

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA  
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

ARTHUR MILLER'S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*:  
POLITICS, SOCIAL CONSCIENCE, AND THE  
AMERICAN DREAM

Por  
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Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento parcial  
dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

Dezembro, 2001

Esta dissertação de Valdemar dos Passos Apolinário, intitulada *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman: Politics, Social Conscience, and the American Dream*, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final, pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura correspondente, da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

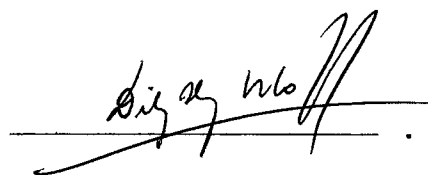
Área de Concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente  
Opção: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa



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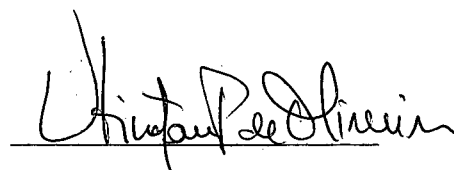
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Florianópolis, 20 de dezembro de 2001

The valiant warrior famous for fight,  
After a hundred victories, once foiled  
Is from the book of honor razed quite  
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled.

Shakespeare ( Sonnet XXV )

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS of The UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA, to SECRETARIA ESTADUAL DA EDUCAÇÃO E DO DESPORTO DO ESTADO DE SANTA CATARINA, especially to SECRETÁRIA ADJUNTA DE ESTADO DA EDUCAÇÃO E DO DESPORTO, teacher Simone Schramm, for the special job leave I was awarded, which gave me more time to develop this research; to Mr. Paul Miller and his wife Mrs. Betty Miller, for the innumerable books they sent to me from Atlanta, Georgia; and to Professor Dilvo I. Ristoff, my advisor, for the unconditional support.

I am very grateful to my friends Márcia N. de Melo, Sinara S. Branco, Danielle B. L. de Almeida, Kay Nowleska and Rubens Prawucki for their moral support; Joél Moser, Luísa Liene Bressan, and Suzzanne de Lara dos Santos for the valuable friendship, Professor Anelise Reich Corseuil for the incentive and to all my colleagues at the PGI.

Finally, I want to thank my mother for all the love and assistance and to God for His protection and constant presence in my life.

December, 2001

**ABSTRACT****ARTHUR MILLER'S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*: POLITICS, SOCIAL  
CONSCIENCE AND THE AMERICAN DREAM****VALDEMAR DOS PASSOS APOLINÁRIO****UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA****2001****Supervising professor: Dilvo I. Ristoff**

The purpose of this research is to investigate how political and social issues affected Arthur Miller's construction of the characters in the play *Death of a Salesman*, shaping their personality and determining their fate. To do so, we discussed Arthur Miller's political position in the context of the American society. In this context, we analysed some of the most influential literary critics, such as Eleanor Clark, Howard Fuller, and Harold Clurman. The main point of agreement between these critics is that Arthur Miller's political position is well disguised in his play, even though it is possible to grasp his criticism on the American political and social system by his clear position against the pressure society inflicts on individuals to reach certain standards of business success. In this sense, it became important to determine the origin of the American dream of success. This research shows that, for Arthur Miller, Benjamin Franklin was an important source of inspiration for the portrayal of the American society's political concerns, social consciousness, and the

principles underlying the American dream of success. For this reason, Benjamin Franklin's three main books, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, *The Autobiography*, and *The Way to Wealth* were analyzed here with special interest on the assumption that this study provides a better understanding of Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*. It is possible to conclude that although Benjamin Franklin's texts have clearly influenced Arthur Miller in the construction of his characters, this influence does not have a deterministic feature and that makes possible to join the characters in three distinctive groups: the pro-Franklin, the pseudo-Franklin, and the anti-Franklin groups.

Number of pages: 62

Number of words: 18,154

## RESUMO

O propósito desta pesquisa é investigar como as questões político-sociais atingiram as personagens de Arthur Miller na peça *Death of a Salesman*, contribuindo para moldar suas personalidades e determinando o seu destino. Para fazer isso, nós discutimos a posição política de Arthur Miller no contexto da sociedade americana. Nesta tentativa, analisamos alguns dos mais influentes críticos literários como Eleanor Clark, Howard Fuller e Harold Clurman. O principal ponto de entendimento entre estes críticos é que a posição política de Arthur Miller está bem dissimulada em sua peça, sendo, ainda assim, possível detectar as críticas que ele faz contra o sistema político e social americanos, pela sua posição bem definida contra a pressão que a sociedade impõe sobre os indivíduos para que eles alcancem certos padrões de sucesso nos negócios. Neste sentido, tornou-se importante determinar qual a origem do sonho americano do homem profissionalmente bem sucedido. Esta pesquisa mostra que, para Arthur Miller, Benjamin Franklin foi a principal fonte de inspiração no seu retrato das preocupações políticas, da consciência social americanas e dos princípios que formam o sonho americano do sucesso. Por esta razão, as três obras mais importantes de Benjamin Franklin: *Poor Richard's Almanack*, *The Autobiography* e *The Way to Wealth* são aqui analisadas com especial interesse na suposição de que este estudo proporcione um melhor entendimento da peça *Death of a Salesman*. Finalmente, concluímos que embora os textos de Benjamin Franklin tenham claramente influenciado Arthur Miller na construção de seus personagens,

esta influência não tem um caráter determinista, sendo possível reunir as personagens em três grupos distintos: o pró-Franklin, o pseudo-Franklin e o anti-Franklin grupos.

Número de páginas: 62

Número de palavras: 18.154



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## 1. Introduction:

### Review of Criticism on *Death of a Salesman*

Since it was performed for the first time, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* has been discussed by a large number of critics. Although the criticisms that arise from these discussions may antagonize each other, critics, at one point, have reached a consensus: this play has put Arthur Miller in a high position within the context of the American theater.

It should be natural that with so much attention focused on a single work, *Death of a Salesman* would be viewed from different perspectives. Considering the way critics differ in their analysis of Arthur Miller's text, they can be joined in three different groups. In the first group, critics argue that the text reflects Arthur Miller's criticism towards the American political system; in the second group, they assert that *Death of a Salesman* represents a collection of social illnesses inasmuch as Willy Loman's perpetual quest for success ends with his death on a very tragic circumstance. However, all throughout his tortured life, Willy Loman was indeed conscious of both his familiar and social obligations, never losing sight of what was expected of him. And last but not least, the third group of critics tries to demonstrate how the plight of Willy Loman represents Arthur Miller's negative view of the so-called American dream values.

Thus, this study is an attempt to establish a connection among these three ways of interpreting Miller's text to try to find his own position in the play, concerning his views on politics, on social issues, and on the influence of historical

factors, such as the American dream upon the individual. We believe that in presenting a review of what critics, in the three groups, have been saying about *Death of a Salesman*, we will enable our readers to better understand some of the underlying forces which sustain Miller's play.

Critics, in the first group, have worked very hard to show that Arthur Miller's text represents a general attack on the American political system. Clark belongs to this group and she justified her position, raising the question of the unfair treatment Willy Loman, the central character in the play, has received from his company. He is a man who devotes most of his life to the same company. When he was young, he was an efficient salesman, but once he gets old and tired, his sales records drop. As a consequence, Willy loses his salary and has to work on straight commission. Finally, he is fired. This led Willy to kill himself. Clark's thesis is that by portraying this scene, Arthur Miller intends to attack the capitalist system which would be responsible for Willy's tragic end. She says: "It is, of course, the capitalist system that has done Willy in;"(219) However, Miller's political position in the play is not clearly defined, as it is implied in Clark's text. In her interpretation, Willy's refusal of Charley's offer of a job, after he has been fired, may indicate Arthur Miller's attempt to withdraw his initial accusation on the American political system. This portrait of a character with a weak personality brings a new theory into discussion, that Willy was entirely responsible for his failure. This theory is supported by Fuller who says that Willy has been the victim of a delusion caused by his wrong reading of reality. (212) Yet, Willy does not lack enthusiasm. At the same time as Fuller asserts that, pointing out how important enthusiasm is for any accomplishment, he adverts that care must be taken, otherwise enthusiasm may become an evil force when not handled with

intelligence. And Fuller finally says that Willy Loman lacked this intelligence. In addition to that, Fuller accuses Willy of being dishonest, and he credits Willy's failure to these two facts, lack of intelligence and dishonesty. With this analysis of Willy's behavior, Fuller can be included in the second group of critics; the one concerned with the influence of social issues upon individuals. Fuller's thesis may be that Willy was under society pressure for the accomplishment of some social standards, and that this pressure may have disturbed Willy's mind. That's why it is important to consider what the second group of critics says about the social implications of the text play.

Certainly, Arthur Miller did not intend to show a man isolated from his social context. In this sense, it is appropriate to discuss any social factor that may have affected the characters' behavior in the play. Critics who support this idea argue that social problems may represent a crucial factor in determining Willy's tragic end. Critics, however, have not focused specifically on the social issues influence on the characters' destiny. Their criticism is, most of the time, mixed with political matters. For this reason it is possible to find social criticism in the critique of the same scholars who discuss politics. Fuller, for example, introduced his discussion on the influence of the social context, quoting Charley's speech in the requiem: "Willy was a salesman; and for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law, or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine; and when they start not smiling back – boy, that's an earthquake..." (240) The question is, why did they start not smiling back to Willy? Fuller's answer is that competition had become very strong in the most powerful economy of the world. But this may not be the only answer to that

question. Arthur Miller's answer to the same question may be different. To know his answer, it is necessary to situate *Death of a Salesman* in time. Arthur Miller set the story just some years after the Great Depression. So, it is natural that the same adversities people had in real life, would be transferred to the stage. Arthur Miller's response to the above question may be that Willy Loman was under the pressure of a society which was struggling to find its own way to get on the track of progress again. Because Willy was part of this society, the analysis of his behavior, of his efforts to succeed in his career, of the strategies he used to try to make his dreams come true, all reflect a society that in time of trouble always returns to the same values that helped to shape its own identity: moral improvement, enterprise, courage, and hard work. To understand these values, one must pay attention to some historical factors. That's what Clurman did when he tried to explain that Willy was highly influenced by the precepts of the American dream.

