

“Willy, when are you going to grow up?”—
The Post-Oedipal Father in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*

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Psychological approaches to Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* frequently stress, partly on the basis of parallels Miller himself drew between his play and Greek tragedy (in particular, the work of Sophocles), the essentially ‘oedipal’ aspects of the drama.¹ Walter Davis asserts the action constitutes “a massive act of aggression toward the father” (126) and is structured like Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* as a sequence of “regressions” each of which brings Willy Loman closer to the truth of his life and his demise. Terry Otten characterizes Willy as a modern-day Oedipus driven by modern-day demons, i.e., “the American dream of success”: “like Oedipus, who at every point insists on fulfilling his obligation as king by unwittingly searching for his own father’s murderer even though it finally destroys him to do so, Willy unreservedly follows his imperative to its fatal end” (“*Death of a Salesman* at Fifty,” 96). Ekbert Fass, in similar terms, sees Miller’s work “pointing back to Sophocles’ drama” and the play, in reflecting Freudian preoccupation with father-son conflict, “shows (its) affinity with twentieth-century psychoanalysis” (21). Willy is the ‘tragic hero’ who brings about his own and his family’s demise by violating a taboo—the act of adultery which, when discovered by the son Biff, destroys the son’s love and loyalty to the father. Willy’s subsequent suppression of this incident, together with the repercussions on his family, becomes the premise on which the action proceeds in a relentless movement towards revelation of long-concealed ‘truth.’ In Fass’s account:

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Arthur Miller's relation to his protagonist resembles Sophocles' towards Oedipus. The play's internal logic gradually renders both audience and hero aware of his hidden guilt. In *Oedipus Rex* this takes the form of an investigation into objective facts, while *Death of a Salesman* gives us a psychoanalytic variant of the same process. Willy Loman's forays into his past proceed with the unpredictability with which a neurotic patient might talk to his analyst ... this involuntary confession, as manifest in the play's structure, finally amounts to a coherent case history of the protagonist's dilemma.

If the parallels to Sophocles and Freud may be of some use in clarifying issues central to Miller's drama, they nevertheless leave open a number of questions. In particular, to characterize Willy as Oedipus-like, i.e., insofar as he acts in ways as ensure his downfall, also raises the question of the son's role, the figure who in the Sophoclean account kills the father and thus the character upon whom the whole of the subsequent action hinges. In Davis's reading, the drama climaxes in "a murderous attack on the Father" (144) and the son would appear to be the principal perpetrator, but Davis goes on to suggest Biff has essentially "no identity" (131) and serves as little more than "scapegoat" in Willy's frantic effort ("I won't take the rap for this" [II, 103]) to avoid the 'truth' he and Biff share (124). In a reading that conforms more closely to the Sophocles version, Daniel Schneider explicitly designates the son, Biff, as "hero of the Oedipal theme" and speaks of "the murder of the father," the play descending at its finale into "an irrational Oedipal blood-bath": "Willy is really brought low ... Blow after blow descends upon him until, symbolically castrated, shouting madly he is forced to his knees" (254). But if Biff is seen as "rebellng against the father"—a view consistent with the classical Freudian reading of the oedipal story—Biff, however excoriating he may be in his

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verbal duels with the father, never displays any particular feelings of guilt nor, if seen as implicated in the father's death, any recognition of the magnitude of his crime or readiness to punish himself for it.

If interaction between father and son would seem, in this sense, to proceed in ways that diverge from Freudian or Sophoclean versions of the oedipal narrative, it is partly because the central issue in Miller's play is not so much that of one figure's aggression towards the other (however hostile father and son may in fact be towards one another) but of how characters are situated and act within an ideological, economic, social environment extending beyond the family. Miller characterized his play as a "the tragedy of a whole society"—a society Miller had described as a "machine-civilization" which would "not admit into itself any moral universe at all" (*Conversations*, 19). As Miller himself acknowledged, this contrasts with Greek tragedy, in which the "tragic hero" sheds "light upon the hidden scheme of existence, either by breaking one of its profoundest laws, as Oedipus breaks a taboo, and therefore proves the existence of the taboo, or by proving a moral world at the cost of his own life" (*Conversations*, 91). Following this line of argument, critics who have focused on the broader social aspects of the play—in particular, Willy's role as businessman/salesman and his commitment to the American success ethic—have been reluctant to view as Willy as 'tragic hero,' a skepticism having to do with questions of social location and whether Willy's suicide (for the twenty-thousand dollar life insurance payout he believes Biff will use to start up in business) can be seen as 'tragic' in the Sophoclean sense. If Willy "personifies the success myth" (Porter, 24) or the "other-directed, success-seeking new middle class man of mid-twentieth century corporate America" (Blumberg, 50), and thus exemplifies "the common man" (*Theater Essays*, 27), Willy's actions and beliefs would seem to reflect particular historical and socio-economic circumstance rather than, as Neil Heims observes about the nature of tragedy, a "struggle with something fundamental

