**Limites de l’extrait :** pp.55-57 à partir de « Music is heard… » jusqu’à « Good-bye, I’m late. »

**Question #1:** How does this scene both echo and contrast with the opening scene? What effect does this have for the audience?

Within the structure of the play, this passage is inevitably connected to the opening scene since it also opens an act. But beyond that, there are many echoes et contrasts between the two. First, in both cases the scene starts with the sound of the flute, which fades away at the beginning of the scene (“The curtain rises as the music fades away.” l.1). For the audience it can be perceived as a progressive reaffirmation of the realism of the scene. But for Willy while the first scene staged a moment of reassurance and return to the comfort of home, the beginning of Act II shows us Willy having to leave the house and confront reality. The disappearance of the music in this second case is thus perceived as a harsh return to reality, which can explain why the stage direction describes the music as “gay and bright” (l.1).

Both passages show Linda assuming the role of a motherly, comforting presence. Her actions are similar, and for example the stage directions around Willy’s jacket. In the opening scene, she takes off Willy’s jacket while he distractedly puts it back on. In this passage, the opposite happens, creating an echo and a contrast for the audience. This adds an element of repetition comedy since it emphasizes Willy’s childlike attitude, especially with slapstick stage directions like: “buttoning up his jacket as he unbuttons it” (l.72). While this is funny for the audience, it is also ambivalent since it highlights Willy’s reluctance to go out possibly because of his tragic awareness of his own decline.

Linda’s cues are also interesting in terms of echoes with the first scene. In both cases she comments on the smell of “shaving lotion in [their] house” (l.15). There is no contrast here between the scenes but the repetition of this detail at the beginning of each act can be understood as a way of showing her stability as a character, contrary to Willy and Biff’s fickle nature. But it can also be perceived by the audience as a sign that Linda, as an old woman, tends to repeat herself. This is the kind of choice that the stage director and the actor would have to make. What is certain is that the shaving lotion is a symbol of Biff and Happy having become men and left the house. Yet, Linda’s love of this smell in the house is ambivalent—does it mean that she loves the fact that they are back in the house? That the natural progress of time has been stopped? Or does it mean that she loves the fact that her boys are now grown? That she has raised them into fully formed adults?

Once again, this is a choice for the director and the actors’ performance, as well as a space open for the audience’s interpretation. What matters is how the construction of the play, in its echoes and contrasts, allows for all of those ambivalences.