

**Twentieth Century American Drama**  
**Prof. Merin Simi Raj**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**

**Lecture - 08**  
**Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman - Part 3**

(Refer Slide Time: 00:14)



Isn't that a remarkable—*[He breaks off in amazement and fright as the flute is heard distantly.]*

LINDA: What, darling?

WILLY: That is the most remarkable thing.

LINDA: What, dear?

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



Hello, and welcome to today's session. We are continuing to look at Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, and we have started looking at Act one, Scene one. We are continuing to look at how the events develop in scene one, and how the stage is set for the events to follow, how the tone of the play is set by introducing us to the characters, particularly within the living room of Willy Loman who is also the protagonist.

We discussed in the last couple of sessions about Willy Loman's longing for success, the feeling of discontentment that he has, his family situation, and the kind of support that they try to give each other. Despite all that, there is a systemic failure that is not able to give them success, happiness, and whatever they envisaged that would come to them as part of the idea of the American dream.

We find that at many levels, all the characters are invested in the notion of the American dream, particularly Willy Loman, and almost bordering on a sense of also hope, he uses that to propel himself forward. An oscillation between denial and disillusionment keeps happening throughout the play and in all interactions between the characters.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:54)



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!

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*



We stopped at the point when his sons Happy and Biff begin to wonder whether Willy had smashed the car against something because that was indicative of the recurrence of him being unable to drive properly, and is also an indication of his failing mental health and the fragile state of his existence.

There is a lot of discontentment that Willy Loman has when it comes to his sons because he had hoped that they would be successful when they grow into adults. But he realizes that they failed to live up to his expectations, and the discontentment and agony over not having achieved what he thought his sons would lie at the heart of this play.

Halfway through scene, one we find Happy and Biff having a conversation, and they are both at home. This is in contrast to the image that Willy Loman presented to us at the beginning of the play, where he laments the fact that he invested a lot in building their home, but there was hardly anyone to live there.

So, this is one of those days where all the members of the family are at home. We get to know that Biff is two years older than his brother Happy.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:22)



[LIGHT HAS BEEN 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, but in a different way, for he has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat and is thus more confused and hard-skinned, although seemingly more content.]

HAPPY [getting out of bed]: He's going to get his licence taken away if he keeps that up. I'm getting nervous about him, y'know, Biff?



Willy Loman is worried about Biff the most. He is the one that Willy Loman thought would make it big in life, given the way his personality was shaping up during his school years. We will quickly read through the description, which gives us a sense of both these characters, Biff and Happy, who are the sons of Willy Loman.

“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, but in a different way, for he has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat and is thus more confused and hard-skinned, although seemingly more content.”

(Refer Slide Time: 04:25)



ACT ONE

9

BIFF: His 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.]*

BIFF: Maybe he's color-blind.

HAPPY: Pop? Why, he's got the finest eye for color in the business. You know that.

BIFF *[sitting down on his bed]*: I'm going to sleep.

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

BIFF: He's all right, I guess.

WILLY *[underneath them, in the living-room]*: Yes, sir, eighty thousand miles—eighty-two thousand!



Biff and Happy are talking about their father. Both of them are worried about what Willy Loman is getting himself into, and they are talking about the way he drives. So, when Biff wonders whether their father's eyes are going bad, Happy reassures him by saying his eyes are all right and that he just does not keep his mind on the road.

We realize that Willy Loman does not pay attention to the road from the way he talked about his driving experience. The moment he lowers the windshield, he is completely enamored and lost in the scenery. His mind is no longer on the road, and more importantly, towards the end of his conversation with Linda, we realize that he thought he was driving a Chevy when in reality he was driving a Studebaker.

The lack of attention on driving and the fact that his mind is not where it is supposed be make Linda and the sons get worried.