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and universal to mankind” (2). Willy Loman has bought into what David Riesman in his characterization of postwar affluence called ‘the standard package’—suburban home, recent model Studebaker, all manner of home appliances—and thus personifies the postwar (and post-Depression) faith in the American ‘way of life,’ a rapidly expanding economy and, with VA loans and the GI Bill, opportunities beckoning to all. The standards by which Willy measures his own worth—income, status, consumer goods—would seem of a radically different order from those confronting the ‘tragic’ hero whose burden was that of “upholding the rightness of the laws” (*Theater Essays*, 36).² If Sophoclean tragedy was rooted in the Greek ideal of the *polis* and the laws which ensured its preservation, the hero is characterized by his commitment to the survival of his community and achieves ‘tragic’ status when he is ‘sacrificed’ (or sacrifices himself) for the sake of preserving the law governing communal life. Thus, once Oedipus has grasped the enormity of his transgressions—violation of the most fundamental taboos (parricide, incest)—he has no choice but to cast judgment on himself and punish himself accordingly.

In defending his hero’s ‘stature,’ Miller would claim Willy is not without “values” (*Conversations*, 37), but he was also unequivocal in viewing these values as fundamentally flawed—Willy giving his life “in order to justify the waste of it” (*Theater Essays*, 5). This would seem clear to the reader/audience from the opening scene in which Willy returns ‘exhausted to death,’ physically and mentally incapacitated by the demands of his job. In his pursuit of success, or at least the tokens of its attainment (what Rita de Giuseppe refers to as “the fat gods of consumerism” [cited Otten, *Temptation of Innocence*, 33]), Willy finds himself locked in a vicious circle of ambition, acquisition and ever-mounting debt; the greater his financial plight, the more intransigent his commitment to ‘success.’ Whatever Willy wants to believe about himself and what America offers, the drama is clear about the consequences of this faith for Willy, for his family and for what Miller

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sees as America as a whole.

What Biff confronts, having impulsively returned to the Loman home from wanderings out West, has thus less to do with the validity of Willy's aspirations—Biff immediately perceives his father's desperate straits and quickly learns Willy has been contemplating suicide—than with just how socially pervasive measures of self-worth, as determined by income, status and assets, would seem to be. If Willy cannot conceive any real alternatives to his life as salesman or to a society not ruled by “the law of success,” it is partly because, within the dramatic universe of Miller's play, there is no character, with the exception of Biff, who does not either speak for or in some sense recall for Willy the all-defining “cash nexus”—or whatever qualities of character Willy believes bring one wealth. Wherever Willy turns, he is pointedly reminded of what it means to have money: his wife, Linda, with reassurances that all is well (“you're doing wonderful, dear” [I, 28]), coupled with importunate reminders of bills to be paid (“nine-sixty for the washing machine ... the roof, you got twenty-one dollars remaining” [I, 27]); his boss, Howard, who can afford “a hundred and a half” for his new dictaphone and exhorts Willy to buy one (“You can't do without it” [II, 61]); Willy's long dead father who “With one gadget ... made more in a week than you could make in a lifetime” (I, 38); his older brother Ben who “walked into the jungle when I was seventeen ... and when I was twenty-one, I walked out ... And by God I was rich” (I, 37); the waiter in “Frank's Chop House,” in recommending “family business ... that's the best” (i.e. to avoid embezzlement) (II, 79); even “The Woman,” Willy's mistress, for whom the highest form of flattery is putting Willy “right through to the buyers” (I, 30). It is a world where, as the neighbor Charley puts it, “No man only needs a little salary” (Requiem, 110) and where, as Willy realizes, even death itself has a cash value.

