

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The Death of a Salesman is a 1949 play written by American playwright Arthur Miller. It was the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Award for Best Play. The play was premiered on Broadway in February 1949, running for 742 performances, and has been revived in Broadway four times, winning three Tony Awards for Best Revival. *The Death of a salesman* has to this day remained a classic. Play intellectual appeal lies in Miller's refusal to portray his characters as two dimension, his refusal to involve himself in a one sided polemic attack on capitalism.

Arthur Miller, one of the great American playwrights, whose work exposed the flaws in the fabric of the American dream, was born and raised in Manhattan. His father was a productive shopkeeper and clothing manufacturer until the great depression dried up virtually all business opportunities. He was a very active young man, in love with such sports as football and baseball. When he wasn't playing outside, he enjoyed reading adventure stories. In 1934, Miller left the east coast to attend the University of Michigan. He was accepted into their school of journalism. His experiences during the depression made him skeptical towards religion. Politically, he began leaning towards the Left. And since the theater was the cutting edge way for socio-economic liberals to express their views, he decided to enter the Hopwood Drama competition. His first play, *No Villain*, received an award from the University. It was an impressive beginning

for the young playwright; he had never studied plays or playwriting, and he had written his script in just five days (Berger, 2013:1).

After graduation, he continued writing plays and radio dramas. During World War II, his writing career gradually became more successful. He did not enter the military due to an old football injury. In 1940 he crafted *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. It arrived on Broadway in 1944, but unfortunately it departed from Broadway four days later. In 1947, his first Broadway success, a powerful drama titled *All My Sons*, earned him critical and popular acclaim. From that point on, his work was in high demand. *The Death of a Salesman*, his most famous work, debuted in 1949. It earned him international recognition (Jefferson, 2001:1).

From *The Death of a Salesman* play brief summary, the story is based on the mind and memory of Willy Loman, the protagonist. The times of the play's action fluctuate between 1942 and 1928, making a simple narration of plot impossible and probably not very meaningful, thus a summary of the action, not necessarily in the order of the play, Willy Loman has been a traveling salesman for thirty-four years, and he likes to think of himself as being vital to the New England territory he works. He constantly compares himself to Dave Singleton, a salesman who would go into a town, pick up a phone, and place many orders without ever leaving his hotel room. When Dave died, people from all over the country came to his funeral. But, as the play opens, Willy has just come back home after having left for New England that morning. He tells his wife, Linda,

that he just can't seem to keep his mind on driving anymore. He asks about his son, Biff, who has just come home for a visit after being away for a long time.

Willy thinks about Biff when Biff was a senior in high school fourteen years ago. Biff was playing in a great football game, and people were coming from all over the country to offer him scholarships. But then something happened to Biff. He never fulfilled the potential Willy felt he had. Later, Willy reveals through his disjointed memories that Biff had caught him with another woman in his motel room in Boston. After this episode, Biff seemed to hold a grudge against his father and could never again bring himself to trust him. Now, after some fourteen years of wandering and working odd jobs, Biff returns home. He and his brother, Happy, decide to ask Bill Oliver, whom Biff used to work for, for a loan of \$10,000 to begin a business of their own. The boys tell Willy about their plans, and Willy thinks that together the two could absolutely conquer the world. He goes on to explain that the important thing in life is to be well-liked.

The next day, Willy meets the boys for dinner in a restaurant. He is so pleased to have his boys with him that he decides to ask his boss for an office job in New York City, to get him off the road. But his boss tells him there is no room, and then fires him instead. Thus, suddenly, Willy's day has reversed, and he has to go to an old friend, Charley, to borrow enough money to pay his insurance premium. We then find out that Willy has been borrowing fifty dollars a week from Charley for quite some time, and then pretending that this amount is his salary. Trying to explain that he has been living an illusion, Biff meets Happy in

the restaurant early, and claims he wants to make everyone especially Willy to understand Biff is not the man Willy thinks he is. But when Willy arrives, he tells the boys that he has been fired and he refuses to listen to Biff's story. Willy simply pretends that Biff has another appointment the following day. Willy gets furious and is about to make a scene. Suddenly, when Willy goes to the bathroom, Biff, out of frustration, leaves the restaurant. Happy, who has picked up two girls, follows him and leaves Willy alone.

