

Twentieth Century American Drama
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Lecture - 07
Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman - Part 2

(Refer Slide Time: 00:14)

KITCHEN doorway. LINDA, his wife, has slipped in her robe in the right. She gets out and puts on a robe, listening. Most often jovial, she has developed an iron repression of her expectations to WILLY's behavior—she more than loves him, she admires him, as though his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, served her only as sharp reminders of the turbulent longings within him, longings which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end.]



LINDA [hearing WILLY outside the bedroom, calls with some trepidation]: Willy!

WILLY: It's all right. I came back.

LINDA: Why? What happened? [Slight pause.] Did something happen, Willy?

WILLY: No, nothing happened.





Hello, and welcome to today's session. We will continue to look at this iconic play, *Death of a Salesman*, and today we will pay close attention to the opening scene in Act One, Scene One. So, here we find that Linda and Willy are having a conversation, and we do understand that there is a certain backdrop to this conversation. They are talking about certain things for which there is a history and a memory, and there are certain preconceived notions regarding how Willy goes about his work.

When the scene opens, we find that Willy is back from one of his sales trips, which had not gone well. He is back, and Linda is trying to engage with him with a lot of compassion and tenderness. We will notice, especially from the first part onwards, that Linda comes across as a person who is very sensitive to others' needs, and she also tries to engage with Willy with a lot of compassion.

But Willy is mostly dismissive about Linda; he also tries to cut her off abruptly in the middle of conversations in many ways. Towards the end of the first scene, we will see how occasionally Willy suddenly becomes very conscious of Linda's compassionate and

tender behaviour towards him and tries to engage with that and reciprocate that in similar ways, but he is not always successful in doing that.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:47)



trepidation]: Willy!
WILLY: It's all right. I came back.
LINDA: Why? What happened? [*Slight pause.*] Did something happen, Willy?
WILLY: No, nothing happened.
LINDA: You didn't smash the car, did you?
WILLY [*with casual imitation*]: I said nothing happened. Didn't you hear me?
LINDA: Don't you feel well?
WILLY: I'm tired to the death. [*The flute has faded away. He sits on the bed beside her, a little numb.*] I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda.
LINDA [*very carefully, delicately*]: Where were you all day? You look terrible.

At the beginning of this play, Linda asks Willy, “you didn’t smash the car, did you?” This gives us the sense that this is something that had happened before during his sales trips; he had smashed the car before, and things have gone wrong terribly.

But Willy responds with a lot of irritation, and he does not want to engage with Linda’s doubt. There is a lot of discussion at the beginning where Linda is being concerned about his physical and mental well-being. She also says that he looks terrible.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:22)



WILLY: I got as far as a little above Yonkers. I stopped for a cup of coffee. Maybe it was the coffee.

LINDA: What?

WILLY [*after a pause*]: I suddenly couldn't drive any more. The car kept going off on to the shoulder, y'know?

LINDA [*helpfully*]: Oh. Maybe it was the steering again. I don't think Angelo knows the Studebaker.

WILLY: No, it's me, it's me. Suddenly I realize I'm goin' sixty miles an hour and I don't remember the last five minutes. I'm—I can't seem to—keep my mind to it.

LINDA: Maybe it's your glasses. You never went for your new glasses.

WILLY: No, I see everything. I came back ten miles an



He first tries to excuse himself out of that situation, blaming it on the coffee, but then, suddenly, he begins to open up. Willy comes across as someone, who tries to see the reality of the situation in some form. He is still very invested in the notion of the American dream. He is still very much invested in the life that he could have had, if things had not gone wrong. But, we find that Linda continues to be in denial.

The way Linda continues to be in denial about their present circumstances, hoping that out of that denial, there is some possibility of something nice coming is exposed right at the outset of the play. Willy confesses about the way he drives and what happened during his recent sales trip.

“Willy: I suddenly couldn't drive anymore. The car kept going off on to the shoulder, y'know? Linda: Oh. Maybe it was the steering again. I do not think Angelo knows the Studebaker.” So, there are a lot of references here about Willy's driving skills or the lack thereof and how he is unable to pay attention to driving when he is at it.

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NEW GLASS.

WILLY: No, I see everything. I came back ten miles an hour. It took me nearly four hours from Yonkers.

