



People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila  
Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of English



**Willy's Perception of the Success Myth Notion and The Quest  
for a Self-hood: A Freudian Study of Arthur Miller's  
“Death of a Salesman”**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Master's Degree in Language, Literature and Civilization**

**Submitted by:**

**Asma CHADDADI**

**Supervised by:**

**Mr. Mohamed GOUFFI**

**Before the following members of jury**

Mr. Bachir SAHED	President	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila
Mr. Mohamed GOUFFI	Supervisor	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila
Miss. Massouda LAADGINI	Examiner	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila

**Academic Year**

**2015/2016**

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled, “Willy’s Perception of the Success Myth Notion and the Quest for a Self-hood: A Freudian Study of Arthur Miller’s *“Death of a Salesman”* is my own work and that all the sources I have quoted have been acknowledged by means of references.

**Signature**

**Date:**

## **DEDICATION**

To the soul of my grandfather,

The one who left fingerprints of grace on our lives. He shall not be forgotten.

To the most precious people to my heart; to all my family and friends.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First and foremost, my immense gratitude goes to Allah the omnipotent for giving me the strength and capacity to achieve this work.

I would like to thank my supervisor Mr. Mohamed GOUFFI for his endless discussions about my topic and for his guidance, help, and general patience in taking so much of his own time for this project despite his busy schedule. He made tremendous efforts to help this dissertation be focused and clear.

Possibly, no words could faithfully convey my profound gratitude. I just want to thank you teacher over for the opportunities you have given me, the wealth of knowledge you have proved to be, and the encouragement I sometimes needed to feel that I would eventually “get it”. I’m indebted to you teacher, for boosting my energy and never stop believing that I’m able to reach the station of success.

I am utterly grateful to the examining members Miss. Massouda LAADGINI and Mr. Bachir SAHED who have accepted to examine my research work. I would thank them for reading this work at a particularly difficult time of the year and for the priceless comments and observations that will help me enormously to polish this work.

I am deeply grateful to all my teachers of the English department who gave me assistance in many ways. I would like to thank them for the academic guidance, the constructive criticism, the encouragement, and mostly for the moral support they provided me with when things went at worst. There is quite a lot to say, but my words fail to express all my gratitude.

Special thanks to Mr. Morad TOUATI; “The Pillar of the English Department.”

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the individual's self-perception by highlighting the quest for a self-hood regarding the American success myth. The chosen corpus of this study is "*Death of a Salesman*", a play written by Arthur Miller as one of the pillars of 20<sup>th</sup> century American drama. Throughout the work, the American protagonist "Willy Loman" displays a salesman's search for his identity in the late 1949 American society. During his quest for self-fulfillment, he clashes with a wrong perception of the success notion due to inner issues, the way that led to his tragic fall. Thus, this research will take as an issue Willy's perception of the Success Myth Notion and the way this perception psychologically affects his quest for a personal self-hood. The main purpose of the present dissertation, hence, is to investigate and elucidate that the motivation of the main character's struggle can be explained from a Freudian standpoint and that "*Death of a Salesman*" is truly a psychoanalytic work through delving into the inner psyche of Willy Loman. Therefore, the study aims, broadly, at (1) elucidating the impact of the "Success Myth" on Willy (2) examining the factors responsible for his perception of the Myth through a deeper analysis of his character and the way these factors interfere in shaping his personality (3) investigating that everything a person feels, thinks, fantasizes, dreams, and makes has a psychological motive. To achieve these goals, the study called for a Psychoanalytic Approach. Such a choice has resorted to the works of Sigmund Freud including the Unconscious mind, Narcissism, Defense Mechanisms, to trace signs of psychological motives held responsible for the plot of the story.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND</b>	
<b>MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL</b>	
<b>FRAMEWORK</b>	
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>I. Freudian Psychoanalytic Criticism.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>I.1. Selected Freudian Concepts</b>	
<b>    I.1.1. Narcissism.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>    I.1.2. The Theory of Personality.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>        I.1.2.1. The Unconscious.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>        I.1.2.2. The Psychic Apparatus: Freud's Structural Hypothesis about Mental</b>	
<b>            Functioning.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>    I.1.3. Defense Mechanisms.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>        I.1.3.1. Repression.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>        I.1.3.2. Regression.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>        I.1.3.3. Denial.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>        I.1.3.4. Other Defenses.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>II. The Success Myth: An Overview.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>    II.1. The Success Myth throughout History.....</b>	<b>24</b>

<b>III. Drama, Arthur Miller, and Psychoanalysis.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>III.1. American Psychological Drama: An Overview.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>III. 2. The Psychological Drama and Miller's Literary Productions.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>III.2.1. Miller's Modes of Writing and Literary Techniques.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>36</b>

## CHAPTER TWO:

### **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: “DEATH OF A SALESMAN”**

#### **AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>I. Willy's Perception of the Success Myth and its Relation to his Personality</b>	
<b>I.1. The Success Notion in Miller's “Death of a Salesman”.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>I.2. Personality versus Personality Disturbance.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>I.2.1. Narcissism and Willy Loman's Quest for Success.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>I.2.2. Willy Loman's Psychic Defenses: Repression, Regression and Denial.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>I. 2. 3. Willy Loman's Unconscious Mind.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>GENERAL CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	

# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

---

Owing to the fact that literature is a repository of both a society's ideologies and its psychological conflicts, it has the capacity to reveal aspects of a culture's collective psyche: the ways in which ideological investments reveal the nature of individuals' psychological relationship to the world. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that American literature would offer a fertile field to explore the interaction between the ideological and psychological dimensions of American life.

*“Death of a Salesman”* of the celebrated Pulitzer Prize winner, American playwright Arthur Miller is one of the representative works of American literature that seeks to draw together these spheres. The play was written in 1949 during the modernist movement and published during postmodernism. It dramatizes how a social event or a society can bring about significant changes in the self-perception of an individual highlighting the loss of identity that have been a pervasive theme in contemporary American literature.

Arthur Miller's tragic protagonist Willy Loman is the quintessential ordinary man striving to achieve extraordinary dreams in the context of great economic depression. Willy's search for the “American Dream” of fame, fortune, and admiration is the hallmark of his identity, but like many of his generation he is unable to meet the unrealistic goals he has set out for himself. Despite failing to achieve the core goals of his identity, Willy Loman's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors were influenced. This dissertation focuses on

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

---

the theme of the quest for a self-hood in relation to the success myth as explained by some of Freudian concepts in Miller's "*Death of a salesman*".

The main purpose of the present dissertation, hence, is to investigate and elucidate that the motivation of the main character's struggle can be explained from a Freudian standpoint and that "*Death of a Salesman*" is truly a psychoanalytic work through delving into the inner psyche of the main character Willy Loman. Such a choice is fuelled by many other reasons which inform the rationale of the research. Therefore, the study equally aims to identify the impact of the "success myth" on Willy, examine the factors responsible for his perception of the "myth" through a deeper analysis of his character and the way these factors interfere in shaping his personality, and investigate that everything a person feels, thinks, fantasizes, dreams, and makes has a psychological motive.

It is noteworthy; that Miller uses a combination between extraordinarily forceful theater with uncanny psychological insights to portray his masterpiece "*Death of a Salesman*". This work studies the intervention of the psychological variables and psychoanalysis of the major character in the play. It elucidates the psychodynamics<sup>1</sup> of the soul, its conflicts which are intrapersonal and interpersonal in nature, and the subsequent attempt to search for a new identity to achieve the emancipation of the soul, thus; giving a new insight into the playwright's work. "*Death of a Salesman*" when studied with the intervention of the psychological variables and psychodynamics of Willy Loman brings out the different ways and means used by this character using the psychic mechanisms as propounded by Freud to deal with his conflicts and achieve emancipation of his soul. Therefore, the motoring issue to be tackled in this work can be reformulated as the

---

<sup>1</sup> The psychodynamic approach includes all the theories in psychology that see human functioning based upon the interaction of drives and forces within the person, particularly unconscious, and between the different structures of the personality.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

---

following question: how does Willy perceive the success myth notion and how does this perception psychologically affect his quest for a personal self-hood?

The present research question is too broad for which an apparatus of sub-questions will help dissect, systematically, the work. The questions are the following: Do psychological issues appear in Willy's character and are they the prominent features of the story? What is the impact of the success myth on Willy and in what ways he was right or wrong in perceiving the myth? Are there problems that affect Willy's perception when he was longing for a notion and how they interfere in shaping his character? What are the motives that pushed Willy to his downfall?

For the reason that the research is going to present an analytical assessment of Arthur Miller's "*Death of a Salesman*", the study called for a Psychoanalytic Approach. In the light of this theory, the study aims broadly at showing how Miller uses his text as an effective paradigm to inner issues by casting the light on psychoanalytic features that are very close to this study. It will try to elucidate the psychological variables within Willy Loman; the leading character of the story relying on the works of Sigmund Freud<sup>2</sup> including the Unconscious mind, Narcissism, Defense Mechanisms. The study has resorted to Freudian Criticism to trace signs of psychological motives that pushed Willy to his way of understanding the notion of success as well as the problems that he was confronting with himself.

Until recently, many researchers have shown interest to Arthur Miller's "*Death of a Salesman*", the play that remains a timeless masterpiece because of its ongoing impact on

---

<sup>2</sup> **Sigmund Freud** (6 May 1856 – 23 September 1939), was an Austrian neurologist who founded the psychoanalytic school of psychiatry. Freud is best known for his theories of the unconscious mind and the defense mechanisms.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

---

society. The existing literature on the play doesn't yet extend far enough to sufficiently address and cover all the aspects of this topic.

Many modern and post modern critics tried to examine the problems of capitalist society for Willy's tragedy. This aspect is shown in Lyndsay Amiro and Dr. Lipscomb's dissertation "*The Wrong Dream in Death of a salesman*" (2012) which emphasizes on the impact of the Great Depression and WWII as it paints a vivid picture of the demands in society and the ways in which people can fall victims to these demands and expectations. These expectations cause Willy's fatal error in judgment and his wrong dream, which is the origin of his inevitable failure.

Additional work held by Steven r. Centola "Family Values in Death of a Salesman" taken from "*Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*" (2007) deals with Willy Loman's self-delusion and moral confusion in relation to Miller's indictment of the competitive, capitalistic society that is responsible for dehumanizing the individual and transforming the once promising agrarian American dream into an urban nightmare, using Willy's collapse to attack the false values of a venal American society.

On the other hand, Jessica L. Tracy and Richard W. Robins' study "*Death of a Salesman: An Integrated Model of Fragile Self-Esteem*" (2006) is concerned with Willy's failure to achieve his core goals by focusing on a one-side analysis, claiming that fragile self-esteem is the reason held responsible for his failure.

This dissertation is important in terms of dealing with Miller's work from a deeper perspective. It is a character-centered study of Miller's protagonist that attempts to investigate other important causes related to his failure away from critics which tried to examine Willy's problems in relation to capitalist society. This research expands the work of Miller to include the whole reasons behind Willy's failure which are completely internal

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

---

factors, identifies a new interpretation of previous work, and determines the way forward for further research. It is a focus that deals entirely with the inner psyche as carried out by some of selected Freudian concepts; how it serves to determine the protagonist's personal identity, and his way of perceiving the ideology of the success myth. It will also show Willy's ideal of the American success myth through subtle actions and shedding lights on the inner of his mind. For that reason, a psychoanalytic criticism is done to analyze the character of Willy Loman. This literary analysis portrays the self as a product of the individual psychological experience. Willy's tragedy is not only the tragedy of an American being affected by "success myth" but it is the story of everyman having identical features in the inner psyche.

Structurally speaking, the work is divided along two main axes. The first chapter will be devoted to the theoretical foundations that are paramount in order to set the base of this study. It is under the heading "Psychoanalysis, Success Myth, and Miller's Psychological Drama: A Theoretical Framework". Therefore due definitions and explanations of basic concepts will be included, notably: Freudian Psychoanalytic Criticism, an overview of the Success Myth, and Miller's literary productions and its relation to the Psychoanalytic Theory as a complement to the work.

The second chapter under the title "Willy Loman's Quest for a Selfhood: "*Death of a Salesman*" as a Psychoanalytic Work" will be an analytical framework. It will shed light on Willy's perception of the Success Myth and its relation to his personality. This part is in turn divided into two. Part One: "The Success Notion in Miller's "*Death of a Salesman*". Part Two: "Personality versus Personality Disturbance" which includes Freudian concepts of Narcissism, the Theory of Unconscious Mind, in addition to, Repression, Regression, and Denial as selected Defense Mechanisms for a study of this scale. Therefore, this chapter will examine the psychic models held responsible for the protagonist's tragedy.

## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

---

The general conclusion will be a synthesis of the main concerns of this research. Hence, this part of the dissertation will provide a clear and concise summary of the main results obtained from various critical views analyzed throughout the body of the work.

**CHAPTER ONE:**

**PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND**

**MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGIACAL DRAMA:**

**A THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

## **Introduction**

At the most basic level, one might say that the practice of literary criticism is applied to various given texts. The theory is devoted to examine the principles behind such texts. One might say that it is a systematic explanation of a text; it brings to light the motives behind it; shows the connection of a text to ideology — the case of the success myth notion—, power structures, peoples' own unconscious, their political and religious attitudes, their economic structures; and above all, theory shows that a text is not something natural but it is a specific historical construct. Such reading entails a great deal of consideration more than merely close attention to the words on the page, or the text as it immediately confronts readers. One needs to know why a text was written, for whom it was written, what religious or moral or political purposes motivated it, as well as its historical and cultural circumstances. Then, indeed, to move on to the issues of its style, its language, its structure, and its literary techniques. The discipline of literary criticism, as operating through both practice and theory, calls for a close, critical, and comprehensive reading.

From literary to scientific, from philosophical to experimental, the twentieth century has been marked by that intense emergence of a wide range of theories. This development, predictably, has created strains and stresses within the institutional structures that contain

and maintain the academic study of literature. They all meant mainly at an explanation of the mysterious and ambiguous human character and behavior that has been changing all over the time and mainly during that period. This change is sometimes due to and sometimes the cause of a tremendous change in the human life, conditions and the technological development that paved the way to new ways of perceiving the relations between people either in the one society or between different societies. However, all the new ways of criticism can not be separated neither from the previous bodies of thought nor from each other. The following is a summary of a critical school that appeared in the last century and was crucial for the understanding of human character as reflected in one of postmodernist literary works "*Death of a Salesman*".

The theoretical part of this chapter is also going to tackle a brief overview about the Success Myth or the so called American Dream throughout different historical periods till the period in which "*Death of a Salesman*" was published in America (1949) and the literature of Arthur Miller and its connection to psychoanalysis for the fulfillment of this chapter.

## **I. Freudian Psychoanalytic Criticism**

Psychology has a great influence on modern writer and is always used to interpret and evaluate literary works. The unstated part of literary characters' experience assumed as much significance as the manifest action after Freud had empirically proved the role the unconscious played in peoples' lives. The inner world of literary characters becomes very interesting for critical exploration, if they happen to be neurotically disposed (Abha 17).

The great changes in social life resulting from the scientific and technological progress gave rise to new ideas in the field of psychology and psychoanalysis; ideas which

had a great impact on the development of literature. Another generation of literary critics drew upon psychoanalysis in their interpretations of literary texts. Such psychoanalytic insight will lead to a better understanding of the work.

## **I. 1. Selected Freudian Concepts**

The aim in this section is to cast light on psychoanalytic features that are very close to this study as represented by Freudian classical psychoanalysis. What is offered in this section is not a full-scale explication of Freudian thought, but a selection of some of Freud's most important concepts needed for the complement of this work.

### **I. 1.1. Narcissism**

Narcissism is a concept in psychoanalytic theory that originates from the myth of Narcissus in Greek mythology. The beautiful boy Narcissus falls in love and becomes obsessed with the captivating beauty of his own reflection in the water (Lowen 26). Freud used this image to describe self-love (Heller 173). Narcissism as a concept was introduced in 1914 by Sigmund Freud in his work "*On Narcissism: An introduction*" (Lowen 11). However, for the purpose of this dissertation, Freud's work on narcissism will not be used as it is considered to be too complex for a literary analysis of this scale.

Drawing on Freud, narcissism is the state of being captivated by and obsessed with one's personal image and ego. Narcissism signifies a personality disturbance characterized by excessive investment in one's own image at the cost of the self. Consequently, narcissists are more concerned with their appearance than their feelings. They deny emotions that would contradict the image they seek to achieve. Narcissists are egocentric, solely focused on achieving their own interests but they lack the true values of the self, such as self-awareness, honesty, dignity, and self-possession (ix).

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

Narcissism is a large and complex psychoanalytic theory that can be daunting to grasp without any prior knowledge in psychology (Lowen 47). Therefore, for this dissertation, only a few aspects of narcissism that are relevant to the work will be considered. These aspects are: the feeling of specialness, grandiosity, denial of emotions, the need of superiority and fear of inferiority, lying, and the inability to feel empathy. Furthermore, a short summary of the common traits of narcissism and an explanation of how these aspects are expressed in general terms will be given below.

The narcissistic personality is generally identified by their most common traits: “*an overt and striking feeling of grandiosity, arrogance, insensitivity to others and denial of emotions*” (49-52). Narcissists have grand fantasies of success, brilliance and act with arrogant and egoistical attitude. They consider themselves as innately superior to others. This is intertwined with a feeling of specialness, a central aspect of the narcissistic personality. Narcissists believe that they are special, unique, perfect, and thereby better than common people. Their pursuit for perfection leads to a need for superiority and power; however, it also leads to a dread of inferiority (75).

