACK OF COHERENCE⁴ IN THE PRESENT EVENTS

So far, reading the present events as a whole has revealed isolated details of the conflict between Willy and Biff, of Willy's attempts to commit suicide, and of Biff's and Happy's problems along with Willy's behavior with Bernard. This much of information, consequently, makes it quite clear that though the present events are chronological, they are not connected to form a whole. In other words, they are not coherent enough to form a whole in their present

⁴ The definition of coherence used here is that used by Shapiro and Hudson in two collaboratively separate studies: in 1991 and 1997, and "concerns how the events and different parts of a story," as Cain reports, "are interrelated and organized in a meaningful way . . . sequencing the events within a . . . causal framework. According to this definition, coherence refers to the overall event structure of the narrative" (qtd. in Cain 336).

entities, because despite their chronological continuity, they lack the dramatic and thematic connectedness.

2.5. TABLE OF PRESENT EVENTS SUMMARIZING CHAPTER ARGUMENT

We have provided a summary of present events above in a textual form. Below we provide a table: fig. 3, summarizing the argument of this chapter. The table depicts the context of situation of each present event, its location and time, the interlocutors involved in it, the topic of discourse that the interlocutors are engaged in, and the unknown context of situation parameters they point to.

| Present Sequences | Location | Time | Interlocutors | Topic of Discourse | Unknown Context of Situation Parameters |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|---|
| A1S1 | Lomans' Home | Monday evening | Willy Loman and Linda | Willy's inability to concentrate on driving | - |
| | | | | Biff's unsettledness | Causative factors |
| | | Later that evening | Biff and Happy | Willy's relationship with Biff | Causative factors |
| | | | | Biff and Happy's past with girls | - |
| | | | | Biff's and Happy's personal problems | Causative factors |
| Biff's idea to borrow some money from Oliver | Causative factors | | | | |
| A1S3 | Lomans' Home | Later that evening | Willy and Happy | Willy's regret for not going to Alaska with Ben | Causative factors |
| | | | Willy and Charley | Charley's job offer to Willy | - |
| | | | | Willy's inability to financially help Biff | - |
| | | | | A ceiling Willy constructed in the living room | - |
| | | | | Ben | - |
| A1S5 | Lomans' Home | Very late the same evening | Willy and Linda | Diamond watch fob Willy got from Ben once | - |
| | | | Linda, Biff, and Happy | Willy and Biff's disagreement | Causative factors |
| | | | | Biff and Happy's carelessness toward Willy | - |
| | | | Linda, Biff, and Happy, joined by Willy | Willy's suicide attempts | Causative factors |
| | | | | Biff's idea to borrow some money from Oliver | - |
| | | | | Willy's instructions to Biff as to how to behave when meeting Oliver | - |
| Willy and Linda | Biff's success in high school | - | | | |

| Present sequences | Location | Time | Interlocutors | Topic of Discourse | Unknown context of situation Parameters |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| A2S1 | Lomans' Home | Ten o'clock on a Tuesday morning | Willy and Linda | Biff's appearance, i.e. clothes, when leaving in the morning | - |
| | | | | Willy's future dreams of a house and a guest house | - |
| | | | | Willy's visit to Howard | - |
| | Lomans' Home: phone call | After Willy's departure | Linda and Biff | The gas heater which Linda discovered and suspects Willy may use it to kill himself with | - |
| | Howard's Office | Later the same Tuesday | Willy and Howard | Howard's new recorder | - |
| | | | | Willy's views about the sales profession | - |
| Willy's position in Howard's firm | | | | - | |
| A2S3 | Charley's Office | Later the same Tuesday | Willy and Bernard | Bernard's personal news | Causative factors |
| | | | | Biff's quitting high school | Causative factors |
| | | | Willy and Charley | Willy's refusal to work with Charley | - |
| | | | | Willy's belief in the power of personality | - |
| | Frank's Chop House: a restaurant | Six p.m. on Tuesday | Biff, Happy and two girls called Miss Forsythe and Letta | Dating the two girls | - |
| | | | | Biff and Happy | Result of Biff's visit to Oliver |
| | | | Biff and Happy joined by Willy | Result of Willy's visit to Howard | - |
| | | | | Result of Biff's visit to Oliver | - |
| A2S5 | Lomans' Home | Tuesday evening | Linda, Biff, and Happy | Reason for Biff and Happy's leaving Willy in the restaurant | - |
| | | | Willy and imaginary Ben | Feasibility of Willy's decision to commit suicide by crashing his car expecting Biff to receive the twenty thousand dollar claim | Causative factors |
| | | | Willy, Biff, Linda, and Happy | Biff's confession of being ordinary, i.e. Biff's enlightenment | Causative factors |
| | | | | Biff's accusation to Willy of being responsible for his [Biff's] problems | |
| | | | | Willy's realization of Biff's love for him | - |
| Willy's decision to commit suicide | Causative factors | | | | |

Fig. 3. Table of present events

In the main, the unknown parameter of each present event and associated topic of discourse is the causative factor(s) underlying them. It must certainly be not happen chance that the past time switches, to which we turn in the next chapter, provide reasonable and sufficient evidence of the factors underlying the crisis in the Loman family.

3 Past Time Switches in Death of a Salesman

3.1. Summary of Past Time Switches in Textual Form

3.2. Table of Past Time Switches

3.3. Coherence of the Play's Plot Structure (Present and Past Events Together)

3.3.1. Light Effects, Music, and Preparatory Stretches of Speech as Cohesive Elements

3.3.2. Past Events and Situations as Coherent Elements

3.3.2.1. Willy's Value-System

3.3.2.2. Impact of Willy's Value-System on Biff and Happy

3.3.3. Characters as Coherent Element

3.3.4. Suspense as Coherent Element

3.3.4.1. Reason of Willy and Biff's Conflict

3.3.4.2. Willy's and Biff's Visits to Howard and Oliver

3.4. Table of Present and Past Events Together Summarizing Chapter Argument

In chapter 2, it has been shown that Death of a Salesman would be damaged if the past time switches were left out. This chapter, in turn, studies the structure as a whole. The focus of the past time switches is on Willy's value-system, Biff's success and failure in high school, and Willy's affair with a woman in Boston. First, we provide a summary of the past events in a textual form and then in the form of a table. We cannot impose a time order on the past events, because the play provides little or no clue for deducing a strict sequence. That is, they are episodic and reveal salience in Willy's memory in the context of the present and familial turmoil in the Loman family. For this reason, the episodes Willy recalls are summarized below in the order that he remembers them. Each past time switch is presented individually and marked off by bullets. It is interesting to note that the only way in which these switches can be presented is by using the instantaneous present tense. This transformation of past events dramatized in the present in the play can employ only the instantaneous present tense, signifying that these events are memories alive and seething in Willy's mind. In his introduction to The Collected Plays, Miller comments that:

The *Salesman* image was from the beginning absorbed with the concept that nothing in life comes 'next' but that everything exists together and at the same time within us; that there is no past to be 'brought forward' in a human being, but that he is his past at every moment and that the present is merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to. (23)

3.1. SUMMARY OF PAST TIME SWITCHES IN TEXTUAL FORM

- *A salesman, we later know as Willy, is seen in the kitchen talking and having some milk. At first, one thinks that he is talking to himself, but after a moment, we realize that he is talking to his two boys, Biff and Happy, who are washing his car. Willy bought them a punching bag in one of his business trips carrying the signature of a famous sports person. Biff shows his father a football he stole. He tells him that he had borrowed it from his school locker room. Willy realizes that Biff has stolen the ball, but he overlooks the theft. He tells him that since the coach likes him, he will congratulate him for what he did. Then, they talk about how famous Biff become due to his being made a captain in his school. While they are*

talking, Bernard, Biff's school friend and neighbor, comes in warning Biff that if he does not study, he may fail the exam. He asserts that he had heard the math teacher say that if Biff does not study, he may not be able to graduate. But Willy mocks Bernard's appearance. He believes that Biff will not succeed by passing the final examination but by the scholarship Biff has to three universities. After Bernard leaves, Willy tells his boys that they will be better than Bernard, because they are well built. He tells them that the most important thing in the business world is personal attractiveness. Linda comes in and the boys go to their friends. Willy and Linda talk about the money that they should pay for the appliances they bought on installments. Willy explains his inability to earn enough money to be due to his talking too much as well as his appearance as people seem to laugh at the way he walks. Just as Linda assures him that he is the most handsome man in the world, Willy is reminded of a previous affair with a woman in Boston. The woman compliments him, giving him the satisfaction that he is a wonderful man. Before the woman leaves, they agree to meet again in Boston next time. Linda still assures Willy that he is the most handsome man. While Willy and Linda are talking, Bernard comes in warning that if Biff does not study, he will not be able to graduate. Willy shouts, looking for Biff. He becomes irritated and confused as Linda and Bernard tell him that Biff behaves badly with girls and drives the car without a license.

- Willy meets Ben, his older brother, who is successful and who is passing through on a short visit. Ben meets Willy for the first time since he left home to follow his father to Alaska when Willy was nearly four. Willy asks Ben to tell his boys how he became successful. Ben ambiguously says that when he was seventeen, he walked into the jungles and when he was twenty-one, he walked out, and he was rich. Willy gets amazed. Talking about his father, Ben says that his father was 'a very great man, a very wild-hearted man.' He was a 'great inventor' of flutes. Willy assures Ben that he is bringing up his boys the same way. To amaze Ben, Willy sends his boys to steal some sand from a nearby construction site. Ben assures Willy that he is bringing up his boys the right way. When Willy asks Ben to tell him the way he became rich, Ben repeats the same thing he told the boys earlier and leaves.
- Willy asks Ben how he became rich and successful. Ben, who comes back from a trip to say goodbye, answers Willy ambiguously saying that if a person knows what to do, it 'doesn't take much time.' Ben offers Willy a job in Alaska. Willy seems enthusiastic about the job in Alaska. However, Willy changes his mind regarding Ben's offer, when Linda comes in and reminds him that he is well liked in the city and his boys love him; besides, the manager of the firm he works for promised him to be a member of the firm. To confirm the chance of success in the city, Willy tells Ben that Biff, who joins them, is now a successful football player with a scholarship to three universities. He says that Biff will be even a successful business man in the future. After Ben leaves, Willy, Linda, and the boys, who now talk enthusiastically about the Ebbets Field football match Biff is going to play, are joined by Bernard and Charley. Charley laughs at Willy's enthusiasm for the match and leaves.

