Death of a Salesman: Arthur Miller's Viewpoint on Materialism

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Abstract

Arthur Miller (1915-2005) is one of the most illustrious American playwrights duringthe post-1945 period. Miller realisesthe impact of materialism on the American society as derived from the money-oriented individual, the distorted concept of the American Dream, and corrosive Capitalism. Subsequently, he tackles it throughhis Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Death of a Salesman* (1949) with great emphasis. The study examines the impact of materialism on both the individual and society alike. In addition, it raises some questions: Is perusing materialistic way of living incarnated as an attempt with dire consequences? Or is the protagonist's undependable and incompetent character the problem behind his tragic end? Does materialism in a capitalistic society have a positive side? If so, does money overweighs morals?

مسرحية موت بائع متجول: وجهة نظر آرثر ميلر تجاه المادية

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المُلخص

يُعد آرثر ميلر(١٩١٥- ٢٠٠٥) من بين أكثر الكُتَاب المسرحيين الأمريكيين شُهرةً ما بعد فترة منتصف الاربعينات من القرن العشرين. أدرك ميلر تأثير المادية على المجتمع الأمريكي كونها نتاج الفرد المادي والمفهوم المُشوَه للحلم الأمريكي والرأسمالية البغيضة ، لذا فإن ميلر تعامل مع المادية خلال مسرحيته موت البائع (١٩٤٩) الفائزة بجائزتي تونيوبولتزر للمسرحية بشكل مُرَكز. تتناول الدراسة تأثير المادية على الفرد والمجتمع سواء ، فضلاً عن طرحها لبعض الأسئلة: هل يُعد إتَباع الطريقة المادية في العيشمسعى ذو عواقب وخيمة؟ أم إنَ شخصية بطل المسرحية الغير كفوءة والتي لا يعول عليها هي السبب وراء نهايته المأساوية؟ وهل للمادية في ظل المجتمع الرأسمالي جانب ايجابي؟ وإذا كان الامر كذلك ، فهل من الممكن ترجيح دفة المال على الاخلاق؟

To begin with materialism one needs to be acquainted with a clear definition of that concept whether socially or even philosophically. Materialism, technically, is "the belief that money, possessions and physical comforts are more important than spiritual values." In philosophy, it "means the belief that only material things exist."(1) The essenceof both approaches exists within the play to reflect the image of the individual accomplishing material desires.

As a recurring theme in *Death of a Salesman*, materialism is connected with and rooted in the American Dream—an idea and principle which is profoundly criticised through this play. The play is set in late forties capitalist America, where the idea of the American Dream had just renewed or distorted. Most of Miller's criticism of the Dream is centred around Willy Loman'sovervaluations of material and shallow things—appearances, attractions, and illusions—in comparison with other things required to survival—values, morals, and facts.(2)

Written within a complex setting;time, and place,*Death of a Salesman* deals with a failure salesman, Willy Loman, the protagonist, and his three-member family. Willy, who depends on a false dream and wrong principles to achieve it, realises that his sons are failure too. Willy believes that he and his sons are well-liked, so they should be successful. He also thinks that their neighbours, Charley and his son, Bernard are not liked, so they should be failure. He proves that he is wrong. As a result, he escapes from the real life to dream of his father's, brother's, and a salesman's successful career through flashbacks. Lastly, because of the merciless capitalism—embodied by Willy's employer, Howard—his materialism and pomposity, and his failed relationship with his family, particularly, his eldest son, Biff, Willy drives his car to death in order to supply his family with a good insurance as a way of achieving success via his death in the eyes of his family.

Death of a Salesman is a blend of multiple genres: tragedy, social or domestic, realistic, and expressionistic play.Despite the various interpretations made by Miller and some critics about the play, the former regards it dealing with"the suppression of the individual by placing him below the imperious needs of . . .

society."[3] Such needs are represented by getting attraction, wealth, and fame. In other words, achieving what is known as the American Dream, whether in good or bad means. For that reason, many scholars,readers, and theatregoersconsider*Death of aSalesman* as Miller's "American Masterpiece," for it "explores the perils of unchecked capitalism." It is also "an aggressive critique of Western materialism and the frequent, painful side-effects for those in its wake."[4]

At the very beginning of the play, a description of a typical American house in the 1940s is drawn carefully. Apparently, such a description might be usual, but it is so essential that it reflects the increasingly urbanised and materialistic society at that time. Miller opens his play by saying:

> *Before us is the Salesman's house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. . . . To the right of the kitchen, on a level raised two feet, is a bedroom furnished only with a brass bedstead and a straight chair. On a shelf over the bed a silver athletic trophy stands*[Italics arein the original text].[5]

Indeed, the description of a typical American household with a kitchen, living room, and a couple of bedrooms with few pieces of furniture compromises the symbolic setting of the play. Surrounded by "*angular shapes*" of the tall apartment buildings, the"*small, fragile-seeming home*" reflectshow difficult for the individual to achieve the American Dream amid society.

