

## AMERICAN DREAM IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

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### ***Abstract***

*The research is concerned with American Dream in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman. The objectives of the research are to describe Willy Loman's bad attitudes and actions, describe Willy Loman's good attitudes and actions in achieving American dream, and to analyze the results of the American dream pursuit in the story. The first theory that is used in this research is American value to figure out Willy Loman's bad and good attitudes and actions and the second theory is American dream that is used to analyze the results of American dream pursuit. While, the method of this research, the writer used descriptive method, and for the technique of data collecting, the writer used document analysis. Then, there are two approaches that are used in the analysis namely sociological and psychological approaches. In the research, the writer found the bad attitudes and actions in the story of Death of a Salesman through the main character, Willy Loman are maintaining his pride, manipulated by his thought, keeping on his unreal social status, and pretending to be rich. Moreover, the good attitudes and actions in this story are working hard, initiative and full of ambition, getting of opportunity, getting ready for the competition, and struggling for his family's life. Furthermore, the results of the main character in pursuing the American dream also found in this story, that are losing the real identity of life, getting jealous of the success of the other's life, living in life of full the illusion and delusional, being a stubborn man, being an arrogant man and the last ending with the unhappy ending life. In conclusion, the main character, Willy Loman could not reach his happiness of his life that is caused by his wrong perspective of his mind about achieving the American dream. And he decided to end his life by suicide himself to get the money insurance for his family.*

**Keywords:** *American Dream, American Value.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Death of a Salesman is Arthur Miller's most famous work produced in 1949, marked an eye catching vestige in American drama. It casts a cold eye on the 'American Dream' and moral that is compromised to achieve it. This play explains about the dream of the salesman named Willy Loman; he is a man who struggles to get the 'American Dream' which is to make sense of his place in the society. Miller gained eminence as a man who understood the deep essence of the United States because the play examines the coast of blind faith in the 'American

Dream'. The failure of Willy Loman in achieving wealth for his happiness can be seen when he is believed that he can become a successful traveling salesman. It makes him becomes more aggressive and full of ambition. But, it guides him to have wrong perception and ambition of the American Dream in the way he applies the vision toward himself and his family. Therefore, the research focuses on three problems that are Willy Loman's bad attitudes and actions, Willy Loman's good attitudes and actions in achieving American dream, and to analyze the results of the American dream pursuit in the story.

There are two theories are applied in order to answer the statements of the problems. The first is American dream and the second is American values. American Dream is about struggling to maintain their life through hard work individually to get the opportunity to improve the economic successful to move up the goals that are wealth and happiness. Hochschild states that American dream or what so called American ideology are individualism, equality of opportunity, the work ethic, and liberal capitalism (1995:357). Hence, in achieving American dream only has one important key that is through hard work and determination.

The second is the theory of American Values. The important to know about the aspects of value are needed to understand the American dream value itself. Value is about the principles or standards of behaviour in achieving something in this life. So do in the America, this country has owns important parts of American culture and community. Here, American values are divided into four parts that are individual freedom and self-reliance, material wealth and hard work, the value of initiative and ambition and then equality of opportunity and competition.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

*Death of a Salesman* is chosen as the main data. This is a play written by Arthur Asher Miller. *Death of a Salesman* has one main character who involves in the story. The name of the main character is Willy Loman. Willy represents as a man who has strong ambition to get the wealth as means to get his happiness for his life and family in achieving American dream. This article uses two approaches. They are sociological and psychological approach. These approaches are needed to analyze the data. Sociological approach is used to decide and know about the relationship among the characters who involve in the play especially the main character and the people around him. The next approach is psychological approach. This approach is used to increase the understanding of human mind and behavior. Moreover, the play entitled *Death of a Salesman* is analyzed by using descriptive qualitative research. Furthermore, to collect the data in form of printed material, document analysis is used. In other words, the data used in this research are all written materials.

