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AMERICAN'S FAMILYHOOD IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

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Abstract

Arthur Miller was known as an American Playwright who often consider put the theme of a man who has problems or struggles for his internal desire or the society or even his family in his work. This research shows Willy's struggle as a father to his family's prosperity. The writer used the sociological approach and Power theory from Michael Foucault to conduct the analysis. Foucault's theories primarily talked about the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions. The writer concluded that in life Willy has a motto to tell his sons which is money is everything and in reality, that motto is not eligible because education is above everything especially in the working world. Willy is obsessed with power. After Willy chooses to do suicide to sacrifice for his family, it finally reveals that Willy is just a normal father who wants his sons to be successful people with his lead as a parent.

Keywords: Family hood, relationship, father and sons

I. INTRODUCTION

Family is the miniature of social and economic activity and family is the basic unit of society. Different places in the world have different values of family culture. For example, China and America have a different value in their family culture. After the First World War, the economical balance of the world was changed, leaving European countries in debt and making the U.S. the leading industrial power and creditor in the world and the salesman system become famous (Tanner, 2016). The industrializing landscape of 19th century United States, however, with its growing companies and manufacturing firms, developed selling campaigns and new business methods. Salesmanship fit in with all Americans, the self-made man which has skills in selling offered another path to success.

The death of a salesman is a drama that talked about the economic condition in America, a big country that is affected by the World War after it ends. The main character of *The Death of Salesman*, Willy Loman is a salesman who lived in New York in 1950 with his wife and two sons. Willy is struggling to find a job after he got fired from his old job and surviving in a big city such as New York after the World War is very difficult for Willy. Even though Willy has two sons, Happy and

Biff, they should do much as well to help their family financially because Biff is only an employee and Happy does not have a job. The relationship between Willy and his sons was going well until Biff, caught Willy cheating in a ballroom of a hotel. His sons do not trust him anymore and their relationship becomes more complicated and the problems finally come up.

In this research, the writer analyzes the relationship between a father and his two sons in America's family hood. The reason why the writer chooses this drama is that this drama portrays the economic condition of America after the World War which requires a fast-selling system to every household in America. The second reason is this drama also represents the inability of a father to adapt himself towards changes in his life and family.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literary theory is a basic way to get a good analysis of the research and help people in analyzing it. In this research, the writer explains about relationship between father and son in an American family hood in *The Death of Salesman*. The main character had his point of view about the success of the economy. He taught that someone is categorized as a successful person when he or she has a lot of money, not by how high their education is, and that point of view impacts his two sons

and his wife which is called Power by Michael Foucault. Willy is obsessed with power. Power here is symbolized by money and position. First, the view of power as something that is owned by individuals or groups to control others, ignores the real function of power in modern society. Power is seen in a juridical context, which connects power with sovereignty and law. In this conception, power is embedded or owned by a certain individual in the hierarchy structure of power relations. This power is legally valid (legitimate) is exercised against others based on a consensus.

However, according to Foucault, this concept of power cannot capture the complexity of power relations in modern society. The concept of power in modern society is not a sovereign power but disciplinary power. Disciplinary power is not a concept of power that is based on authority to control others but it functions in and against every social, economic, family, and sexual relationship. Power in this context is not a matter of the legality of actions and punishment in controlling others, but about the normalization of behavior designed by utilizing the productive and reproductive abilities of the body.

Disciplinary power operates on the body to precipitate the normalization of power

as a process of habituation in the body to behavior and places the subject as an effect and vehicle for power (vehicle of power). Sovereign power is negative, subjecting behavior through obedience to the law, while disciplinary power is productive, controlling the body through an oversight mechanism that is internalized as the process of normalizing the operation of power over the body. Therefore, according to Foucault, modern subjects are vehicles for power and objects for knowledge.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

There are two methods of appreciating the data, qualitative and quantitative. The writer used qualitative methods in this drama and the data are collected in form of documents from the quotation, phrase, and sentences from the drama script. The qualitative method is the method that is used to answer questions about why and how people behave in the way what they do or provide information while a quantitative method is a method that explains phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematical based formula or in particular statistic (Gunderson, 2005). In reporting the data, the writer uses the descriptive method. The descriptive method is a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied. In other words, the descriptive method focuses on

describing the subject of the research, without covering the reason why it happened (Bhat, 2020).