Based on this, Clurman can be considered the main representative of the third current of critics mentioned earlier. This current also advocates the idea that Willy was under the influence of the so-called American dream. And due to Willy's tragic end, there may be some criticism on Arthur Miller's text, concerning those values implied in the American dream of business success. Lest he be misunderstood, Clurman explains what he calls the two versions of the American dream: the historical one and the dream of business success. What differentiates them is that the first is related to "the promise of a land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all" (212); and the second version is the dream of business success which came up after the Civil War (213). This second version of the American dream would be based on the premises that enterprise, courage, and hard work were the keys to

success. Yet, Clurman distinguishes in the second version of the American dream a new change that, for him, occurred after the First World War. With this change, salesmanship replaces the idea of enterprise, hard work and courage as the key for business success. According to him, the central character of *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman, acts guided by this new version of the American dream. Willy's relationship to the concepts of salesmanship would have been crucial to determine not only Willy's fate, but also the fate of his sons, who have failed in business for not having followed their father's orientations.

Be that as it may, to investigate the premises of the American dream without examining Benjamin Franklin's ideas expressed in *The Autobiography*, and in his two other books, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, and *The Way to Wealth*, would not do justice to the discussion of the American dream and to its extensive presence in Miller's play. Not only are Franklin's writings very similar to the premises of the American dream of business success, but evidence was found that Arthur Miller was highly influenced by Franklin's ideas. Based on that evidence we built the hypothesis that most of the characters in *Death of a Salesman* not only tried to follow Benjamin Franklin's pieces of advice on how to do business, but the way Arthur Miller interpreted Franklin's ideas may help us to determine his political position and the kind of criticism he is making on the American society and the values that shaped his country.

## **2. Benjamin Franklin and the American Dream**

### **2.1 Historical Background**

No other man in any other country has better represented his nation through his thoughts, his lifestyle, his accomplishments, and his behavior than Benjamin Franklin did. He emerged from obscurity to fame by his own effort, his intelligence, and his desire to be successful. He was ambitious and he advised people on the way to wealth and in the art of conversation. His writings also show a man concerned with religion, moral values, and politics.

To a better understanding of how Benjamin Franklin became a philosopher, a statesman, and a man of letters, it would be appropriate to trace his career since his birth in Boston, in 1706. Franklin was the youngest son of fifteen children of Josiah Franklin, tallow chandler and a soap boiler who had emigrated from England in 1683 to practice his puritan faith freely. Benjamin Franklin was sent to grammar school when he was eight, but there he could not stay long because his father could not afford it. By the age of ten, Franklin was working with his father. The boy was employed in cutting wick for candles, filling the dipping mold, and the molds for casting candles, attending the shop and going on errands. Franklin did not like the job. He had a great inclination for the sea, but his father was against it. In order to

keep his son's mind out of the sea, Josiah Franklin, used to take little Franklin to see different jobs, while the father observed the son's inclination.

Then, when Benjamin Franklin was twelve, he found himself serving his brother James Franklin as an apprentice to printing. James had a printing house, and Benjamin felt the new job would fit him, since it would enable him to have a better contact with books, an acquaintance with the apprentices of booksellers, and the opportunity to borrow books, which he did very often. This satisfied Franklin's old habit of reading and helped to shape his personality and to introduce him to important people. From now on, Benjamin Franklin started to guide himself toward the first changes in his life, which were achieved by his own effort and through the influence of his own readings.

Franklin worked with his brother until he was seventeen years old. During this time, Franklin had contact with different authors, made new friends with whom he could discuss his readings. In 1720, or 1721, his brother started printing a newspaper, the "New England Courant." Benjamin, anonymously, wrote some articles that were eventually published in his brother's newspaper. By this time, James Franklin published an article, from another author, which was considered offensive to the Assembly. This caused him to be imprisoned. During his brother's confinement, Benjamin Franklin managed the paper, which continued to be printed on his name since his brother's discharge was accompanied with an order from the House that he should no longer print the paper called "New England Courant."

At length the divergences between James and Benjamin led the latter to leave his town for the first time. Benjamin Franklin had a long and hard boat trip from



Boston to Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, Franklin got a job and began to get acquainted with the young people who were lovers of reading. The new acquaintances and the new job contributed to take Franklin overseas. The new life has confirmed Benjamin Franklin's self-determination and represented the starting point of a brilliant career. It was in London that Benjamin Franklin improved his professional skills which later would enable him to change his life completely. These changes, as Benjamin Franklin later acknowledged, happened because he relied on his struggle to develop virtues and defeat vices.

The investigation of Benjamin Franklin's virtues provides the background to understand not only the way he changed his life but also the concepts of the American dream which are closely related to Franklin's ideas. These concepts were part of Franklin's personality and he tried to pass them on to other people. Initially, he used his personal contacts to carry out this intention, then, as a writer, he continued spreading his ideas to a larger group of people. This was possible because in both cases Benjamin Franklin took the advantage of his deep involvement in social affairs which made him a well known person. Wherever there was a problem to be solved, Franklin was there to discuss it, to present his suggestions, or to come up with a solution. Because of this active participation in the society's problems, Franklin gained recognition and fame. Motivated by this, as well as by the successful changes in his life, he decided to address a larger number of people. His first and most successful attempt of doing that resulted in the book *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

## 2.2 *Poor Richard's Almanack*

Franklin first published the almanac when he was only twenty-six, and continued with new editions annually for the next quarter of century. He adopted the persona of Richard Saunders, a dreamy astrologer and sometimes moralist whose wife urges him to think of his familial responsibility. *Poor Richard's Almanack* offered up everything from weather predictions and horoscopes to common sense observations and wise sayings.

It is from these sayings that the reader can get some evidence of how much Franklin helped to shape America's way of thinking. This can be asserted if one considers the immense popularity which distinguished Franklin from many other historical characters of his time. *Poor Richard's Almanack* certainly contributed to that. The sayings used by Franklin in the almanac were applied to different features of human behavior in society. Franklin either addressed his teachings to those involved with religion, or to entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens. In short, Franklin's teachings were intended to change the whole society – a society that was rough, competitive, unfair, violent and based on privilege. As Daniel Aaron says in his introduction to *The Autobiography*, Franklin hoped that he could make the society "...more bearable not through spiritual revivals, not by burnt offerings, but by harnessing aspiration to possibility, by small, gradual, and unmomentous remedial acts, by self-discipline and self-trust." ( xi )

Self-discipline was the central issue in Franklin's writings, and the key to start the development of his set of virtues: moral, social, economic, and political. Starting with *Poor Richard's Almanack*, one can draw from the different editions a wide range

of sayings that represent the struggle of the individuals to change society through a change in their own behavior. If that was not the case, how could one explain that the almanac was annually printed for almost a quarter of a century? Every edition of the almanac opened with a short introduction through which Richard Saunders used to address his readers. Then, he passed to his sayings.

One of his most common worries was the way people used to eat. Probably they used to eat too much, which caused Poor Richard to come up with such sayings as: "Eat to live, and not live to eat." (8) "To lengthen thy life, lessen thy meals." (9) And self-discipline related to the correct way of eating continued being the topic of subsequent editions of Franklin's almanac: "Who dainties love, shall Beggars prove." (23) Here, Poor Richard was concerned with extra money people would spend to eat food of refined taste. And he continued, "He that never eats too much, will never be lazy." (50) "Sleep without supping, and you'll rise without owing for it." (77) "A full Belly makes a dull Brain." (102) Richard Saunders was also worried about two other bad habits: drinking and laziness, which in his opinion should be defeated if people wanted to accomplish more. People with these habits should consider the following sayings: "Take counsel in wine, but resolve afterwards in water." (11) "He that drinks fast, pays slow." (11) "The diligent Spinner has a large Shift." (45) "Trouble springs from Idleness; Toil from Ease." (44) "Laziness travels so slowly that Poverty soon overtakes him." (49)

The rough and ruthless society of the time concerned Richard Saunders. This concern is expressed in the sayings prepared in order to teach moral values and social behavior. They also show how much Mr. Saunders would like to change the way

people relate to each other. Again, Richard Saunders points out that the correct observance of these teachings would represent an opportunity of accomplishments both in personal life and in business. One of these moral values would be the correct payment of one's debts: "He's gone, and forgot nothing but to say farewell to his creditors." (5) "A rich rogue is like a fat hog, who never does good till as dead as a log." (7) "There is neither honor nor gain got in dealing with a vil-lain." (14) "An honest Man will receive neither Money nor Praise that is not his due." (53) Personal relationships would be improved by defeating the vice of pride, by forgiveness, and by mutual respect: "Presumption first blinds a Man then sets him a running." (21) "Declaiming against Pride, is not always a Sign of Humility." (27) "Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; Revenging one makes you even with him; Forgiving it sets you above him." (28) "Be civil to all; sociable to many; familiar with few; Friend to one; enemy to none." (41) "Act uprightly and despise Calumny, Dirt may stick to a Mud wall, but not to polish'd Marble." (73)

Franklin was a master persuader, skilled in the art of making his readers accept his ideas as their own. Writing for him was a form of action, and he transferred these skills to his fictitious character Richard Saunders. When Richard taught a kind of social or personal behavior through his almanac, he was pretty convincing, probably because his creator had already undergone through the same situation. Franklin was pretty much worried with self-discipline, moral and social virtues as well as with man's engagement in political and economic affairs. His own example of rapid economic growth is present throughout his writings. *Poor Richard's Almanack* shows how seriously Franklin addressed the issue. Perhaps, he was so convincing due

to his great ability to connect the virtues he taught: self-discipline, moral and social values, as well as the economic and political behavior man should adopt to build up a peaceful and growing society. The first quotation below may illustrate this very well: "Relation without friendship, friendship without power, power without will, will without effect, effect without profit, and profit without virtue, are not worth a farto." (7) Besides these more general sayings, Poor Richard had many others through which he more directly referred to the economic issue. In doing so, he clearly stressed the value of industry and frugality: "Plough deep while Sluggard sleep; And you will have Corn to sell and to keep." (48) "Scarlet, Silk and Velvet have put out the Kitchen Fire." (64) "Idleness is the Dead Sea, that swallows all Virtues: Be active in Business, that Temptation may miss her Aim; The Bird that sits is easily shot." (69)

However, adages were not the only way Franklin chose to teach his readers. Besides the introduction, in every edition of the almanac Richard Saunders also addressed his readers through larger texts inserted among his sayings. Either these texts were prose like, or they were built like short poems. The author's concern was to highlight the importance of following some moral values or giving good advice to people on how they could make their lives better. The ideas of these texts, as well as the ideas of the short poems inserted among the adages were not in any form inconsistent with what Franklin taught through his sayings; that is, man should not neglect any of the thirteen virtues he included in his project to arrive at moral perfection. This set of virtues offers opportunity for more discussion, which will be presented in the review of *The Autobiography*. Nevertheless, it is convenient to name

them here: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity, and Humility.

The 1749 edition of *Poor Richard's Almanack* opens the page reserved for February with a short poem, which is a good example of how persistent Franklin was in his purpose to develop virtues and defeat vices. The voice of the poem urges readers to start the day by praying to God and asking for his protection, thus defeating daily temptations.