LINDA [*resigned*]: Well, you'll just have to take a rest, Willy, you can't continue this way.

WILLY: I just got back from Florida.

LINDA: But you didn't rest your mind. Your mind is over-active, and the mind is what counts, dear.

WILLY: I'll start out in the morning. Maybe I'll feel better in the morning. [*She is taking off his shoes.*] These goddam arch supports are killing me.

LINDA: Take an aspirin. Should I get you an aspirin? It'll soothe you.

WILLY [*with wonder*]: I was driving along, you understand? And I was fine. I was even observing the scenery. You can imagine, me looking at scenery, on the road every week of



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WILLY [*with wonder*]: I was driving along, you understand? And I was fine. I was even observing the scenery. You can imagine, me looking at scenery, on the road every week of my life. But it's so beautiful up there, Linda, the trees are so thick, and the sun is warm. I opened the windshield and just let the warm air bathe over me. And then all of a sudden I'm goin' off the road! I'm tellin' 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*



The gravity of the situation strikes us when he is giving a detailed description which we will now read together. “I was driving along, you understand? And I was fine. I was even observing the scenery. You can imagine, me looking at scenery, on the road every week of my life. But it’s so beautiful up there, Linda, the trees are so thick and the sun is warm. I opened the windshield and just let the warm air bathe over me. And then all of a sudden I’m goin’ off the road! I’m tellin’ ya, I absolutely forgot I was driving.”


This is the state of mind that Willy is in, and Linda was rightfully concerned the moment he walked in, wondering whether he had smashed the car again. “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 am dreaming again”.

He is dreaming in the middle of driving, and we also know that there is a sense of nostalgia dominating his thoughts. He is dreaming while he is looking at the scenery, and he is also having nostalgic thoughts and only, later on, realizes that he has been dreaming again.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:56)

4 DEATH OF A SALESMAN



presses two fingers against his eyes.] I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts.


LINDA: Willy, dear. Talk to them again. There's no reason why you can't work in New York.

WILLY: They don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England.

LINDA: But you're sixty years old. They can't expect you to keep traveling every week.

WILLY: I'll have to send a wire to Portland. I'm supposed to see Brown and Morrison tomorrow morning at ten o'clock to show the line. Goddammit, I could sell them! *[He starts putting on his jacket.]*

LINDA *[taking the jacket from him]*: Why don't you go down to the place tomorrow and tell Howard you've simply got



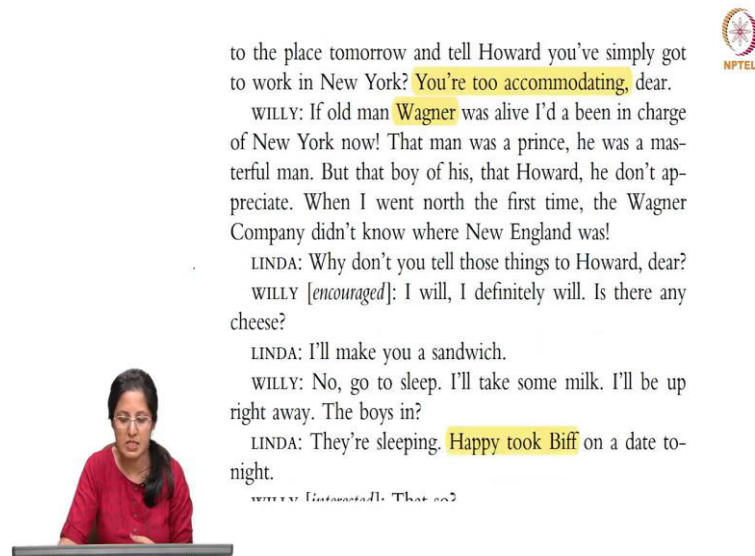
“I nearly —*[He presses two fingers against his eyes.]* I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts.” Willy is strangely aware of his condition; he knows that he does tend to switch off in the middle of things. Even when he is right in the middle of driving, his mind drifts off to a number of other things. So, that is another dominant theme that sets the tone for the rest of this play.