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In America, the life of the family or what is called familyhood is something that you experienced every day in your family that connects with the relationship between parents and children. The typical American family consists of three people on average (Parents and 1 kid or more) and people called it by Nuclear Family. The American family has traditional values, two of them are the beliefs in a traditional home-based role for women and the belief of the father as the head of the family. As you can see in *The Death of Salesman* drama, the family hood of Willy Louman's family is pictured as something that is controlled by the head of the family or the father. The father has a big role in deciding for the family and responsibility for the child's future. In the story of *The Death of Salesman*, Willy worked as the salesman but his wife does not work and only be the housewife. Willy has two sons, the oldest son Biff and his brother Happy. Willy is always concerned with the future of his two sons and that is why he always gives his sons some advice about life such as what job they had to get to be successful people. Willy always taught his sons that education is something that is not

important in this life, what is important is to have a lot of money. This mindset that Willy always told his sons is not true and caused his sons more problems in their life.

4.1 THE AIM OF LIFE IN WILLY'S FAMILY

In general, what does it means by success is accomplishing an aim or purpose. What does it mean by economic successful or successful in an economy is about how well the economy is delivered the need of the people especially some things that are important to the people. In this section, the writer is going to discuss what it means by the economic success by the main character of *The Death of Salesman* drama, Willy. The main character had his point of view about the success of the economy. He taught that someone is categorized as a successful person when he or she has a lot of money, not by how high their education is, and that point of view impacts his two sons and his wife. Money is everything if you want to survive in this world.

Willy, as the main character, is obsessed with power or money-oriented. Power here is symbolized by money and position. First, the view of power as something that is owned by individuals or groups to control others, ignores the real function of power in modern society. Abhorring to Foucault (1998) power is seen in a juridical context, which connects power with

sovereignty and law. In this conception, power is embedded or owned by a certain individual in the hierarchy structure of power relations. This power is legally valid (legitimate) is exercised against others based on orders.

*That's just what I mean.
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 the
business 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. (P.21)*

The quotation above shows that Willy does not care about education because he is obsessed with power. The phrase *Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead* showed that what Willy believes is that in the working world, Power is more important than education. As long as you have a good

appearance and personality, you are going to be better than a person who went to school according to what Willy believes.

Willy's point of view about the success of the economy also affects his oldest son, Biff, in his working life. He always quit his job and finds a new one because he cannot compete with the other worker who has better education and smarter than him. He also struggles to adapt to his job every day.

*Hap, I've had twenty or thirty
different kinds of jobs since I
left home before the war, and it
always turns out the same. I just
realized it lately. In Nebraska
when I herded cattle, and the
Dakotas, and Arizona, and now
in Texas. It's why I came home
now, I guess, because I realized
it. This farm I work on, it's
spring there now, see? And
they've got about fifteen new
colts. There's nothing more
inspiring or — beautiful than the
sight of a mare and a new colt.
And it's cool there now, see?
Texas is cool now, and it's
spring. And whenever spring
comes to where I am, I suddenly
get the feeling, my God, I'm not
gettin' anywhere! What the hell
am I doing, playing around 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.
(After a pause.) I've always*

*made a point of not wasting my
life, and everytime I come back
here I know that all I've done
is to waste my life(P.13)*

The quotation above shows how hard Biff to stay with his current job. The sentence *I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of jobs since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same* shows how hard Biff to stay with his current job and he already experienced more than twenty kinds of jobs because he cannot compete with the other worker who is better than him. The phrase *I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere!* shows that Biff felt that he cannot evolve to be better because he did not have enough requirements to get a better job and always do the same thing every day.

Even though Billy always gets a new job, Willy should not get a salary as much as a long-term employee get because he is inexperienced to work in new places. Because Willy has his point of view about economic success, he did not happy about Biff who is working while getting a small price salary.

*How can he find himself on a
farm? 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! (P.7)*

The quotation above shows that Willy is not happy when Biff is working but he only gets a small price of salary. The phrase *But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty-five dollars a week!* shows that Willy is unhappy with Biff's job because he only gets a little money. The phrase *How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life?* shows that Willy is unhappy with Biff because Willy believed that success can only be achieved when you worked in an office and get a lot of money. Willy always believes that in life, money is everything and he always holds into his point of view about that. Another reason why Willy believes that education does not matter and what matters is money and power is because of his brother who has nothing but become successful in his life. His brother's name is Ben and he lived in Alaska.