While recognizing how questions of money—having or not having it—define the parameters not only of Willy's life but of a whole society, we begin, too, to grasp

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what Biff is up against when he undertakes to challenge both a system where he has never managed to find a place for himself and a father who, despite his own increasingly desperate straits, constantly invokes the rewards to be had by unquestioningly committing oneself to the goals of the system. If Willy's seemingly inexorable demise signifies the grip the success ethic has on a society of which Willy is only the most visible spokesman, one can also ask whether opposition of the sort that promises change or reform of any sort is in fact possible. Indeed, given what Miller presents as mass fixation on acquisition and 'success,' the drama seems to suggest broad social change is simply not in the cards.³ If there is to be an alternative of any sort, it can occur, as is intimated in the shift which takes place in Biff's perceptions of himself, only on the level of the individual subject, i.e. in terms, in this instance, of Biff's decision to 'drop out' and, however inchoate his own sense of himself, to live a life as much as possible outside the world Willy inhabits. Given the nature of postwar American society—the seemingly endless opportunities it held open, material rewards proffered, unquestioned faith in the superiority of American ideals—even action on the most personal, immediate level becomes a struggle. Biff is as perplexed and uncertain about himself and his future, at least initially, as Willy is unequivocal about what is worth pursuing. Nevertheless, as Biff grasps where he stands in relation to the larger society, he recognizes and freely confesses (almost, one senses, with a sense of pride) that he is a 'failure,' one who has slipped to the very bottom of the socio-economic heap. Where 'identity' is defined in terms of wealth and status, Biff is, in monetary standards of measure, a "dollar an hour man."

And yet, if at the outset Biff is characterized as shiftless, unsure of himself and what he wants, it is by relegating himself to the margins of society that he begins to see, in the quasi-dialectical twist Miller puts on the relation between father and son, what the quest for 'success' can do to those who, like Willy, have been induced to

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pursue mirage-like goals. Where Willy repeatedly professes his faith in a system which soon finds little use for him, Biff, having already written himself off, comes to understand, in perceiving his father's despair and increasingly erratic behavior, the ruthlessness of the social and economic imperatives which dictate Willy's behavior. As he watches Willy go into an emotional tailspin and retreat into a world of fantasy and delusion, Biff, having sloughed off the last vestige of ambition, can see how his father's position now resembles his own: "Pop, I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you" (II, 105). As Willy relinquishes any pretense of self-control ("the woods are burning," [II, 84]), Biff can see that any measure of self-worth in terms of cash value transforms the subject into something other than 'human'—a mere cipher, a figure on a wage slip or monthly sales report. For Biff, such measures constitute a form of radical self-negation. However one adds up the numbers, as Willy does in the final scene where he sees his life "ringing up to zero" (II, 100), they reduce those who perceive themselves in terms of such measures to 'nobodies.'

Against the larger backdrop of a "whole society" in the grip of ideals which doom those who would pursue them, the relation between father and son—here in the opposition between a father who speaks for a social ideal ('success,' however unattainable this proves to be) and an initially inarticulate son (a 'bum') who has failed to make anything of his life—the action begins to evolve in terms of an outsider/insider dynamic, rather than the hierarchical, ruler/subject configuring of character associated with tragedy. Thus the process of coming-to-terms-with a 'truth', which can be effected only by those outside the system, entails, in this instance, a reversal of the relation between father and son. The greater Willy's zeal in committing himself to success—to the point where he can no longer distinguish between his dreams and those he has long harbored for Biff—the more of a victim he comes to be. Conversely, the greater the clarity with which Biff perceives what is

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happening and the more determined he is to avoid the father's fate, the more clearly he understands that preservation of self and integrity requires that he remain an outsider. As Biff comes to grasp the 'superiority' of his position vis a vis society as a whole, he frees himself of his dependency on his father (and all that father and family signify in terms of ambition, loyalty, responsibility) and begins to achieve a sense of himself—an 'identity'—defined, somewhat paradoxically, by the absence of any vocational attainment or social accomplishment. In a society where pursuit of success is shown to involve a process of self-nullification, Willy is characterized as "the man (who) didn't know who he was," just as Biff will ultimately assert with new-found confidence, "I know who I am" (Requiem, 111). Given the moral and rhetorical authority with which Biff is invested, the early uncertainty about his aims—"I don't know what the future is ... I don't know ... what I'm supposed to want ... I don't know what to do with myself"—are first halting steps in his efforts to refuse the role his father would have him play. His account of himself as "mixed up very bad," as "not married," "not in business," as still "like a boy" (I, 16-17)—attest to just how far beyond, despite or because of his seeming disorientation, the father, family and larger society he has managed to come. By the final scene, it is Biff, the son—a figure lacking 'stature' of any sort—who, as judge of the father, arbiter of identity, promulgator of an alternative vision, has seized the moral and existential high ground.

