

4-21-2009

The Myths of the Self-Made-Man: Cowboys, Salesmen and Pirates in Tennessee Williams' the Glass Menagerie and Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman

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THE MYTHS OF THE SELF-MADE-MAN: COWBOYS, SALESMEN AND PIRATES IN TENNESSEE

WILLIAMS'S *THE GLASS MENAGERIE* AND ARTHUR MILLER'S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

by

CAMILLE GROS

Under the Direction of Matthew Roudané

ABSTRACT

Most books written about American drama concern definitions of masculinity, the American dream, and the family in a society that encourages people to surpass their competences and limits. American playwrights of the twentieth century reveal the anxiety and insecurity of men who do not rise up to the standards of the American dream. In concentrating on these themes, most critics have analyzed the main characters and plots but have left aside hints about other myths. This study aims to analyse the extended use of the cowboy, of salesman, and of pirate in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. The recurrence of these three myths touches on the core of American drama that playwrights and critics have tried to define endlessly: the definition of the male in the American society.

INDEX WORDS: Pirate, Cowboy, American drama, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, Tennessee Williams, Salesman, Arthur Miller, Masculinity, Self-made man, American dream, Myth

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2009

To Emmeline, Marie-Hélène, and Jacques Gros

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my director, Dr Matthew Roudané, for his patience and support while I attempted to delimit a topic for this MA thesis; Dr Pearl McHaney who always made herself available, triggered my interest and helped my research more than once; and finally Dr Wayne Erickson, who is one of the most valuable proof-readers and advisors when it comes to writing.

My roommate Alison Asmussen and my friend Patricia Lawson have also contributed to the writing of this MA in many ways: thank you for the care, love and patience you demonstrated. My parents, Jacques and Marie-Hélène Gros, played one of the most important roles in my achievement by allowing me to come and study in the United States of America at Georgia State University.

Finally, but not the least, I want to thank my sister, Emmeline Gros, who has been by my side through all these years far from home. She helped me formulate my ideas and helped me sustain my efforts and research for this Thesis. She shared my ideas, my thoughts and most importantly, the moments of despair, inspiration and the final “Eureka.”

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Introduction

Traveling around the United States, and later committing to paper the experience, John Steinbeck defines the essence of the American people as one of movement:

I saw in [American's] eyes something I was to see over and over again in every part of the nation—a burning desire to go, to move, to get under way, any place, away from any Here. They spoke about how they wanted to go somewhere, to move about, free and unanchored, not toward something but away from something. I saw this look and heard this yearning everywhere in every state I visited. Nearly every American hungers to move. (*Travels with Charley* 10)

Steinbeck underlines the need for movement in the USA as well as the lack of movement per se. Indeed, he mentions the “desire,” the “yearning,” the fact that people “*spoke* about how they wanted to go somewhere” (my emphasis). The yearning is only vocal as he does not note any physical movement. However, Robert James Butler, when concentrating on the literary work of Dos Passos, declares that “one of the most distinctive drives in American culture is a quest for pure motion, movement which is not directed towards any particular end point. A relatively new and chronically rootless society, America has always placed an unusually high premium on mobility rather than stability” (Butler 80). If the American culture foresees a lack of movement, a hunger for “outer direction,” literature—as analyzed by Butler—seems to be willing to answer this need for movement, this desire for a situation of adventure, of escaping somewhere that is wished for but not acted upon in real life.

Favoring the model of the self-made man, the United-States not only encourages the physical movement as described by Steinbeck and Butler—be it a movement directed toward the outside, the unknown territories, or the virgin land—but also promotes a social movement upward. In *Death of a Salesman*, for example, Happy, Biff, and his father Willy desire to make more money, to have their own business, and to enjoy a vacation house. When the wish to succeed fails to materialize, many characters escape their present situations by daydreaming or reinventing their past, engaging in what Eugene O’Neill refers to as “pipe dreams.” In *Death of a Salesman* and in *The Glass Menagerie*, Willy Loman and Amanda Wingfield find refuge in a remembered past and/or imaginary life, an existence dramatically different from the one they are living and in which they feel imprisoned. The need for movement has become a need to escape.

This hunger for movement is a main component of the American drama of the twentieth century that stages males who attempt to define their identities in a society that keeps evolving without ever slowing down. Concentrating on the physical movement as well as on the use of pipe dreams by male characters in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*, we can trace the recurrence of three possible escapes. A first one lies in the American West, with males describing themselves as cowboys on the frontier. In *Death of a Salesman*, Biff has spent many years “in Nebraska when I herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now in Texas” (17), and declares that “there’s nothing more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt” (16). He invites his brother Happy to “come out West” (17), to “buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles,” for “Men built like we are,” he tells his brother, “should be working out in the open” (17). Happy, on the contrary, seems to enjoy his life working in the city. His desire for outdoor activities overtakes him when he explains to Biff that

“sometimes I want to just rip my clothes off” (18). This instinct seems to be inherited from their father Willy Loman, who oscillates between a life in the city and the ideal of the West. He longs for “a little place out in the country” to “raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens” (56). He spends his time on the road, “open[ing] unheard-of territories” (44) for his company. Using a vocabulary fit to describe the West, Willy attempts to inscribe himself within the cowboy mythology. Willy’s brother Ben also embodies a frontier man. He first went to Africa before following his father’s path to Alaska. We are told that Mr. Loman, Biff and Happy’s grandfather, was an adventurer who would “toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he’d drive the team right across the country; through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western States” (38). The ideals of the cowboy and the frontier thus have been anchored in the Loman family for generations. But Willy, like his son Happy, remains in the East and embraces the myth of the salesman as represented by Dave Singleman in the play. Being a successful salesman who “without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, [. . .] made his living” (63), Dave Singleman embodies the supposed quintessential myth of success that Willy forces himself to follow. By following these steps, Willy and Dave embrace both a physical movement, they become travelling salesmen. They also embody the hope for a social movement upward.

Another different escape appears in *The Glass Menagerie* in which we find references to the maritime world. In Tennessee Williams’s play, Tom, a young man who introduces himself as the narrator of a “memory play” (14), presents a family deprived of its patriarch. Mr. Wingfield is indeed “a telephone man who fell in love with long distances” and “skipped the light fantastic out of town” (14). He went to the Pacific coast of Mexico, a movement westward that also associates him with the cowboy figure (Rosefeldt 41). Because he needs to financially support his mother

Amanda and his sister Laura, Tom works at a shoe factory. When he is not at work, he drinks and goes to the movies, a daily pilgrimage that enables him to escape his mother. Amanda grows worried throughout the play and draws connections between Tom and his father. Her fear of his departure is confirmed by Tom himself when he declares that “[he]’d be where [Mr. Wingfield] is—GONE!” (31), as well as when Tom explains that “people go to the *movies* instead of *moving*! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! Yes, until there is a war. [. . .] But I am not patient. I don’t want to wait till then. I’m tired of the *movies* and I am *about to move*” (61-62).

Tom does not follow his father’s steps. Instead of going west, he joins the Merchant Seamen, thus choosing a life at sea. However, Williams’s use of visual elements suggests that Tom’s escape is not that of ordinary seaman’s life, but rather of a pirate’s. When Tom explains his goals to Jim and his mother, a slide projected on stage shows “a vessel flying the Jolly Roger” (39 and 61), the pirates’ flag of a white skull above two-crossed bones on a black background. In the production notes, Williams explains that the screen device “will strengthen the effect of what is merely illusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly than if the entire responsibility were on the spoken lines” (9). The slides are thus an important detail of the play and accentuate the type of adventures Tom is looking for: dangerous and mythical. Tom is not the only character who is linked to piracy in this play. Jim, the other male character on stage, had the lead role in his high school production of the operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*. Thus, the male characters on stage are subtle reminders of the ongoing theme of piracy in *The Glass Menagerie*.

These two plays have been chosen in part for the success they have encountered since their first production. *Death of a Salesman* has been staged every day since its premiere in New York in 1949. *The Glass Menagerie*, written in 1944, was the first successful play by Tennessee Williams and won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Matthew Roudané call attention to the importance of the two plays in the history of American drama, writing that "we may say that the American theatrical Renaissance commences during an incredible fertile time, framed by *The Glass Menagerie* and *Death of a Salesman*" (*Public Issues, Private Tensions* 2). Now considered classics, these plays were written in times of great changes and promote three ways to achieve the American dream.

This thesis will concentrate on the myths of the pirate, the cowboy, and the Salesman that has been built through time thanks to literature and movies, blurring the limit between reality and legend. I use the term "myth" to distinguish the cowboy, the salesman, and the pirate mythical figures from the historical character. To define the mythical aspects and consequences, I will refer mainly to psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung as well as Joseph Campbell, who have dedicated most of their research, if not all, to the theory of myth. These three agree on the purpose fulfilled by myths, that of explaining what man ignores. Freud focuses on the consequences of these myths to individuals and concludes that they engender neurosis. Campbell, on the contrary, focuses on the manifestation of myth through literature and art and seems to find a pattern in the hero's evolution, as exposed in his work *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. According to his research, the hero follows the call for adventure; he discovers a foreign place where he encounters obstacles that yet do not prevent the hero from returning home after having completed his task. French theorist René Girard also devotes part of his research to myth,

defining myth as “originating in real or historical events and [. . .] in fact distorted representations of these events” (quoted in Golsan 61). Considering the cowboy, the salesman and the pirate figures as myths and looking at the characters of the plays with the help of these theories will allow me to grasp the issues that the myths encapsulate as represented on stage. Girard’s, as well as Campbell’s theories, have been the subject of controversies in the last decade. But Girard has been criticized for his work on religion mostly, and not his research on myth. Their theories help us in this research to shed light on important aspects of the plays, pointing to the fact that more than plays they are indeed modern myths.

The application of these theories will lead us to the inevitable subject of male anxiety in American drama and will raise many other questions. Do these escapes annihilate the male anxiety that is expressed on stage, or on the contrary, do they reinforce it? Are these the only three escapes? How does a character choose between the three? The cohabitation of the pirate, the salesman, and the cowboy in the plays brings forth another set of interrogations. Why are the three myths needed? Is one favored or chosen at the end of the play or do they all fail to relieve the tension? If so, is there another myth emerging in order to fulfill what the frontier, the world of business, or a life at sea fails to provide?

The question of male anxiety has not yet been studied by looking at the recurrence of these myths. A few critics have noticed the presence of the cowboy figure without however contemplating it as a new explanation for—or consequence of—male anxiety. For instance, in his book *Communists, Cowboys and Queers*, David Savran concentrates mainly on Tennessee Williams’s and Arthur Miller’s works and sees the cowboy as a disguise available to men to reinforce their masculinity. The cowboy thus becomes, in a story like “Hard Candy,” the object of

sexual fantasies for other men. The symbol of the salesman has been the object of many studies, especially in relation to *Death of a Salesman* and the American dream. If Willy has been perceived as a new American icon, presenting the confusion of an entire society, few have seen in Willy the expression of a new American myth.

As for references to a life at sea, they have been extensively studied in novels about the maritime world, or in relation to the works of American romantics like James Fennimore Cooper and Herman Melville. However, they seem to have been left aside in American Drama. In *Public Issues, Private Tensions*, Martin Esslin describes American dramatic writing as being

[M]ainly concerned with family relations: the parents suffering bitter disappointment at their children turning out differently from what they had expected; or conversely the sons'—and daughters'—cruel disenchantment with their parents when they revealed themselves to be less wonderful than they had made their children believe; the parents' inability to let go of their children; the children's difficulties in freeing themselves of that bond; or the tragedy of lack of communication between parents and children with the younger generation, realizing that they had never really talked to their parents. (Esslin 36)

In *The Glass Menagerie* and *Death of a Salesman*, we witness the expression of family matters that become a public issues. The confusion felt by the parents is bequeathed to the children, and it is my point to argue that the myths of the cowboy, salesman, and pirate are present in the plays to provide a masculine identity to children abandoned by their fathers and in need of defining their own masculinity. One main question remains: why are three myths required to depict the myth of the American dream? I argue that the icon that one follows is

chosen as an act of rebellion against the father. It seems that the new male generation heavily depends on the example set by – and the consequences of –the father’s actions.

This thesis will first define the pirate, the salesman, and the cowboy, their common aspects and differences, and how these characters become icons of the American myth. Then, the plays will be studied in depth in a chapter, each presenting the manifestations of the myth within the plays, and what it entails for the characters aspiring to live the lives of men who no longer exist. In a fourth chapter, I will study the importance of myth in literature and I will argue that American dramatists use new American myths in order to illustrate male anxiety and the confrontational relationship with the father. The aim of this thesis is to prove that, the sons who have had contacts with their fathers—or with a father figure—tend to pursue the ideal of the frontier or of the salesman, whereas the sons who have been left on their own, mostly around women, and without a masculine example, tend to adopt a life at sea. Transformed into myths, the plays do not only stage private tensions, they highlight major public issues.

