

**Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*:
Traumatic Moments**

by

**Najlaa Hosny Ameen Mohammed
English Department, Thadiq College of
Science and Humanities, Shaqra University**

Email: nhsayn@su.edu.sq

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Abstract:

This article titled "Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*: Traumatic Moments" investigates six shocking moments that traumatized Willy Loman, the central character in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. The six traumas are:

- a. "Bernard's-Supreme-Court-Case" Traumatic Moment,
- b. "Biff's-Stealing-of-Oliver's-Pen" Traumatic Moment,
- c. "The Boston-Hotel-Room" Traumatic Moment,
- d. "Ben's-What-Are-You-Building?" Traumatic Moment,
- e. "Howard's Firing-of-Willy" Traumatic Moment,
- f. "Charley's You-Can't-Sell-That?" (72) Traumatic Moment.

The article adopts the psychoanalytic approach. It utilizes different theories and concepts by different psychoanalytic critics.

Keywords: A. Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, traumas, PTSD, psychoanalytic

ست صدمات نفسية في مسرحية موت بائع متجول للكاتب آرثر ميلر

الملخص:

يدرس هذا البحث المعنون "ست صدمات نفسية في مسرحية موت بائع متجول للكاتب آرثر ميلر" ست لحظات صادمة في حياة ويلي لومان الشخصية المحورية في المسرحية. اللحظات الست يمكن إجمالها كما يلي:

- أ. لحظة إدراك ويلي أن برنارد يتراجع في المحكمة العليا
 - ب. لحظة إدراك ويلي أن ابنه بيف قد سرق قلم هوارد الذهب
 - ت. لحظة رؤية بيف والده ويلي والسيدة الغريبة في غرفة الفندق في بوسطن
 - ث. لحظة سؤال بن ويلي ماذا تبني؟
 - ج. لحظة فصل هوارد ويلي من العمل
 - ح. لحظة قول تشارلي لويلي "لا يمكنك تسويق هذا الكلام".
- يتتبع البحث دراسة هذه الصدمات وتأثيرها السلبي على ويلي لومان وكيف أدى تأثره بهذه المواقف إلى انتحار ويلي لومان إذ وجد في استعجال الموت والحل والمخرج الوحيد من مشكلاته - ولا سيما المشكلات النفسية التي تطورت إلى حالات من الهلاوس - التي لم يستطع حلها أو التعامل معها.

كلمات مفتاحية: موت بائع متجول، آرثر ميلر، التحليل النفسي، صدمات نفسية، ويلي لومان

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*:

Traumatic Moments

I

The aim of this article is to explore the psychic problems that enthrall Willy Loman the central character in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. This will be mainly discussed through investigating the shocking and traumatic moments Willy Loman experienced. The article focuses on six specific moments, as will be detailed below. It is worth noting that every time Willy gets back in time to one of his memories, he relives such a memory as it was in the past. At the heart of each of Willy's recollections lies a traumatic moment; such are, thus, moments that he could not get over despite the fact that so many years have passed since such events occurred. His recollecting of such moments is restored with a stinging sense of remorse and hurtful agonies of realization. Noticeably, such memories of the past have, so to speak, left indelible scars and incurable ailments in Willy's psyche; ones that he was sure he could not overcome or cure.

Arthur Miller is a dramatist of a special caliber. His drama *Death of a Salesman*, considered by many critics to be the author's *magnum opus*, excellently probes the fathoms of human psyche and explores human mind in an almost unprecedented way in the genre of drama. The title of the drama, it is worth noting, was originally *The Inside of his Head* (www.csus.edu/). The drama pinpoints fact that the modern (American) man can well collapse from within rather than from without. Willy's biggest problems are basically psychological ones. Remarkably, the problems that wore out and exhausted the protagonist's mind; were primarily inner ones. It is true that he could not stand forces

of life, but such external problems were not the ones that led to his deterioration; rather, such problems were psychologically transformed into traumatic moments that got instilled into Willy Loman's mind, and led finally to his collapse.