*What's the mystery? The man
knew what he wanted and went
out and got it! Walked into a
jungle, and comes out, the age
of twenty-one, and he's rich!
The world is an oyster, but you
don't crack it open on a
mattress! (P.27)*

The quotation above shows that how proud Willy to his brother, Ben. The phrase *Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of*

twenty-one, and he's rich! shows that at the first time Ben had nothing when he was young and later he became a successful person, so Willy believes that hard work will bring him success in life just like Ben.

Willy's point of view about economic success is wrong. His son, Biff experienced it. He always struggles to compete with the other work because he does not have enough education, so he tends to quit his job and find another one. Biff also cannot move to be a better person or get a better job which mostly required a person to have enough education. In life, education is the most important thing that you need to have, and then you can evolve to be a better person or get a job that you want and achieve all your dreams.

4.2 SONS' POINT OF VIEW TO THEIR PARENTS

In general, what does it mean by image is what do you think first about someone or what is pictured in your mind when you think about someone. In life, parents are the two people who support our life since we were born without asking a paid bank for what they have done. The image of parents is about what a person thinks first about the figure of the parents looked to them. In this section, the writer is going to discuss what the character of this drama think about their parent which is what Happy and Biff think about their

parents.

In *The Death of Salesman* drama, Willy as the main character has two sons. His firstborn is named Biff and his second is named Happy. Biff has so much experience in working life than Happy while Happy is still in high school. Willy and his wife Linda love their sons, Biff and Happy but Willy as the head of the family felt that he has a big responsibility for the future of his sons. Willy sometimes is more decisive toward his two sons to make them better because Willy already experienced everything bad in life as a salesman in a big city such as New York.

4.2.1 Untrusted Parent

What does it mean by an unbelievable father is when Willy's family member finds out a surprising fact about what happened to Willy or what else that Willy is doing without telling his family. Willy in *The Death of Salesman* drama works as a salesman until he is 55 years old. He worked as a good salesman for more than 40 years and he feels proud of his job. There is something that Willy has been hiding from his family. The thing is that Willy had already got fired from his job a while ago and he has not told his family about it. Willy is always home to his family with money that he borrowed from his friend, Charley.

Why shouldn't he talk to himself? Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty

dollars a week and pretend to me that it's his pay? How long can that go on? How long?

You see what I'm sitting here and waiting for? And you tell me he has no character? The man who never worked a day but for your benefit? When does he get the medal for that? Is this his reward — to turn around at the age of sixty-three and find his sons, who he loved better than his life, one philandering bum...(P.40)

The quotation above shows that Willy had already been fired from his job but he always had money to give to Linda. The phrase *borrowed fifty dollars a week* shows prove that Willy borrowed Charley's money every week because he already got fired.

Charley, as the friend of Willy already knew that Willy always borrows his money because Willy does not have a job. Charley is being nice and offered Willy a job but Willy keeps refusing it and insists that he already has a job. Willy does not realize that he should not live like that forever

I — I just can't work for you, Charley. (P.70)

The quotation above shows that Charley offered Willy a job but he choose not to take it. The phrase *I just can't work for you* shows that even though Charley offered Willy a job,

he decided not to take it, even though Willy already got fired and he just keep borrowing Charley's money every week.

The other reason why Willy refuses to take the job offered by Charley is that he feels jealous of Charley becoming a successful person. Willy has a big pride as a father so he does not want other person's pity but he still needs money. So, he decided to not accept the job but only borrow some money for his family.

You been jealous of me all your life, you damned fool! Here, pay your insurance. (P.71)

The quotation above shows that Charley knows that Willy envies him. The phrase *You been jealous of me all your life, you damned fool!* Shows what Willy felt towards Charley. Willy knew that he could not be like Charley in his life so he keep refusing Charley's job offer but he only borrows his money to pay for the insurance.