1. Cowboys, Pirates and Salesmen: Symbols of the American Dream

1.1 The Cowboy

Walter Prescott Webb was a historian of the frontier in the early twentieth century. In 1931, he published *The Great Plains*, at the time one of the most influential books on the West, in which he described the cowboy as a man who

[L]ives on horseback as do the Bedouins; he fights on horseback, as did the knights of chivalry; he goes armed with a strange new weapon which he uses ambidextrously and precisely; he swears like a trooper, drinks like a fish, wears clothes like an actor, and fights like a devil. He is gracious to the ladies, reserved towards strangers, generous to his friends and brutal to his enemies. He is a cowboy, the typical Westerner. (quoted in Frantz and Choate 80)

Webb inscribes the cowboy within an existing literary myth, linking the cowboy to the myth of the Arthurian knights. In this myth, the man is depicted as riding on his own and fighting to defend justice or to conquer a lady's heart. Webb presents the image of the stereotypical western cowboy that has been brought to life by literature and Hollywood productions. However, the cowboy is more ambiguous than the stereotype, as Frantz and Choate explain in *The American Cowboy: The Myth and the Reality*, published in 1981:

[T]he American cowboy exists on three distinct levels – the historical level, about which the average American cares and knows no more than he does about any other phase of nonmilitary or nonpolitical history; the fictional level, in which the cowboy occupies a not quite respectable but highly popular position; and the

folklore level, on which the cowboy sits as an idealized creation of the American folk mind. (15)

The real cowboy—the historical figure—has disappeared with the frontier and the few written accounts that are to be found do not allow historians to accurately portray the reality in which they evolved. William Savage, Jr, remarks that “despite tomes that commemorate him, the cowboy remains the invisible man in our national past, for while we know almost exactly what he did, we have no clear idea of who he was” (139). It is not the cowboy’s everyday life that fascinates the public, but the environment of his evolution, for the west has no clear definition either. It is a space located geographically without, however, being delimited. It thus appears as a new escape available to any courageous young man wishing to escape an American society that is becoming more industrialized and more capitalistic:

As a cultural value, a national index, a mythological topos, or a historical and geographical site the West is mainly perceived, recognized, read and known through popular images. [...] *the West is related not to an act of clearly mapping out a specific Western territory but rather to a course of displacing and disorienting it. Pop images feel and depend on, sustain and circulate the vagueness of the aura emanating from and enveloping the West and its figure.* (Blatanis 139, emphasis added)

The aura—or the vagueness of the cowboy and of the territory he evolves in—enables the myth to exist. At the foundation of the American empire, “the popular images of the West are recognized as an integral and indispensable part of American ethos and identity” (Blatanis 151).

For Frantz and Choate, “there is no denying that the cowboy myth exists, that it is fundamental to an understanding of the cultural content of American life, nor that it is real” (82).

For authors such as Walt Whitman, the American icon of the cowboy embodies a way to detach the United-States from Europe in order to find a new order based on nature more than social ranks. If the eastern part of the United States is influenced by Europe, Whitman finds in the West the only future for America. In 1855, he dedicates *Leaves of Grass* to the new world opening Westward (Jacquin 186):

Come, said my soul,
 Such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one,)

That should I after return,
 Or, long, long hence, in other spheres,
 There to some group of mates the chants resuming,
 (Tallying Earth's soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves,)

Ever with pleas'd smile I may keep on,
 Ever and ever yet the verses owning—as, first, I here and now
 Signing for Soul and Body, set to them my name,
 Walt Whitman.

The appeal of the Western territory is also linked to the need for a new national hero. Leaving European myths behind, in which fate dictates the future of the hero, the cowboy is able to take a hold of his future and to decide for himself who and what he will become: The living embodiment of the American dream. Being a self-made man, the cowboy is “a unique phenomenon in American Mythology” (Davis 111). As a folk figure, the cowboy “has embodied all

the virtues of the Anglo-American [. . .]. You can accept him, either as completely good or as completely bad, or as Robin Hood who will bend the law to aid the unfortunate. Good or bad, he meets the challenges of the day, never quailing before the odds, never craven when facing a stampede or the exit end of a Winchester barrel” (Frantz and Choate 72). Good or bad, he embodies all the values that are expected of an American man: individualistic, he is in charge of his destiny, and he reconciles both respect for the individual and the necessary aggressiveness to succeed. The cowboy embodies the American dream, a cultural myth that has become a modern religion according to Jacquin:

[L]e cow-boy, homme de la terre et de la sauvagerie, incarne les valeurs de l’individualisme, démontre que chaque homme est maître de son destin dans la Nation élue, et concilie le respect de l’individu avec l’agressivité et la compétitivité nécessaires à une réussite impitoyable. Le cow-boy personnifie le rêve américain, un mythe culturel qui est devenu la véritable religion civile des Temps modernes. (220)

1.2 The Pirate

If one considers the cowboy, a man whose freedom was without limit, to embody the quintessential adventurer encouraged to go westward by the American government to civilize the west, pirates also represent such an adventurous path. Marcus Rediker offers a definition of the typical pirate in his work *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age*, describing him as follows:

He was born into poverty in a port city, he was experienced in the rough conditions of life at sea, in both the navy and the merchant service; he was apparently unmarried; and he was in his mid-twenties. These traits served as bases of unity with others when, in search of something better, he decided to become a pirate. And yet he, like the others, was not merely escaping oppressive circumstances. He was escaping *to* something new, a different reality, something alluring about which he had heard tales in his youth. (59)

Pirates, like cowboys, hoped and dreamed of a better future. It was also the promise of easy money as well as the promise of an egalitarian right to the bounty, like the discovery of gold, and the free plundering of natural gifts which propelled the Westward expansion. As Rediker explains, "Piracy [. . .] offered the prospect of plunder and 'ready money', abundant food and drink, the election of officers, the equal distribution of resources, care for the injured and joyous camaraderie, all as expressions of an ethic of justice" (*Villains of All Nations* 9). The West and piracy both represented the hope for a life of freedom and quick fortune, two main aspects of the American dream.

A life at sea, while full of promise, was also a life full of adventures and dangers. It was above all a way to break free from families and from the oppressing social hierarchy. These men had several options to reach freedom, one of which was to enroll in the navy as well as the merchant marines, though the hierarchy and discipline were harsh and life conditions rudimentary. Modeled on the organization of the society ashore, these careers were no escape. And so the last option was to become a pirate, which became the fate of many of the men previously enrolled in the Navy or merchant seamen. Historians reason that pirates plundered

many boats. Once under attack, many merchant marines and navy men did not defend their ship but instead volunteered to join the pirates thereby rebelling and escaping the powerful and unfair hierarchy on board. Pirates had a reputation among the men living at sea of being an egalitarian society, thus encouraging the navy and merchant seamen to become outlaws (Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 7). Piracy was a revolt against the social classes and injustice of the time. Rediker adds, "Pirates constructed their own social order in defiant contradiction to the ways of the world they had left behind" (85).

Just like the cowboy, the character of the pirate was heavily used in literature and Hollywood movies. Pirates abound in fiction—from children's books to love stories and adventure novels, and the pirate figure, often considered as the devil incarnate, evolved to become the anti-hero of the nineteenth century British novel saving the damsel in distress. Even though the myth keeps evolving, the pirate remains in popular culture a fearless man who lives a chaotic life and threatens the set order and the established government. He is lawless and violent, and his sexual tendencies are ambiguous. Like the cowboy, his everyday life consisted of rotten food, numerous diseases, and hard work. These aspects of piracy can hardly appeal to the public. What appeals, it seems, is the pirate's tremendous search for freedom, for a better life, which has turned both pirates and cowboys into mythic figures.

1.3 The Salesman

In the essay "'Personality Wins the Day': *Death of a Salesman* and Popular Sales Advice Literature," Brenda Murphy explains the origin and the evolution of the salesman in the United States. She comes to the conclusion that Willy Loman's confusion comes from the fact that he

represents three generations of salesmen at the same time, “that of his father and his hero Dave Singleman, that of Willy, his brother Ben, and his friend (or brother-in-law) Charley, and that of his sons and his boss, Howard Wagner” (Murphy 2).

She traces back the first steps of salesmanship in the early nineteenth century when men would buy goods on the East Coast and then travel to the West (reminding us of the cowboy, frontiersman) to sell the goods and make a large profit: “Peddlers,” she explains “were entrepreneurs, operating completely on their own, free to buy and sell whatever they wanted to and travel wherever they liked” (Murphy 2). She sees Mr. Loman, Willy’s father, as a peddler, producing the goods he was selling, being less constrained than regular salesmen who had to buy their merchandise. The peddler gave way to the drummer in the early twentieth century, a man who represented large manufacturers, and in the main Eastern cities greeted the clients interested in purchasing goods from his company. But later, the drummer was sent to meet clients with samples and catalogs of his products. His main characteristics were his charm and affable personality which seduced the customers. One main example of the drummer in *Death of a Salesman* is Dave Singleman who is still on the road at eighty-four years old, selling goods from his hotel-room. When he dies, his funeral represents the quintessential proof for Willy that a salesman must be well-liked to succeed, since hundreds were present for Dave’s final journey.

Willy starts his career as a drummer but somehow fails to adapt to the changes occurring within the profession. Whereas drummers did not need to be educated since their success relied on their personalities, more and more salesmen took classes to improve their salesmanship. While older salesmen like Willy Loman made a good living during World War II, the return of the younger men from the war into the business realm changed the profession dramatically. Instead

of valorizing the relationship between clients and salesman, what Willy attempts to do, the focus shifted to the product being sold. Murphy notes that “the two human beings, salesman and buyer, were becoming the least important elements of the transaction. Willy’s complaint that salesmanship was becoming “cut and dried” is meaningless to a man like Howard [his boss], who is interested only in the bottom line of profit and loss” (7). Willy, who counts on the loyalty of his buyers, is outdated in this new business world, an idea that Biff underlines in the play, calling his father “a hard working drummer who landed in the ash-can like all the rest of them!”(105)

Brenda Murphy points out the main role of figures like Dave Singleman in literature, propagating the idea of the importance of personality in business. Willy Loman is one example of a character who has adopted the concept of business being personal, which comes from the American dream where the American self-made man is described as someone who has control over his own success. When talking to his brother Ben, Willy describes this precise idea stating that “that’s the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being well liked!” (68). By becoming a salesman, one wishes to gain social freedom, a possibility to rise socially. To this matter, Christopher Bisgby in *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* quotes Arthur Miller, insisting that the salesman in the twenties was

[A] vital force in building the trade and commercial network of the country. The salesman needed little or no education, but an engaging personality and a faith in the inevitability of next week’s upswing. Every salesman knew some other man who had hit big, opened his own business, and died respected and rich. The myth of the salesman exemplified the open ranks of a society where practically overnight a man could leap to the head of the line. (107-108)

Willy takes the myth of the salesman as an example hoping to fulfill the American dream. When the myth fails to materialize, Willy becomes confused. Miller himself explains Willy's character and confusion through the myth of the self-made man prone by the American society:

Of course, I said, [Willy] is romanticizing as he always does, but there is something real underlying his feeling. In the era he is talking about, the buyers for the stores he sold to were either the owners themselves or had held their jobs for many years and knew him. You know there was actually a man called Filene [the Boston Department store named in *Salesman*], a man called Gimbel, R.H. Macy—and for that matter, Louis Chevrolet, Buick, Olds, Ford, Firestone... these were actual human beings at one time, and if Willy did not really deal with them in person, their reality was part of his reality, and their beginnings in poverty and their rise in the world were the pantheon that circled his mind. The era of the salesman as mere order-taker whose canned pitch had been made for him on television and who has no options as what to say or charge, this was not yet the case in his time. (quoted in Bigsby 107)

Willy's illusions are based on a dated reality. He chooses a career path not based on his ability as a good salesman but on the intention to become somebody fast. He wants to impress his family to gain an identity, if not as a man—he feels temporary about himself—at least as a salesman. Quoting Miller, Christopher Bigsby adds to this matter that

“Willy believes in just that kind of quick, smashing beginning. And so his sons are never trained, have no patience with the process of foregoing and delaying the slaking of whatever thirst is on them at the moment. They are narcissists.”

This is the process that leads Happy into his pointless womanising and Biff to a prison cell. A deferred future is intolerable; it must be collapsed into the present. (108)

The children inherit Willy's dreams, aspirations and lifestyle. Their future is conditioned by Willy's past, a condition that precludes their own success as, like their father they have "the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong" (*Death of a Salesman* 110).

1.4 Pirates, Salesmen, and Cowboys: A Common Ground

As we have seen, both pirates and cowboys often have a vivid reputation involving chaos and violence. In general, the salesman does not carry such a reputation, even though Willy uses numerous death metaphors throughout the play to describe his profession. However, the three myths share many other characteristics. Pirates battled on the high deep seas and the cowboy evolved in the open territories of the West. Similarly, the salesman ventured West when Willy began his career. In *Villains of All Nations*, Rediker defines the pirate's environment in terms that can be applied to the cowboy as well:

[T]he seamen's mobility, long stints of work at sea, and his single-sex community of labor diminished the family's regulatory powers and encouraged other social bonds. And labor itself was none too reliable a mechanism given the tendency of seamen to mutiny and turn pirate. The disciplinary network that underlay the social order thus had a weak presence at sea. (136)

Outside of all normative institutions and structured government, the pirate was considered lawless as well as a threat to "property, the individual, society, the colony, the empire, the Crown,

the nation, the world of nations, and indeed all mankind. His villainy was complete” (129). However, the historical pirates rebelled against the oppression of the society they lived in, the reason that pushed many European immigrants to the new world. They had the ambition to create a new nation which would insure one’s freedom. As such, there is a historical parallel between pirates and the USA as they share common origins and desires. It seems logical then that the pirates were to become a main figure of the American folklore and literature.