The fact that Arthur Miller managed to present the protagonist's mind, and all its struggles, with such prowess and connoisseurship is, undoubtedly, worth considering. Miller was a forerunner in this respect in the sense that he could present two radically different, intricate and intersecting worlds replete with actions and reactions. The worlds presented are remarkably built on stark oppositions including such ones of the present and the past, now and then, disappointment and hope, affliction and ease of mind, etc. The author's craftsmanship is further asserted through the clarity with which the two worlds are depicted.

In this introductory section of the article, it is important to point out that hidden thoughts in the minds of a number of characters/*personae* were dwelt on in both fiction and poetry, but rarely in drama. It should be acknowledged that the complex interminglings of the human mind have, more often than not, been explored in fiction, as it is remarkably the case, for example, with D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. Moments of silence and unexpressed thoughts that busied and dominated the protagonist's mind are characterizing features of the work; they unveil oppressed and inexpressible thoughts that troubled Paul Morrell's psyche. The following quotation, from Chapter XIII of the novel, captures one such moment in which:

Paul would have died rather than his mother should get to know of this affair. He suffered tortures of humiliation and self-consciousness. There was now

a good deal of his life of which necessarily *he could not speak* to his mother. He had a life apart from her—his sexual life. The rest she still kept. But he *felt he had to conceal something* from her, and it irked him. *There was a certain silence between them*, and he *felt* he had, in that *silence*, to defend himself against her; he *felt* condemned by her. Then sometimes he hated her, and pulled at her bondage. His life wanted to free itself of her. It was like a circle where life turned back on itself, and got no farther. She bore him, loved him, kept him, and his love turned back into her, so that he could not be free to go forward with his own life, really love another woman. (gutenberg.org/) (My Italicizing)

In poetry as well, the depths and complexities of the human psyche have been explored countless times. The psyche has been a major interest of such poets as Robert Browning and Thomas Hardy. As the lover, in Browning's "Porphyria's Lover", all-silently with an ailed mind, and admits:

I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair, Perfectly
pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she. (hsfc-ac.org.uk/).

In his "My Last Duchess" as well, Browning, aptly enough, ushers readers into the Duke's mind and that is the way

readers come to know about the Duke's hidden thoughts of his jealousy, doubts about the Duchess's conduct, sense of humiliation and his own consequent decision of revenge taking:

...she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift

...
Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. (uu.edu/dept/)

Similarly, in his ballad, "A Trampwoman's Tragedy", Thomas Hardy delves deep into the narrator's lover's mind to tell readers how, when provoked and unleashed, human jealousy can go unbridled and turn a lover into a murderer in a minute. The woman speaker tells us how, after stirring her lover's jealousy with few words, the lover was madly provoked and, without uttering a single word, decided to kill the man he thought of to be a rival. The lover

... sprung, and with his knife —
And with his knife,
He let out jeering Johnny's life (victorianweb.org/)

In its turn, Hardy's "Neutral Tones" tells the story of how love first started between two lovers, probably between Hardy's own father and mother as some critics speculate, through looks and thoughts without a single word being uttered:

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles solved years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro -
On which lost the more by our love. (superprof)

In the field of drama, however, apart from direct dialogue that takes place between the characters, thoughts can also be expressed through soliloquies, monologues, telepathies, gestures, mimes or insinuated through dramatic ironies. Such dramatic techniques play the function of, so to speak, windows through which the spectators delve into the characters' minds.

With its audacity of introducing to the audience the world of the mind with all such nuances and *minutiae*, and with the employing of stage directions, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* has proved to be a permanent source of inspiration for both readers and critics alike. Notably, drama, more than any other literary genre, depends primarily on dialogue, that is outspokenness and expressive utterances of the characters. This leaves only a little chance for inner, in-mind thoughts to be presented. In spite of this, the drama astonishingly ushers the audience into the minds of the characters with great skillfulness.

Review of Literature

Despite the fact that Miller's *Death of a Salesman* has, ever since its publication in 1949, stood out remarkably as a cornerstone in American drama, the latent, psychological problems with which the work teems have not received the attention they deserve. Most of the research conducted on the work focused on dealing with the work from standpoints other than the psychoanalytic one which this article adopts.