We find the sons fondly talking about their father, but despite the fondness and concern that the family members have for each other, there is a systemic failure which is unable to keep the family happy and together despite their best intentions.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:45)



thousand miles—eighty-two thousand!  
BIFF: You smoking?  
HAPPY [*holding out a pack of cigarettes*]: Want one?  
BIFF [*taking a cigarette*]: I can never sleep when I smell it.  
WILLY: What a simonizing job, heh!  
HAPPY [*with deep sentiment*]: Funny, Biff, y'know? Us sleeping in here again? The old beds. [*He pats his bed affectionately.*] All the talk that went across those two beds, huh? Our whole lives.  
BIFF: Yeah. **Lotta dreams and plans.**  
HAPPY [*with a deep and masculine laugh*]: About five hundred women would like to know what was said in this room. [*They share a soft laugh.*]  
BIFF: Remember that big Betsy something—what the hell was her name—over on Bushwick Avenue?  
WILLY [*looking at his hand*]: With the collar, dead



We find them fondly talking about Willy when Happy mentions that he has the finest eye for color in business. This brings us to another point which the play never really reveals to us. We do not get to know about the kind of product that Willy Loman is aiming to sell as a salesperson. What we do get to know at the end of it is that he is unable to reap much success through his career as a sales person.

At some level, this also indicates that Willy is unable to sell himself as a salesperson. So, it is not the product which is important but it is the personality which becomes more important and that is what Arthur Miller's play is trying to demonstrate to us through these various discussions. It is not really about what one intends to do, it is also about how to go about it.

The lack of success or the perceived failure that Willy Loman and his family experience is also an extension of their failures as individuals. Both the father and the sons also have this consciousness built into them, that perhaps they have failed as individuals, and they try to map this failure onto this image of the projected successful image of the American dream.

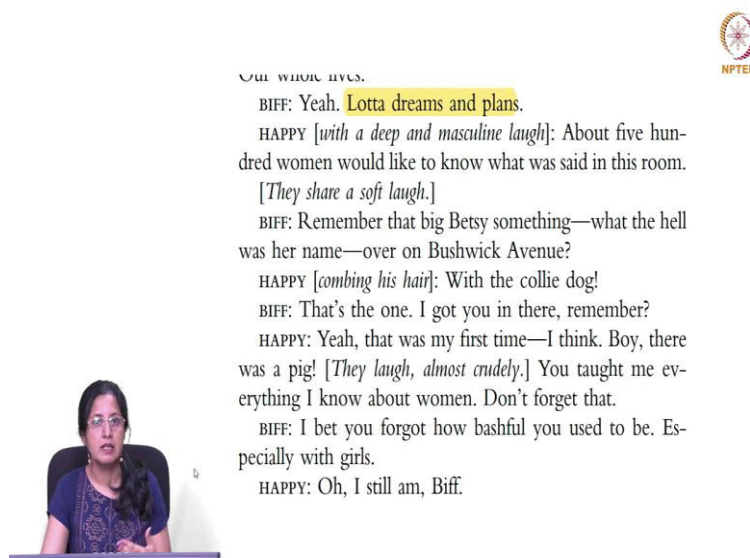
. They are no match to the projected American dream, and they have numerous examples around them to compare with, and whichever way they compare themselves with others within the same system, they always seem to be faring less.

at multiple levels, we find that this is a structural and systemic problem as well it is something in the system, that also determines the way in which happiness shapes up for these individuals.

Happy and Biff speak briefly about their father and Happy tries to voice the concerns for his father and the entire family. For a brief moment they recollect how they used to share the dreams and plans they had while growing up and how this room and their two beds at home have witnessed a lot about their prospects, plans and dreams.

A sense of nostalgia and longing for a past which seemed to be promising at some point, is always there in most intimate conversations the characters have.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:50)



CUT WHOSE LIPS.

BIFF: Yeah. Lotta dreams and plans.

HAPPY [*with a deep and masculine laugh*]: About five hundred women would like to know what was said in this room.

[*They share a soft laugh.*]

BIFF: Remember that big Betsy something—what the hell was her name—over on Bushwick Avenue?

HAPPY [*combing his hair*]: With the collie dog!

BIFF: That's the one. I got you in there, remember?

HAPPY: Yeah, that was my first time—I think. Boy, there was a pig! [*They laugh, almost crudely.*] You taught me everything I know about women. Don't forget that.

BIFF: I bet you forgot how bashful you used to be. Especially with girls.

HAPPY: Oh, I still am, Biff.


They also talk briefly about the women who walked in and out of their lives, and we find that Happy comes across as more confident at this point. He is much more confident than Biff, who, as Willy Loman recollects, was the one with a charming personality in school.

Happy seems to be more in control. He seems to have a magnetic personality that is attractive to women, and he seems to be doing well in life. Even though it is very superficial in nature, he seems to be doing well compared to Biff.