- *Willy is with a woman in a Boston hotel room talking about his personality when they hear a knock on their door. Willy opens the door and, to his astonishment, finds Biff. Biff tells Willy that he failed math and will not be able to graduate. He came to Boston to get Willy to convince the math teacher to change his mark to a passing mark. Biff thinks that since Willy is well liked, the math teacher will agree to change the mark for him. While they are talking about the matter, the woman, who has been in the bathroom, joins them. Willy gets nervous and puzzled and asks the woman to get out. He makes up an excuse for the presence of the woman in his room, but Biff does not believe him. Biff discovers that Willy has been giving the stockings of his mother to the woman. When Willy tells him that he will go with him to convince the math teacher to change the mark, Biff replies that the teacher will not listen to him. Calling Willy a 'phony little fake,' Biff gets out crying leaving Willy on his knees.*

3.2. TABLE OF PAST TIME SWITCHES

This same summary of the past time switches is also presented below in a table: fig. 4. The table shows each past event, its location and time, the interlocutors involved in it, and the topic of discourse the interlocutors are engaged in.

| Past Time Switches | Location | Time | Interlocutors | Topic of Discourse |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---|--|--|
| A1S2 | Lomans' Home | When Biff was in high school | Willy, Biff, and Happy | A punching bag Willy bought for the boys |
| | | | | A football Biff stole from his school locker room |
| | | | | Willy's dream of business success and of being well liked |
| | | | | Willy's popularity at work (as he tells it) |
| | | | | Glamor of Biff's captaincy at school |
| | | | Willy, Biff, and Happy, joined by Bernard | Biff's study and possibility of failing math |
| | | | Willy, Biff, and Happy | Biff's and Happy's personal attractiveness |
| | Boston hotel room | | Willy and Linda | Money that should be paid for the appliances bought on installment |
| | | | | Willy's appearance |
| | | | | Willy's personality |
| | | Willy and The Woman | Meeting in Boston again | |
| | | | Willy, Linda, and Bernard | An exam Biff has to study for |
| A1S4 | Lomans' Home | Some time when Biff and Happy were boys | Willy, Linda, and Ben | Time when Ben left home to follow his father |
| | | | Willy, Linda, and Ben, joined by Biff and Happy | Ben's success story |
| | | | Willy, Linda, and Ben, joined by Charley and Bernard | Willy and Ben's father |
| | | | Willy and Ben | Biff and Happy's stealing from a construction site |
| | | | Willy's way of bringing up his boys | |

| Past time switches | Location | Time | Interlocutors | Topic of Discourse |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| A2S2 | Lomans' Home | When Biff was in high school | Willy, Linda, and Ben | Ben's job offer to Willy |
| | | | Willy, Linda, and Ben, joined by Biff and Happy | Biff's success potential |
| | | | Willy, Linda, and his boys, joined by Bernard and later by Charley | The Ebbets Field football match |
| A2S4 | Boston hotel room | When Biff was in high school | Willy and The Woman | A knock at their door |
| | | | | Willy's personality |
| | | | Willy and Biff | Biff's flunking math |
| | | | | The math teacher |
| | | Willy and Biff, joined by The Woman | The Woman in Willy's room | |

Fig. 4. Table of past time switches

3.2. COHERENCE OF THE PLAY'S PLOT STRUCTURE (PRESENT AND PAST EVENTS TOGETHER)

The play's event structure does not move chronologically but rather logically. The present events cover the last twenty-four hours of Willy's life: from Monday evening through Tuesday evening. The funeral takes place some day after that (137-39; Requiem). The past events, however, go back as far as Willy's childhood. They word paint visual pictures of the inner workings of Willy's mind and enable us to directly watch what is going on in his mind. Put together, the present events and the past time switches remove all the doubts which arise when the play is read without the past time switches, as shown in chapter 2. In other words, they together show how coherent the play's event structure is by clarifying the unresolved issues shown in the previous chapter. When the past time switches are put back, "the play sings and shines. A lucidity is imparted to every gesture of the disintegrating Willy Loman" (Goyal 166). The coherence of the play's event structure is also made clear through certain elements, namely, light, music, preparatory stretches of speech, past events and situations, characters, and suspense.

3.2.1. Light Effects, Music, and Preparatory Stretches of Speech as Cohesive⁵ Elements

Miller successfully manages to convey to us that there are two types of events: present and past, and that the past events actually occur in Willy's mind. He effects a smooth transition from one to the other by means of light, music, and some preparatory stretches of speech or dialog (Goyal 141) within the present sequences employed as cohesive elements.

The transition from as well as within the present sequences to and within the past ones is made vivid and real for us through the techniques of light and music. The stage setting of

⁵ Cohesion implies connection or transition between parts of a text. "Conjunction [which is one of the cohesive devices recognized by many linguists among whom, for instance, Halliday and Hasan] is a relationship indicating how the subsequent sentence or clause should be linked to the preceding or the following sentence or parts of sentence" (Niska). Moreover, Shi observes that "Conjunction signals the way the writer wants the reader to relate what is about to be said to what has been said before." De Beaugrande and Dressler state that there is no need for adding words like 'and' and 'also' in a text unless the interdependency is not obvious and should be emphasized (qtd. in Niska). This idea of linking parts in a text can be extended and applied as much between the sequences, i.e. present and past, in Death of a Salesman as it does between sentences or clauses.

Death of a Salesman, Roberts and Jacobs observe, “is designed to allow fluid transitions between present and past, between current action and memory” (1207). For example, the transition process from A1S1, a present sequence, to A1S2, a past sequence, takes place smoothly by means of light and music. A1S2 begins by gradually focusing the light on Willy in the kitchen and making it fade out in the boys’ room. Miller writes “*Their light [Biff and Happy’s light] is out. Well before they have finished speaking, Willy’s form is dimly seen below in the darkened kitchen.*” The scenery also changes. Miller goes on to say “*The apartment houses are fading out, and the entire house and surroundings become covered with leaves*” (27; Act I). In this regard, Roberts and Jacobs observe, “When memory takes over . . . the apartment houses disappear (a technique of lighting), and the orange glow gives way to pastoral colors and the shadows of leaves—the setting of dreams” (1207). Music also adds to the dreamlike atmosphere. At the beginning of A1S2, Miller writes, “*Music insinuates itself as the leaves appear*” (21; Act I). Spalding also comments that “to the accompaniment of music, the scene changes. The apartment blocks disappear, the Loman house and garden become sunlit and covered with leaves” (19).

The idea that the past events do actually happen in Willy’s mind is made possible through providing us with certain information indirectly within the present events, i.e. some preparatory stretches of speech. The presentation of this information is done in such a way that a quick response to the changes, i.e. from present to past, is made possible and the desired message that these events happen in Willy’s mind is successfully conveyed. For instance, in A1S2, the idea that the past events do occur in Willy’s mind has already been established in A1S1 through the demonstration as well as discussion of Willy’s confusion and mumbling, (a cohesive technique). At the outset of the play: A1S1, Willy tells Linda:

. . . I’m telling, ya, I absolutely forgot I was driving. If I’d’ve gone the other way over the white line I might’ve killed somebody. So I went on again—and five

minutes later I'm dreamin' again, and I nearly—*He presses two fingers against his eyes.* I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts. (14; Act I)

Here, we are made aware that there is something that confuses Willy and makes him unable to focus on driving. Willy's "inability to concentrate on driving his car," Spalding comments, "may well be symptomatic of a much deeper stress. The audience begin to wonder what is wrong so they watch him closely" (16). It can also be added that the repetition in the statement 'I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts,' with the emphasis on the word 'strange,' makes Willy's confusion more vivid as we go on reading. Since it is very important not to forget this much of information about Willy, as it prepares us to grasp the kind of change that will soon happen in A1S2, Willy's confusion, along with one of his other problems: his mumbling, is also discussed by Biff and Happy near the middle of A1S1:

BIFF: His [Willy's] eyes are going.

HAPPY: No, I've driven with him. He sees all right. He just doesn't keep his mind on it. I drove into the city with him last week. He stops at a green light and then it turns red and he goes. *He laughs.*

...

. . . I wanted to talk to you about Dad for a long time, Biff. Something is—happening to him. He—talks to himself.

BIFF: I noticed that this morning. But he always mumbled.

HAPPY: But not so noticeable. It got so embarrassing I sent him to Florida. And you know something? Most of the time he's talking to you? (19-21; Act I)

One can notice that Willy cannot concentrate on driving, not because of a health problem but because of something worrying him. He also noticeably talks to himself in public. When he does so, he talks to Biff most of the time. Again, this is important to notice, because it will smooth the way for us to easily conclude that the past events in A1S2 happen in Willy's mind.

This presentational strategy of Willy's mumbling leading to a past event in the past is seen at the end of A1S1 through the utterances Willy makes which are overheard coming from the kitchen by Biff and Happy:

WILLY, *underneath them, in the living-room*: Yes, Sir, eighty thousand miles—
eight-two thousand!

...

What a simonizing job, heh!

...

below: You gonna wash the engine, Biff?

HAPPY: Shh!

Biff looks at Happy, who is gazing down, listening. Willy is mumbling in the parlor.

HAPPY: You hear that?

They listen, Willy laughs warmly.

BIFF, *growing angry*: Doesn't he know Mom can hear that?

WILLY: Don't get your sweater dirty Biff!

...

What a simonizing job!

BIFF: Mom's hearing that!

WILLY: No, kiddin', Biff, you got a date? Wonderful! (20-27; Act I)

Here, Willy is heard talking to himself. This indicates the state of confusion he is in. He is so confused that he talks to himself loudly. Willy's state of confusion and his mumbling are considered a cohesive element in that they smooth the way for the shift from A1S1 to A1S2 to take place. It is observed that Willy's first utterance in A1S2 is a continuation of his last

utterance overheard by Biff and Happy in A1S1: ‘No, kiddin’, Biff, you got a date? Wonderful!’:

Just wanna be careful with those girls, Biff, that’s all. Don’t make any promises. No promises of any kind. Because a girl, y’know, they always believe what you tell ‘em, and you’re very young, Biff, you’re too young to be talking seriously to girls. (27; Act I)

This speech begins A1S2 and gives the idea that Willy is absorbed with events of the past. “Willy has regressed to a time when his sons were younger,” Campbell observes. He goes on to say that “The pain of reality forces him to regress to earlier, happier times, particularly those involving the young Biff and Happy” (17). When the change takes place, we have already been made aware that Willy is confused and publicly talks to himself. Therefore, it is not difficult for us, with the help of this information as well as that of light and music, to conclude that the new sequence: A1S2, is a past one and happens in Willy’s mind.

The overlap sequences: A1S3 and A2S3, in which present and past events take place simultaneously, reinforce the understanding that Willy is reliving past events. For instance, in A1S3, the confusion created between Willy and Charley while playing cards reinforces our conclusion that the past events only occur in Willy’s mind. In this sequence, while Willy and Charley are playing cards, Ben, Willy’s brother, is presented:

BEN: Is Mother living with you?

WILLY: No, she died a long time ago.

CHARLEY: Who?

BEN: That’s too bad. Fine specimen of a lady, Mother.

WILLY, *to Charley*: Heh?

BEN: I’d hoped to see the girl.

CHARLEY: Who died?

BEN: Heard anything from Father, have you?

WILLY, *unnerved*: What do you mean, who died?

CHARLEY, *taking a pot*: What're you talkin' about?

BEN, *looking at his watch*: William, it's half-past eight!

WILLY, *as though to dispel his confusion he angrily stops Charley's hand*: That's my build!

CHARLEY: I put the ace— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY: If you don't know how to play the game I'm not gonna throw my money away on you!

CHARLEY, *rising*: It was my ace, for God's sake!

WILLY: I'm through, I'm through! (46; Act I)

The confusion created between Willy and Charley after Willy's utterance that 'No, she died a long time ago' makes it clear that Charley is not aware of Ben's presence and that Ben only exists in Willy's imagination. Charley's reaction 'Who? . . . Who died?' to Willy's utterance indicates that he does not hear or see Ben. Simultaneously, Willy's reaction 'Heh?' to Charley's question shows that he is not mentally present with Charley. In addition, his angry claim for the turn in the game indicates his confusion. All this gives the idea that Ben is only present in Willy's mind, otherwise, Charley will realize Ben's presence. Regarding this sequence, i.e. A1S3, Spalding observes that "now almost . . . the usual narration technique (the timeswitch) has been established" (23). This is true in that we are now used to the technique of telling the past events, i.e. the past time switches, through light, music, and the stretches of speech or dialog within the present sequences that pave the way for a more insightful understanding of the present events themselves.

3.2.2. Past Events and Situations as Coherent Elements

The past time switches have a key function in the structure of the play: they provide answers to the questions raised in chapter 2 that a reading of present events by themselves fails to do. In other words, they contain the elements which make the play coherent through the leitmotifs which reveal Willy's value-system and its falsity by gradually revealing the past contexts of present conditions and states of mind of the principal protagonist of the play, Willy Loman, and his son, Biff. It has been shown in fig. 3. that a reading of the present events in the play fails to reveal the causative factors that lead to them. It is a significant aspect of the structure of the play that the causative factors are revealed in the past events. The seeds of the present lie in the past. Therefore, the events and situations from Willy's memory that the past time switches dramatize provide a more significant coherence to the present events than that imposed by their chronological ordering. This chronological ordering is highlighted in chapter 2. It has been pointed out in chapter 2 that the present events in the play which begin on a Monday evening and end with Willy's suicide the next Tuesday evening, are contiguous in time without making at the same time a coherent story. This argument reveals that a meaningful perspective of the past time switches would be to consider them as coherent elements.

In the rest of this chapter, this coherence producing function of the past time switches is discussed in terms of the unresolved issues that the past time switches resolve. Among the other issues highlighted in chapter 2, there are Biff's unsettledness and his planning to visit Oliver. It will be argued that the past time switches provide a complete picture of Willy's value-system and its falsity in terms of those two significant issues, just mentioned, along with Willy's problems at work.