Willy has a sense of nostalgia about the past and always thinks about how things could have been better. The sense of loss that Willy experiences and the state of denial that Linda is in together lead the family to a very helpless situation. Halfway through the play, we realize that there is not much that could be salvaged.

We also get to know the nature of his work, and we realize that he is a sixty-year-old man, who is not doing very well in his job. He also constantly thinks about how he could have done better in New England. He also thinks of himself as a New England man and

assumes that his bosses do not need him in New York. To him, it is more or less a territorial thing, and so, he thinks that he could have performed better in another setting.

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to the place tomorrow and tell Howard you've simply got to work in New York? You're too accommodating, dear.

WILLY: 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 appreciate. When I went north the first time, the Wagner Company didn't know where New England was!

LINDA: Why don't you tell those things to Howard, dear?

WILLY [*encouraged*]: I will, I definitely will. Is there any cheese?

LINDA: I'll make you a sandwich.

WILLY: No, go to sleep. I'll take some milk. I'll be up right away. The boys in?

LINDA: They're sleeping. Happy took Biff on a date to-night.

WILLY [*Interestedly*]: That so?

Linda tries to sympathize with him as much as possible by saying that perhaps he is too accommodating. We find that Linda is trying to make things easier for him emotionally. But at the same time, she is in denial of the reality, while Willy is acutely conscious about his limitations and about the things that are going wrong.

Even when he realizes that he was daydreaming while he was supposed to be concentrating on his driving, he also genuinely believes that things could have been better if it were the other way around. He believes that if he were out of New York or some other person were in charge, things could have been better.

His longing for something that he had hoped to achieve by investing in the American dream seems to dominate his thoughts always. This disillusionment manifests in many forms, and it even becomes very pathological as you would see he is a person who is mentally, emotionally and physically weak at the beginning of this play, and there is very little that the societal or family circumstances could do to make things better for him.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:50)

LINDA: I'll make you a sandwich.
WILLY: No, go to sleep. I'll take some milk. I'll be up right away. The boys in?
LINDA: They're sleeping. Happy took Biff on a date to-night.
WILLY [*interested*]: That so?
LINDA: It was so nice to see them shaving together, one behind the other, in the bathroom. And going out together. You notice? The whole house smells of shaving lotion.
WILLY: Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it.



We are introduced to the two sons of Willy: Happy and Biff. The way Willy and Linda talk about Happy and Biff are as if they are still very small kids. So, Linda becomes more accommodating when they are talking about the kids, and trying to defend both their sons to whatever extent possible. We find that Willy is in a dilemma as he is concerned that his sons are not really making it big in their career and life. But he also wants to sympathize with them in a way that that will not affect them.

So, they are having this conversation about Happy and Biff, and Willy is also concerned that there is a house that he has worked for, but the children are not there to spend time with them effectively and productively.

We realize that one of the sons is trying to make a living away in Texas, which is far away from the urban settings where Willy wanted to build a life. He tries his hand at farming, which Willy does not approve of.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:05)



LINDA: Well, dear, life is a casting off. It's always that way.

WILLY: No, no, some people—some people accomplish something. Did Biff say anything after I went this morning?

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?

LINDA: But, dear, how could he make any money?

WILLY [*worried and angered*]: There's such an undercurrent in him. He became a moody man. Did he apologize when I left this morning?

LINDA: He was crestfallen, Willy. You know how he ad-



Willy and Linda have a conversation about their sons and link it up with how certain people will eventually make it while others do not. “Some people accomplish something.” There is a constant sense of loss and nostalgia in almost everything that Willy articulates, and he projects his failure and disillusionment onto his sons.

From the way the conversation is progressing, we get to know that, just before he left for the latest sales trip, Willy had lost his temper and had become severely critical of Biff, which Linda is disapproving of as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:52)

LINDA: He was crestfallen, Willy. You know how he admires you. I think if he finds himself, then you'll both be happier and not fight any more.

WILLY: How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farmhand? In the beginning, when he was young, I thought, well, a young man, it's good for him to tramp around, take a lot of different jobs. But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty-five dollars a week!

LINDA: He's finding himself, Willy.

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

LINDA: Shh!

WILLY: The trouble is he's lazy, goddammit!

LINDA: Willy, please!

WILLY: Biff is a lazy bum!