The setting also refers to the negative impact of materialism, progress, and urbanism on the Loman's house, so it symbolises"Willy's lack of success."In the same way, "the apartments dwarf Willy's house, making Willy Loman the "low man" in the neighbourhood, someone who has seen others rise while he has not."[6]As if the housewas the only one in which a poor

family lived in a period known for easy making money. "The claustrophobic effect of the large apartments," the readers and spectators feel,"suggests Willy's insignificance and the idea that progress and business seem to have passed him by."(7)

Additionally, these large apartments allow only the least amount of blue light from the sky to fall upon the Lomans house. The "*solid vault of apartment houses*" is an ironical reference either to "a site of banking, investing, and finance, or to a site of entombment, entrapment, a place of no exit." Such a view"clearly draws attention to the fragility of the Loman home [and] creates a trope for the decline of the natural world."(8) The "*silver athletic trophy*"symbolises,in general, the AmericanDream of "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" and the ownership of property as it was emphasised in the Declaration of Independence (1776).While, in particular, "thetrophyis symbolic of thecompetition within American capitalism."(9)

The first image of Willy Loman coming home raises sympathy and pity because the readers or spectators see him enter carrying two large heavy valises. They are literally filled with samples to be sold, though they are never shown, but symbolically they are filled with sixty-odd years of Willy's lifespan. Obviously, Willy is exhausted physically and spiritually and this exhaustion is apparent in the image of a distressed salesman with bending shoulders, and bent head with a hat on. Thus, he representsa defeated man burdened with life's needs.(10)

Right after his return home, Willy Loman anticipates his own failure and death. Henumbly tellsLinda, his wife: "I'm tired to the death"(*DS*, I.1).Such a phrase figuratively means "exhausted,"yet, and it can be interpreted literally for Willy has attempted suicide several times and is planning to try it. Therefore, he proceeds : "I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda" (*DS*, I. 1).

While Biff and Happy, Willy's sons,are discussing their father's situation, they express their dissatisfaction with their own jobs. They talk about their future which is ambiguous for them. They are dissatisfied with their present too. Biff shows his tediousness and contempt for experiencing different kinds of jobs

but in vain. Future for him is unrecognizable and unattainable because like every irresponsible and reckless person he is not interested in planning it properly.

Indeed, such a view is so common at that time and still prevailing nowadays.Biff expresses his intention to work on a farm with horses. He longs for being in the middle of nature far away from the city and its choking atmosphere. He refers to the negative side of the money-oriented city in comparison with non-materialistic country. But, the difference is so clear in earning money."Like his father,"in this sense, "Biff is torn between rural nostalgia and his need for solid achievement, and is tormented by the knowledge of personal failure."[(11)]Biff confesses to Happy: "I've always made a point of not wasting my life" (*DS*, I. 11).On his part, Happy shows a selfish attitude toward his employer, and he shows other viceslike envy and greed too.Clearly, the impact of the society's grasping inclinations is expressed.

What Happy thinks about is to become the future boss and to be the only judge on faulty people. In fact, this is a reckless dream because he has no qualifications to achieve it. That is why he longs to get what he dreams of at the expense of deserting morals, ideals, and principles. Happy believes thathe is anadmiredand attracted man who only cares for appearances, money, dreams, and getting possessions and women. Indeed, these are among the repercussions of materialism.As a "philandering bum" (*DS*, I. 41), Happy like his father and may be his generation, represents "the shallowness of his filial emotions."[(12)]

Miller wishes to express his vision about materialism through the conversation between Biffand Happy. That vision is not a criticism to attainable dreams, rather, it is so to overambitious dreams, irresponsible people, and materialistic society. The images of the two sons dreaming vainly reflect their father's too in various ways. In this connection, both father and his eldest son "feel a deep attraction to the beauty of nature, but while Willy chooses to lead a life bound by materialism, Biff chooses a life of simplicity in the open reaches of the West."[(13)]And both Willy and Happy share the same attitudes of being envious, competitive,and acquisitive.

One of the false principles inherited from their father is to be a well-liked person. Definitely it is not a crime to be so, but the matter is how to be one or how to employ that properly in a society though cares for appearances, it is most of the times cares for money. Thus,the "contemporary equivalent ofWilly's desire to bewell liked is thewish to be famous. . . . Fame is not somuch the spur as the point of living, the substitution of seeming for being."(14)

In addition, there is no consideration for dishonesty or evenunfaithfulness. In this respect, Miller expresses his opinion about stealing and he also wants to criticise both Willy and Biff. With the presence of Happy, Biff proudly shows his fathera ball he has stolen. Even though Happy assures that his father will get angry at that, it seems that Willy does not care about his son's theft, particularly, when he asks Biff to return the ball back while "*laughing with him at the theft.*" (*DS*, I. 18)

Besides, Willyassociates getting a good job with being a well-liked person as he thinks himself is. He tells the boys: "Someday I'll have my own business, and I'll never have to leave home anymore." Happy sarcastically says: "Like Uncle Charley, heh?"But he gets the answer: "Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not—liked. He's liked, but he's not—well liked" (*DS*,I.18). It is the first time that the name of Charley is mentioned. Charley is their neighbour and he is mentioned purposely to be the first competitive and rival to Willy. Seemingly, Charley is taken as an example of a successful businessman by Happy. The proof on Charley's success is Willy's underestimationto him before his own sons.