3.2.2.1. Willy's Value-System

The fact of Biff's unsettledness is introduced right at the beginning of the play. In A1S1, Linda blames Willy:

LINDA: You shouldn't have criticized him, Willy, especially after he just got off the train. You mustn't lose your temper with him.

WILLY: When the hell did I lose my temper? I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism? (15; Act I)

Here, one can notice that Biff's financial affair is what sour his relationship with Willy. Moreover, it is what establishes Willy and Biff's disagreement in the play. Goyal thinks that Willy and Biff's disagreement is one motive that impels Willy to remember the past. He states that "Two motives impel Willy to conjure the 'reminiscences.' First, he seeks escape from his problems by reliving a happier time [the second is that] Disturbed by recurring troubles . . . he involuntarily recalls bad news; then he seeks the origin of his and Biff's difficulties" (141). Linda's attempt to know the reason for Willy and Biff's disagreement from Biff in A1S5 emphasizes the seriousness of this problem to Jeffares who observes that "she [Linda] also tries to emphasise the gravity of Biff's own position [toward Willy]" (135).

We know from the sequences dramatizing present events that Biff is unsettled at the age of thirty-four. When he was away from home he worked as a farm hand. We also know that this unsettledness is what preoccupies Willy. Now, it is found that the source of Biff's unsettledness leads to his past life as we come to know of it through Willy's mind. In this way, it enables us compare between Biff's present life with his past one. Through this comparison, not only is Willy's value-system made clear but also the fact that Biff has acquired it. The following three extracts or exchanges sufficiently demonstrate this point. In the first of these exchanges: A1S2, Willy asks Biff:

WILLY: What do they say about you in school, now that they made you captain?

HAPPY: There's a crowd of girls behind him everytime the classes change.

...

Bernard enters in knickers. He is younger than Biff, earnest and loyal, a worried boy.

BERNARD: Biff, where are you? You're supposed to study with me today.

WILLY: Hey, looka Bernard. What're you lookin' so anemic about, Bernard?

BERNARD: He's gotta study, Uncle Willy. He's got Regents next week.

HAPPY, *tauntingly, spinning Bernard around*: Let's box, Bernard!

BERNARD: Biff! *He gets away from Happy.* Listen, Biff, I heard Mr. Birnbaum say that if you don't start studyin' math he's gonna flunk you, and you won't graduate. I heard him!

WILLY: You better study with him, Biff. Go ahead now.

BERNARD: I heard him!

BIFF: Oh, Pop, you didn't see my sneakers! *He holds up a foot for Willy to look at.*

WILLY: Hey, that's a beautiful job of printing!

BERNARD, *wiping his glasses*: Just because he printed University of Virginia on his sneakers doesn't mean they've got to graduate him, Uncle Willy!

WILLY, *angrily*: What're you talking about? With scholarships to three universities they're gonna flunk him?

BERNARD: But I heard Mr. Birnbaum say— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY: Don't be a pest, Bernard! *To his boys*: What an anemic!

BERNARD: Okay, I'm waiting for you in my house, Biff.

Bernard goes off. The Lomans laugh.

WILLY: Bernard is not well liked, is he?

BIFF: He's liked, but he's not well liked.

HAPPY: That's right, Pop.

WILLY: That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. (32-33; Act I)

This extract demonstrates Willy's value-system, the fact of Biff's success in high school as a football player, and Biff and Happy's acquisition of Willy's value-system. Willy believes that 'appearance,' 'personal attractiveness,' and 'being well liked' are crucial to success in business and in the sales profession. It is very significant here to notice that Willy says 'in the business world.' In other words, he does not say 'in practical life,' for example. He repeats the phrase 'in the business world' twice. This phrase attracts our attention immediately, because we know that Biff's working at a farm does not appeal to Willy as revealed in A1S1. For the time being, it is sufficient to say that the significance of the phrase 'in the business world' is that it has negatively affected the adult Biff's life. It is also observed in this exchange that Biff seems to fulfill these requirements. He is the captain of his school football team and girls follow him. That is, he has personal attractiveness and is well liked. When Bernard comes to remind Biff to study with him, Willy uses the chance to teach his sons a practical lesson by comparing them physically to Bernard. When Bernard reminds Biff to study, Willy does not care about it at first. He calls attention to Bernard's appearance: 'Hey, looka Bernard. What're you lookin' so anemic about, Bernard?' This is so because appearance is more important to him than academic achievements. He again mocks Bernard's appearance when Bernard tries to assert what he had heard from the math teacher about Biff. The conversation shows that

Willy believes that passing the final examinations is not as crucial for Biff's success as the offers of scholarships he has received to three universities. Moreover, as soon as Biff shows him the name of the University of Virginia he printed on his sneakers, Willy forgets about the study Biff needs to be doing and expresses his admiration of the printing. Jeffares observes that "Biff believes this [i.e. Willy's belief in Biff's potentiality to succeed] and is determined to succeed in these terms [i.e. Willy's beliefs]" (134). Goyal, in this regard, comments that when Willy asks Biff if Bernard is well liked, "Biff echoes the very words of Willy which he had used about Charley: 'He's liked, but he's not well liked.' Thus Biff is inheriting his father's values very quickly, going the same way that he is going" (88). Earlier in A1S2, when Willy talks about his future dreams of being successful, Happy asks him "Like Uncle Charley, heh?" Willy, then, replies "Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not—liked. He's liked, but not—well liked" (30; Act I). Therefore, when Biff answers Willy's question about how well Bernard is known in school, he echoes Willy's words. Happy also gets encouraged by his father's remark about Bernard's appearance, and so he tries to upset Bernard: 'Let's box, Bernard?' This shows that his boys have acquired his beliefs. "Willy could have persuaded Biff to stay in training but also to keep up the study," Spalding observes, "but instead he belittles Bernard in front of Biff" (49).

The second exchange that reveals Willy's value-system occurs earlier in this same sequence: A1S2, when Biff shows Willy the football he stole from the locker room:

BIFF: Did you see the new football I got?

WILLY, *examining the ball*: Where'd you get a new ball?

BIFF: The coach told me to practice my passing.

WILLY: That so? And he gave you the ball, heh?

BIFF: Well, I borrowed it from the locker room. *He laughs confidentially.*

WILLY, *laughing with him at the theft*: I want you to return that.

HAPPY: I told you he wouldn't like it!

BIFF, *angrily*: Well, I'm bringing it back!

WILLY, *stopping the incipient argument, to Happy*: Sure, he's gotta practice with a regulation ball, doesn't he? *To Biff*: Coach'll probably congratulate you on your initiative!

BIFF: Oh, he keeps congratulating my initiative all the time, Pop.

WILLY: That's because he likes you. If somebody else took that ball there'd be an uproar. (29-30; Act I)

Here, it is implied that Willy believes that a person's negative behavior can be condoned if he is well liked. In other words, being well liked can justify wrong behavior. In this regard, Goyal observes, "Willy believes that a man can get anything in life if he has got a handsome personality" (88). It is observed that Willy, at first, realizes that Biff's behavior is wrong and so he asks Biff to return the ball. To prevent a possible argument, however, Willy changes his attitude toward Biff's theft and finds a justification for it: 'he's gotta practice with a regulation ball.' Since this justification sounds logical to him, he tells Biff 'Coach'll probably congratulate you on your initiative!' And since the coach, as Biff says, 'keeps congratulating my initiative all the time,' there is no justification for this to Willy but 'That's because he likes you.' To prove himself right, Willy adds 'If somebody else took that ball there'd be an uproar.' The implication here is that since there is no uproar about the stolen ball, then Willy's belief is right. Here, Jeffares comments that "At this stage in his life, Biff conformed to Willy's idea of what he should be; he was liked, good at 'manly' things like football, and hopeful for the future" (134).

Finally, the third exchange in A1S4 emphasizes the fact that Willy instills the habit of stealing into his boys, especially Biff. In the presence of Ben, Willy asks his boys:

WILLY: Boys! Go right over to where they're building the apartment house and get some sand. We're gonna rebuild the entire front stoop right now! Watch this, Ben!

BIFF: Yes, sir! On the double, Hap!

HAPPY, *as he and Biff run off*: I lost weight, Pop, you notice?

Charley enters in knickers, even before the boys are gone.

CHARLEY: Listen, if they steal any more from that building the watchman'll put the cops on them!

LINDA, *to Willy*: Don't let Biff . . .

Ben laughs lustily.

WILLY: You shoulda seen the lumber they brought home last week. At least a dozen six-by-tens worth all kinds a money.

CHARLEY: Listen, if that watchman— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY: I gave them hell, understand. But I got a couple of fearless characters there [Ellipsis is the writer's]. (50; Act I)

We notice that Willy overtly asks his boys to steal some sand from a nearby construction site. Apparently, he does so to show Ben how 'fearless characters' his sons are. In other words, he considers stealing a manly behavior. However, this is not the first time his boys do such a thing; they have also stolen lumber before. The point here is that Willy unconsciously instills this negative habit in his boys.

The episode preparatory to Biff's visit to Oliver is an important event that further reveals Willy's value-system. When Biff tells Willy his idea of borrowing some money from Oliver in A1S5, Willy instructs him:

WILLY: . . . don't wear sport jacket and slacks when you see Oliver.

. . .

A business suit, and talk as little as possible, and don't crack any jokes.

BIFF: He did like me. Always liked me.

...

WILLY: . . . Walk in very serious. You are not applying for a boy's job. Money is to pass. Be quiet, fine, and serious. Everybody likes a kidder, but nobody lends him money.

...

WILLY: . . . But remember, start big and you'll end big. Ask for fifteen. How much you gonna ask for?

BIFF: Gee, I don't know— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY: And don't say "Gee." "Gee" is a boy's word. A man walking in for fifteen thousand dollars does not say "Gee!"

BIFF: Ten, I think, would be top though.

WILLY: Don't be so modest. You always started too low. Walk in with a big laugh. Don't look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up. It's not what you say, it's how you say it—because personality always wins the day.

...

. . . And if anything falls off the desk while you're talking to him—like a package or something—don't you pick it up. They have office boys for that.

...

. . . Tell him you were in the business in the west. Not farm work.

...

. . . And don't undersell yourself. No less than fifteen thousand dollars. (64-67; Act I)

It is noticed that Willy's instructions are about how Biff can influence Oliver by his appearance: 'don't wear sport jacket and slacks,' and by his behavior 'talk as little as possible,'

‘don’t crack any jokes,’ ‘walk in very serious,’ ‘Be quiet, fine, and serious,’ ‘don’t say “Gee,”’ ‘Don’t be so modest,’ ‘don’t pick it up,’ ‘tell him you were in the business in the west.’ When we look at Willy’s and Biff’s financial situation, they are both not in good financial condition. Willy’s condition is made clear in A1S3 when he says “I got nothin’ to give him [Biff], Charley, I’m clean, I’m clean” (43; Act I). And Biff in A1S5, when deciding to go to Oliver, asks Happy “Lend me ten bucks, will ya? I want to buy some new ties” (66; Act I); and this indicates that Biff is as broke as Willy is. In this situation, therefore borrowing some money from Oliver is not just an idea to both Willy and Biff, rather, it is something that means a lot to both of them. It is, as Willy says, ‘Money is to pass.’ This is why Willy gives elaborate instructions to Biff. In this way, Willy’s beliefs about how one succeeds in business become clear. In this regard, Goyal comments that:

. . . when Biff thinks of going to see Oliver, suddenly Willy feels strongly the validity of his theory about being well-liked. He knows that Biff can’t fail with Oliver because Biff has so much personal attractiveness. He even insists that Biff ask for fifteen thousand rather than a measly ten thousand. (192)

Not only is Willy’s value-system made manifest with the help of Biff’s unsettledness and the advice Willy gives Biff before he visits Oliver, but it is even made clearer through Willy’s problem at work as it helps to show how his value-system affects him professionally. Willy’s present work problems make him remember two role models, both of whom contribute to his value-system. The first is his brother, Ben, and his success story. A1S4 dramatizes an episode in the past in which Ben tells Willy and his boys his success story:

WILLY: . . . Boy’s! Boys! *Young Biff and Happy appear.* Listen to this. This is your Uncle Ben, a great man! Tell my boys, Ben!