This strive for power stems from the belief that, power gives them control over their weakness, also it serves to deny it. Accepting their weaknesses means to acknowledge it which would conflict with their flawless and grandiose image. To maintain or achieve such an image, narcissists deny emotions that could conflict with it. What is more, the inclination to lie without guilt and hesitation as well as the deception of others, even themselves, comes naturally for narcissists. They are analogous to imposters in the sense that both mask their real identity in a shroud of lies and false grandiose claims to project an image that contradicts the truth. Though the vital distinction between the two is that unlike narcissists, impostors are well aware of their facade and use it for the purpose of deception.

On the other hand, narcissists cannot distinguish between lies and truths and the facade becomes a part of their identity (Laplanche 75).

From a social standpoint, narcissists are loners and incapable of healthy relationships. They are characterized by their ruthless, exploitative and manipulative behavior towards other people since they use them for their own benefit (Laplanche 105-6). These characteristics described earlier will be used in the analysis of Willy's notion of success.

### **I. 1.2. The Theory of Personality**

In his early theory about human personality, Freud used the notion of unconscious processes to explain why people often act in ways that seem irrational. He proposed three levels of consciousness, or awareness: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. At the conscious level, people are aware of certain things around them and of certain thoughts. At the preconscious level there are memories or thoughts that are easily available, with a moment's reflection — for example, what people had for breakfast, or the parents' first names. In contrast, the unconscious contains memories, thoughts and motives that one cannot easily call up. The entire id is unconscious: the ego and superego include material at all three levels of consciousness. Figure 1 can be a best embodiment to Freud's early theory about human personality that is divided into three parts (see appendices).

#### **I.1.2.1. The Unconscious**

One of the keystones in psychoanalytic theory is the concept of the unconscious. As Freud writes in his essay "*Psychoanalysis*" (1963):

It was a triumph for the interpretative art of psychoanalysis when it succeeded in demonstrating that certain common mental acts of normal people, for which no one had hitherto attempted to put forward a psychological explanation, were

to be regarded in the same light as the symptoms of neurotics<sup>1</sup> . . . A class of material was brought to light which is calculated better than any other to stimulate a belief in the existence of unconscious mental acts even in people to whom the hypothesis of something at once mental and unconscious seems strange and even absurd. (235–236)

So, the unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that are outside of conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict. According to Freud, the unconscious continues to influence behavior and experience, even though people are unaware of these underlying influences. They are not, then, aware of everything that is going on in their minds. Not only that, they are aware of only a little that is going on in their minds meaning that only a small portion of mental life is accessible (Berger 76).

### **I.1.2.2. The Psychic Apparatus: Freud's Structural Hypothesis about Mental Functioning**

Freud made notable contributions to the development of Psychoanalysis. He is the author of the structural model of personality by classifying mental activity into conscious, preconscious and unconscious. But later on he found this classification insufficient. In this theory, he introduced three new entities, explaining that each person's personality is formed of three interlocking parts: the Ego, the Superego and the Id. They are, for the most part, unconscious. Each operates according to different, even contrasting, principles (Dobie 51).

Ego denotes the entities through which the individual becomes aware of his own existence and the existence of the external world. Freud placed a large segment of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Neurosis: in psychology, a disabling or distressing disorder, often manifesting itself in irrational anxiety (Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack 71).

human ego in the unconscious. Part of the superego is conscious and part is unconscious. The unconscious censor in charge of repression is part of the ego-repression. The id is the bedrock of the unconscious, “*a cauldron of seething excitement, untamed passions and destructive instinct*” (Winson 136), In that way, repression is a mechanism that the ego uses to defend itself against the impulses of the id’s destructive forces.

Psychoanalysis is the process of using knowledge about these three parts of someone’s personality to analyze the ways that a person behaves and the way they influence the literary work as a whole (Abha 17).

### **A) The Id**

The id, the most primitive part, can be thought of as a sort of a storehouse of biologically based urges: the urges to eat, drink, eliminate and especially, to be sexually stimulated. The id operates according to what Freud called the pleasure principle.

It is the repository of the libido<sup>2</sup>; the source of the psychic energy and the psychosexual desires which gives humans their vitality, or simply the sexual energy that underlies these urges, because it is always trying to satisfy its hunger for pleasure and its fundamental urges immediately and reflexively as they arose. It operates without any thought of rules, realities of life, consequences, anxiety, ethics, logic, precaution, or morality. Demanding swift satisfaction and fulfillment of biological desires, it is lawless, asocial, and amoral. As described by Freud, the id is “*only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle*”

---

<sup>2</sup> Libido: in psychoanalytic discourse and theory, a psychic energy or drive associated with sexual instinct. When men hit fifty and women go through menopause, some will complain of lack of libido, or sex drive. Freud used the term libido more broadly—as psychic energy, encompassing sexuality but also including the desire for pleasure through stimulation and achievement (Heller, 164).

(qtd. in Dobie 51). This part of the human psyche is usually bridled and managed by the ego.

Obviously, the id can be a socially destructive force. Unrestrained, it will aggressively seek to gratify its desires without any concern for law, customs, or values. It can even be self-destructive in its drive to have what it wants. In many ways it resembles the devil figure that appears in some theological and literary texts, because it offers strong temptation to take what one wants without heeding normal restraints, taboos, or consequences (51).

### **B) The Ego**

To prevent the chaos that would result if the id went untamed, other parts of the psyche must balance its passions. The ego is one such regulating agency, its function is to make the id's energies and motives non-destructive by postponing them or diverting them into socially acceptable actions and outlets, sometimes by finding an appropriate time for gratifying them. *"It keeps a person working for a living, getting along with people, and generally adjusting to the realities of life"* (qtd. in Dobie 51). Indeed, Freud characterized the ego as working in the service of the reality principle. That is, the ego tries to satisfy the id's urge for pleasure but only in realistic ways that takes account of what is possible in the real world.

The ongoing tension between the insistent urges of the id and the constraints of reality helps the ego develop more and more sophisticated thinking skills. Although it is for the most part unconscious, the ego is the closest of the three parts of the psyche to what people think of as consciousness, for it mediates between the inner selves and the outer world. Nevertheless, it is not directly approachable. One comes closest to knowing it, when it is

relaxed by hypnosis, sleep, or unintentional slips of the tongue. Dreams, then, become an important means of knowing what is hidden in one's inner self (Dobie 51).

### **C) The Superego**

The third part of the psyche; the superego provides additional balance to the id for it furnishes a sense of guilt for behavior that breaks the rules given by parents to the young child. Similar to what is commonly known as one's conscience, it operates according to the morality principle, for it provides the sense of moral and ethical wrongdoing. Although parents and other authorities, who enforce their values through punishments and rewards, are the chief source of the superego, it is expanded by institutions and other influences later in life. Consequently, it works against the drive of the id and represses socially unacceptable desires back into the unconscious.

Balance between the license of the id and the restrictions of the superego produces the healthy personality, but when unconscious guilt becomes overwhelming, the individual can be said to be suffering from a "*guilt complex*" (52). When the superego is too strong, it can lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the self. The superego may condemn as "wrong" certain things which the ego would otherwise do to satisfy the id. But the superego is not all fire and brimstone. Its conscience-like prodding is also guided by what Freud called ego ideal, a set of positive values and moral ideals that are pursued because they are believed to be worthy.

Freud sees ego acting as a sort of mediator between the id with its blind demands for instant gratification and the superego with its rigid, often irrational rules, prohibitions and ideals. The ego's task of satisfying both id and superego requires risky balancing act. For example, if the ego yields to the id's desire for something that is morally forbidden the

superego may punish the ego with feelings of guilt. The ego's task often involves finding a compromise between the instinctual gratification sought by the id and the strict rule-following sought by the superego.

Freud theorized that personality contains three structures—the id, ego, and superego—and that the mind is like an iceberg in which the unconscious making up 90% while the conscious (like the tip of the iceberg floating above water) makes only 10% of the mind (see figure 2, appendices). <sup>3</sup>

Freud saw the id as the energizer of the entire psyche — the great 'reservoir of the libido'. The ego after all is only a portion of the id. It must, on the whole, carry out the id's intentions. It fulfills its task by finding out the circumstances in which those intentions can find fulfillment. The ego has to solve three severe masters i.e. the external world, the superego and the id (Rajeshwar 02).

### **I.1.3. Defense Mechanisms**

Life can be cruel. To protect the ego from the slings and arrows of a sometimes harsh reality, one erects defense mechanisms — unconscious strategies of the ego to distort reality and lessen anxiety. Many of the defense mechanisms that Freud identified are part of people's everyday parlance. Though they all use them, they become a problem when used excessively or inflexibly, as in the neuroses (Heller 67).

Psychoanalytic theory holds the view that because the id's unconscious demands are instinctual, infantile and amoral they must often be blocked by the ego and superego. This conflict coupled with the persistence of unsatisfied demands causes anxiety and guilt. The person then seeks ways to protect the ego from this anxiety through several defense

---

<sup>3</sup> [http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1530/1567154/278-316\\_CH08\\_61939.pdf](http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1530/1567154/278-316_CH08_61939.pdf)

mechanisms by which the ego disguises, redirects, hides and otherwise copes with id's urges.

Many psychologists do not agree with Freud's view that defense mechanisms originate in unconscious conflicts among the id, ego and superego. However, many do agree that these mechanisms account for some of the ways people cope with their problems. Defense mechanisms are generally accepted as a useful way of looking at how people handle stressful situations and conflicts or simply the processes by which the contents of the unconscious are kept in the unconscious (Clifford 578). The following is a brief explanation to some of the defense mechanisms that are closer to this study.

### **I.1.3.1. Repression**

This is the commonest and most prominent defensive operation used in mental life, and it frequently operates in conjunction with other defenses. It occupies a singular place in the history of psychoanalytic concepts. It refers to the barring from consciousness of ideas, feelings, thoughts, fantasies, and memories.

Ideas, fantasies, and memories associated with the instinctual drives are constantly pressing for discharge and entry into consciousness, where they can lead to action and gratification. The defense of repression keeps these thoughts in the unconscious part of the mind. But various repressed ideas, fantasies, and memories may overcome what is keeping them repressed and become conscious in dreams, slips of the tongue, daydreams, and symptoms.

Although repression can occur at any time during life, it regularly arises concerning memories in childhood. The repression of memories from this period is known as infantile amnesia. In adult life, repression is particularly apparent in amnesia, fugue states, and in

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

patients who tend to have symptoms and character traits associated with hysteria (Beak 07).

A defense mechanism, acts to keep information out of conscious awareness. People repress, or banish from consciousness ideas, memories, feelings or motives that are especially disturbing, forbidden or, otherwise unacceptable to them. These memories do not just disappear; they continue to influence behavior. The process of repression is itself unconscious and automatic. One does not choose to repress an idea or impulse, it just happens, whenever the idea or impulse is so painful and anxiety-arousing that one must escape from it. In such cases, one's anxiety triggers repression, and the unacceptable material is buried in the unconscious. The material repressed is usually something that clashes painfully with ethical standards or self-image (Clifford 578).

According to Freud, repressed material does not remain safely tucked away. Instead, it continues to operate underground, often converting the repressed conflicts into neurosis-disturbed behavior involving anxiety or defenses against anxiety. Neurotic symptoms often bear a symbolic relationship to the repressed material that is causing them. Freud believes that the repressed material is not dormant but active — in unconscious, often painful ways (579).

To reduce kinds of anxiety, the brain shunts from consciousness a dangerous impulse, idea, or memory. For example, a man forgets to attend the nuptial of his brother to a woman to whom he was attracted, repressing his continued romantic interest in her. In another example, a lady had, over a two-year period, cared for her terminally ill husband, to whom she had been happily married for twelve years, but after his death she had no memory of getting married or of her life with her husband before his illness. Photos of her marriage and their life together seemed like a dream or something from a past life; they

jiggled no recall of the photographed events. Her husband's long illness and death had been so traumatic that she had to repress the good times, because she could not bear to think about the happiness she had lost.

Freud believed that repression explains why humans do not remember the childhood lust for their mother or father that he hypothesized to exist in their unconscious. At the same time, this lust is incomplete, and the repressed urges seep out in dreams and slips of the tongue (Heller 68).

### **I.1.3.2. Regression**

According to Freud, Regression is the temporary return to a former psychological state which is not just imagined but relived. It can involve a return either to a painful or a pleasant experience. It is a defense because it carries one's thoughts away from some present difficulty. So, in the face of a threat, one may retreat to an earlier pattern of adaptation, possibly a childish or primitive one. Adults too, sometimes revert in stress-producing situations to childish episodes of exaggerated dependency. Such behavior may ward off anxiety by focusing attention on earlier ways of achieving tranquility (Berger 81).

Freud suggested that everyone resorts to defense mechanisms from time to time. When used sparingly and without cost to others, they are nothing to worry about. However, if a person comes to depend on them too much, then those defensive patterns may be harmful. They do not solve the real problems; they only relieve anxiety about it (Clifford 591).

This complex behavior pattern or psychic phenomenon is a fundamental characteristic of mental life. When the term is used to designate a defensive process, it can refer to drive, ego, or superego functioning. In the first of these, it refers to a return to the wishes and

aims of the earlier phases, in an effort to avoid the anxieties. Thus, a woman might express intense longings to sit in her male friend's lap and be taken care of, while her unconscious wishes for intercourse with him and a baby are repressed. An example of the regression of ego functioning for the purpose of defense would be a five-year-old boy who reverts to sucking his thumb and wanting a bottle when his sister is born (Beak 06).

Namely, one retrieves to an earlier, more primitive form of behavior to avoid pain or threat. Freud made this comparison to "*a stream of water which meets with an obstacle in the river bed is dammed up and flows back into old channels which had formerly seemed fated to run dry*" (Heller 70). In other words, whenever confronting a tough decision or a threatening situation, one returns to an earlier stage.

### **I.1.3.3. Denial**

Repression blocks internal thoughts from conscious awareness, whereas, denial blocks external events whose perception threatens one's ego. Repression makes sense of the refusal to recognize an internal reality or source of anxiety, such as a taboo impulse; on the other hand, denial is the refusal to acknowledge an external source of anxiety. Considering the following example in which a woman who has been diagnosed as terminally ill may go on planning a lengthy trip to be taken when she is well again. Denial is usually resorted to by children or by people facing a very serious threat like a terminal illness or the death of a loved person (Chang 01-2).

All people deny reality to some extent. For instance, a husband lies dying; his wife continues to set his place at the table denying his impending death. Smokers and junk food eaters deny the potential health risks of their habits. Gamblers keep taking chances that the slot machine will pour out thousands of quarters or that one of the hundreds of lottery

tickets they purchased will be the winner, denying the extremely slim likelihood of winning a fortune.

In similar cases, supposing a person who felt very vulnerable does not take in, acknowledge, or believe some aspect of reality. In order to ward off feelings of helplessness, he/she starts fantasizing or acting as if he/she was strong and powerful. Additional examples can be, a dying patient denies the fact of his illness, or a man's wife died last night, but he believes that she is still alive. In this way; denial is reserved for blocking out external reality (Beak 05).

While denial can be dangerous, as in continuing to smoke or overeat, it can also be adaptive. Considering the example of denying that one has a terminal cancer may keep his mood more upbeat and might actually facilitate healing rather than allowing him to become deeply depressed and lose all hope (Heller 69).

#### **I.1.3.4. Other Defenses**

**A) Reaction Formation** — reversal of motives is one of the defense mechanisms by which people attempt to cope with conflicts. A motive that would arouse unbearable anxiety if it were recognized is converted into its opposite.

**B) Projection** — blaming others or what is known as 'projection' is a way of coping with one's unwanted motives by shifting them on to someone else. The anxiety arising from the internal conflict can then be lessened and the problem dealt with as though it were in the external world. Carried to the extreme, projection is the mark of a behavior disorder known as paranoia. People with this disorder may project their own unacceptable hostile feelings about others into a whole system of thinking in which they feel that others are out to get them (Clifford 589).

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

**C) Rationalization** — this defense mechanism substitutes an acceptable conscious motive for an unacceptable unconscious one. People ‘make excuses’ giving a reason different from the real one for what they are doing. Rationalization is not lying; one believes his/her explanation. It is a common mechanism all people use to bolster their self-esteem when they have done something foolish. Examples about rationalization range from the innocent to the serious.

**D) Intellectualization** — it involves reasoning. In which, the intensity of the anxiety is reduced by a retreat into detached, unemotional and abstract language. Temporarily separating emotional and cognitive components sometimes helps the individual to deal with parts of an experience when the whole is too much to handle.

**E) Displacement** — in displacement, the motive remains unaltered but the person substitutes a different goal object for the original one. Often the motive is aggression that for some reason the person cannot vent on the source of the anger. Thus by displacing aggression, the one finds a substitute outlet.

Modern psychology has exercised extensive influence on literature especially in the twentieth century when psychoanalysis grew into a worldwide movement. It became not only the dominant influence in psychiatry, but it also found its way into literature including drama and other products of Western culture. *“Freudian psychology had flooded the field like a rising tide and the rest of us were left submerged like clams buried in the sands at low tide”* (Winson 147), it is in this way Freudian theories have changed the way Western man thought about himself.