ForWilly, attraction, reputation, and charm are the only characteristic features required in any business, but skill, experience, and satisfaction are necessary toofor Charley and for anypractical person tobe a successful (business)man. Hence,

> Willy Loman in particular has absorbed the values of his society until they seem part of what he wishes to see as his own definition. His is a salesman, the epitome of a society built on social performance and wedded to the idea of a transforming future.(15)

Loman disregards and underestimates Charley for he is just liked, but not well-liked. As if Loman did that intentionally, to make Charley—who is described by Miller as "a capitalist"—a failure and losing competitor.(16)Likewise, Commenting on the attitude and advice of Bernard—Charley's son—to Biff, the Lomans laugh out and mock at him. Willy has faith inthata well-liked person is better than a clever or hard-working one. Bernard wants to encourage Biff at studying math in order not to be "flunk," therefore, he "won't graduate" (*DS*, I. 20).Angrily, Loman overestimates his son at the expense of Bernard whom is called by "a pest," and"anemic"to be an object of laughter(*DS*, I. 20).

Loman is convinced that Bernard—similar to his father—is liked but not well-liked and that mayprove to beimpractical in the business world and results in failure too. Loman expresses his opinion about Bernard in comparison with his sons, stating:

> Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in thebusiness world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. »Willy Loman is here!« That's all they have to know, and I go right through. (*DS*, I. 20-21)

Ironically, future events prove the contrary. Miller criticises the Lomans by showing their self-contradictory dreams. Paying no attention to learning, Willy Lomanproudly says that his own sons are like Adonis, a very handsome young man in Greek mythology. Repeating the necessity to be an attractedperson,

> Willy desires to be more than friends with people; he wants them to have a strong feeling of his importance. . . . [It is] possibly show[n] that he is desperate to assess how he is received by his counterparts. This correlates with the constant

idea that Willy wishes to be superior to people, whether that is through material goods or, in this case, through social status.(17)

Pathetically,for Loman, Bernard's diligence and assistance worth nothing in America in comparison with what he believes in himself and his sons.Out of pride, Willy takes himself as an example for success. In fact, he gives his sons a best example of failure because he is fully aware, as they are, that he is no longer a successful salesman.

As much as *Death of a Salesman* is an indictment of materialism and capitalism, it is also a criticism of Loman who tries to hide his failure and incompetence by praising himself and mocking of the others in front of his sons. Not only does Miller blames Loman's incompetence, mistrust, and care for appearances, but also he shows the negative and destructive impact of materialism through presenting the failure of an old salesman.Therefore,Loman's American dream or his way of living is "a faith in the supremacy of the material over the spiritual."(18)

From another perspective, Willy's sense of materialism is deepened by Charley's situation and condition within a capitalistic society, however, such a situation is exemplified as nonthreatening one. For Miller, capitalists, like Charley, do not necessarily be inhuman, insensitive, selfish, mean, and pompous. Poignantly, some of these vices are seen in the protagonist's personality. Unlike Willy, "Charley's most distinctive feature is that he operates within the hegemonic economic system, while, paradoxically, not being obsessed either with capitalism or with the myth of the American Dream."(19)

Charleyis a successful businessman and father who hasa good fortune and a son who doeswell in school too. His character is intended to be the opposite of Willy's and he stands to be his own undeclared rival in business, fatherhood, responsibility, and success.In many respects, Charley functions as Willy's double. Each one of them embodies contrastingattitudes to moneymakingin particular and to life in general.

Regarding Charley his own competitor and opponent, Willy depreciates Charley again, but this time face to facein a card game. The relationship between them is then introduced as unreal one, rather, it is based on contention, opposition, and envy particularly on Willy's part. Likewise,

> Miller creates an underlying feeling of rivalry and even competition between the two neighbors, which is symbolically enacted in the card games they play. . . so that from the very beginning their relationship is based on competition.(20)

Furthermore, Willy's behaviour—cheating on Charley during the game—reflects his own behaviour during life.He therefore tries to distort reality to make it suit his own greedy needs. Willy calls Charley "ignorant" (*DS*, I.28), "[i]gnoramus!" (*DS*, I. 32) with no justification, nonetheless, he proves late in the play that he has such descriptions. As if he knew that he had them but he directed them at his opponent to be the winner. In contradiction,

> Willy brags about his talent as a builder yet fails to realize that one will fail in the capitalist system if one chooses the wrong profession, such as choosing sales over carpentry. Willy chooses manual work as the weapon to humiliate Charley because he knows that it is one of the few areas in which he clearly outdoes his neighbor and because he feels upset after failing, unlike Charley, at the capitalist system.(21)

Moreover, Loman feels himself as a ''kind of temporary''(*DS*, I. 36) because he has placed his full faith in the transformed future with uncertain past: his dead father, brother, and salesman.The three were successful in achieving their American dreams in Willy's opinion. That past represents an exit from his entrapping present, on one hand, and it also constitutes a valuable advice particularly from his brother, on the other. However, Loman depends on Ben's appearances and wealth without figuring out how he achieves them.