Researchers and critics have often approached the drama through one or more of the following three perspectives: a. exploring the aspects that make *Death of a Salesman* a modern tragedy, as in Injamamul Hoque's "Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* as a Modern Tragedy", WEI Qingxia's "The Analysis of *Death of a Salesman* from the Perspective of Modern Tragedy", and NITESH's "*Death of a Salesman*: A Modern Tragedy"; b. investigate the Modernist aspects of the work, as Soham's Chaudhary's "Alienation and Modernism in the Plays of Arthur Miller"; and/or c. exploring Postmodernist aspects of the work as in Kalaivani M.'s "Fall of Grand Narratives: Duality and Conflict in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*: A Postmodernist Study". This indicates how researchers and scholars of English literature have, more often than not, approached the work from one of three perspectives: modern, Modernist and/or Postmodernist. This is important as it indicates the directions to which the needle of the compass points when it comes to academic research, and, likewise, it helps readers figure out about areas that have not received due attention and, thence, the ones that can be potentially explored and can well prove rewarding.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Since its beginning at the hands of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), psychoanalytic criticism has developed greatly; the discipline has witnessed the contributions of great, numerous psychologists and psychoanalysts that enriched the field greatly. It should be acknowledged that it is difficult to stick to the concepts of one theorist at the cost of the prolific, enriching views of other psychoanalytic critics, especially with a work of such psychological dimensions and depth as Miller's *Death of a*

Salesman being a case in point. That is why, to avail itself as much as possible of the different theories and concepts, this article will adopt an eclectic method through which various, and different concepts from various theories by different critics will be selected and applied to the text. All the theories and concepts applied lie, however, within the domain of psychoanalysis, and psychology.

Flexibility, it should be noted, is characteristic of this discipline, one that Charles Bressler lauded as he discussed this approach. Bressler, acknowledges that flexibility underlying psychoanalytic criticism also consists, further, in the fact that, “unlike some other schools of criticism, psychoanalytic criticism can exist side by side with any other critical method of interpretation” (120).

Eclectic amalgamation of theory and application will be implemented. This will bring about the fulfillment required to conduct this research as it will enable the author of this article to integrate the different theories and, thence, to provide a balanced investigation of the psychic disorders that blight Willy Loman, the central character.

Essential to understanding this tragedy is to evaluate it with some contextual facts in the background. One of the important facts about Miller a reader should bear in mind is that he was a passionate advocate of Sigmund Freud. Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was published ten years after the death of Freud, that is, in the heyday of psychoanalytic studies. In addition, the drama was published in the years that followed both American financial Great Depression (1929-41), and the almost concurrent 1939-45-War. The drama, thus, warned of ghostly deteriorations

on the different levels: the economic, the social and the psychological. The shocking, as well as the prophetic, realities that the drama presents were misinterpreted by many politicians and statesmen who accused Miller of being a detractor of the American Capitalist system and supporter of the Soviet Union Communism (soar.suny.edu/). In 1957, Miller was further convicted of contempt of the Congress for refusing to name names.

II

Miller's *Death of a Salesman* revolves around a few traumas, or traumatic moments, and the aftermaths of such traumas. Since the terms trauma and post-trauma are pivotal to this discussion of the drama, it is appropriate to define such terms. Trauma is, "a psychic injury, especially one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed" (Reisberg 78).

Traumatic moments represent a doorway to a rewarding, and hence reassessing, reading of this drama. This article will deal with six key moments that played havoc with, and had ruining and detrimental effects on, the protagonist's mind. Besides, the post-traumatic effects which, as the drama makes clear, turned into post-traumatic syndrome disorders (PTSD) will also be dwelt on. After experiencing a trauma, a person can be apt to PTSD:

An anxiety disorder diagnosable according to the DSM-IV-TR. PTSD occurs in people who have experienced life-threatening events to which they respond with feelings of fear, helplessness, or

horror. Examples of causal events include, but are not limited to, combat, childhood abuse, rape, other physical assaults, natural or human-caused disasters, and severe motor vehicle accidents. Not everyone who experiences a traumatic event ...chances [of developing PTSD] increase with more severe or repeated traumas. PTSD is marked by three distinct sets of symptoms: reexperiencing the trauma, avoiding reminders of the trauma, and experiencing increased physiological arousal. Reexperiencing symptoms may include intrusive thoughts or nightmares about the event, psychological or physiological reactivity when reminded of the event, and in its most severe form flashbacks in which the person feels as if he/she is reliving the event in the moment. (*The Cambridge Dictionary* 394)