Today in literature one comes across neurotic characters. Neurotic characters are perhaps those who behave with psychological truth. They are cast in distant modes and the

most common of these is that the character is shown as healing himself of his ailment on becoming aware of certain hidden facts about himself (Winson 02).

Freud's three-tier structure of personality is by common consensus the first comprehensive theory of personality. Id, ego and superego are the three components of personality. The id is the contact point between the psychic structure and the instinctual energy emanating from the body and the storehouse of psychic energy, as Freud describes in his "*New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*" as a pot full of livid excitations (qtd. Rajeshwa 106).

In the end, when making a Freudian psychoanalytical reading of a text, consideration must be given to the work itself, looking at its conflicts, characters, dream sequences, and symbols. By using the language Freud provided to discuss what theorists preceded him did not give names, having awareness that outward behavior may not be consonant with inner drives, avoiding over simplification of analysis, exaggerated interpretations of symbolism and excessive use of psychological jargon; one can have the means to explore not only what is apparent on the surface but what is below it as well (Dobie 55).

Freud's theory is going to be used to analyze the character of Willy Loman in one of the most famous postmodernist plays "*Death of a Salesman*" by the American playwright Arthur Miller. The story depicts Willy's obsession with the success myth notion or the American Dream which can be seen from a psychological perspective.

## **II. The Success Myth: An Overview**

The "Success Myth" or the American Dream is widely considered a cornerstone of the national ethos of the United States. The idea success is something quintessential to the American culture. It is an ideal that had started from the arrival of the puritans to the new

continent, and lasted till nowadays. This chapter presents a brief overview of the success myth and the way it is related to Arthur Miller's "*Death of a Salesman*".

## **II.1. The Success Myth throughout History**

The success myth is an ideal that has been presented since the beginning of the American history. It began when people wanted to change their lives by introducing new principles as freedom, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. It is the idea which suggests that anyone can succeed in his life through hard work and pursues whatever he dreams of, and that any one has the right to live a happy and a new life. The concept holds nearly all higher American ideals: the religious ideals of a moral nation and a political ideal of a democratic country, and the dream of both material and spiritual comfort.

The American dream has been used in varying contexts, and has come to mean different things to different people; it has captured the imagination of people from all walks of life, and represents the heart and the soul of the country. It is a term tightly associated with a social, economic, political, and cultural organization of the United States since the beginning of the country's history. In his book "*The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*" (2003), Jim Cullen, Sketches out six different aspects, which have contributed to the concept of the American dream: The religious purity of the puritan settlers, the establishment of political freedom with Declaration of Independence, the dream of upward mobility, the dream of equality, the dream of home ownership, the dream of easy living on the west coast (06).

The first appearance of the term American dream has been traced to the historian James Truslow Adams in his book "*The Epic of America*" (1931) in which he defined it as:

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

The American dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every one with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (404)

As one can see, there is an apparent emphasis on a particular theme in Adams's definition of the American Dream— self-fulfillment. This is divided into two parts. Firstly, every man and woman has the opportunity “to become richer and better”. Secondly, the success one may achieve is according to one's “ability or achievement”. In other words, Adams advocates that everyone has the opportunity of achieving success, but also stresses that one can only attain the success equivalent to one's own ability and achievement.

The American dream has served as a roadmap for every person to take his chance in life and make his own decisions without thinking of the limitation of race, religion, or class as Jim Cullen stated: *“That American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world, the dream or hope has been presented from the start”* (Adams 06).

The American Dream is deeply rooted in the American history, it dates back to the early settlers, the Puritans who crossed the ocean and landed on the New Continent seeking the opportunity to worship their religion without getting interrupted by tyranny and autocracy of king or rulers. Few decades later, new waves of immigrants landed on the new continent in search of wealth and limitless land. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the dream took another shape which was the fight for ideals like democracy, property and the pursuit of happiness (Wendell 55).

---

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

On the Fourth of July 1776, America signed the Declaration of Independence which states in its second sentence "*that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness*". The declaration brought to America a new sense of democratic freedom and established a notion of a society in which anything was possible. An American dream was born; a dream that boasted democracy, equality, prosperity and freedom. America became a land of opportunity where every man had power over his own destiny (Brogan 174).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the discovery of gold, the love of the unknown, and the desire to spread the Christian religion pushed thousands of the frontiersmen and pioneers to cross the wilderness to discover what is beyond the Appalachian Mountains. In the same century (Turner 35), The Civil War has contributed to bring the dream equality among the Americans with no racial, religious, social, or geographical differences through the reconstruction amendments.

In the early decades of the twentieth century — the 1920s — the Dream took another path and became mainly linked with the quest for wealth. It turned to be a quest for a comfortable, new and luxurious life rather than the spiritual side. These issues contributed in corrupting the noble purpose of the American Dream, where the well-breed society, the tradition and individualism ceased to exist during the early decade of the twentieth century. Prohibition, moral decadence, social distinction, the desire for social mobility and crimes became the dominant features of the decade. Wealth becomes the idol for the Americans and the American Dream was corrupted by greed, materialism and the fierce competition within the middle class to join the upper class.

---

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

The Depression of the 1930s seemed to break the promise of the American Dream, the promise that America had made to its citizens — that if one worked hard enough, he could enjoy success and prosperity. The crash of the stock market in 1929 ended a particular version of history of infallible optimism and confidence. The American dream seemed to fade (Bigsby, "Afterword" 13). And yet the myth of the American Dream was so potent in the national psyche that it did not really disappear. It lingered on and continues to exercise a tremendous hold in American discourse as individuals evaluate the causes of their success or failure. It was the common person's experience of this powerful American Myth—a myth that manifested for some but evaded others—that inspired Miller to write *"Death of a Salesman"* (Mackinnon 13).

Following the period of hard times brought on by the Great Depression and the Second World War, America experienced an unprecedented period of economic growth. The boom of the late 1940s, however, didn't bring prosperity to everyone. The massive amount of people buying goods triggered inflation and many Americans on moderate wages suddenly found themselves unable to afford a lot of products.

The first workers to be hit hard by this change in the economic situation were the lowest-paid, unskilled workers like field laborers, shop clerks, janitors, waiters and salesmen. At the same time, other members of American society — shareholders, professionals, businessmen, middle management — would have been enjoying the benefits of a massive boost in corporate earnings. The rich started getting richer while the poor started getting poorer — a trend that has continued in America to this day. Thus, the 1940s where *"Death of a Salesman"* was published made a turning point in the history of the American Dream of success.

### **III. Drama, Arthur Miller, and Psychoanalysis**

This Part of the chapter is going to establish a link between the theory discussed earlier and drama, more specifically; between Psychoanalysis and Arthur Miller's theatrical productions. Furthermore, it will display the playwright's modes of writing and literary techniques for the complement of this work.

#### **III.1. American Psychological Drama: An Overview**

The psychological play is as old as drama itself. The mystery of human motivation was the subject matter of the ancient Greek dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. At least five centuries before the Christian era, audiences were responding to the stories of Oedipus, who inadvertently slew his father and married his mother, and Electra, whose destiny was to avenge her father's death by causing the murder of her brother.

During the years when Sigmund Freud was formulating his concepts, Clyde Fitch was the finest realist of the turn of the century; he depicted in his plays studies of human characters that are endowed with a shining virtue or possessed by one absorbing vice. Credit for the first application of a psychoanalytic — as contrasted with a pre-Freudian — concept of psychiatry in American drama rightly belongs to Arthur Hopkins (Schneider 21).

Concerning the era of transition — Post WWI Era — the playwrights were seeking for new themes to replace the war and turning to psychoanalysis as a major topic. With the exception of Arthur Hopkins's "*The Fatted Calf*", American plays had been skirting the main issues of psychoanalysis and dangling before the public only the more superficial and

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

palatable of gleanings. Beginning with the 1919 season, however, the critics themselves noted the new era (170).<sup>4</sup>

The playwright who epitomizes the Freudian period is Eugene O'Neill. O'Neill, Philip Barry and S. N. Behrman were the three significant American playwrights of the twenties. They reflected Freudian thinking to some extent. Significant dramatists of the era Owen Davis' treatment of Freudian subjects are in fact almost a miniature history of psychoanalysis in American drama (171).

The thirties were significant as a transitional decade in American history and no less crucial as a transition in the American drama. The most conspicuous shift was from an interest in isolated aspects of individual psychology to group-centered problems. With the changed attitude, however, the influence of psychoanalysis did not diminish. Rather the insights of psychoanalysis were variously applied to social problems as related to prisons, schools, labor and management, poverty, juvenile delinquency, fascism and radicalism. Theodore Dreiser wrote a number of plays dealing with reform schools and the general subject of juvenile delinquency, finally branching off into more general explorations of adolescent psychology (171).

In the third generation of psychoanalytic writers, one finds a group of young talents, many of them with wartime service, who are very much aware of the sociopolitical pressures in the contemporary world and who are able to interpret them in the light of unconscious motivation. Subtly and with personally created symbols they are able to apply psychoanalytic insights to such various problems as race relations, juvenile delinquency and the American occupation of conquered countries. If there is a difference between the post-war group and their sociological-minded predecessors in the thirties, it is the

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.chegg.com/homework-help/definitions/psychological-realism-41>

disappearance by now of doctrinaire political theories to explain the world's troubles in favor of a psychological substructure of unconscious conflict within the inter-acting individuals who compose the social and political masses.

Of all American playwrights, Tennessee Williams is more characteristic of his generation. He is more psychoanalytically-oriented. Arthur Miller too, was influenced by psychological realism. In this mode of realism the subjective reactions of man's inner consciousness are objectified and enacted on the stage. Playwrights used the flashback and stream-of-consciousness techniques to give fluidity and depth to drama.

### **III. 2. The Psychological Drama and Miller's literary Productions**

Miller was one of the many writers of the 40s and 50s who were influenced by psychoanalytic methodology in which he depicts the inner thoughts of characters. Miller felt the need for theatrical idiom to address social and political concerns in the 50s. So he used Expressionism. His plays depict private and public issues and they probe into the inner world of private relations and emotions (Nelson 88).

In all of his plays, Miller has consistently given a high attention to the human social and psychological conditions. In fact, Miller's literature is a remarkably diverse yet tautly consistent group of major works that have made him the major American dramatic writer of his time, perhaps of the twentieth century. He produced many noticeable literary pieces among which one can mention: *Death of a Salesman*, *All My Sons*, *A View from the Bridge*, *The Crucible*, *After the Fall*, *Broken Glass*, *The Price* and *The Last Yankee* (Bigsby, "The Cambridge Companion" 230).

Miller was relentless to excavate his own and the general human psyche and to place his discoveries into hypotheses about the human experience that draw broad conclusions,

the thing that makes his plays so compelling and powerful. “*Great drama*,” he declares, “*is great questions or it is nothing but technique*.” It is this notion of ‘great questions’ that Miller has been most interested to explore, throughout his work (Miller, “Timebends” 180).

### **III. 2.1. Miller’s Modes of Writing and Literary Techniques**

In his attempt to expose the real motives of his characters, Miller resorts to theatrical techniques in his play as a language to expose their psychological motives by delving into the inner mind of the characters. It is important to look at the dramatic techniques that Miller employed to expose such motives and to explain how his plays go so smoothly and so powerfully.

#### **A) The Psyhcic Time**

By studying his literary pieces carefully, one may clearly find two sorts of time. One is “*psychic time, the way we remember things; the other is the sense of time created by the play and shared by the readers as well as the audience*”(Roudane 363). Christopher Bigsby also noted Miller’s treatment of time in the introduction he has written in “*Death of a Salesman*”, declaring that:

There is also what Miller has called “social time” and “psychic time.” By social time he seems to mean the unfolding truth of the public world which provides the context for the character’s life, while psychic time is evident in memories which crash into his present, creating ironies, sounding echoes, taunting him with a past which can offer him nothing but reproach. All these different notions of time blend and interact, that interaction being a key to the plays’ effect. (xi)

Partly because of the advance of modern psychology has made it easy to switch from the present to its memory in the past and back again. It offers “*many profound clues toward a work’s thematic and symbolic mysteries*” (Wilfred 121). So, one returns to the past and comes back to the present without difficulty making transitions. This technique of time treatment is totally free from time bounding. Partly because an illusion of such movement lies within the structure of the play.

For Miller, the playwright’s job is to show history being made, in the details of past events insinuated into present experience. This is central to Miller for two reasons: because of his links to his own past and because America must constantly be reminded that it has one. Most of his plays are indeed for those overlappings of time by which the past and the present melt together into a composite time that informs a more total notion of experience. It is the past and the present collapsed together, inseparable and yet discrete sense-memory layerings, that give one the sense of ‘unity’ over any sense of difference or separation (Bigsby, “The Cambridge Companion” 234).

### **B) Flash-backs in the Stream-of-Consciousness Style**

This theatrical technique serves to present the character’s present dilemma that is closely connected with the past. It is important that the plays establish the convention within which they operate so that the audience is aware that it is seeing time manipulated in a certain way. In each play, one deals with the imaginings of the protagonist and whenever he lapses into memory and the action is cited in the past, the characters step out of the conventional ‘fourth wall’ of the conventional set. This is also known as a flashback.

Arthur Miller used flashbacks to create a montage of events. “*Montage is the business of juxtaposing two images which would not normally be found side by side in real life to*

*create a third meaning*" (Adrian 83), in which the character does not actually go back to the past. It is the past, as in a hallucination, that comes back to him. Each time when he is frustrated, guilty, or accused by others, he will be in a dream and the past appears in his mind.

The reason for the stream-of-consciousness technique is to show the unconscious desires in order to avoid pain and to repair the bitterness, frustrations and humiliation of daily life at the present. The past as in hallucination comes back to the character, but it does not come in the right order or chronologically as in a flashback. It comes dynamically with the inner logic of the character's erupting volcanic unconscious. Here a mind breaks under the invasion of primitive impulses no longer capable of compromise with reality, "*the technique of psychic projection, of hallucination, of the guilty expression of forbidden wishes dramatized*" (Schneider 253); this happens when a character cannot stand the bitterness of the reality, for that reason, he goes back to the past in his mind.

### **C) Expressionism**

Expressionism is a theatrical technique which uses the stage to "*create a scene symbolic of the workings of a character's mind*" (Adrian 81). The main concern with expressionism was the creation of images of the inner self – a concept that was developed by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in the early twentieth century. Employing the expressionist theatrical technique allows the audience to focus on the psychology of the piece rather than just on the social conditions of the play.

Miller introduces the expressionistic style in his plays when most of the things are mental and emotional, not physical. The psychological picture created for each character, and the way characters interact, are real and rooted in mental states. It reproduces the psychological urgency of past events. As observed by Barbara Lounsberry in her article

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

“*The Expressionistic devices in Death of a Salesman*”, Willy Loman is Miller’s brilliant demonstration that expressionistic technique can express inner as well as outer forces, and that expressionism can be used to create humane character (Lounsberry 11-2).

Symbolism plays an important role in Expressionistic technique. Miller uses symbolism where “*language or even montage cannot convey meaning accurately or economically*” (Adrian 89). In this way, symbolism allows a meaning to be conveyed without being explicit to the readers/audiences.

Poetic language is brought out with the help of metaphors, images and symbols which are often embedded in the idioms and slang expressions of the common man’s language. Considering the illusions that appear so suffused within the psychodynamics and vocabulary of the characters show that there was a melting of the barriers between inner and outer worlds which gave Miller’s plays their disturbing, poetic quality. In the symbolic, structural and verbal styles of the plays, Miller makes use of expressionistic technique. He used apt metaphors to show the gap between the private life and the social life.

### D) Psychological Realism

Literary works that grow out of Psychological Realism are considered to be character-driven and place special emphasis on the internal of the protagonist or other characters’ point-of-view. In these works, the actual plot is not only secondary, but arises from the motives, fears, and reactions of characters to the dilemmas that confront them.<sup>5</sup>

Miller believes that a playwright chooses this style when he decides that the private or family aspects of his hero’s life, rather than the social or symbolic side, will predominate

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.chegg.com/homework-help/definitions/psychological-realism-41>

---

## CHAPTER ONE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, SUCCESS MYTH, AND MILLER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

---

in a play. *“His own approach”*, he says, *“has varied from the realistic to the heroic in accordance with the relative proportion of psychological - as opposed to social- causation in each of his dramas”* (Miller, “Spoken Arts Records” 704).

These theatrical skills give dimension to the portrait of characters and without them, the plays would be a sentimental pieces of work, and it would be very hard for the audiences/readers to feel the tragic sense of the hero.

Arthur Miller’s plays depict psychic aberrations, exhibit insights into the psychology of desperation and finally reflect his ability to create stories that express the deepest meanings of struggle which have made him one of the most highly regarded and widely performed American dramatists.

## **Conclusion**

The three bodies of thought discussed earlier are closely interrelated. Their interrelatedness stems from the psychological nature of Miller's plays themselves. Psychoanalysis can therefore, be used as a description of the processes that contribute to understand the characters' psyches as reflected in the literary text with the help of the theatrical techniques that Miller uses to approach his stories.

In the next chapter, Arthur Miller's "*Death of a Salesman*" is going to be analyzed from a Freudian psychological perspective revealing how Freud's concepts have a link with what was happening with the leading character, the impact of the "success myth" on him as well as the key factors responsible for his perception of that myth through a deeper analysis of his character and the way these factors interfere in shaping his personality.