BEN: 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.

WILLY, *to the boys*: You see what I been talking about? The greatest things can happen! (48; Act I)

One can notice that Willy is very keen that his boys hear their uncle's story of success. It is also noticed that Willy takes Ben's story of success as it is without further questioning: 'The greatest things can happen!' Regarding this incident, Abbotson comments, "Ben found success largely by luck, but Willy believes there is something more to it and that his brother can teach him" (39). Thus, the first model: Ben, that contributes to Willy's value-system is demonstrated.

The second role model is Dave Singleman who Willy remembers when he is fired. When Howard, Willy's boss, tells him that "there just is no spot here for you," Willy is really put in a critical situation. He is fired after long years of service with the company. But Willy does not give up hope. In an attempt to influence Howard to make him stay in his job, Willy tells him Dave Singleman story:

. . . And I was almost decided to go [to Alaska with Ben], when I met a salesman in the Parker House. His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he'd drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on his green velvet slippers—I'll never forget—and pick up his phone and call the buyer, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? (80-81; Act II)

It is, then, that by choosing the sales profession, Willy wanted to be successful, loved and remembered after death, just like Dave Singleman was. His description of Singleman is

highly significant in that it demonstrates another source of his value-system. We can observe that Willy concentrates in his description on Singleman's personality, way of behaving, and style of doing work. This shows that he set a high value on the effectiveness of personality in business right from the beginning of his career. Moreover, he emphasizes the importance of personality by saying 'I'll never forget.' It should be noticed here that the clause 'I'll never forget' is parenthetical to indicate that Willy says it now in the present, and not in the past. This means that Willy continues to be influenced by everything he saw of Singleman. It logically follows then that Willy still sets a high value on the effectiveness of pleasing personality. It is also noticed that Willy uses the superlative degree of the adjective 'great' to describe the sales profession: 'I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want' (emphasis added). He does not say 'I realized that selling was one of the greatest careers a man could want'. This indicates that Willy considers the sales profession to be the only profession that can lead to success.

3.2.2.2. Impact and Falsity of Willy's Value-System on Biff and Happy

It has been shown that the past time switches provide a complete picture of Willy's value-system with the help of Biff's unsettledness, the planning of Biff's visit to Oliver, and Willy's problems at work. Consequently, the negative impact of these beliefs on Willy's boys, especially Biff, becomes apparent. In effect, Willy's behavior with Bernard and his boys' problems found to be unjustified when the play is read without the past time switches in chapter 2 of this study are no longer so. The falsity of Willy's value-system becomes obvious.

One can observe that Biff's and Happy's aimlessness and their having such character flaws as contradiction, jealousy, self-deception, and stealing are due to the influence of Willy's value-system. The lucrative place Biff thinks he should be working in is 'the business world,' not the farm: 'What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future.' This is because Willy used to

tell him, as observed above, that ‘the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead.’ So, though working with horses is the work he enjoys, and even though, as Biff says ‘There’s nothing more inspiring—more beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt,’ it stimulates a feeling of emptiness in his life: ‘I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I am not gettin’ anywhere!’ Happy, as observed in Chapter 2, in his turn, considers himself better than his bosses both physically and mentally ‘I can outbox, outrun, and outlift anybody in that store . . . I got more in my pinky finger than he [his merchandize manager] got in his head.’ This self-deception is obviously because of Willy’s ideas. Willy assured them when they were younger that ‘I thank Almighty God you’re built like Adonises.’ He compares them, especially Biff, to Bernard: ‘Bernard can get the best marks in school, y’understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y’understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him.’ “Biff is inheriting his father’s false values very quickly,” Goyal observes, “and in spite of Willy’s fatherly concern about his sons, they are going the same way he is going” (88). This is true, because when Willy asks Biff about Bernard’s status in school, Biff repeats Willy’s words about Charley: ‘He’s liked, but he’s not well liked.’ In addition, the last confrontation of Biff with Willy in which he accuses Willy of being responsible for spoiling his life makes clear the impact of Willy’s value-system on his boys. In A2S5, Biff tells Willy as well as Happy:

BIFF, *to Happy*: The man don’t know who we are! The man is gonna know! *To*

Willy: We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!

HAPPY: We always told the truth!

BIFF, *turning to him*: You big blow, are you the assistant buyer? You’re one of the two assistants to the assistant, aren’t you?

HAPPY: Well, I’m practically—[Biff interrupts]

BIFF: You’re practically full of it! We all are!

...

[To Willy] You know why I had no address for three months? I stole a suit in Kansas City and I was in jail.

...

WILLY: I suppose that's my fault!

BIFF: I stole myself out of every good job since high school!

WILLY: And whose fault is that?

BIFF: And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That's whose fault it is!

...

It's goddam time you heard that! I had to be boss big shot in two weeks, and I'm through with it! (131; Act II)

It becomes evident that Biff overtly accuses Willy to be responsible for their personal problems. Before Biff overtly accuses Willy, he [Biff] tries to make the problem the responsibility of the Lomans in general: 'We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!' But he changes his mind when Happy objects to his remark: 'We always told the truth.' He then tells Happy to his face that he is a big liar. He also accuses Willy to be responsible for the habit of stealing he has. He also blames Willy to have made him believe that he [Biff] can 'be boss big shot in two weeks.' It has become quite apparent that Willy's value-system has negatively influenced his boys' lives. In this regard, Goyal comments, "Willy's house of illusion begins to shake when Biff holds him responsible for this failure" (109).

3.2.3. Characters as Coherent Element

Not only is the falsity of Willy's value-system shown through the organization of events and actions, but it is also reinforced through the characters of Bernard and Charley. Besides the past events and situations, these characters work as another coherent element by the

contrast they establish to the Lomans and their beliefs. In chapter 2, we have observed that Willy's reaction to the revelation about Bernard's success as a lawyer of high standing, in A2S3, is not understood and its relevance cannot therefore be estimated. Now, however, when the play is read as a whole, such a reaction finds justification and its relevance becomes clear. After hearing Bernard's personal news, Willy cannot control his feelings: 'I'm—I'm overjoyed to see how you made the grade, Bernard, overjoyed. It's an encouraging thing to see a young man really—looks very good for Biff—very—*He breaks off, then: Bernard—He is so full of emotion, he breaks off again.*' Being familiar with Willy and Bernard's past relationship, Willy's behavior becomes clear. As stated above, Willy, in A1S2, focuses on and mocks Bernard's appearance when he comes to warn Biff to study with him. Biff also mocks him and tells Willy that in school Bernard 'is liked, but he's not well liked.' Willy then tells Biff that 'Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him.' These details now stand in sharp contrast with the adult Bernard's success. Through such contrast that Bernard's character provides, Willy's expectations, based on his beliefs in the power of personality, are shown to be false. Abbotson observes that "Miller makes it clear that being well liked has little to do with success. He uses various characters in the play to exemplify how people get ahead through hard work (Charley and Bernard) inheritance (Howard) or sheer luck (Ben)" (144). Hence, Bernard's character clearly contributes to making Willy's value-system appear to be false.

Charley's character also makes its contribution in showing the falsity of Willy's value-system by the contrast it provides to Willy's character. Goyal comments that Charley's life "stands as a contradiction to everything that Willy believes in . . . He stands as a living proof that Willy's views are wrong" (155). In A2S3, Willy tells Charley:

WILLY: I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing— [Charley interrupts]

CHARLEY: Why must everybody like you? Who liked J. P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked. (97; Act II)

It is noticed that Charley's character contrasts Willy's. Willy believes in being impressive and well liked as a basis for success. We have already seen that Willy says to Biff in A1S2 that 'Be liked and you will never want.' Charley, however, does not believe in this philosophy of Willy, as it is implied by his speech: 'Why must everybody like you?' To prove himself right, Charley gives Willy an example: 'Who liked J. P. Morgan?' Obviously, J. P. Morgan was a rich man and consequently well liked though his appearance was not impressive. "To Charley," Goyal states, "it is what you have that counts, not being well-liked" (155). Moreover, in this same sequence (A2S3), Willy asks Charley about the way he raised Bernard:

WILLY: And you never told him [Bernard] what to do, did you? You never took any interest in him.

CHARLEY: My salvation is that I never took any interest in anything. (95-96; Act II)

Another difference between Willy and Charley, as observed here, is that Charley never interferes in his son's affairs. On the contrary, Willy interferes in the smallest details of Biff's behavior, as demonstrated above, when Biff decides to pay a visit to Oliver for borrowing some money. "While Willy teaches Biff and Hap that all they need to be successful is to be well liked," Abbotson states, "Charley makes sure Bernard understands that he has a better chance to get ahead through hard work" (50). In effect, Bernard is a success while Biff is not. We know, in A1S4, that Ben assures Willy that he is raising his boys in the right way:

WILLY: Ben, my boys—can't we talk? They'd go into the jaws of hell for me, see, but I— [Ben interrupts]

BEN: William, you're being first-rate with your boys. Outstanding, manly chaps!

WILLY, *hanging on to his words*: Oh, Ben, that's good to hear! Because sometimes I'm afraid that I'm not teaching them the right kind of—Ben, how should I teach them? (52; Act I)

Charley's way of raising Bernard as well as his success sharply contrast and consequently shows the falsity of Willy's value-system.

3.2.4. Suspense as Coherent Element

3.2.4.1. Reason of Willy and Biff's Conflict

The gradual revelation of the reason for Willy and Biff's conflict is a third important coherent element in the play's structure for a double purpose. That is, it removes some of the ambiguity caused in a reading of A1 without the past time switches, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. Simultaneously, it generates suspense; and as a result, it maintains enough interest in us to follow the play's events till the end.

In Chapter 2, it is found that Biff's accusation of Willy to be not clean, his abrupt reaction to the word 'woman,' his denying responsibility for Willy's erratic behavior, Willy avoiding to answer Linda's question regarding what Biff holds against him—all these arouse our curiosity without satisfying it. In other words, we find no explanation for any of these situations within the present events alone. With the past time switches put back in place in the play, the Boston episode in A1S2 provides insights into these perplexing issues.

A1S2 presents the Boston episode that plays a significant role in helping to understand the cause which underlies Willy and Biff's conflict to a certain extent. In this sequence, while Willy confesses to Linda that people mock him, the following happens:

WILLY: I'm not dressing to advantage, maybe.

LINDA: Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY: Oh, no, Linda.

LINDA: To me you are. *Slight pause.* The handsomest.

From the darkness is heard the laughter of a woman. Willy doesn't turn to it, but it continues through Linda's lines.

LINDA: And the boys, Willy. Few men are idolized by their children the way you are.

Music is heard as behind a scrim, to the left of the house, The Woman, dimly seen, is dressing.

WILLY, *with great feeling*: You're the best there is, Linda, you're a pal, you know that? On the road—on the road I want to grab you sometimes and just kiss the life outa you.

The laughter is loud now, and he moves into a brightening area at the left, where The Woman has come from behind the scrim and is standing, putting on her hat, looking into a "mirror" and laughing.

WILLY: 'Cause I get so lonely—especially when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't making a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys. *He talks through The Woman's subsiding laughter; The Woman primps at the "mirror,"* There's so much I want to make for— [The Woman interrupts]

THE WOMAN: Me? You didn't make me, Willy. I picked you.

WILLY, *pleased*: You picked me?

THE WOMAN, *who is quite proper-looking, Willy's age*: I did. I've been sitting at that desk watching all the salesmen go by, day in, day out. But you've got such a sense of humor, and we do have such a good time together, don't we?

WILLY: Sure, sure. *He takes her in his arms*. Why do you have to go now?

THE WOMAN: It's two o'clock . . .

WILLY: No, come on in! *He pulls her*.

THE WOMAN: . . . my sisters'll be scandalized. When'll you be back?

WILLY: Oh, two weeks about. Will you come up again?

THE WOMAN: Sure thing. You do make me laugh. It's good for me. *She squeezes his arm, and kisses him*, And I think you're a wonderful man.

WILLY: You picked me, heh?