So, we get some insight into how Happy used to be more bashful, especially around girls. Biff briefly reminds him of how things used to be and how they are positioned

now. There seems to have been a dramatic change in their personality, in the way they approach life, and more importantly, the way success has treated them.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:54)



10 DEATH OF A SALESMAN

BIFF: Oh, go on.

HAPPY: I just control it, that's all. I think I got less bashful and you got more so. What happened, Biff? Where's the old humor, the old confidence? [*He shakes BIFF's knee. BIFF gets up and moves restlessly about the room.*] What's the matter?


BIFF: **Why does Dad mock me all the time?**

HAPPY: He's not mocking you, he—

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

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



Success is one very abstract term, but, we find that throughout this play there are certain yardsticks that are used by the society, by various systems, domestic as well as public, to measure success.

We find that only certain kinds of achievements make the cut and make it possible for a person to call themselves successful. Biff opens up a bit during the conversation and wonders why his father is mocking him always, since it appears as if there is a twist of mockery on Willy Loman's face whenever he interacts with Biff.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:47)



Something's—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.

BIFF: What's he say about me?

HAPPY: I can't make it out.

BIFF: What's he say about me?

HAPPY: I think the fact that you're not settled, that you're still kind of up in the air . . .

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.

HAPPY: But I think if you got started—I mean—is there any future for you out there?



Happy clears the air by saying that Willy treats Biff that way only was out of concern. As the conversation proceeds, we find that there is more to worry about Willy Loman than perhaps any of his sons.

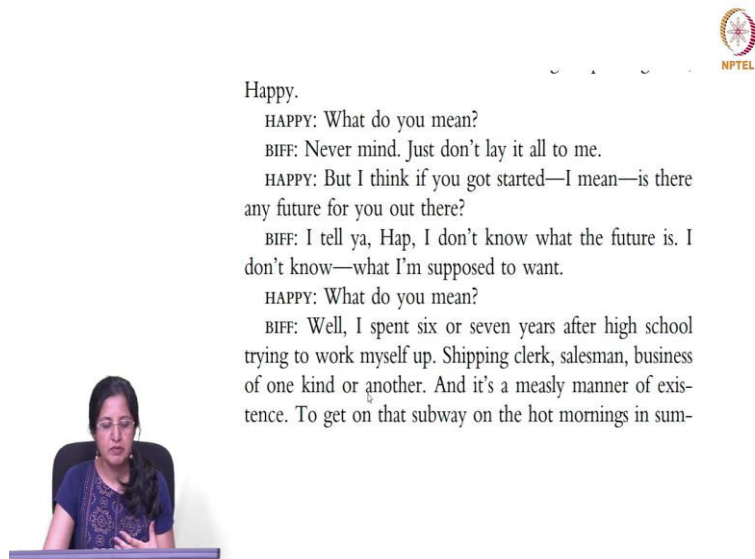
Happy is visibly concerned about Willy Loman and thinks that his father is gradually beginning to lose it because of anxiety and worry over a number of things. The two sons have a discussion, and Happy shares with his brother a few things he had noticed.

“I wanted to talk to you about Dad for a long time, Biff. Something—is happening to him. He—talks to himself.” Willy’s mental fragility is beginning to show visibly in the way that he is engaging with the world outside. So, we find that Willy Loman has come to a point where he cannot handle he cannot handle the pressure that is building up in his mind, and it is spilling over in these embarrassing ways, as Happy believes.

Happy thinks that Willy is more upset about the fact that Biff has not yet settled down and that he is “still kind of up in the air”. We find that Biff’s situation in life and how he has these outlandish dreams which do not fit into the scheme of things that Willy Loman has in mind. That seems to be one of the primary concerns which is stressing Willy Loman and is almost driving him to a kind of mental instability.