There are some steps used to conduct this research. Firstly, the play entitled *Death of a Salesman* is read to find the data that are going to be analyzed. Secondly, after finding the data, the document analysis is done to find the theories to support the topic. The two related theories that used in this research are American dream and American values. Finally, the concrete data are used to get the data in *Death of a Salesman*. The data are made up of ideas related to Willy

Loman's attitudes and actions in achieving his American dream and the result of the American dream pursuit itself. Additionally, the problems in this study are analyzed descriptively by using sociological and psychological approach. Sociological approach is applied to decide and know about the relationship among the characters who involve in the play especially the main character and the people around him the relation between the main character and other characters in the story. Psychological approach is used to analyze how the main character keeps his desire in struggling to achieve American dream to be a successful salesman. The last step is concluding the result of analysis.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This part will discuss the man who has been a travelling salesman for thirty- four years strive to keep the faith in the American dream and struggling to achieve his ambition as being vital to the New England territory he works after he has just returned from a road trip. That ambition leads him to do anything to fulfill his dream although it is good or bad, he does not care about it.

#### **a. Willy Loman's Bad Attitudes and Actions in Achieving American Dream in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman***

##### **1. Maintaining His Pride**

The main Character, Willy Loman, says proudly about himself as a vital figure in New England since he has experienced for many years in this work. It means that he can stand by his own without any outside help through his efforts and abilities.

LINDA: "Willy, dear. Talk to them again. There's no reason why you can't work in New York."

WILLY: "They don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England (DOASM.Act1.1949:6).

Here, we know that Willy Loman insists that he is a critical player in his business in order to support in his sense of self-worth. He is not the man who does sales for New England; he is the New England man. He believes that he can be vital to the company. It proves that he is proud of himself, even though in reality his sales have not been good for a while. He argues that he is a really important man that is needed. Although it can lead him into a blinding view of his dreams, he believes his dreams to be absolute and original, devoid of even the slightest of defects. Willy has inserted his sense of arrogances. He never stops questioning himself about the condition of his dream.

##### **2. Manipulated by his Thought**

Manipulating has a meaning that the way someone or something takes control of our life and mind. With the manipulate something, it will influence our mind overall to do anything that we want. It also can affect our behavior and action in good or bad way depends on our wisdom on facing the situation.

WILLY (continuing over Happy's line): "They laugh at me, heh? Go to Filene's, go to the Hub, go to Slattery's, Boston. Call out the name Willy

Loman and see what happens! Big shot!

BIFF: All right, Pop (DOASM.Act1.1949:43).”

Willy’s insistence that he is so popular and well-liked reflects his increasing blindness to reality. He is manipulated by his own mind that he is still on the higher stage of his career and work. He struggles with the reality of his life and refuses to stop trying all of thing that can maintain his position. He believes that he still gets more respects from people in the importance of being well-known person. His mind influences him that he must be better than the other person in achieving his goal to reach American dream.

### **3. Keeping on His Unreal Social Status**

Social status becomes the important thing that is happened in this life. Usually social status refers to a position that is determined your place in society or group. Likewise Willy Loman always looks for the way to increase his social status in social life.

WILLY: “... because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. »Willy Loman is here!« That’s all they have to know, and I go right through (DOASM.Act1.1949:21)”.

Here explained that Willy needs to prove that he is more successful than he ever was. He always tries to impress all of the people around him, especially for his family, his friend, and even himself. He also needs recognition as well as his reward in achieving his American dream. He does not care about how hard it is to through it but he just need to all of the people that he can be a successful businessman beside he becomes a salesman.

### **4. Pretending to be Rich**

In the era of 19th century, the American goal that must be achieved by people is about receiving a lot of money, have a big house, a costly car, higher salary, and other material things. It just has a meaning that the dream of becoming rich overnight. That the instant way always thought by the main character, Willy Loman. Willy Loman represents of every low-man in America that wants to be a successful and well-liked businessman in America by his own fortune.

WILLY: “The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle and comes out, the age of twenty- one, and he’s rich! (DOASM.Act1.1949:41)”.

