

Death of a Salesman

Setting and Figurative Language

Setting:

Towering, angular shapes surrounding his house → pressure Willy feels from society
Blue light of the sky → (archetype of blue: enlightenment, calm peaceful) → the only light falling upon house and fore stage

Angry orange light → surrounding area → feels pressure

“small, fragile-seeming home” among “sold vault of apartment houses” → unstable vs. stability

“air of the dream clings to the place” → seems unclear, not all there, not substantial

”kitchen at center seems actually enough” → only certainty is events in the kitchen → seems to be heart of home → bare essentials to qualify as kitchen

“table with three chairs, and a refrigerator” → bare essential for the kitchen →

archetype: male symbol → seems to signify only 3 people are home (Biff is no longer a part of the family) → Linda doesn't seem to have place in the family, regular women domain is also women

“bedroom furnished only with a brass bedstead and a straight chair.” → very scarce, a house not a home → no comfortable things → everything is rigid → nothing sentimental

“over the bed a silver athletic trophy” → Willy is hanging onto the past → Willy is only focused on Biff's accomplishments → only sentimental thing

“raised six and a half feet” → signifies Willy's expectations for both boys are very high → boys seem more carefree and truthful in their room → safe haven

Flashback: the apartments fade out → shows it is the past when there were trees and no towering buildings → felt free, less pressure

Kitchen is always dark when Willy has flashbacks → shows the disorder he is experiencing in his mind

Everyone is dressed really stereotypically as the persona Willy associates with them →

Bernard is wearing “knickers,” like a stereotypical nerd → Linda carries laundry like a housewife → Biff carries his football and wears his University of Virginia shoes, a sports star → Ben wears a suit and carries “a valise and an umbrella” like someone with high status and intrigue

His flashbacks are always during fall-because of the leaves: archetype: tragedy-beginning of the end.

Flashback of Ben is when Ben is the same age as Willy in reality → Ben is very successful while Willy is not

The West represents dreams and opportunities to the boys while to Willy it's the boys shrinking responsibility

ACT II

At Howard's office, Willy "pulls a chair from the wing" → seems to impose into Howard's space

"Ben's music" → his mood is wistful and wanting success which is everything Ben embodies

pg. 1741

"on a small table in the reception room..." → typical office found anywhere

"Traffic sounds are heard." → busy part of time → business district

"Bernard...part of tennis rackets and an overnight bag..." → tennis is a rich sport →

"furred, lavishly dressed girl enters" → high ended → prostitute?

"She is in a black slip; he is buttoning his shirt" → suggests a sexual scene → "raw, sensuous music" → stops when Biff comes

pg. 1753 "Standish Arms" → hotel Willy met with the woman → generic kind of anywhere →

pg. 1761 "in the blue of night" → the truth comes out → the night signifies the end

pg. 1764 "Ben appears in the light" "Ben's idyllic music" → seems to be all knowing

pg. 1767 "suddenly music faint and high" → Willy panicking and not knowing what to do

"rises in intensity, almost to an unbearable scream" → seems to follow his emotions and his realization of what he has to do

"music crashes down in a frenzy of sound...becomes the soft pulsation of single cello string" → sounding out the accident of the car crash to the hollow results

"into a dead march" → signifying Willy's death

"leaves of day" → usually leaves come out during flashbacks but no scene is not a flashback

"somerly dressed...in clothes of mourning" → mourning for Willy's death

Figurative Language:

Pg. 1760 "You're a pair of animals!" → indicate Linda's anger toward her sons and how they are acting primitively, selfishly

"Now you hit it on the nose!" → shows that Biff is fed up

pg. 1761

"I work like a coolie to meet ever" → Willy compares himself to an unskilled worker with low wages

"my life ringing up a zero?" → Willy refers to not making any money and contributing sees the proposition like a "diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough" → feels that his suicide (insurance money) is completely solid and worth a lot

pg. 1765 "I'm a dime in dozen" → means that Biff sees himself as very common and easy to get and not superior to other as he was led to believe

pg. 1765 "but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can" → Biff says Willy works hard but is not significant and ends up useless

Extended metaphor

Jungle-comes out not sure of what to get while appointment gives certain answer

Appointment does not come out with sure results while diamond is solid and there

Pg. 1768 “riding on a smile and a shoeshine” → Willy worked with the things he had, his personality and the clothes on his back

“that’s an earthquake” → all that matters for a salesman is to sell so it shakes Willy up to have them stop buying him