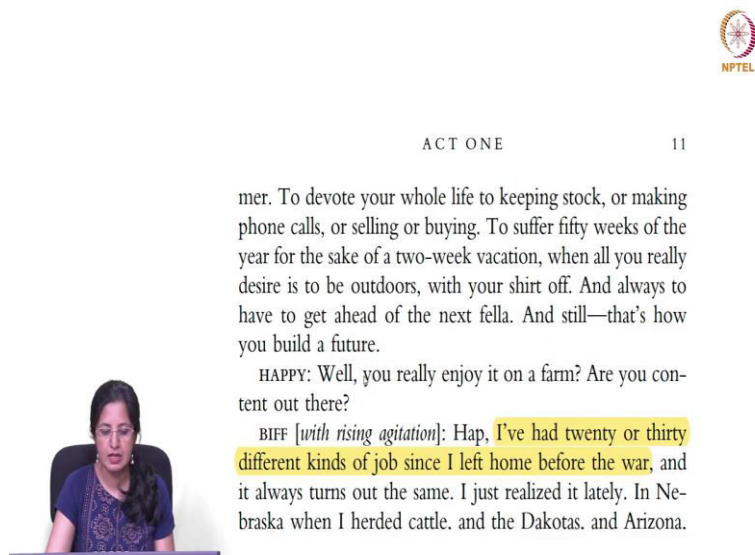
(Refer Slide Time: 12:36)



Happy.  
HAPPY: What do you mean?  
BIFF: Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me.  
HAPPY: But I think if you got started—I mean—is there any future for you out there?  
BIFF: I tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is. I don't know—what I'm supposed to want.  
HAPPY: What do you mean?  
BIFF: Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly manner of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in sum-

Biff tries to articulate his side of the events. He is trying to explain what he has in his mind. “Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it is a measly matter of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer.”

(Refer Slide Time: 12:59)



ACT ONE 11

mer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still—that's how you build a future.  
HAPPY: Well, you really enjoy it on a farm? Are you content out there?  
BIFF [*with rising agitation*]: Hap, I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of job since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same. I just realized it lately. In Nebraska when I herded cattle. and the Dakotas. and Arizona.

“To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really

desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still—that is how you build a future.”

So, this is in stark contrast to the many outputs that are being projected as part of following the American dream. We find that this play is exposing the reality of the American dream, and the hollowness which lies behind it, which Willy Loman also seems to be aware of.

Willy Loman is painfully aware of what this situation is doing to his life, how it is changing the economy, the world view, and the order of things. Willy voices out how these things are affecting his own life, especially in the scene where he complains to Linda that they are in these box sized apartments, outside of which nothing exists.

There is nothing that will bring them closer to nature. It is like living a life within a box, which is why he feels tempted to enjoy what is outside the house while he is driving.

On the one hand, there is Biff who seems to be trying to do something very different from this urban, modernized dream. But, when Biff is talking we realize that his dream is also a contrast against the urbanized or modernized dream that modern America presents before them.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:42)



braska when I herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now in Texas. It's why I came home now, I guess, because I realized it. This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring or—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'm 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 everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life.

Happy asks him a pertinent question, whether Biff enjoys staying at the farm. Biff lives in Texas and at the beginning of the play, we get to know that there is disagreement within the family about him choosing to work as a farm hand.



Biff's sounds agitated at this point which is very important for us to notice because, despite the choices they all have made in life, none of them has it all sorted. Success and happiness seem to be very elusive in this play, and most characters, are living in different states of denial.

In Linda's case, sometimes, the state of denial becomes more visible. Denial becomes part and parcel of the existence of all the characters. It becomes one of the defining aspects of their personalities as well as a quotidian way in which they live life.

So, Biff says with rising agitation, "Hap, I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of jobs since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same. I just realized it lately. In Nebraska when I herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now in Texas. It's why I came home now, I guess, because I realized it. This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring or-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'm not getting' anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I am thirty-four years old, I ought to be making my future. That's when I come running home."

(Refer Slide Time: 16:33)



with noises, 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 everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life.

HAPPY: You're a poet, you know that, Biff? You're a—you're an idealist!

BIFF: No, I'm mixed up very bad. Maybe I oughta get married. Maybe I oughta get stuck into something. Maybe that's my trouble. I'm like a boy. I'm not married, I'm not in business, I just—I'm like a boy. Are you content, Hap? You're a success, aren't you? Are you content?

HAPPY: Hell, no!

“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 everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life.”

This is the sound of the dilemma that Biff and many others like him are caught in, and we realize that this play is also about trying to know oneself. Arthur Miller is trying to push the limits of this play and every character into a pursuit of one's personality.

Happy intervenes by saying that Biff is a poet or an idealist, and Biff also realizes that his problem is that he is unable to anchor himself onto something, and it could be just about anything. Here again, we find that the play is drawing attention to one pertinent problem which most of the characters face: they are unable to find the one thing that will keep them anchored for the rest of their lives.