Miller was one of the many writers who were influenced by psychoanalytic methodology to depict the inner thoughts of characters. His plays depict private and public issues; they probe into the inner world of private relations and emotions. Miller invites the audience to enter the inside of Willy's head, in effect; the audience becomes privy to the crisis within Willy.

Miller felt the need for theatrical idiom to address the inner life of characters and the techniques of dramatizing events is a skillful interweaving of psychological issues with reality of America at that period.

**CHAPTER TWO:**

**WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR**

**A SELFHOOD: “*DEATH OF A SALESMAN*”**

**AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

## **Introduction**

One of Sigmund Freud's greatest accomplishments was creating psychoanalysis which is a systematic structure of theories concerning the relation of conscious and unconscious psychological processes. Freudian psychoanalytic critics have great contributions to literature. In a way, they give central importance to the literary interpretation and to the distinction between the unconscious and conscious mind. Besides, they pay close attention to unconscious motives and feelings, whether those of the author or of the characters depicted in the work. In addition, they demonstrate the presence in the literary work of classic psychoanalytic symptoms, conditions, or phases and make large scale applications of psychoanalytic concepts to literary history in general. Furthermore, they identify a psychic context to the literary work, at the expense of social or historical context, privileging the individual "psycho-drama" above the social drama of classic conflict. The conflict between generations, siblings, or between competing desires within the same individual looms much larger than the conflict between social classes (Barry 105).

Among other things, tragedy dramatizes identity crises. The loss of identity and the quest for it have been a pervasive theme in contemporary American literature which is embodied in Arthur Miller's tragedy "*Death of a Salesman*". Modern man suffers and his

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

life becomes a tale of suffering, ending with the cessation of earthly life, owing to a number of entirely different causes. In his play, Miller presents modern man's desire for psychic wholeness, an American dreamer Willy Loman can lose his self-worth by many negative situations that occur throughout his life.

Arthur Miller may not have intended his play; "*Death of a Salesman*", to be a psychoanalytic work; however examples of Freudian theory seem to be on every page. The reason for the numerous examples of Freudian concepts derives from the fact that both the play and psychoanalysis are about family, or more precisely familial relationships. Louis Tyson explains that family is important to psychoanalytic theory, because people are each a product of the role they are given in the family-complex.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the story "*Death of a Salesman*" can be seen through a psychoanalytical lens.

"*Death of a Salesman*" is based on a salesman's obsession with the success myth in the context of great economic depression. Arthur Miller's American dreamer Willy Loman is an illustration of much practiced philosophy of being well liked. People in a modern business oriented society tend to run after profit without realizing their own capability. Success, in a fast growing modern society as in America, does not depend on any miracle. Success and failure go side by side. This economic fall and prevalent American success myth must have influenced Miller to manifest the background of the play. Willy Loman in the play "*Death of a Salesman*" exemplifies America's success myth — his failure is the wrong assumption of this myth — which is well discussed in the field of American Literature of the 20th Century.

Many modern and post modern critics tried to examine the problems of capitalist society for Willy's tragedy. This paper will try to investigate a character-centered study of

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://everything2.com/title/Death+of+a+Salesman+as+a+Psychoanalytic+Work>

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

Miller's protagonist to determine other important causes related to his failure. In this paper, the American dream of success and Miller's treatment of it is discussed and a psychoanalytic criticism is done to analyze the character of Willy Lowman. Miller tactfully shows Willy's ideal of the American myth through subtle actions, throwing lights on the inner of his mind since he first thought of calling the play "*The Inside of His Head*", and that Willy already lives in a phantasmagoria<sup>2</sup> when the drama opens.

Miller's "*Death of a Salesman*" displays a loss of identity and a man's inability to accept change within himself and society. Willy Loman is searching for his identity among the persons whom he considers his role model. The play is a montage of memories, dreams, conflicts, all of which make up the last day of Willy's life which ends with his suicide and subsequent funeral.

### **I. Willy's Perception of the Success Myth and its Relation to his Personality**

Willy's character is based upon his understanding of the success notion. His quest for himself as human as well as a salesman will be presented in this chapter with consideration to some selected concepts of Freudian theory including: Narcissism, Repression, Regression, Denial, and unconscious mind, presenting their interference in shaping his personality.

#### **I. 1. The Success Notion in Miller's "*Death of a Salesman*"**

"*Death of a Salesman*" was not set during the Depression nor was it written during this period, but it bears its mark. In the play, Willy Loman, a sixty-three-year-old

---

<sup>2</sup> **Phantasm:** A mental image, the product of fantasy, the imagination or delusion; imaginary projections or visualizations, images arising from the unconscious (Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack 78).

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

salesman, who is baffled by his own lack of success, goes back in his memory to the Depression Era, suggesting that personal and national fate were intertwined. He tells himself that he lives in "*the greatest country of the world*" (Miller 11) where the American Dream is destined to come true for everyone. But when he is faced with his own failure, he can blame no one for it and the very basis of his identity is threatened. He searches desperately back in time through his life for evidence of the moment he took the wrong path, enlisting the help of his dead brother Ben, for whom the American Dream had manifested. Having failed to make a success of his life himself, he looks desperately to the next generation; to his sons, to give him back that sense of achievement through their success (Mackinnon 14).

"*Death of a Salesman*" is the reverse of a rags-to-riches story so that it becomes the story of failure rather than the story of success. Willy Loman's history begins at the end of the line; instead of the young, determined, and hopeful salesman, an exhausted, old, and jaded salesman enters, carrying along with his sample cases, sixty years of an uphill struggle. The subsequent events show him failing to overcome each obstacle, thus failing to live up to the American Dream. He fails to make a single sale on his last sales trip; he fails to negotiate a salary raise and is in fact, fired. His sons fail to succeed in their own endeavors and his marriage is exposed by his son, Biff, as a lie. In the collapse of the salesman, Miller attempted to illustrate the collapse of the myth of the American Dream. Through the tale of Willy Loman's final day of life, Miller exposes the hold the collective myth of the American Dream over the individual imagination — of the promise of assured victory and the tragedy of a life that could not live up to that great promise (15).

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

Willy's obsession with the success myth is presented by Miller through different theatrical techniques to reflect that his notion of success can be seen from a psychological perspective, through a closer examination to the inner of his mind.

### **I.2. Personality versus Personality Disturbance**

Psychodynamic<sup>3</sup> theories consist of a group of theories that view personality and behavior in terms of the dynamics of driving forces of personality and development such as desires, anxieties, and defenses. All focus on unconscious mental forces that shape one's personality and the inevitable clash between conflicting forces. As discussed earlier in the first chapter that Freud's psychoanalytic theory is based on the following assumptions: personality is governed by unconscious forces that one cannot control and that childhood experiences play a significant role in determining adult personality.<sup>4</sup>

#### **I.2.1. Narcissism and Willy Loman's Quest for Success**

The American Dream has a fundamental role in the play. Amy Sickels — the writer of “Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman: History of Criticism”— proclaims that Miller “critically examines the myth of the American Dream” (Sickels 79). Despite the fact that the American Dream is not openly expressed, defined or mentioned in the play, it is well-known that Arthur Miller took inspiration from the American society (Adrian 102-03); this is brought to light through the characters. According to Chester E. Eisinger — the author of “Focus on Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman: The Wrong Dreams”— there are various renditions of the American Dream in “*Death of a Salesman*”, in which “Willy

---

<sup>3</sup> The psychodynamic approach includes all the theories in psychology that see human functioning based upon the interaction of drives and forces within the person, particularly unconscious, and between the different structures of the personality (<http://www.simplypsychology.org/psychodynamic.html>).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cabrillo.edu/~jtice/Psychology%2033/What%20Is%20Personality.pdf>

## WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK

---

*Loman himself gives us the corrupt version of the American Dream*" (Eisinger 98). Zheng Dan-qing<sup>5</sup> also supports Eisinger's claim, highlighting that it can be considered as the cause of his demise (Dan-qing 27). Indeed, Willy Loman is an unsuccessful salesman, considering the fact that he misunderstood the basic concept of the American Dream, namely that hard work equals success. If he had a more realistic understanding, he would have accepted Charley's job offer (Miller 76) and worked his way up the ranks instead of chasing his unrealistic vision of wealth and success until his death.

The most obvious example of Willy's ideological armor, and the one that informs all the psychological events that structure the play, is his personal image. For him, the road to the American dream is paved with a winning personality. Willy's concept of success hinges on his own idea of success: "*It's not what you say; it's how you say it—because personality always wins the day*" (51). That is, as Eisinger clarifies, Willy's dream rests on the cult of personality. It is necessary, he holds, to make a good appearance and to be well liked, "*Appearance is a key concept*" in his notion of success (Eisinger 98). In other words, Willy believes that personal attractiveness is the only necessary ingredient to attain wealth and success. For the route to success is not paved with hard work but by having a charismatic personality. In the play, Willy's understanding of success is primarily conveyed through his words and actions. One of his most famous quotes that is related his conception of the dream is when Willy gives his opinion on Charley's business: "*bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not – liked. He's liked, but he's not – well liked*" (Miller 23).

The concept of being well liked is the essence of his notion of success. What is more, Willy makes another prominent statement which gives more details of his view and the

---

<sup>5</sup> Dan-qing, Zheng is the writer of "*Who is to Blame for Willy Loman's Death? -On Arthur Miller's "Death a Salesman*.

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

entailment of being well liked: "*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*" (Miller 25-6). As one can see, these quotes give an insight on the emphasis placed on being well liked by Willy.

In his mind, personality is the key to achieve success. On the other hand, Willy's fixation on this concept also lends itself to express one of the main characteristics found in all narcissists: arrogance (Lowen 24). As Pamela Loos — the writer of "Best Intentions Far Awry: The Family Dynamic in Miller's All My Sons and Death of a Salesman" — clarifies, "*while many would agree that likability may be an ingredient for success in the world at large. For Willy, "being well liked" takes on enormous proportions at the expense of other key characteristics or skills*" (Loos 21).

Indeed, Willy's exaggerated emphasis on being well liked has severe consequences on his career; it has made him the laughingstock of the business world (Miller 28). Even so, as exhibited by his opinion on Charley, Willy still clings to his arrogant belief that being well liked is the most essential criteria for success and therefore provides him with superiority over other salesmen regardless of his lacking expertise. That is, with this statement, Willy implies that regardless of the obvious disparity in success, he is still superior to Charley since he, unlike himself, is not well liked. This shows that he considers his view of being successful as better than others.

The American essayist, Adrian Page states that Willy can be considered a hypocrite. He is a man of empty words and values that are liable to sudden change. In one of his hallucinations, Willy remarks to Biff about not getting too involved with women because they are gullible. In these remarks, he is essentially trying to lecture Biff on a moral fault of which he is guilty of himself as it is later revealed in the story that he has a mistress. In

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

addition, shortly after giving him life advice about women clear in Willy's saying: "Just wanna be careful with those girls, Biff, that's all. Don't make any promises. No promises of any kind. Because a girl, y'know, they always believe what you tell 'em, and you're very young, Biff, you're too young to be talking seriously to girls" (Miller 21).

Willy then rejoices in the fact that his son is so popular that women pay money to date him as stated in the play "*Willy: ... Then when you're all set, there'll be plenty of girls for a boy like you. [He smiles broadly at a kitchen chair.] That so? The girls pay for you? [He laughs.] Boy, you must really be makin' a hit*" (21) which arguably suggests that he deceives and exploits them for money. This illustrates that when necessary, Willy is willing to deceive himself into reinterpreting things differently and change his values to suit his vision (62-3). Lying, hypocrisy and self-deception are recurring traits in narcissism due to the use of a false image in conjunction with the inability to distinguish between lies and truth (Lowen 54-5).

In other words, Willy's alleged successful career as a well liked salesman is a facade that he created in order to hide the truth that he is a lousy salesman. He started to exaggerate and lie about his professional accomplishments to appear successful, so often and convincingly that it became the truth. Early in the story, it becomes clear that Willy has difficulties with relationships, although he frequently boasts about his reputation and success in the business world. One of many examples is when he tells his sons that "*they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, there'll be open sesame for all of us, 'cause one thing', boys: I have friends*" (Miller 24). This unquestionably suggests that Willy is quite socially capable, but the truth is that he is lonely (29). He does not have any friends besides Charley (77). Loneliness is common characteristic amongst narcissists.

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

As Lowen — the author of “Narcissism: Denial of the True Self” — writes: “*the denial of feeling characteristic of all narcissists is most manifest in their behavior towards others. They can be ruthless, exploitative, sadistic, or destructive to another person [ . . . ]. This insensitivity derives from insensitivity to one's own feelings [ . . . ] When we deny our feelings, we deny that others feel*” (Lowen 49). Putting it differently, the denial of feelings not only makes narcissists insensitive to their own emotions but to other people's emotions as well, since they also become incapable of empathy.

Willy's values are not only limited to himself but are also represented through his sons. Loos — see page 43— explains that Willy has been plagued for years by Biff's inability to find a steady job or become the great salesman that he would like him to be. Willy replays earlier years that he considers as successful during which he gave his sons advice on how to achieve success: “*as a salesman, Willy believes that success does not come just from being liked but from being well liked, and he instills this belief in his sons*” (Loos 20-1). This means that Willy transfers his wrong values to his sons.

A great example of this indoctrination can be seen when Willy reminisces about the time his sons asked him of his opinion on their neighbor, Charley. While he does not deny his neighbor's success, he does not approve of it by claiming that unlike himself, he is not well liked (Miller 23). With this, Willy implies that Charley's way of business is misguided. In this manner, he instills his values in his sons by belittling Charley's success while enlarging his own, thus inspiring them to adopt his view. Therefore, to get the complete picture of Willy's conception of success, it is important to observe how it is represented through Willy's sons as well. When examining Willy's sons, it becomes apparent that between the two, Biff was the one influenced the most by him. He is an important part of his father's vision of success and narcissism. It is painfully obvious that

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

Biff is put on a pedestal by Willy. In his eyes, he is "*the son of promise*", the epitome of success (Loos 21).

They had a very close relationship in the past. To Biff, Willy was his role model; he inspired him to adopt his values and strive to succeed his dream. An example of how Willy's influence is expressed through Biff can be seen during Willy and Bernard's discussion about Biff's situation in school (Miller 25). In this scene, he shows similar signs of arrogance as his father. He expresses no signs of concern over his upcoming regent test. He is far more concerned with his appearance than passing the math test, which is made evident when he flamboyantly shows off his new custom imprinted shoes since they connote being well liked. The university insignia clearly signifies his bright future prospects. Additionally, shortly after Bernard leaves, Biff states that he is not well liked (25) because he prioritizes studying above other matters that signifies being well liked. This is identical to Willy's statement about Charley (23). These similarities between Willy and Biff demonstrate how Willy's narcissism is portrayed through his son.

As Loos mentions, when Willy's beliefs are applied to his sons, it means that being well liked becomes more important than studying hard (Loos 21). However, in the present, it quickly becomes clear that Biff does not share his father's view any longer. Their once close relationship is no more. This does not come as a surprise from a narcissistic perspective, for their relationship is a clear testament of Willy's lack of empathy. It is based on manipulation and exploitation. Willy forces his views onto Biff without any care for his feelings, which is not uncommon for narcissistic parents. They commonly turn to and exploit their children to satisfy the desires that they themselves cannot satisfy (Lowen 105).

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

In other words, through manipulation, Willy attempts to use Biff to compensate for his own failure of achieving his dream. The underlying cause for this sudden change in their relationship is revealed in Willy's flashback of Biff's visit in Boston, where he discovers his father's affair with another woman (Miller 92). This act of adultery ultimately causes Biff's image of his role model to shatter. He realizes that Willy is no longer the great man he once knew who would certainly be able to persuade his math teacher, he was never a great man to begin with (95). Thus, Biff no longer desires to follow Willy's footsteps, for he realizes that his father and his dream are anything but true. In addition, during this scene, Willy manifests the denial of emotions that is characteristic for all narcissists. Rather than falling into despair, he remains calm, cool and collected. He orders Biff, who is suffering from a mental breakdown, to ignore the incident or else he will "*whip him*" (95).

Moreover, Willy tries to shift the focus from himself to Biff's situation in school: "*well, better get going. I want to get to the school first thing in the morning [.] .] you mustn't over-emphasize a thing like this. I'll see Birnbaum first thing in the morning [.] .] You need those points for U. of Virginia*" (94-5). Willy's unusual behavior can be explained in terms of narcissism. The ability of being able to shut down emotions is the most distinctive yet basic characteristic of narcissism (Lowen 46). Willy is able to maintain his calm in this situation because he denies the problematic and unbearable emotions caused by his infidelity, as they would undoubtedly affect his ability to maintain his image.

This also allows Willy to divert his focus to Biff's situation rather than his terrible act, since it is connected to his narcissistic goal of Biff becoming a well liked salesman. The topic change functions as a way of denying it ever taking place; it is Willy's method of dealing with the guilt of his act. Hence, when Bernard asks Willy about why Biff suddenly

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

changed after his visit to Boston, he says: "*Why? Why? Bernard, that question has been trailing me like a ghost for the last fifteen years. [.] was it my fault? [.] Why did he lay down?*" (Miller 73). In other words, Willy has repressed the fact that he was the cause behind Biff's failure since it would be too painful for him. This illustrates that Willy displays the narcissistic trait of denying emotions in this vital event of the story.