The following are the six traumatic moments that this article takes to its focal interest:

- a. **“Bernard’s-Supreme-Court-Case” Traumatic Moment,**
- b. **“Biff’s-Stealing-of-Oliver’s-Pen” Traumatic Moment,**
- c. **“The-Boston-Hotel-Room” Traumatic Moment,**
- d. **“Ben’s-What-Are-You-Building?” Traumatic Moment,**
- e. **“Howard’s-Firing-of-Willy” Traumatic Moment,**
- f. **“Charley’s-You-Can’t-Sell-That?” (72) Traumatic Moment.**

Such traumas represent six important shocking moments that collectively led to Willy Loman’s collapse.

a. "Bernard's-Supreme-Court-Case" Traumatic Moment

In one of his babbling fits, Willy Loman was heard by Bernard, Charley's son. Bernard wonders who Willy was speaking to. Jenny, the secretary, tells him that Willy is arguing with "[n]obody. There's nobody with him. I can't deal with him anymore" (67). Willy went to Charley to borrow money from him, as usual. Willy gets back to reality by the shock of seeing Bernard, now a well-dressed gentleman. Miller's employing of stage directions importantly indicates the degree of shock, as well as the sense of guilt, that strikes Willy Loman. Willy is "*shocked*" when he sees Bernard, that was a laughingstock of the Lomans (21), and [*Willy comes quickly guiltily, to Bernard and warmly shakes his hand*] (67). In the same situation, readers are told that Willy feels [*small and alone*] and that he speaks "*desperately*" (69) "*with a strong edge of resentment in his voice*" (70). Such are, so to speak, effects of this traumatic moment. When told about Bernard's important position as a lawyer, Willy is [*genuinely shocked, pained, ...*] (71) desperately traumatized. He utters words intermittently and elliptically "*with difficulty*", a symptom of post-trauma (71), as if he were choked.

Charley: ... How do you like this kid? Gonna argue a case in front of the Supreme Court.

Bernard [*protesting*]: Pop!

Willy: [*genuinely shocked, pained, ...*]: No! The Supreme Court! And he didn't even mention it! (71)

Appalled and mesmerized, Loman repeats it to himself twice, "The Supreme Court!" (71). The above breakthrough accomplished by Bernard should be read in context with Biff's

fiasco as he was “washed up with Oliver” (83). Top versus flop marks Bernard’s practical life as contrasted with Biff’s own.

b. “Biff’s-Stealing-of-Oliver’s-Pen” Traumatic Moment

In context with the moment of harsh and striking realization of Bernard’s success, that of Biff’s stealing of Bill Oliver’s gold pen can well ensue. Biff, who is now thirty four years of age without a real beginning of any successful career, is Kleptomaniac. Biff’s psychic illness, of kleptomania, was not corrected by the father. Since his childhood, Biff has been accustomed to stealing. What is really shocking is that Willy, the father, sometimes encouraged Biff’s thefts (Miller 35), and, at other times, he called it borrowing (Miller 18-19), to avoid facing the fact of his son’s being Kleptomaniac. The term refers to

a psychological disorder characterized by compulsive stealing in which the person feels a pressure to steal and a combination of relief and pleasure during and immediately after the theft. The stealing is often of objects not needed or sometimes even not wanted. (*The Cambridge Dictionary* 247)

The following quotation captures an essentially traumatic moment in Willy’s life:

Biff [at the table, now audible, holding up a *gold fountain pen*]: ... so I am washed up with Oliver, you understand? Are you listening to me?

Willy [*at loss*]: Yeah, sure. If you hadn’t flunked –

Biff: Flunked what? What are you talking about?

Willy: Don't blame everything on me! I didn't flunk math – you did! What pen?