Rediker’s definition of the pirate can also be applied to the cowboy: always on the move to complete a physical and strenuous job, the cowboy evolves in a single-sexed community, which reduces the power of many normative institutions such as the church, marriage, school, and law. The cowboy feels free in his behaviour as well as in his personal rendering of justice. Pirates and cowboys, by evolving in unsettled environments, are considered lawless. Just as the pursuit of the frontier was encouraged by the American government, the importance of piracy in the eighteenth century was due mainly to European governments commissioning pirates to plunder other nations’s vessels, especially Spanish boats. Cowboys and pirates have the power to serve as well as to destroy a given society. They remain outcasts and evolve in far and wild places. Their environment seems to justify their lawlessness. Free from society and institutions, the pirate and the cowboy changed their identities: they “took new names, manly and rough, like Texas Jack, Whiskey Tom, French Flat Pete, Buckeye, and Sawbones (a doctor); they neither bathed nor changed their clothes, but they gambled, drank incessantly, swore, and attended bare knuckle prize fights more often than they attended church services. A deck of cards was called the ‘California prayer book’” (Kimmel 42). In doing so, they reinvent a society of their own and emphasize their detachment from all normative institutions which governed their former life.

Similar to the cowboy and the pirate, the salesman evolved in a dangerous world, as the business environment is equated with death in *Death of a Salesman*. The references to death emphasize the idea of barbarism and lack of laws in business, an idea reinforced by Ben, Willy's brother, who teaches Biff and Happy to "never fight fair with a stranger" (38). Willy does not take action when his sons steal from the nearby construction site. Charley, his friend, blames Willy for his laissez-faire behavior, declaring "the jails are full of fearless characters," to which Ben replies "[a]nd the stock exchange, friend" (39), with a stage direction that underlines Ben's mockery of Charley "*clapping WILLY on the back, with a laugh at CHARLEY*" (39). The salesman, contrary to the cowboy and the pirates, evolves within the American society and promotes free enterprise, a system favored by the American government. He enables the expansion of a financial network while promoting his own ascension in society. Wanting to make money fast, the salesman, like the pirate, goes on the road to meet with clients. The frontiersman shares such a desire to make money as the Gold Rush of 1848 indicates. All the frontiers, whether the West, Alaska or Texas, were popular because of the rumors of abundant gold or oil, i.e. natural resources to be plundered, a way to get rich quick while remaining in touch with the natural surroundings.

Two of these three personas, the pirate living during the Golden age of piracy (1700-1726), and the cowboy as understood through the American myths, have disappeared long ago, but remain in literature as symbols of freedom, as the "living" possibility to invent a new self. Yet, if their lawlessness and detachment from society were the central appeals to these individuals, such lawlessness and detachment also led to their downfall:

They took a hand in their own destruction. From the outset, theirs had been a fragile social world. They had no nation, no home; they were widely dispersed;

their community had virtually no geographic boundaries. Try as they might, they were unable to create reliable mechanism through which they could either replenish their ranks or mobilize their collective strength. These deficiencies of social organization made them, in the long, relatively easy prey. (Rediker, "The seaman as pirate" 154)

The cowboys found themselves in a similar situation. They did not disappear because the government chased them away but because the territory they had to discover, as spacious as it was, came to an end. Thus, they too "took a hand in their own destruction" by settling the West and opening the trail that enabled the society they fled to develop westward.

If salesmen still exist today, Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is forced to witness a major transition in the salesman's identity, which leads him to commit suicide. Christopher Bigsby explains that Willy "is a man who attaches his life to a myth which proposes a life without limits but who finds himself trapped in a shrinking physical, social and psychological space" (112). The former salesman, riding on "a smile and a shoeshine" (111), seems to disappear with Willy to leave room for a "cut and dry" way of doing business. According to Bigsby, this transition marks the disappearance of the salesman as understood by Willy. This is the end of this type of salesman who

[I]s a middle man. He is a means serving something beyond himself, an agent whose function is a factor of his own lost freedom. He is involved in transactions and the risk is that such transactions will begin to define his life, that the market which shapes his dreams and that of others, and in which he is implicated, will

deprive him of the dignity he seeks and the significance for which he yearns.

(*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 107)

Like the cowboy and the pirate, the salesman embraces a new life in search for a new identity, for a reason to be. But their careers bring an end to the chosen path. The cowboy settles the great outdoors, the pirate community lacks foundations and crumbles, the businessman turns into a commodity instead of being recognized as a human being. They all become a commodity that literature and movies translate as myths of liberty and rebellion.

1.5 Pirates, Salesmen, and Cowboys: A Literary Myth

The West in popular culture represents freedom from social hierarchy, where everyone has the same chance to become someone in the wilderness. Richard White, in his book *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West*, explains that the "Anglo American settlement of the West happened to take place simultaneously with the rise of penny newspapers, dime novels, and sensationalist journals such as the *National Police Gazette*" (620). He continues

The West became the center for the media's imaginative attentions in part because Americans had already assigned significant symbolic meaning to westering. When Henry Thoreau wrote, "Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free," or when Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn "lights out" for the territory to escape the constraints of "civilization," both spoke to an audience for whom westering, and thus the trans-Missouri West, had already taken on an

identification with freedom and independence in a country that regarded freedom and independence as its peculiar hallmark. (620)

The cowboy embodies the quintessential icon of liberty advocated by the American government.

The myth of the West emphasizes this freedom, as Jack Weston explains it, declaring that

The myth obscures the class struggle to gratify popular longings for a pre-industrial community. And the myth of the cowboy is just part of the myth of the West, which led its famous theorist Frederick Jackson Turner to invent the 'free condition of the frontier,' where 'free land promoted individualism, economic equality, freedom to rise, democracy' (70).

The yearning for freedom is also embedded in the pirate icon. As explained earlier, pirates created a functioning system in disharmony with that of the army or the marine merchants. Rebellious against all hierarchy, they established a democracy on board their vessels. Captain Charles Johnson "recognized piracy as a 'Life of Liberty' and made the matter a major theme of his book" (Rediker, "Liberty Beneath the Jolly Roger" 308).

With the disintegration of social classes in both the new territory and pirate vessels, these environments provided a perfect setting to promote the American Self-Made man and endless opportunities, as advertised by the American government: "Go West, Young Man" (Jacquin 180). At the same time, the government favoured the businessman. Both the cowboy and the salesman evolved in the USA at the same time. Kimmel notes the simultaneity of both careers when defining the west: "The frontier provided a cultural safety valve, siphoning off potentially rebellious young men whose economic futures were clouded or stymied. Geographic mobility might compensate for failed social mobility—if one couldn't rise in the economic system, one

could at least head west" (61). Movement is reasserted in times of hardship, when one is stuck socially. The desire for movement is translated into physical movement.

The salesman is yet another icon used in literature for decades to represent the hope of a better tomorrow and a possibility to rise socially. He embodies the American ideal of the pursuit of happiness. The new start, control of one's fortune were the fundamental desires that the west could fulfill for the cowboy and the entrepreneur alike. Bigsby underlines the importance of the salesman, especially in his critiques of American literature, when he declares that

In choosing a salesman for his central character Miller, was identifying an icon of his society seized on equally by other writers before and since, not least because a salesman always trades in hope, a brighter future. In *The Gilded Age* Mark Twain sees the salesman as a trickster, literally selling America to the gullible. In Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, he is a man who values appearance above substance and relies for his sexual success on sustaining that appearance. Sinclair Lewis chose a realtor as the key to his satire of American values as, decades later, John Updike chose a car salesman in his Rabbit Angstrom books. The central figure in Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* is a salesman, as is Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Rubin Flood in William Inge's *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. David Mamet's *Glen Glengarry*, *Glen Ross* featured real estate salesman. But what did Hickey sell, in *The Icemen Cometh*? He sold the same thing as Willy Loman, a dream of tomorrow, a world transformed, only to discover that meaning resides somewhere closer to home. (106)

The above quote—even if only indirectly—reasserts the idea that the three symbols analyzed here—the cowboy, the salesman and the pirate—share common ideals and represent the foundation of the American pursuit of happiness. They represent a society that believes in a natural order instead of the old European order based on social rank and birth. The cowboy and the pirate are rebellious figures who helped found the United States. The salesmen established in its own right a social network in which business equals a social movement upwards or downwards enabling anyone to have a share of the dream. All three symbols embody the hope for a better future and the possibility of becoming a self-made man.

Aspiring to follow the pattern described in the American dream, the men in the Loman family in *Death of a Salesman*, Tom Wingfield, the narrator of *The Glass Menagerie*, Jim the gentleman caller, as well as Mr. Wingfield, embodying one of these three icons described in this chapter, take on a journey. These characters represent and live their lives in pursuit of the American dream. Arthur Miller, when interviewed by Matthew Roudané, defines the American dream:

Early on we all drink up certain claims to self-perfection that are absent in a large part of the world. People elsewhere tend to accept, to a far greater degree anyway, that the conditions of life are hostile to man's pretensions. The American idea is different in the sense that we think that if we could only touch it, and live by it, there's a natural order in favor of us; and that the object of a good life is to get connected with that live and abundant order. (Roudané, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* 361)

Arthur Miller recognizes the revolutionary side of the American dream when it comes to separating the new nation from the old Europe in the organization of a new society. Anyone can benefit from the “natural order” that Miller mentions, as Popkin explains it in more detail, stating that

The various formulations of the idea of success, whether created by Horacio Alger or Herbert Spencer or Dale Carnegie, have contributed to the state of mind that makes failure a crime. Success is a requirement that Americans make of life. Because it is magical and inexplicable, as it is to Willy, it can be considered the due of every citizen, even those with notable or measurable talents. One citizen is as good as any other, and he cannot be proven to be a natural-born failure any more than he can be stripped of his civil rights. (“Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter” 13)

Equated with the American dream, success seems to be contingent upon the American way of life, which Miller notes, as all Americans are raised with this idea: “Early on we all drink up.” Thus the American dream is a cultural myth that is passed on from generation to generation. As a cultural myth, it is present in most work of literature as he states that “the American dream is the largely unacknowledged screen in front of which all American writing plays itself out—the screen of the perfectibility of man. Whoever is writing in the United States is using the American dream as an ironical pole of its story” (Roudané, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* 361). As narrators of “memory plays,” both Tom and Willy “write” the story they share with the audience. The American dream lies in the background of both plays, either to be pursued endlessly, or to be criticized and turned away from. Everywhere present, the American dream

Forms a context of irony for the kind of stories we generally tell each other. After all, the stories of most significant literary works are of one or another kind of failure. And it's a failure *in relation to* that screen, that backdrop. I think it pervades American writing, including my own. It's there in *The Crucible*, *All My Sons*, in *After The Fall*—an aspiration to an innocence that when defeated or frustrated can turn quite murderous, and we don't know what to do with this perversity: it never seems to 'fit' us. (Roudané, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* 361-2)

Even though failure is presented as a 'crime' in Pokin's words, Miller underlines the presence and seeming inevitability of the American dream's failure in literature. The non-realization of the dream seems to explain the violence that we find on stage as well as in the icons that main characters choose to embody, i.e. the cowboy and the pirate. Willy's references to death in business also underline the violence contained in the world of entrepreneurs. Popkin also points out this American frustration, as he continues his statement declaring that

The consequent disappointment that Willy feels is one of the great American exasperations. He postpones his anguish by transferring his ambitions to his sons, and so the play's free use of time permits us to observe aspiration and failure in both generations. (13)

By passing on his dream and ideas, Willy condemns his sons to follow his path. The dream is also present in *The Glass Menagerie*, through the character of Amanda who hopes for a better future. But contrary to Willy Loman and other male characters, Amanda, Tom's mother, is not seeking an immediate fortune, but mere security. Her search for security could be compared to

that of Linda Loman. However, Amanda cannot help to dream of a gentleman caller for Laura and of a better career for her son Tom. Her dream emphasizes the different ways to fulfill the American dream according to one's gender. Even though Laura attempted to take typing classes to enter the business world, the only escape from her present situation lies, from her mother's point of view at least, in marriage. Amanda questions Tom about Jim's salary and position at the warehouse. She buys into Jim O'Connor's speech about knowledge, money and power. Jim points out that he is taking classes on public speaking. Like Willy, Jim believes in improving his external appearance and presentation skills. The pursuit of the American dream, in *The Glass Menagerie* as well as in *Death of a Salesman*—closely linked to the American ideal of masculinity—seems to be based more and more on appearances instead of personality. This evolution of pursuit defines Willy's problem as well as that of Biff and Tom.

According to Bigsby, "Willy's dilemma"—and I argue Tom's and Biff's problem as well—"is that of a culture that proposes as a national mission the pursuit of happiness and then confuses it with material possessions, as did the Founding Fathers who debated whether happiness and property were synonymous" (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 103). Both Biff and Tom turn away from the ideal of achieving the American dream through business. By turning into cowboys and pirates, they attempt to go back to the origin of the American dream, when at its foundation, the United States only insured one's freedom to act, think and believe. However, the necessity to succeed has transformed the American dream into a crushing myth producing more anxiety, and ultimately death, than success.