It can not be ignored that Franklin's successful professional career brought him not only fame, but also wealth. It was Franklin's opinion that he had accomplished this position as a result of his strict observance of his set of virtues; on the other hand, being rich offered him the opportunity to practice these virtues. This may explain why Franklin was so obstinate in teaching people how to profit from business, how people should make money, and enlarge their fortune. It is from the 1749 edition of *Poor Richard's Almanack* that this quotation was taken: "The Art of getting Riches consists very much in THRIFT. All Man are not equally qualified for getting Money, but it is in the Power of everyone alike to practice this Virtue." (30) At the end of the same edition, there is a poem in which the idea of order, resolution, and frugality is clearly expressed. In that poem, Franklin emphasizes the importance of not delaying for tomorrow what one can do today, and he also advises people that what is to be done, should be done with care. He closes the poem passing his lesson about frugality, then inviting readers to balance their expenses, to avoid any kind of waste and to take even the small opportunities to start one's fortune. In subsequent editions of the same almanac, these teachings were ever present. When it was issued

in 1756, along with the short poem and the sayings presented in April, this page closes with a text, containing a short account of Franklin's trip in the Jerseys. In this account, he tells that one of his old acquaintances had been complaining too much about the want of money. Franklin tells his friend that one could spend just half of the money one is used to spending; he estimates that the other half of the money was usually spent on "superfluities" or "conviniences". Then, Franklin gives his advice on how to save up this other half of the money. First, one should avoid buying unnecessary new clothes; second, the expenses with China ware and India silks should be postponed for the following year; third, drinkers should lessen the amount of punch, wine or tea, no matter how much they are used to drinking. Finally, one of the most important lesson on economy was the idea of building a Striking Sundial. The purpose of making this very complicated clocklike apparatus was to show that certain things have greater cost for little advantage. It is really an important economy lesson.

Although the adages, small stories, and poems contained in *Poor Richard's Almanck* may sound funny for most of the 21<sup>st</sup>'s century readers, for Benjamin Franklin they were meant for much more than making his 18<sup>th</sup> century readers laugh. He believed that through his writings, he might contribute to change people's behavior, as well as society itself. And there is evidence that this worked out successfully since Franklin made meaningful changes not only in his life, but also in the lives of many people around him. These changes are evident in the pages of Benjamin Franklin's most celebrated book, *The Autobiography*.

### **2.3 The Autobiography**

This book portrays so much of Franklin's personality that it is worth to be studied separately. However, the title *The Autobiography* is a little misleading, since the book ends around 1757, long before Franklin had taken on many of his important public roles. Furthermore, it omits episodes in his life that predated 1757 – his celebrated kite experiment, for example – and the monologue of the narrator is interpolated with fictions, not to mention the misrememberings. In short, *The Autobiography* is neither chronological, nor a strictly accurate report of Franklin's career, but a conduct book grounded in facts and designed to show America's youth how they, too, might rise from obscurity to eminence.

Franklin called his *Autobiography* a “rambling series of Digressions.” (12) It might more accurately be defined as an account of histrionic life, in which he acted out various and illustrative roles on the stage of history. For this reason, it would be quite interesting to devote some pages to discuss this book, and to watch the development of Franklin's life, and later on to use this information in order to show how Franklin's ideas have been perpetuated throughout history.

One of the strongest features that characterized Franklin's interest for moral values is his attachment to family. This is the starting point of *The Autobiography*. He addresses his son to tell the story of his life, and starts narrating his investigations by the history of his early family members. This investigation provided him the means to find out details about his uncle's lives, as well as his grandfather's and father's. There are interesting common points in the life of his three uncles, Thomas, John and Benjamin, that are worth mentioning. The three of them, as well as his father, were all hard-working. The oldest one, Thomas, was bred a smith under his



father's orientation, and also had an active participation in the civic and religious life of the county where he lived. Benjamin, his third uncle, was also a religious man and very active in politics. Franklin's father was not much different from his brothers. He was hard-working and engaged in his community's religious and political affairs. *The Autobiography* itself was the most extraordinary demonstration of Franklin's concern with family values, as it was initially conceived to teach Franklin's son how to behave in order to be successful both in business and social affairs.

The important role Franklin played in the social life of his time is irrefutable, but he himself was honest enough to declare that, sometimes, he took personal business advantage from his participation in many of his works that were envisaged to benefit a larger group of people: "Among my Friends in the house I must not forget Mr. Hamilton before mentioned, who was then returned from England & had a Seat in it. He interested himself for me strongly in that Instance, as he did in many others afterwards, continuing his Patronage till his Death." (61-62) However, most of the public service he was involved with had been personally favorable to him, as they contributed to bring him fame and distinction from his fellow citizens. The best example can be drawn from Franklin's idea of creating the first subscription library. This was Franklin's first project of public nature which has greatly contributed to bring him respect from his community. Other projects followed, like the establishment of the Union Fire Company, the first fire brigade to be set in America, and the Academy of Philadelphia, the first college in town.

There are some facts which may help to explain why society so easily accepted Franklin's ideas: his successful personal life, characterized by a fast and

solid economic growth, as well as his independence to develop his own plans. Independence is sometimes implied, and at other times evident in Franklin's writings. But in both cases it is a clear demonstration that Franklin believed man should find inside himself the necessity and the strength for any personal change. This idea of "individuality" may be one of the strongest characteristics which helped to shape the ideals of the American dream throughout History, as it has been the theme for many American writers, like Emerson, for example. In *Self-reliance*, he says: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." (20), "The magnetism which all original action exerts is explained when we inquire the reason of self-trust." (27) On the other hand, Benjamin Franklin's whole life, as he portrayed himself in *The Autobiography*, is an extraordinary lesson on how an individual should build his career by himself. And the position Franklin assumed in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, can also be compared to what was commented before about Emerson: "In Things of moment, on thy self depend,/ Nor trust too far thy Servent or thy friends:" (32), "God helps them that help themselves," (82), and He that by Plough must thrive,/ Himself must either hold or drive." (86) Besides that, Franklin was completely convinced that his financial success was due to a life conduct he created based on his own experiences. In *The Autobiography*, he tried teaching this to the readers. The value that he mostly highlighted as essential for economic growth is that of hard work. He showed this when he talked about his family members and about himself. His first example of how hard work helped him to accomplish his goals is present in the narration of his early professional life, when he worked as an apprentice for his brother, and then continued when he started a more independent life in Boston. The same kind of attitude he adopted when he lived abroad, as he himself pointed out:

“Thus I spent about 18 Months in London. Most Part of the Time, I worked hard at my Business, & spent but little upon myself except in seeing Plays, & in Books.” (49)

When Franklin returned to Philadelphia this virtue was largely incorporated to his behavior. With the start of his own business, he could exercise this virtue even with more pleasure. Soon the people in town started to distinguish Franklin from other workers. This recognition brought him more profit, since now he had more work to do.

Certainly, Benjamin Franklin’s concern with economic growth was not only related to hard work. The development of this virtue was also based on producing a work of good quality. One can have a good example of this just looking into Franklin’s earlier career as a newspaper owner. By that time, he easily surpassed his opponent in the business, since he offered his readers a paper produced with better letter type and better printed. However this is not all. The concept of economic success adopted by Franklin also included organization and the art of making good relationships. As for organization, he recommended that all business should be ruled by a contract. The importance of keeping good relationship to improve business was mentioned throughout *The Autobiography*. He took all the opportunities to make friends. He did that in his jobs, and in the social, political, and religious meetings he used to participate. The way Franklin has been depicted here may lead some readers to think of him as a man greatly moved by his own financial interests<sup>1</sup>. That is not the case. First of all, Franklin’s attitudes were based on strict rules of probity. To show

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<sup>1</sup> When Weber discussed the origins of capitalism, he made this analysis of Franklin’s ideals: “The spirit of capitalism, in the sense which we are using the term, had to fight its way to supremacy against a whole world of hostile forces. A state of mind such as that expressed in the passages we have quoted from Franklin and which called forth the applause of a whole people, would both in ancient times and in the Middle Ages have been proscribed as the lowest sort of avarice and as an attitude lacking in self-respect.” (20-21)

this, he does not only talk about himself, but he also give examples of other people who have succeeded in business without having to cheat others. Credit and honesty were very important for Franklin:

My old Competitor's Newspaper declined proportionally, and I was satisfy'd without relating his Refusal, while Postmaster, to permit my Papers being carried out by the Riders. Thus He suffer'd greatly from his Neglect in due Accounting: and I mention it as a Lesson to those young man who may be employ'd in managing Affairs for others that they should always render Accounts & make Remittances, with great Clearness and Punctuality. – The Character of observing such a Conduct is the most powerful of all Reccommendations to new Employments & Increase of Business. (100)

This is just one way to show how moral values, like honesty, had such a great influence in the shaping of Franklin's personality, and how he cared about teaching these values to others. The examples he presented were either taken from his own life, or from the lives of people around him. In many opportunities, Franklin recognized his own mistakes. He did that when he talked about the differences between him and his brother, when he told he had spent money a friend had trusted him, and he was convinced it was a wrongdoing to spend his friend's money. However, for Benjamin Franklin, moral was not just regret about one's mistakes. It was a life conduct, based on strict principles that should be followed every day. Franklin believed that truth, sincerity and integrity in dealing between men were of extreme importance for a happy life. He was so convinced of that, that he registered these principles in his diary as a reminder that he should observe them all the time. Franklin was so determined to accomplish moral perfection that he created a plan containing the virtues he should pursue. The set of virtues he intended to observe had

been taken from different books, and he ordered them his own way. The table below shows how Franklin organized these virtues along with their respective actions:

VIRTUES	ACTIONS
1. Temperance.	1. Eat not to Dullness. 2. Drink not to elevation.
2. Silence.	1. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. 2. Avoid trifling Conversation.
3. Order.	1. Let all your Things have their Places. 2. Let each Part of your Business have its Time.
4. Resolution.	1. Resolve to perform what you ought. 2. Perform what you resolve.
5. Frugality.	1. Make no Expence but to do good to others or yourself. 2. Waste nothing.
6. Industry.	1. Lose no Time. 2. Be always employ'd in something useful. 3. Cut off all unnecessary Actions.
7. Sincerity.	1. Use no hurtful Deceit. 2. Think innocently and justly; and if you speak; speak accordingly.
8. Justice.	1. Wrong none, by doing Injuries or omitting the Benefits that are your Duty.
9. Moderation.	1. Avoid Extreams. 2. Forebear resenting Injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10. Cleanliness.	1. Tolerate no Uncleaness in Body, Cloaths or Habitation.
11. Tranquility.	1. Be not disturbed at Trifles, or at Accidents common or unavoidable.
12. Chastity.	1. Rarely use Venery but for Health or Offspring; Never to Dullness, Weakness, or Injury of your own or another's Peace or Reputation.
13. Humility.	1. Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

Franklin tried to develop these virtues one by one, and he only passed to the next virtue after he had observed clear results in the accomplishment of the basic

precepts of the virtue he was working on. It should be convenient to comment on the fortuitous difficulties and results Franklin obtained in his attempt to arrive at moral perfection. Starting with Temperance, Franklin justified that the development of this virtue gives the person coolness and clearness of head which are necessary to keep constant vigilance against old habits and the force of perpetual temptations. Since Temperance had been acquired, it would be easier to pass to Silence, the next virtue. Franklin thought he should work hard on this virtue, since he had the habit of prattling, punning, and joking, which are contrary to his view that one would learn more by listening. Immediately, after Silence, he put Order, because he believed that this virtue would bring him more time to study and to develop his projects. Franklin was very clever in ordering the thirteen virtues. The sequence he chose would make their development easier, so Resolution was immediately followed by Frugality and Industry. Franklin had in mind that since Resolution had become a habit, he could benefit from this in the accomplishment of the next virtues, Frugality and Industry, which would bring him, affluence and independence, conditions which, he believed, were essential to more easily practice Sincerity and Justice. Franklin worked hard in his project of moral improvement. The results came in different ways.

