

**MAKING A MORAL CHOICE IN ARTHUR MILLER'S
THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN DRAMA (1949):
AN EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH**



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**MAKING A MORAL CHOICE IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *THE DEATH*
OF A SALESMAN DRAMA (1949): AN EXISTENTIALIST**

APPROACH.

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Abstract: The major issue of this study is how to make a moral choice for searching meaningful of life reflected in Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* Drama. The objective of the study is to analyze the drama based on the structural elements and also to analyze the drama based on the existentialist approach. This study belongs to descriptive qualitative research. There are two types of data source. Namely primary and secondary data source. The primary data is the drama itself. Meanwhile the secondary data sources are the other materials related to the study. Both of the data are collected through library research and analyzed by descriptive analyzed. Based on the existentialist analysis, it is evident that Arthur Miller illustrated an Existentialist phenomenon in which an individual is making the right way in his life. Although this is a difficult choice in his life, he is willing to take the risk and also be responsible for his choices.

Keywords: Making Moral Choice, *The Death of a Salesman*, Existentialist Approach.

A. INTRODUCTION

Life is a continuous choice and every choice comes with a consequence. Everything in your life is a reflection of a choice you have made. Every choice that we make will affect us negatively or positively, now or in the future. We can know that a good or bad person by action in the daily routine and the attitude of the person is call morality.

Morality from the Latin *moralitas* manner, character, and proper behavior is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are good or right and those that are bad or wrong. Generally, morality is a system of rules that modifies our behavior in social situations. It's about the doing of good instead of harm, and it sets some standard of virtuous conduct (MacDonald, 2002).

Morality may also be specifically synonymous with goodness or rightness. Immorality is the active opposition to morality, the example is opposition which is good or right. Amorality is variously defined as an unawareness of, indifference toward, or disbelief in any set of moral standards or principles. Morality spans the entire history of Western philosophy. Two of the greatest works of ancient Greek philosophy Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* are extended inquiries into the nature and origins of good persons and good societies. We rarely look back for guidance from centuries-old philosophical treatises on vision, ontology, or epistemology, but we keep our moral philosophers close. Aristotle's emphasis on habit, Hume's critique of reason, Kant's categorical imperative, and J.S. Mill's ideas on liberty and utility all crop up in modern discussions of moral education and moral psychology. Moral insights are rarely made irrelevant by the advances

of science. But as I will argue in the next section, moral insights are sometimes gained or lost as societies change (Haidt, 2008).

This study uses Existentialist Approach. Existentialism is a branch of philosophy which is focus on human existence. Existentialism is not easy to define each philosopher has different way to define the meaning of existentialist. Live human existence, according to Sartre presence or absence of God will not change the human appreciation of him as the existence of Sartre insists that his philosophy is not intended to conclude atheism. According to Sartre in Hassan Existentialism is “not so atheistic that it wears itself out showing that God does not exist. Rather, it declares that even if God did exist, that would change nothing (Hassan, 1985:106).

According Sartre (2002: 40) there are two kinds of existentialists, namely “Theistic existentialist or Christian existentialists” and “atheistic existentialism”. Christian existentialists are Jasper and Gabriel Marcel, Heidegger, Albert Camus and Sartre are included in atheistic existentialist. Both of them believe that existentialism before essence but they have different opinion about existentialism. Existentialism taught that truth and act involve the environmental and subjectivity of a man. Sartre (2002: 5) said also that the reality of existentialism in every human come from “depth” each soul, it is arranged systematically by human thought, because the objectivity of knowledge is not always same with truth.

In analyzing this literary work the writer uses the existential psychology because the individual experience and shows that ‘death’ is the best choice in the someone’s life. Rollo May in his work *Existential Psychology* (1969), suggests that our challenge arises in being able to open our

vision to more of human experience, to free our clinical methodology to do justice to the richness and breadth of each individual's experience. The existential approach views the individual, not inductively, parts to a whole, but rather deductively; moving from whole to parts with the individual consisting of a whole person - composed of past, present and future - experiencing the conditions of existence that all people must face throughout their lifetimes, from birth through death. An existentialist viewpoint takes into account a "holistic" person (Hacker, 1994).

Existentialism basically urges us to live our lives to the fullest, according to our own individual understanding. For the existentialist, to live is to live passionately. And the importance of human freedom to make choices, and the responsibility to do so consciously. "The message of existentialism, unlike many more obscure and academic philosophical movements, is about as simple as it can be. It is that every one of us, as an individual, is responsible – responsible for what we do, responsible for who we are, responsible for the way we face and deal with the world, responsible, ultimately, for the way the world is. It is, in a very short phrase, the philosophy of "no excuses!" (Solomon, 2000). The major existentialist study of the subject is linkage between the text and its background.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

In this study the writer uses *The Death of a Salesman* play that was release on 10 February, 1949. As the object of the data sources in the study is the play entitled *The Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and the script. Then, secondary data sources are Existentialist theory, review of the movie, comments, critics, homepages, previous study and other relevance sources.

The writer use note taking technique of collecting data. The technique of data collecting steps applied in third research are reading *The Death of a Salesman* play script from internet, taking notes of important information from the play, marking the point in the script and other to make easy in analyzing it, classifying the data into some relevance categories, analyzing the data, make conclusion based on analyzed data. The technique of data description in this study started from studying material of Existentialist theory.

C. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This analysis deals with the existentialist analysis of *The Death of a Salesman* play. The researcher takes existentialist theory to analyze of making a moral choice in *The Death of a Salesman* play through the major character Willy Loman in dilemma with his life. This compresses seven major through the major characters, especially used theory of Sartre's existentialism. The research will investigated the major characters of Willy Loman dilemma with his life. This compresses seven major points which consists of *Being, Existence before essence, Consciousness (Cogito), Freedom to Choose, Anxiety, Transcendence of Ego, Nothingness and the last is Discussion.*

The existentialist analyses of *The Death of a Salesman* play concern with Willy Loman's feeling as the major character in the play. This character becomes main analysis that closely related with the existentialist condition. The existentialist analysis of *The Death of a Salesman* play will give answer to the problem statement about how to make moral choices in reflected Willy Loman in *The Death of a Salesman*. This analysis is presented through seven basic principles of Sartre's theory, which covers *Being, existence before essence, cogito, freedom, anxiety, transcendence of ego, and nothingness*

1. Being

Being is divided into two: being in itself which is concerning in thing's existence and being for itself is the being for human that express with the action, the action is the sign of human who has the being. Being in itself in *The Death of a Salesman* play impress in the major character is Willy Loman as a salesman. Willy Loman prefers choose salesman as his job than a carpenter like his grandfather.

2. Existence before Essence

Everyone has existence the existence is the way of his goal, the goal is what he wants to become. People have freedom to define themselves as what they want. The process of becoming can be seen in essence, the phenomenon is called existence before essence

In *The Death of a Salesman* play the writer focused analyzing of the existence before essence of the major characters in this play like Willy Loman. Willy Loman is sixty years old make some existence in his life with his way and struggling middle economic, family and his life. There are some situations that bring the salesman decided to end his life with suicide. First, when he decided to be a salesman and not be a carpenter like his father is because he think that as a salesman can make his life more happily with much money but when he was a father he see that his first son, Biff Loman is not became what he want, but Biff is become someone that he didn't want at all, Willy wants his son can continue his job but Biff always rejects and wants to become himself. Willy Loman is actually really

wants to have his own business that does not always leave his family and go out of town to continue his job as a salesman.

3. Consciousness (Cogito)

Cogito is an aspect of existentialist which is a point to the analysis to show the existence of the major character, the existence is implied by consciousness. The aspect of *The Death of a Salesman* play will be analyzed through the character of Willy Loman with the goal to differentiate the consciousness of Willy Loman.

Willy Loman as a salesman makes his decision consciously, when all his problems came to him. Suicide is the best option for him. Willy ended his life by crashing himself in order to get money insurance for his family and his son. Biff Loman can use the money insurance to start a new business.

5. Anxiety

There is a condition in which human has to choose. In this condition, there are two choices which he feel dilemma to decide the right choice. To make clear the anxiety occurs in the play the researcher analyzes the major character, Willy Loman.

In the condition that he experiences and faces the dilemma occurs when has to choose whether he has to commit suicide or not. At the end he decides that suicide as the ultimate choice.

6. Transcendence of Ego

The Transcendence of Ego in this play is when the major character, Willy Loman, represents the ego for the happiness of his family. He is crashing himself to get the money insurance. Willy Loman

chooses a suicide is the best choice. In this case the main character of Willy Loman is not selfish. He chooses to commit suicide and hopes the best for his family in the future.

7. Nothingness

Every existence must be ended by death. It means that death is one prevention of human freedom. Human life, absolutely exist. They can do anything freely and people can receive their existence. But when the people die, he is nothing.

According to nothingness, the ending of this play poetry the major character Willy Loman who chooses to end his life by suicide. He thinks that commit suicide his family can be better and happier, if he died then his family can get money insurance and Biff can begin his business with that money.

D. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In analysis above based on the existentialist analysis, it is evident that in *The Death of a Salesman* play, the writer illustrated the dilemma of a man who has many problem of his life. The problems about his job and his family. It is closely related to existentialist condition which can support some dilemma. Arthur Miller reflect Willy Loman how he faced his problem in his life. The problem deals with Ego, anxiety, dilemma and nothingness. These are arranged in the narrative and technical elements of structural elements that have relationship one to another. The existentialist problem faced characters are portrayed through in the visualized.

Naturally, Human tends to have dilemma about making moral choice in the life. It motivates human to solve their problem by choosing the right

choice not only for himself but also for everyone that he loved. They are succeeding when they can solve the dilemma instead of avoiding it. Besides that, as human being it is normally to have a willing to get the best things for life.

The writer hopes this study gives benefits to the readers especially pedagogical benefits. The writer suggest to other researcher to concern analyzing *The Death of a Salesman* play in different way especially for Psychoanalytic Perspective because there is moral conflict that is happens in someone's feeling. The last, this play teaches us about father sacrifice for the people who really cared about his children. He is willing to sacrifice for the happiness of his family. The writer realize this study is far from being perfect as result of the limitation of the writer's ability, but the writer hopes that the study can be useful for the readers or other researcher in widening the knowledge of literary studies.

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