Willy Loman thinks that maybe it is his salesman job that had the potential to keep him anchored and show him what success was. This play is also about the characters not getting the material things that they wanted, but, at a deeper level, it is about their quest for finding an anchor.

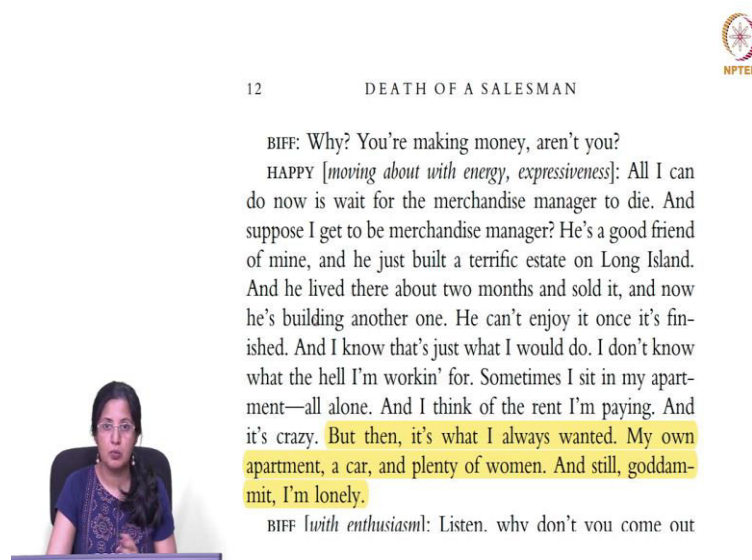
Finding something to which they could stay rooted and contented is what this play refers to because the characters, especially when Happy and Biff are having a conversation, they ask each other if they feel content.

So, this is again another question to which the play does not have an answer. But it becomes very important to ask this question, especially against the backdrop of the American dream and the many flaws which are inherent to that system, because upholding that dream becomes important to ask as an individual, as a family, whether one is happy or content.

In the case of Willy Loman and his family, this problem is more real and accentuated because they also have very real concerns about their failing physical and mental health and the future in terms of how one would fend for oneself when things begin to go wrong.

Biff even goes to the extent of wondering whether getting married or starting a new business would alleviate his problem to some extent or the other. So, it is at this point that he decides to ask Happy whether he is content with the kind of success that he has achieved.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:21)



12 DEATH OF A SALESMAN

BIFF: Why? You're making money, aren't you?

HAPPY [*moving about with energy, expressiveness*]: All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die. And suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He's a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he's building another one. He can't enjoy it once it's finished. And I know that's just what I would do. I don't know what the hell I'm workin' 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.

BIFF [*with enthusiasm*]: Listen. why don't you come out

We find Happy's response resonating very well with Biff's mindset, but the only difference between those two is that they are stuck in two different systems altogether. Biff goes on about experimenting with his life, shifting jobs left, right and centre, and as he mentions he left home before the war and got into about thirty-odd jobs, but none of them could keep him Happy.

Biff always has this existential question about whether he is doing well in life and about his directionlessness in life. He comes back home hoping to find an anchor, but he seems even more lost in that domestic setting.

Happy responds to these questions about his success, whether he is content or not. “All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die.” It is a very dark and stark commentary on the way the world works around the capitalist structure. “And suppose I get to be a merchandise manager? He’s a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he is building another one. He can’t enjoy it once it’s finished. And I know that’s just what I would do. I don’t know what the hell I’m workin’ 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 am lonely.”.

This acknowledgement, this confession that Happy makes at this point, that he is lonely despite everything is very important. All the characters, while they are within the superficially happy domestic settings, are lonely, deep within.

There is something about the structure. There is something about the societal projections where success, dreams, contentment are defined for the citizens or individuals. So, at some level, they find it difficult to identify themselves in this pursuit of many things.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:46)



apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I’m lonely.

BIFF [*with enthusiasm*]: Listen, why don’t you come out West with me?

HAPPY: You and I, heh?

BIFF: Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles. Men built like we are should be working out in the open.

HAPPY [*avidly*]: The Loman Brothers, heh?


BIFF [*with vast affection*]: Sure, we’d be known all over the counties!