Willy wants to know whether, after he had walked out, feeling terribly disappointed with Biff the latter had bothered to apologize or have a discussion about that. At the core of this family are two people, Linda and Willy, who are trying to make things work, but there are also a number of things around them, including the lives and futures of their sons, which are not adding up to the life that they have envisaged.

This crisis is always there, and so does the sense of loss and denial, overshadowing their life in multiple ways. So, this is what Willy feels about Biff's choice of what he wants to do in life: "How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farmhand? In the beginning, when he was young, I thought, well, a young man, it's good for him to tramp around, take a lot of different jobs. But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty five dollars a week!"

Willy is concerned about Biff not making it big in life as he is not even onto some steady livelihood. Biff is thirty four-years-old and Willy's career was also coming to an end. So, the concern is very real; it is not just an emotional crisis or a phase of disillusionment that Willy is going through, and it is very real, because there is very little money coming into the household.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:27)



LINDA: He's finding himself, Willy.
WILLY: Not finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace!
LINDA: Shh!
WILLY: The trouble is he's lazy, goddammit!
LINDA: Willy, please!
WILLY: Biff is a lazy bum!
LINDA: They're sleeping. Get something to eat. Go on down.
WILLY: 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, at some level, finds this very strange because America is the land of dreams; it is the place where a young man can experiment and find his way around and eventually become successful. He also has a number of successful models and success stories

around him to show that this is indeed possible, but at the same time, that model is not working well for his sons.

Willy makes the statement that, “Biff is a lazy bum.” Here is when we begin to see that, along with the denial that Linda has and the disillusionment that Willy faces almost daily, Willy projects his disillusionment on his family too. Within addition to denial and disillusionment, there is also a sense of contradiction in what they feel and experience. What makes this situation more tragic is that all of these feelings are very genuine.

When Willy feels that Biff is a lazy bum, Linda gets defensive and says that he is just lost and not lazy. She also wants to stay clear of the discussion and tries to distract Willy from even calling a spade a spade because that is also very discomforting; it is unsettling at many levels when one begins to identify their children as failures as for being lazy.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:02)

6 DEATH OF A SALESMAN 


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.

LINDA: Never.

WILLY [*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. When he walked down the street . . . [*He loses himself in reminiscences.*]

LINDA [*trying to bring him out of it*]: Willy, dear, I got a new kind of American-type cheese today. It’s whipped.

WILLY: Why do you get American when I like Swiss?



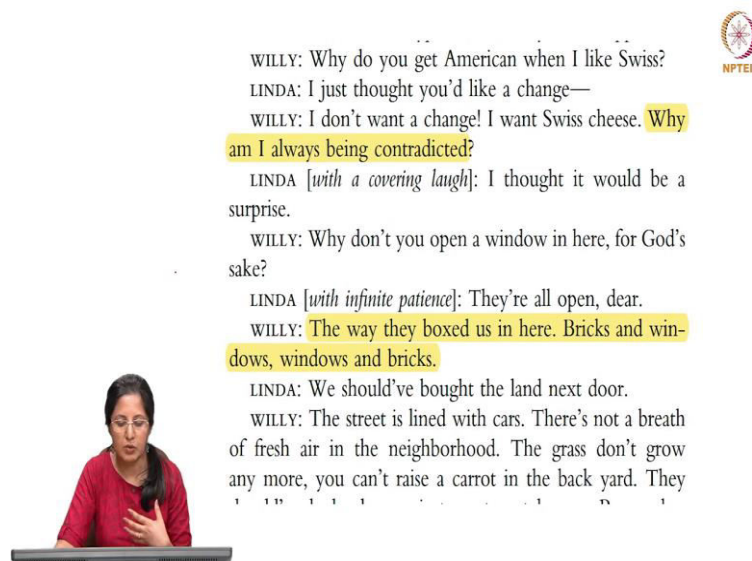
But in less than a few seconds, we find Willy making a statement, almost assuring himself, if not anything else. “Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such personal—attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There’s one thing about Biff—he’s not lazy.” Barely a few seconds after saying that Biff is a lazy bum, Willy claims that Biff is such a hard worker and that he is not lazy.

