

THE ILLUSION OF WILLY LOMAN'S IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

Irwan Sumarsono, SS., MPd

English Language Laboratory of Electronic Engineering Polytechnic Institute of Surabaya

irwan@pens.ac.id

Sumarsono, Irwan. 2019. The Illusion of Willy Loman's in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

Abstract:

This study discusses the illusion and explains the conditions that lead the main character, Willy Loman to be in illusion. The analysis will be focused on the characterization of Willy Loman, his marriage with Linda Loman, his relationship with his sons, Biff and Happy. The analysis also focuses on the illusion of Willy Loman by discovering why he cannot face the reality and what the effects to his life. To analyze these problems, the writer uses the psychological approach since psychology and literary works cannot be separated.

Keywords : depression, illusion, reality,

Studi ini membahas tentang ilusi tokoh utama, Willy Loman dan menjelaskan kondisi yang menyebabkan tokoh utama tersebut hisup dalam dunia ilusi dan tidak bias menerima kenyataan. Analisa akan difokuskan pada penokohan Willy Loman, perkawinannya dengan Linda Loman dan hubungannya dengan kedua anaknya, Biff dan Happy. Analisa juga memfokuskan pada ilusi Willy Loman dengan cara menggali sebab-sebab kenapa dia tidak bisa menerima kenyataan dan apa akibatnya pada hidupnya. Untuk menganalisa masalah ini, penulis menggunakan pendekatan psikologi dengan pertimbangan bahwa psikologi dan karya sastra tidak bisa dipisahkan satu dari lainnya.

Kata Kunci : depresi, ilusi, realitas

Introduction

Arthur Miller was one of the best American playwrights at his time (Gardner, 2016). He experienced a difficult life when he was a teenager, when the Americans had to struggle through the Great Depression. This condition made his family move to Brooklyn to survive. It made Miller learn how hard it could be to make a living at that time. This condition influenced him to write about the life of the people at that time, the life of the

vulnerable, everyday people who had to work to struggle to survive.

Arthur Miller wrote about morality, responsibility, compassion and the fragility of human relationships. He transformed what he saw in his life into his works. All these theme had a relationship with his real-life.

Arthur Miller wrote not only dramas, but also some articles. *In All My Sons*, who wrote a story based on a true story of a businessman when the US was involved in the second World War. He wrote about Joshep

McCarthy's congressional hearing in *The Crucible. After the Fall* is about his marriage with Marilyn Monroe. He was inspired by his uncle who had to struggle as a salesman to write *Death of a Salesman*. (artsedge.kennedy-center)

Death of a Salesman is one of Arthur Miller's works that made him win not only a *Pulitzer Award* and *Tony Award* for Best Play in the same year, 1949, but also one of the best playwrights. *Death of a Salesman* was performed on Broadway in 1949 and run for more than 700 performances. Arthur Miller has made *Death of a Salesman* have an important role in American drama (Wainscot, 2007).

Arthur Miller manages to combine both realism and expressionism in *Death of A Salesman* is (M. Metzger, 2009; 30). *Death of A Salesman* presents the life of a salesman, Willy Loman who fails to face the reality that happens on him and his family. Willy Loman at his young age was a salesman with good work, a responsible husband and good father who always gave good attention on his family and his children. When he is facing his retired time, he experiences some difficulties, such as the decreasing income, and the worsening relationship with his two children. This condition influences his psychological life. He starts talking to himself, and he cannot differentiate his illusion from the reality.

Willy Loman is presented as an old salesman who fails to reach his dream. He starts dreaming and having a delusion / illusion. He fails to face the reality that he fails in his carrier. *The Death of a Salesman* is a drama about the tragedy of human incomprehension, that is the failure to face the reality that is different from the main character's dream.

Willy Loman always feels that he is liked by anybody and he considers himself as a great man. He considers himself that he is a great father and husband, but he is not. Willy Loman is a man who lives in his own world, the world of illusion.

To analyze this problem, the writer uses psychological approach since illusion is one of human psychological problem. As the personality of every human cannot be separated from its psyche, to understand the human psyche, we need the help of psychology to find out the motives and backgrounds of every human action.

Psychology and literature has a closed relationship. Psychology can be used to study not only about human, but also fictitious characters in a literary work. Human psyche is the source of all sciences and art, and to understand about it in a literary work we can use the science of psychology (Jung in Sekada, 1987; 104).

To analyze the psychological backgrounds of Willy Loman's illusion, it is necessary to comprehend what the illusion is. Klauber defines illusion as a false belief accompanied by uncertainty as to whether it should be given credence. The breakthrough of unconscious emotion without consciousness surrendering to it completely is the factor that causes someone has an illusion (Klauber, 1987; 6).

Illusion is like a walking dream where someone who experiences it does not realize that he is walking while he is sleeping. Someone who has an illusion has a false perception about his life, his future and his ideas. He cannot see the reality, he sees something that is different from the reality, something that does not really exist.

Illusion is not simple a false perception, but it is the manifestation of the experience in the past and in the present. Illusion represents new piece of understanding that is expressed not in logical language. When someone has an illusion, he will make a comparison between his past experience and his present one. He will express it not in a rational way, but in unrealistic way. He refuses to acknowledge the reality that is different from his dream.