THE WOMAN: Sure. Because you're so sweet. And such a kidder.

WILLY: Well, I'll see you next time I'm in Boston.

THE WOMAN: I'll put you right through to the buyers.

WILLY, *slapping her bottom*: Right. Well, bottoms up!

THE WOMAN, *slaps him gently and laughs*: You just kill me, Willy. *He suddenly grabs her and kisses her roughly*. You kill me. And thanks for the stockings. I love a lot of stockings. Well, good night.

WILLY: Good night. And keep your pores open!

THE WOMAN: Oh, Willy!

The Woman bursts out laughing, and Linda's laughter blends in. The Woman disappears into the dark. Now the area at the kitchen table brightens. Linda is sitting where she was at the kitchen table, but now is mending a pair of her silk stockings.

LINDA: You are, Willy. The handsomest man. You've got no reason to feel that—

[Willy interrupts]

WILLY, *coming out of The Woman's dimming area and going over to Linda*: I'll

make it all up to you, Linda, I'll— [Linda interrupts]

LINDA: There's nothing to make up, dear. You're doing fine, better than— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY, *noticing her mending*: What's that?

LINDA: Just mending my stockings. They're so expensive— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY, *angrily, taking them from her*: I won't have you mending stockings in this house! Now throw them out!

Linda puts the stockings in her pocket [Ellipses are the writer's]. (37-39; Act I)

We observe that Willy is having an affair in Boston with a woman, who is obviously a secretary to one of his clients. Willy seems to get involved in this affair, because he gets 'so lonely—especially when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to.' So, it seems that the woman satisfies his need for companionship. In addition, the woman says nice words about him: 'you've got such a sense of humor . . . you're a wonderful man . . . you're so sweet . . . such a kidder . . . you just kill me, Willy,'—all of which raise his self-esteem. She also facilitates his job by setting up opportunities for him to meet the buyers: 'I'll put you right through to the buyers.' Spalding comments that this sequence: A1S2, "has its maximum dramatic effect because Willy guiltily remembers his mistress at the very moment in which he feels affection towards his wife" (20-21).

This brief demonstration of Willy's affair with the woman in Boston helps us partially understand the reason for Biff's remarks, in A1S1 and A1S5, about Willy as well as his behavior with him. A1S1 provides enough information to establish an existence of a conflict because of an unknown secret that Willy and Biff share. Linda tells Willy 'You shouldn't

have criticized him, Willy, especially after he just got off the train. You mustn't lose your temper with him.' It is obvious that Willy and Biff are in disagreement with each other. This disagreement is emphasized later in this same sequence when Biff asks Happy 'Why does Dad mock me all the time?' Moreover, when Happy tells Biff that Willy considers him 'not settled . . . still kind of up in the air,' Biff responds that 'There's one or two other things depressing him, Happy.' When Happy tries to know what Biff means, Biff replies 'Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me.' This information in A1S1 sets our suspense into motion. In other words, it makes us go on reading to know what it is that sours Willy and Biff's relationship. Biff's reply to Happy that there is one or two things worrying Willy and his attempt to escape the responsibility for Willy's behavior make it clear that the matter does not seem to be as Willy says when responding to Linda's blame that he is only concerned about Biff's livelihood: 'when the hell did I lose my temper? I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism?' Meanwhile, Biff's reply contradicts his previous question to Happy: 'Why does Dad mock me all the time?' Biff's reply to Happy, in other words, suggests that Biff knows the reason and that this reason seems to be more than money: 'Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me.' Roberts and Jacobs state that "one of the central conflicts stems from a secret known only to Willy and his son, Biff, but withheld from the rest of the characters and from us for most of the play" (1206). Though the Boston episode comes immediately after A1S1, it does not explain anything yet regarding Biff's remarks about Willy: 'There's one or two things depressing him, Happy . . . Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me,' which imply that there is something Biff holds against Willy. Spalding comments that this "sequence [A1S2] is inserted in the play at this particular moment to give the audience a piece of information about Willy which is not known to the other characters at this time," (20-21) or any other time during the whole play except to Biff as far as the Boston episode is concerned, we can add.

This information about the woman, however, has some significance for understanding A1S5. In other words, Biff's remarks about Willy as well as his own [Biff's] unusual behavior and Willy avoiding to answer Linda's question become relevant now that the play is read as a whole. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Biff, in A1S5, accuses Willy of being not clean when he asks 'Since when did you get so clean?' Biff's accusation asserts that Willy has done something immoral, and therefore Biff shows no respect to his father, otherwise he would not dare say so. Biff's behavior with Willy immediately reminds us of the Boston episode in A1S2 quoted above. In other words, we make some connection between Biff's behavior and Willy's affair with the woman. That is, though we are not given clear information that Biff knows about Willy's affair with the woman, his accusing Willy here of being not clean makes us able to link the two situations. Moreover, Linda's speech to Willy, in the Boston episode, that 'Few men are idolized by their children the way you are' strengthens our hunch, because her speech can be taken to add to the impact of the Boston affair consequences on Willy, especially when we know, in A1S1, that Willy and Biff are in disagreement with each other, as demonstrated above. Biff's unusual reaction to the word 'woman' in A1S5 when listening to Linda talk about Willy's suicide attempts as well as his response to Linda's attempt to know the reason for his conflict with Willy that he knows 'he's fake and he doesn't like anybody around who knows! . . . Just don't lay it all at my feet. It's between me and him—that's all I have to say,' as demonstrated in Chapter 2, further strengthens our hunch that there is some connection between Willy's Boston affair with the woman and Biff's behavior and attitude toward Willy. Furthermore, Willy's avoidance of Linda's question regarding the reason for his conflict with Biff that 'I'm so tired. Don't talk anymore' supports our intuition of the existence of some connection between his disagreement with Biff and his affair with the woman. When we have this background information, in A1S5, Willy and Biff's disagreement in A1S1 becomes clear. That is, Willy's and Biff's remarks in A1S1 only makes sense

after we understand the link between Willy's Boston affair with the woman and the remarks in A1S5. For instance, Biff's remarks about Willy that 'There's one or two things depressing him, Happy . . . Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me' can be taken to indirectly refer to Willy's guilt caused by his affair with the woman as the Boston affair in A1S2 and its contribution to the understanding of A1S5 help us to conclude. Thus, the Boston episode satisfies our curiosity to know the reason for Willy and Biff's conflict to such an enough extent in A1 that we are eager to go to A2. In other words, enough interest is maintained in us to go on reading.

Our curiosity to know the reason for Willy and Biff's conflict is completely satisfied in A2S4 though some allusions are provided earlier, i.e. in A2S3. The exchange, in A2S3, between Willy and the adult Bernard, referred to in Chapter 2, adds some but not enough information to reveal the secret behind Willy and Biff's conflict. In this episode, we know that Biff failed math in high school and was ready to repeat it that summer. But after his visit to Boston to meet Willy, he changed his mind and quit school. When Bernard asks Willy 'Did he have a talk with you, then?' Willy, *'With a strong edge of resentment,'* answers 'Yeah, he came to Boston. What about it?' When Bernard asks Willy 'What happened in Boston, Willy?' *'Willy looks at him as at an intruder'* and refuses to answer as he gets angry. The word 'Boston' here attracts our attention, for Boston is the city where Willy used to meet the woman he had an affair with. This and the fact that Willy gets angry and refuses to answer when Bernard asks him about Biff's visit to Boston support our conclusion to some extent that the reason for Willy and Biff's conflict can be due to Willy's affair with the woman in Boston. Moreover, Bernard's news of Biff's failing math and the woman's laugh at the end of this same sequence: A2S3, support this conclusion. All this information, at the same time, keeps the suspense in motion. Thus, our interest is still maintained till now.

As far as the reason behind Willy and Biff's conflict is concerned, A2S4 is the revealing sequence. It is the sequence "that would understandably issue last out of Willy's recollections since it is the one memory he has tried hardest to repress," to quote Benjamin Nelson's words (qtd. in Goyal 164). Here, we find the confirmation that Willy and Biff's conflict is due to the affair Willy had with the woman in Boston. All the allusions to the conflict in A1S1, A1S5, and A2S3 culminate in the full revelation in A2S4. In this sequence: A2S4, dramatizing Willy's memory of the Boston affair, Biff finds out Willy having an affair with a woman in Boston. He comes to Boston to make Willy talk to the math teacher to change his mark to a pass mark, because, as he tells Willy "I'm sure he'll change it for you!" When he discovers him with the woman, however, he changes his mind about Willy. When Willy tells him "Never mind! He's going to give you those points. I'll see to it," Biff responds "He wouldn't listen to you." Furthermore, when he discovers Willy giving the woman his "Moma's stocking," he addresses Willy "You fake! You phony little fake! You fake! *Overcome, he turns quickly and weeping fully goes out with his suitcase. Willy is left on the floor on his knees*" (118-21; Act II). Now our curiosity regarding the reason or secret for Willy and Biff's conflict is completely satisfied as the suspense comes to an end with this revelation.

3.2.4.2. Willy's and Biff's Visits to Howard and Oliver

Before the end of A1, Biff decides to borrow some money from Oliver, an old employer of his, and Willy decides to go to his boss, Howard, to ask him for an office work instead of a road one. This is so to both create hope in an utterly hopeless situation and produce some suspense and therefore maintain our interest in A2 till it is time to know the reason for Willy and Biff's conflict, because the references to the reason behind Willy and Biff's conflict are held up in A1S5 and appear only near the end of A2S3. During this temporary hold-up of all references to the conflict, the two visits Willy and Biff pay to Howard and Oliver respectively take over. In A1S5, Biff tells Willy that Oliver "always said he'd stake me. I'd like to go into

business, so maybe I can take him up on it . . . I'll see Oliver tomorrow" (62-64; Act I). Then, as recapitulated above, Willy instructs Biff as to how he should behave when he meets Oliver. Moreover, when Linda asks Willy "Will you ask Howard to let you work in New York?" Willy replies "First thing in the morning. Everything'll be all right" (68; Act I). This information about Willy and Biff stimulates us to read through to A2 by creating hope and suspense for the results of their visits. A2 opens with Willy preparing himself to go to see Howard while Biff has already gone to meet Oliver. In A2S1, Linda tells Willy "Biff was very changed this morning. His whole attitude seemed to be hopeful. He couldn't wait to get down-town to see Oliver." Willy is no less optimistic than Biff. He tells Linda "I'm gonna knock Howard for a loop, kid. I'll get an advance, and I'll come home with a New York job. Goddammit, now I'm gonna do it!" (71-74; Act II).

The hope and suspense this information creates maintain our interest for only some time. Willy's argument with Howard culminates in Willy being fired. Howard tells Willy "I don't want you to represent us. I've been meaning to tell you for a long time now . . . Oh, yeah. Whenever you can this week, stop by and drop off the samples" (83-84; Act II). Biff is no luckier than Willy in his visit to Oliver. When he meets Happy in the restaurant episode in A2S3, he tells him "Well, I waited six hours for him, see? All day. Kept sending my name in . . . but no soap . . . Finally, about five o'clock, he comes out. Didn't remember who I was or anything. I felt like such an idiot, Hap" (104; Act II). In short, among their other functions in the play, these two visits are used as coherent elements in such a way that they create hope and suspense, and consequently they help maintain our interest in the play.