So, the sense of denial and disillusionment and contradiction are continually built into this play. There is also a continual play between order and disorder. Right from the time

the tone of the play is set, we find there is a continual oscillation between order and disorder.

At some level, they are a set of individuals who are trying to bring in some order, but the way they navigate through this is complete chaos. Things do not seem to fall into place, and that becomes a worry, almost descending into a pathological condition.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:24)



WILLY: Why do you get American when I like Swiss?
LINDA: I just thought you'd like a change—
WILLY: I don't want a change! I want Swiss cheese. Why am I always being contradicted?
LINDA [*with a covering laugh*]: I thought it would be a surprise.
WILLY: Why don't you open a window in here, for God's sake?
LINDA [*with infinite patience*]: They're all open, dear.
WILLY: The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks.
LINDA: We should've bought the land next door.
WILLY: The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They

We find Willy continually thinking of a past, which could have taken a different direction altogether, a more positive, promising, and successful sight. This is how he talks about Biff: “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. When he walked down the street... [He loses himself in reminiscences.]” So, the space between denial and disillusionment is very significant here.

We do not know whether Willy’s recollections are real or whether he is going a bit overboard with his imagination, trying to think about a past where Biff had the potential to be successful; where Biff was very attractive; where Biff was being followed around in high school, because the others used to look up to him; whether he showed the potential to come up as very successful or influential in life when he exhibited leadership qualities.

We do not know whether these are the qualities that Willy Loman is projecting onto his son or whether he sees in Biff the ideal qualities he wishes that he had possessed or whether he is merely reminiscing. We get to know at the beginning itself that he has the habit of daydreaming, even if it is in the middle of driving. So, we need to take this into account whenever we come across Willy thinking about the past, sometimes lamenting a loss or wondering about the missed possibilities.

Linda tries to distract him from the domestic affairs and she is tries to talk about something she thinks is very neutral. She talks about a new kind of American type of whipped cheese that she bought that day. Immediately, that triggers Willy. Willy Loman comes across as a person who is waiting for a trigger to explode; he could lose his temper for no reason, and even make a mountain out of nothing.

We find Linda very kindly saying that she tried to get a new kind of cheese, and she tries to bring in some domestic conversation to distract him from the other unpleasant things. We find that it does not go down very well either. So, Willy immediately says that he wanted Swiss cheese, and he feels that he is always contradicted at home.

From Linda's responses and the stage directions we find within brackets, we realize that she is used to such situations, and she also deals with them quite well. She knows how to manage her husband emotionally and to control the situation at home without letting things go overboard.

Right after that, we find Willy expressing his discontentment over the apartment life he is currently living in, which gives a contrasting image to the scenery that he was describing at the beginning - the scenery that led him to daydream while he was driving.

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LINDA: We should've bought the land next door.

WILLY: The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them?

LINDA: Yeah, like being a million miles from the city.

WILLY: They should've arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighborhood. [Lost] More



“The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks.” So, there is again some wishful thinking about some land that they could have bought. We find Willy complaining increasingly about the growing urbanization, their life, and the boxed lives that they have in the apartment in the big city.

“The street is lined with cars. There is not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass do not grow anymore, you cannot raise a carrot in the backyard. They should have had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful entries out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them?” So, Willy is someone who is stuck in the past.

There is a discourse of denial, disillusionment, and contradiction which sets the tone for the rest of the play. Willy is constantly trying to access a past, which is no longer accessible to him. He is constantly lamenting about something that he no longer has access to. We realize that once Willy Loman gets into the mode of complaining, there is no way to stop him; he starts by complaining about the American cheese that Linda got instead of the Swiss type that he thinks he likes more.

From there he moves on to complain about the apartment houses, apartment culture, growing urbanization and how things are very congested in the city.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:31)

ACT ONE

7



and more I think of those days, Linda. This time of year it was lilac and wisteria. And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils. What fragrance in this room!

LINDA: Well, after all, people had to move somewhere.

WILLY: No, there's more people now.

LINDA: I don't think there's more people. I think—

WILLY: There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening! Smell the stink from that apartment house! And another one on the other side . . . How can they whip cheese?

[On WILLY's last line, BIFF and HAPPY raise themselves up in their beds, listening.]