By the time he had completed the first round of his plan, he had already gained fame and fortune. Along with money, came his country's recognition that he was morally qualified to represent the nation in the most honorable events of the time. Through his experience as a statesman, Franklin also tried teaching people how to do a good job when dealing with public affairs. Perhaps his ideals of liberty of conscience were inherited from his father.

In the very beginning of *The Autobiography*, Franklin mentions liberty of conscience as one of his father's qualities. One of his attitudes that he himself considered essential for business, also characterized his political position: the importance of keeping good and important relationships. Sometimes these relationships were started by Franklin himself, but in many other opportunities these relationships stemmed from Franklin's ongoing success both in his personal life and in social affairs. Franklin, however, did not do politics just as a set of rules that politicians should know very well to play the game. He believed politics was much more than that. Besides his own inclination to do good, he took all the opportunities to listen to the advice of other people. When Benjamin Vaughan wrote to Franklin, urging his addressee to write his autobiography. In some part of the letter, he clearly stated his opinion about what should be the right political position for a statesman. He said that sometimes statesmen are warriors, or that people in high position may become incongruent to the ordinary citizen. He concluded that there is no incompatibility in being big and living close to the mass. (71) This may have had an influence on Franklin's political position because it perfectly fitted what Franklin used to quote from other writers. Franklin was also very critical of the way politics was practiced. In his opinion, political parties were largely responsible for the world's problems. They had divergences among them and it was always hard for them to come to an agreement because of personal interests, and the interests of groups, sometimes, conflicted with more general objectives. (91) Therefore, most of Franklin's acts produced benefits that aimed at the improvement of society in general. That explains his concern in offering education, health, security and quality of life for a larger community. These practical examples match the philosophy of *Poor*

*Richard's Almanack*. That's why Franklin and Richard Saunders are often seen as undistinguishable characters. The first firmly believed in the usefulness of Poor Richard's advice. When he was away and he could not advise his daughter, Sally, directly, he used to instruct her to read *Poor Richard's Almanack* a little.

Both in *The Autobiography* and in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, as well as in Franklin's other writings, readers could find ample suggestions for achieving a good life, by being healthy, wealthy and wise. People were interested in the means of achieving these ideals and Franklin furnished the answers. His answers, mostly, reflected not only the thought of a man, but they also represented the ideals of a society that was emerging from anonymity to progress. These ideas of progress were connected to a set of values which were prior to the era. To be clearer, Franklin's ideas of personal progress and moral values were similar to those adopted by the early pilgrims in America. It would be convenient here to mention some of the main facts which characterized the pilgrims' early life in the New World. The Puritans that came to America were highly intellectualized. Between 1630 and 1690 there were as many university graduated settlers in New England as in their mother country. This was remarkable because, by this time, most people living in America were aristocrats and such people would not risk to live in hard conditions. The Puritans that came to America were decided to win through their own effort. They were self-taught people and they wanted education to understand and carry out God's will. In the Puritans' definition, good reading aimed to make people aware of how important it was to worship God and to understand the dangers for the soul on Earth. Life was seen as a probation. Those that failed in life on Earth, would be condemned to eternal spiritual



suffering, while those who were successful, would live in heavenly peace. In this sense, the world was the arena for constant fight between God's power and evil hosts. This explains why the Puritans were so ambitious, worked hard, and wanted so much to be successful in business. For many scholars this may be the point of connection between puritanism and capitalism. And again, a new connection could be established between these ideas and the precepts that helped to shape the ideals of the American dream. In Franklin, one can find much of those ideals, which are expressed by his engagement in society's problems, by his religious tolerance, his desire for moral improvement, and his strong belief that economic growth favors the development of spiritual and moral perfection. That's why Franklin worried so much in teaching people how to do business. Franklin's lessons on the subject can be found both in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, and in *The Autobiography*, but it is in *The Way to Wealth* that Franklin goes more straight to the point.

#### ***2.4 The Way to Wealth***

Benjamin Franklin started the book with a self-evaluation of his life. Even considering he had great accomplishments in a short period of time, Franklin acknowledged, he could have gone further if he had established some life plans from the beginning of his professional career. When he decided to write *The Way to Wealth*, he was concluding his career as a rising tradesman and entering the world of diplomacy. That means, he was already an experienced man in business. In order not to repeat mistakes he had already made, Franklin made some resolutions, that, as he said in *The Autobiography*, helped him to "live in all respects like a rational creature." (182) In his resolutions, he reiterated some of the thoughts he had already expressed in his previous books. Basically, the resolutions that open *The Way to*

*Wealth* refer to the precepts of frugality, sincerity, and industry. Franklin said he used to feel really uncomfortable until he had paid what he owed because this would be contrary to the virtue of sincerity. To practice this virtue, he promised no use of hurtful deceit, and he endeavoured to speak truth in every instance. Franklin firmly believed that a sincere person would give nobody expectations that could not be fulfilled. Also, he continued to apply the idea of industry to any business, at the same time as he advised people to be wary of projects that promised to bring large profit in a short period of time. Then, Franklin assured that industry and patience were the surest ways to succeed in business.

It should be recalled what father Abraham told his audience, in the book *The Way to Wealth*, about industry. People were complaining about the heavy taxes which were imposed on them by the government. Father Abraham agreed with them, but they were also warned to be wary of the dangers of idleness, pride, and folly. For father Abraham people were taxed much more by these vices than by any other tax that came from government. If people did not do anything to defeat these vices, they were not trying to help themselves, and, in his words, “God helps them that help themselves.” (11)

Next, he elaborated on one of the virtues he was most concerned with, Industry. To do that he brought into discussion some of *Poor Richard's Almanack's* sayings: “Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all easy; and he that riseth late, must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night.” (12) This adage fits well his idea that one should make good use of time, because the time one loses can not be found again. And father Abraham went on quoting Poor Richard to teach the

importance of working hard for paying debts, because, as he said, once you have them, it is with hard work that you will pay them off, not with despair. Certainly, one should be happier with no debt to pay. However, this comfortable situation would be accomplished only by those who were careful at any instance of their lives. His first advice related to care in business, it was that one should oversee his/her own affairs without trusting too much to others. Next, he stressed that a good way to be prosperous in business, it would be to settle down, and that business owners should themselves manage their own business. Then, father Abraham continued with his teaching on care, urging his listeners to pay attention to their workers. According to him, the lack of attention to the workers would bring damage to business. When father Abraham spoke, he made clear that his teachings should be applied even to the smallest matters. And he takes, once again, an adage from *Poor Richard's Almanack* to justify his opinion: "A little neglect may breed great mischief; for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for want of a horse the rider was lost, being overtaken and slain by the enemy, all for want of a little care about a horse shoe nail." (18)

We have been seeing that in *The Way to Wealth*, Franklin was restating what he had already said in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, or in *The Autobiography*. Frugality, for example, was one of the first virtues he had tried to develop when he designed his plan to arrive at moral perfection which was first shown in *The Autobiography*. This explains why Franklin's own conduct was so clearly reflected in his words. For him, to develop the virtue of Frugality, one should live a plain life, worrying about saving as much as about earning. Then, father Abraham warned that one vice means extra

money spent in unusefulnesses. He even mentioned that small extravagances may cost significant loss in one's personal budget. It is in this context that he advised people not to spend too much money with unnecessary food, drink, finer clothes, and entertainment. With this adage, father Abraham illustrated his teachings: "A small leak will sink a great ship." (19-20) And through the voice of this character, Franklin goes on showing how much he worried with expenses that could be avoided, either these expenses were related to spending money with parties, or buying what was not necessary. Again, Poor Richard is evoked as a kind of wise voice-over always able to have some fun with his own teachings: "Fools make feasts, and wise men eat at them." (20), or "Buy what thou hast no need of, and ere long thou shalt sell thy necessaries." (20) Soon, readers are warned to watch out with pride. Pride, in his views, was a vice that contributed to corrupt the virtue of Frugality. Proud people were likely to spend more money and forget that no expense should be bigger than one's budget. This financial basic rule has also a saying for that, "Vessels large may venture more, But little boats should keep near shore." (23) If people had in mind all dangers that the vice of pride brings, they would avoid the great problems debtors have always to face. One of these problems would be to borrow money usually from whom they regarded in a lower position to them. The lesson on pride goes on, and the next point to be considered was how easily people buy one thing that call their attention, but much easier, he warned, it was to buy the next objects just to satisfy one's feeling of pride. The next inconvenience of running in debt was, as he said, "You give to another power over your liberty." (24-25) Debtors will always be in shame, fear, and they even may tell lies to their creditors when they can not pay what they owe. Franklin finally asserted that debtors will live under such pressure, that

time seems to run faster for them. Thus he brought one more adage: "Those have a short Lent who owe money to be paid at Easter." (27)

*The Way to Wealth* was closed urging readers to follow its precepts of Industry, Frugality and Prudence, but not without considering man's humble position in relation to God. This would be the starting point through which people would reveal their wisdom. Besides that, one should learn through one's own experience. Also, individuals should allow themselves to be counselled, and they should not forget to hear their reason, because as father Abraham said, "If you will not hear Reason, she will sure rap your knuckles." (29)

In the preceding pages we saw the many-sided Franklin. We saw him through his own eyes, and sometimes through the eyes of the characters he created himself. When we started to follow his life, we could perceive his own efforts to work on a set of values aimed at improving his moral qualities. The reader was also surprised by Franklin's teachings on how to do business, and how to help others to achieve a better life, revealing Franklin's engagement in society's affairs. The analysis that has been done here reflects not only Franklin's personality, but also a society whose founders have all worked hard to promote its growth. And they must have succeeded in their design because they got to highlight their country's position in the context of the nations of their time.