In Willy's mind, under the pressure to succeed, it is necessary to delude everyone, even oneself, because "*the appearance of things is always more important than the reality and the truth about one's accomplishments are never impressive enough*" (Eisinger 100). Willy frequently lies about his alleged successful career as a well liked salesman to give the impression of greatness to his sons, such as when he claims that he never has to wait in line for his customers and that he "*knocked 'em cold in Providence, slaughtered 'em in Boston*" (Miller 26), when in reality he barely managed to get by (27).

Willy considers himself a great salesman. He competes with other salesmen by ranking them based on their personal attractiveness and professional achievements. His accomplishments as a salesman are essential to him because they serve as vital evidence of his prowess as a well liked salesman in comparison to the other "liked" salesmen. An example of this can be when Linda asks Willy if he sells anything, Willy replies to that saying: "*I did five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston*" (27).

A need of power and superiority is characteristic of all narcissists. The relationship between narcissism and power is that narcissists strive to project an image of superiority, perfection and invulnerability. This could thus be seen as yet another example confirming that the narcissist's grandiose image is only a facade to hide their weakness. To accommodate to this lack of validity, narcissists need power to energize and validate their image. Power serves to control and deny their vulnerabilities (Lowen 75-7). In other

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

words, one could argue that competitiveness comes naturally for narcissists since it is the most efficient way of gaining power.

Willy has always considered himself unique and better than the other “liked” salesmen, because he is a so called “well liked” salesman. This is exposed during his final confrontation with Biff before his demise:

**Biff:** Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

**Willy** [*turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst*]: am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman! (Miller 105).

This sudden outburst of rage could be connected to narcissism, for all narcissists have a need of being special. It bestows them with an ascribed status of superiority above the “commonness” (Lowen 107). Hence, Willy becomes infuriated, when Biff calls him and himself “*a dime a dozen*” (Miller 105) and insists that they are unique because this proclamation jeopardizes their specialness and its ascribed status of superiority.

Charley and Willy's relationship play an important role in the representation of the American Dream in the play, for if Willy's conception of success represents the “corrupt” notion of the American Dream, Charley's conception represents “its ideal form” (Eisinger 97). In stark contrast to Willy, Charley is realistic, has a good business sense, and above all, has an ideal grasp of what it takes to achieve wealth and success. Through hard work, he has found a stable way of life and financial security in his own successful business (97). In other words, Charley is the living proof that one has to work hard to attain wealth and success (Adrian 76) and symbolizes the man Willy should have striven to become. Thus, their relationship lends itself to reveal the fallacy of Willy's understanding of success.

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

For example, baffled by his dismissal, Willy asks Charley how Howard, his boss, could fire the man who gave him his name, he responds: *"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"* (Miller 76-7). By clarifying this, Charley attempts to make Willy realize that he was fired because his values are misguided. He has misunderstood the most significant aspect of being a salesman — selling merchandise: *"Why must everybody like you? Who liked J.P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked"* (77). Additionally, Charley tells Willy to grow up (76), implying that his view is naïve in the sense that it is unrealistic.

In light of this, Willy and Charley's relationship takes on the role of exposing Willy's need of superiority. Willy envies Charley's success but refuses to acknowledge it. Doing so would mean to admit his inferiority to him. Thus, to underline his superiority, Willy acts with an arrogant attitude towards Charley. He frequently makes him appear stupid and incompetent in comparison to himself such as during the time they play cards. During this scene, Charley gives Willy the advice to let Biff go back to Texas (34); he is old enough to take care of himself. Willy responds by ignoring his advice and insulting him. Furthermore, when Charley gives him credit for his work on the ceiling in the living room, Willy calls him "disgusting" for his lack of masculinity, that is, his lack of handiness, *"a man who can't handle tools is not a man"* (34). This makes Charley appear incompetent in contrast to Willy, who has put up the ceiling in his living room himself.

On the other hand, Willy's superiority complex lends itself to express his fear of inferiority. Charley tries to make Willy face reality. He is the only one who attempts to

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

give him some sense of reason by questioning his values but to no avail. Whenever Charley endeavors to help him, Willy pushes him away by either insulting, rejecting or ignoring him (Adrian 76). For example, when Charley offers him a job and criticizes his naïve notion of the success Willy angrily rejects his offer and tells the blatant lie that he already has a job despite being unemployed with debts in order not to appear dependent on him: "*I've got a job [ . . . ] What's the matter with you? I've got job [ . . . ] I don't want your goddamn job! [ . . . ] You big ignoramus, if you say that to me again I'll rap you one! I don't care how big you are!*" (Miller 76). Due to his fear of inferiority, Willy argues back and threatens Charley despite knowing that he is right, "*I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing—*" (77). In other words, his sudden outburst is an expression of his inferiority complex.

Charley offers Willy a job out of pity because Willy has lost his job and now has no source of income to pay his bills. When Willy becomes angered, his ego fights off his feeling of failure. Working for, let alone receiving a lesson from Charley, is absolutely unacceptable. Willy has claimed for years that he is far superior to him; accepting his criticism would be a sign of weakness and an admittance of his inferiority to him. Willy cannot imagine himself being helpless and dependent on Charley. He does everything in his power to avoid it, even if it means lying about being unemployed with debts. However, helplessness and dependency are part of human nature and narcissists are not an exception of this rule, but they refuse to acknowledge it.

In their mind, being helpless and dependent on someone gives the other person control over them (Lowen 98). This explains Willy's continuous returns to Charley every week to ask for money, only to insult and push him away. He is aware of his helpless dependence

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

on him but refuses to admit it. Hence, he remarks that he is “*keeping accounts*” and that he is going to “*pay every penny back*” (Miller 76).

Willy’s long lost brother; Ben, and his tale of success in Africa have a huge impact on him. Both Eisinger (98) and Dan-qing (3-4) acknowledge that Ben’s success contributes significantly to his notion of success. As Willy declares: “*Ben! That man was a genius, that man was success incarnate!*”- emphasis added - (Miller 32). Ben was the embodiment of Willy’s idea of success. Ben managed to attain the success of his dreams — becoming a rich, assertive and well liked salesman. Therefore, Willy and his extreme obsession with Ben may perhaps be considered as secondary narcissism.

By secondary narcissism, one means that the narcissist is drawing his ego from an object (Laplanche, Pontalis 256). In other words, Willy substitutes his own self-image with his image of Ben, because he is the embodiment of his dream. However, contrary to Willy’s assumption that impersonating Ben would translate into becoming a successful and rich salesman, he ends up unsuccessful. The secret behind Ben’s mysterious success in Africa is never revealed; it is a question that haunts Willy. He asks him to reveal the secret of his success whenever he appears in his hallucinations: “*Ben! I've been waiting for you so long! What's the answer? How did you do it?*” (Miller 36).

That question left unanswered, or rather, Ben cannot answer Willy’s question since he is based on his memories. As a result, this causes Willy to resort to self-deception. He convinces himself that his brother’s key to success was his distinctive character, or as he calls it, being well liked. This is further stressed by his endeavors to pass it on to his sons: “*Ben, how should I teach them? [. . .] That's just the spirit I want to imbue them with! To walk into a jungle! I was right! I was right!*” (40-1), the so called “spirit to walk into the jungle” refers to Ben’s extravagant confidence and charisma.

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

To sum up, there is a clear connection between Willy's notion of success in relation to the American Dream and his narcissistic behavior. It is possible to interpret his conception as narcissistic. He believes that success is not attained through hard work but from being well liked. However, this fixation and glorification of being well liked clearly expresses the main characteristic of narcissism which is arrogance.

When Willy's affair with the woman is exposed, he manifests a narcissistic denial of emotion as he manages to stay calm and collected in order to focus on the goal of Biff achieving his dream:

**Willy:** Now look, Biff, when you grow up you'll understand about these things. You mustn't—you mustn't overemphasize a thing like this. I'll see Birnbaum first thing in the morning.

**Biff:** Never mind.

**Willy:** ... Heh? If I can't get him to change that mark you'll make it up in summer school. You've got all summer to—

**Biff** [*his weeping breaking from him*]: Dad . . .

**Willy** [*infected by it*]: Oh, my boy . . . (Miller 95).

Furthermore, Willy's relations with the other characters serve as further testimony of his narcissism because the representation of his view of success is not limited to himself. His relationship with Biff exposes the lack of empathy and exploitation of others. Happy is essentially the embodiment of his father's view, thus further emphasizes the narcissism caused by it. This is evident by their shared traits that could be regarded as narcissistic. Consequently, he displays many similar traits of narcissism seen in Willy.

Willy and Charley's relationship affirms his superiority and inferiority complex respectively by exhibiting his assertion of being better than him. Ben's success in Africa

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

serves as the epitome of Willy's image of success. However, he makes the grave mistake of assuming that his brother's key to success was being well liked. As a result, this becomes the focal point of Willy's narcissism. Perhaps Biff was right all along, Willy is truly nothing more than a dime a dozen (Miller 105).

The protagonist's obsession with image throughout the play underscores his insecurity, for it bespeaks the narcissist, the man who must continually bolster the surface of his personality by finding its positive reflection in the world around him, because that surface has no firm ground of its own to support it from within.

### **I.2.2. Willy Loman's Psychic Defenses: Repression, Regression and Denial**

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Defense mechanisms are unconscious psychological strategies brought into play by various entities to cope with reality and to maintain self-image; the strategies used to overcome the conflicts related to the three structures of personality or psyche.

Since *Death of a Salesman*'s New York premiere in 1949, critics have tended to view Arthur Miller's remarkable play in one of the two ways: as a psychological drama or as a Marxist critique of capitalist culture. Despite the play's rather obvious psychoanalytic content — the drama is structured by a series of detailed descriptions of the stages in Willy Loman's psychological breakdown. This dissertation treats the work's psychological dimension in terms of its psychoanalytic function.

Giles Mitchell — the author of "Living and Dying for the Ideal: A Study of Willy Loman's Narcissism" — puts it; Willy's failures are "*preeminently personal*" (Mitchell 394). Similarly, in his "*Arthur Miller*", the writer Leonard Moss argues that "*Miller's*

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

*technical apparatus — the colloquial language, the symbolic images, and the dramatized recollections — shapes the pride and blindness of a mentality, not the evil influence of a social condition" (Moss 36).* Therefore, this chapter will attempt to show Willy Loman's perception of the American dream and its relation to his psyche.

For the American dream serves as the ore from which Willy constructs the ideological armor he uses to disguise and deny his psychological problems and those of his family in order to escape the existential inwardness that such a self-awareness would force upon him. The play's psychological content is shown most clearly through Willy's personal image, his five so-called memory scenes which are regressive episodes, and the structure of the play which underscores its psychological importance. In addition, the psychological dimension can be observed also through the playwright's own apparent emotional investment in his protagonist, which is revealed in the interaction of the play's expressionist episodes (Tyson 11).

Willy is in a state of denial for unpleasant realities that continually threaten to invade his awareness. It is his struggle with those realities, brought to the fore by the double trauma of mounting pressures at the office and Biff's visit home that constitutes the five expressionistic episodes in which he seems to remember or imagine events from his past. However, these episodes are not a function simply of memory or imagination. They are, rather, psychological regressions, which, in pathological cases like Willy's, involve "*a full hallucinatory cathexis<sup>6</sup> of the perceptive system*" (Freud, "Interpretation of Dreams" 496).

---

<sup>6</sup> Cathexis: Given as the translation of Freud's libidobesetzung, the concept refers to the mental process of concentrating and channeling the psychic energy of the libido as this is manifested in forms such as anxiety, dread, fear, and so on. Also the term refers to the displacement of libidinal interest to objects (Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack 20).

## WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK

---

As D. W. Winnicott<sup>7</sup> explains, regression involves not the imagining but the "*reliving of dream and memory situations*" (Winnicott 288) which opens the psyche to new possibilities. Although, in the therapeutic encounter, the regressed subject relives early childhood episodes, Winnicott's description of regression closely parallels, and illuminates, Willy Loman's behavior.

Like Winnicott's patients, Willy has developed a "*false self*" (281) — his successful salesman persona — to defend against what Winnicott calls an "*original environmental failure situation*" (287), in this case, Willy's childhood loss of father and older brother. The existence of this false self "*results in a sense of futility*" (292) which the protagonist recurrently manifests throughout the play.

Furthermore, regression can involve a return either to a pleasant past experience, such as Willy's happy times with his young family, or to a painful episode from the past, such as his initial falling-out with Biff in the Boston hotel room. Most important for one's understanding of the protagonist that "*regression is distinct from the other defense organizations in that it carries with it [...] a new opportunity for an unfreezing of the failure situation and a chance for spontaneous recovery*" (283). Because regression involves a return to the experience that lies at the bottom of a current conflict, as it does in each of Willy's five regressive episodes, it allows the regressed person to become aware of the concrete source of a heretofore baffling psychological condition.

Recovery, in this context, means the acquisition of a new attitude toward oneself and one's problems based on the insight gained during the regression. Thus, in offering the

---

<sup>7</sup> Donald Winnicott (1896-1971) was an English paediatrician, who early on in his career became passionate about the new field of psychoanalysis. He proposed that the happiness and future satisfaction of the human race depended ultimately not so much on external political issues, but on something far closer to home: the way parents bring up their children (<http://thephilosophersmail.com/perspective/the-great-psychanalysts-donald-winnicott>).

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

opportunity to live an authentic relationship to one's conflicts, regression always offers the opportunity to acquire or deepen existential inwardness. From this perspective, Willy's five regressive episodes represent five opportunities for him to alter his course, both psychologically and existentially, and it is significant that his response, in each case, is the same. The pattern formed by his responses to regression reveals a systematic, if only partly conscious, effort on Willy's part to eschew the existential inwardness increasingly pressed upon him by the accumulated refuse of his psyche (Tyson 68).

The first three regressive episodes follow roughly the same pattern: each time Willy is confronted with a traumatic reality in the present, he regresses to a time when his American dream fantasies could still convince him and his family that he was the success he wanted to be. Thus, as it is seen in his first regression, which occurs shortly after his return home from his aborted attempt to drive to New England (Miller 21), the protagonist tries to escape the present reality of having been taken off salary and put on straight commission by regressing to a time when his young sons, still in high school, polished his car and hung on his every word, a time when he could still look to the future with hope.

In his second regression, which occurs during and after his card game with Charley later that night (35-40), Willy tries to escape his present pain over Biff's life as a drifter and his own inability to help his son by regressing to a time when he was able to show off his boys' high-spiritedness and filial devotion in front of his brother Ben: he imagines sending the boys off to steal sand from a nearby construction site in order to rebuild the front stoop.

In his third regression, which occurs in Howard Wagner's office (65), the protagonist tries to escape the present trauma of being fired by regressing to a time when he had the

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

opportunity to superintend Ben's Alaskan timberland: "*God, timberland! Me and my boys in those grand outdoors!*" (Miller 66).

None of these three visions of the past, however, provides the escape Willy seeks. For it is during such regressive experiences that repressed conflicts tend to erupt. Thus, his first regressive vision of his happy young family is inevitably interrupted by the memory that Biff had been an irresponsible boy and a petty thief whose behavior was often wild and selfish:

**Bernard** [*entering on the run*]: Where is Biff? If he doesn't study!

**Willy** [*moving to the forestage, with great agitation*]: You'll give him the answers!

**Bernard:** I do, but I can't on a Regents! That's a state exam! They're liable to arrest me!

**Willy:** Where is he? I'll whip him, I'll whip him!

**Linda:** And he'd better give back that football, Willy, it's not nice.

**Willy:** Biff! Where is he? Why is he taking everything?

**Linda:** He's too rough with the girls, Willy. All the mothers are afraid of him!

**Willy:** I'll whip him. (Miller 31)

Similarly, Willy's second pleasant regression is interrupted by his fear that he didn't raise his sons right. He imagines telling Ben, "*Sometimes I'm afraid that I'm not teaching them the right kind of—Ben, how should I teach them?*" (40). Finally, Willy's third regressive episode is interrupted by the memory that he had refused the opportunity to manage Ben's Alaskan timberland: Linda's repetition of his story about the successful Dave Singleman convinced him to keep his job.

In terms of Willy's psychological experience, readers' concern over whether or not the past events he recalls are accurately reported according to some standard of objective

## WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK

---

reality is irrelevant. What matters is that the conflicts' emergence reveals Willy's experience of them; it is subjective reality that is revelatory here. For these eruptions of repressed conflicts are products of Willy's present psychological state as well as a reflection of his former condition. During a traumatic period, conflicts that have been long buried tend to surface and demand attention or discharge.

This is, of course, why regression often functions as a tool of psychological growth: it brings forward into consciousness, and allows the subject the opportunity to work on, conflicts that have heretofore inhabited the unconscious.

In Willy's case, Instead of using the knowledge offered by his regressive episodes to Willy relies on commodity<sup>8</sup> psychology to repress the conflicts anew: he clings to the American dream myths and fantasies he used to deny and submerge the conflicts in the first place.

Thus, when his pleasant picture of his sons' adoration is interrupted by his memory of Biff's misconduct, he defines the boy's behavior as spiritedness, which, one may recall, is the basis upon which Willy believes financial success is founded: "*There's nothing the matter with Biff! ... He's got spirit, personality. Loaded with it. Loaded!.*" (Miller 31-2).