3.3. TABLE OF PRESENT AND PAST EVENTS TOGETHER SUMMARIZING CHAPTER ARGUMENT

The interaction between the present and past events shows Willy's value-system and its falsity. How his value-system, however, affected Willy himself will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. In this chapter, the falsity of Willy's value-system is discussed in its negative impact on the lives of Willy's boys, Biff and Happy. This discussion is summarized in the table below: fig. 5. This table retains two columns from fig. 3: the columns headed the "Present Sequences" and the "Topic of Discourse." However, the topics of discourse included in this figure: fig. 5, are just those which lack in background information necessary for understanding the focus of these topics. The third and fourth columns headed the "Past Time Switches" and the "Topic of Discourse," retained from fig. 4., fill in the background information lacking in the associated (Present Topics). The last column headed "Context of Situation Parameters" describes the parameter in (Past Topics) which Completes the unknown background information in the (Present Topics).

| Present Sequences | Topic of Discourse: (Present Topics) | Past Time Switches | Topic of Discourse: (Past Topics) | Context of Situation Completing Parameters | |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| A1S1 | Biff's unsettledness | A1S2 | A punching bag Willy bought for the boys | -Willy's value-system which provides the causative factors underlying Willy's suicide and Biff's accusation of Willy, as well -Causative factors underlying Biff's and Happy's character flaws: Instilling the value of being well liked -The dilemma of failure: Biff's success in high school | |
| | Willy's relationship with Biff | | A football Biff stole from his school locker room | | |
| | Biff's and Happy's personal problems | | Willy's dream of business success and of being well liked | | |
| | Biff's idea to borrow some money from Oliver | | Willy's popularity at work (as he tells it) | | |
| A1S3 | Willy's regret for not going to Alaska with Ben | | Glamor of Biff's captaincy at school | Biff's study and possibility of failing math | Willy's value-system: Importance of personal attractiveness |
| | | | Biff's and Happy's personal attractiveness | Money that should be paid for the appliances bought on installment | Willy's low sales level |
| | | | Willy's appearance | Willy's personality | Willy's value-system: Importance of personal attractiveness |
| | | | Meeting in Boston again | Meeting in Boston again | Hints at the causative factors underlying Willy and Biff's conflict, i.e. adultery |
| | | | An exam Biff has to study for | Willy's personality | Willy overindulges his sons and abdicates his parental responsibilities |
| | | | Biff's negative behavior at school | Meeting in Boston again | Willy overindulges his sons and abdicates his parental responsibilities |
| A1S5 | Willy and Biff's disagreement | A1S4 | Time when Ben left home to follow his father | Willy's value-system: Willy's role model | |
| | Willy's suicide attempts | | Ben's success story | | |
| | Biff's idea to borrow some money from Oliver | | Willy and Ben's father | Causative factors underlying Biff's and Happy's character flaws, i.e. Willy's instigation of negative behavior Willy's value-system: Willy's role model | |
| | Willy's instructions to Biff as to how to behave when meeting Oliver | | Biff and Happy's stealing from a construction site | | |
| | | | Willy's way of bringing up his boys | | Willy's way of bringing up his boys |

| Present sequences | Topic of Discourse: (Present Topics) | Past time switches | Topic of Discourse: (Past Topics) | Context of Situation Completing Parameters |
|----------------------|--|---------------------------|---|---|
| A2S1 | Biff's appearance, i.e. clothes, when leaving in the morning | A2S2 | Ben's job offer to Willy | The dilemma of choice |
| | | | Biff's success potential | The dilemma of failure: Biff's success in high school |
| | | | The Ebbets Field football match | |
| | | A2S4 | A knock at their door | Causative factors underlying Willy and Biff's conflict, i.e. adultery |
| Willy's personality | | | | |
| Biff's flunking math | | | | |
| The math teacher | | | | |
| A2S3 | Bernard's personal news | The Woman in Willy's room | Causative factors underlying Willy's behavior with Bernard, i.e. adultery uncovered | |
| | Biff's quitting high school | | | |
| A2S5 ⁶ | Feasibility of Willy's decision to commit suicide by crashing his car expecting Biff to receive the twenty thousand dollar claim | | | |
| | Biff's confession of being ordinary, i.e. Biff's enlightenment | | | |
| | Biff's accusation to Willy of being responsible for his [Biff's] problems | | | |
| | Willy's decision to commit suicide | | | |

Fig. 5. Table of present and past events together

⁶ The past time switches listed above provide a summative context for the final present sequence entirely.

4 Impact of Willy's Value-System on Willy

4.1. Self-Defeating Dream of Success

4.1.1. Loss of Love and Respect

4.1.2. Loss of Peace of Mind

4.2. Troublesome Sense of Possession

4.3. Troublesome Sense of Achievement

4.4. Agonizing Guilt

4.5. Oversized Self-Image

4.5.1. Denying Facts

4.5.2. Claiming Importance and Admiration

4.5.3. Admiring Salesmanship

4.5.4. Disdaining Manual Work

4.6. Reality Vs. Illusion

It has been argued in chapter 2 that a reading of the present events highlights issues that remain unresolved, because they fail to reveal the factors that reasonably lead to them. These issues are resolved in the past time switches, because the past events provide answers to the questions that a reading of present events gives rise to. That is, the past time switches contain the elements which make the play coherent. This significance of the past time switches has been demonstrated in chapter 3. More significantly, it is only in the past time switches that there are references to Willy's value-system.

All of Willy's ideas about success and parenthood are found in the past time switches. The past episode in which young Bernard reminds Biff to study math contains the reference to the importance of personal attractiveness and of being well liked to professional success. In the same episode, we see Willy's ideas about fatherhood: of the need for a father to instruct and guide his children into adulthood, though also at the same time overindulging them and overlooking, and encouraging unethical conduct.

There are two ways in which we may respond to the past time switches. They may be understood to be happy memories which relieve Willy's acute depression and anxiety in the present (Pradhan 120; Spalding 9; Goyal 141; Campbell 17) or as nagging thoughts of guilt, of his sense of failure as a husband, a father, a friend, and as a salesman. This is to say that the past time switches dynamically interact with events in the present to express the attitude of the dramatist to the drama of Willy Loman and his family. In his introduction to The Collected Plays, Miller states that in Death of a Salesman "I wished to speak of the *Salesman* most precisely as I felt about him . . ." (24). He also comments that Willy Loman is a victim of his severe limitation of self-awareness (35). As far as the play's ideas are concerned, he writes that "The play grew from single images." Among these images are "The image of the son's hard, public eye upon you, no longer swept by your myth . . . Above all, perhaps, the image of . . . a need to leave a thumbprint somewhere on the world. A need for immortality . . ."

the image of a man making something with his hands . . .” (29-30). Even though Miller made these comments about the play and about Willy after the play was written, they are consistent with the dynamic interaction of the past time switches and present events in the play.

We can therefore conclude that the dialectical sequencing of Willy’s past in his present determines the attitudinal rubric of Death of a Salesman. The sum total of Willy’s value-system, as it is laid bare in the past time switches, unleashes forces that work against Willy himself and ultimately leads him to self-destruction. These attitudinal underpinnings are identified and described in the rest of this chapter. It is shown that Willy’s ideas about success, about parenthood, and to the unethical and moral failures lead him to self-defeating dream of success, troublesome senses of possessing and achieving, agonizing guilt, an oversized self-image, and clashes with reality.

4.1. SELF-DEFEATING DREAM OF SUCCESS

Willy’s dream of success, i.e. getting rich and being well liked, is the main dream and an overpowering antagonist in that it is his big source of confusion, depression, and abnormal behavior. In his search for this dream, Willy has indulged in an affair with a woman in Boston, that has twofold negative consequences in his life: loss of Biff’s love and respect and loss of peace of mind. His affair with this woman was out of business interest. She would facilitate his business deals by introducing him to the buyers, as it is indicated by her speech with him in A1S2: “I’ll put you right through to the buyers” (39; Act I). Concerning this, Campbell observes, “Willy sees her [the woman] as a reinforcing agent . . . to his ability to do things at which men are supposed to excel—such as selling” (23). Willy used to meet this woman when he was in Boston:

THE WOMAN: . . . When’ll you be back?

WILLY: Oh, two weeks about. Will you come up again?

THE WOMAN: Sure thing. You do make me laugh. It's good for me. *She squeezes his arm, kisses him.*

...

WILLY: Well, I'll see you next time I'm in Boston. (39; Act I)

This shows that they are familiar with each other which means that they know each other for sometime. That is, this is not their first time to meet though this Boston affair is presented for the first time in the play. It is also noticed that they meet each other every time Willy is in Boston.

4.1.1. Loss of Love and Respect

Biff's discovery of this affair causes Willy to lose his son's love and respect. "The affair that Willy had and Biff discovered," Jeffares observes, "has left a deep impression on the latter, and has altered the relationship between father and son" (146). Biff treats Willy in a way that shows he does not respect him anymore. When Willy asks Biff not to "curse in this house," Biff turns to Willy, as he is "*starting . . . for the stairs,*" and says "Since when did you get so clean?" (63; Act I). Biff's reaction to Willy's order denotes that he does not have any love or respect for his father, otherwise he would not dare say so. In fact, he has lost respect for his father since the moment he found him with the woman in Boston. When he realized that his father was betraying his mother, he called Willy:

You fake! You phony little fake! You fake! *Overcome, he turns quickly and weeping fully goes out with his suitcase. Willy is left on the floor on his knees.*

(121; Act II)

We can notice that this was the incident that made Biff lose trust in Willy. In this regard, Abbotson states, "It was the discovery of Willy's adultery, and in his [Biff's] young eyes, the betrayal of his mother which it signified, that originally shattered Biff's capacity to dream, [and] turned him against his father . . ." (41).

4.1.2. Loss of Peace of Mind

Willy's affair with the woman in Boston, however, does not only deprive him of his son's love and respect, but it also deprives him of peace of mind. Whenever he sees Linda mending stockings, he feels guilty, because he used to give Linda's stockings to his woman in Boston:

WILLY, *noticing her mending*: What's that?

LINDA: Just mending my stockings. They're so expensive— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY, *angrily, taking them from her*: I won't have you mending stockings in this house! Now throw them out! (39; Act I)

Moreover, at the beginning of A2, while Linda saying goodbye to him as he is going to meet Howard,

She kisses him, and a silk stocking is seen hanging from her hand. Willy notices it.

WILLY: Will you stop mending stockings? At least while I'm in the house. It gets me nervous. I can't tell you. Please. (75; Act II)

We observe that Willy gets nervous when he sees the stockings in Linda's hands. This indicates that he is sorry about what he was doing: giving Linda's stockings to the woman in Boston, and does not want anything that reminds him of his past relationship with the woman, otherwise he would not mind the stockings at all. Spalding, in this regard, observes that "Even at this moment of hope [the prospect of getting a new job], Willy is reminded of his unfaithfulness when Linda kisses him goodbye, carrying a stocking that she has been mending" (25). It is not just the stockings in Linda's hands that make Willy feel guilty, it is also Linda herself as she shows him her real love. When Linda tries to comfort Willy by telling him that he is the most handsome man in the world for her, he remembers the woman in Boston, as she also used to say nice words about him. To Campbell, one reason Willy has become involved with the woman is "he is flattered by her interest in him" (23). But Willy feels the difference between Linda's true words and the woman's false ones. He tells Linda, as he is "*coming out*

of The Woman's dimming area and going over to Linda: I'll make it all up to you, Linda . . ." (39; Act I). We notice that his speech here shows that he regrets his affair with the woman and that he did injustice to Linda by having an affair with another woman behind her back. Therefore, he wants to compensate Linda for betraying her. While music is heard and the figure of the woman is dimly seen, Willy tells Linda, "*with great feeling: You're the best there is, Linda . . .*" (38; Act I). It is observed that the comparison is in favor of Linda over the woman, which indicates that Willy wants to compensate Linda even if she does not know what he did. His behavior toward Linda highlights the fact that he is not mentally comfortable; and this fact is strengthened at the end of the play when Willy refuses to get inside the house with Biff saying "No, no, I don't want to see her [Linda]" (128; Act II). In other words, he has no peace of mind which is the outcome of his affair with the woman in Boston.

Biff's failure, which is due to his quitting school and which is also traced to his discovery of his father's affair with the woman, also deprives Willy of peace of mind. "There is no doubt of Willy's love for his family," Brian Parker observes, "particularly for his son, Biff. It is the betrayal of this loyalty which ruins Willy's life . . ." (qtd. in Goyal 163). Willy is sure that the Boston affair is the reason of Biff's failure and so, he blames himself for it. His speech with the adult Bernard, in A2S3, in which Bernard attempts to find out the reason for Biff's quitting school, shows clearly that Willy suffers from the consequences of his Boston affair. His reactions to Bernard's question about the Boston visit explains his uneasiness when this topic is mentioned:

BENARNAD: . . . I got the idea that he'd gone up to New England to see you. Did he have a talk with you, then?

Willy stares in silence

BERNARD: Willy?

WILLY, *with a strong edge of resentment in his voice*: Yeah, he came to Boston.