2. Miller's *Death of a Salesman*: Cowboys and Salesmen

Arthur Miller wrote *Death of a Salesman* in 1949, for which he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. Since then, the play has been in constant production around the world. The play is, in part, a depiction of the American dream gone wrong. Willy Loman, an unsuccessful salesman of 63 years old, has been on the road since he was 18 or 19. Back to working on commission, he is fired during the play. Persuaded to be unworthy and guilty of his family's lack of success, he starts reviewing his life in order to pinpoint the moment when everything went downwards, and keeps dreaming of a brighter future for his boys.

2.1 Mr. Loman

The cowboy figure and more generally the idea of the frontier represents an ongoing theme in the play and within Willy's family, starting with his father Mr. Loman. Willy himself cannot remember the man who left when he was three years old. He questions his brother Ben to learn more about this enigmatic figure. Willy and the audience must rely on Ben's stories, in which Ben draws a portrait of the father using terms fit to picture the pioneer of the nineteenth century: "[H]e was a very great and wild-hearted man. We would start in Boston, and he'd toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he'd drive the team right across the country: through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and the Western States" (34). By mentioning a wagon, the traditional means of transportation of pioneers, Ben describes a scene of the American expansionism westward. Boston being the starting point of their conquest, the historical rebellious reputation of the town underlines the revolutionary aspect of the frontier. Looking for

liberty and success, the father represents the American nation against England, Mr. Loman against social conventions.

Mr. Loman abandoned his family to take part in the opening of the Alaskan frontier. The father embodies the cowboy ideals: he rides off to open-spaces, not taking into consideration any family bond, and Ben rightly uses the term “team” (34) as a synonym for “family,” hence reducing the importance of his attachment to the family. Like a typical cowboy, the father's identity remains undefined: he is succinctly described physically as “a man with a big beard” (38) and his first name is never mentioned. He is a vague aura that manifests itself through music that is heard at the beginning of the play and during Ben’s apparitions. Willy is unable to define either his father or the music without the help of his brother. Ben succinctly explains that the father was a flute maker and a successful salesman who “made more in a week than a man like [Willy] could make in a lifetime” (34). The father thus embodies two myths: that of the cowboy and that of the salesman, but chooses the cowboy’s way of life when he abandons his family to go to Alaska.

2.2 Ben Loman

Ben in turn leaves Willy and the rest of the family at a young age to follow the father’s trail, thus also embodying something of the cowboy spirit. But contrary to his father, who never comes back, Ben does so and brags to Willy and his nephews about his commercial success: “when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich” (37). The idea of the frontier is tightly linked to the idea of the American dream, as going west seems to entail making a fortune quickly. The idea is further underlined in the play when Ben invests in a lumber company in Alaska. Instead of conquering the physical space, he helps establish and grow his stake in the business and his own profit. Metaphorically, he conquers

a piece of the west. But he also admits to Willy that his inexperience led him to Africa when he meant to join his father in Alaska.

Ben's adventure eastward, however, is not a denial of the frontier ideal but its continuation. When Ben decides to leave for the open territory, the American frontier has already been explored. The West has been discovered and civilized. But many a pioneer who needed to escape their lives decided to carry on the frontier to other territories, like Alaska, and later to the jungle, opportunities embraced by Mr. Loman and Ben. Indeed, according to Kimmel, "men thought to revive manhood in the real jungle. If the frontier was closed, some reasoned, why not extend its boundaries beyond the borders of the continental United States and create new frontiers where men could test and prove their manhood?" (76) As such, Ben remains inscribed within the ideal of the frontier.

Ben and Mr. Loman share particular characteristics that no other Loman males in this play do: both are presented as adventurous and successful in business, contrary to Willy, who struggles to make a proper living. Mr. Loman left with the intention of never returning, which seems to be also the case for Ben, "walking away down some open road" (37). He does however come back a few times, but his appearances on stage are very short and timed: Ben is always on the go, adding to the pressure felt by Willy: "I've only a few minutes," (30) "I have an appointment," (33) "I must make a train," (31) "Boarding ship in an hour. Wanted to say good-bye" (64). By the end of *Death of a Salesman*, Ben is in such a hurry that he cannot use proper syntax in communicating with Willy. Ben and Mr. Loman also share the characteristic of being married to insignificant females. Willy never talks about his mother, states only that she "died a long time ago." (35) Ben's wife is also unknown: she is mentioned once as the author of a letter

announcing Ben's death. Finally, Mr. Loman and Ben are described through their actions instead of by whom they married, contrary to Willy whose wife has an important role in his life.

2.3 Willy Loman

Left alone at an early age, Willy looked for surrogate fathers all his life, starting with mimicking his brother Ben. When Ben left, Willy turned towards Dave Singleman, an old salesman who "without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, [. . .] made his living" (63). Salesmen, Kimmel argues, "were heralded as the self-made men of the new century. Sales reinforced 'independence and individuality,' wrote a salesman. [. . .] America became a nation of Salesmen" when it was previously a nation of pioneers (71). Business was also in part a defining means of comparison between Willy and his father. Ben points out that Mr. Loman "made more in a week than a man like [Willy] could make in a lifetime" (34). It is to be noticed, however, that both Mr. Loman and Ben are introduced to the audience through Willy. Ben's character arises from Willy's imagination. As such, the exactitude of the characters and their statements is questionable. Willy describes Mr. Loman and Ben as frontiersmen who are also successful in business, which could be one of Willy's numerous deformations of the truth, used as an attempt to better identify with them. Unlike the male examples in his family who follow a path westward, Willy only embraces Dave Singleman's model as a salesman. However, when he is discontent with the path he chose, he attempts to link his career to the West, describing it with terms related to the frontier. Opening "unheard-of territories," (44) he is "a road man" working in "a road business" (59). Bigsby points out the irony of such an attempt:

Willy Loman's sales trips into the New England territory are ironic versions of a mythic experience in which the frontiersman simultaneously took possession of

a country and a selfhood in challenging the physical world and encountering the new. The rhetoric survives: the reality does not. Knocking them dead in Boston is no longer an account of frontier challenges but of commercial success, access to which is controlled not by the threat of the wild but by secretaries to be cajoled, bribed or seduced. (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 113)

Willy and Ben have both adapted the cowboy ideal embodied by their father to their generation and needs. They ride modern means of transportation like trains, boats, and cars instead of the traditional horse. They want to represent the modern cowboy, considering themselves as adventurers. But Willy's continuous failures, being on commission again, and unable to bond with Biff, make him realize that his life did not turn out how he had expected: he did not follow his brother to Alaska, he is not successful as a salesman, he feels "temporary about [him]self" (40), and his sons seem to follow the same path. His search for an answer triggers a psychological breakdown.

Willy's attempt to understand what has happened goes through various stages. First, he turns to the past, remembering Biff's success as a football player and as the captain of the football team. This is a normal reaction according to Rutondo who writes that "as men felt their real sense of masculinity eroding, they turned to fantasies that embodied heroic physical action, reading novels of the Wild West and cheering the exploits of baseball and football players" (32). Thus, Willy glorifies the football game that Biff won in honour of his father:

Like a young God. Hercules—something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him. Remember how he waved at me? Right up from the field, with the representatives of three colleges standing by? And the buyers I brought, and the

cheers when he came out—Loman, Loman, Loman! God almighty, he'll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away! (54)

The recurrent altercations with Biff force Willy to turn to yet another pipe dream in his quest to understand what happened, talking to his late brother Ben. Feeling belittled compared to his father's and Ben's successes, Willy still needs to compensate for his lack of adventure, and tries to live up to an imagined version of Ben's way of life. He recreates wilderness in his backyard and justifies to his brother his residence in Brooklyn by stating that: "It's Brooklyn I know, but we hunt too. [. . .] There's snakes and rabbits and—that's why we moved out here" (35). His attempt to return to wilderness complies with Rutondo's statement quoted above as well as with Michael Kimmel's explanation that "the search for authentic experience, for deep meaning, always led men back to the frontier, back to nature, even if it was inevitably the frontier of their imaginations" (212). Willy dreams of a little place in the country to raise chicken, and stays in contact with nature by being a carpenter, using wood to build or repair his house: "there is more of him in this front stoop than in all the sales he ever made" declares Biff, to which Charley, their neighbour and friend responds "yeah. He was a happy man with a batch of cement" (110). But the growing city of New York prevents Willy's communion with nature which represents yet another personal failure. Surrounded by apartment buildings, Willy feels "[b]oxed [. . .] in. Bricks and windows. Windows and bricks," (12) which adds to the pressure felt by Willy as he longs even more for the "grand outdoors" (66). Nature continues to disappear throughout the play: Willy complains that "the street is lined up with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighbourhood. The grass don't [sic] grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the backyard. [. . .] They massacred the neighborhood" (12). Later he remarks that one "Gotta break [his] neck to see

a star in this yard” (41), and when he wants to buy seeds, Linda reminds him that there is “not enough sun [...] back there. Nothing’ll grow any more” (55). According to Willy, it is the population that destroys Nature: “There’s more people! That’s what ruining this country! Population is getting out of control! The competition is maddening!” (12) Thus his attempt to relate to the frontier is countered in every way. The wilderness is impossible to recreate and the population is exploding when it is supposed to be minimal in the West. Willy longs to become a cowboy but fails to make his the feeling of freedom and contact with nature that the cowboy represents. He also fails to take on the physical move that the cowboy mythology entails as he explains to Linda “I suddenly couldn’t drive anymore” (9). Contrary to the city and Willy’s neighbourhood where the business world is constraining, the West is represented as an open space without limits. Willy reminisces about Ben “walking away down some open road” (33).

The feeling of captivity, due to the tall buildings, apartment homes, and the destruction of nature is contrasted with the emptiness this society produces. When Ben challenges Willy to lay his hand on what he has built throughout his career as a salesman, Willy is dumb-founded (65) and is reminded instantly that he has failed, a sentiment reinforced by the fact that one never knows what Willy—and his company for that matter—sells. Howard describes the activity of the company as a “road business” and Willy is a “road man” (59). Bigsby states that

Willy Loman has lost his contact with the natural world, the west of his youth and the tree-lined idyll of his middle age. He can do no more now than sow seeds on barren ground. He has also lost touch with those around him. In that, too, as it seems to Fromm, writing in another book, *The Art of Loving*, he is a representative figure: ‘Modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow

men, and from nature. He has been transformed into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions.' Despairing of realising this investment, he turns to the only place he can, his children. (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 111)

His children, however, are not comforting him either. His relation with Biff is more than complex. Happy leads his own life without caring much for his parents. When he meets his sons at the restaurant, Willy "is looking for a little good news to tell [their] mother," adding: "the gist of it is that I haven't got a story left in my head, Biff" (84). He depends on his sons, especially on Biff, to find a reason to keep hoping, until he realizes that Biff is "no good, [...] no good for anything" (88).

Willy then turns towards a new type of frontier that reflects his need for new possibilities outside the business world. Willy's last lines are particularly relevant to such a search: he never mentions the word 'suicide' but uses the metaphor of death as a jungle that needs to be conquered. This new—and last—frontier will enable him to provide his family with \$20,000, represented by "a diamond" that needs to be grasped in the jungle. There are five references to the jungle and the diamond in the last two pages of the second act of the play. Like Mr. Loman and Ben, Willy is looking for an immediate wealth that death will provide thanks to a life insurance. But Willy fails even in death as he did not pay the insurance premium as Linda reminds him "It's the grace period now" (56). Moreover the insurance company is also aware that he attempted to commit suicide previously by faking several car accidents as Linda relates to her sons: "The insurance inspector came. He said that they have evidence. That all these accidents in the last year—weren't—weren't—accidents" (46). Willy's death is not just a way to put an end to

his misery and pain; it is his final attempt to succeed as a salesman. His last conversation with Ben is his attempt to sell to himself the idea of committing suicide: “To the end,” declares Bigsby, “[Willy] is a salesman. When he explains his plan to Ben, conjured up precisely to give him licence, to ratify his decision, he is making the pitch and since Ben is a figment of his imagination he is, in effect, making the pitch to himself. His death is the bargain on offer. It will solve all his problems, it will not only justify his life, it will also redeem his son” (112).

Through death and his ability to provide for his family, Willy is looking for approval from his family and especially from Biff: “He’ll worship me for it!” (107). Bigsby underlines that Willy “sees not death but justification, not simply an inheritance to fuel the dream he bequeathed to his son, but the funeral which, like that of Dave Singleman, the old drummer who had in part inspired his life as a salesman, would attract his peers, be the final evidence that he was indeed, well liked” (111). To the end, he wants to prove to Biff that he is wrong to consider his father to be a “hard working drummer who landed in the ash-can” (105). His search for approval from another man is characteristic of the twentieth century male, according to sociologist David Reisman in his work *The Lonely Crowd*. Kimmel summarises Reisman’s work as follows:

Reisman discerned the shift in identities and ethics from the inner-directed nineteenth century man—a man of strong character animated by an inner sense of morality, fixed principles by which he grounded his identity—to the twentieth-century “other directed” man—a sensitive personality, animated by a need to fit in, to be liked. Inner-directed men went their own way, could stand alone, tuned the hum of an internal gyroscope; other-directed men scanned a mental radar screen for fluctuations in public opinion. For the other-directed

man, having a good personality was the way to win friends and influence people.