Happy: That was awful dumb, Biff, a pen like that is worth –

Willy [seeing *the pen for the first time*]: You took Oliver's pen?

Biff [weakening]: Dad, I just explained it to you.

Willy: You stole Bill Oliver's fountain pen!

...

Willy: My God, Biff.

Biff: I never intended to do it, Dad! (83)

It was too late that Willy, so to speak, called a spade a spade. He used “stole” to speak of his son's theft. With Bernard's towering success in Willy's mind, the father was pathetically traumatized by his son's disappointing failure after meeting Bill Oliver, and the theft, which made matters even worse. Biff's explanation that he “never intended it” matters greatly as it exposes Biff's being Kleptomaniac; he has become “a habitual thief with low self-esteem” (Hussain 286).

c. “The-Boston-Hotel-Room” Traumatic Moment

Interestingly, it was this Boston-Hotel-Room traumatic moment that afflicted and blighted Biff so shockingly that his progress stunted completely. Biff was profoundly shocked. When speaking to Bernard, Willy identifies the day that represents the checkmate point after which Biff's career got stunted, and his life turned upside down. Ever since that time, Biff achieved no

progress whatsoever. Willy asserts that, “[Biff’s] life ended after that Ebbets Field game. In so doing, Willy attempts to escape the right traumatizing moment that lead to the ruining of his own and Biff’s lives. This is one of the “defense mechanisms” (Jalal 291), to employ Sigmund Freud’s term, that Willy uses to avoid facing reality. He knows well that it was not that specific day that marked the end of Biff’s aspiringly prosperous career and ambitious life. “From the age of seventeen nothing good ever happened to him” (68). Indeed, the lives of both father and son came to a stop. Such was the obstacle that neither father nor son could ever get over; it was, to employ Macbeth’s words, applicable here the “step” that both Willy and Biff “[f]ell down” and neither could ever “o’erleap” (folger.edu/explore).

This “Boston-Hotel-Room” Trauma turned, into Willy’s mind, into a ghostly captivating nightmare that haunted Willy’s mind. The trauma victimized the old man and preyed on his peace of mind, and turned the old man into a useless, exhausted being. He asks Bernard about the reason why his son opted out and left school, and never returned to it. “Why? Why?” (69), wonders Willy, and admits:

Bernard, that question has been trailing me like a ghost for the last fifteen years. He flunked the subject, and laid down and like *a hammer hit him.*” (69) (My Italicizing)

Importantly enough, Bernard asserts to Willy that when Biff flunked mathematics, he “wasn’t beaten by it at all” (69). Bernard takes Willy back to another day (moment), the one when Biff visited him in Boston. “What happened in Boston, Willy” (70). This confounds Willy greatly, and he looks at Bernard

skeptically as “an intruder” (70). This was significantly, so to speak, diagnosed by Bernard who did not really know about such a traumatic moment but could aptly describe what it was like. On coming back from Boston, Biff burnt up the sneakers he liked most in the furnace. Bernard and Biff had a fist fight that lasted for half an hour. After giving details about the situation, Bernard summed it all up by stating that, “he’d given up his life” (70). Later on, in the restaurant scene, when he remembers that specific “Boston-Hotel-Room” Trauma, Willy can’t but fall down to his knees. In the restaurant, he raved, “babble[d]” (94) and fulminated. His mind never cured nor was it alleviated or assuaged of that trauma. His deteriorating mental state can simply be attributed, above all traumas, to this specific one:

Willy: She’s nothing to me, Biff. I was lonely, I was terribly lonely.

Biff: You – you gave her mama’s stockings! [*His tears break through and he rises to go.*]

Willy: [*grabbing for Biff*]: I gave you an order!

Biff: Don’t touch me, you – liar!

Willy: Apologize for that!

Biff: You fake! You phony little fake! You fake!
[*Overcome, he turns quickly and weeping fully goes out with his suitcase. Willy is left on the floor on his knees.*]

Willy: I gave you an order! Biff, come back here or I’ll beat you! Come back here! I’ll whip you!

[*Stanley comes quickly in from the right and stands in front of Willy.*]

Willy [*shouts at Stanley*]: I gave you an order...

