



Fall of Gran Narratives, Duality and the Conflict in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman: A Postmodernist Study

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"Postmodernism" is utilized to depict a wide range of aesthetic, cultural, historical, literary and philosophical goings-on. It is frequently likewise used to recommend, differently, a diverse style, a historical period, and a philosophical idea, and in addition a hostile to style, an temporal occasion, and a non-concept. Regularly connected with deconstruction and post structuralism, it is a term which undergoes uninterrupted redefinitions. In the visual art and in architecture, postmodernism is alluded as pastiche or eclecticism. In philosophy, it remains against characterizing logo centricism and epistemological assurance that has described Western logic since Descartes. Postmodern theory is anti-foundational, and now and then is seen as contemporary skepticism. In the 1960s, French philosophers, for example, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-Francois Lyotard left from conventional studies in the history of philosophy and started to address the epistemological crisis fortifying Western philosophical thought. Their initial scholarship concentrated on the structure of language and its part in creating world-views. The work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, particularly his posthumous text entitled, *Course in General Linguistics*, and exhibited the scholarly insight that was important to isolate the synchronic and diachronic components of language. Dividing language and, in actuality, liberating the sign from the signified, allowed poststructuralists to redefine language as an arrangement of differential signs.

Death of a Salesman, a grim satire, brought Miller creative accomplishment and in addition worldwide acknowledgment. This play has been seen by several as a scathing attack on the American Dream of making riches and progress. The play made Arthur Miller and the character Willy Loman easily recognized names. Death of a Salesman offers number of interesting elucidations. It is about the

oddities of being alive in an innovative society; it is about the feeling of confinement brought by technological development and the value individuals pay for advancement. It is a story of viciousness within the family, about individual concealment by putting him beneath the tyrannical needs of capitalist society. It is a play around a man who slaughters himself since he is not preferred. It communicates every one of those sentiments of a society falling to pieces which we have, emotions that, to him, are one reason for the play's proceeding with prominence. But, the perception that goes most specifically to the heart of the play is contained in a remark made in connection to the production Miller focused in China in 1983:

“Death of a Salesman, really, is a love story between a man and his son and in a crazy way between both of them and America” (qtd. In Bigsby, 2005:102)

Fall of Gran Narratives:

In The postmodern condition, Lyotard characterizes postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives. A metanarrative sets out the tenets of narratives and language games “(1984: 24). The postmodernist authors mock these metanarratives as ideologically developed, so postmodernism is deconstructionist by nature.

Lyotard claims that in postmodern period our social “language game” no more requires metanarratives to legitimize the expressions made in them. The modernist thoughts of justification, system proof, and the solidarity of science no more hold. He breaks down the generation of knowledge by science, as well as the discourse of everyday social life, in terms of discontinuity. Lyotard (1984) believes:

Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy (32).

Death of a Salesman is a story of a man who penances himself to an idea, the bogus guarantee of a golden future. Willy Loman specifically has retained the estimations of his society until they appear to be a piece of what he wishes to see as his own definition. His is a salesman; the encapsulation of a society based on social execution and married to the possibility of a changing future. Future for Willy is blushing and brimming with trust. Bigsby in Critical Study (2005), declares:

Willy Loman is a man who wishes his reality to come into line with his hopes, a man desperate to leave his mark on the world through his own endeavor and through those of his children. Though he seems to seek death, what he fears above all is that he will go before he has justified himself in his own eyes and there are few, from New York to Beijing, who do not understand the urgency of that need (101).

Willy Loman, frantically driving the highway of New York and New England, is toward the end of a historical procedure that once saw men pioneer trails into the heart of the obscure and of a utopia that guaranteed another personality and another trust. His fatigue reflects entropy that taints more than just himself. Biff and Happy are no less confounded by the loss of vitality than their father. Death of a Salesman is a declaration of the end of Enlightenment and Grand narratives. Willy's feeling of requiring affection and respect causes him to commit his life to the everlasting American quest of a transformed tomorrow. Robinson in Nietzsche and Postmodernism (2000) states:

Our postmodern world seems very likely to become one of spiritual emptiness and cultural superficiality, in which social practices are endlessly repeated and parodied, a fragmented world of alienated individuals with no sense of self or history, tuned into a thousand different TV channels. This is certainly the vision of both present and future offered to us by the postmodernist Jean Baudrillard. For him, this postmodern world is one of simulacra in which there is no longer any difference between reality and surface. Modern citizens will not be 'Over people' – just consumers of media in a world of signs without signifiers (p.43).