### 3. Arthur Miller and the American Dream

The analysis of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* offers an outstanding opportunity to determine to what extent it is possible to establish a relationship between Benjamin Franklin's ideas of business success and moral improvement and Arthur Miller's critical position towards the concepts of the American dream. As we have seen, Benjamin Franklin's ideas of business success were closely linked to the individual's construction of self. For this construction, the development of a set of moral values that could be accomplished only through strict observance of a conduct plan was required. The success of this plan was mostly based on the individuals' engagement to obtain the changes they proposed for their lives.

Around two hundred years after Benjamin Franklin's writings appeared, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* was published and staged, but Franklin's voice can still be clearly perceived, either in his characters' words, or in their attitudes. In comparing Miller's text with Franklin's ideas expressed in three of his most famous writings, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, *The Autobiography*, and *The Way to Wealth*, one can perceive that some of Arthur Miller's characters

positively re-present Franklin's ideas, whereas the denouement given to another character's life, particularly to Willy's, may be seen as a criticism to Franklin's ideas and to the concepts of the American dream.

With his ideas of business success and the development of moral values, Franklin not only influenced the society of his time, but also showed some facts which help to define the kind of society Franklin represented. When Franklin's three most important books were discussed in the previous chapter, it could be realized how concerned he was with personal growth based on moral values. It is important to note that this characteristic so strongly present in Franklin was, to a certain extent, the representation of a whole society's behavior, a society that was under construction in a new land. This land promised freedom, with opportunity and equality for all. But it was up to each individual to seek his or her own opportunities and to fight for this equality. This fact constitutes the basis of the first version of the American dream<sup>1</sup>. And dream may be one of the best words to define some of the characters in *Death of a Salesman*.

There is no doubt that the main dreamer in the play is Willy Loman. The discussion of how Loman's emotions, doubts, insecurities and hopelessness affected his relationship with others and with society may serve as a clear indictment of the concept of the American dream. On the other hand, Willy Loman's brother, Ben, may be the main representative in favor of Franklin's voice in the play. Besides Ben, there are three other characters playing similar roles.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Clurman distinguishes two versions for the American dream. The first is the historical American dream. This is related to the promise of a land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all. The second version appeared just after the Civil War, particularly after 1900. Its original premise of the American dream of success is represented by enterprise, courage and hard work.

These characters are Charley, Willy's friend, and Charley's son, Bernard, along with Howard, Willy's boss.

A good start for the analysis of the relationship between Miller's characters and the concept of the American dream may be the discussion of two contrasting points in the main character's behavior. These points are the concepts of success and failure for the American society. Certainly, Willy Loman in his struggle for success, as well as in his failure, offers important elements for the establishment of a connection between Franklin's ideas and Arthur Miller's analysis of their country's society. If one traces Willy's life from the beginning of the play, one can realize how much this character was affected by the idea of success and self-realization which society inflicted upon individuals. Willy is depicted as a tired man who, for some reasons, did not succeed in his job, and for these motives he wants his oldest son, Biff, to be what he could not be. The problem seems that Willy misinterpreted some of Benjamin Franklin's ideas to succeed in business. Perhaps Willy's first mistake was to think that appearance in itself could build a professional career: "WILLY: Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such – personal attractiveness, gets lost..." (16) Appearance was also a question raised by Benjamin Franklin. Franklin, however, took it more seriously, having even included it as part of his tenth virtue to achieve moral perfection. That is not the case for Willy Loman, whose obsession for the idea of having a good appearance is much more connected to his, or his sons' incapacity of presenting any professional talent, than to the importance of being clean, which was Franklin's case. Willy constantly brings the subject into question to justify Biff's poor performance at school: "WILLY: That's



just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I think Almighty you are both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead..." (33)

He also raised the subject in order to show how appearance is the greatest worry when he and his sons are discussing the idea of Biff looking for his former boss and trying to get a loan from him to start his own business: "WILLY: *wildly enthused to Linda*: Stop interrupting! *To Biff* : But don't wear sport jacket and slacks when you see Oliver." (64)

Besides appearance, Willy Loman is also very preoccupied in being liked, as well as in having good and important relationships. An idea that he probably borrowed from Franklin, too: "Love and be loved." (44) But again he treated this from a different perspective than Franklin did. It is true that Franklin mentions throughout *The Autobiography*, he, in many opportunities, took advantage of being liked, that is, of having good friendships and using them to do good business. But this was not his only strategy for trading. The difference between the two men, in this aspect, is that Franklin's attitudes were part of his moral improvement plan aimed at changing the individual as a whole, while Willy sees the fact of being liked as an opportunity in itself to succeed in business. Willy Loman firmly believed that he had become a brilliant salesman due to the fact that he was well liked and had good and important relationships.

It is not clear in the text play which was Arthur Miller's intention in making his character behave in such a way. If he wanted to share Franklin's opinion that being liked and having important friendships is very helpful to do

business, the fact that Willy Loman failed on this is enough to weaken this theory. Perhaps this was not Miller's intention. He might have wanted to show that Loman's failure was probably much more connected to his incapacity to see his own reality. Willy misinterpreted Franklin because he never mentioned that man should live beyond reality. Willy, like Franklin, tries to reach success through his personal influence, but the difference between them is that Franklin had some influence on people around him, and Willy did not. To escape from this reality Willy takes refuge in illusion. The idea that Willy Loman was pretty convinced that everybody had a profound admiration for him as a salesman, and as a person, just shows how wrong he was: "WILLY: ... Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. "Willy Loman is here!" That's all they have to know, and I go right through." (33) This was just a fantasy in Willy's mind. The most important person who should admire him should be his boss. But that was not the case. When Willy talked to his boss about stopping traveling and working in the office, Howard did not see any reason for a recognition of Willy's efforts and fired him. But before he fired Willy, Howard expressed his opinion about his employee: "WILLY: ... Now pay attention. Your father – in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions. HOWARD, *impatiently*: Now, Willy, you never averaged –" (82) This fact alone proves that Willy was not such a great salesman. Moreover, at the end of the play, there is strong evidence that Willy was not so well liked. Willy himself thought that through his death he could show his son Biff how much people liked him. He thought there would be a lot of people from everywhere at his funeral. This did not happen: "LINDA: Why didn't anybody

come? CHARLEY: It was a very nice funeral. LINDA: But where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him.” (137)

Willy's fortune sharply contrasts with Benjamin Franklin. Franklin asserted that good relationship with distinguished people played a significant role to reach his most important accomplishments. And he gave evidence of that. Franklin became the friend of governors and businessmen, and from these relationships he not only took the opportunity to improve his professional skills, but he also enlarged his business. These relationships brought him public recognition. Some good examples of this are Franklin's friendship with Keimer, the printer and his relationship to Bradford and many assembly members. Perhaps the great difference between Willy Loman and Benjamin Franklin was that Loman did not connect friendship with any other fact, while Franklin not only made this connection, but also taught it to other people: “Relation without friendship, friendship without power, power without will, will without effect, effect without profit, and profit without virtue, are not worth a farto.” ( 07) When one considers Willy Loman's talk about the importance of being liked, having good relationships, it may be appropriate to ask, which kind of relationship did Willy have? According to Willy the most important of his friends was the mayor of Providence:

BIFF: Where'd you go this time, Dad?

WILLY: Well, I got on the road, and I went north to Providence. Met the Mayor.

BIFF: The Mayor of Providence!

WILLY: He was sitting in the hotel lobby.

BIFF: What'd he say?

WILLY: He said, "Morning!" And I said, "You got a fine city here, Mayor." And then he had coffee with me. And then I went to Waterbury. (30-31)

It can not be said that this mayor was really Willy's friend. Willy just met him and introduced himself to the mayor. Willy's friendship with this mayor is just one more of his illusions. Even if this mayor could be considered Willy's friend, there is an important element in Franklin's theory that is not considered by Willy. Which was Willy's intention with such a friendship? It might be said that Willy just wanted to satisfy his feelings, or his pride, or that he could be using this friendship to take professional advantage of it. In this case it did not have any effect on Willy's life, since Willy did not get any profit from such a friendship. Again, Willy made the wrong use of Franklin's teachings.

A third feature in Willy's personality that is worth discussing is the way he does business. No one can say that Willy does not want to progress, or that his plans are out of the context in a society where success in business is the standard measure that defines man's position in the social group. This is, for sure, included in Clurman's concepts of the second version of the American dream, which must have embodied Franklin's beliefs. But again Willy misinterpreted the idea of success. There are two hypotheses to explain why Willy's misinterpretation caused him to fail in his attempt to accomplish business success. First, Willy overestimated his position in his social group. He considered himself and his sons, particularly Biff, above other people. The analysis of Biff's attitudes shows this is not true. Willy and his sons were just trying to find a way to get somewhere, but they could not see clearly how to do that. Second, Willy's wrong view of his family and of himself blindfolded him to reality. Because of this, he acts

irrationally in his attempt to succeed and gain recognition from other people. If one compares Willy's speech to Franklin's, one can better understand this. Willy wanted to progress and he worked very hard for that, but without any plan:

WILLY: ... When I was a boy – eighteen, nineteen – I was already on the road..." (80) "WILLY: ... I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance. You can't eat an orange and throw the peel away. A man is not a piece of fruit! *After a pause*: Now pay attention. Your father – in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions. (82)

What were Willy's plans to succeed? He wanted to become a successful salesman. He invested in this plan, he worked hard, he tried to make friends in the business world, and he also tried to use these friends to improve his sales records. Besides that, he worried with his appearance. He was a perfect salesman. He averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions. But when his sales records started to drop, he focused attention on his son Biff. He tried to use Biff to implement the changes he was unable to bring to his life. The problem is that Willy did not have control over his plans. For example, when he realized Biff was a good football player, he started to invest only on this, and he completely neglected Biff's academic life, and he ended up losing control of his own career as a salesman. Willy, finally became dependent on his dreams. This dependence may be the great difference between Willy Loman and Benjamin Franklin. Perhaps Franklin's most important attitude was the idea of starting his own business when he was still very young. And he did that by himself. In fact, Franklin's attitudes were rather independent and marked by a strong individualist position. Franklin's first independent attitude was when he decided to leave the job he had with this brother. Franklin himself, in *The Autobiography*, saw this fact as a brave attitude

he did in the name of his freedom: "At length a fleshy Difference arising between my Brother and me, I took upon me to assert my Freedom, presuming that he would not venture to produce the new Indentures." (21) This was followed by his decision to leave town. Later, Franklin decided to open his own business, and again individualism and independence, and the control over the results of his attitudes led him to accomplish his plans.