His refusal to acknowledge the reality is caused by his inability to determine the reality from his dream. It is important for

every human to be able determine the world of dream from the world of reality. By being able to determine it, human will be able to fulfill his need. To be able to determine it, human has to learn how to compare what in his mind from what really exists in the real world.

There are some conditions that make someone not be able to differentiate his dream from the reality he faces; the fears and worries to face the reality. From the feeling of fears and worries to face the reality there is a forming of reaction to reduce or replace those feeling rationally or unrealistically (Freud in Suryasubrata ;156). Everybody always tries to reduce his fears and worries in many different ways. But when he fails to find the way, he will face the reality unrealistically, whether he will be frustrated or live in his own world, escaping from the outside world.

Research Method

This study is to analyze the psychological backgrounds that determine the behaviors of the characters in *Death of a Salesman*, especially on the illusion of Willy Loman's. To analyze this study, the writer uses library research by collecting some sources, interpreting and summarizing. The methodology used in this study is the descriptive method. It will give the readers

some descriptions about the problems that are analyzed.

Since the focus of this study is the illusion of Willy Loman's then the study also uses the theory of psychology, especially Klauber's theory on illusion. The study uses the psychological point of view in analyzing the problem since the literary works and psychology cannot be separated from each other.

Finding and Discussion

Willy Loman and His Illusion

There are six main characters in the play *Death of a Salesman*; Willy Loman, a 63 travelling salesman who loves his family but fails to make his own dream come true, Willy's wife, Linda, a suffering house wife, Biff Loman, the eldest son of Willy Loman, Happy Loman, the younger brother of Biff, Charley, the neighbor, Charley's son, Bernard, and Ben, Willy Loman's dead brother.

The study analyzes how Willy Loman lives in illusion and not able to face the reality. Willy Loman's illusion can be seen from his beliefs that he is a well-liked and popular salesman, both his sons are destined for success and greatness, and from his funeral where there are no other people who come, but his wife, his sons, Charley and Bernard.

As a father, Willy Loman loves his sons, Biff and Happy. He is very proud of them. He always believes that both his sons are better and more well-like than the other boys in the neighborhood. When Biff steals a ball, he thinks that it is not a big deal because he believes the teacher likes Biff and Happy. He asks Biff not to worry about it. "That's because he likes you. If somebody else took that ball there'd be an uproar" (Miller, 1998; 18).

He always believes that Biff is better than the other boys in his neighborhood. He likes to look down other children in his neighborhood. He likes to ask Biff to compare himself with Bernard, his neighbor and classmate. He thinks that Bernard is a weird who does not have many friends and spends his time doing the school works. "Bernard can get the best marks in school, y' understand, but when gets out in the business world, y' understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him." (Miller, 1998; 20-21). Even Willy does not care when Biff fails in mathematic. He always thinks that Biff is better than Bernard. He does not realize that his ignoring this reality will drive his sons to the failure. Bernard becomes a successful lawyer, while Biff is still finding himself.

Willy Loman believes that to be a successful a man must be well like and have attractive personality. He always tells his

children to behave that kind of personality. He believes that he is well liked and have attractive personality. He wants to be a successful salesman, but Willy Loman fails to make his dream come true. He starts to put his dream on his sons, Biff and Happy. He wants both his sons become successful men, but Biff destroys his dream. Biff fails to be a successful person. Willy cannot face this reality and always thinks that Biff will be a successful person in the future.

As a husband, Willy Loman is not a good husband. He fails to be a husband who is loyal to his family, especially to his wife. Willy Loman has a love affair with another woman, Miss Frances, a secretary of one of Willy's clients. He likes giving Linda's stockings to her. That's why every time he sees Linda mending her stocking, it reminds him to the woman he has affair with. Every time he sees Linda mending her stocking, he forbids her to mend the stocking when he is at home.

Willy [noticing her mending]: What's that?
Linda: Just mending my stockings. They're so expensive—

Willy [angrily, taking them from her]: I won't have you mending stockings in this house! Now throw them out! (Miller, 1998; 26).

The stocking makes him remember the woman and makes him feels guilty that he had made a mistake that he betrayed his love

to his wife. So we can say that Willy builds his marriage on lies.

And the tragedy that Willy Loman experiences is when his son, Biff Loman found out his affair with Miss Frances. Since then, Willy Loman loses his sons' respect and love. Finding the affair that his father has with the other woman makes Biff's ambition for a better future and a successful businessman turn out. This is what makes Willy Loman disappointed very much and makes him feel guilty. This condition influences the relationship of father and sons. The affair makes Biff and Happy have no respect to their father and they lose their love too. When Willy asks Biff not to curse in the house, Biff treats him in a worst way that he does not show his love and respect to his father. Even, he calls his father "phony little fake" (Miller, 1998; 95). Since he discovers the fact that his father was betraying his mother, he loses his trust on his father.

As a salesman, Willy Loman is a failed salesman. He works as a travelling salesman whose income depends on the commission that he makes in selling his products. He got married to Linda who gave him two sons, Biff Loman and Happy Loman who become the pride of the family.