It is essential in this point to refer to the time technique employed by Miller to make Loman fluctuate among the past, the present, and the future. So,Loman desires to give himself and his sons an imitation and model to follow. Such a model, whether it isrealistic or not, is the perfect image in achieving quick money. Willy tells Ben about his sons' failure which is ascribed to his upbringing, and then he asks for Ben's advice. Ben gives an example of himself as a self-reliant and may be a lucky person too:

> BEN: William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen.When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I wasrich!
>
> WILLY: . . .was rich! That's just the spirit I want to imbue them with! To walk into a jungle! I was right! I was right! I was right! (*DS*,I. 36-37)

For Willy, "Ben represents an ideal which is closer to reality, thatof worldly success . . . the personification of the great American virtues of self-reliance, and initiative by which an enterprising man may attain untold wealth. . . ."[22]Indeed, Willyshows that he only cares for the American Dream which is associated with the "jungle" as a source of danger, obscurity, and adventure. Unfortunately, he is not armed against these issues.

Willy proves that he is so materialistic man for he is shown to be acutely conscious of his public image. This is in itself could be regarded as a criticism by Miller against anyone who follows the distorted and materialistic American Dream. Such a dream can make the individual shallow and narrow-minded solely interested in other's opinions and perceptions about the value of material things.[23]

Yet, Willy has other traits revealed by Linda. Through a passionate and affective conversation with Biff, Linda shows part of her personality as well as Willy's. As a faithful wife and dedicated mother, Linda feels that there is something wrong with the relationship between the father and his son. Wishing to settle that problem down, Linda expresses her love towards Willy: "He's the dearest manin the world to me, and I won't have anyone making

him feelunwanted and low and blue" (*DS*, I. 39). She then warns Biff:"You've got to make up your mindnow, darling, there's no leeway any more. Either he's your fatherand you pay him that respect, or else you're not to comehere" (*DS*, I. 39).

Biff then declares that there is a gap in his relationship with his father. He addresses his mother:"Stop making excuses for him! He always, always wiped thefloor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you"(*DS*, I. 40).In return, Linda continues defending Willy and she is ready to forgive him for all his deeds and ascribes this action to exhaustion.For Linda, Willy is in pursuit of benefit and welfare of his family. Old age, corrupted materialism, andthe negative capitalism are among the reasons that make Willy lose himself, customers, and finally family.

Willy's suffering is reflected in his relationship with his family, especially Linda who asks some questions to provoke her sons' and the readers' sympathy and pity towards such. Linda suggests that his sons bring him trouble too.She wonders:Are they [the above-mentioned] any worse than his sons? Then she proceeds summing up Loman's career:

> He used to be able to make six, seven calls a dayin Boston. Now he takes his valises out of the car and putsthem back and takes them out again and he's exhausted. Insteadof walking he talks now. He drives seven hundred miles,and when he gets there no one knows him anymore, no onewelcomes him. And what goes through a man's mind, drivingseven hundred miles home without having earned a cent? Whyshouldn't he talk to himself? Why? When he has to go to Charleyand borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it'shis pay? How long can that go on? How long. . . ? The man who never worked a day but for your benefit?When does he get the medal for that? (*DS*, I. 41)

Willy Loman'sexhaustion has strong effects onhimself and on both Biff and Happy who are bewildered by their self-loss and their father's. At the same time, Linda realises her husband's

deterioration, but her thinking is restricted within the domestic needs, no more no less.

Act Two discusses materialism from another perspective.Materialism is dealt with as a ramification of capitalism. After discussing Willy'ssituation in business, Linda raises some issues connected with fixing car engine and the refrigerator and paying some money for them. Then,Willy ascribes his repeated need for money to capitalism and consumerism. He complains:

> Whoever heard of a Hastings refrigerator? Once in mylife I would like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard! I just finished payingfor the car and it's on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac. They time those things. They time them so when you finally paid for them, they're used up. (*DS*, II. 54)

It is a complaint against the "mass production of poor quality items" which have a very short life that disturbs Willy's life by making it short too.[24]In addition to hard luck in business, Willy faces an economic crisis that distresses him psychologically and makes him lose his temper with his wife frequently. The whole complaint prepares both the readers and spectators for the next scene which is the meeting between Willy and his employer, Howard. Through that meetingone could see the side of corrosive capitalism, materialism, business, and technology.

Trying to convince Howard togive a good salary and a job home, Willy makes a comparison between himself as a current salesman and Dave Singleman, a dead salesmanwith "green velvet slippers."(*DS*, II. 61). Willy wishes to live, die, and have the funeral of Singleman, who is in his eighties and does business well in different states. Willy realises that a salesmanship is the greatest career. He then wonders: "'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty four, into twenty or thirty

different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people?"(*DS*, II. 61)

Willy continues giving examples about different events. He says that when Singleman died, "hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral(*DS*, II. 61). Such a reference has multiple meanings: for Willy, it is the maximum end in achieving the American Dream, for Howard, it is a useless example, and for the readers and spectators alike, it is an ambiguity because they are kept suspended whether Willy will achieve what he longs for or not. It is a distorted dreambecause it is emptied from its spiritual meaning and replaced by a materialistic one. Also,"when Willy contemplates his funeral, he expects his sons to discern that he has achieved the American Dream."[25] He definitely confuses happiness with material possession and regards owning them a success.