It is given just how irreconcilable the father's and son's positions come to be that the one real turning point in the drama—Biff's decision at the end of Act One to approach his former boss Bill Oliver for a business loan—can seem something of an anomaly. Biff abruptly refrains from further provocation of the father and unexpectedly undertakes to act in compliance with Willy's wishes, a decision which seems to affirm the father's position. Viewed in the context of Biff's larger

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transformation (the only character to undergo any real change), his action here, insofar as he relinquishes his own ‘aims’ (or ‘aimlessness’), reveals his grasp of what is happening to his father on the level of the existential and purely human. While suggesting he might have gone further in underscoring the key role Biff plays in the drama, Miller has unambiguously described the action as “a race for Willy’s faith,” and the struggle between father and son pitting “the law of success” against “the system of love,” the latter as “embodied in Biff Loman.” (*Theater Essays*, 149-150). Biff’s seemingly paradoxical decision to re-enter the business world, and thus set aside his own incipient ‘humanity’ in an effort to save his father’s life, suggests the ‘sacrifice’ Biff is ready to make for the sake of the father. Insofar as Biff’s action points to recognition of a purely existential order—defined by hope, survival and some more intimate form of connection—he rejects any valuing of self in terms of income or socio-economic status, any assessment of the individual in purely quantitative terms following a ‘win/lose,’ ‘succeed/fail’ logic. Thus even as Biff here seems to reaffirm the paternal principle and the success ethic with which it is linked, the son reframes the terms in which the father is perceived. Biff resolves to approach his former boss neither for the sake of ‘opportunity’ nor to become the ‘winner’ his father wants him to be, but simply to save a man’s life. Even as he seems to accede to what Willy has repeatedly demanded of him, he does so for motives other than those Willy ascribes to him at this point.

Once Biff is viewed in terms of that which resists classification in accord with conventional measures of income or status (or ‘integration’ of any sort into the larger socio-economic system), interaction between father and son can be seen to involve something more than a conflict between opposed value systems (or between a ‘value system’ and anything that would subvert the claims a system of values might be seen to exert over any one individual). Even as Biff’s efforts to rescue his father fall short—Biff runs off with Oliver’s fountain pen before he has a chance to meet his

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former boss—his gesture opens onto the question of why it is Biff offers such determined resistance to who and what the father is, and why, even when he resolves to re-commit himself to a life on Willy's terms, he proves incapable of doing so.

If in lifting Oliver's fountain pen, Biff is driven by impulses he remains incapable of understanding fully, the theft begins to suggest an etiology of behavior and, indeed, the degree to which Biff's 'failure' is linked to Willy's behavior as putative 'father.' Establishing an equivalence between the thirty-four year old Biff of the drama's present, Biff the aimless, out-of-work wanderer, who, as he reports, "stole himself out of every good job he had since high school" (II, 104), and Biff the high school football champ who casually filches "cartons of basketballs," Biff's delinquent streak and his casual disregard for claims of ownership frame the grown son's behavior in the context of Willy's relation to Biff as adolescent. While the scenes of reminiscence and what seem to have been earlier moments of blissful domesticity (proud fathers, respectful sons) contrast with Willy's dire circumstances in the dramatic present, these episodes also underscore the obsessiveness which has characterized Willy's relation to Biff from the outset. While Willy's bouts of nostalgic recollection resurrect Biff as high school all-star—a figure of endless potential which Willy has never ceased to idealize—even as he excoriates the thirty-four year old Biff for everything he has failed to become ("not finding yourself at thirty four is a disgrace" [I, 12]), the scenes repeatedly reveal not simply a young man with delinquent propensities but the extent to which Willy, despite Linda's warnings, repeatedly condones his son's actions. In endorsing Biff's behavior, Willy reveals how far he is prepared to go in efforts to meet his sons on the basis of an essential equality or, as Linda later puts it, on the fact they are "pals."