Similarly, when self-doubt about his parenting interrupts his vision of showing off his boys for Ben, he imagines receiving Ben's reassurance that he was raising them to be "*outstanding, manly chaps*" (40), perfectly suited to fulfill their father's dreams of success. And when the memory of his refusal to accept an outdoor job from Ben interrupts his vision of receiving the job offer, Willy remembers Biff's Ebbets Field game —

---

<sup>8</sup> Commodification: The process by which an object or a person becomes viewed primarily as an article for economic exchange - or a commodity. Also the translation of the aesthetic and cultural objects into principally economic terms. The commodification of an object or the raw materials from which it is produced is a sign of the transformation from use-value to exchange-value (Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack 22-3).

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

evidence that Biff had what it takes to be a success in Willy's competitive world and that he had therefore made the right decision in turning down Ben's offer.

Even Willy's fourth regressive episode, in which he relives the unhappy time young Biff discovered him in a Boston hotel room with another woman (Miller 92-5), does not open the salesman's eyes and force him to recognize his own responsibility for what has happened to his family; for the protagonist refuses to accept the painful awakening this regression offers him. As Willy recalls, young Biff flunked his high school math course and rushed off to Boston to ask his father to pressure the math teacher into giving him the four points he needed to pass. As Bernard later explains to Willy, Biff was ready to make up the credit in summer school, if he had to, so that he could go to college in the fall. It wasn't until Biff's ill-fated trip to see his father that he gave up on his own future. Although Bernard doesn't give Willy this information until later in act 2, it is clear in the fourth regression that Willy's knowledge of his role in Biff's failure is the repressed conflict that is erupting here.

When Biff first arrived at Willy's hotel room he was very eager for his father to talk to the math teacher: *"If he saw the kind of man you are, and you just talked to him in your way"*, Biff told his father, *"I'm sure he'd come through for me"* (93). It was not until Willy's lover came laughing out of the bathroom in her slip — and Biff realized that his father was having an affair — that the boy stubbornly refused to carry out any of Willy's plans for him. Willy represses his awareness of his role in Biff's difficulties; however, telling himself that Biff's flunking the math course is the source of his son's problems, an excuse he uses even when the adult Bernard confronts him with the truth.

It is noteworthy that Willy's awareness of the importance of the hotel incident is itself an attempt to sidestep the real issue: his failure as a parent in general. As Biff later admits,

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

his father had so raised his expectations of success — and provided so little real basis for them — that, because instant success did not come his way, he “*stole himself out of every good job since high school*” (Miller 104). Willy’s immediate flight from the restaurant where this regression occurs, to buy seeds for the plot of sterile land behind his house — an obvious escape into a time before the hotel episode occurred — underscores his repression of the psychological insight this regression provides.

It is part of the nature of conflict, however, that repression merely increases its force. Therefore, Willy’s conflicts get more out of control with every attempt he makes to deny and resubmerge them. In this context, his decision to kill himself, which occurs during his fifth and final regression at the end of act 2 (107), is not “*an act of affirmation*” (Heyen 50), nor an effort to “*re-establish his own self-confidence and his family’s integrity*” (Moss 24), nor, as many critics would have it, a misguided attempt to secure his son’s future. Rather, Willy’s suicide is his ultimate act of denial.

Having bought the seeds he had run off from the restaurant to get earlier that evening, Willy is now pacing off a garden plot in his backyard. It is noteworthy that planting the garden is an abstract act — not linked, like his behaviors in past regressions, to some significant, specific past event — because Willy wants to avoid the eruptions of repressed content that occurred during his more specific regressions. Unable to face the day’s accumulated disappointments; he frantically seeks a way out of his despair: he will kill himself in a way that appears to be an accident — in a car wreck — and Biff will collect twenty thousand dollars in life insurance. With this financial backing, Willy reasons, Biff will achieve the business success of which he believes him capable. In both segments of this regression, Willy imagines himself discussing his idea with Ben and the deeper motive for Willy’s intended suicide quickly surfaces: he wants to regain Biff’s esteem so that he

## WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK

---

can regain, in his son's eyes, the personal image that used to impress the boy so much. As Willy tells Ben:

This [Willy's death]... changes all the aspects. Because he thinks I'm nothing, see, and so he spites me. But the funeral—*[Straightening up]*: Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! ... That boy will be thunder-struck, Ben, because he never realized—I am known ... and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. (Miller 100)

The blunt revelations and accusations with which Biff interrupts his father's imaginary conversation with Ben — Biff's claims that Willy raised him to be the thief he is and that he and Happy, like their father, are failures who lie about their success — seem to have no lasting effect on Willy. The only thing the protagonist takes from this experience is the fact that Biff cries to him, that Biff loves him. "*That boy ... is going to be magnificent!*" (106) is Willy's final response to his interaction with Biff, and he returns immediately, his suicide project unchanged, to his conversation with Ben. "*Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?*" Willy asks Ben during the second half of his final regression (107).

This vision of Biff holds such charm for Willy, as does every success Biff ever had, because Willy feels it is his own success he is experiencing in Biff's success. This is something other than healthy parental pride in a son who makes good, pride in one's success as a father — Charley's pride in his son, not Willy's, is of this kind. Willy's pride is projection, a very personal and intense form of vicarious experience and if he can just keep this vision intact until he kills himself, Willy will not have to face the repressed awareness of his failed life that keeps threatening to break through into his consciousness and overwhelm him.

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

Thus, the protagonist's self-destruction is a last ditch act of repression; the twenty thousand dollars in life-insurance money intended for Biff provides both his excuse for killing himself and the fantasy he needs in order to keep self-knowledge at bay until he can accomplish it. The conflicts that pathologically constructed his psyche have come to such an impasse that ordinary forms of denial and avoidance are nothing but ineffective stopgap measures. The only way to shut this psyche off is to kill it.

One can conclude that Willy Loman's case is the outcome of his ineffective defense mechanisms. Unlike normal people, his defenses are used excessively, extensively, and inflexibly making him a neurotic character.

### **I. 2. 3. Willy Loman's Unconscious Mind**

In terms of ego, Willy's demise results from his distorted view of the American Dream, which he holds onto stubbornly because of his ego-ideal or perfect self as Freud called. This distorted concept stems from his belief that being liked and popular will make one successful. This egotistical man, refuses to give up a twisted version of the American Dream because then he have to admit that what he has strived for all his life is wrong. The false ego and pride which comes from his assured success are the bridges that prevent him from seeing through his fake dream, pushing him to persuade the rest of his family to worship it along with him. One can conclude that Willy's ego is not operating according to the reality principal because his mind is wandering between the real and the unreal what hinders his natural and logical thinking.

In terms of sexuality, Willy's problem can also be seen from what Freud called the repression of the pleasure principle. As he described, the id is "*only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle*

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

*principle*" (qtd. in Dobie 51) which is usually bridled and managed by the ego. From a Freudian perspective, the pleasure principal refers to a state of gratification, particularly in terms of delight or sensual fulfillment (Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack 78). The pleasure principle or the idea that if necessity did not dictate working, humans would simply do things for their own self-gratification is innate in all humans, and when they repress it, there are consequences that may be harmful (Tyson 20).

The Loman family's sexuality especially the one of Willy appeared clearly to be another aspect of the play's psychological dimension: "*human sexuality is primarily a matter of meanings: through one's sexuality one enacts one's conscious and unconscious attitudes and motives toward others and thereby reveals, one's manner of being towards the world*" (Davis 80-7). In the Lomans' case, the family's sexual attitudes are not only compatible with the ideology of the American dream, but, like that dream, the family's sexual mores help them disguise and deny their own psychology and thereby avoid existential inwardness. In order to see how Willy's apparently sexual nature achieves a psychological end, a brief review of some key elements in his sexual characterization is given.

Willy's extramarital affair, a natural focal point for any consideration of his sexuality, reveals neither "*the hollowness of Willy's affection for Linda*" (Aarnes 96), nor his unhappiness over "*his failure to impress her*" (Hayman 51), nor the paucity of Linda's comprehension of Willy. For the source of the protagonist's infidelity cannot be circumscribed by his relationship to his wife but lies in the merger of his sexual and professional identities. As it can be seen in the following scene, Willy's memory of his inadequacy in business is replaced by the memory of his lover:

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

**Willy** [to Linda]: ... I get so lonely—especially when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys [*The Woman prims at the "mirror."*] There's so much I want to make for—

**The Woman:** Me? You didn't make me, Willy. I picked you.

**Willy** [pleased]: ... You picked me?

**The Woman:** ... I've been sitting at that desk watching all the salesmen go by, day in, day out. But you've got such a sense of humor, and we do have such a good time together, don't we?

**Willy:** Sure, sure. [*He takes her in his arms*] Why do you have to go now? (Miller 29-30)

Clearly, Willy's strong positive response to "The Woman" was elicited by her preference for him over the other salesmen who came through her office. Finally, someone in the business world liked him better than his competitors. For Willy, this woman was a commodity he used to hide the truth that he is a lousy salesman in front of other successful ones.

For Willy, the achievement of financial success is tied to masculine self-image. This is why, as is typical in America, their metaphors for success involve winning fights and killing opponents. "*Knocked 'em cold in Providence, slaughtered 'em in Boston*", Willy tells his young sons upon returning home from a sales trip (26), using the same kind of language his brother Ben had used in advising him to go to Alaska: "*Screw on your fists and you can fight for a fortune up there*" (66). This link between business success and masculinity is, of course, one reason why Willy uses women to assuage his ego, to make up for his disappointments in the business world. Willy's desire to be recognized pushes

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

him to make the sexual relationship and to break the rule of the sexual code which society has set for him what brings the disastrous filial relationship in the play.

The conservative era, during which "*Death of a Salesman*" was written and in which the play was set, is directly related to the sexual attitudes expressed by the Loman family. For the repression of psychosexual awareness is a product of the same unconscious desire that informs the repression of political awareness: the desire to restrict the growth of critical thinking — thinking that examines motives and subtexts — which is always a threat to a conservative *status quo* (Tyson 79).

In terms of unconscious contents of Willy's mind, Freudian approach holds that human beings are mostly motivated by unconscious desires, conflicts and fears. The unconscious is the store house of those pains fears, failures and sufferings that humans do not want to bring forth. Considering these effects one can look into the mind of Willy Loman. As a family oriented man Willy's concern, about his father who disappeared when he was a child is natural, he was deprived of fatherly affection what makes him asking Ben all the time about their lost father.

**Willy** [*pulling ben away from her impatiently*]: Where is Dad? Didn't you follow him?

**Ben:** Well, I don't know how much you remember.

**Willy:** Well, I was just a baby, of course, only three or four years old—

**Ben:** Three years and eleven months. (Miller 32)

Willy talks with Ben when he is in his imaginary world clearly marks the evidence of this sense of loss. The playwright uses the flute music when Willy is in his past; such music is symbolic as his father's memory is accompanied with it. All these losses might have found a store house in Willy's mind which is the reason behind his inferiority

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

complex "... *Dad left when I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel — kind of temporary about myself*" (Miller 36).

A careful analysis of Willy's character, his childhood alienation, guilty conscience, failure, fatherhood and other dimension of his mental manifestation will reveal the soul of a common man being affected by psychological disorders. A Freudian psychoanalytical approach to Willy's character projects that Willy's tragedy is not only the tragedy of an American being affected by "success myth" but it is the story of everyman having the similar features identical in the inner psyche. He could not cope with the changing business world; nor does he get rid of the marks deeply rooted in his psyche which are the accumulated unpleasant experiences stored in his unconscious —since he was a child until he becomes an old man — that appeared again in terms of psychic pathological symptoms and daydreams.

## **Conclusion**

Through the analysis, one can conclude the following results. Psychoanalysis reveals that Willy's sad ending is the result of his narcissistic behavior, denial of reality and repression. It is Willy's psyche which drives him to suicide; he is unable to come out of the world of illusion. Sadly, Willy perceived that his only escape from the pain of life was suicide. Willy's mental condition is the reason behind his choice of committing suicide which is absolutely wrong. His desperate dwelling in the past and denying the present does not help him achieve the self-realization or self-knowledge typical of the tragic hero.

The protagonist's obsession with image throughout the play underscores this insecurity, for it bespeaks the narcissist, the man who must continually bolster the surface of his personality by finding its positive reflection in the world around him because that surface has no firm ground of its own to support it from within. His desire to be recognized pushes him to a sexual relationship and to follow his pleasure principle which brings the disastrous filial relationship in the play.

Each time Willy confronted with a traumatic reality he tries to escape his present pain by regressing to a time when his American dream fantasies could still convince him and his family that he was the success he wanted to be. These repressed conflicts are products of Willy's present psychological state as well as a reflection of his former condition. During a traumatic period, conflicts that have been long buried tend to surface and demand attention or discharge.

Willy is in a state of denial for unpleasant realities that continually threaten to invade his awareness. It is his struggle with those realities, brought to the fore by the double trauma of mounting pressures from his past memories. Such memories or imaginations are

---

## **WILLY LOMAN'S QUEST FOR A SELFHOOD: "DEATH OF A SALESMAN" AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK**

---

psychological regressions. Regression brings forward into consciousness, and allows working on conflicts that have inhabited the unconscious prior to the present period.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

---

Miller is one of the writers who were influenced by psychoanalytic methodology to depict the inner thoughts of characters. A Freudian Psychoanalytical approach to Willy's character that is affected by "Success Myth" is the story of everymen having similar features identical in the inner psyche. Willy could not cope with the changing business world; nor does he get rid of the marks deeply rooted in his psyche.

Characterization of the interaction between the conscious and unconscious elements of the mind is very overtly obvious, because the characters are consistently and rigorously subjective though intrigued by interior psychological questions. Throughout his work, Miller repeatedly displays intrapersonal conflicts between the individual and the selfhood. This type of conflict is most evident in "*Death of a Salesman*", where Willy faces conflict with himself.

A Freudian approach holds that human beings are mostly motivated by unconscious desires, conflicts and fears. The unconscious is the store house of those pains, fears, failures and sufferings people do not want to bring forth. Considering these effects one can look into the mind of Willy Loman. His ideal of the American success myth was shown through subtle actions shedding light on the inner of his mind. Willy Loman's unpleasant contents of his unconscious that were accumulated in his mind since his childhood appear again in his life in terms of psychic pathological symptoms and daydreams.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

---

A careful analysis of Willy's character, his childhood alienation, guilty conscience, failure, fatherhood and other dimensions of his mental manifestation will reveal the soul of a common man being affected by psychological disorders. Willy is living in an imaginary world which clearly marks the evidence of his sense of loss. All these losses might found a store house in Willy's mind which hinders his natural and logical thinking and makes his mind wandering between the real and the unreal because his ego is not operating according to the reality principal.

Willy suffers from a personality disorder, pathological narcissism, which demands grandiosity, omnipotence, and perfection rather than normal achievement. This kind of superiority complex is just a veneer for his fear of inferiority. Willy's madness is like a fatal flaw, which blinds him to his reality and fills him with arrogance or hubris so that he challenges the limits of his humanity. The play shows the trivialization of human concerns — apparent in Willy's attempt to substitute superficial personal interaction for meaningful business service and productivity, Willy Loman could not follow the change of time and became obsessed with the old values of success dream in the past, without recognizing that his dreams involved the “image” rather than the reality of such values. His failure to succeed in business is based on his personal ethics which are very problematical.

There is a clear connection between Willy's notion of success in relation to the American Dream and his narcissistic behavior. It is possible to interpret his conception as narcissistic. He believes that success is not attained through hard work but from being well liked. However, this fixation and glorification of being well liked clearly expresses the main characteristic of narcissism.

Psychoanalyzing Willy reveals another reason behind his case. He uses regression to escape from reality and represses his wish to have a business like other successful men

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

---

including — Dave Singleman, his brother Ben, Charley, and Howard Wagner — by repressing his failure to achieve his dreams and maintain his self-image. Willy's self-delusion was an attempt to sustain a sense of personal dignity and meaning to his life. He would not face the repressed awareness of his failed life that keeps threatening to break through into his consciousness and overwhelm him.

Willy was searching for his identity with type of those who are considered his role models. He fails to realize his personal failure through the constructed deception of his life. He cannot grasp the true personal, emotional, spiritual understanding of himself whether he is Loman or low man. Willy's life is a set of lies, delusions, and self-deceptions due to his lack of self-realization. Despite this failure, Willy makes the most extreme sacrifice in his attempt to leave an inheritance that will allow his son Biff to fulfill the American Dream which is his obsession.

Miller's central character is motivated by an obsession to justify himself. His ego-assertion states destruction in his life. Thus, Miller brought the psychological consequences to the fore through the embodiment of Willy's character.

Willy is the victim of his self-version or own edition of the American Dream of success. He does not encourage his sons to study as they were well built, attractive and full of personality. He prefers chance to hard work. Instead of doing hard work and looking for the opportunity he becomes a day dreamer, the play therefore turns into an anti- myth, the rags to riches formula is reversed and thereby it becomes the story of a failure in terms of success myth. Willy's conception of success represents the “corrupt” notion of the American Dream highlighting the fallacy of Willy's understanding of success. For that reason, his commitment to a pointless dream makes him unable simply to walk away.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

---

Willy has developed a false self; throughout his life he tries to be successful by his wrong ideals and he is completely living in a falsehood — accused of having a false notion. His notion of personal attractiveness in a way that being well liked becomes more important than working hard reach to such an extent that he can not accept his failure. In his mind, it is necessary to delude everyone, even oneself, because the appearance of things is always more important than the reality and the truth about one's accomplishments.

The conflicts that pathologically constructed Willy's psyche have come to such an impasse that ordinary forms of repression, regression, denial, and avoidance of reality are nothing but ineffective defense mechanisms because he used them excessively, extensively, and inflexibly. The only way to shut this psyche off is to kill it. Psychoanalyzing Willy reveals that his escape from reality causes his premature death and his psyche is the one which drives him to suicide.

