Death Of A Salesman: An Overview Essay, Research Paper

Death Of A Salesman: An Overview

The play “Death Of A Salesman” , the brainchild of Arthur Miller was

transformed and fitted to the movie screen in the year 1986. The play itself is

set in the house of Willy Loman, and tells the melancholy story of a salesman

whom is in deep financial trouble, and the only remedy for the situation is to

commit suicide. In the stage production of this tale, the specific lighting,

set, and musical designs really give the story a strong undertow of depression.

And logically the screen and stage productions both differ greatly in regards to

the mood they set. Moreover the movie production can do many things that just

cannot be done on stage, with reference to the setting of course. To generalize,

the play gives us a good hard look at the great American Dream failing miserably.

However the combination of both the stage and screen productions accurately

depict the shortcomings of the capitalist society.

Death of a Salesman specifically focuses on four characters, the first

being the main character Willy Loman, his wife Linda, and their two sons Hap and

Biff Loman. As mentioned, the focal point of this play is Willy Loman, a

salesman in his early sixties. Throughout the story we are told the hard life,

emotions and triumphs of Willy the salesman. Early in the play we learn that

he has recently been demoted to working for commission, which later in the

play,(on par with his luck) translates into Willy getting fired. As the plot

unfolds we discover that Willy had a rich brother who recently died named Ben,

whom Willy looked upon with great admiration for becoming extremely wealthy and

the ripe old age of 21. However Willy also becomes very depressed when Ben

leaves, the fact being that he re-realizes the meagerness of his own life, and

that he is still making payments on all of his possessions. Willy then

comprehends that bye the time his worldly possessions are paid for?they shall no

longer be of any use. For example, the Loman house has become virtually

unnecessary now that the two sons have moved out. It isn’t until after Willy’s

death that the final mortgage payment is made?.for a house with no one inside it.

The one example of this statement is given by Linda during the final paragraph

of the play,

“I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there

will be nobody home. We’re free and clear???.we’re free??.we’re free????

we’re free”

As the plot thickens, Willy the salesman plummets deeper and deeper into

depression until his most likely route of action, which of course is suicide.

However the reasoning behind this course of action, we find, is his genuine love

for his family, along with Willy’s deep longing to supply his family with as

much money as he can possibly get his hands on. As we learn more about Willy’s

trials and tribulations, the age old expression “like father like son” appears

out of nowhere like a beacon. Like his father, Willy’s son Biff also has some

problems of his own, the main one being that Biff cannot seem to find his niche

in life. Furthermore, we are told that Biff at one point did in fact have his

future all planned out. It turns out that Biff was a shoe-in for a position on

the University Of Virginia State football team. However, that chance was all

but lost when Biff did not qualify to pass his final mathematics course. Now as

you can imagine the fact that Biff had to explain this to his father was quite a

large problem in itself. But to add insult to injury, when Biff made the trip

to Boston to explain his mathematical dilemma, he is horrified to find that his

father has been with another women. And this one incident would leave Biff

being an entirely different person altogether. He didn’t even make an attempt

to finish his math in summer school. After Boston, Biff couldn’t have cared

less what happened to his own life. However, as is in life, out of something

horrible comes something worthy. And Biff finally comes to the realization that

he in fact wants to make his future. And that future entails working in the

outdoors on a farm. The other reasoning behind this life decision is of course,

is to go against the wishes and values that his father has tried to instill in

Biff his entire life. Biff pours his heart to his brother Hap one quarter

through act I.

?..”To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls,

or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks a year for the sake of a two week

vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off …”

Fortunately for Biff, he determines his future by the play’s conclusion.

He comes to the understanding that he and Willy were never meat to be business

men. Including that they were intended to be working on a farm with their hands.

And after vexing to procure Hap to come with him (which is to no avail), he

escapes from his home to continue on with the rest of his life. Which for Biff

seems to be the soundest choice, the decision that Willy just couldn’t make.

Hap on the other hand stays with his father, and at play’s end decides to

follow in Willy’s footsteps. That of course is to succeed at business at all

costs.