What about it?

BERNARD: . . . what happened in Boston, Willy?

Willy looks at him as at an intruder.

BERNARD: I just bring it up because you asked me.

WILLY, *angrily*: Nothing. What do you mean, “What happened?” What’s that got to do with anything? (94; Act II)

We notice that Willy is resentful about Bernard’s question to know what happened between him [Willy] and Biff in Boston. He does not satisfy Bernard’s curiosity. For, what happened in Boston when Biff visited him is so private that they both do not talk about it again. We only know about it from Willy as he mentally relives his past. Willy does not expect that Bernard knows about Biff’s Boston visit. That is why the situation is turned on Willy; that is, instead of Willy knowing the story of Biff’s failure from Bernard, as he was a school friend of Biff, he becomes in a position to explain. Had Willy known that Bernard knows about Biff’s visit to Boston, he would not discuss Biff’s problem with him. In this regard, Campbell observes:

[Willy] pathetically asks Bernard for advice. Bernard rejects the role of advice-giver, but focuses on the more important question of Biff’s high school failure. The encounter between Biff and Willy in Boston was centered around his affair with Miss Francis [The Woman]. In light of this, Willy’s failure as a husband and father is linked to Biff’s inability to cope with summer school. (40)

The Boston affair, as we notice, justifies Willy’s contradiction: first he asks Bernard and after sometime gets angry with him.

4.2. TROUBLESOME SENSE OF POSSESSION

Willy's self-indulgence in pursuit of his dream of success is just one of the many sources of his confusion, depression, and abnormal behavior. Another source, in this regard, is the consequences of Willy's sense of possession, i.e. the house appliances installments such as the refrigerator etc., and his car. When Willy and Linda of the past calculate the money they have to pay for the car expenses, the house appliances, and the house mortgage, Willy gets irritated and confused. When Linda, for instance, mentions that they need some money for the refrigerator, the washing machine, the vacuum cleaner as well as for the Chevrolet's carburetor, Willy is not at ease discussing these things:

LINDA: Well, on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator— [Willy interrupts]

WILLY: Why sixteen?

...

But it's brand new.

...

... That goddam Chevrolet, they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car!

...

A hundred and twenty dollars! My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do! (35-36; Act I)

It is noticed that these due payments remind Willy that he is not progressing and hence a source of anxiety. Abbotson comments that "The Lomans try to keep up—with a refrigerator, a vacuum, and a new car—but they find themselves in a constant state of worry that they may not be able to meet all their payments" (49). Moreover, in the present, such problems continue to exist. Willy is very upset, because he always has problems with everything he has. He tells Linda:

. . . Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it's broken!
I'm always in a race with the junkyard! I just finished paying for the car and it's
on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac. (73; Act II)

One can notice that while Willy dreams of success, these things continue to add up to his sufferings in that they require money in a time of hardship. They spoil his dream of success by making him feel that he is unable to deal with them as trivial necessities, let alone his big dream of success. His speech shows that in his whole life, he has not owned something while it is still new, and that everything he owns after paying it off is not in a good condition. It also shows that these things are always a source of anxiety to him, hence 'I'm always in a race' is uttered. Murphy and Abbotson comment that the Lomans "have surrounded themselves with a plethora of things above and beyond the mere necessities of life . . . The drive to keep up with your neighbor becomes a spur to consumption and ensures that no one is ever satisfied, as all are ever hungry for more" (76).

4.3. TROUBLESOME SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Willy's dream of leaving something to be remembered by is not a less demanding dream. It is equally powerful and is not easy to achieve and thus another source of confusion, depression, and abnormal behavior. This dream is foreshadowed right at the beginning of the play: A1S1, when Willy, as he talks about his house which he nearly owns but his sons are not in and as Linda, in this regard, comments that this is the nature of life, comments that "No, no, some people—some people accomplish something." We observe that Willy is preoccupied with the idea that he should achieve something. In A1S1, Willy also mentions that "The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard" (15-17; Act I), which can be indicative of the difficulty of his dream of leaving something to his family. Willy "plants seeds just as he plants hopes:" Abbotson observes, "both will die and never come to fruition" (50). Moreover, in A2S3, Willy tells Charley, "Funny, y'know? After all the highways, and

the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive” (98; Act II). This shows that Willy has been comparing between his value alive and dead and has found that he would be more valuable dead than alive. One can notice that Willy’s mind cannot forget that he should leave or achieve something in his life and hence his mind is overactive. Furthermore, in A2S5, Willy is seen trying to plant vegetables. Here, he says, as he is imagining Ben, “A man can’t go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something.” Stating this, i.e. something should be achieved, at the beginning of the play: A1S1, nearly in the middle: A2S3, and at the end: A2S5, implies that such a dream occupies some space in Willy’s mind and is also a source of anxiety in that it is not easy to achieve. At the end, Willy decides to put an end to such a powerful dream by considering the twenty-thousand-dollar insurance money which would be gotten by committing suicide. This amount of money, to Willy, is a practical idea to achieve this dream, as it is indicated by his speech while talking to the imaginary Ben: “Remember, it’s a guaranteed twenty-thousand-dollar proposition” (125-26; Act II).

4.4. AGONIZING GUILT

Closely related to Willy’s dream of achieving something as well as to his dream of success is his hope for Biff’s success. In other words, Willy’s hope for Biff’s success is also a source of confusion, depression, and abnormal behavior. Willy is determined not only to find Biff a selling job but also to make him successful in no time, as manifested in his speech at the outset of the play:

With pity and resolve: I’ll see him in the morning; I’ll have a nice talk with him. I’ll get him a job selling. He could be big in no time. My God! Remember how they used to follow him around in high school? When he smiled at one of them their faces lit up. (16; Act I)

We notice that what Willy relies on for Biff's success is Biff's personality. His speech highlights the fact that Biff was successful in high school but is not now. It also shows that Biff's personal attractiveness appealed to the people in high school. To Willy, it logically follows that if Biff's personal attractiveness won him success once in high school, it is going to win him success once again; and this justifies his resolution. Willy's problem with this hope, however, is that it is difficult to achieve. Its difficulty springs from Willy's inability to forget what Biff knows about him as well as to see that Biff is disillusioned with his [Willy's] dream of success. What Willy believes in is that Biff's failure is a deliberate act of spite. In the last confrontation between them, Willy tells Biff:

I want you to know, on the train, in the mountains, in the valleys, wherever you go,
that you cut down your life for spite!

. . .

Spite, spite, is the word of your undoing!

. . .

Sinking into a chair at the table, with full accusation: You're trying to put a knife
in me—don't think I don't know what you're doing! (129-30; Act II)

It is observed that Willy thinks that Biff does not want to succeed deliberately. Willy is alluding to the secret Biff holds against him: his affair with the woman in Boston. Pradhan observes that “perhaps the more painful cause of his [Willy's] guilt is his feeling that he has failed his children . . . [A]s Willy sees his son [Biff] go down in the world over the years, his burden and his responsibility in his son's failure become almost unbearable” (67-68). One can also notice that the phrase ‘put a knife in me’ which Willy uses could be indicative of the unbearable burden Biff's behavior has on Willy. Willy thinks that Biff tries to upset him. He also tells Biff “You vengeful, spiteful mut.” This implies that he is convinced that Biff does mean to be a failure just to upset and punish him for the affair he had with the woman. What

adds to his uneasiness, in this regard, is his inability to believe Biff who tells him that “There’s no spite in it anymore. I’m just what I am, that’s all.” In other words, Biff is disillusioned with Willy’s dream of success, but Willy refuses to accept such a fact. Despite Biff’s attempt to make Willy see the reality: “I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you,” Willy is determined that “The door of your life is wide open!” (132-33; Act II).

4.5. OVERSIZED SELF-IMAGE

Willy’s dreams are some of the forces working against him in that they are his source of confusion, depression, and abnormal behavior. That is, they are not the only forces working against him. His oversized self-image is also another force working against him. It is a barrier to his accepting the reality and hence his failure to achieve success. In other words, Willy is so obsessed with the idea that he is of respectable origin, important, and well liked that he cannot think of himself otherwise. Bigsby observes that Willy is “desperately clinging to the conviction that he is ‘well liked’ because this is the only valuation which he can accept as having any value” (125).

4.5.1. Denying Facts

To maintain his self-image, Willy adopts certain behavior. He resists the fact that he is a common man. In the last confrontation between him and Biff, he refuses to accept this fact from Biff: “Pop! I’m a dime a dozen, and so are you!” In reaction to this, Willy, “*turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst,*” says “I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!” (132; Act II). Here, Willy does not admit that they are common people and responds by mentioning their names indicating that they are of a higher social status. It is important to notice that this confrontation between Willy and Biff is the last one after which Willy commits suicide. It shows that Willy does not give up the belief that he comes from a respectable family till the end. When he hears Biff, in A1S5, saying that the Lomans should be carpenters, he replies “Even your grandfather was better than a carpenter” (61; Act I).

“Willy represses these [his own and his son’s] physical urges . . .” Goyal comments, “Thus Willy’s dreams make him aim higher than his contentment demands” (194). To confirm his belief in being of great origin, Willy, in A1S4, asks his brother, Ben, to tell his boys “the kind of stock they spring from.” Ben narrates:

BEN: Father was a very great and a very wild-hearted man. We would start in Boston, and he’d toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he’d drive the team right across the country, through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western states. And we’d stop in the towns and sell the flutes that he’d made on the way. Great inventor, Father. With one gadget he made in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime.

WILLY: That’s just the way I’m bringing them up, Ben—rugged, well liked, all-around. (49; Act I)

One can observe that Ben uses the phrases ‘a very great and a very wild-hearted man,’ ‘Great inventor,’ and ‘more in a week than . . . in a lifetime’ to impress Willy. Willy is impressed and believes that he has already been bringing up his boys the same way. So, the belief that he is of a highly respectable family prevents him to admit the fact that he is a common man as Biff does.

4.5.2. Claiming Importance and Admiration

Willy also lies and pretends to maintain that he is important and well liked. He tells Linda at the beginning of the play: A1S1, that “They don’t need me in New York. I’m the New England man. I’m vital in New England.” Here, Willy pretends that he is very important in New England. A moment later, he tells Linda:

If old man Wagner was alive I’d a been in charge of New York now! That man was a prince, he was a masterful man. But that boy of his, that Howard, he don’t

appreciated. When I went north the first time, the Wagner company didn't know where New England was. (14; Act I)

One can see that Willy pretends to be important. He can neither prove that the old Wagner would have made him in charge of New York nor could his saying that he opened new territories to the Wagner company be proved. If Linda believes him, Howard does not. In A2S1, Willy tries to convince Howard to give him a New York job by telling him that he used to earn a lot of money with his father:

WILLY: . . . Now pay attention. Your father—in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

HOWARD, *impatiently*: Now, Willy, you never averaged— [Willy interrupts]

Willy lies, as it is observed, to influence Howard to give him a job in New York, but, unlike Linda, Howard does not believe him and confronts him with the truth that he 'never' earned that amount of money. Howard's speech can be taken for the truth, because, as his employer, Howard knows Willy's sales history. Even in a critical situation like this with Howard, Willy's self-image is predominant. He, "*banging his hand on the desk*," tells Howard:

. . . And your father came to me—or rather, I was in the office here—it was right this desk—and he put his hand on my shoulder— [Howard interrupts] (82; Act II)

We notice that Willy says 'your father came to me' which shows that he is a person people come to, not that he goes to them. So, instead of saying: or rather I came to him, as it is expected in such a situation after he realizes that he has gone far by saying 'your father came to me,' Willy says 'or rather I was in the office here.' This indicates he still thinks highly of himself. This is so to show his importance to Howard as he does with Linda. Furthermore, Willy boasts before his boys that he is very important and well liked. When Biff asks him where he went in one of his business trips, Willy replies:

WILLY: Well, I got on the road, and I went north to Providence. Met the Mayor.

BIFF: The Mayor of Providence!

WILLY: He was sitting in the hotel lobby.

BIFF: What'd he say?