The loss of identity and the quest for it have been a pervasive theme in contemporary American literature. In Miller's play, Willy is searching for his self-hood through a misconception to the notion of success; instead of doing hard work, he clings to the American Dream myths and fantasies to deny and submerge his psychological conflicts in the first place. His personality is the outcomes of different psychological motives as explained earlier from a Freudian token.

In this perspective, the American society should offer a fertile ground and open the door to discuss and resolve its psychological issues in order to meet all conflicts and uncertainties. Thus, the American family must bridge barriers and make fruitful contact among its members when one of them is in a threat.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

---

It is noteworthy that family environment can be a helpful means to the reduction of symptoms of its ill member. Not knowing how the illness functions can create misconceptions and prevent families from giving their loved ones effective help. They have to grasp and appreciate the severity of the symptoms such as the terrifying thoughts about suicidal ideation associated with a deep depression. Family may not realize that every time the person has a psychotic episode, more and more neurological damage occurs. So, attention must be paid to the inner souls and its conflicts for a healthy integrated family.

As a future prospect, the present study may be used in the field of psychology for further investigations about identity issues held responsible for cases that have similar features in the inner psyche.

## **WORKS CITED**

**I. Primary Sources:****Fiction:**

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem*. New York: Penguin Books, 1949. Print.

**Criticism:**

Arthur Miller Speaking on and Reading from The Crucible and Death of a Salesman (Spoken Arts Records, Distinguished Playwright Series, 704), side 1.

**II. Secondary Sources:****A-Books:**

Abha, Singh, *Tennessee Williams: The Psychic Perspective. Contemporary American Drama*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1998. Print.

Adams, James Truslow. *The Epic of America*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1931. Print.

Adrian, Page. *Death of a Salesman – York Notes Advanced*. London: York Press, 2003. Print.

Allen, Frederick. *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's*. New York: Harper and Rowe, 1931. Print.

Barry, Peter. *Psychoanalytic Criticism: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995. Print.

Berger, A. Aurtur. *Media Analysis Techniques*. 4<sup>th</sup>ed. United States of America : Sage Publication, 2012. Print.

Bigsby, Christopher. *Afterword in Arthur Miller. Death of a Salesman: 50th Anniversary Edition*. New York: Penguin. 1999. Print.

Bigsby, Christopher. *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*. Cambridge University Press, 2005. Print.

Brogan, Hugh. *The Penguin History of the United States of America*. London: Penguin Books, 1990. Print.

## WORKS CITED

---

Clifford T, Morgan, Richard A. King, John R. Weiz, and John Schopler. *Personality: Introduction to Psychology*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill Publishing Company Ltd., 1993. Print.

Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2003. Print

Davis, Walter A. *Get the Guests: Psychoanalysis—Modern American Drama—The Audience*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1994. Print.

Dobie, Ann B. *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Boston: Michael Rosenberg, 2012. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *A Genaral Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Clark Universuty: PDF Books World, 1920. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *Character and Culture*. Ed. Philip Rieff. New York: Collier, 1963. Print.

Hayman, Ronald. *Arthur Miller*. London: Heinemann, 1970.

Heller, Sharon. *Freud A to Z*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, 2005. Print.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum, 1982. Pint

Julian Wolfreys, Ruth Robbins and Kenneth Womack. *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edinburgh University Press. 2006. Print.

Laplanche, J, Pontails. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac books, 1988. Print.

Lewis, Allan. *American plays And Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre*. Rev. ed. New York : Crown Publishers,1970. Print.

Lewis, Allan, *Arthur Miller — Return to the Self: American Plays and Playwrights*. Rev. ed. New York: Crown Publishers, 1970. Print.

Lowen, Alexander. *Narcissism: Denial of the True Self*. New York: Touchstone, 1997. Print.

McAlister Williams, Liza, and Kent Paul. *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. New York: Barron's Book Notes, 1993. Print.

---

## WORKS CITED

---

Miller, Arthur. *Timebends: A Life*. New York: Grove Press, 1987. Print.

Moss, Leonard. *Arthur Miller*. Boston: Twayne, 1980. Print.

Nelson, Benjamin. *Arthur Miller: Portrait of a Playwright*. New York: David McKay, 1970. Print.

Perret, Geoffrey. *America in the Twenties*. New York: Touchstone, 1982. Print.

Porter, Thomas. *Willy Loman and the American Dream in Thomas Siebold's (Ed.) Readings on Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. San Diego: Greenhaven, 2003. Print.

Rajeshwar, M. *Fiction and Neurosis: Indian Women Novelists and Psychoanalysis*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1998. Print.

Roudane, Matthew C. *Conversations with Arthur Miller*. Jackson: Mississippi UP, 1987. Print.

Schneider, Daniel E. *A Modern Playwright: A Study of Two Plays by Arthur Miller. The Psychoanalyst and the Artist*. New York: International Universities Press, 1950. Print.

Steinberg, M. W. *Arthur Miller and the Idea of Modern Tragedy*. In Corrigam, R. W. (Ed.), 1969.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. Washington D.C.: United States Information Agency, 1988. Print.

Tyson, Lois. *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-Century American Literature*. Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1994. Print.

Wendell, Barrett. *A Literary History of America*. 4th Edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957. Print.

Wilfred L, Guerin, Lee Morgan, and John R. Willingham. *A Handbook of Criticism to Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. Print.

Winson, Jonathan. *Brain and psyche: The biology of the unconscious*. New York: Anchor Press, 1985. Print.

**B- Articles:****1- Collected Articles:**

Aarnes, William. "Tragic Form and the Possibility of Meaning in *Death of a Salesman*." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1988. 95-111.

Abend, T., Kernis, M. H., & Hampton, C. "Discrepancies between explicit and implicit self-esteem and self-serving responses." 2000.

Baumeister, Roy F, Karen Dale, and Kristin L. Sommer. "Freudian Defense Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Social Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projection, Displacement, Undoing, Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial". *Journal of Personality*. Backwell Publishers, 1998.

Beak, Sehyon. "Defense Mechanism". Law Department.

Bloom, Harold. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretation : Death of a Salesman*, updated edition. New York: Chelsea House, 2007. Print

Centola, Steven R. "Family Values in Death of a Salesman." CLA Journal 37.1 (1993): 29-41.

Chang-Ghone, Kim. "Defense Mechanisms of Freud". *Abnormal Psychology*.

Crudzina, Rebecca. "Teaching Death of a Salesman from Multiple Critical Perspectives." Prestwick House, INC.

Eisinger, Chester E. "Focus on Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman: The Wrong Dreams". *Critical insights: Death of a Salesman*. Ed. Brenda Murphy. California: Salem Press, 2010. 95-105. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 1900. Rpt. in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. Dr. A. A. Brill, ed. New York: Modern Library, 1938.180-549.

Heyen, William. "Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and the American Dream." *American Drama and Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Alfred Weber and

## WORKS CITED

---

Siegfried Neuweiler. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck, 1975. Rpt. in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1988. 47-58.

Jackson, Esther Merle. "Death of a Salesman: Tragic Myth in the Modern Theatre." *CLA Journal* 7.1 (1963). Rpt. in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1988. 7-18.

Loos, Pamela. "Best Intentions Far Awry: The Family Dynamic in Miller's All My Sons and Death of a Salesman." *Critical insights: Arthur Miller*. Ed. Brenda Murphy. California: Salem Press, 2011. 19-32. Print.

Mackinnon, Pam. "The Old Globe". San Diego, 2011.

Murphy, Brenda. *Critical Insights: Arthur Miller*. California: Salem Press, 2011. Print

Parker, Brian. "Point of View in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 35.2 (1966): 144-57. Rpt. in *Arthur Miller: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Robert W. Corrigan. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969. 95-109.

Porter, T. E. *Acres of Diamonds: Death of a Salesman*. In Martine, J. J. *Critical Essays on Arthur Miller*. New York: G.K. Hall, 1979

Sickels, Amy. "Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman: History of criticism." *Critical insights: Death of a Salesman*. Ed. Brenda Murphy. California: Salem Press, 2010. 76-91. Print.

**C- Journals:**

Chandron, Jaya. "A Psychoanalytic Study of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman". *International Journal of English Language and Literature* volume3. Issue 1 (2013): 21-24. Print.

Dan-quing, Zheng. "Who is to Blame for Willy Loman's Death?"-On Arthur Miller's Death a Salesman". *Canadian Social Science*, 4 (2007): 25-29. Print.

Mitchell, Giles. "Living and Dying for the Ideal: A Study of Willy Loman's Narcissism." *Psychoanalytic Review* 77.3 (1990): 391-407. Print.

## WORKS CITED

---

Shariful, Karim. "A Critical Overview of Miller's Willy Loman-A Dreamer, More Sinned against the Sinning". *Researchers World-Journal of Arts, Science and Commerce* IV volume 1. Issue 1 (2013): 55-60. Print.

Unnati, Datar. "Psychoanalytic Study of the Plays of Arthur Miller". *International Journal on English Language and Literature* volume 1. Issue 1.23-29

### D- Electronic Sources:

Ahab. "Death of a Salesman as a Psychoanalytic Work". *Everything2*. Web. 03 October 2015. <<http://everything2.com/title/Death+of+a+Salesman+as+a+Psychanalytic+Work>>.

"Donald Winnicott." *The Great Psychoanalysts*. Web. 15 April 2016. <<http://thephilosophersmail.com/perspective/the-great-psychanalysts-donald-winnicott>>.

"Freud's Iceberg Model for Unconscious, Pre-conscious, & Conscious". *Topography of Mind*. <<http://www.wilderdom.com/personality/L83TopographyMindIceberg.htm>>.

Kazlev, A. "Freud's view of the human mind: The mental iceberg". 2004. Web. 14 December 2015. <<http://www.wilderdom.com/personality/L83TopographyMindIceberg.html>>.

Lounsberry, Barbara. "The Expressionistic Devices in Death of a Salesman." Web. 13 December 2015. <<https://kbsenglisha.wikispaces.com/Expressionistic+Devices?showComments=1>>.

McLeod, Saul. "Psychodynamic Approach." *Simply Psychology*. 2007. Web. 16 March 2016. <<http://www.simplypsychology.org/psychodynamic.html>>.

"Personality Theories." *Psychoanalytic Theory*. N.p. n.d. Web. 06 January 2016. <[http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1530/1567154/278316\\_CH08\\_61939.pdf](http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1530/1567154/278316_CH08_61939.pdf)>.

"Psychological Realism." Web. 02 February 2016. <<http://www.chegg.com/homework-help/definitions/psychological-realism-41>>.

## WORKS CITED

---

“Reality Within: Psychological Realism”. Web. 02 November 2015.  
<[Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/.../07\\_chapter%204.pdf](http://Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/.../07_chapter%204.pdf)>.

“What Is Personality.” Web. 12 April 2016. <<http://www.cabrillo.edu/~jtice/Psychology%2033/What%20Is%20Personality.pdf>>.  
<[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/11877/7/07\\_chapter%204.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/11877/7/07_chapter%204.pdf)>  
<[http://wwwParedes.us/image/freud\\_2.gif](http://wwwParedes.us/image/freud_2.gif)>. Web. 15 December 2015.  
<<http://www.lincoln.leon.k12.fl.usimmedia/menu/APreadings/Expressionistic.doc>>.  
Web. 04 February 2016.  
<[http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1530/1567154/278-316\\_CH08\\_61939.pdf](http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1530/1567154/278-316_CH08_61939.pdf)>.

## **APPENDICES**

## 1. Background and Context

### 1.1. Historical, economic, and social context

The historical context of “*Death of a Salesman*” is very important. As a social drama, much of the play resonates with and comments on aspects of society at that time. Consider, for example, the economic situation in America in 1949. Following a considerable period of lean times brought on by the Great Depression and then the Second World War, America experienced an unprecedented period of economic growth. The country had been geared up for massive industrial production during the war, and peacetime directed that industrial potential onto the domestic market.

For the first time in nearly thirty years there was a surplus of goods, from foodstuffs to electronics to cars, and a good deal of money going around with which to buy them. Large-scale housing (especially construction of urban apartment blocks) and inner-city businesses experienced a boom. The boom of the late 1940s, however, didn’t bring prosperity to everyone. The massive amount of people buying goods triggered inflation and many normal Americans on moderate wages suddenly found themselves unable to afford a lot of products. Small-scale farmers also experienced difficulties because the American government had embarked on a series of policies designed to encourage mass food production by large corporations. It was a time when big business started to thrive at the expense of the individual operator.

The first workers to be hit hard by this change in the economic situation were the lowest-paid, unskilled workers like field laborers, shop clerks, janitors (cleaners), waiters and salesmen. In the play, Biff has been working as a field laborer for a small-scale farmer and Happy is an assistant to the assistant clerk in a clothing store. Both of these kinds of workers would have experienced a significant reduction in their wages and spending

---

## APPENDICES: “DEATH OF A SALESMAN”: A LITERARY ANALYSIS

---

power. At the same time, other members of American society (shareholders, professionals, businessmen, middle management) would have been enjoying the benefits of a massive boost in corporate earnings. The rich started getting richer while the poor started getting poorer — a trend that has continued in America to this day.

Another significant change in the economic situation was an increase in the use of credit, which triggered more inflation. Cash-rich corporations encouraged customers to use credit to buy products at inflated prices that they could not normally afford. People used credit to buy commodity items like cars and houses. There is evidence in *“Death of a Salesman”* that Willy has relied heavily on credit, as we see the pressures of his repayments restricting his ability to afford basic domestic necessities.

The global political climate was also an important factor. America was in the early stages of the Cold War with their new ideological enemies, the Soviet Union. In order to prove their ideological and economic superiority, American citizens started to feel obliged to exercise their democratic right to freedom and prosperity by diving headfirst into capitalism and materialism. The acquisition of goods and ostentatious demonstrations of affluence moved a notch up the social ladder and was widely deemed to be an act of patriotism. Being rich and owning advanced technology was physical proof that the ‘American Dream’ of freedom and opportunity was morally and materially superior to Communism’s dictum of ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’. Personal and national pride had become fused together and the acquisition of wealth had become an explicit and requisite expression of ‘freedom and liberty’.

Notice also that there are in fact two versions of the great American Dream being alluded to. There is Willy’s, which is distinctively urban — focused on money and materials — and Biff and Ben’s, with a ‘go West, young man’ mythology belonging to the

century before. This second dream was founded on adventure, physical endeavor and claiming a birthright — the kinds of values embodied in ‘Western’ movies.

### 2. Arthur Miller and the Play

Arthur Asher Miller, an American playwright, was born on October 17, 1915, in Harlem, New York City and is renowned for his critical understanding of social problems. He proved his worth by understanding and portraying the inner psychology of his characters. Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* is set against a post-war America where he draws the depression and magic of American business world.

The play premiered on Broadway on February 10, 1949 at the Morosco Theatre (New York), it was a commercial success and was critically acclaimed, winning a Tony Award for Best Author, the New York Drama Circle Critics’ Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. After the production of “*Death of a Salesman*” in 1949, Miller was considered by many as one of the world’s most significant living dramatists.

At the time of his birth, his family was rich and his father owned a successful clothing business which engaged more than a thousand workers living in a Harlem neighborhood. But the crash of Wall Street in 1929 caused damage to their business what led them to move towards Brooklyn. His education was also affected by the economic depression in America in which he had to earn to support his educational expenses. This economic fall and prevalent American success myth must have influenced Miller to manifest the background of the play.

Although the play premiered in 1949, Miller began writing “*Death of a Salesman*” at the age of seventeen when he was working for his father’s company. In his youth, he had written a short story about an unsuccessful salesman. His relationship with his uncle

---

## APPENDICES: “DEATH OF A SALESMAN”: A LITERARY ANALYSIS

---

Manny Newman revived his interest in the abandoned manuscript. In short story form, it treated an aging salesman unable to sell anything. He is berated by company bosses and must borrow subway change from the young narrator. The end of the manuscript contains a postscript, noting that the salesman on whom the story is based had thrown himself under a subway train.

Arthur Miller reworked the play in 1947 upon a meeting with his uncle and transformed it into one of the most successful dramas in the history of the American stage. In expressing the emotions that Manny Newman inspired through the fictional character of Willy Loman, Miller managed to touch deep chords within the national psyche.

### **3. Setting**

#### **1. Time**

The present; either the late 1940s or the time period in which the play is being produced, with daydreams into Willy's past; all of the action takes place during a twenty-four-hour period between Monday night and Tuesday night, except the Requiem, which takes place, presumably, a few days after Willy's funeral.

#### **2. Place**

According to the stage directions, Willy Loman's house and yard in Brooklyn and various places he visits in New York and Boston, and Manhattan, in addition to Willy's head.

### 4. Character list

#### **Willy Loman**

Willy is a sixty year old salesman living in Brooklyn, who has powerful aspirations to success. He focuses on personal details over actual measures of success, believing that it is personality and not high returns that garner success in the business world.

#### **Biff Loman**

The thirty-four year old son of Willy Loman, Biff was once a star high school athlete with a scholarship to UVA. But he never attended college nor graduated from high school, after refusing to attend summer school to make up a flunked math class. He did this primarily out of spite after finding out that his father was having an affair with a woman in Boston.

#### **Linda Loman**

The dutiful, obedient wife to Willy and mother of Biff and Happy, Linda Loman is the one person who supports Willy Loman, despite his often reprehensible treatment of her.