Loman is certain that business is transformed to be another greedy façade of mad modern age. So he laments that change:

> In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear—or personality. You see what I mean? They don't know me anymore."(*DS*,II. 61)

Willy makes such a comparison to elucidate the immoral influence of capitalism and the change that happened in society within few decades. Pathetically, Willy cannot avoid his indulgence in such a situation.Howard contrastingly replies "I can't take blood from a stone"(*DS*, II. 61). He refers here to Willy's old age;and it is an anticipation of Willy's death.Howard's remark also proposes that profit and benefit are significant while moral decency and ethics are not. In return, Willy says: "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit!"(*DS*,II. 61) Therefore, Willy insists thatmaterialism, capitalism,and consumerism make him exploited throughout his life, without a reward or at least fulfilling his wish.

Besides, Willy's long service and loyalty or even his future welfare worth nothing in Howard's capitalistic and materialistic opinion. Howard hopes that Willy take rest and depend on his sons instead of asking for a constant job. Insistently, Willy says: But I gotta earn money, Howard. I'm in no position to... (*DS*, II.63). Unable to complete his sentence, Willy realises that he is in a very weak position and cannot depend on his sons. Apparently, Willy's pride and dignity prevent him to do that, but in reality he knows very well that they are failure like him, without mentioning the gap between them. The conversation continues:

> HOWARD: Where are your sons? Why don't your sons give you ahand?
> WILLY: They're working on a very big deal.
> HOWARD: This is no time for false pride, Willy. You go to your sons and you tell them that you're tired. You've got two greatboys, haven't you?
> WILLY: Oh, no question, no question, but in the meantime...
> HOWARD: Then that's that, heh?
> WILLY: All right, I'll go to Boston tomorrow.
> HOWARD: No, no.
> WILLY: I can't throw myself on my sons. I'm not a cripple! (*DS*, II. 63)

Willy then is fired for his inability to make profits for Howard's firm. Willy is in a dire financial crisis, yet he keeps struggling for getting money for his family's sake and that is a noble way. Unfortunately his struggling is not in the right place or time. In this connection, "Howard's disregard for Willy's financial plight and long-time serviceto the company illustrates the business world's indifference toward theindividual and suggests that this attitude is commonplace in a capitalistic system."[26]

Unquestionably, Willy's dignity is destroyed as he puts a price to himself particularly when he asks Howard for money with decreasing insinuation: "IfI could take home–well, sixty-five dollars a week . . . fifty dollars . . . fortydollars." (*DS*, II. 59, 60, 61). So,

money measures man and it is not what man's principles and values are, but what he has got of money.

Sofrustrated, Willy is in an intense conflict concerning his current position in business.He really realises his self-deception, but he does not realise that

> A salesman is 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.(27)

Dismissedfrom Howard's office and losing his job, Willy feels his life comes to an end, sohe cannot do anything at all. His friend, Charley offers him a job and feels Willy's conflict, desperation and suffering. Charley tells him:"The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that" (*DS*, II. 75).Through this statement Charley reveals Willy's triple failure: as a salesman, a father, and a man who has sacrificed his ownreality, independence, and dignity to fantasy, dependence, and ignominy.

Willy's contradictorily replies: "I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing..." (*DS*, II. 75). Again, Willy's incomplete answer "is not a plea for genuinehuman values but a statement of his belief."Nonetheless, Bigsby proclaims:

> [T]his is a significant exchange for if it exposes Willy's faith in appearance, it alsoreveals the extent to which Charley, deeply humane in his response to Willy,nonetheless subscribes to a reductive view of society and the individual.(28)

Willy for the first time acknowledges his own failure and his wrong vision to struggle in a capitalistic and materialistic environment. Willy feels that he is entrapped, frustrated, deluded, and misled

because of both his false dreams and expectations, and because of the society which is greedy for money at the expense of happy life based on respect, satisfaction, and responsibility.