In describing the relation between father and son, the term 'pals' transforms the father into something other than figure of paternal authority (no matter how benevolent the father may be). More than simply a process of generational leveling,

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the ‘equality’ suggested here clearly transpires on terms dictated by the sons; i.e., not in terms of an ideal of ‘maturity’ of which the father might serve as model and expect the son to live up to, but rather in terms of a fraternal camaraderie which would embrace the father. In wanting to be the ‘pal’ of his own sons, Willy forfeits his paternal status, descends to the level of the sons and, for the sake of that bond, is more than willing to overlook Biff’s seeming ‘immaturity’ and hazy notions of right and wrong. When Biff steals from the school gymnasium, he is simply showing, in Willy’s eyes, “initiative;” when Biff becomes “too violent with the girls,” it is because he has “spirit;” when he neglects his studies, it is because he possesses “personality.” More than simply the permissive parent, Willy seeks to enter into his son’s world, to the point where he is incapable of passing judgment on his sons, and for reasons which suggest that he himself remains essentially a juvenile. Unlike Biff, who in refusing to assume an office job—a position of ‘responsibility’ that would confer a certain authority—in one sense resolves to remain a ‘juvenile,’ Willy fails to perceive that no matter how much effort he puts in, he will always remain essentially marginal to the society he zealously defends. In a line, which is perhaps a key to the most fundamental aspect of the Willy figure, the much-mocked neighbor Charley, the one character who, besides from Biff, shows any insight into Willy’s nature, repeatedly queries: “Willy, when are you going to grow up?” From the son’s perspective, the father has become little more than a narcissistic extension of the self, something Biff himself seems to recognize when in the climactic showdown, he accuses Willy of having “blown him so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anyone” (II, 104). Biff’s failed attempt to see Oliver, and the reason for that failure (a proclivity carried over from youth), makes clear that ultimately at issue are not two opposed systems of value but a single larger pattern defined by adolescent behavior, one in which Willy as ‘father’ is as much implicated as Biff, both as teenage son and thirty-four year old “dollar an hour man.”

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Indeed, what becomes clear from the flashback scenes is that Willy, more than simply seeking to maintain a relationship of equality between himself and Biff, is caught up in something tantamount to an apotheosis of Biff as teenage hero. In his references to Biff as an ‘Adonis,’ a ‘Hercules,’ ‘a star that can never fade’ (I, 54)—an idolatry of the son which loses none of its force in the seventeen-year interval since Biff failed out of high school—Willy elevates his son into god-like figure before which he, the father, prostrates himself. For Willy, Biff—in his guise as high school football hero—becomes something transcendent, a venerated figure to whose judgment Willy ultimately defers.

This de facto apotheosis of the teenage son controls the series of sudden reversals which characterize the exchanges between father and son in the final sequence of scenes. When Willy learns he has been fired and, in drunken despair, recalls the moment when Biff discovered him with his mistress in a Boston hotel, it is in terms which seek to explain and thus in fact absolve his son of any responsibility for what Biff has (failed to) become. Biff has never lived up to his ‘potential’ Willy persuades himself at this point because, qua father, he failed to live up to his responsibilities to the family. Repeated references to Biff seeking to ‘spite’ Willy simply reveal the degree of guilt the father feels with respect to his own conduct. Insofar as the scene identifies Biff as witness and judge of the father’s ‘sin,’ it only supports perceptions of the degree to which Willy has elevated Biff into final judge of character and moral worth, a shift in the ‘power structure’ symbolized in the physical positioning of characters in the final exchange between the two: Willy is “on the floor on his knees” as if to beg for mercy before the son who castigates him—“You fake, you phony little fake”—for betraying the mother (II, 103). In the conversation between Biff and Willy later in the evening, Willy continues to be haunted by his feelings of guilt, but Biff, on the verge of issuing a final declaration of independence, has already moved

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on to a more compassionate plane and is beyond wanting to punish the father. As Willy here seems to disavow responsibility for Biff's failure ("I won't take the rap for this, you hear" [II, 103]), Biff makes it clear that questions of blame and responsibility no longer pertain. Impulsively embracing the father, he tells Linda, in language which would ordinarily be used to refer to a young child and thus suggestive of who possesses authority at this juncture, "Put him — put him to bed" (II, 106).