As Nietzsche saw the modern age as concerned with Becoming rather than Being, in this sense Willy Loman can stand as an ideal figure. He is never at rest, a traveller for other reasons than his job. Willy bends toward the future. His is a pending life. He is on hold, waiting to hear the good news of his imminent arrival in the promised future of possibility. In Bigsby's words:

He holds his breath in awe of the promise, dying for want of the air he should breathe in a shared present. The irony is that, staring through the windshield towards the future, he increasingly finds himself looking into the rear-view mirror, suddenly struck by the irony that the meaning of his life might exist in the past. It is guilt that draws him back, but the greater irony is that he might, after all, have missed the epiphany for which he has waited an entire life (2005:115)

The obvious fixities of the social world are uncovered as unforeseen. Yesterday's new technology becomes today's obsolete product. The rural turns into the urban; brilliant hopes fade into regrets. However Willy's recollections are those of a society endeavouring to live mythically.

Willy apparently yearns for tomorrow but is kept away by all evidence of the consumer society, high-rise apartments, wire recorders which lie outside his control. The problem is that the future holds the certainty of dissolution. His refrigerator and his car are disassembling themselves before his eyes and so, he knows, is he.

Duality and The Conflict

The characters in *Death of a Salesman* find themselves in an oozy ocean of dualism. Duality of theme, duality of self, duality among the characters, and duality of time are quite vivid in the play. Willy as the father of family, who traditionally must act as a unifying core in the orbit of family, is completely absent and Biff is separated from his father. The relationship between Willy and his son is central. There are the magnetic forces that paradoxically pull them together and thrust them apart. Biff wants to save Willy, and at the same time to free himself. He is angry at Willy's weakness, helplessness, and at Willy's love for him. Biff and his father see the world differently. The essence of this drama is contained within these tensions. Father and son are a divided self. Bigsby interestingly in critical study (2005) gives the following details:

Their identities are ineluctably intertwined. For Willy Loman, Biff is his justification and vindication. In refusing to embrace his father's dreams he is, thus, denying him fulfilment, expiation, that sense of identity that comes from passing the torch from generation to generation. For Biff, his father stands between himself and his life. He is the past that has to be transcended, the falsehood that must be rejected, but also the debt that must be discharged (102).

The past is the burden they bear in a play in which the past threatens at every moment to break through into an increasingly desperate present. There is a race on, a race for Willy's life and Biff's soul. Therefore, drama is born out of a situation in which the individual cannot walk away. In wrestling of Biff and Willy, Biff is Willy's ace in the hole, the proof that he was right, after all, that tomorrow things will change for the better and thus offer a retrospective grace to the past. Willy, meanwhile, is Biff's flawed model, the man who seemed to sanction his hunger for success and popularity, a hunger suddenly stilled by a moment of revelation.

Willy desperately needs Biff to embrace him and his dream. He needs the affection and success of his sons to destroy his failure. Biff, by contrast, desperately needs to cut the link between himself and Willy. This is the motor force of the play. There can be only one winner and whoever wins will also have lost. Miller says: "the story of *Salesman* is absurdly simple! It is about a salesman and it's his last day on the earth" (1996: 423).

Biff, at the interview, chooses to steal the pen of the man on whom his future supposedly depends, the thefts he has committed since catching his father in a Boston hotel room with another woman, are, at least subconsciously, indirect acts of vengeance. As Bigsby (2005) says:

though Happy rededicates himself to Willy's false dreams, his is a voice that now lacks social resonance. Biff, alone, draws the necessary conclusions from the death of a man he loved but from whom he had to separate himself, Biff the man who 'returned for Willy's blessing without which he cannot find himself as a man', a fact which was unplanned by Miller, but, as he once remarked, 'there it is'.(119)

The problem in *Death of a Salesman* is the inability of human beings to accept the changed reality and develop new attitudes compatible with one's changed circumstances of life. The problem of isolation arises in the play because of the protagonist's insensitivity to the inevitability of change.

This study has tried to dramatize a situation in which the personal motives of the characters are in conflict with the arbitrary norms of society. Society forces man to put on false faces and live his life through inherently contradictory and false values. The study has made an attempt to show the individuals stuck in the limbo of modern and postmodern values. He has to encounter the dilemma of creating an image of himself out of the illusory social life he is compelled to live. In order to succeed in public life, the individual desperately attempts to put on a socially acceptable mask and performs a role before the society. In this process, he becomes isolated from his own self.

References

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