As a salesman, Willy experienced some successes in his career as a travelling salesman when he was younger. He could

live in life of luxury because he has worked hard. But as the time is going, and he is becoming older, he starts to consider himself as a failure because he cannot face the changing climate in the business world.

One of the reasons that make Willy not be able to face the change is that he still holds his idea of success that to be able to succeed someone must be well-liked and have an attractive personality. For Willy, the man who can make an appearance in business, the man who can create personal interest, is the man who gets a head. The man can be successful in his business.

That is what Willy teaches to his son, Biff Loman. He wants Biff be a successful man, and to be success, Biff must be able to be a well-liked man and has an imposing personality. He tells Biff that being a well-liked man is the only way to success. Willy wants his two sons to be successful like his brother, Ben who has overshadowed him. Ben is the man that Willy always wants to be. He admires Ben very much. For Willy, Ben is genius and represents the business ideals and the successful salesman at his time. Unfortunately, Willy fails to be successful like his brother, Ben. He is not rich and neither lives in happy life.

Willy Loman who believes that to be a well-like is the only way to make him success and rich, fails to make him a well-like

salesman. He is not liked by everyone as he says to his wife, Linda.

“They seems to laugh at me...they just pass me by...” (Miller, 1998; 23).

He fails to face the reality and lives in his illusion world. He dreams to have awarded a good job with a good salary in New York after working for about 35 years, but the reality is he comes into a situation that he is not used anymore by the company. In another word, he is fired by the company.

He believes that he is a great salesman who will make any good sales any time. He believes that he is very well like in Hartford, but he is not. Besides that, Willy Loman is not a good salesman, he is not good at selling, especially at his aging. As he is getting older, he cannot do the things he used to do when he was younger. He cannot make good money to support his life. He is getting too old to travel every day. When he asks his boss to raise his salary, his boss fires him.

Willy Loman who cannot face the reality that his sons do not love and respect him after Biff discovered his affair with another woman and they cannot be successful men as he dreams, makes him live in confusion, depression and behave abnormal behavior. As the result that he cannot make himself a successful salesman and his sons successful businessmen like his brother, Ben, Willy decides to commit a suicide. He is driven by

his shame to kill himself to present his dream that he is well-liked and a successful father and salesman.

But the funeral—[Straightening up] Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates—that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized—I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey—I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben! He's in for a shock, that boy! (Miller, 1998; 100).

He has an illusion that his funeral will be a very big and spectacular funeral where all his friends, other salesmen and his customers were coming to his funeral. He always says to his dead brother Ben in his imagination that he is well-liked and hundreds of people will come from any different towns to his funeral when he dies, but it is just his biggest illusion since nobodies else come to his funeral except his two sons, his wife Linda, Charley and Bernard..

Linda: Why didn't anybody come?
Charley: It was a very nice funeral.
Linda: But where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him. (Miller, 1998; 110).

The quotation above shows that actually Willy Loman was not as popular as he believed. If he were well-liked and popular, many people would have come to his funeral. It is an evident that Willy does not have many friends. He only has Charley as his friend.

Conclusion

What make Willy Loman cannot face the reality and has to live in the world of illusion is that he is not well-liked by people. His believes that he is well-liked of people is one of his illusion to face the bad reality he has.

Willy Loman also believes that he is a great salesman that can make a good selling. What he believes that he is a good salesman is a false believe since he is not a great salesman who can make a good selling. All this feeling is his escape from the reality that he is a failed salesman.

The other factor that makes him in illusion is his losing opportunity to have a better life when his brother, Ben asked him to follow him to leave his town. This situation makes him always idolize his dead brother and makes him his model every time he talks to his sons about their future dream.

His committing suicide is his biggest illusion since he believes that his funeral will be spectacular one where many people will come to his funeral. And the committing suicide is his illusion that he thinks by committing suicide he can restore his remarkable status in his family's eyes.

References :

- (1) Gardner, Ashleigh. *13 Classic American Playwrights You Should Know*. 2016. <https://performerstuff.com/mgs/13->

- classic-american-playwrights-you-should-know/ accessed May 8th, 2019.
- (2) <https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/students/features/master-work/miller-death-of-a-salesman>. Accessed May 8th, 2019.
- (3) Klauber, John and others. *Illusion and Spontaneity in Psychoanalysis*. London, Free Association Books. 1987.
- (4) Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. New York, NY: Penguin Books. 1998.
- (5) M. Metzger, Angela. *The Critical Fortunes of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*. England 2009.
- http://csuchico-dspace.calstate.edu/handle/10211.3/10211.4_96. Accessed April 14th, 2019
- (6) Sukada, Made. *Pembinaan Kritik Sastra Indonesia, Masalah, Sistematisa Analisis Struktur Fiksi*. Bandung. 1987
- (7) Suryasubrata, Sumadi. *Psikologi Kepribadian*. Jakarta, CV. Rajawali. 1988.
- (8) Waincot, Ronald. *American Literature; Drama "Realism"*. Microsoft student 2007.