Black book

Pg 1779

“I am tired to the death” – foreshadowing of Willy's impending death

pg 1780

“That man was a prince” (describing “old man Wagner”)

showing how Willy doesn't really like Howard because he doesn't give Willy the same opportunities that the old man would have

pg 1781

they finally will own the house with “there’s nobody to live in it”

foreshadows Willy’s death and the bitterness of having finally made the last payment after his death only to have only an old woman living there

pg 1782

Linda tells Willy that he makes “mountains out of molehills”

Trying to calm him down, soothe him

Pg 1784/1785

Biff says that he is “like a boy”

Demonstrates that even biff knows that he needs to grow up and be successful eventually because Happy is “a success” and he is not

Also how he needs to set down and pick a career

Pg 1785

Happy has “ more in [his] pinky finger than he’s (the merchandise manager) got in his head”

Shows how Willy has brought them up to always believe they are better than the others, even when its been proven that they aren't (the manager is the manager while happy is “ one of two assistants to the assistant”

Pg 1785

(to women) happy keeps “knockin’ them over and it doesn't mean anything” to him

shows his tiredness with being what he is

pg 1790

(describing how he did in selling)

Willy “knocked ‘em cold in Providence, slaughtered ‘em in Boston.”

Pg 1791

Willy will “knock them dead next week”

Pg 1808

From Willy to biff about his meeting the next day “Knock him dead, boy”

(also shows that Willy still treats biff like a child)

pg 1809

(from Willy to Linda in the morning the boys went to biff’s interview)

“ I slept like a dead one”

(now that he is confident about his boys' futures, he can stop being worried and he doesn't have flashbacks till Biff tells him that he's not getting a job from Oliver)

pg 1822

(from Charley to Bernard) "Knock 'em dead, Bernard!"

pg 1823

(from Willy to Charley) "You end up worth more dead than alive."

(immediate indicator of how Willy is now realizing that it may be good to die that his family can finally have something useful from him now that he doesn't have any work)

Foreshadows Willy's death

Pg 1793

(to the woman he's seeing on the side)

"keep your pores open!"

???

Pg 1794

(from Willy to Linda, angry)

"you want him to be a worm like Bernard?"

event though Bernard does very well in life, in his young life Willy looked down on him because he didn't not fulfill his image of an "all-american" boy and he thought his sons (Biff) had more tangible accomplishments (the silver trophy, and the attention Biff got from the fans at football games)

pg 1798, later too

(some variation from Ben)

"when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by god I was rich"

what Willy believes represents the American dream (SYMBOLS)

pg 1801

(from Linda to Biff) "a man is not a bird, to come and go with the springtime"

represents her original mission of bringing this family back together and being happy together

pg 1802

(from Linda to the boys) "He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog."

Shows that while Linda cares about her sons, her main priority is Willy and making him happy

Pg 1807

(From happy to Biff about Linda) "What a woman! They broke the mold when they made her"

happy sees how Willy treats Linda and how Linda still loves him and is still willing to do anything for him

pg 1812

(from Linda to Biff about Willy) "He's only a little boast looking for a harbor"

shows that even after Willy constantly gets mad at her for stupid stuff Linda still loves him and wants to help him. she sees that the way that Willy is better is when their sons do well, so she always tries to push the sons to do well on Willy's behalf.

Pg 1831

(from Biff to Willy, Biff is mad at Willy for not seeing that he was going to the interview for Willy) "A team of horses couldn't have dragged me back to Bill Oliver!"

demonstrates how when Biff does something that messes with Willy's notion that Biff is going to be successful, he lapses into the past (the woman's laugh is heard)

pg 1832

(From Biff to the ladies they meet at the restaurant) "You've just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hard-working, unappreciated prince"

pg 1833

(from Happy to the ladies and Biff) "we're going to paint this town!"

even when his father just had a mental breakdown, Happy still wants to have fun with the ladies. Later called out on this by his mother. Shows how that even though Happy is kind of the favorite, he cares less about the well being of his father than Biff does.

Pg 1845

(from Biff to Charley about Willy) "There's more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made."

Biff does appreciate his father when he was home in his younger days and he wasn't crazy.

Pg 1845

(from Charley to Biff)

"Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man out there in the blue riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back---that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and you're finished."