(81)

Contrary to Ben and Mr. Loman who seem to be inner-directed men able to live on their own in a masculine world, Willy is made fun of by his co-workers. Compared to a “walrus,” he is laughed at. This rejection proves to Willy that he is a failure as a man, since he believes that to be successful one needs to be well liked. David Mamet reaffirms this feeling when he states that “What men need is men’s approval” (quoted in Kimmel 5). Indeed, Kimmel reinforces Mamet’s statement when he writes that “manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating [American males], having power or control over [American males]. Throughout American history American men have been afraid that others will see us as less than manly, weak, timid, frightened” (4). This definition is Willy’s motivation in life: he refuses to be lessened by his co-workers, and he shows his superiority through physical violence. He keeps refusing Charley’s offer of employment because accepting it would be to recognize his own failure. He diminishes Bernard’s intelligence by ridiculing him physically, calling him “an anaemic” (25) or “a worm” (31) as to value his son’s physical strength. However, his attitude is self-destructive and Biff reproaches Willy for blowing him “so full of hot air that I could never stand taking orders from anybody!” as well as “never [telling] the truth for ten minutes in this house!” (104).

Since Willy fails to be recognized by other men, he turns towards women to exist. Feeling lonely in Boston, he cheats on Linda. But contrary to Happy who seduces women, Willy is chosen by the woman. She repeats “I picked you” (29) and explains why Willy is different from the other men: “you’re so sweet. And such a kidder” (30). However, the conversation between the two

characters stresses an impossibility to connect. Their relation is more an attempt to cheat loneliness than to express any type of feelings. As Bigsby notes, Willy and the woman “were not so much talking to each other as ‘stating their dream-like, disjointed, and intensely compressed positions.’ And of course, it is the nature of much of Willy’s ostensible dialogue in the play that is in fact a discussion with himself, an externalized account of his internal interrogation. Since he conducts these internal conversations in the presence of others, however, there is a surreal quality to many of the interchanges” (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 109-10). Willy, it seems, cannot connect to anyone surrounding him anymore.

The laughter of the woman blends in with Linda’s laugh, the steadfast woman in Willy’s life. Whereas Willy’s mother remains unmentioned, his wife Linda has a major role in his life: she is a strong woman who raises their sons while Willy travels. Happy describes her as “What a woman! They broke the mold when they made her” (52) and takes her as an example when he talks about getting married to “someone with character, with resistance! Like Mom, y’ know?” (19). When Willy remembers Ben’s visits during which he asked him to take care of his lumber company, Willy starts picturing himself with his “boys in those grand outdoors!” (64) But it is Linda who puts an end to the dream, reminding Willy that he is “doing well enough [. . .] Enough to be happy right here, right now” (67). In charge of everything around the house, she desires security for her family, and every conversation with Willy deals with invoices to pay. Willy reproaches her for being too present in her sons’s lives and especially in Biff’s life, making them less manly as a result, when he asks her “You want him to be a worm like Bernard?” (31) However, apparently subdued to the desires of her husband, Linda is one of the main characters of the play. Miller himself explains that:

[Linda]'s not just sitting around. She's the one who knows from the beginning of the play that Willy's trying to kill himself. She's got the vital information all the time. Linda sustains the illusion because that's the only way Willy can be sustained. At the same time any cure or change is impossible on Willy. Ironically she's helping to guarantee that Willy will never recover from his illusion. She has to support it; she has no alternative, given his nature and hers....the females are victims as well. (Roudané, *Conversation with Arthur Miller* 370)

Willy goes through several stages while searching for an answer, before deciding that death "is the only way" (*Salesman* 107). Miller declared, "to me, the tragedy of Willy Loman is that he gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it" (Quoted in Bloom 2). Willy wasted his life by trying to conform to the many definitions of what the American male is and how he defines himself. He attempted to adopt the symbolism attached to the salesman figure as to assert himself in the society he lives in, contrary to his brother and father who became cowboys to escape society. When Willy fails to encounter success, he embraces the myth of the west through death, sure of the inevitability of his success. He "dies in hope. He dies radiant with unexamined optimism, almost an absurd hero finding meaning in his conspiracy with death, purpose to the purposeless. He never does close the gap between what he wishes and what he is" (Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 118). On the contrary, he transmits his confusion to the next generation of the Loman family, Happy and Biff.

2.4 Biff and Happy Loman

Biff and Happy follow the same pattern as their father and uncle. Like Willy, they have been raised by their mother since Willy was only home on the weekends. While Happy continues Willy's dream to become a successful businessman, Biff escapes Willy's fantasy only to enter a new one. Raised as the high-school hero, named captain of the football team, praised for his physical strength and good looks, Biff is the first generation of the family to have the opportunity to go to college thanks to his achievements on the football field. When his math teacher fails him, Biff goes to Boston to find his father and ask for help. But instead of finding the hero he thought his father was, he realizes that Willy is "a fake," "a liar," as he walks in on him with another woman in his hotel room (95). And even more catastrophic for Biff, he sees Willy giving to the woman the silk stockings that were to be his mother's, an expensive good that Linda has to mend throughout the play. Interestingly enough, Boston is also mentioned when Ben describes his father's trip, the city being his point of departure. For Willy and Biff, it is the beginning of the end. Realizing that he has lived a lie all his life, Biff abandons all hope of graduating and going to university, and goes west whenever he can.

Raised in the memory of his grandfather who left for the West, seeing his uncle stopping by the house on his way to far places, hearing his father dreaming about the "grand outdoors" (*Salesman* 64), Biff does not seem to have chosen his own path. By going west, he transforms the dream into reality and explains to his brother Happy how life is in the west: "In Nebraska where I herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now Texas. [. . .] There is nothing more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt" (16). Referring to the western states and to the cowboy's main tools, Biff has adopted the cowboy personae, his longings and expectations.

However, it would be too simplistic to affirm that Biff has chosen the west because of his family's history. If so, there would be no tension between Willy and Biff since he would have realized his father's ambitions. At the same time, Biff does not seem convinced of having made the right decision, contrary to his uncle and grandfather who never or scarcely came back. As he himself explains to his brother "I don't know—what I am supposed to want" (16). He emphasizes this feeling when he describes to Happy that "whenever springs come to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not getting anywhere. What the hell am I doing, playing with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future. That's when I come running home. And now, I get here, and I don't know what to do with myself" (16-17). Measuring his success by the importance of his paycheck, Biff acts like his father and all businessmen. He is not totally free of his father's influence.

Biff remains divided between becoming a businessman or a cowboy for most of the play. His discourse repeats Willy's who does not consider the west as a possible career as he questions: "Is that a life? A farmhand? In the beginning, when he was young, I thought, well, a young man, it's good for him to tramp around, take a lot of different jobs. But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty-five dollars a week!" (5) Quickly realizing the impact of his father on his life, Biff wonders "[w]hy am I trying to become what I don't want to be? What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous begging fool of myself when all I want is out there waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am!" (105). He pleads his father "Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?" (106). But like Willy who feels temporary about himself, Biff does not know what he is "supposed to want" (16). Bigsby sees in this dynamic "two people [...] fighting for survival, in the sense of sustaining a sense

of themselves. Willy desperately needs Biff to embrace him and his dream... Biff, by contrast needs to cut the link between himself and Willy" (*Arthur Miller: A critical Study* 104). It is only after his father passes away that he is able to say "I know who I am" (*Salesman* 111). Commenting on the relationship between the father and Biff, Bigsby states that

Neither man can walk away, though Biff will, it seems, do so at the end of the play, stepping out of the drama into a projected, if historically suspect, future. They are wedded to their dreams and they are held together by a complex of emotions they can barely understand, not least because they consist of contrarities—love/hate, vengeance/redemption, ambition/despair. Father and son are a divided self. Their identities are ineluctably intertwined. For Willy Loman, Biff is his justification and vindication. In refusing to embrace his father's dreams he is, thus, denying him fulfilment, expiation, that sense of identity that comes from passing the torch from generation to generation. For Biff, his father stands between himself and his life. He is the past that has to be transcended, the falsehood that must be rejected, but also the debt that must be discharged.

(*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 102)

Biff embodies the cowboy ideal in his way to look at the development of his brother's life. Contrary to Happy who wants to get married, Biff seems reluctant about the idea. He takes it into consideration "Maybe I ought to get married" to add in the next sentence "Maybe I oughta get stuck into something. Maybe that's my trouble. I'm like a boy. I'm not married, I'm not in business, I just—I'm like a boy" (17). Thus, what is considered to represent adulthood for most represents imprisonment in Biff's mind. This imprisonment felt by Biff, as well as by Willy, is

juxtaposed with their desire for physical freedom. Similar to Ben who goes back and forth between Africa and Alaska, and to Willy who is always on the move, Biff has no location. He has been to many states in the West, keeps going back and forth between home and a new destination. At the end of the play, he mentions yet a new frontier when he declares that “if I strike oil I’ll send you a cheque,” referring to Texas or Alaska (102).

The entire play is in fact written based on several dichotomies, most importantly between life and death and between society and the grand outdoors. Most men in the Loman family are confronted with these dilemmas, especially Willy and his son Biff, who both aspire to leave for the country, but cannot help themselves to conform to the demands of society. Bigsby describes the play as “a love story between a man and his son, and in a crazy way between both of them and America” (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 102). Both embodying two myths of the American society, the cowboy and the salesman, none of them fulfills the American dream.

From Mr. Loman to Biff and Happy, the cowboy ideal is certainly present through the play and the family. This ideal comes hand in hand with the concept of the frontier that keeps moving. The first frontier mentioned is Alaska that Ben and Willy’s father followed. Ben also went to Africa, a new eastern frontier, also known as “the Gold coast,” (33) which renders the idea of the frontier international. Dressed up like an English colonizer, wearing the traditional umbrella and growing a moustache, Ben represents both the American frontier man as well as the international movement of colonization to exploit the natural resources of Africa. Evolving with the needs of society, Biff, as a cowboy, still enables the expansion of civilization and finally come to peace with his father. But the ending of the play is not clear. One does not know if Biff will leave once more

for the west, even though he invites his brother to come with him during the father's burial.

According to Bigsby,

Biff is presumably about to light out for the territory, following the sound of the flute. But that natural world was where the first act of betrayal occurred, as it did in the original Eden. Perhaps, as Fitzgerald has Carraway say in *The Great Gatsby*, this had been a story about the west, after all. The West, in this case, is that towards which Biff goes, as it was once the place where Willy's salesman father deserted his family[...] It was where Uncle Ben began his capitalist enterprise which Willy believed first he and then Biff would match. (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 118)

Most importantly, the Loman men must remain on the move. The father has disappeared, Ben keeps going back and forth between Alaska and Africa, Willy is on the road for business and Biff follows the same pattern, going from home to the West and back every year. Linda does not fail to remark: "How would I write to you? For over three months you had no address" (42). Whereas Biff was in jail, Rosefeldt points out the necessity for American Heroes to always be in movement so as "to stay out of the reach of the law" (47). Ben tells his brother Willy to "get out of the cities, they're full of talk and time payments and courts of law. Screw on your fists and you can fight for a fortune up there" (Miller, *Death* 66). The men in the plays refuse to be submitted to the surroundings society. They do so by adopting the ideal of the cowboy and salesman.

3. Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and Pirates

3.1 Pirate Figures

In the *Glass Menagerie*, written in 1944 by Tennessee Williams, we are confronted once more with a dysfunctional family, the Wingfields. The father has abandoned the family who now lives in a small apartment in Saint Louis. Presented by his wife Amanda as a “telephone man who—fell in love with long distance”(64), Mr. Wingfield is never described physically, does not have a first name, but he sits enthroned on the mantel on the apartment through a “larger-than-life-size photograph” (14). The father’s absence oppresses all the characters. Amanda has to cope with the financial and moral problems that this situation engenders. She sells magazine subscriptions to “*The Home-Maker’s Companion*” (27), while she sends her son Tom to work at a shoe factory. As for Laura, Tom’s sister, her father’s rejection seems to have added to her physical handicap in making her asocial and unable to confront the outside world.

Forced into this situation because of the father, every member of the family has developed a pipe-dream, an escape from reality, which Tom the narrator recognizes in his first speech, as he describes Jim the gentleman caller as “being an emissary from a *world of reality* that we were somehow set apart from” (14, emphasis added). Amanda finds refuge in the past, remembering her life prior to her wedding when sons of planters were trying to seduce her, a past that she continuously shares with her son and daughter. According to Jordan Y. Miller,

The fine, gentle life and the proprieties evidenced by the Sunday afternoon gentleman callers, all seventeen of them, remain a dream that cannot be verified. They are distant from reality [. . .] Its surface beauties as recalled by

Amanda notwithstanding, life at Blue Mountain was in its way as sterile and unproductive as Belle Reve, as lushly and oppressively decadent as life in the Siete Mares. And one wonders, given the attraction of place and persons evoked in Amanda's recall, how she could in the end do not better than the telephone lineman and the depressing urban flat in which she finds herself. (58)

Amanda clearly lives in a dreamed past like Willy Loman. As for Laura, she stays home, finding refuge in her glass menagerie, a collection of animals made of glass, and by playing "worn-out records" (41) that her father left behind. Her physical discrepancy—a leg slightly shorter than the other—adds to the trauma provoked by the father's escape and to her inability to confront strangers. Tom finds refuge every night in movies and alcohol to escape his life and the apartment they live in, "taking after his [father's] way" (38) according to his mother. But the movies do not only distract Tom from his everyday life; they also, according to Rosefelt, "recreate the mythical past of the father" (57). Instead of feeling temporary about himself like Willy Loman who was left without a father figure at an early age, Tom seeks masculine guidance in movies. There, he is presented with overly masculine icons to which he compares himself during the play, be they magicians, criminals, pirates, etc.