Later that night, Biff comes home and finds Willy out in the backyard, apparently losing his wits planting seeds and talking to his brother, Ben, who has been dead for nine months. Biff explains to Willy that it would be best if they break with each other and never see one another again. He tries once again to explain that he is no leader of men and that he is a common person. But Willy refuses to believe him and tells Biff once again how great he could be. He then resolves on suicide, which he has hinted at before, because with \$20,000 in insurance benefits, Biff could be such a magnificent person. Thus, Willy commits suicide. But he dies a forgotten man, and nobody but his family attends the funeral.

The *Death of a Salesman* is an interesting play. The controversy between positive and negative reviews about the death of a salesman play comes from the audience after watching the play. The positive reviews are coming from Pedro, Student High School - 12th Grade, United States. He said that *The Death of a Salesman* is a great drama performance and the major character of Willy Loman

was excellent and very sad indeed tragic drama that is draining emotions, As much as he want to feel love for Willy and pity his case, he cannot deny the fact that he have no sympathy for him as a husband or father. One can look at the characteristics of a tragic hero and pick out a couple that do identify with him, but the majority show he comes up short of that label. He will admit, Willy does have a tragic flaw of not being able to detach himself from his son, Biff. But he believe his obsession with his son's success was fueled by his motives to be known as the dad who raised and brought him up as a child, and it is hard to find any sympathy in such selfishness.

Willy's fortune was never reversed, it seemed as if he was destined for an ending such that he experienced. From the start of the book, to the end, there was no reason to predict otherwise that his demise would be exactly what it was, his death. The most important factor that sways me to the anti tragic hero side, is that there was no point in the story that I felt pity for Willy Loman. He brought all of his troubles upon himself, and tried to scrape together some honor to his name with his death.

The second positive critic is come from Doody he think that “Willy is not a tragic hero as well he is not the one who causes sadness and failure to himself, it's society that turns him down, the American usually don't look to the lower classes as human, or in another expression they see them nothing”.

Because of that Willy tried hardly to gain power and success but he fails to do so. The thing that makes him more sympathy with Willy is his way to deny

the truth, by showing his family and friends that he is successful and he will do something interesting and useful. But in fact he is has a tragic flaw.

In addition there are also positive comments negative comments for this play. There are some negative comments for this play, but in here I want to show one of them. Knott Split, he said that “he dislike with the character of Willy Loman because he think Willy's greatest character flaw is his faulty view of his over-inflated success.” He spends too much time pretending to be much more than he really is and ignoring the reality of his life. This inability to cope with the real world eventually leads to his death. Willy was the source of his own depression and ultimate end, a very important trait of a tragic hero. It was his individual actions that lead to his downfall, and his own fault that his life got so twisted.

From the responses of the audience, *The Death of a Salesman* becomes best player market. The play is getting a lot of awards in 1949. *The Death of a Salesman* gets great responses from audience and market. It has many awards from many categories. Broadway revivals *The Death of salesman* have many awards. In 1949 have seven Tony awards and in 1975 it has one award George C. Scott as nominee of Tony Award Best Actor in Play. Then in 1984 Broadway revival *The death of a salesman* have four awards and one nominee there are Drama Desk Award Outstanding Revival, - Dustin Hoffman in Drama Desk Award Outstanding Actor in a Play, Tony Award for Best Reproduction, -John Malkovic in Drama Desk Award Outstanding Featured Actor in a Play David