Sincerity is certainly the virtue Willy lacked the most. The first person he betrayed in the story was himself. When Willy started to close his eyes to his own reality, he entered a world of illusion which prevented him from seeing what was happening in the real world around him. It was Willy's incapacity to realize the boundary between reality and fantasy that misguided him and led him to make some mistakes. When Willy broke this line, it became easy for him to adopt certain attitudes and behavior which were totally opposed to Sincerity. If Willy were not out of his mind, he would have taken different attitudes about himself, and about his sons, particularly Biff. When Biff took a ball from the school locker room, Willy did not scold him for that. From this moment on, things started to get worse in the construction of a character based on Franklin's principles of moral. Willy's next fault was to encourage his son to cheat at school. He even got angry with Bernard because he did not give Biff the answers of the test. However the situation really went out of control when Willy demanded his sons to steal sand and lumber from a construction near their house:

WILLY: Oh, sure, there's snakes and rabbits and – that's why I moved out here. Why, Biff can fell any one of these trees in no time! Boys! Go right over to where they're building the apartment house and get some sand. We're gonna rebuild the entire front stoop right now! Watch this Ben!

...

*Ben laughs lustily.*

WILLY: You shoulda seen the lumber they brought home last week. At least a dozen six-by-tens worth all kinds a money. (50)

It seems that Willy's attitudes were gradually driving him away from the early principles of the American dream, enterprise, courage and hard work towards something different and big. Willy, with his first dishonest attitudes, seemed to get prepared to do something bigger. And he did. Unfortunately in a very negative and tragic way. When Willy decided to put an end to his life, in order to get money for the family, this was the strongest evidence that Sincerity was not included in Willy's plans to have a successful family. And Willy did not seem very interested in changing his position about Sincerity. Perhaps if Willy had listened to his friends' advice to be sincere, particularly Charley's, he would not have ended up so tragically. Even young Bernard tried to help Willy in different situations, but he refused every kind of help which implied any change in his way of thinking. In fact, Willy's interpretation of Franklin's concepts of the American dream made him very different from other characters in the play. To make this clear, it is convenient to check the way other characters behaved and how they were related to the protagonist of the story.

Bernard is the youngest of these four characters, but this fact does not mean that he played a less important role. Bernard's role was to bring Willy to reality as far as Biff's performance at school was concerned. Even the way Bernard was described contrasts him to Biff: "*Bernard enters in knickers. He is younger than Biff, earnest and loyal, a worried boy.*" (32) In any part of the text play, these qualities can be applied to Biff. And that could not be different because his father was, most of the time, encouraging him to act in the opposite way. More important

than Bernard's description were his attitudes. When he went to the Lomans' to remind Biff that they should study together, or their teacher would flunk the latter, he was ridiculed by Willy: "WILLY: Hey, looka Bernard. What're you lookin' so anemic about, Bernard?" (32) At first, Willy seemed to understand Bernard's worry, but soon Willy was involved by his dream, and again he preferred illusion to reality. Bernard's voice in this situation was in fact Franklin's voice. It is appropriate to remember how Franklin was devoted to learning. He learned well at school, he studied hard by himself, and he always took every opportunity to join someone else to study. This is clear in *The Autobiography* and in *Poor Richard's Almanack*: "Learning, whether Speculative or Practical, is, in Popular or Mixt Governments, the Natural Source of Wealth and Honour." (31) Arthur Miller's intention of emphasizing the importance of taking Franklin's teachings seriously is even more evident if one considers Bernard's accomplishment as an individual in the development of the text play. Soon, at the the beginning of Act II, Bernard is presented as a successful lawyer who made a brilliant professional career because he studied very hard: "CHARLEY: *an arm on Bernard's shoulder*: How do you like this kid? Gonna argue a case in front of Supreme Court."(95) When Bernard reacted without any pride after his father mentioned his position to Willy, Bernard was, in fact, reminding Willy he had forgotten to practice Poor Richard's teachings on modesty: "Great Modesty often hides great Merit." (98)

There is no doubt that Charley also incorporated Franklin's voice in defense of the American dream concepts. But Charley also seemed to play the role of Willy's consciousness. It is important to know that Charley's first appearance in the play happened in the middle of one of Willy's inquiries about his own refusal



to follow his brother Ben to Alaska. What can be deduced from this reflection is that Willy was not happy with his job anymore. But he refused to admit it, mainly to other people. When Charley came and offered Willy a new job, it was, in fact, Franklin's voice that was acting on Willy's consciousness. Charley's offer to Willy can be compared to Franklin's advice in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, "Get what you can, and what you get, hold. Tis the Stone that will turn all your Lead into Gold." (51) But Willy decided not to hold the opportunity his friend was offering him. It is not clear the reason why Willy behaved that way. Willy's refusal may be based on pride, or on his false hope that he could progress by following his own methods.

Whichever interpretation is chosen, Willy would be breaking some of Franklin's teachings. If pride explains why Willy did not accept Charley's help, then Willy should be reminded that: "Pride gets into the Coach, and Shame mounts behind." (100) Willy's shame was that he had to borrow money from the same friend he did not accept help from. However, if Willy's false hopes that Biff could make a good professional career explain why he refused the job his friend was offering him, it was Charley's own voice that was there to try to bring Willy back to reality: "CHARLEY: You take it too hard. To hell with it. When a deposit bottle is broken you don't get your nickel back." (44) Charley was referring to Biff. He wanted to say that something might have gone wrong in Biff's education and that now it would be too late to expect any change in Biff's behavior. How could Biff be different if he grew up in a fantasy world where he was considered the best when evidence just shows the opposite? Evidence is very little to convince the Lomans they were wrong. In this sense, it was Charley's role to show them they

were living in a world that was not real. For example, when Willy was taking his family out for a baseball game the Lomans were completely lost in their dream. They did not consider it was a bad weather for playing. They did not seem to understand that Charley, through his irony, was just trying to tell them Ebbets Field was not a place where Biff might be playing. Once again, in his dreams, Willy lacked modesty, and because of that he overestimated his son's capacity. The Lomans did not seem to know the meaning of the word 'pretension,' but then Charley came and tried to pass this lesson to them:

CHARLEY: Don't you listen to the radio? Ebbets Field just blew up.

...  
WILLY: Yeah, heh? This game is over, Charley, you'll be laughing out of the other side of your face. They'll be calling him another Red Grange. Twenty-five thousand a year.

CHARLEY, *kidding*: Is that so?

WILLY: Yeah, that's so.

...  
CHARLEY: Who is Red Grange? (89)

Perhaps Charley's lesson would be more effective if he had directly used Richard Saunders' words against pretension: "Hold forth upon yourself on no Pretence, Unless invited, or in Self-Defence; The Praise you take, altho' it be your Due, It will be suspected if it come from you, ..." (73) Unfortunately Charley was not successful in his attempt at helping Willy to see the real world. Charley's failure was not his fault. He was persistent, and he acted patiently and friendly, but he had to face some problems. Charley's main problem was to convince a stubborn friend who did not want to change. And as Poor Richard said "They that won't be counselled, can't be helped," (93) That's why Charley could not help Willy. If Charley can not be considered influential enough to change Willy's mind, there

may be another character, more attached to Willy and for this reason with better chances of doing that. This character is Ben.

Ben's attitudes were more emphatic in the sense that they are more directly similar to Benjamin Franklin's teachings. Ben, in fact, seemed to have incorporated Franklin's personality. If one compare the development of the two characters, Franklin in *The Autobiography* and Ben in *Death of a Salesman*, one can find many points in which their attitudes converge to identical results. The starting point in the comparison could be Franklin's decision to leave home when he was still very young. He was only seventeen when he first ventured to go to Boston and then to England. In England, Benjamin Franklin got experience enough to start a professional career. And it was this career that made him a wealthy man. Ben was also seventeen when he left home to go to Alaska, but like Franklin he ended up going further. In his words, "At that age I had a very faulty view of geography, William. I discovered, after a few days that I was heading due to south, so instead of Alaska, I ended up in Africa." (48) But the resemblance between the two characters can be perceived even earlier in their lives. To start with they were baptized with the same name. Then, when both Benjamin Franklin and Ben were young kids, their parents emigrated to New England. There is also some similarity in the way Franklin and Ben talked about their fathers:

Franklin	Ben
My father carried his wife with children unto New England, about 1682.	Father was a very wild-hearted man.
He had a mechanical genius, too, and on occasion was very handy in the use of others tradesmen's tools	He was a great inventor. With a gadget he made more in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime.
He was skilled a little in music.	He made flutes.

These are interesting points in the comparison of the two characters, but the analysis of Ben's attitudes and behavior will better define the importance of his role in the context of the world in which Willy was living.

Both Willy and Ben were imbued with the same strong wish for success, but there are some differences in the strategies they applied to accomplish it. Willy, as he has been depicted here, seemed a bit confused in the choice of his methods to be a successful man. At the same time as he admired his brother Ben for his accomplishments, he acted in a way quite the opposite. Ben's premises of success were strictly based on enterprise, courage and hard work. These are the original premises of the American dream of success which Franklin used as the basic rules to succeed in business. If one take these premises and compare them with Ben's attitudes and speech, interesting interpretations can be drawn from that. Consider, for example, Ben's decision to go to Alaska. Only a courageous man would venture on such a trip. As Charley said, one could freeze there. Nevertheless, Ben felt encouraged to go because in his opinion "Opportunity is tremendous in Alaska," (44) In fact, Ben did not go to Alaska. Even taking the wrong way and ending up in Africa, instead of Alaska, one can not deny that Ben showed enterprise and courage with this initiative. And the most important point is that from this adventure he came out rich. Ben must have worked very hard in Africa, as it is implied in his speech, but, in his opinion, hard work was not enough for him. Besides being enterprising and hard-working, a man should know how to fight for success. In Ben's words one should not fight fair with strangers if one wants to be successful. Ben's experiences can be viewed as good lessons for

Willy. First, Willy lacked enterprise and courage because he held the same job for many years without any plan to change it. Later, when he realized the job he was doing did not offer him any opportunity to change his life, he did not have courage to start a new career, or he was not able to show enterprise and create a fact that might bring new possibilities to make his job more interesting and profitable. Although Willy's sincerity is questionable, it seems that he did not understand Ben's lessons very well as far as business is concerned. When Ben said "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way."(49), he was probably using the word jungle in a figurative way. He might have wanted to use a metaphor here, and jungle might mean the danger of competition which may represent a threat to people who fight fair with strangers in the world of business, and that was what happened to Willy. He fought fairly with his company all the time, and when he expected a reward because he was too old and could not produce the same as when he was young, he was fired. Howard was not fighting fair with the stranger, in this case Willy. For him, his company's interests were much more important than his employee. That is why it can be said that Howard got the point. His own words prove that: "HOWARD: 'Cause you gotta admit, business is business."(80) Howard may be put in the same position as Ben in the understanding of Benjamin Franklin's ideas.