WILLY: He said, "Morning!" And I said, "You got a fine city here Mayor." And then he had coffee with me. (31; Act I)

It should be noticed that it was the Mayor who said 'Morning' first, not Willy; and that it was also the Mayor who had coffee with Willy, not the opposite. Like the situation with Howard, this one confirms the fact that Willy presumes to be an important personality in the society at large. Meeting the Mayor by itself shows that Willy is very important and well liked, because the Mayor is not accessible to anyone, let alone the Mayor having coffee with him. In this same conversation with the boys, Willy tells them that "they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people." This is to impress his boys. Moreover, Willy tells his boys that one day he would have his own business. When Biff questions "Like Uncle Charley, heh?" he replies "Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not—liked. He's liked, but he's not—well liked" (30; Act I). Willy's reply, as observed, makes a difference between himself and Charley. That is, he is more well liked.

These lies and pretensions deprive Willy from facing and coping with reality. They allow no space in Willy's mind for reality. He adopts them to feel important and well liked but no avail. Willy confesses to Charley that "I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing— [Charley interrupts]" (97; Act II). If Willy was not interrupted, he would say something like: that nothing would prevent him from what he wants. For, he always believes that "Be liked and you will never want" (33; Act I). It should be noticed that Willy says 'I always felt' which means that he always depended on feeling, not on reason. His confession to Charley denotes that he could not help thinking depending on feelings, and hence his self-image is against him.

4.5.3. Admiring Salesmanship

Not only does Willy's oversized self-image force him to lie and pretend and consequently deprive him from facing and coping with reality, but it also makes him underestimate manual work and prefer the sales profession. At the outset of the play, Willy responds to Linda's comment that Biff could not find himself by saying 'How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farmland?' This response indicates that he believes that working in a farm is not the road to success in life; and so, Biff was mistaken to choose a farm job. He also belittles manual jobs such as carpentry as it is indicated by his saying to Biff 'Even your grandfather was better than a carpenter.' Furthermore, when Willy wants to find a job for Biff, he thinks of selling: 'I'll get him a job selling.' Above all, Willy has decided from the beginning of his career that no other career is better than the sales profession. From Willy's speech to Howard in A2S1 about Dave Singleman, we observe that Willy uses the superlative degree of the adjective 'great' to describe the sales profession: 'I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want' (emphasis added). He does not say, for example, 'I realized that selling was one of the greatest careers a man could want,' which might have left the door open for Willy to change or modify his mind later in his life if he discovered that his choice for the sales profession was wrong or that his dreams were unlikely to come true. What he did then was to have no chance for a change or modification of either his dreams or profession. In other words, he never considered the likely consequences of his choice when he decided to be a salesman. It is also noticed that Willy uses the phrase 'a man' which means 'anyone' regardless of anything, i.e. skills, ambitions, willingness, etc, for example.

4.5.4. Disdaining Manual Work

Preferring the sales profession to manual work, Willy neglects his natural ability of working with his hands, which could have made him a successful carpenter or builder. Gould observes that “Willy Loman might have been a superb craftsman, but he is forced by the demands of a mechanized world to run pantingly in search of the will-o’-the-wisp, financial wealth” (252-53). In the requiem, Linda makes it clear that “He [Willy] was so wonderful with his hands” (138; Requiem). Willy himself exhibits his natural talent of working with hands more than once in the play. He tells young Biff:

. . . Biff, first thing we gotta do when we get time is clip that big branch over the house. Afraid it’s gonna fall in a storm and hit the roof. Tell you what. We get a rope and sling her around, and then we climb up there with a couple of saws and take her down. (28; Act I)

We notice that Willy’s description of the way the tree branch can be cut down highlights the fact that he has an experience with such manual work. What makes his speech believable is what he shows Charley in A1S3:

WILLY: Did you see the ceiling I put up in the living-room?

CHARLY: Yeah, that’s a piece of work. To put up a ceiling is a mystery to me.

How do you do it? (44; Act I)

It is observed that Charley credits Willy with the skill he has in putting up the ceiling. It should be noticed that what is difficult for Charley is not so for Willy. Willy, then, boasts before Charley, in the same exchange, to the extent that he becomes impolite: “A man who can’t handle tools is not a man. You’re disgusting.” Willy’s skill in putting up the ceiling is also reinforced, in A1S5, when he asks Biff “If you get tired hanging around tomorrow, paint the ceiling I put up in the living-room” (62; Act I). Furthermore, his talent of working with his hands is also demonstrated in A2S1, when he talks to Linda before going to Howard:

. . . I'd build a little house. 'Cause I got so many fine tools, all I'd need would be a little lumber and some peace of mind.

. . .

I could build two guest houses, so they'd [Biff and Happy] both come. (72; Act II)

One can notice here that Willy has everything except one thing to become a successful builder. He has the natural talent or skill to build houses and has 'so many fine tools,' that is, things he needs for building, but he cannot see the value of the talent he has. In a word, Willy's self-image, as observed, prevents him from realizing who he and his sons are, leads him to self-deception, and makes him unaware of the value of his natural talent of working with his hands; and thus his failure to achieve something.

4.6. REALITY VS. ILLUSION

Willy's dreams and self-image, however, are not the only forces working against him in achieving success. Reality represented by society is also another force working against him. Willy's hope for getting a New York job and a salary is destroyed by reality in his encounter with Howard. Howard, in A2S1, tells him that "there just is no spot here for you" (80; Act II). Thus, Willy's thirty-five-year service with Wagner's company ends in vain. When Willy is seen to be of no use to the company, he is fired. He expects that he would be rewarded a New York job and a salary after his long service with the company, but when he faces the reality, his hope is shattered.

Willy's dream of establishing his own business also crashes with reality. Willy is unable to achieve his dream of having his own business as he tells his boys:

. . . Tell you a secret, boys. Don't breathe it to a soul. Someday I'll have my own business, and I'll never have to leave home any more. (30; Act I)

He also tells Linda "You wait, kid, before it's all over we're gonna get a little place out in the country, and I'll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens . . . [Linda interrupts] (72; Act

II). We notice that Willy dreams of establishing his own business one day and of having a house of his own in the countryside where he would be more comfortable. But he is unable to achieve this dream, because business is slowing down as it is indicated by his speech to Linda: “My God, if business don’t pick up I don’t know what I’m gonna do!” (37; Act I).

Willy’s dream of popularity, i.e. being well liked, also collides with reality. He notices that people do not like him, as manifested in his talk to Linda: “You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don’t seem to take to me” (36; Act I). It should be noticed that when Willy chose the sales profession he wanted to be loved as he tells Howard in A2S1:

. . . I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. ’Cause what could be more satisfying than to be . . . remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? (81; Act II)

Willy’s discovery that ‘people don’t seem to take to me’ is not easy on him. For, it works against his wish. What is more annoying to Willy is what he tells Linda about, in A1S2, when he was in one of his business trips:

. . . a salesman I know, as I was going in to see the buyer I heard him say something about—walrus. And I—I cracked him right across the face. I won’t take that. I simply will not take that. But they do laugh at me. I know that. (37; Act I)

Here, Willy was made fun of. This mockery is so degrading to him that he could not stand it. Thus, his dream of popularity collides with reality, too.

Finally, his expectation of a massive funeral also collides with reality. He expects to have an impressive funeral when he dies. In A2S5, he tells the imaginary Ben (as he is hallucinating):

. . . the funeral—*straightening up*: Ben, that funeral will be massive! They’ll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates—that boy [Biff] will be thunder-stuck, Ben, because he

never realized—I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey—I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben! He's in for a shock, that boy! (126; Act II)

We can notice that Willy dreams of a funeral like that of Dave Singleman which he tells Howard about in A2S1: “when he [Singleman] died hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral” (81; Act II). In Willy’s funeral, however, only five people attend namely, Linda, Biff, Happy, Charley, and Bernard. Linda gets surprised and wonders “Why didn’t anyone come? . . . But where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him.” Charley responds to her wonder saying “Naa. It’s a rough world, Linda. They wouldn’t blame him” (139; Requiem).

5 Conclusion

In this study, we observe that Death of a Salesman is a highly structured literary work notwithstanding Miller's assertion, quoted in section 1.3.1. of this study, that the play's structure grew out of Willy's mode of thinking. The play consists of two acts and a requiem. Its story introduces broadly two times: the past in Willy's mind, which is only seen by the audience-readers, and the present as it appears to the people around Willy, who do not know what is going on in his mind. Each Act contains five sequences. In each Act, the events of the first and fifth sequences happen in the present time; those of the second and fourth ones take place in the past; and in the third sequence, the present and past events overlap. In other words, both acts contain the same number of sequences: five sequences each, and the same chronological distribution of present and past events: time switches. The play's events: present and past, however, are not presented chronologically but rather logically.

We also find that when the structural elements of the play are considered separately, the play does not have any dramatic and thematic significance.

In the attempt to read the play without the past time switches, i.e. past events, it is found that the play makes an ineffective dramatic and thematic presentation. The play's story is disturbed. Our suspense keeps increasing without any release at all till the end of the play. That is, we are never able to understand the reason for the conflict between Willy and Biff. In the present events alone, Willy and Biff do not say anything about the reason for their disagreement. Moreover, they both avoid talking about it when they are asked or even when they talk to each other. There are some allusions to a hidden reason for their conflict, but they, in turn, create lack of interest in us as this reason is also not revealed at all within the present events. Willy's suicide is also unjustified within the present events alone. That is, Willy's erratic and abnormal behavior ultimately leading him to commit suicide is given more predominance than the causative factors underlying such behavior. Why Willy's boys, Biff and Happy are aimless and have such character flaws as jealousy, self-deception, habit of stealing,

etc., along with Willy's strange behavior with Bernard in A2S3, are not justified, too. All this, consequently, indicates that the present events alone fail to reveal the causative factors that lead to them. In other words, the present events by themselves are devoid of any dramatic and thematic significance.

Similarly, when we attempt to read the play with only the past events, we find the events episodic. That is, we cannot impose a time order on them, because the play provides little or no clue for deducing a strict sequence.

When the play is considered as a whole: present and past events together, however, we find that the past time switches are an integral part of the play's structure. They [the past time switches] are distinctly marked and skillfully presented through light effects, music, and preparatory stretches of speech. Through these light effects and music, the transition from the present sequences to the past ones is also made possible and smooth. At the same time, the idea that those past contexts occur only in Willy's mind is also conveyed intricately. Those stretches of speech are incorporated within the present events in such a way that a quick response to the changes, i.e. from present to past, in us is maintained and the message that these events happen in Willy's mind is perceived.

When these past time switches are put back, we notice that the play's dramatic and thematic significance becomes evident. The past events provide answers to the questions that a reading of present events by themselves fails to do. In other words, they contain the elements which make the play coherent through the leitmotifs in Willy's personality. Taken together, these leitmotifs reveal Willy's value-system and its falsity by gradually revealing the past contexts of present conditions and states of mind of Willy and Biff. This gradual revealing of Willy and Biff's conflict controls the level of suspense in such a way that it maintains enough interest in us to follow the play's events till the end. The characters of

Charley and Bernard also help demonstrating Willy's value-system by the contrast they provide to Willy's character.

The interaction between the present and past events, finally, paves the way for us to observe the impact of Willy's value system on his own life ultimately leading to his death. That is, it makes clear the thematic issues of the play. Willy's dreams and self-image seem to be rightfully his. That is, no one can deny him the right to dream and to estimate his abilities and character the way he likes. What is interesting, however, is how Willy's dreams and self-image are turned against him and how the other related forces, that is, senses of possessing and achieving, guilt, and reality represented by society, participate in adding to his suffering. Instead of facilitating his business deals and consequently leading him to success, Willy's Boston affair made him lose his son's love and respect as well as peace of mind. It also, as a negative consequence, deprives him of achieving success through Biff. His self-image, too, makes him lose sight of his true abilities and set his sights on false prestige and popularity. To claim having these qualities, Willy indulges in lies and pretensions. His dream of having his own business collides with reality as do his hopes of a New York job and a salary and popularity; and thus his dream of leaving something to be remembered by also turns into a source of confusion, depression, and abnormal behavior. What is interesting in this is Willy's determination to achieve or leave something to be remembered by despite all the forces working against him, which are successfully demonstrated through the structural elements of the play.

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