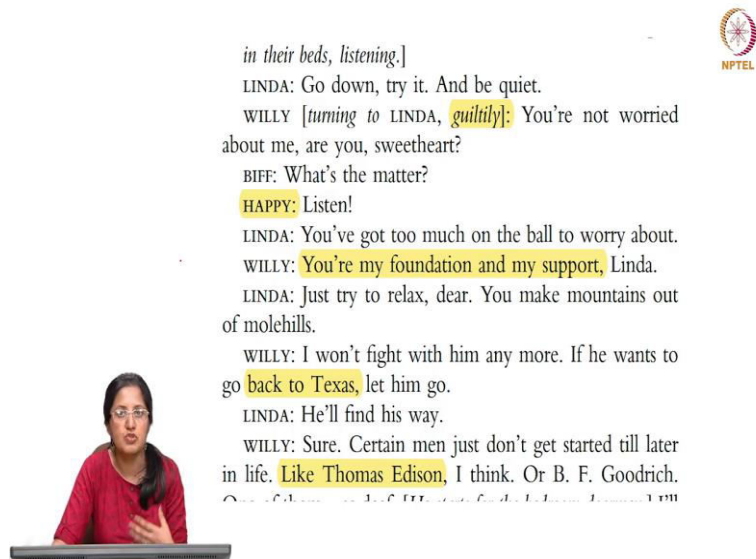


Then he very briefly gets into a mode of nostalgia, thinking about the kind of plants and the flowers and the fragrance that he was he could otherwise have experienced.

He begins to complain about the population and how it is getting out of control. Here is a person trying to make sense of his life, always hoped that his life would be a massive success, and continues to wish the same for his sons, but nothing seems to be under his control.

The country and the city are growing, and there seem to be a lot of opportunities and a lot of success stories all around Willy. But he begins to feel that his entry into the American dream of making it big is falling flat in multiple ways.

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in their beds, listening.]
LINDA: Go down, try it. And be quiet.
WILLY [*turning to LINDA, guiltily*]: You're not worried about me, are you, sweetheart?
BIFF: What's the matter?
HAPPY: Listen!
LINDA: You've got too much on the ball to worry about.
WILLY: You're my foundation and my support, Linda.
LINDA: Just try to relax, dear. You make mountains out of molehills.
WILLY: I won't fight with him any more. If he wants to go back to Texas, let him go.
LINDA: He'll find his way.
WILLY: Sure. Certain men just don't get started till later in life. Like Thomas Edison, I think. Or B. F. Goodrich.

So, towards the end of this scene, we find this brief moment where he realizes that he has not been very kind to Linda. “Willy [*Turning to Linda, guiltily*]: You're not worried about me, are you, sweetheart? Biff: What is the matter?” In between their conversation Happy is trying to interfere but he is ignored Linda articulates what she has in mind to Willy - “You've got too much on the ball to worry about.”

This is a real worry and concern that Linda has throughout this play, despite the state of denial that she is in about her husband, family, the lives that they are stuck living in, their sons, and their future. She realizes that Willy is worrying about too many things.

She is quite rightfully worried and concerned about him, given the way that the play began with Willy Loman confessing that he started dreaming in the middle of driving and that he could have smashed his car onto something and could have got killed.

Linda, at some level, is worrying for his life itself. Willy also realizes that for a brief moment when he says , “You're my foundation and my support”. He is also trying to come to terms with the reality and he even says that he would want to allow Biff to go back to Texas if that is what he wants.

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HAPPY: Listen!

LINDA: You've got too much on the ball to worry about.

WILLY: You're my foundation and my support, Linda.

LINDA: Just try to relax, dear. You make mountains out of molehills.

WILLY: I won't fight with him any more. If he wants to go back to Texas, let him go.

LINDA: He'll find his way.

WILLY: Sure. Certain men just don't get started till later in life. Like Thomas Edison, I think. Or B. F. Goodrich. One of them was deaf. [*He starts for the bedroom doorway.*] I'll put my money on Biff.

LINDA: And Willy—if it's warm Sunday we'll drive in the country. And we'll open the windshield, and take lunch.

WILLY: No, the windshields don't open on the new cars.

LINDA: But you opened it today.