Feminist Criticism

Feminist:

Linda doesn't seem to have place in the family, doesn't even have a place to call her own → for a housewife usually kitchen is the domain but even the kitchen seems to be partially Willy's → there are three kitchen chairs → 3 is archetype for the male principle

SEE STAGING: In Willy's dreams, Linda is always portrayed with wash, looking pretty and with a ribbon in her hair → he sees her as a housewife first and foremost → wears a ribbon, shows he sees her as pretty and as someone to just look at.

always mending stockings → more portrayal of the typical women back then → she hides her stockings from him → is forced to be secretive because she is considered inferior → opinion doesn't have much value

Willy calls Linda 'kid' → doesn't see her as an equal → demeaning of women and their inferior status

During Ben's arrival, Willy pulls Ben away from Linda → seems to prioritize over Linda

“Linda holds his jacket for him.” “buttoning up his jacket as he unbuttons it” → woman expected to help husband, keep him together → Willy doesn’t seem to notice, no appreciation, no respect

Linda is the passive-enabler; holds true to women during that time-silent observers not necessarily voicing what they know etc. → “Every day I go down and take away that little rubber pipe. But, when he comes home, I put it back where it was” → has faith in her husband to fix things, doesn’t want to interfere → doesn’t know what to do, doesn’t think her opinion has any impact

Two types of women during that time → the good housewife and the prostitute → examples of each are connected to Willy → Linda and the woman in the hotel room → both have their own uses to men, neither get any respect

The woman who Willy has an affair with is much more flirty than Linda/any normal housewife → “...I picked you...and I think you're a wonderful man...because you're so sweet. And such a kidder”

Used for her connections, so that Willy can go “right through to the buyers.”

“...whyn't you have another drink, honey, and stop being so damn self-centered?” the words she uses (damn) → diction shows how she is unsophisticated → “..drummer-boy...” uses pet names for Willy, very confident

Linda is also more intelligent than she or others let on, she is incredibly observant and knows what goes on, from Willy's suicide attempts, to him borrowing money from Charley, and the rubber pipe Willy put on the gas valve. She also takes care of the bills, and in Willy's flashback she takes care of the bills and figures out his pay. However because of her inferior status as a woman she doesn't let this be known

Miss Forsythe and Letta are ignored by the men when there is a problem.

They are coddled

Linda getting mad at boys

Going away from the perfect housewife image

Once they threaten Willy directly, reverts back to perfect housewife, protecting husband

AT THE RESTAURANT

Happy and Biff see a good looking girl at the restaurant.

See women only as things to be had, not as people

Lie to them a lot

Don't treat them as equals

-initially Forsythe isn't interested in Happy until he starts to lie and show off

-“...a beautiful girl like that...there's not a good woman in a thousand. New York is loaded with them, kid!”

-Ignored by men-seen as pretty trophies to be won instead of humans not seen as equals
(they sit there and look pretty, they're also left in the dark and further lied to because they fail to mention that Willy is their dad, they say that he's just a friend.)

Women are like men's property → Happy sleeps with someone's fiancé in order to get back at him → "I have an overdeveloped sense of competition or something but I went and ruined her" → takes advantage of a girl just because of his sense of competition

"Because I don't want the girl and still I take it and- I love it!" → doesn't consider their feelings → they're just objects to be won and had

Linda

Linda doesn't seem to have place in the family, regular women domain, the kitchen, is also men's (3 kitchen chairs)

Willy treats her with "casual irritation." This shows that he doesn't really respect her or appreciate her.

She treats him "very carefully, (and) delicately" and talks to him with "infinite patience." She's aware of Willy's mental state and his tendency to have dreams and delusions and knows how to deal with him.

"She has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to Willy's behavior..."

She shares his "massive dreams" but is unable to follow through with it whereas Willy wants to.

Whenever she disagrees with him, he gets mad at her → "I don't think there's more people. I think-" "There's more people!"