Here, the quotation proves that he wants to be like his brother named Ben in achieving his American Dream. Ben is one of his inspiration that influences him to become wealth and successful in his life. Ben is known a man who becomes rich because he is investing in diamond in Africa. Through that experience of Ben, he believes that he can also change his family’s life, and class also for himself. He hopes that he does not to be a travelling salesman anymore. He just wants to become a non- travelling

salesman who stays on one place because he is too tired if he must travel around all of world.

**b. Willy Loman's Good Attitudes and Actions in Achieving American Dream in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.**

Willy Loman's American dream is to be well-liked man and a successful salesman. It will lead him to get a wealth that can be used as a means to get his Happiness of his life. There are some good attitudes and action that Willy Loman do in achieving his dream. The first thing is hard working, Initiative and full of ambition, getting the opportunity, getting ready for the competition, and Struggling for His Family's Life.

**1. Hard Working**

WILLY: "... in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions. (DOASM.Act2.1949:58).

It shows that he ever breaks the record in good result in his work. He proves it that he can be success with the hard work. When the people do everything with hard work that it will turn become a good result that can be achieved. The characters of Willy Loman can be shown that he is a loyal and responsible, especially for doing work. He will do the best to can achieve the good result for his future career.

**2. Initiative and Full of Ambition**

The fact is about Willy Loman is a man with full of ambition to achieve his American dream. His ambition is about being well liked and to be a great a successful person like as his older brother named Ben, who represents the man that can achieve the American dream with a good point.

WILLY (turning to Ben): "Business is bad, it's murderous. But not for me, of course.

BEN: I'll stop by on my way back to Africa.

WILLY (longingly): Can't you stay a few days? You're just what I need, Ben, because I — I have a fine position here,... (DOASM.Act1.1949:35)".

It can be shown that Willy Loman is a man that has a big ambition for his work. He tries to impress to the illusion of Ben that he is a successful man. He wants people to see him with the point of view that he is also a great salesman. It makes Willy Loman better because he can show the best of him to all of people especially for his friends and his family.

**3. Getting the Opportunity**

Opportunity refers to the occasion or situation that makes it possible to do something that you want to do or have to do. In short, opportunity is a chance that given for us to do something in big situation that the others cannot do it. To have the opportunity is needed the higher dedication and good in taking the responsibility in running some works or career.

WILLY: "... 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 (DOASM.Act1.1949:21)".

Here, according to Willy Loman, the people who well-liked will have the chance to get the opportunity. The doors of opportunity will be opened widely that is leading to get a great success in this life. Willy thinks that personality and presentation will get a good score to create the opportunity for man. Two aspects above are the most important keys to achieve American dream standard used to get a promotion in a good company.

#### **4. Getting Ready for the Competition**

When people get the opportunity in front their eyes, they must take it and get ready for the competition. Because when the opportunity in our hand, we must hold it tight as possible as we can and find the way how to manage that opportunity to get a good result in the end of our life. Likes Willy tells about his older brother, Ben:

“The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it (DOASM.Act1.1949:41)”.

Here explains that Ben can manage his opportunity well. He can achieve what is called by American dream standard. He can find his happiness in using his wealth as a means to reach what he wants to be. He is ready defeating his competitor that blocks his way to find his happiness. And it makes Willy Loman extracted to be like as his brother. And find his own happiness and the happiness for his family.

#### **5. Struggling for His Family's Life**

The importance of family's love and the necessity for each person to find his place in society are needed by him to achieving his American dream. The supports of his family make him increasingly encouraged to realize the dream that the family want it. The success of his acquaintance in doing the business also influences his higher target to achieve American dream in his version. He feels challenged to have better life and career than the others. That situation also affects how he deals his life with the point of view in America dream.

Willy: “The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses...More and more I think of those days, Linda. This time of year it was lilac and wisteria. And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils. What fragrance in this room! (DOASM.Act1.1949:8-9)”.