Charley gives Willy money to pay his insurance after offering him a job. But the latter refuses. Ironically, Willy who thinks himself dead after being fired, comments on his situation: "After all the highways,and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, youend up worth more dead than alive" (*DS*, II. 76). In response, Charley illustrates to Willy that"nobody's worth nothin' dead"(*DS*, II. 76). In fact, "A manis interchangeable with a thing; he no longer determines his own worth; aprice can be put on him. Man has lost his humanity."[29]

In a climactic scene, Biff finds out that his father has a love affair with a woman. Willy tries to justify that relationship:

> WILLY: She's nothing to me, Biff. I was lonely, I was terriblylonely.
>
> BIFF: You—you gave her Mama's stockings! *(His tears breakthrough and he rises to go.)*….
>
> BIFF: Don't touch me, you—liar!
>
> WILLY: Apologize for that!
>
> BIFF: You fake! You phony little fake! You fake! *(Overcome, heturns quickly and weeping fully goes out with his suitcase.Willy is left on the floor on his knees.)*(*DS*, II. 95)

If Loneliness and failure were employed as excuses to adultery by Willy, he had nothing to do or to say why he gives his wife's stockings to his mistress. Skilfully, the stockings are used as a significant symbol by Miller. Such a symbol reflects Willy's infidelity, self-centredness, and greed.And the darning of the stockings also "symbolizes Willy's failure in business because Linda cannot afford to buy new pairs."[30]By giving the stockings to his mistress, Willy closes his eyes to the fact that his wife darns her own stockings to save money. Furthermore,

> Thestockings also demonstrate the salesman's guilt because he becomes irritatedwhenever he sees Linda darning her stockings; when Willy ordersLinda to throw out her

> stockings, his demand symbolizes his desireto shed his sin and his guilt, although Willy perhaps feels terrible notbecause he has committed adultery but rather because Biff caught him.(31)

Thus, to use Bigsby's words, the play in general is not a denunciation or attack on American standards and principles. It is, however, an investigationofdevastating themthrough infidelity and unfaithfulness.Willy Loman's American dream is not that based on pursuit of happiness and attaining worldly desires within standard values. In this case,

> What Miller attacks, then, is not the American Dream of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, but the dream as interpreted and pursued by those for whom ambition replaces human need and the trinkets of what Miller called the 'new American Empire in the making' are taken as tokens of true values.(32)

Near his death, Willy Loman thinks deeply about a material alternative that support his family. Ironically, Willy thinks of killing himself in order to provide his family with the money of insurance—twenty thousand dollars—an amount he could not collect throughout his life. He talks with Ben about that proposition:

> WILLY: Remember, it's a guaranteedtwenty-thousand-dollar proposition. . . .I've got nobody to talk to, Ben. . . .
> BEN: What's the proposition?
> WILLY: It's twenty thousand dollars on the barrelhead. Guaranteed,gilt-edged, you understand?
> BEN: You don't want to make a fool of yourself. They might nothonor the policy.
> WILLY: How can they dare refuse? Didn't I work like a coolie to meet every premium on the nose? And now they don't pay off?Impossible!
> BEN: It's called a cowardly thing, William.
> WILLY: Why? Does it take more guts to stand here the rest of mylife ringing up a zero?(*DS*, II. 99-101)

For Willy, who is so desperate to achieve anything and who has no hope at all, believes in the future money for his family strongly. He talks with the dead Ben and asks for his opinion about getting that after his death. Willy justifies his intention by the burden of capitalistic society and unconsciously by his own materialistic vision. The conversation proceeds:

> BEN: That's a point, William.And twenty thousand—that is something one can feel with the hand, it is there.
> WILLY: Oh, Ben, that's the whole beauty of it! I see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand. Not like—like an appointment! This would not be another damned-fool appointment, Ben, and it changes all the aspects. (*DS*, II. 99-101)

Willy also likens that money with a diamond which is regarded as light in the darkness, and solid and tangible thing in fragility like his fragile and broken spirit. On the other hand, he underestimates the appointment with Howard which results in nothing good for him. What Willy aspires to is to have a funeral that would be impressive for Biff. A funeral that would be attended by so many notable people and salesmen from various states and cities. Willy continues his conversation with Ben about Biff's reaction to such a funeral:

> WILLY: Because he [Biff] thinks I'm nothing, see, and so he spites me. Butthe funeral... *(Straightening up.)* Ben, that funeral will be massive!They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, NewHampshire. . . !that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized—I am known. . . !
> BEN: He'll call you a coward.
> WILLY *(suddenly fearful)*: No, that would be terrible.
> BEN: Yes. And a damned fool.
> WILLY: No, no, he mustn't, I won't have that! *(He is broken anddesperate.)*

BEN: He'll hate you, William.(*DS*, II. 99-101)

Profoundly, Willy suffers from internal and external conflicts. He then discerns that driving seventy miles with his bad-engine car results in a failed sale, longing to meet his sons for dinner results in their abandonment to him, doing all the payments for his house results in a broken refrigerator and broken tube heater, and playing on the nostalgic and emotional nerves with Howard, leads to his dismissal. Thus, "Willyknows that he will reap more profits in one masterstroke—his suicide—than in all the sales he closed in a lifetime. . . . Willy, exhausted after dealing with feelings of innocence and guilt, protectionand betrayal, and celebration and loss," reasons that his death is worthier than his life.(33)

What adds insult to injury is that last shocking conversation between Willy and Biff whoadmits that he is nothing and unimportant person just like his father:

> BIFF: Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!
> WILLY: I amnot a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!
> BIFF: I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. Youwere never anything but a hard-working drummer who landedin the ash can like all the rest of them. . . ! I'm not bringing home any prizesanymore, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bringthem home!(*DS*, II. 105-106)