HAPPY [*enthralled*]: That’s what I dream about, Biff. Sometimes I want to just rip my clothes off in the middle of the store and outbox that goddam merchandise manager. I mean I can outbox, outrun, and outlift anybody in that store, and

Let us look at the following section where Biff invites Happy to join him in Texas. Biff thinks that they could make it big as two grown-up American men working in a ranch and be known as the Loman brothers.

Biff genuinely believes that if Happy is with him, he probably could do something about his life, and together they can make it work because both of them are essentially lost in some form or the other.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:14)




times I want to just rip my clothes off in the middle of the store and outbox that goddam merchandise manager. I mean 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.

BIFF: I'm tellin' you, kid, if you were with me I'd be happy out there.

HAPPY [*enthused*]: See, Biff, everybody around me is so false that I'm constantly lowering my ideals . . .


BIFF: Baby, together we'd stand up for one another, we'd have someone to trust.




The brothers are not happy with what they are doing, and both of them do not see themselves as successful in any form. In Biff's case it is more visible and he is more or less branded a failure because he has not been able to attach himself to anything or find a goal.

In Happy's case, he looks more sorted, and it looks like he is making money and is becoming successful. But we find that he is also lost and lonely at many levels. So, Biff makes this proposition that they could work together in Texas and make it big in life.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:06)



ACT ONE 13 

HAPPY: If I were around you—  
BIFF: Hap, the trouble is we weren't brought up to grub for money. I don't know how to do it.  
HAPPY: Neither can I!  
BIFF: Then let's go!  
HAPPY: The only thing is—what can you make out there?  
BIFF: But look at your friend. Builds an estate and then hasn't the peace of mind to live in it.  
HAPPY: Yeah, but 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, and I got more in my pinky finger than he's got in his head.  
BIFF: Yeah, but you just said—  
HAPPY: I gotta show some of those nompous. self-

But, we find that they are not on the same page. Just for one vulnerable moment, Happy admits that he is also unhappy, that this is not something that he wanted in life, and despite having everything around him, he finds himself being very lonely in his apartment. But, it is just a temporary moment, and Happy, quite unsurprisingly, is unwilling to give away what he possesses at that time.

We get a minor insight into the way they were brought up. Biff says, “Hap, the trouble is we weren't brought up to grub for money. I don't know how to do it”, to which Happy says, “neither can I!” Both of them cannot make the same decision about leaving for Texas and working on a farm and doing something very masculine, manual and try to make it big, because this was not “mainstream” at that point.

This is not how the American dream was supposed to happen. It is very urban and modernized. It has a shape and colour that Biff is not able to wrap his head around.



(Refer Slide Time: 24:20)



my gorgeous creatures.

BIFF: Yeah, yeah, most gorgeous I've had in years.

HAPPY: I get that any time I want, Biff. Whenever I feel disgusted. The only trouble is, it gets like bowling or something. I just keep knockin' them over and it doesn't mean anything. You still run around a lot?

BIFF: Naa. I'd like to find a girl—steady, somebody with substance.

HAPPY: That's what I long for.

BIFF: Go on! You'd never come home.

HAPPY: I would! Somebody with character, with resistance! Like Mom, y'know? You're gonna call me a bastard when I tell you this. That girl Charlotte I was with tonight is engaged to be married in five weeks. [*He tries on his new hat.*]

BIFF: No kiddin'!



They continue the conversation, and Happy keeps giving Biff certain brief insights into the many things that he has access to and how he would not want to let go of any of those. They also briefly talk about what kind of women they ideally want in their lives, and Happy even says that he would want somebody with character and resistance.

These characters are inhabiting multiple worlds; they are idealistic and practical at the same time. Especially in Happy, we begin to see that there is an idealism at work, but that does not pose any resistance to the many things that he is doing.

He is out there making money and presenting himself as a very successful, attractive man who is highly sought after, but the lack of happiness inside and loneliness are not interfering with his actions or with what he wants to do in life.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:20)



14 DEATH OF A SALESMAN



HAPPY: Sure, the guy's in line for the vice-presidency of the store. I don't know what gets into me, maybe I just have an **overdeveloped sense of competition or something**, but I went and ruined her, and furthermore I can't get rid of her. And he's the third executive I've done that to. Isn't that a crummy characteristic? And to top it all, I go to their weddings! [*Indignantly, but laughing*] Like I'm not supposed to take bribes. Manufacturers offer me a hundred-dollar bill now and then to throw an order their way. You know how honest I am, but it's like this girl, see. I hate myself for it. Because I don't want the girl, and, still, I take it and—I love it!