The pride that Willy has as a father prevents him to tell his family his true condition. Willy is rather borrowing some money from Charley than accept the job offered by Charley. They should have been solved if Willy accepted the job and he does not have to be stubborn. Sometimes people have to throw away their pride for the happiness of the

family.

4.2.2 Regretting Parents

What does it mean by regret is the feeling of sadness or disappointment when you failed in doing something or making false decisions. In this section, the writer is going to discuss what Willy and Linda have regretted in their life as the parents of their children, Happy and Biff. Willy and Linda as the parents of Biff and Happy feel that they have failed as parents. Willy thinks that he already failed as a father because he cannot do the best for his sons. In the end, Willy chooses to suicide to get the insurance money for paying his debt and giving the rest of it to his family.

(As the car speeds off, the music crashes down in a frenzy of sound, which becomes the soft pulsation of a single cello string. Biff slowly returns to his bedroom. He and Happy gravely don their jackets. Linda slowly walks out of her room. The music has developed into a dead march.

The leaves of day are appearing over everything. Charley and Bernard, somberly dressed, appear and knock on the kitchen door. Biff and Happy slowly descend the stairs to the kitchen as Charley and

Bernard enter. All stop a moment when Linda, in clothes of mourning, bearing a little bunch of roses, comes through the draped doorway into the kitchen. She goes to Charley and takes his arm. Now all move toward the audience, through the wall-line of the kitchen. At the limit of the apron, Linda lays down the flowers, kneels, and sits back on her heels. All stare down at the grave. P.102)

The stage direction above shows the condition after Willy chooses to suicide from the rooftop of his house. The phrase *All stop a moment when Linda, in clothes of mourning, bearing a little bunch of roses, comes through the draped doorway into the kitchen. She goes to Charley and takes his arm* shows Linda's condition after Willy's death and the phrase *clothes of mourning, bearing a little bunch of roses* shows the condition at the cemetery.

Willy felt that he takes a big responsibility for all the problems that happened in his family. Willy also felt that he cannot be the best father for his two sons. Unfortunately, Willy does not know that both his sons love him the way he is but everything is too late for Willy's family.

All right, boy. I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the

only dream you can have — to come out number- one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him. (P.104)

The quotation above shows that Happy loves his father. The phrase *He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him* shows that Happy knows that his father fought for his family and he planned to continue his fight to be a successful person as Willy always taught him. The phrase *He had a good dream* shows that Happy knew his father always wanted the best for his sons and always tried to achieve it as long as he is alive.

Willy finally realizes that Biff loves him so much. He even cries when he realizes that Biff loves him. What Willy thought about Biff this whole time is wrong; he did not hate his father. He loves him with everything he has but only Linda knew it.

Oh, Biff! (Staring wildly.) He cried! Cried to me. (He is choking with his love, and now cries out his promise.) That boy — that boy is going to be magnificent! (Ben appears in the light just outside the kitchen.) (P.99)

The quotation above shows how proud Willy is when he finds out that Biff loves him. The stage direction *(He is choking with his love, and now cries out his promise.)* shows how

much Willy loves him and he feels proud when he knows that his son loves him. He feels that his son is amazing and supports him the best.

The main character had his point of view about the success of the economy. He taught that someone is categorized as a successful person when he or she has a lot of money, not by how high their education is, and that point of view impacts his two sons and his wife. Money is everything if you want to survive in this world. Willy as the main character is obsessed with power. Power here is symbolized by money and position. Willy's point of view about the success of the economy also affects his oldest son, Biff in his working life. He always quit his job and finds a new one because he cannot compete with the other. In the end, it finally reveals that Willy had already getting fired from his job a while ago and he has not told his family about it. Willy is always home to his family with money that he borrowed from his friend, Charley. Willy thinks that he already failed as a father because he cannot do the best for his sons. In the end, Willy chooses to suicide to get the insurance money for paying his debt and giving the rest of it to his family, he died as a hero for his family.

V. CONCLUSION

From the whole analysis, it can be concluded family is something important in

our life because family is the number one support in our life. Family also takes a big part in shaping the characteristics of children. If the children grow in a good and stable family, the children will grow to be better and responsible children, not the opposite. As the head of the family, the father runs the family by his methods. In this drama, the father has his point of view about life that he told his son to follow so he can lead his son to be a successful person in the future.

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