Stanley: Hey, let's pick it up, pick it up. Mr Loman.
[*He helps Willy to his feet.*] Your boys left
with the chippies. They said they'll meet you
at home. (91-2)

Biff was not ready to accept any justification. He wept and then shouted at his father calling him "phony little fake" (91).

d. "Ben's-What-Are-You-Building?" Traumatic Moment

In one of his flashback reminiscences, Ben, Willy's brother, tells Willy he bought a timberland. Stupefied, Willy replies, "God, Timberland!" Ben offers him a job of taking care of the timberland and Willy is really happy with the job. Linda, Willy's wife, however, does not welcome the idea. She easily persuades Willy to give up Ben's job offer. She even goes on to tell him that he is achieving something great in his current job. Willy naïvely tells Ben that he is building something with the firm he is working for. Ben questionably asks Willy, "What are you building?" (63). The question was like a slap in Willy's face:

Ben: Now, look here, William. I've bought
timberland in Alaska and I need a man to look
after things for me. (62-3)

Willy: God, Timberland! Me and my boys in those
grand outdoors!

Ben: You've a new continent at your doorstep,
William. Get out of these 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.

Willy: Yes, yes! Linda, Linda!

...

Willy: ... I am building something with this firm,
Ben, and if a man is building something he
must be on the right track, mustn't he?

Ben: What are you building? Lay your hand on it.
Where is it?

Willy [*hesitantly*]: That's true, Linda, there's
nothing. (62-3)

Such is another traumatic moment (of shocking realization) that left a permanent impact on Willy's mind. Willy's reply, "[t]hat's true, Linda, there's nothing", indicates a shocking moment, that is of the speaker's realization of his state of self-deception and his realization that he has actually achieved nothing, and, more seriously that, if he has been building something, he should have been building it for himself and his family not for the firm he is working for. It is true that Willy is often immersed in his memories, but his revisiting of the past is accompanied, this time, by a bitter sense of realization of a life's lost opportunity that he could never make up for.

e. "Howard's-Firing-of-Willy" Traumatic Moment

Of all the traumatic moments brought into discussion in this article, this one is probably the acutest. Full of hopes of getting a New York job that will save him the pains of travelling and, more importantly, of dealing with buyers and people that do not respect him. One time he was called a "walrus" (25), by another salesman, "And I – I cracked him right across the face" (25). He, further, asserts to Linda, "they do laugh at me. I know that" (25). He was deeply traumatized by the realization, through different

situations, that he was is not respected at all by anyone, other than his wife Linda. He says to his neighbor Charley, “If you are going to say something say it to my face! I know you laugh at me behind my back” (66-7). He once confessed to Linda that he is not seen. He finally made up his mind to speak to Howard to find him a job in the office; he reminds Howard of the promises Howard’s father gave him of affording him an office job. Howard refuses the idea, and fires him:

Willy: I’ll go to Boston.

Howard: Willy, you can’t go to Boston for us.

Willy: Why can’t I go?

Howard: I don’t want you to represent us. I have been meaning to tell you for a long time now.

Willy: Howard, are you firing me?

Howard: I think you need a good long rest, Willy.
(61)

This was the last straw. After that traumatic moment, Willy became sure death is the only way out of his dilemma.

f. “Charley’s-You-Can’t-Sell-That?” Traumatic Moment

On weekly basis, Loman goes to Charley to borrow fifty dollars from him, as Linda tells Biff and Happy. Willy tells Charley that Howard has fired him, and goes on to explain to Charley how, when Howard was born, Wagner, Howard’s father and Willy’s ex-employer, discussed naming the new baby with him; Willy named the baby Howard. He kept telling Charley such stuff about his career in the firm, but the

latter tells the former simply that such stuff is just worthless and has not any consideration in the world of business. Simply, such are trifles that do not pay in the business world:

Willy: Charley, I'm strapped, I'm strapped. I don't know what to do. I was just fired.

Charley: Howard fired you?

Willy: That snotnose. Imagine that? I named him. I named him Howard.

Charley: Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. 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.