Tom feels trapped in the apartment he lives in where the mother's presence is suffocating. Jordan Y. Miller summarizes Tom's situation as follows:

While the dismal St Louis apartment is no brutish cave, those who must live within it have little prospect of rising above its stultifying oppressiveness. It is ruled by the infuriating dominance of Amanda [. . .] It is inhabited by the physically and emotionally crippled; its imprisoned family must escape its sordid

realities with endless memories of Blue Mountain, with scratchy phonograph records from a past almost as distant as Amanda's plantation days, with fragile bits of glass, and with ceaseless visits to the movies. (58)

Tom has the same feeling about the factory where he works, of which he emphasizes the artificiality with its "celox interior with—*fluorescent—tubes*" (163). He complains of having no privacy to his mother who controls what he does and what he reads, a problem that he also encounters at work where his coworkers denounce him when he writes poetry instead of working. To divert himself, Tom explains to his mother that he goes to the movies to find "adventure" (38). But as Walker Percy writes in "The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry," "we all know perfectly well that the man who lives out his life as a consumer, sexual partner, an 'other-directed' executive; who avoids boredom and anxiety by consuming tons of newsprint, miles of movie film, years of TV time; that such a man has somehow betrayed his destiny as human being" (415). Aware of this modern pipe dream, Percy tells a similar story to Tom's in *The Moviegoer*. Binx, the main character, spends his time at the movie theatre to escape his miserable life. Allen Rodney comments about *The Moviegoer* an idea that applies to *The Glass Menagerie* as well: "*The Moviegoer* is essentially Binx's progression from a life of diversion to a greater admission of his despair, but his casual, laconic tone is misleading, because as [Mark Johnson] puts it, 'Binx verbalizes like an essayist' rather than a character" (22). Tom, like Binx, tries to elude reality but his role as character and narrator of a memory play underlines the irony of his situation. He presents to the audience the story of his failed escape. Presently trapped in the past, his speech reinforces his desperation and his search for freedom. He tells his story by presenting his overly dysfunctional family, giving himself excuses to hope for a better future. He bases his hope on the

Merchant seamen, who presents a possibility of escape from the city and of finding contact with a natural order that the American dream promises. As the narrator of the play, Tom writes the story. Thus, as Arthur Miller stated it, Tom uses the American dream as the pole of his story, which adds irony to the play as Tom knows from the start that he stages his own failure. Like his mother and sister at the end of the play, being reminded of Laura by every piece of glass he sees, Tom is a prisoner, not of a physical space as he used to be, but of his past and conscience. While following his father's footsteps, Tom has become Amanda, enacting the past.

However, the father has also shown proofs that he has not forgotten what he left behind. Mr. Wingfield, we are told, sent a postcard years ago with the simple message "'Hello—Goodbye!' and no address." (14). According to Rosefeldt in *The Absent Father in American Drama*, the father "acknowledges his presence, then closes his discourse, leaving no message or advice" (40). Like the father, Tom remembers what he has left behind, and like Amanda, Tom becomes the narrator of a memory play, reenacting the reasons why he left, trying to cope with the consequences of his actions on his mother and sister. Tom's need to recount the story again and again underlines the obvious idea that Tom "has not fulfilled himself" (Biggsby 38). "The story is told", declares Matthew Roudané, "for a purpose and serves a need outside that story. Tom Wingfield recalls the past for much the same reason that Willy Loman does in *Death of a Salesman*: guilt. He revisits the past because he knows that his own freedom, such as it is, has been purchased at the price of abandoning others" (37). Like the outlaws he saw in movies, Tom is condemned to

[W]ander[] from city to city, looking for the companionship he had failed to offer his sister. [. . .] In that Merchant Marine uniform which is the very symbol of his

homelessness, he returns, in his memory, to the home he deserted for the fulfilment he failed to find. When his mother asks him to “look out for your sister...because she is young and dependent” (175), she identifies an obligation which Tom refuses... For Tom, memories of the past are a distraction from present failure for though situated in time they exist outside of time. (Bigsby, “Entering *The Glass Menagerie*” 38-39)

Dressed as a seaman, Tom is still the spectator of his life. He spent his time looking at the future, of the day he will escape the apartment by watching movies to distract him. But once he reaches for his goal, he needs to rely on his past to distract himself from the present he wished for. Tom becomes his mother, who finds refuge in her past to better escape the present. She relies on a mythical past in a mythical South; myths that she sells to other females when selling subscription to the magazine (Bigsby 38). By fleeing, Tom refuses all the obligations his mother put on him. Christopher Bigsby points out that Tom’s “decision to leave has financial as well as personal implications. He earns a wretched sixty-five dollars a month but in Depression America any job is valuable and, though Tom feels suffocated by work which leaves him little time or space for his poetic ambitions, it has at least served to sustain the family. By leaving, he condemns mother and sister to something more than spiritual isolation” (“Entering *The Glass Menagerie*” 34). Tom condemns the women of the play to a social death.

Tom’s desire for liberty is felt and expressed throughout the story, but it is not articulated in the same manner as in *Death of a Salesman*. Instead of finding refuge in the west, Tom seems to imagine a life at sea as the ideal symbol of liberty and adventure. He admits to his friend Jim that he has subscribed to the Merchant Seamen with the money Amanda gave him to pay the

electricity bill. But this life at sea is no ordinary life as Williams also includes slides in his play “to give accent to certain values” as well as “strengthen the effect of what is merely allusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly” (9). Interestingly enough, he chooses to incorporate the picture of “a sailing vessel with Jolly Roger,” (*The Glass Menagerie* 39) the flag of pirates, also referred to as “the banner of King Death” (Rediker, *Bandits at Sea* 140). It appears twice during the play: it is first projected on the wall when Tom explains to his mother why he goes to the movies every night. The second time, he is outside on the fire escape with Jim his friend from the warehouse, explaining his plans to join the Merchant Seamen.¹

With slides to direct our attention, the script of the play takes on another meaning and presents details that transform the life at sea desired by Tom into a desire to become a pirate. Tom’s discourse is full of irony throughout the play and reaches a climax every time Tom fights with his mother. With the goal of enraging his mother, Tom states that he is “living a double life, a simple, honest warehouse worker by day, by night a dynamic *tsar of the underworld*, Mother” (31). To scare her, he claims to “wear a patch over one eye and a false moustache,” and adds “sometimes I put on green whiskers. On those occasions they call me—*El Diablo*” (31). The patch over the eye and the moustache are the stereotypical components of a pirate’s costume. By referring ironically to “*El Diablo*” and “the underworld,” Tom refers quite explicitly to Death and Evil, two characteristics of piracy as represented by the Jolly Roger. In order to make his point quite clear, while having “a poet’s weakness for symbols,” (14) he makes a list of several important places and figures belonging to the crime organizations of Saint Louis:

¹ History seems to confirm Williams’s vision of the member of the Merchant Seamen as future pirates: Rediker explains in *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* that most pirates started their careers as seamen (258), which let us think that Tom who has embraced a life at sea might choose the life of a pirate.

I'm going to Opium dens! Yes Opium Dens, dens of vice and criminals' hang-outs, Mother. I've joined the Hogan gang,² I'm a hired assassin, I carry a tommy-gun in a violin case! I run a string of cat houses³ in the Valley! They call me killer, Killer Wingfield [...] I go to gambling casinos, I spin away fortunes on the roulette table! (31)

By claiming that he is part of the Hogan Gang, Tom unconsciously underlines his desire to belong to an organized group, mainly composed of men, who, like pirates and cowboys, take new identities and names and have no family bond to keep them together. They rely on their participation in crime and their status as outlaws to fuse them together. They are outcasts in many ways: as Tom mentions, they are involved in all activities banned by society: drugs, murder, gaming and sexual depravation, characteristics embodied by the pirate figure as well. As Rosefeldt noticed it, "his portrayal of himself as a gangster links him to the romantic world of outlaws perpetuated by the American cinema. The restless sons of absent fathers often see themselves as rebellious outlaws or compulsive petty criminals trying to beat the system" (42).

Tom also uses many curse words to madden his mother, expressions like "in Christ's name" (28) or "God Damn" (31). According to Rediker, "swearing had implied defiance of middle-class society and its ideals of gentility, moderation, refinement, and industry. Rough speech was thus essentially transgressive" (*Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* 166). As a consequence, the language used by Tom is another way to differentiate himself and to rebel against his mother's wishes and education.

² The Hogan Gang was a major organized crime group in Saint Louis, who opposed the Egan Rats, another crime group, in the 1920's. Hogan was part of the political life of the city and was elected senator. He stayed in office for 40 years.

³ « Cat house » is synonym of brothel. Tom imagines himself at the head of several institutions which provides an outlawed way to find sexual intercourse.

His behavior finally is also a key element to link him to piracy: more than violence expressed in words, all his movements betray a contained rage against his mother, his position at the warehouse and the apartment. After a fight with his mother, for example, the stage direction reads *“He goes through a series of violent, clumsy movements, seizing his overcoat, lunging to the door, pulling it fiercely open. [...] His arm catches in the sleeve of the coat as he struggles to pull it on. [...] With an outraged groan he tears the coat off again, splitting the shoulder of it, and hurls it across the room”* (31). Seemingly violent for no apparent reason, Tom is left groaning during fits of violence, he is unable to speak, a paradox for someone who claims to be a poet. (14) Reduced to sounds to express himself, Tom thus appears to be closer to the animal kingdom than human society, an idea that is brought forth again in a discussion with his mother, taking place right after the first appearance of the *“sailing vessel with Jolly Roger”* (39). Tom defines his need for adventure in term of instincts, which his mother refuses to hear as she makes a clear difference between Christian adults and animals on the precise presence or absence of instincts:

TOM: Man by instinct is a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse!

AMANDA: Man is by instinct! Don't quote instincts to me! Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!

TOM: What do Christian adults want, then?

AMANDA: Superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs!

Than monkeys—pigs—

TOM: I reckon they're not. (39)

In refusing his mother's definition of Christian adults' expectations, Tom differs himself from the religious vision of man, a widely spread idea in the United States. By associating with animals, Tom becomes an outcast, and in quoting instincts he also refuses the importance of feelings, only responding to calls of nature. As we saw in the first chapter, pirates embody the paradigm of inhumane and insensitive creatures with which Tom seems to be associating.

When his mother begs Tom to bring home a gentleman caller, that is to say a suitable courtier for Laura, Tom invites Jim, a man with whom Tom and Laura went to high school. During his senior year, Jim had the lead role of the high school production, staging the operetta *The Pirates of Penzance* by Gilbert and Sullivan. Hence, through Jim and Tom, the pirate figure is present throughout the play. If Jim embodied a pirate for the span of three shows, underlying the superficiality of the disguise, he is now taking action to reach for his dream. He appears to be a very confident man, basing his future success on television and public speaking, declaring that "Knowledge—Zzzzzp! Money—Zzzzzp! Power! That's the circle democracy is built on!" (79) He inscribes himself in the ideal of the American dream, trying to become a self-made man. He went to the "Century of Progress," an exposition in Chicago on the future of the United States, whereas the country was going through a major financial crisis. But Bigsby underlines that "Jim's confidence is paper thin for within a few moments he confesses that 'I hoped when I was going to high school that I would be further along at this time, six years later, than I am now' [. . .], his high school yearbook having predicted inevitable success" ("Entering *The Glass Menagerie*" 34). Like Tom, Jim is looking for movement, but neither can let go of the past. Tom fails in his attempt to flee the world he evolves in, as he presents the audience a memory play, in which he cannot help

but think of his sister that he has abandoned. But as Bigsby explains it, "*The Glass Menagerie* is more than a lament for a tortured sister (Laura is based on Williams's mentally damaged sister, Rose); it is an elegy for a lost innocence. The Depression has already destroyed one American dream; the war destroyed another, and Tom looks back on the events which he stages in his memory and imagination from the perspective of an immediately postwar world" ("Entering *The Glass Menagerie*" 36). Contemplating the failures of the American society through the Depression and World War II, Tom's escape cannot lie in the business world, neither can it stand in the West.

But Tom's story is not just about the Wingfields. He makes a point of mentioning the headlines of the local newspaper which contextualize the play in American and international history. One of the main issues that is present in the background of the play is the Depression of 1929 and the disastrous economic years following the financial crash. Tom makes sure to define from the beginning the time of the play: "I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties," underlining the irony of the play by qualifying the thirties, of all periods, as "quaint" (13). The references to society and the international scene are threats towards the American way of life. Tom mentions Franco's victory and Guernica which remind the reader of the ease with which democracy may be undermined. On the contrary, Tom focuses his attention on the superficiality of young Americans who go dancing, distracting themselves from the seriousness of the international situation, a distraction that he himself seeks when going to the movies. Based on capitalism and consumerism, the period in which he sets the play is a first attempt to point out the superficiality of the American society in general. But as the narrator of the play, Tom grasps the void in American life, declaring that "adventure is only available to the masses when

there is a war,” an event he announces as the narrator, as World War II just came to an end (61).