There is an exaggerated hope for success that the American dream seems to be promising to its citizens. Willy feels that “Certain men just don’t get started till later in life. Like Thomas Edison”. This is the kind of success story on which he had built his dream, on which he thinks his sons and his family will find a future.

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LINDA: What, darling?

WILLY: That is the most remarkable thing.

LINDA: What, dear?

WILLY: I was thinking of the Chevvy. [*Slight pause.*] Nineteen twenty-eight . . . when I had that red Chevvy—*[Breaks off.]* That funny? I coulda sworn I was driving that Chevvy today.

LINDA: Well, that's nothing. Something must've reminded you.

WILLY: Remarkable. Ts. Remember those days? The way Biff used to simonize that car? The dealer refused to believe there was eighty thousand miles on it. [*He shakes his head.*] Heh! [*To LINDA*] Close your eyes, I'll be right up. [*He walks out of the bedroom.*]

HAPPY [*to BIFF*]: Jesus, maybe he smashed up the car again!



This moment of realization that Willy has shows the reader or the viewers the extent of the emotional stress that he is facing.

Willy realizes with some discomfort and perhaps shock that he thought he was driving a Chevvy while he was actually driving a Studebaker. So, this tells us a lot about the

character, the growing concern in the family and the real possibility that he could be going through emotional derangement.

“I was thinking of the Chevvy. [Slight pause.] Nineteen twenty eight... when I had that red Chevvy—[Breaks off] That funny? I coulda sworn I was driving that Chevvy today”. Willy is totally out of his senses at multiple time slots during the day. While he is driving and enjoying the scenery, he also daydreams and loses track of time and the road itself. He realizes that throughout the day when he thought he was driving the Chevvy, he really was not.

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there was eighty thousand miles on it. [He shakes his head.] Heh! [To LINDA] Close your eyes, I'll be right up. [He walks out of the bedroom.]

HAPPY [to BIFF]: Jesus, maybe he smashed up the car again!
LINDA [calling after WILLY]: Be careful on the stairs, dear!
The cheese is on the middle shelf! [She turns, goes over to the bed, takes his jacket, and goes out of the bedroom.]

[Light has risen on the boys' room. Unseen, WILLY is heard talking to himself, "Eighty thousand miles," and a little laugh. BIFF gets out of bed, comes downstage a bit, and stands attentively. BIFF is two years older than his brother, HAPPY, well built, but in these days bears a worn air and seems less self-assured. He has succeeded less, and his dreams are stronger and less acceptable than HAPPY'S. HAPPY is tall, powerfully made. Sexuality is like a visible color on him, or a scent that many women have discovered. He, like his brother, is lost,



Linda is trying to be very supportive and tries not to panic. She tries to maintain her composure, and she tells him that perhaps something must have reminded him of the Chevvy and assures him that nothing had gone wrong. Willy drifts back into this mode of nostalgia, thinking about a past to which he has no more access.

“Remarkable. Remember those days? The way Biff used to simonize that car? The dealer refuse to believe there was eighty thousand miles on it. [He shakes his head.] Heh! [To Linda] Close your eyes, I'll be right up.” Happy tells Biff, “Jesus, maybe he smashed up the car again.” So, we know that this is how the routine conversation goes in this house, with the family waiting for the real possibility of Willy Loman smashing up his car against something over and again.

This concern is coupled with a sense of denial, disillusionment and contradictory behaviour amongst the family. Sometimes Willy Loman contradicts himself sometimes the family members contradict each other, and sometimes the storyline itself constantly reminds us of their contradictory existence within that ecosystem.

This possibility of living out the American dream was projected onto their lives from a very early time, but the contradicting reality is that they could not live up to it. The first scene is packed with all of these emotions and experiences, almost simultaneously, thus setting the tone of this play in multiple ways. We understand that memory plays a very big role in shaping these characters.

The way we understand these characters are also heavily mediated by their own memories. At some point, we begin to wonder whether Willy's memories and recollections are real. It is unclear whether it is an imagined past that Willy has in mind or whether it really happened. It could also be the family that is trying to project onto each other their wishes, disillusionment and the crisis and the dilemma that they are going through at that point.

With this, we will begin to wrap up for the day. We will continue to look at the play in the next few sessions. I thank you for your time, and I look forward to see you again.