It is suitable to entitle this conversation, "Like Father, Like Son" because Biff is a mirror for his father who fails in his business, but before that he has just failed in his relationship with his son. There is an existential touch stresses on each one's existence. In this sense, both Willy and Biff "lived like artists, like actors whose product is first of all themselves, forever imagining triumphs in a world that either ignores them or denies their presence altogether."(34)

Ben has hastened Willy's suicide by his motivating sentences: "The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy. . . . One

must go in to fetch a diamond out. . . . Not like an appointment at all. A diamond is rough andhard to the touch"(*DS*, II. 107). A diamond as an influential symbol refers to materialism, tangibility, and wealth. But it often means "light, brilliance," or something "unconquerable."(35) Willy believes in the first three words and ironically ignores the others.

Willy needs love and respect so much, but he does not care for those who offer them. He totally dedicateshimself to the everlasting American quest of a misshapenand materialised tomorrow. For him, the only option left is to commit suicide via the same means of his way of living—the car. That car which also stands for materialism, fame, transportation, is a means of death and killing the innocent as well. At last, Willy thinks that he will bring "the reward he has chased so determinedly, a reward which will expiate his sense of guilt, justify his life, and hand on to another generation the burden of belief which has corroded his soul but to which he has clung until the end."(36)

In the last part of the play, entitled "Requiem," Miller wants to be sure that the readers and spectators see or continue tracing Willy's dream. So, in the funeral the present people are: Linda, Biff, Happy, Charley, and Bernard only. The very few number of mournersin Willy's funeral—which contradicts the abundant number expected by Willy himself previously—makes evident how bad the salesman has failed in his pursuit to achieve the American Dream.Linda wonders in front of everyone else: "I can't understand it. At this time especially. First time inthirty-five years we were just about free and clear. He onlyneeded a little salary." But Charley disagrees, saying:"No man only needs a little salary"(*DS*, R. 110).

Despite the fact that Willy sacrifices his life for Biff's sake, the latter is the only one among the mournerswho knows the sheer reality of his father's dreams. Meanwhile, Happy and Charley are the defenders and sympathisers. Biff comments that Willy"had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong," and he "never knew who he was"(*DS*, R. 110-111).Paradoxically, such comments are applicable to Biff himself. Instead of giving a hand to his father, he continues criticising him. It is not a matter of whose fault it is; rather, it is the

spirit of cooperation, help, love, solidarity, and responsibility among the family members in a materialistic and capitalistic society. That society which is represented by many people in the play—Charley is one of them—proves that there are other positive things within. Accordingly, in his reply to Biff's opinion, Charley states:

> Nobodydast blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was asalesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. . . . He's man way out there in the blue, ridingon a smile and a Shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that's an earthquake. . . . Nobody dastblame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes withthe territory.(*DS*, R.110-111)

On his part, Happy replies too by addressing Biff that his father's death is not useless and he will continue his father's dream. He also states that their father "had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have—to come out number-one man.He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it forhim."(*DS*, R. 111)

Linda in an impressive and dedicated talk addresses the dead Willy and asks for his forgiveness. She thinks that he will return from his daily trip,therefore,she waits for him. Symbolically, his daily trip for selling is likened to the everlasting one for he was selling nothing but himself. Materialism, capitalism, and the American Dream altogether brutalise Willy Loman who "completes the brutalization process by reducing himself to a commodity, an object, a thing, which enables him to make the greatest and last sale of his entire professional life: the sale of his very existence for the insurance payment."[37] Linda is in a shock, then she goes on:

> Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is, Ican't cry. I don't understand it. . . . It seems to me that you're just on anothertrip. I keep expecting you. . . . I made the last payment on the house today. Today,dear. And there'll be nobody home. *(A sob rises in her throat.)*We're free and clear. *(Sobbing more fully, released.)* We're free.*(Biff comes slowly toward her.)* We're free... We're free...(*DS*, R. 112)

As the play opens with the music of flute and the dark light over house, it ends in the same way. Besides, "*the hard towers of theapartment buildings*[still] *rise into sharp focus*"(*DS*, R. 112).These conclusive lines refer to the continuity of the negative impact of both materialism and capitalism over the modern man—like Willy Loman—as he faces his destiny. Incongruously,

> The play edges towards silence with only the flute music now audible, as the surrounding apartment buildings come into sharp focus. America's past and present are thus brought together, as they had been in Willy's mind, a reminder of utopian dreams lost somewhere in their materialisation.(38)

Death of a Salesman, as many criticssuggest, is a critique of a capitalistic society that dehumanises, brutalises, and maltreats the unsuccessful. Yet, it is also a condemnation to the unsuccessful, reliant, irresponsible, and failure (sales)man.

In conclusion, despite the fact that Willy Loman dies at almost the end of the play to declare himself a tragic hero, he dies the death of a father rather than a salesman. This condition clarifies that it is not only materialism has the deleteriouseffect on him, but also the cold-bloodedrelationship with his eldest son, Biff, is the reason behind his death. Contradiction, as one of the crucial elements employed skilfully, demonstrates Willy's internal and external conflicts between inner world and external reality. Willy is just like a feather in a high wind, he is flown from place to place according the strength of that wind. He feels himself beingloved but hated,he considers himself as a winner but a loser too.