As explained by Christopher Bigsby in “Entering *The Glass Menagerie*,”

The play is set at a moment of change, change in the private world of the characters but also in the public world, as though it resonated this private pain. As Tom tells us, “Adventure and change were imminent in this year. They were waiting around the corner for all these kids. Suspended in the mist over Berchtesgarden, caught in the fold of Chamberlain’s umbrella. In Spain there was Guernica!... All the world was waiting for bombardments!” (179) It is a speech which does more than situate the play, provide a context for what, by contrast, must seem a minor drama. It is an invitation to read the events ironically, and to see in the desire to live with comforting fictions, rather than confront brutal truths, a doomed and ultimately deadly strategy. For, as Tom indicates in the same speech, whatever consolations or distractions existed—hot swing music, liquor, movies, sex, glass menageries (the last hinted by his reference to a chandelier)—flooded the world with rainbows which he characterizes as “brief” and “deceptive.” (35-36)

Through the use of irony linked to his presence on stage as a narrator and character acting on his desire for adventures, Tom differentiates himself from the rest of society. Like Biff in *Death of a Salesman*, Tom is the only character able to realize that he does not fit in such a life, and he is the only one who tries to physically escape it. If consumerism and success do not present a valid escape for Tom, only atypical ones like that of the pirate or the cowboy can offer a suitable escape. However, the West is also criticized in the play as stage directions describe the

neighbourhood and the city of Saint Louis, using a vocabulary attached to the West: we are told that the building in which the Wingfields live “is flanked on both sides by dark, narrow alley which run into murky *canyons* of tangled clothes lines, garbage cans, and the sinister lattice-work of neighboring fire escape”(13, emphasis added). Using the term canyon to describe the narrowness of the streets, the author underlines the pollution and domestication of such an element that usually conveys the idea of far natural places. Finally, the family lives in Saint Louis which reminds the audience of the “gate to the West,” of the last civilized city before the western wilderness in American history. Equated with civilisation and cities, the West is not appealing to Tom. The play does not offer a real “American escape” going westward or becoming a successful businessman. All the American values have been shattered. Bigsby states that

Williams announces that American ideals can no longer even be stated, let alone enacted, and insists on the importance of struggle. ‘Security’ he announces, ‘is a kind of death’. The essence of that struggle, however, does not so much lie with challenging the class system as resisting the deprivations of time because, as he reminds us, ‘time is short and it doesn’t return again. It is slipping away while I write and while you read it, and the monosyllable of the clock is Loss, loss, loss, unless you devote your heart to its opposition.’ The need for social justice thus becomes entwined with a more fundamental struggle to discover meaning and identity in the face of absurdity. (“Entering *The Glass Menagerie*”32)

Time is an issue that Tom raises in the play: as a narrator, he first “turn[s] back time” (13). Talking with Jim, he explains that “whenever I pick a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing!” (62) Time, like everything else, has been made a controllable commodity. In

both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Glass Menagerie*, time can be reversed and toiled with on stage. In business, time is money. As Tom has no control over his life in Saint Louis, his time is stolen from him. This depravation of time and the annihilation of all American ideals seem to explain Tom's desire to embrace a life at sea, with hints towards piracy. Turning down the American myths, Tom is looking for control over his life, for a life of ready enjoyment and pleasure, involving physical movement and actions that the movies could not provide. Like the younger generation of the Loman family, Tom cannot wait to achieve his dream of freedom. But contrary to them, being "the bastard son of a bastard," Tom is not bequeathed any of the traditional American values and dreams, his mother only inculcating values from the Old South that are outdated and not in phase with Tom's society (62). He finds an illusion of freedom through movies first and later in the ideal of the pirate, an international icon instead of an American one. But what he envisioned does not become reality, and he needs to find an escape from his present, which he finds in his past. He is doubly prisoner, contrary to Willy and Biff who find freedom through death.

4. *Death of a Salesman* and *The Glass Menagerie* as American Myths

In the previous chapters, I have underlined the presence of cowboys, salesmen, and pirates as symbols of behaviours and freedom, and as being core elements of the plays. More than symbols, the pirate, the salesman, and the cowboy are archetypes belonging to distinct myths based on Jung's and Campbell's definitions of archetypes as "not just recurrent mythological motifs but ones that stir emotion and propel behaviour" (Segal 103). If they stir emotion and propel behaviour, it is because "the hero of a myth is heroic for two reasons. First, he does what no one else will or can do. Second, he does it on behalf of everyone else as well as himself" (Segal 4). Thus, the main character of a myth, here the cowboy, the pirate, and the salesman, stand as courageous men, searching for truth on their behalf and the behalf of their community. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the three mythic icons are symbols of physical freedom and freedom to act, for which the male characters in the plays are desperately reaching. They attempt to do so by embodying one of the three icons. They become archetypes, "mythological motifs," which transform the plays into myths. The private stories of American families turn into universal concerns, which might explain the success of *Death of a Salesman* when presented in Beijing China in 1983, a country where salesmen such as Willy did not exist then.

But if indeed the plays become myths, several questions come to mind: What is a myth? What is its purpose? Why do we need myth? In what aspects can the cowboy and the pirate be found on a same stage? And if they are myths, why are we inventing new ones when we have a plethora of Western Greco-Roman ones?

4.1 Origin and Purpose of a Myth

Many theorists have attempted to define the concept of “myth.” If most agree with the idea that myths follow a set pattern of events, none seems to accept a common definition concerning their origin. They fail to explain the similarities of myths present among various populations. Joseph Campbell, one of the key researchers on myth, wonders “[w]hy is mythology everywhere the same, beneath its varieties of costume? (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 4). The answer to this question is twofold: it is either “independent invention or diffusion” (Segal 101). By diffusion, one understands that “myth originated in a single society and spread elsewhere from it”(Segal 126). Others, like Campbell, claim that every society invents its own myths, and that the similarities come from the mind which invents them as “the mind of all mankind is fundamentally the same” (Segal 101). Rene Girard adds another possible origin for myth, considering myths as stories “originat[ing] in real or historical events and are in fact distorted representations of these events,” a definition that describes the transformation of historical figures like the pirate and the cowboy into myths (Golsan 61).

Diffused, invented or distorted historical events, myths seem to follow a common pattern as Campbell demonstrates in his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Inspired by the work of Arnold Van Gennep, Campbell divides the myth in three parts to describe the hero’s journey: separation, initiation, and return. In Segal’s words, “a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonders: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men” (4). Campbell also adds that

[T]he two worlds, the divine and the human, can be pictured only as distinct from each other [...] different as life and death, as day and night. The hero adventures out of the land we know into the darkness; there he accomplishes his adventure, or again is simply lost to us, imprisoned, or in danger: and his return is described as a coming back out of that yonder zone. (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 217)

In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy ventures off to the world of Business, which he describes as life threatening by using death metaphors. Biff goes West, the grandfather takes the direction of Alaska, and Ben oscillates between Alaska and Africa. In American popular culture, all these locations are sometimes considered as wild and dangerous. In *The Glass Menagerie*, The father also ventures West while Tom goes at sea, another “yonder zone.” At the beginning of the play, as Campbell describes, the world they are about to discover is presented as extremely different from the world they live in. Biff keeps comparing his life in New York and the life he had in the West. Willy compares the present with the past, a past that is scattered with allusions to Biff being god like when younger. His father compares him to “Adonis” (25) and to a “young god. Hercules,” with “the sun all around him” (54).

For both Willy Loman and Amanda Wingfield, the past is protective of the present and enables both characters to avoid decay. They both consciously step into a myth to freeze time. Willy does so by committing suicide. As Bigsby explains: “Willy Loman’s last ride takes him out of time and into myth, where he will be immune to decay. The future, to which he had looked for resolution, but that so tormented him, will now be dissolved” (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 112). Bigsby explains the same idea about Amanda, for whom

[M]emory has become myth, a story to be endlessly repeated as a protection against present decline. She wants nothing more than to freeze time; and in this she mirrors a region whose myths of past grace and romantic fiction mask a sense of present decay. In William's words, she clings 'frantically to another time and place' [...]. The South does no less and Williams [...] acknowledges the seductive yet destructive power of a past reconstructed as myth. At the same time, she knows that compromise is necessary. Survival has its price and Amanda is one of William's survivors. She survives, ironically, by selling romantic myths, in the form of romance magazines, to other women. ("Entering *The Glass Menagerie*" 38)

Tom first looks at the world around him and hopes for a better outcome for himself, before turning to the past like Amanda and Willy. Campbell, however, explains that "the two kingdoms are actually one. The realm of the god is a forgotten dimension of the world we know [...] The values and distinctions that in normal life seem important disappear with the terrifying assimilation of [what is now] the self into what formerly was [...] only otherness" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 217). Campbell here first differentiates the two types of myths. The first one and the most common in studies on myths is the circular one, including a return home. The second type of myth is linear, based on the myth of the wandering Jew, which tells the story of a man condemned by Jesus to walk around the earth without ever stopping. In this kind of myth, the hero never returns home. However, the lack of a return home does not mean that the hero does not come to the realization of the unity of the world. As we can see in *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom only comes home in dreams and explains that "I would have stopped, but I was *pursued* by

something” (92, emphasis added). He is not searching for truth or for an escape but simply avoiding his guilt. Willy in *Death of a Salesman* is only too aware of his situation. However, even when Biff confronts him with the blatant truth about who the both of them really are, Willy refuses to admit what he already knows. Until the end of the play, he keeps wandering in new “yonder zones,” the last one being death. Contrary to Campbell who favours a circular pattern in myth, Fish underlines the existence of a linear one that a character like Willy seems to follow. In a *Remembered Future*, Fish states that

The myth expresses something more than the rounded shape of the journey and the inevitable return to the point of departure. There is also the wandering itself, the sense of distances traversed, the weary movement through time and space, which echo the very nature of our own existence. In that existence, the point of departure is hardly remembered, the destination scarcely known. (3)

The return home is not, contrary to Campbell’s idea, the main focus of the myth. According to Fish, the physical movement and wandering is as important as the result of the myth. Tom Wingfield, the narrator of *The Glass Menagerie*, describes that:

I left Saint Louis, I descended the steps of this fire escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father’s footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space—I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but torn from the branches. I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. (92)

Tom is pursued by his guilt as he realizes that he has abandoned mother and sister for a life as sinister as the one he fled from. Tom and Biff seem to be the only characters who come to grasp

the truth, discovering that “the perfectibility of man” mentioned by Arthur Miller in his definition of the American dream does not exist. For Willy, there is no going back home because there has been no physical departure. It is Biff’s return that propels Willy to action, choosing to die in hope of finally closing a deal. Willy does not grow out of the myth he has adopted contrary to Biff’s and Tom’s actions. If both still embody the pirate and the cowboy icons, Biff and Tom are not lured by the illusion of freedom anymore, as it is made clear by Tom’s use of irony through the play. Only Biff is free from his father and his situation once Willy disappears.

René Girard leaves the structure of the myth on the side to concentrate on the content of the myth. In *Scapegoat*, he explains that the main content of a myth is the “[more] or less explicit lynching or immolation of a victim” (quoted in Segal 63). It is implicit because the goal of a myth is to justify “sacrificial violence and then disguise it or erase it all together” (68), what Girard refers to as “mythic crystallization.” Otto Rank, a follower of Freud, takes on this concept and states that

The mythic hero is precisely heroic because he dares to kill his father. He thus fulfils one of the child’s most fundamental urges. The myth, however, disguises the hero’s quest to murder his father as a quest for power, and the hero’s murder of the father is presented at least partially justified: Oedipus for example, kills Laius because Laius has first attacked him on the road, not to say at birth. Moreover, at this stage, Oedipus does not even know that Laius is his father and it is fate that condemned him to commit this terrible crime. The desire to kill the father so as to possess the mother is an unconscious desire because its disclosure would inspire horror and repulsion. (Quoted in Golsan 68)

Myths then have at their core the essential relation between father and son. As the father figure is in power, the son needs to leave in order to later take the father's power, with the help of the truth he has discovered.

4.2 Relationship with the Father

In our study of *Death of a Salesman*, we have noticed the importance of the relationship between Willy and Biff. The comparison with Oedipus in the above quotation sheds a helpful light on the nature of their relation. Biff adores his mother: he protects her from his father's harsh language by confronting Willy, shouting "Stop yellin' at her" (51). He despises his father for "never ha[ving] an ounce of respect for [his mother]" (43). If an Oedipus complex might be subjacent and explains some of the dynamics between the two men, Bigsby adds that Willy and Biff are "two men [...] fighting for survival, in the sense of sustaining a sense of themselves. Willy desperately needs Biff to embrace him and his dream. [...] Biff, by contrast needs to cut the link between himself and Willy. This is the motor force of the play" (*Arthur Miller: A Critical study* 104). The fight for survival engenders recurrent disputes between the two characters. During the last fight, before Willy's suicide, we see in Biff the mythical hero who brings back the truth and shares it with his community. Biff states that "I am a dime a dozen, and so are you!...I am no leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard working drummer who landed in the ash-can like the rest of them! I am one dollar an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I am not bringing home any prizes anymore, and you are going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!...Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing Pop" (105). While Biff claims to finally say the truth, "You're going to hear the truth—what you are and what I am" (104), he also diminishes

his father through his speech, in order to challenge his authority and power as a father figure. He starts by putting his father and himself on a same level, thus cancelling the familial hierarchy. Then, he describes his father and goes on to describe himself, blending the two characters together. When Biff concludes with "Pop, I'm nothing," he reinstates the patriarchy after having weakened it (105). But the "equation" of Willy and Biff remains in the father's mind when the latter declares to Ben "I knew one way or another we were gonna make it, Biff and I!" (107) Later in the night, the father will commit suicide, and Biff is given the father role. Indeed, he seems to fill in the void left by Willy at the end of the play. After Willy's funeral, Biff "*lifts [Linda] to her feet and moves out right with her in his arms. Linda sobs quietly. Bernard and Charley come together and follow them, followed by Happy*" (112). In front of the funeral procession and by his mother's side, Biff becomes the father figure. Willy's suicide, however, is not presented as a murder, but as a means to help Biff financially in his entrepreneurial adventures. It is nonetheless the truth that has been spoken for the first time on Willy's behalf that propels him to action, dying for the good of others. Willy becomes the hero of another myth, going to unknown territories as death is referred to as "a jungle" (106).