Both the stage and screen rendition utilize a melange of distinct

effects to set the tone and to enact the specific place where the action

transpires. For example the stage interpretation utilizes a unique convention

that involves walking through the set to delineate circumstances in the past, or

episodes going on inside the mind of Willy. This illusion can be easily created

with specific crossfades and musical underlay, and of course willing suspension

of disbelief. Divergently, in the screen production the set is obviously

utilized in a completely different manner. On that account the movie uses a

distinct fading and brightening lighting technique, that still stays true to the

conventions set forth by the playwright. The one device that the screen

production contains that the stage does not, is the ability to display the past

events of Willy’s life in a completely accurately set manner. Meaning when

there is a flashback to a previous happening, the setting travels back in time

as well. Which, from a certain perspective, better illustrates the past

recollections of Willy and his family. As mentioned the stage production

successfully employs music to delineate certain characters or the tone of that

particular instant. There is in fact music used in the movie, however it is

only a small aspect of the screen medium whereas it is an integral component of

the stage version. Although you cannot fully comprehend the importance of the

music by simply reading the play, it must be performed right in front of you..

While the movie gives you a generally decent feel for the musical intonation.

In its entirety the music does an excellent job of setting the mood that Willy

is in.

The play is set inside the house of Willy Loman. Surrounding his house

are some tall building that are quite visible on the edges of the set. The

house itself contains two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. This is also

where the majority of the action of the play takes place. All other action

happens outside the house lines. Which for a stage audience requires them to

suspend their disbelief even further. Whereas in a movie the viewer isn’t

required to stretch any of his or her imaginations. Although this particular

screen production utilized a uncommon convention that allowed the viewer to

actually see through the set. One other interesting convention used by the

designer was that there was no roof on the house at certain times during the

performance. And in place of the roof were huge buildings and skyscrapers.

These buildings were used to divulge a over-powering feeling of gloom. This

tool is much more effectual in the movie, due to its original and abstract

nature. This was also was very helpful during Willy’s dreams, on account of the

house would exude an aura of peace an tranquillity. Together with the prevalent

set in the movie, (where there is a roof and normal fencing), the idea is very

well perceived.

In spite of the fact that this play has been described as a modern

tragedy, there has been some controversy to that description. The reason being

that it does not accompany the standard protocol of tragedy. Traditionally

speaking, a tragedy usually begins with the main character in the midst of a

prominent position of piety. And over the course of the play becomes

transformed and that character flips to a lower level of status. A tragedy is

also reputed to acquaint its audience with regard to life. The audience should

leave a tragedy feeling virtuous about themselves, even though the tragedy

concludes on a note of melancholy. This is why scholars say they cannot include

this play in the definition of tragedy.

This famous tale of a salesman contains a singular main character; Willy

(The Salesman)Loman, his two strapping young lads Happy and Biff, and of course

his adoring wife Linda. Willy struggles to climb his way up the American

capitalist hierarchy, but its seems his ship will not come in. In spite of the

fact that Willy would much rather be laboring with his hands, he is set in

the mindset that his real love could never make enough money. Disappointment

after disappointment Willy decides that his only way to provide for his family

would be to commit suicide. The number one son of the salesman, Biff, is paving

his way for a discouraging life. Symbolically speaking, the character of Biff

represents Willy at a younger age, for they both carry the same characteristics.

However Biff is given the same chance to do something with his life, and

surprisingly enough he takes it. As for Willy’s other son, Happy decides that

he will take the same long, hard road as his father, only he thinks that he’ll

make it.

The Character of Willy Loman seem to be the consummate model to

illustrate the dissension of the American capitalist ideals. For example he is

a salesman who dons an aged suit that is ceaselessly creased during the course

of the screen production, moreover in the script is directed to appear

dilapidated. He drive an archaic, run down vehicle on the brink of extinction.

While on the contrary, a proper salesman must appear presentable and attractive

to market his goods. And Willy definitely does not harmonize with the ideals of

being a salesman, divergently he pains to match it. Moreover that is the reason

why he doesn’t belong inside the world of business. As exemplified in the

passage made by Biff in the requiem.

“When he’d come from a trip; or on Sundays, making the stoop????.?You

know something Charley, there’s more of him in that front stoop than in all the

sales he ever made.”

This story seems to epitomize the frivolity of agonizing to achieve

something as insignificant as money and power. It definitely makes one question

the social values of the American capitalist system, and why certain individual

continue to pursue the ideals of that system on a daily basis. For the downside

to the capitalist dream is hopelessness. And that downside is more that

apparent in the Loman family.

References

Quote on page one: Death of A Salesman, Arthur Miller, Viking Penguin Inc. 1949,

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Quote on page two: Death of A Salesman, Arthur Miller, Viking Penguin Inc. 1949,

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Quote on page four: Death of A Salesman, Arthur Miller, Viking Penguin Inc. 1949,

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