It shows that he holds out hope, he wants to give his family a better life. He still believes that the life is still possible to be passed together. Willy has to be a hard worker and really ambitious to achieve the success. He wants to show to his family that whatever it is happened in this life he has to be strong as the head of the family.

### **c. The Result of the American Dream pursuit in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman***

There are some results of the American dream pursuit in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. The wrong American Dream vision makes Willy Loman's life as the main character become like a mess. His wrong perspective of the dream also leads him to ruining his way to get the happiness

as his goals of the end of his life. The key to happiness is often unveiled by his dream. To unlock that happiness, he must find the right key. The dreams of someone else actually cannot bring happiness for himself. Willy makes himself to live his life in someone else's dream to find his real happiness. That thing can bring Willy Loman losing the real identity of his life.

### **1. Losing the Real Identity of Life**

The wrong American dream that he creates from very beginning of his life makes him lost his real identity. It feels that he uses his own mask in front of all the people that he is well-liked and a success man who makes a lot of sales and has many friends in his life.

WILLY: "... in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

HOWARD (impatiently): Now, Willy, you never averaged...

WILLY (banging his hand on the desk): I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928! (DOASM.Act2.1949:58)".

That conversation happens between Willy Loman and his boss, Howard. In this situation tells about Willy Loman asks to move his Job and just stay in one place in New York. He clearly believes that he is a good salesman and gets a high average in 1928. It is enough to prove that he is still stuck on his past that he can sell a lot in his career. It proves that he unable to admit the fact and face the reality that now he cannot get a hundred and seventy dollars anymore. He talks about himself continuously that he is a well-likes salesman as his ambition. But in reality he shows a different fact.

### **2. Getting Jealous of the Success of Others' Life**

During his whole life, Willy lives in the condition full of fake fact. He feels that he can do well on his job more than the others can do. He claims that he is the best in all aspects in his life and being well-like in all places that he travelled for his work. But, the fake situation that happen to him will bring the jealousy toward the achievement that the others get.

Willy:" ...pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room (DOASM.Act2.1949:57).

This quotation shows that Willy wants to be like Dave Singleman. He makes Dave Singleman as his role model in being of a great salesman beside his older brother and for the person who he focused his main concept of success around. It shows that Willy feels a little bit of jealous when Dave Singleman did his career only by pick up his phone, calls the buyers, and does not need to go around the city to get the buyer. In fact, Willy Loman feels tired on his job. He loves his job but until now he just stuck in the same place and there is no the significant development in his career. Willy struggles with the reality of his work very hard. He thought if he can through it well it can bring him into his real happiness.

### **3. Living in Life of Full the Illusion and Delusional**

Willy Loman is living where his life is full of illusion and delusional. He spends his entire of his life in the shadow of being a great of salesman as likes he expected. He never can accept the fact that he is just a travelling

salesman in the end of his age that has ambition to be a well-liked and well-known by many people. He does not want to show his weakness to others especially for his family. He proudly says that all the people will know who he is to his two sons. He also refuses that he had already got fired by his boss and says that he still can be on the top of his career.

**a) Being a Stubborn Man**

He keeps his life run with the wrong ambitions and the way he understand about the American Dream itself. And that thing leads him to live in the condition where his life is full of illusion and delusional.

LINDA (trying to bring him out of it): "Willy, dear, I got a new kind of American-type cheese today. It's whipped.

WILLY: Why do you get American when I like Swiss?

LINDA: I just thought you'd like a change...

WILLY: I don't want a change! I want Swiss cheese. Why am I always being contradicted? (DOASM.ACT1.1949:8)".

This quotation shows that his wife who named Linda Loman gives his surprise with the new variant to his food. She thinks that Willy will like that food. But Willy Loman refuses it and says to his wife why she prepared that food when she knew what he likes. It can be the evidence that Willy Loman is a stubborn man. It is shown how he declares that he does not want to change his life. He questions why he must to be changed when he feels that his life is run well with any meaningful obstacles and difficulties. It can be seen clearly how the mind of this man refuses the change for his better life. He does not realize that his position on his career is not good enough as his past.