Although sincerity was one of the key words in his plans to achieve moral perfection, Franklin showed, in many opportunities, that he also did not fight fair in the world of business. The first opportunity Franklin behaved this way was when his brother could not print his newspaper under his own name. On that occasion, Franklin's brother, James, was imprisoned because one of the pieces

published by his newspaper was considered offensive to the Assembly. James's discharge, one month later, was accompanied with an Order of the House "that James Franklin should no longer print the paper called the New England Courant." (*The Autobiography* 20) The solution to this problem was to print the newspaper under Benjamin Franklin's name. This fact gave him some power, and Franklin took the opportunity to break the contract he had with his brother, which brought him some advantage that he himself later considered unfair. And what about the story "The Benefit of Going to Law," presented in *Poor Richard's Almanack*? It is a story of two beggars, one blind and the other lame. They found an oyster on their way, but they could not decide who would keep with the pearl, so they went to a lawyer, and this was his verdict: "A shell for him, a shell for thee, The middle is the *lawyer's fee*." (16) What Franklin wanted to show through this story was, among other things, that fighting fair with strangers may bring loss instead of profit.

There is an important detail that makes a big difference in the way Benjamin Franklin, Ben, and Willy Loman try to get successfully out of the jungle. As Ben seemed to represent Franklin's ideas, his fights with strangers may have produced only good results as the fact that he became rich proves. Ben tried to pass this to his brother. That is why Ben did not approve of Willy's plan to kill himself in order to get money for his family, especially for Biff to start his own business. Ben was simply not sure the plan would work out properly: "BEN: You don't want to make a fool of yourself. They might not honor the policy." (126) But Willy was totally lost in his dreams. He could not decide between good and bad, right and wrong, and he ended up doing the wrong thing.

Considering the differences among characters' behavior presented here, it may be convenient, from this perspective, to discuss one more of Franklin's virtues: Frugality. Once again characters in *Death of a Salesman* seem to differ a lot among themselves in their interpretation of this virtue which Franklin took so seriously. The importance Franklin gave to this virtue can be measured by his extensive discussion of the subject not only in *The Autobiography*, but also in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, and in *The Way to Wealth*.

As Willy Loman has proved to be the character more prone to misinterpret Franklin's teachings, he was chosen to be the first to show what he inferred from Franklin's suggestions on how to be frugal. To start with, for such a proud man as Willy was, it would be difficult to do anything that could be considered frugal. The kind of food he preferred, the way he wanted Biff to dress, and his impatience when he saw Linda mending her stockings, serve as evidence that Willy Loman decided to ignore everything Benjamin Franklin taught about Frugality.

Willy's preference for Swiss cheese instead of American cheese is totally contradictory to what Poor Richard said about those who prefer more expensive food rather than having a plain diet: "Who dainties love, shall Beggars prove." (23) Even Linda, usually so passive in her role of patient wife, had her opportunity to show she had in some way assimilated Willy's ideas that Frugality would not be included in his plans to succeed in business. When the family discusses a remote possibility of Biff getting a loan of ten thousand bucks from his old boss, Bill Oliver, to open his own business, Linda starts to share the same feeling of happiness the other members of the family had, and she got even more involved in the same illusory world and she suggested: "I'll make a big breakfast --" (67) Still

relating the way the Lomans eat to the total absence of Frugality in their attitudes, there is one more fact to be considered: the dinner Biff and Happy decided to offer Willy. Again they would be spending unnecessary money to have dinner at an expensive restaurant in order to celebrate something they had not been accomplished yet. But this is not all about the Lomans' neglect of Benjamin Franklin's virtue of Frugality. Franklin also considers things like dressing plainly, being careful with purchase, and the danger of borrowing money, aspects that the Lomans completely ignored. Benjamin Franklin strongly believed that the observance of these rules had contributed to bring him success in business, that is why he tried to pass his readers all this information through his books, especially in *The Way to Wealth*. When we analyse Willy's great concern on the way Biff used to dress, we can immediately perceive that Willy broke one more of Franklin's rules. Although Franklin considers important to be adequately dressed, he does not mean it would be necessary to spend a lot of money on expensive clothes. For those tempted to do so, Franklin advised "Silks and satins and scarlets and velvets put out the kitchen fire." (21)

A life based on ostentation requires a lot of money. With Willy it was not different and that explains why his condition afflicted him so much. Depending on a mediocre job, with almost no money of his own, and dominated by strong wishes of looking successful, Willy had no other choice but breaking another of Franklin's teachings, that is, to borrow money from someone else. It is ironic that Willy had to borrow money from someone who was most of the time criticising him for his attitudes, Charley. This may be the reason why there is a kind of antagonism between Willy and Charley. Willy was financially dependent on



Charley who lent him just a small amount of money Willy needed to pretend he had not failed in his professional career. This must have been cruel to Willy. Even though he did not acknowledge the importance of Franklin's advice, in *The Way to Wealth*, on how to manage life as far as money is concerned: "Think what you do when you run into debt" (24), or "Those have a short Lent, who owe money to be paid by Easter" (27). But Willy did not seem to think about that as he continued borrowing money from Charley.

If Willy is a key character in the context of misinterpretation of Franklin's ideas, his sons' respective behaviors also reflect the same way of thinking. Biff's incapacity to get a job and start a career just shows his father's failure to teach him the best way to build a career. According to what Franklin says in *The Autobiography*, it would be following the virtue of Industry. The precept of this virtue was "Lose no Time. – Be always employ'd in something useful. – Cut all unnecessary Actions. –"(81) But losing time was the kind of thing Biff did the most. And he never was employed in something useful. On the contrary, he was totally lost in his actions which were, in their majority, completely unnecessary and they did not contribute, in any way, to help Biff build a career.

Happy was not very different from his brother. Although he had a job, this job did not satisfy his dreams of business success, but at the same time, Happy did not do anything to change the situation. He behaved much like his father. He only did his work and he hoped something might happen and bring him the opportunity to be promoted. In Happy's case this opportunity would come only with the death of the merchandise manager. That would be the highest position Happy could reach in the company. This remote possibility of progress in his job led Happy to

share his brother's illusion that with a loan they could start their own business and become rich in a short period of time. Both Biff and Happy never mentioned enterprise, courage and hard work as part of their strategy to succeed in business. Yet, enterprise, courage and hard work as the precepts of the American dream of success were at the base of most of Franklin's ideas. The Lomans' attitudes were once more representing their refusal to follow Franklin's teachings. This was reflected not only in their attitudes related to professional career, but also in their lifestyle.

One of Franklin's great concerns, besides professional success, was that individuals should avoid venery. In fact, Franklin advised this in *The Autobiography*: "Rarely use Venery but for Health or Offspring; never to Dullness, Weakness, or Injury of your own or another's Peace or Reputation. –" (81) But Biff and Happy acted quite the opposite to these rules. The tone of their talk about their sexual experiences with women shows they did not value Franklin's advice:

"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 resitence! 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 rises on his new hat.*"(25)

Even Willy liked to remember how Biff was admired by the girls, and Happy was not ashamed to mention his love affairs with his workmates' girlfriends: "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 wedding!...” (25) There is another strong evidence that Biff and Happy were not committed to Franklin’s virtue of Chastity: they deserted their father in the restaurant to follow a prostitute.

The way Willy, Linda, Biff and Happy acted converged to a single result: failure. Willy Loman failed not only professionally, but also as a husband and a father. Linda failed as a wife since she did not understand her role very well. As a wife, she could have helped Willy to see his own reality. But she did not do that. She preferred to agree with Willy under any circumstance. Biff brought his family disappointment both at school and in the way he tried to build his professional career. Happy, with his apparently stable life, can not be considered much different from Biff. He was still looking for his great opportunity to make his dreams of business success come true. Like his brother, Happy used the wrong strategies to accomplish it. These characters sharply contrast with Ben, Charley, Bernard and Howard who succeeded in their respective lives.

From these four successful characters, Ben seems to be the one who accomplished more. It’s no wonder since Ben is the character who took Franklin’s teachings more seriously. That is evident in Ben’s lifestyle as well as in his attitudes. Acting as Willy’s consciousness, Charley showed, in different opportunities, he was, in fact, Franklin’s voice trying to remind Willy that to reach success some rules must be followed, his rules. That’s why Charley was built on someone who had accomplished something in his life. Charley had his own business, and he was even in a position to offer Willy some help. In short, Charley was a successful person. His son Bernard was an example of how a good student should behave. For his commitment to Benjamin Franklin’s ideas, Bernard was

transformed into a successful lawyer at the end of the play. A good lesson for Biff who quit school and could not develop any professional skill.

Finally, attention must be paid to Howard. Howard's presence in the story has a double meaning. The first and most evident meaning is expressed by his speech. The only occasion in which Howard spoke was when Willy looked for him to ask his boss to stop traveling and to work in the office. Howard's reply was the well-known sentence "Business is business" (80) and then he fired Willy. This attitude, which for some seems lack of sensitivity, for others means that Howard was, in fact, showing his commitment to Benjamin Franklin's philosophy: "Drive thy business, let not that drive thee;" (*The Way to Wealth* 12). Howard was just trying to drive his business in order to make it more profitable. The second meaning of Howard's role in the story may be implied by his evaluation of Willy's capacity to manage his own life. Willy is portrayed as a character totally dependent on others. First, he financially depended on Charley to pretend he was making enough money to live on; second, he depended on other people's opinion to evaluate his own attitudes:

WILLY: Ben, my boys – can't we talk? They'd go into the jaws of hell for me, see, but I –

BEN: William, you're being first-rate with your boys. Outstanding, manly chaps!

WILLY, *hanging on to his words*: Oh, Ben, that's good to hear! Because sometimes I'm afraid that I am not teaching them the right kind of – Ben, how should I teach them? (52)

Third, he was dependent on a job which, for some circumstance, did not offer him the same opportunities to succeed in business as he had succeeded in the past. Willy, however, seems to refuse to face this reality. That's why he becomes dependent even on his past to bargain with his boss a new position in the company.