Willy: I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing -

Charley: Why must everybody like you? Who liked J. P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he's look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked. Now listen, Willy, I know you don't like me, and no body can say I am in love with you, but I'll give you a job because – just for the hell of it, put it that way. (72-3)

He felt stunned by Charley's words that brought him face to face with the harsh realities of the pragmatic world that he has always endeavored to escape; such a world that acknowledges nothing other than capitalism and materialism.

Willy is such a kind of person who rarely shares his feelings of defeat. Only on quite few occasions does he speak of his submission. He is such a kind of person who could not discuss or share his problems with others, one who always believed “I can’t throw myself on my sons” (62); he was ready to fight Charley when he felt insulted. This explains why it was a tormentingly excruciating experience for him to ask Howard, his employer, for a New York office job and to ask Charley to lend him money to pay for his insurance. It is such oversensitivity that kept him cornered and made him recoil greatly upon himself till he became, “the saddest, self-centrest” (88). Near the end of the drama, he turned into an all-“tormented and isolated private life” (Anwar 31).

It should be pointed out that Willy Loman was so sensitive that he never asked a person for a favor as he himself admits. His sensitive nature added greatly to his vulnerability and incapability of facing the forces of modern life. Such problems worked the worst with Willy Loman because he was such an oversensitive person. From the beginning of his talk with Howard, he told Howard about a very important characteristic of his personality, “God knows, Howard, I never asked a favour of any man” (58), but Howard remains completely indifferent to the old man’s pleading. Howard, harshly enough, tells Willy that he, “can’t take blood from a stone” (60) and even fires him, “I don’t want you to represent us” (60).

In a capitalist system, life becomes less and less important as money and material become more and more important. Under such a system, it is easy to sell one’s life for money. Ironically, the drama exposes the way in which many concepts have been

turned head over heels. One such concept is that it is a well-known fact that worldwide people pay money to ensure their lives. The drama starkly exposes the way in which even what was accepted as an unquestionable fact has turned out to be a refutable one. Thus, the protagonist pays his life for the insurance (money). Willy tells his brother Ben about his plan to commit suicide so that the insurance money, "twenty thousand dollars" (96), will go to his family, especially Biff that he loved most.

Willy is a frail figure that is supposed to stand against the forces of life. He succumbs as he is too weak to overcome, manipulate or even face such harsh, crashing realities of life. Willy's choosing of taking his life by crashing the car at the end of the drama is significantly indicative of how he himself has been crashed and completely beaten by the merciless forces of the modern world, of which capitalism is a major one.

Conclusion

With all its pleasurable memories, the past ingrained many serious warnings that made Willy, in his cinematic-like, flashback recollections, through revisiting and reassessing the past, realize that he ignored such clear warnings and that he was genuinely responsible for the deterioration of his family's fortune and future. That is why, by way of amending the deplorable state of his family he decided to take (pay) his life to make up for the foolish mistakes made. Willy Loman's realization and understanding of the reeling past was different. In his old age, he was, above all else, more of regretful assessor than of the (lost chances of the) past.

The past is re-presented, it is true, but it is also re-evaluated. The recurrent times the past was replayed intrapersonally reveal a genuine sense of remorse in Willy Loman's "subconscious" (Jayachandran). This added importantly to Willy's overwhelming sense of acerbic, bitter resentment and, and, thence, depression. Such daydream-recollections augmented and amalgamated Loman's sense of guilt and remorse. This accounts for the reason why such reminiscences took the form of "daydream[s]" (Rajendran 513) and "repeated, intrusive hallucinations" (Al-Hussainawy 290). Collectively, such memories added greatly to deteriorating his mental state, reclusion, depression, and they, undoubtedly, spurred him in the sheer direction of death that represented the only way out of such besieging psychologically excruciating torment.

The drama tolls the bell to warn Americans of the psychic plagues of the modern age. Significantly enough, such trauma(tic moment)s kept corroding Willy persistently from within till he became like hollow, and collapsed. Long-term effects of such traumas should, by no means, be overlooked.

In their entirety, the traumas discussed represent the six most crucially shocking moments Willy Loman experienced. Interestingly, each traumatic moment was effected by a different character. Such stand out like slaps that traumatized the protagonist psychologically.

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