**b) Being an Arrogant Man**

He knows that he does not fulfill the criteria in achieving American Dream. But the arrogance and his pride are more dominant, so he still assumes that he is still good as his past. And it leads him to live in illusion and delusional. Even though he got fired from his previous job, he still does not want to receive any helps from the others. It will hurt his pride as a salesman who always makes proud to himself.

CHARLEY (taking a deck from his pocket): "Yeah, I got them. Someplace. What is it with those vitamins?

WILLY (dealing): They build up your bones. Chemistry.

CHARLEY: Yeah, but there's no bones in a heartburn.

WILLY: What are you talkin' about? Do you know the first thing about it? CHARLEY: Don't get insulted.

WILLY: Don't talk about something you don't know anything about (DOASM.Act1.1949:28-29)".

The thing that makes Willy Loman lives in illusion and delusional because he feels that he know everything better that anyone knows. It can be a trigger for him to be arrogant and feels that he does not need someone's help. He believes that he can through all the obstacles and difficulties by himself. When he got fired from his job, his neighbor Charley wants to help him to cheer him up from his problem. He



offers Willy some money and a job which would give Willy some income temporary while Willy is in that condition. But he refuses it and feels insulted by Charley's help. He thinks Charley will have an opinion that Willy cannot resolve his problem himself.

#### **4. Ending with the Unhappy Ending Life**

When Willy Loman realizes that his life is not good enough for him and his family, he becomes frustrated and feels humiliated. He spent his productive period of the life working as a salesman, but he cannot bring the changes of his family's financial.

WILLY: Loves me. (Wonderingly.) Always loved me. Isn't that a remarkable thing? Ben, he'll worship me for it!

BEN (with promise): It's dark there, but full of diamonds.

WILLY: Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?

LINDA (calling from her room): Willy! Come up!

WILLY (calling into the kitchen): Yes! Yes. Coming! It's very smart, you realize that, don't you, sweetheart? Even Ben sees it. I gotta go, baby. 'By! 'By! (Going over to Ben, almost dancing.) Imagine? When the mail comes he'll be ahead of Bernard again!

BEN: A perfect proposition all around (DOASM.Act2.1949:100-101)".

That conversation above show the condition of Willy Loman that is full with the desperation. He is give up to face the reality that he has been failure as a good husband for his wife and a good father for his two sons. The greatest desperation that is happened to Willy Loman is when he cannot fulfill the standard of his American dream that have everything like as a lot of salary, a big house, and the important thing is becoming a good father and a husband for his family. He wants to leave a precious something that someday can be used by his family, especially for his sons. He also really wants to be well-liked and a successful salesman likes as his ambition before.

Talking about whether Willy Loman can get the happiness in order to achieve of American Dream in his life, the answer is no. Willy Loman from the beginning is explained clearly that he pretends to be well- liked man and have many friends in front of all people to cover up his weakness and the fact that he cannot shine anymore like his past. It brings him the desperation that makes his wife feels worries about her husband because she knows very well about the condition of him that is caused Willy is fail to achieve his dream. And he decided to end his life by killing himself in order to get the money insurance that can be used for his family to get a better life, especially for his children to start a new life.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Arthur Miller as the author of the character Willy Loman wants to reveal the daily problems that happened in our life, such as the problem of the financial, the problem that happened in our family, and the problem of

being popular and success in our society. It can be seen based on Willy Loman's perspective that Willy Loman is a man is facing his problem with full of spirit and confidence. He also always tries to do the best in achieving the dream that he expected. On the other hand it becomes a tragedy for Willy Loman when he realizes that he cannot achieve his dream, and that thing leads him into the depression. The standard of American dream influences his mind and makes him to believe that he will be success in the future if he wants to work hard and never give up on his struggling. Willy Loman has a simple dream that is being successful and popular to have a better life for him and his family, but this simple dream is bringing him into great depression because he cannot deal with his reality that he is not a successful man as he expected. He decides to suicide to end his all of problems, and thinks that his family can get better life with the money insurance.

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