"carrying the wash basket" "a ribbon in her hair" → in all the flashbacks, Linda is carrying the wash and is wearing a ribbon in her hair → represents the way Willy sees her → the pretty, loving housewife doing chores

During Ben's arrival, Willy pulls Ben away from Linda → seems to prioritize over Linda
Linda does the calculations of the commission → seems smarter than society depicts of women

"strains of Linda's desperate but monotonous humming rise." → desperate to please him
"Linda holds his jacket for him" "buttoning up his jacket as he unbuttons it" → she seems to try to keep him together → only stable one of the family

pg. 1732-1733 worries about him, asking him if he remembers things → treats him almost like a child at times

optimistic about things

wants the whole family to be happy together

passive enabler → observant

pg, 1739 Linda doesn't want Willy to leave → "Oh, you're back?" → not very happy Biff returns

pg. 1739 "frightened of Ben and angry at him" → she wants stability and happiness and not Willy leaving to supposedly become successful

"There's a man eighty-four years old-" "

pg 1836-

gets angry at Biff and Happy for abandoning Willy at the restaurant "pair of animals"

Knows what Willy is thinking “didn’t have to say anything”

after biff insisted on seeing Willy then Linda put aside her anger at the boys to stop them from bothering him

always looks out for Willy at her own expense

Willy feels that Linda has “suffered” because he has not made enough money and therefore she is not happy, even though she had said they had “enough” when Ben offered for Willy to go with him to Alaska.

“Did you plant it” ← humoring his need to plant in the middle of the night

gives up on biff and happy, just focusing on Willy’s happiness

now that she has experienced them all being home, she doesn’t want it anymore because she sees that its affecting Willy in a negative way

wants them to end politely so that Willy doesn’t obsess over it/makes him happy when he thinks of it?

All she does is “search and search” and feels like he’s “just on another trip”

Feels lost without him and wont be able to get used to it

Charley

Foil character

Willy mentions that Charley is not “well liked”

“large man, slow of speech, laconic, immovable.” → a man of little words

“there is pity...not, trepidation.” → seems to pity Willy, also a good friend who is worried about him

“a robe over his pajamas, slippers on his feet” → watches out for the family and cares for Willy → rushes over

Willy insults him as “ignorant” but Charley still tries to get him to sleep/relax

“I eat with my mouth.” → has a sense of humor → contrasts with Willy → simpler, not as many apparent problems → doesn’t take Willy’s insults to heart → “Don’t get insulted”

“You want a job?” → cares for Willy → signifies that they might have constant financial problems

Charley tries to calm him down by playing cards with him even though it’s late at night and probably inconvenient

“What do you keep comin’ in here for?” → seems to have cared for Willy for a long time

“Well, talk about it.” → wants to help Willy but doesn’t know what the problem is → he wants Willy to be cooperative → thinks Willy needs to vent, he needs support → is willing it be that support

“Don’t call me disgusting, Willy.” → doesn’t take Willy’s words to heart → rational mind set

“You should be ashamed of yourself!” → he doesn’t take all of Willy’s insults

“You’d froze to death up there” → grammatical error → seems to be less educated

Even when Willy talks to himself Charley tries to keep up with him → lots of patience → wants to understand Willy

“Willy, when are you going to grow up?” → Charley has a better grasp of reality and what is possible for Biff /importance while Willy still believes that Biff can accomplish anything (AMERICAN DREAM)

“Knock a homer” → Charley joking around → shows that Charley doesn’t take it so seriously because he doesn’t want Biff to put his whole future into it when it may not work out, cares about them

Now Charley is successful → is in a meeting with “an accountant”

He “never took an interest in anything” → led to his “salvation”,

Foil to Willy again, never boasts about his son, taught his son to not boast

“didn’t even mention” that Bernard is going to be in front of the supreme court

Already starts to take “out his wallet” before Willy even mentions anything about money

Treats him like a child by offering him a job all the time and giving him money

Knows it won’t get paid back but does it anyway

Why???

Owes Willy? Feels a lot of pity for Willy

Counting out the money is very routine for Charley

Wishes Willy “good luck” on his dream that his sons will be big too and “all play tennis together”

But he does it only because Willy asked him too

Reaction= “Jesus!”

Always ends up fed up with Willy

“nobody’s worth nothing dead” → foreshadows Charley kind of knowing about Willy’s suicidal tendencies

Charley understands Willy, he says that no man can survive on only a little salary he is there for the family

9. Describe Miller’s staging of the play. Consider his use of lighting and music, and the way he dramatizes dreams and memories.

playing flute → sets the tone of the setting → father makes flute

Going through the “walls”- Willy’s grasp on the past is “shaky” his interpretation of the past events may be different than what actually happened.

-sake of telling the present apart from past?