In this sense, Howard's attitude may be connected to Franklin's idea of individualism. Individualism was a strong Franklinian characteristic. Franklin did everything by himself, and he found out his own mistakes. Willy, however, acted quite the opposite. He was dependent on a job which offered him little opportunity for success, he depended on Charley's financial support, and he was even dependent on Biff's professional success to prove his family was not a failure. That's why Howard's role was very important to show Willy he should find out his own way by himself. For this reason, Howard did not interfere in Willy's way of working even when he noticed Willy had stopped producing good results for the company, "Now, Willy, you never averaged - " (82) The thesis here is that Howard might have wanted Willy to find out by himself he was not a good salesman anymore. As in other occasions, Willy showed he had his own way to understand Franklin's ideas, but his understanding may not have contributed to make him as successful as he wanted to be. In fact, every character in *Death of a Salesman* had his/her particular way to interpret Franklin's teachings. They sometimes diverged among themselves, but at other times they converged to a similar interpretation. The analysis of similarities and differences in the characters' interpretations of Franklin's philosophy allowed us to join them in three different groups, but the discussion of how these groups are formed is part of the conclusion of this research.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion which emerged from this research allows us to say that Arthur Miller's characters in *Death of a Salesman* were gradually affected by Benjamin Franklin's idea that the development of a set of moral values would be essential to accomplish business success. This study also offered us the opportunity to investigate any possible criticism Arthur Miller addressed to the American society, as well as his political position, which may be implied in the text play.

Our analysis of the characters' attitudes and speech reveals some similarities in their behavior, allowing us to join the characters in three different groups. In the first group, Charley, Ben, Howard and Bernard seem to be almost completely committed to Benjamin Franklin's teachings, while in the second group characters may just have been partially committed to his ideas, and in the third group we put characters whose behavior represents no commitment to the same ideas. In the second group, we could put together Willy and Happy because these two characters' accomplishment did not bring meaningful changes to their lives, but their attempt to achieve more can not be denied. Finally, Biff's behavior shows that he does not fit in any of the two groups, since he acted in complete disagreement with Franklin's ideas. Biff is the only character suitable for the third group. Our intention is to give more details about each character in the three groups to help readers perceive more clearly the differences that make the three groups very distinctive from each other.

There is evidence that Charley is the character who is more clearly dedicated to the practice of Franklin's virtues. Charley had his own business and he continued living a plain life, never bragging about his accomplishments; on the contrary, he

used his position to be solidary to his friend Willy. The consideration of these facts alone is enough to show that Charley followed Franklin's advice in the use of virtues of Order, Resolution, Industry and Humility. However, the more attention we pay to Charley's behavior, the more we realize that he also tried to follow other Franklin's virtues. It is important to note that the way Charley used to speak to Willy, giving him advice, is in perfect accordance to Franklin's virtues of Silence and Sincerity. Charley was not used to talking much and he was very sincere when he tried to bring Willy back to reality. The comparison of Lomans' and Charley's attitudes allows us to assert that Charley also practiced Franklin's virtues of Temperance and Tranquility. While the Lomans were frequently talking about eating and drinking, Charley did not seem to worry about it. Nor did he disturb himself with small problems while Willy was constantly disturbed by them. The sense of justice Charley expressed at Willy's funeral is probably the strongest evidence he was entirely guided by the principle of Franklin's eighth virtue, Justice, which says: "Wrong none, by doing Injuries or omitting the Benefits that are your Duty." (81) But as stated earlier, Charley was just one of the characters who took Franklin's teaching very seriously. Ben is another character identified with Franklin's ideas.

Ben's accomplishment and behavior mean he also had a strong commitment to some of Franklin's moral virtues. Temperance, Resolution, Frugality, and Industry may be the virtues which most influenced Ben. His decision to go to Africa, to face the severe conditions of a wild land, and his hard work there fit very well those virtues. The fact that Ben came out of his adventure a wealthy man may represent Arthur Miller's position in favor of Franklin's ideas. This theory gains strength if one considers that most of the successful characters in the text play have a lot in common

in the way they were affected by the use of the same virtues. Bernard and Howard, for example, also showed Resolution and Industry. We can say that because Bernard was very successful both as a student and as a lawyer. As for Howard, the fact that he was able to manage his own business puts him on the same level of Bernard, as far as these virtues are concerned. Sincerity is another virtue which was shared by all the characters in this group but Ben. Charley showed Sincerity in the way he treated his friend Willy, mainly when he addressed people in defense of Willy during his funeral. Bernard was a sincere student and he refused to cheat at school. He also built his career without using hurtful deceit. And Howard, although he was not sensitive to Willy's problem, can not be seen as insincere. Finally, Ben is the only character in the group who did not believe one could be successful in business being sincere to everybody. Ben's position is clearly expressed in his talk to Willy: "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." ( 49 ) If we think how much Franklin was concerned with profit, with the idea of saving up money and making good use of it, we can say that he was really a capitalist man<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, Ben's advice for not fighting fair with a stranger makes him more like Franklin, that is, Ben was imbued with the same capitalist ideas. The difference between them is that Ben clearly assumes that his attitudes are his strategies to take financial

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<sup>1</sup> "He that spends a groat a day idly, spends idly above six pounds a year, which is the price for the use of one hundred pounds." "He that loses five shillings, not only loses that sum, but all the advantage that might be made by turning it in dealing, which by the time that a young man becomes old, will amount to a considerable sum of money." After the discussion of these and other Franklin's sayings, Weber declares: "It is Benjamin Franklin who preaches to us in these sentences, the same which Ferdinand Kürnberger satirizes in his clever and malicious *Picture of American Culture* as the supposed confession faith of the Yankee. That is the spirit of capitalism which here speaks in characteristic fashion, no one will doubt, however little we may wish to claim that everything which could be understood as pertaining to that spirit is contained in it."(16)



advantage of other people while Franklin's attitudes has led some critics to think he used the development of moral values to accomplish business success.

In the second group, characters seem to have partially accepted Franklin's ideas. Willy and his son Happy can be included in this group. Although Willy did not end successfully in his career, he tried, as much as possible to follow Franklin's teachings. First of all, a man who worked until he was sixty, like Willy did, was certainly in accordance with Franklin's virtue of Industry and his principle of hard work as the key for success. Willy was a successful salesman, at least as long as social conditions were favorable to him. Franklin's virtue of Resolution was also adopted by Willy. If one compare Willy's speech to Franklin's concept of this virtue, the similarity between their thoughts is very clear. Willy said: "...When I was a boy – eighteen, nineteen – I was already on the road. And there was a question in my mind as to whether selling had a future for me..." ( 80 ), and Franklin: "Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail what you resolve." ( 81 ) Again, if Willy failed, it was not his fault. He was certainly affected by conditions which were out of his control. Charley could understand that, and for this reason he defended Willy after his death. Charley's speech was decisive to change Happy's mind. Happy, who throughout the play had been denying most of Franklin's teachings, adopted a new discourse: "I'm not licked that easily. I'm staying right in this city, and I'm gonna beat this racket! *He looks at Biff, his chin set.* The Loman Brothers!" ( 138 ) But Happy did not convince Biff to join him.

Biff had been refusing Franklin's ideas all his life and he continued to do so. To better understand why Biff behaved this way, one should carefully trace his life from the very beginning of the play. As a boy, he used to accept all his father's ideas;

then, as a young man he decided to live by himself, going from one job to another, not caring about having a career, stealing from his own boss, throwing money away with women. In short, he did everything which represented the denial of Franklin's teachings. But the most important of Biff's attitudes was his public rejection of Happy's invitation to continue pursuing their father's dream of business success:

HAPPY: I'm not licked that easily. I'm staying right in this city, and I'm gonna beat this racket! *He looks at Biff, his chin set.* The Loman Brothers!

BIFF: I know who I am, kid.

HAPPY: All right, boy. I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have – to come out number one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him. (139)

This portrait of such a character helps to define Arthur Miller's political position in the play. He may have wanted to show he does not agree with the principles of a society whose socio-political system puts individuals in constant pressure to reach certain standards of business success.

Arthur Miller's position towards the American political system is also evident in the discussion Willy had with his boss. Howard's sentence: "...business is business." (80) and Willy's argumentation "... You can't eat an apple and throw the peel away..." ( 82 ) may indicate that Arthur Miller is talking about the capitalist system. While Howard's words represent the essence of capitalism, Willy's speech represent Miller's criticism towards the capitalist system which does not treat man as man, but as an object that is only good until it serves its purpose, and then you can throw it away. Willy's metaphor, " ...You can't eat an apple and throw the peel away..." (82) shows Willy's disappointment with a company that treated him well when his production rates were high, but fired him when he was unable to offer his boss the financial records he was expected to. This may indicate Arthur Miller's

political criticism, but we do not know the exact target of it, if it is capitalism in its purest essence or if it is the industrialized society in general. In fact, *Death of a Salesman* is not the only text where Miller has been reluctant to clearly assume his political position. This reluctance is also evident when he speaks more directly about the subject as he did in his essay "On Social Plays:"

The social drama, as I see it, is the main stream and the antisocial drama a bypass. I can no longer take with ultimate seriousness a drama of individual psychology written for its own sake, however full it may be of insight and precise observation. Time is moving; there is a world to make, a civilization to create that will move toward the only goal the humanistic, democratic mind can ever accept with honor. It is a world in which the human being can live as a naturally political, naturally private, naturally engaged person, a world in which once again a true tragic victory may be scored.

But that victory is not really possible unless the individual is more theoretically capable of being recognized by the powers that lead society. Specifically when men live as they do under any industrialized system, as integers who have no more weight, no *person*, excepting as either customers, draftees, machine tenders, ideologists, or whatever, it is unlikely ( and in my opinion impossible ) that a dramatic picture of them can really overcome the public knowledge of their nature in real life. In such a society, be it communistic or capitalistic, man is not tragic, he is pathetic. ( 57-58 )

Arthur Miller's critical analysis of the American society is also implied on Charley's speech at Willy's funeral. When Charley tried to defend Willy, he was, in fact, condemning society for the pressure it inflicts upon individuals to accomplish certain social standards. In a capitalist system individuals' failure is always connected to their incapacity to fit the system, rather than to the influence of any possible social adversity. That was exactly what happened to Willy. Because of the nature of his occupation, Willy was vulnerable to be affected by the social problems which characterized the society of his time. The story is set by the time the U.S. were still affected by the Great Depression, which certainly represented a bad time for sales in

general. But most people did not consider this fact when they judged Willy, except Charley. through Charley's speech in defense of Willy, Arthur Miller is in fact reenforcing his criticism towards a society which considers man much more for his ability to make money, than for his personal virtues. In this sense, the text play is contradictory on the two points of discussion it raised. On the one hand, it tries to relate personal success to the development of some moral values. On the other hand, it contains some criticism on capitalism. And this political system is seen in the text play as a system where success in business is an end in itself.

It is not the purpose of this research to present a final conclusion of Arthur Miller's political and social position towards the American society. A more clear definition of the target of Miller's criticism requires further investigation on his other writings – all of them highly charged with political and social implications.

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