In *The Glass Menagerie*, the situation is more complex. As the father figure is "GONE" (31), there cannot be a confrontation. However, the son has replaced Mr. Wingfield since his early age, a duty of which Amanda reminds him so often "you are my right-hand Bower! Don't fall down! Don't fail," putting a tremendous pressure on Tom (37). Working at the shoe factory, he becomes the provider of the family and acts as a protector for Laura. However, Tom complains of having only partial powers: "I've got *no thing*, no single thing- [...] In my life that I can call my OWN! Everything is-...yesterday you confiscated my books! You had the nerve to- [...] House, house, who

pays rent on it, who makes a slave of himself to-[...] No, no / mustn't say things! /'ve got to just-" (29). He underlines his awkward position as both the provider—father figure—and yet the son. Amanda also partially embodies the father figure. Her presence is suffocating for Tom, and she imposes herself as both parents when she explains that "[She has] had to put a *solitary* battle all these years" (37, emphasis added), and complains that the father left her with "the bag to hold" (40).

In the play, Tom juxtaposes the two worlds in which he has always evolved as worker at the shoe factory and as a seaman, comparing the situation in the United States and on the international scene: "In Spain there was a revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion. In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labour, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis" (13-14). In an attempt to reach for freedom, he flees from his apartment and his mother. But his departure does not offer the needed freedom. It has only brought despair to his family and himself as he reminisces about his sister. Aware of the financial strain experienced by the family, it is not Tom's return but his departure that puts an end to the father figure in the play. He stops being the provider, the adult, and puts an end to his mother's control over him—at least tentatively. At the end of the play he only mentions his sister Laura during his monologue, but the audience sees the mother reduced to a nurturing role, comforting her daughter.

However, Tom never comes home, or only does so in dreams. Like him, Willy and Ben Loman have no father figure to confront with the truth they grasp. Tom and Ben keep moving around the world. Ben never really settles anywhere and even after death, he is still on the move

in Willy's mind. Interestingly enough, all characters without a father figure in their life are caught in wandering myths, contrary to Biff who comes home and claims power over his father.

Before the killing of the father, the ultimate goal of all myths, the hero creates rituals within the plays. Rituals, according to René Girard and Joseph Campbell, are an important part of the myth. However, both theorists do not agree on their purpose. For Campbell, they allow the hero to gradually detach himself from what he knows:

It becomes apparent that the purpose and actual effect of [rituals] was to conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand change in the patterns not only of conscious but also of unconscious life. The so-called rites of passage [. . .] are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of severance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind. (*The Hero With a Thousand Faces* 10)

This ritual of severance can be found mostly in *The Glass Menagerie*, through Tom's abuse of movies to detach himself from reality and the apartment. It seems that this pattern was also used by his own father. Amanda keeps emphasizing their similarities: "More and more you remind me of your father! He was out all hours without explanation! Then *left! Goodbye!* And me with the bag to hold"(40). Like the father, Tom—we may safely conclude—will also abandon his mother.

But Tom's outings seem to also be an attempt to reach a catharsis, which is for Girard the purpose of rituals as he explains that "[e]ven the most violent rites are specifically designed to abolish violence" (*Violence and the Sacred* 103).

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom starts by going to the movies every night. When this ritual does not serve its purpose anymore, he finds another ritual through the myth of freedom at sea, going from city to city without end. However, he will eventually reach the last city, like the cowboy who has reached the end of the frontier.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's life is a ritual, being on the road every week and coming home on the weekends, which provides him with an escape from work and the murderous business environment. However, when home does not enable him to escape any longer, he keeps remembering his past. He even ritualizes his death. Linda explains that he has tried to kill himself several times, always using the same method, a car accident, which he finally achieves by the end of the play, providing a catharsis not only for himself but for all other characters as well as the audience.

Biff has become a kleptomaniac who "stole [him]self out of every good job since high school" (*Salesman* 104). On this subject, Bigsby quotes Miller's notebook to say that "the thefts [Biff] has committed since catching his father in a Boston hotel room with another woman, are, at least, subconsciously, indirect acts of vengeance [. . .] While humbling himself by soliciting money, in order to give his father the hope he lacks, he simultaneously subverts the action [by stealing the fountain pen]" (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 104).

Biff has created another ritual in the play in addition to stealing. He keeps going back and forth between the West and Brooklyn. He comes home during the spring, right before everything turned sour in his life when he was still in high school. He physically attempts to go back to a time when he had not yet failed math, and before he discovered the truth about his father. However, this ritual fails to bring the expected relief. On the contrary, it creates more tension between Biff

and Willy. It is only when Biff comes to term with his own identity and with his father's behaviors, that the myth is completed, and that we can presume he will be able to let go of his rituals.

However, rituals do not help us solve one of the main questions raised in the introduction of this thesis, about how a male chooses the myth he desires to follow. Why are three icons needed? The relationship with the father determines the choice of one myth over the other. Myths allow the hero to impose his authority on the community, and to do so, he needs to suppress the authority of the father. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's father has chosen the myth of the cowboy, leaving for Alaska when his son is only three years old. Since the father has disappeared and has never returns, Willy, like Ben, does not need to rebel against the father, nor kill him in order to impose his will. Ben follows his father steps, wanting to go to Alaska but ending up in Africa. Adopting the father's myth, he still needs to discover a "region of supernatural wonders" (Segal 4) different from the one chosen by the father. Once he has proven himself, he can go to Alaska. Willy finds himself in a similar situation. However, instead of adopting the cowboy ideal embodied by his father, Willy takes on the father's myth of the businessman, "opening unheard-of territories" (44) to prove himself.

Biff, however, is in a different situation as he has been raised and kept in a dream-like existence by both his parents. It is only when he discovers his father's affair that he needs to escape. Torn between the world of cowboys and of salesmen (Biff stays in business for seven years after the episode in Boston and before going west), he complies with David Davis's interpretation of the importance of the cowboy myth in the life of an American man. To quote him at length, Davis states that

In our mythology the cowboy era is timeless. [...] There is it is true a nostalgic sense that this is the last great drama, a sad knowledge that the cowboy is passing and that civilization is approaching. But it never comes. This strange, wistful sense of the coming end of an epoch is not something outside our experience. It is a faithful reflection of the sense of approaching adulthood. The appeal of the cowboy, in this sense, is similar to the appeal of Boone, Leatherstocking, and the later Mountain Man. We know that adulthood, civilization, is inevitable, but we are living toward the end of childhood, and at that point 'childness' seems eternal; it is a whole lifetime. But suddenly we find it is eternal; the forest disappears, the mountains are settled, we have new responsibilities. When we shut our eyes and try to remember, the last image of a carefree life appears. For the nation, this last image is cowboy. (113-14)

In other words, turning towards the cowboy image is a way for the American male to escape adulthood and responsibilities. Biff was raised in an imaginary world: Captain of the football team, womanizer in high school, admired by his father and by all the boys in school, and about to go to college thanks to his athletic victories (not his grades), his dream life comes to an end when his math teacher fails him, thus preventing his bright future at the University of Virginia. Idealizing his father's aura and impact on others, he rushes to Boston to meet Willy to ask him to intervene. As the Tea Party in Boston was a call to adulthood for the American nation, Biff's trip to Boston puts an end to his childhood when he finds his father cheating on Linda. Realizing that his father is a "phony little fake" (95), Biff refuses to embrace this wake up call and remains "like a boy" (17). Later on, as Davis describes it, Biff turns towards the cowboy myth, the last image

representing unconsciousness and liberty, as a way to differentiate himself from Willy who chose the myth of the businessman. It is interesting to notice that even the vocabulary they use reflects the path they have chosen. Whereas Willy's expressions are always related to business and death "I'll knock'em dead next week," (28) Biff's vocabulary reflects his past in the West and his identity as a cowboy when he declares: "a team of horses couldn't have dragged me back to Bill Oliver" (88).

In *The Glass Menagerie*, the father figure has followed the route to the West, thus embodying the cowboy myth. Rebelling against the father, or the absence of the father, that is oppressive, Tom needs to differentiate himself from Mr. Wingfield as well as from his mother who embodies a surrogate father figure. Since the father has gone West and the mother encourages both her children into business, Tom needs to find yet another escape to rebel and annihilate the power of the father figure over him. At the same time, Tom stages the play during the financial crisis of the 1930s and what will be the prelude of World War II with Franco's victory in Spain. Commenting on what happens internationally, he criticizes the reaction of Americans, not recognizing himself in such a behaviour: "the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy" (13). American values have been shattered and the American self-made man seemed to have reached his own end. Tom needs another escape. As we saw earlier, pirates are another icon very present in movies and literature, which might explain the choice of Tom to live a life at sea.

Without a father figure to copy or to rebel against, the main male characters of these two plays are dismayed when they have to deal with the outside world. To become men then, boys need to turn to icons of masculinity as presented by their society. Kimmel explains the need to go back in time to mythologize the past:

Part of the normal, garden-variety neurosis that is the human condition is the creation of a stockpile of symbols that remind us of those lost objects, a secret symbolic treasure chest we can occasionally raid to re-create those earlier moments of fulfilment. As individuals struggling to find meaning in the world, we create those symbols to help us return to those earlier experiences so that we can again feel secure and without anxiety. [...] Just as the realm of production had been so transformed that men could no longer anchor their identity in their position in the market, we created new symbols, the consumption of which “reminded” men of that secure past, evoking an age before identity crises, before crises of masculinity—a past when everyone knew what it meant to be a man achieving one’s manhood was a given. (81)

By mythologizing the past, men feel more secure about who they are supposed to be. By stocking up on symbols, male characters who are abandoned by their fathers when children become overtly masculine. Happy and Biff seduce women, and brag about their own physical strength; Tom drinks too much.

Kimmel’s definition also complements the one given by David Davis in his article “Ten Gallon hero” in which he studies the cowboy myth in particular as it is the only one which has not declined as fast as all other American myths like Davy Crockett. He states that since the cowboy

era was the last sure idea of what it meant to be a man, males nowadays define themselves through the cowboy myth in order to find themselves, thus creating an identity. It is also a refuge from adulthood. We have stated earlier that the cowboy, the pirate, and the salesman are characters present in movies and literature for all public. Thus, following Davis's argument, it is safe to state that any symbol of liberty and lack of responsibility, present in a child's surrounding when growing up will become a refuge and a myth to follow when the child is confronting adulthood. In *Death of a Salesman*, Biff decided to go out West after he has discovered the truth about his father. Willy searches for new escapes every time he realizes another failure. Coming face to face with his shortcomings, with reality, he goes back and forth between the icon of the businessman and the icon of the cowboy before choosing the Jungle at the end of the play.

Finally, in *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom first escapes through movies and through many icons in the play, as we see when he invents a second life to enrage his mother. However, it is when he is fired from the shoe factory, when he is forced to confront his responsibilities as provider for the family that Tom goes way. However, Tom grows up in a time period that shatters all American values: the financial crisis has put an end—or at least a hold—on the American emphasis on social upward movement. The crisis in Spain threatens the ideals of democracy and freedom that the United States stands for. Thus, Tom is left without any American icons. Following a more international symbol, he takes on a life at sea, and more precisely, a life of piracy.

Through pirates, cowboys, and salesmen, the males on the American stage attempt to find a freedom they have been denied. Myths of liberty and of freedom of action, the three icons represent an escape from adulthood while embodying the American dream. However, none of the characters we took into consideration is granted freedom, because the happiness of each

character is not to be found in physical freedom nor in possession. And it is the main problem of the American dream, as happiness is neither defined nor definable. The Founding Fathers themselves wondered if happiness was synonymous with belongings. In his study of Willy Loman, Bigsby explains that “[Willy’s] dilemma is that of a culture that proposes as a national mission the pursuit of happiness and then confuses this with material possessions, as did the Founding Fathers who debated whether happiness and property were synonymous” (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 103). In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy and Ben think that money and things are the most important as they measure their success through their pay check. However, Mr. Loman, like Mr. Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*, seems content with a physical freedom. At the end of the play, Biff Loman has stopped measuring himself by his pay check. Ready to go back to the West, he is looking only for freedom to act and think for himself. Like Biff, Tom flees to find freedom. Thus, contrary to their parents, the newer generation adopts the American dream as it was meant when the United States was founded: to insure everyone’s freedom to act, think and believe. It was the base on which this nation could differentiate itself from the old European system. However, as time went by, the pursuit of happiness became the pursuit of belongings. Not satisfied with any version of the American dream, all the characters come to the conclusion that, to use Bigsby’s line, the “meaning [of life] resides somewhere closer to home” (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 106).

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