BIFF: Let's go to sleep.

So, this is where we find that Biff comes across more as a failure.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:27)



what to do about him, it's getting embarrassing.

WILLY: What a **simonizing job!**

BIFF: Mom's hearing that!

WILLY: No kiddin', Biff, you got a date? Wonderful!

HAPPY: Go on to sleep. But talk to him in the morning, will you?

BIFF [*reluctantly getting into bed*]: With her in the house. Brother!

HAPPY [*getting into bed*]: I wish you'd have a good talk with him.

[*The light on their room begins to fade.*]

BIFF [*to himself in bed*]: That selfish, stupid . . .

HAPPY: Sh . . . Sleep, Biff.

[*Their light is out. Well before they have finished speaking,*

WILLY's form is dimly seen below in the darkened kitchen.

He opens the refrigerator, searches in there, and takes out a



As the first scene is about to come to an end, we find that the concerns that Biff and Happy have about Willy Loman are quite right.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:39)



*entire house and surroundings become covered with leaves.*

*Music insinuates itself as the leaves appear.]*

WILLY: 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.

*[Light rises on the kitchen. WILLY, talking, shuts the refrigerator door and comes downstage to the kitchen table. He pours milk into a glass. He is totally immersed in himself, smiling faintly.]*

WILLY: Too young entirely, Biff. You want to watch your schooling first. Then when you're all set, there'll be plenty of girls for a boy like you. *[He smiles broadly at a kitchen chair.]* That so? The girls pay for you? *[He laughs.]* Boy, you must



Because, we see that Loman is largely talking to himself and whenever he is talking to himself, it is mostly about Biff. He is weighed down by his concerns about Biff and he thinks that Biff is going to end up like a nobody, achieving nothing.

This is one of the things that Willy is caught musing about: “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.”

So, we find that in Willy Loman’s mind Biff is still a child; Biff is still that high school boy to whom all other kids were drawn to. So, in his mind Biff is not grown up. This is why there is a defense mechanism operating in his mind, because that helps him to make allowances for the many bad choices Biff has been making in terms of switching jobs, his inability to anchor himself to anything substantial, the inability to carry on with his life in alignment with modern America’s promise.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:52)



20 DEATH OF A SALESMAN

[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



As we begin to wrap up the discussion for today's session, I want you to pay attention to the tone and the language in this play. There is not much of an action which is taking the play forward. It is more like a compilation of a series of dialogues which gives us an insight into the characters' mind, and what happens in these characters' mind is also a contrasting reflection of what happens in the society.

The dilemma that they are going through, the difficulties that they are facing, the concerns that they have, and the yardsticks against which they are judging their own lives is a telling commentary on what happens around them. It is very significant that in the opening scene everything happens within their apartment.

That domestic setting accentuates the irony and agony in the play the characters experience even when they are in the safest place, at their home. There are a lot of things that are left unresolved.

In fact, as Biff would point out, the moment he realizes that whether he is in Texas or Nebraska or anywhere where he is doing something which he thinks is not making sense to him, he tries to come back home, hoping that there would be some kind of an anchor for him. Waiting for some kind of contentment or discomfort, he finds that he is all the more lost at home.

It also accentuates their agony in multiple ways, by projecting home as a space where discontentment, disillusionment and a sense of denial come together to make the family members more and more unhappy. There is hardly anything that they can do for each other and neither can they can draw help from outside to resolve the situation.

This play will continue to broadly expose the shallowness and the void in the characters' lives and to demonstrate this through the various settings and situations that they encounter, and use all of that together to critique the American dream, the many lives which do not make the cut to feature into a success story as part of the American dream.

In that sense, the play and the characters and what they stand for opens up a number of debates, which could be productively used to critique the society and some of the systems which would eventually grow larger than individual lives.

So, with this, we wrap up this discussion. From the next session onwards as we continue with the play, we will also try and bring in a few theoretical frameworks which would helps us to better situate the play and the characters during our discussion. So, I strongly encourage you to read the play in original, so that you will be better equipped to engage with the continuing discussion.

Thank you for your time today, and I look forward to seeing you in the next class.