Willy's plight is that his life worth nothing but few dollars to secure his family as insurance money. He commits suicide as a result of his being unemployed, exploited, and deceived. He also reaches a state of despair and self-delusion. In fact, Willy Loman is dead at the very beginning of the play, and his presence in the play is described as spiritually dead but physically alive. He escapes his real failure life and replaces it with a nostalgia by remembering his dead father, brother, and salesman.

Contradictorily, Willy longs for the bright future, yet he is shunt by modern capitalistic society and sophisticated technology, business, and consumerism. Willy represents the image of Everyman of the commercialised culture and society, and his death, by which he desires to be a redemption to his guilt and a financial support to his family, gives no hope for the readers or theatregoers alike. Thus, his virtues include redemptive inclinations; but his vices include his preferences to materialism, dishonesty, irresponsibility, appearances, and attraction. He also stands for the hollowness of materialism, capitalism, and the American Dream; rather, Nightmare.

Although the condemnation against materialism, capitalism, and the American Dream is raised by so many people like Willy, he is one of the most influenced characters by them. The façades of materialism, capitalism, and business are multiple. Nonetheless, they are not necessarily negative. Charley for example represents capitalism but he is the only source of money, help, and support for Willy. Willy proves at the end that he is wrong because a well-liked person is not necessarily a successful salesman. Particularly, in the case of Bernard, who becomes a popular lawyer in comparison with his own sons, who are nothing but a womaniser,in Happy's case, and a failed dreamer, in Biff's case.

Capitalism, in Miller's perspective has two opposite façades: the benign oneincarnated in Charley'ssupporting initiatives to Willy, and the malignant one represented by Howard's rejection and dismissal to Willy. Additionally, there is another implicit view which refers to the adverseinfluence of material things on peopleto possess them. Living in a society prefers material things on the values and principles is a very challengingway of living, especially for someone who struggles for the sake of his family's welfare and goodness. Nevertheless, such struggle should be noble, responsible, unselfish, realistic, and decisive.

Notes

(1)A S Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8th ed.(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 948.

(2)"Death of a Salesman—Materialism & Alienation." StudyMode. com.http://www.studymode.com/essays/Death-Of-a-Salesman Materialism-1098344.html. (accessed Oct. 9, 2014).

(3)Quoted in Christopher Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 101.

(4)L. Bailey McDaniel, "Domestic Tragedies: The Feminist Dilemma in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*," in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, ed. Eric J. Sterling (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2008), 21.

(5)Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem*, (New York: Penguin Books Ltd.,1998), Act I., 1. All subsequent quotations cited in the text are from this edition, with the abbreviation*DS*and act and page number(s).

(6)Eric J. Sterling, "Introduction," in *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*, ed. Eric J. Sterling (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2008), 9-10.

(7)Ibid.

(8)Matthew C. Roudané,"*Death of a Salesman* and the Poetics of Arthur Miller," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*, ed., Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66.

(9)"*Death of a Salesman* and *Antigone* Comparison and Contrast Essay,"1.http://wwwnew.nsd.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx ?moduleinstanceid=6324&dataid=19873&FileName=Death%20 of%20a%20Salesman%20and%20Antigone%20Example%20Ess ay.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2014).

(10)Roudané, 66.

(11)Leah Hadomi, "Rhythm Between Fathers and Sons: *Death of a Salesman,"* in*Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Death of*

*a Salesman,*ed., Harold Bloom(New York: Chelsea House An imprint of Infobase Publishing, 2007), 18.

(12)Ibid, 19.

(13)Deborah Cosier Solomon, "The Emergence of Hope in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*," in *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*, ed. Eric J. Sterling (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2008), 138.

(14)Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*,108.

(15)Ibid., 100-101.

(16)Juan Ignacio Guijarro-González and Ramón Espejo, "Capitalist America in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*: A Re-consideration," in *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*, ed. Eric J. Sterling (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2008), 63.

(17)"Death of a Salesman—Materialism & Alienation," 3.

(18)Bigsby, "Introduction," xxiii.

(19)Guijarro-González and Espejo,63.

(20)Ibid.

(21)Ibid., 64.

(22)Hadomi, 17.

(23)"Death of a Salesman—Materialism & Alienation," 3.

(24)Guijarro-González and Espejo,62.

(25)Sterling, 4.

(26)Ibid.

(27)Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*,107.

(28)Ibid.

(29)Quoted in ibid.,107.

(30)Sterling, 9-10.

(31)Ibid.

(32)Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study,*105-106.

(33)Roudané, 80.

(34)Arthur Miller, *Timebends* (New York: Grove Press, 1987),127.

(35)J. E. Cirlot and Jack Sage Trans., A Dictionary of Symbols, 2nd ed., Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 81.
(36)Bigsby, "Introduction," xxvi.
(37)Roudané, 77-78.
(38)Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study,*122.

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