Forestage is used for important events as well as events that include/are Willy's dreams/delusions

“music insinuates itself as the leaves appear” → the leaves represent going into his memories because there are no leaves in a kitchen → music as the tone changes and he goes off to think of something else

“speaking through the wall of the kitchen” → does not fit reality → goes into his own world

he mostly describes the events that are happening such as the setting → probably the perception of the event through Willy's eyes and may not have actually happened → unreliable narrator

characters are stereotypically dressed: Biff with "S" sweater (star? School star?) and Bernard with "knickers" and Linda is portrayed with "washing" with a pink ribbon

In dreams and memories the characters disregard boundaries and walk through walls "set wholly, or in some places, partially transparent"

"From the darkness is heard the laughter of a woman."- Darkness archetype: hidden, in confusion, unknown. The woman is in the darkness away from the "present" like a secret.

"...the woman has come from behind the scrim..." Helps show how Willy has a dream within a dream.

When they move onto the forestage then the audience is aware that there is a flashback.
Greater emphasis on dreams than on reality.

Willy's expectations for Biff → Biff stands in a "golden pool of light" → happens right after Willy remembers

"a blue flame beneath red coils" → red: disorder seems to be covering the blue: truth/security (pg. 1731)

Pg. 1744 Charley's actions of getting out wallet is routine
Shows that Willy is at his office often, and is familiar with it. The secretary; Jenny is familiar with him too always being there.

Pg. 1750-1751 very specific gesture of Biff, Happy, and Willy trying to communicate
Want to take him out to dinner and show him a good time, Biff to try and break the news gently to him.

Pg. 1764 specific actions of anger "seems on the verge of attacking his father"
Towards the end when they're in the house and Biff and Willy are arguing.

MUSIC:

"Ben's music" → his mood is wistful and wanting success which is everything Ben embodies

pg. 1740, 1762 "gay music of the boys" → comes up when thinking of good things in the past

Pg. 1740 "mocking frenzy" → shows Willy's interpretation of how others view him

Pg. 1746 "raucous music" → changes into rowdy feel

Pg. 1752 "single trumpet note jars the ear" → sudden interruption of the dream into reality

Pg. 1759 "Willy's theme" → calmed down a bit from dream frenzy

Pg. 1768 "flute begins, not far away...only the music of the flute is left" → the flute s ???

LIGHTING:

When Willy's focus shifts the light shows that by brightening on his new focus.

"light on his chair grows very bright...breaks off, staring at the light, which occupies the chair..." → apostrophe (talks to Frank who is dead) → Willy talks into the light

pg . 1746 "red glow rises" → passionate (?)

pg. 1752 → "light of green leaves" → change into dream → "holds the air of night and a dream"

10. What is typically "American" about Miller's play? What cultural attitudes and values displayed by the characters provide it with an American tone?

Biff wants to play football → stereotypically American

Typical American family portrayed → housewife Linda, salesman Willy

Willy's "massive dreams" represent his belief in the American dream, and that he can do anything he sets his mind to, he projects this belief onto Biff. (silver trophy)

Willy has worked "a lifetime" to pay off the house- shows the typical American dream; you have a house, and a family and you work.

Willy's criticism of Biff being "a farmhand" shows Willy's interpretation of the American dream is to be in business as well as succeed.

Convinces himself through his delusions that he has achieved the American dream: well-liked, athletic sons; beautiful and feminine wife; successful and well-like him

Believes that success is being well-liked

Symbolized in Uncle Ben → went into a jungle and came out rich

Linda has a different view of the American dream → wants a stable family

Willy's belief in the American dream is that people have to be successful in business and looks down on Biff going into the countryside → wishes to command respect

"The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy" seems to be Willy's belief of success (darkness is an archetype for death and the unknown)

American dream → starts out with nothing and comes out with something "without a penny to his name" pg 1740

“a man could end with diamonds here on the bases of being liked”

Willy still believes that Biff can accomplish the American dream

Pg. 1745 Charley offers Willy a job but Willy refuses → wants to do everything himself
→ Willy doesn't want to work under Charley

pg. 1757 “if he saw the kind of man you are, and you just talked to him in your way” →
believes that his father is well like therefore will be able to get those points for him

Wishes to be known/famous → Willy encourages Biff's theft/attitude without really
discouraging it, it doesn't really matter to him because he knows Biff is well-liked and
assumes that he'll become great

Money = success, Willy believes Linda has suffered because he hasn't been making
money or providing for her as he should

Willy refers to diamonds which goes back to Ben's into the jungle out with diamond
mines

Throughout the whole play, Willy keeps expecting Biff to follow his path of success
which carries into the idea of people mutually helping each other. (I scratch your back
you scratch mine.)

“to come out number-one man”