#### **Happy Loman**

The younger of the two Loman sons, Happy Loman is seemingly content and successful, with a steady career and none of the obvious marks of failure that his older brother displays.

#### **Charley**

The Lomans’ next door neighbor and father of Bernard, Charley is a good businessman, exemplifying the success that Willy is unable to achieve.

---

## APPENDICES: “DEATH OF A SALESMAN”: A LITERARY ANALYSIS

---

### **Bernard**

Bernard is Charley's only son. He is intelligent and industrious but lacks the gregarious personality of either of the Loman sons. As a grown-up, he is a lawyer preparing to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court.

### **Ben**

Willy's older brother, Ben left home at the age seventeen to find their father in Alaska, but ended up in Africa, where he found diamond mines and came out of the jungle at twenty-one an incredibly rich man. Although Ben died several weeks before the time at which the play is set, he often appears in Willy's hallucinations. Ben represents the fantastic success for which Willy has always hoped but can never seem to achieve.

### **Howard Wagner**

The thirty-six year old son of Frank Wagner, Willy Loman's former boss, Howard now occupies the same position as his father.

### **Stanley**

Stanley is the waiter at the restaurant where Willy meets his sons.

### **The Woman**

An assistant in a company in Boston with which Willy makes business. This nameless character has a continuing affair with Willy.

## **5. Synopsis**

“*Death of a Salesman*” takes place in New York and Boston. The action begins in the home of Willy Loman, an aging salesman who has just returned from a road trip. Willy is

---

## APPENDICES: “DEATH OF A SALESMAN”: A LITERARY ANALYSIS

---

having difficulty in remembering events, as well as distinguishing the present from his memories of the past. His wife, Linda, suggests requesting a job in New York rather than traveling each week. Linda and Willy argue about their oldest son Biff.

Biff and his brother, Happy, overhear Willy talking to himself. Biff learns that Willy is usually talking to him (Biff) during these private reveries. Biff and Happy discuss women and the future. Both are dissatisfied with their jobs.

At this point, Willy relives several scenes from his past, including the time when — during high school — Biff admits stealing a football and promises to throw a pass for Willy during the game. Willy also remembers his old dream of the boys visiting him in Boston during a road trip. Finally in his reverie, he relives the time that Bernard, son of the next-door neighbor Charley, informs Willy that Biff is failing math and will not graduate unless his scores improve. In this last scene, Willy listens but dismisses the important news because Biff is “well-liked,” and Bernard is not.

Willy remembers a conversation with Linda in which he inflates his earnings but is then forced to admit that he exaggerated when Linda calculates his commission. Willy recalls complaining about his appearance and remembers Linda assuring him that he is attractive. At this point, Willy's memories begin to blend together. While he is reliving his conversation with Linda, he begins to remember his conversation with the Woman (a woman with whom he had an affair). He is unable to separate memories of Linda from the Woman.

The play continues in the present with his neighbor Charley coming over to play cards. However, Ben appears to Willy while he is playing cards with Charley, and Willy relives an old conversation with Ben while simultaneously talking with Charley. As a result, Willy becomes confused by the two different “discussions” he is having — one in

---

## APPENDICES: “DEATH OF A SALESMAN”: A LITERARY ANALYSIS

---

the present, one in the past — and he accuses Charley of cheating. After Charley leaves, Willy relives Ben’s visit and asks him for advice because he feels insecure since he did not really know his own father. Willy also remembers instructing Biff and Happy to steal some supplies from the construction site in order to remodel the porch so that he can impress Ben.

The play once again returns to the present, in which Biff and Happy talk with Linda about Willy. Biff and Happy learn that Willy is on straight commission and has been borrowing money from Charley in order to pay bills. Linda criticizes her sons for abandoning their father in order to pursue their own selfish desires, and she gives Biff a choice; whether to respect his father or not to come home again. Biff decides to stay in New York, but he reminds Linda that Willy threw him out of the house. He also tells Linda that Willy is a "fake." It is at this point that Linda informs her sons that Willy is suicidal.

Willy overhears his wife and sons talking, and he and Biff argue. When Happy describes Biff’s plan to open his own business, Willy directs Biff on what to do during his interview with Bill Oliver. Willy remembers Biff’s football games. Before Linda and Willy go to bed, Linda questions Willy: She wants to know what Biff is holding against him, but Willy refuses to answer. Biff removes the rubber tubing Willy hid behind the heater.

The next morning Willy prepares to visit his boss Howard to ask him for a job in New York. During the meeting, Howard informs Willy that there are no positions available in New York. Willy reminds Howard that he named him, and he was a very successful salesman when he worked for Howard’s father. Howard remains impassive and instead fires him.

Upon being fired, Willy begins freefalling into his memories of the past. Willy recalls Ben’s visit once again. This time, Willy asks for advice because things are not going as he

---

## APPENDICES: “DEATH OF A SALESMAN”: A LITERARY ANALYSIS

---

planned. He remembers Ben offering him a job in Alaska. He accepts, but Linda intervenes and reminds him of Dave Singleman. Willy shifts from his memory of Ben to Biff's last football game. Willy recalls Charley pretending he is unaware of Biff's game, the thing that infuriates him. Willy's daydream ends when he arrives at Charley's office.

Bernard is waiting for Charley in his office. Willy and Bernard discuss Biff and consider possible reasons for his lack of motivation and success. Bernard says Biff changed right after high school when he visited Willy in Boston. Bernard questions Willy about what happened when Biff went to visit him. Willy becomes defensive. Bernard is on his way to present a case before the Supreme Court. Bernard's success both pleases and upsets Willy. Charley gives Willy money for his insurance payment and offers him a job, an offer that Willy refuses.

At a restaurant where Willy and his sons meet, Happy flirts with a young prostitute, and Biff is upset because Oliver did not remember him. Then Biff realizes that he was never a salesman for Oliver; instead, he was a shipping clerk. Willy tells his sons that he has been fired. Biff attempts to explain what happened with Oliver (after seeing Oliver, Biff sneaked back into his office and stole Oliver's pen); however, Willy is reliving the past, recalling Bernard and informing Linda that Biff has failed math and that he will not graduate. Willy then remembers Bernard telling her that Biff has taken a train to Boston.

Willy relives the time when Biff finds out about Willy's affair with the Woman: Biff comes to Willy's hotel room in Boston to tell Willy that he will not graduate unless Willy can convince Mr. Birnbaum to pass him. Willy tries to hide her, but his attempts failed and his final memory is of Biff calling him a “fake” before walking out the door.

The play continues in the present when Stanley reappears, and Willy realizes he is actually still in the restaurant. Willy returns home and begins building a garden, even

---

## APPENDICES: “DEATH OF A SALESMAN”: A LITERARY ANALYSIS

---

though it is night. Linda throws Happy and Biff out of the house. Ben appears to Willy while he is planting seeds. At this point, Willy does not remember a previous conversation with Ben, as he does several times earlier in the play. Instead, he and Ben discuss his plan to commit suicide. Willy and Ben converse in the present, but they are talking about the future. Ben warns Willy that the insurance company might refuse to pay a settlement and Biff might never forgive him.

Biff approaches Willy in the garden to tell him he is leaving home. Biff and Willy argue, and Biff confronts Willy with the rubber hose, saying he will not pity him if he commits suicide. According to Biff, the Lomans have never been truthful with one another or themselves. Biff believes that he and Willy are ordinary people who can easily be replaced. Biff and Willy reconcile. Ben reappears to Willy and reminds him of the insurance policy. Willy drives away. The Lomans, Charley, and Bernard gather at Willy's grave.

## 6. Major Themes

### 1. The American Dream

Willy Loman is a man trying to realize the American Dream. However, his failure to achieve it lies in his inability to waver from his belief in its promises.

### 2. Success

The notion of success is very important to Willy. He believes that to be successful one must be well liked and defines success by popularity.

### **3. Reality and Illusion**

A major theme and source of conflict in the play is Willy's inability to distinguish between illusion and reality. Willy is under the illusion that he and his sons will make something of themselves despite their setbacks, yet the truth seems to be, in the new capitalistic and technological world, they are all destined for failure.

### **4. Cult of Personality**

Willy believes that it is not what a person is able to accomplish, but who he knows and how he treats them that will get a man ahead in the world. This viewpoint is tragically undermined not only by Willy's failure, but also by that of his sons, who assumed that they could make their way in life using only their charms and good looks, rather than any more solid talents.

## **7. Symbols and Imagery**

### **1. The Stockings**

One example that Miller uses often is the stockings which Linda darns and which Willy presents as a gift to Miss Francis. They can be seen as a symbol of Willy's career, his self worth, and his ‘product.’ At home, his life is in crisis and the stockings are full of holes. Linda, the loving wife, attempts to mend their life in the same way that she mends holes in the stockings. Willy is enraged at this action and orders her to throw the stockings in the garbage. This action is symbolic of his desire to be free of problems at home and enjoy a life of success and harmony. When Biff discovers his father with Miss Francis, he is most angered by the fact that Willy has given her the stockings of his mother. Again, the garments represent a bond of integrity and happiness that has been violated.

### **2. Willy’s car**

In this car, Willy is driving himself to death. One learns from Linda that Willy has staged several previous car accidents. These “accidents” were perhaps early attempts to commit suicide, but they were definitely attempts to draw attention to his condition. The car represents power, movement forward, acceleration and mobility — all of which are symbols in Willy’s life of hopelessness, decay, and despair. It should therefore come as no surprise that Willy considers this vehicle as an instrument with which to kill himself.

### **3. The refrigerator**

In the Loman’s kitchen assumes symbolic significance as it was the quintessential image of the 1950’s American Dream in physical form. The popularity of radios, refrigerators and automobiles in particular began in the pre-Crash capitalist boom of the 1920’s and soon became potent images of consumer America. However, just as in a reflection of his dreams, Willy’s refrigerator is broken.

### **4. The fountain pen**

That Biff steals is symbolic of Biff’s inadequacies. He has no need for the pen, nor is it meaningful in any conscious manner. Rather, it serves to highlight the absurdity of theft, the demeaning quality of taking from someone something which one does not need. Biff has lived a life based on Willy’s values, but when he discovers that these values are not good for him, he abandons them in search of his own. The pen can therefore also be seen as the symbol of someone else’s values, of someone else’s possessions. Biff discards it in favor of integrity and belief in himself. He wishes to get rid of his life-long habit of taking from others (such as the football back in high school). He has spent time in prison, and this symbolically represents how he has spent much of his life imprisoned by his father’s mentality.

### 5. The Seeds

At the end of the play, Willy purchases some seeds for his garden and begins to plant them late at night. He is close to suicide but realizes that he must leave something “real” behind for his sons. The planting of the seeds is symbolic of Willy’s desire to grow big and tall; ironically, Biff is the one who will secure growth in life. Happy, in his determination to continue Willy’s action can be seen as the weed in the Loman’s garden.

In terms of imagery, one of the most important is that of “the woods are burning.” Willy’s brother Ben made a success of himself early in life and compared the process of success building to entering a jungle. Willy constantly remembers Ben saying: “*When I was seventeen, I walked into the jungle and when I was twenty-one I walked out...And by God I was rich!*” The jungle was the locale of Ben’s success, but for Willy, the forest is burning and there is little time left. The burning woods image is symbolic of Willy’s feeling that everything is closing in on him: time, debts, and human relationships. Even the apartment buildings in his neighborhood are closing in on him and he cannot bear the pressures. That is why he considers throwing himself into the fire and committing suicide.

### 8. Point of view

This particular piece of literature does not have a narrator through whose eyes or voice readers learn the story.

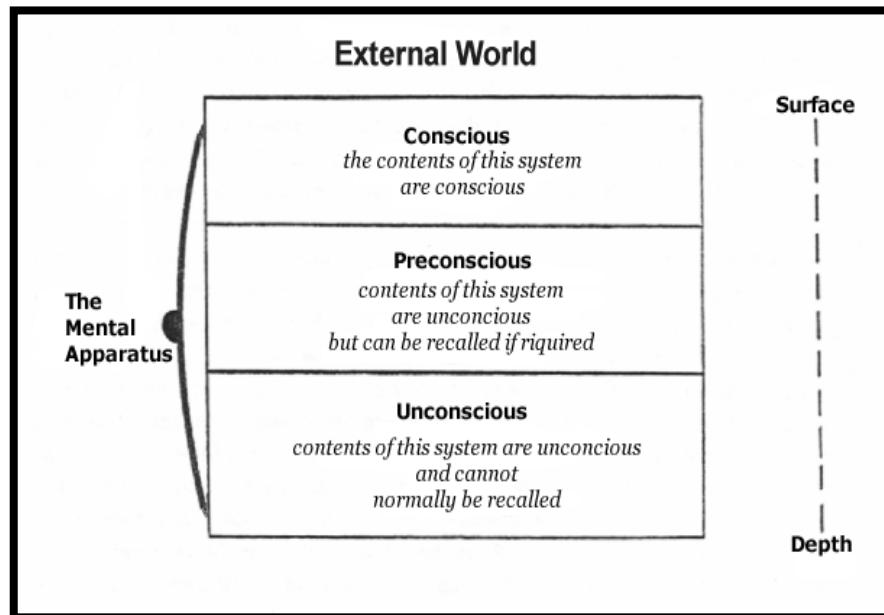


Figure 1 from ([http://wwwParedes.us/image/freud\\_2.gif](http://wwwParedes.us/image/freud_2.gif))

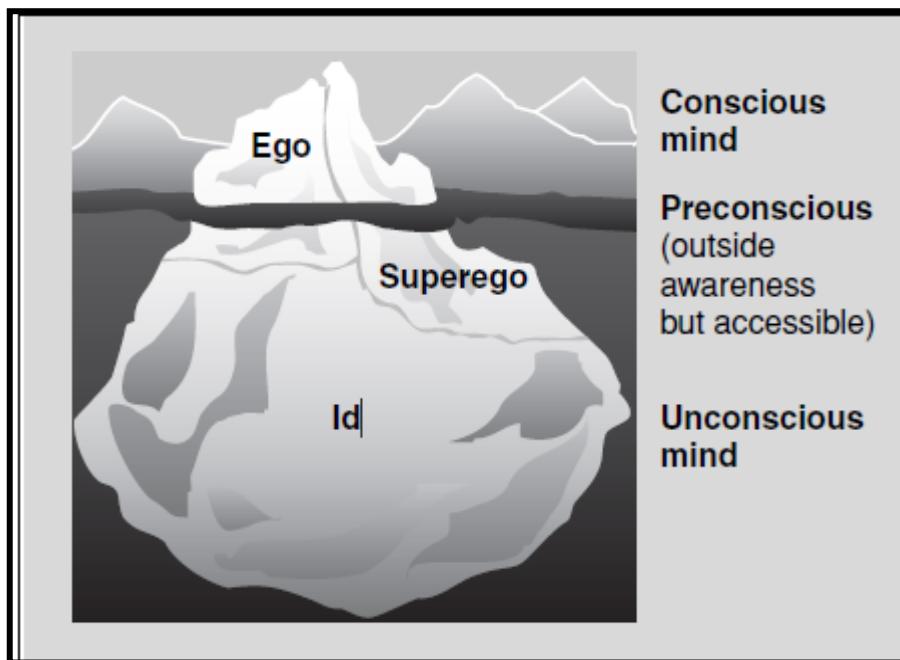


Figure 2 from ([http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1530/1567154/278-316\\_CH08\\_61939.pdf](http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1530/1567154/278-316_CH08_61939.pdf))

## ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة موضوع تصور الفرد لذاته و ذلك بتسليط الضوء على سعي الأخير لإيجاد هويته الشخصية و علاقتها "بأسطورة النجاح الأمريكية". تهدف الدراسة إلى إماطة اللثام عن هذه العلاقة و ذلك عبر مناظير نقدية متعلقة بمدرسة التحليل النفسي التي سينظر من خلالها في عمل مسرحي يعد حجر الزاوية في الدراما الأمريكية للقرن 20 ألا و هي مسرحية "موت باع متجول". المسرحية كتبها "آرثر ميلر" و هو قامة من قامات المسرح الأمريكي حيث أن "ولي لومان" و من خلاله سعيه لإدراك ذاته يصطدم بالتصور الخاطئ لمفهوم النجاح في المجتمع الأمريكي و مرد ذلك تراكمات نفسية داخلية أدت في الأخير إلى انهياره النفسي و الذي بدوره أدى إلى موته التراجيدي. وبالتالي فإن الهدف الذي تتواخاه الدراسة هو توضيح الفكرة التي تقول أن معاناة "ولي لومان" يمكن ردها و تفسيرها من وجها نظر "سيغموند فرويد". و تثبت الدراسة أن مسرحية "موت باع متجول" هي بحق نتاج لنظرية التحليل النفسي إذ أثبتت أن الآتا الداخلي "ولي لومان" أنتجته مورثات نفسية ذات صلة بالمفهوم الخاطئ لقيم النجاح المادي بما يسمى "الحلم الأمريكي". و تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن الشخصية البطلة تتحكم فيها جملة من الدوافع متعلقة بالشعور و الاعتقاد و الحلم و كل ما يفعله الشخص بدوافع نفسية لذا تبني الدراسة مقاربة تعتمد على مدرسة التحليل النفسي معتمدة في ذلك على أفكار "سيغموند فرويد" كنظرية النرجسية و اللاشعور و آليات الدفاع.