Significantly, it is in the refiguring of the father as child that Willy, in recognizing Biff's compassion ("Isn't that—isn't that remarkable? Biff—he always loved me!" [II, 106-107]), is himself suddenly reinvigorated and again inspired to act. Willy's older brother, Ben, a projection of Willy's own inner fantasies of wealth and power, reappears to endorse Willy's decision to go ahead with his suicide and his plan to pass on the insurance payment to Biff: (Ben: "Outstanding with twenty-thousand behind him" [II, 109]). While Willy has been suicidal for some time, he can bring himself to act only once he has found an ideal in the name of which he can justify the deed. He goes to his death with a final evocation of Biff in his glory days as football star: "Now when you kick off boy, I want a seventy yard boot, and get right down the field under the ball, and when you hit, hit low and hit hard, because it's important" (II, 108). If Willy's suicide would seem yet another instance of a misconceived pursuit of ideals—status, wealth, success—which he so relentlessly clings to, it is also clear that, given his failures of vision, it is only on such terms that he can express what is in effect a sacrifice 'in the name of the son,' i.e., a figure characterized by what he is not (in Biff's words, "a nothing"), a figure perpetually poised, at least in Willy's imagination, on the threshold of becoming something.

In asserting the father sacrifices himself *au nom du fils*, one is also suggesting just how radical a reversal the drama effects in traditional representations of the relationship between father and son. In Miller's drama, it is the father who is

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sacrificed (or sacrifices himself) for the sake of the son (and the marginality that the son represents) and not, as is repeatedly the case in Western literature from its origins in the Bible and Greek tragedy, the son (Isaac, Oedipus, Jesus) sacrificed *au nom du père*. Indeed, the notion of ‘reversal’ does not do full justice to the extent of the transformation Miller effects in the standard representations of ‘oedipal’ conflict, in which, if we follow the classical Freudian or Sophoclean account, the son must invariably go down to defeat. If one is tempted to see in this reversal something more like a collapse of the oedipal structure, in which the father, by allying himself with the son, becomes himself in effect a ‘marginal,’ an outsider—a process of leveling which subverts whatever remains of the father as personifying any broader social ideals—the drama nevertheless remains haunted by a certain ideal of authority (the authority of a truth) which the father must be penalized for having failed to see. In this sense, it is the guilt-ridden father who, blind to his true nature, is compelled to atone for what he has been and done. Inasmuch as Willy fails to heed his own son, the father, who has never in any real sense been a ‘father,’ puts the seal on a fate he consigned himself to when he first committed himself to a life in business. Conversely, Biff, who experiences none of the guilt we conventionally expect the son to feel for having challenged (and, in this instance, ‘defeated’) the father, becomes—from his new-found position of ‘authority’—the dispenser of mercy and forgiveness. While this radical reconfiguring of the relation between father and son can help to explain the place Miller’s drama has come to occupy in the canon of twentieth-century American drama, the play was also among the first works of the postwar era to point to a new post-Freudian, post-oedipal figuring of the father and what I would see as a ‘post-oedipal’ dynamic which came to inform a broad array of drama, fiction and poetry of the period.

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Notes

1. In his essay “Tragedy and the Common Man,” published in 1949 shortly after *Death of a Salesman* opened on Broadway to virtually universal critical acclaim, Miller defended his view that the “average man” is “as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were.” Miller further commented that “this ought to be obvious in light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as the Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instances, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations” (*Theater Essays*, 3).
2. Miller comments in an uncharacteristically lyrical voice, noting Willy’s obsession with the tokens of success—his refrigerator, his automobile, his home improvements—that the “the tragedy of Willy Loman is that he gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it. It is the tragedy of a man who did believe that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down ... by those clean-shaven frontiersmen who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices. From those forests of canned goods high up near the sky, he heard the thundering command to succeed as it ricocheted down the newspaper-lined canyons of his city, heard not a human voice, but a wind of a voice to which no human can reply in kind, except to stare into the mirror at a failure” (*Theater Essays*, 15).
3. Miller would comment in an interview with Philip Gelb in 1958: “We have come to a kind of belated recognition that the great faith in social change as an amelioration of transforming force of the human soul leaves something to be wanted ... So that the social solution of the evil in man has failed—it seems so, anyway—and we are now left with a kind of bashful unwillingness to state that we still believe in life and that we still believe there is a conceivable standard of values” (*Conversations*, 36).

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