Huddleston as nominee. In the third revival in 1999, there are many awards in this year such as Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play Drama Desk Award Outstanding Revival of a Play Brian Denney as Tony Award Best Actor, Kevin Anderson and Howard Witt as nominee, Play Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a play, Elizabeth Franz as Tony Award Best Featured Actress in a Play, Robert Falls for Tony Award Best Direction of a Play, Drama Desk Award Outstanding Revival of a Play, Brian Denney for Drama Desk Award Outstanding Actor in a Play, Elizabeth Franz as nominee of Drama Desk Award Outstanding Actress in a Play, Kevin Anderson and Howard Witt as nominee, Robert falls as nominee Drama Desk Award Outstanding Featured Actor in a Play Drama Desk Award Outstanding Director of a Play, Drama Desk Award Outstanding Music in a Play Incidental music by Richard Woodbury. And the last in Broadway revival, there are seven awards and the last two as winner and five as nominees.

The writer chooses this play, *The Death of a Salesman* because of five reasons the death of a salesman is a unique things in it. The first one is in the characters of the play. There is an interesting character of the play like Willy Loman. He is 60 years old and very unstable, tending to imagine events from the past as if they are real. He vacillates between different perceptions of his life. Willy seems childlike and relies on others for support. His first name, Willy, reflects this childlike aspect as well as sounding like the question "Will he?" His last name gives the feel of Willy's being a "low man," someone low on the social

ladder and unlikely to succeed; however, this popular interpretation of his last name has been dismissed by Miller.

The second one is setting of the play. The setting of *The Death of a Salesman* drama is in the Late 1940s of Willy Loman's house and yard in Brooklyn and various places he visits in New York and Manhattan Boston. Most of the action is set in Willy Loman's home and yard in Brooklyn buildings. Throughout the play, the big encroaching buildings are shown to choke the more natural beauty that once surrounded the Lomans' home. Once there were trees, and once there was enough sunlight to grow a garden. The looming buildings, which have separated the characters from nature, add to their feelings of confinement and desire to escape.

There are a few scenes that don't take place at the Lomans' Brooklyn home. We see Willy get fired in an office in Manhattan, and he also meets his sons at a Manhattan restaurant. There's also the scene where Biff learns of Willy's affair, which happens in a hotel room in Boston. The Loman house, however, totally dominates the set, perhaps highlighting Willy's longing to provide for his family, and showing that no matter how misguided he is, everything he does in some way revolves around his family.

The third one is plot. The *Death of a Salesman* drama is an interesting tragedy play. It has a lot of differences from the ancient Greek version of the genre. There are no choruses in this play, and the protagonist, Willy Loman, differs in several ways to traditional tragic hero. The main difference is that he is

not a king or mighty warrior of some kind – he's just a salesman. And an unsuccessful one at that. With *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller set out to create what he called a "tragedy of the common man." He wanted to show that the sorrows of your average everyday guy are just as worthy of dramatization as those of kings. This play tells about Willy Loman Willy a 60 year-old salesman, who at some point comes home early from his work trip because he is not longer able to drive and he cannot do his job. Biff his son is in his home after working as a farm hand for many years in the West. But with the seeds of conflict contrasting buried here, this initial situation is not bound to last long. Conflict in the play is when Willy gets worse wandering soul. He was busy with Biff aimlessly and inability to find success in business. Linda, her mother tells her son that Willy has tried to commit suicide and tell Biff that his life was in his hands. Biff need to get a job and get serious or take the blame for the actions of his father. Biff realized he and his whole family had been living a lie. The second is more of a climactic action-based, and takes the form of a large blow-out argument between Biff and his father. This was followed by a lot of screaming and crying, and finally found out that Biff Willy really loved him. That would be great and we probably will have a happy ending if not for the small fact that we have not reached the stage of tension yet. Willy commits suicide. And finally Willy commits suicide in order to get the money insurance for the continuation of his family life.

The fourth is style of the play, in this play is mostly told from the point of view of the protagonist, Willy and the previous parts of Willy's life are revealed

in the flashback in Willy's mind, sometimes during a present day scene. It does this by having a scene begin in the present time, and adding characters onto the stage that only Willy can see and hear, representing characters and conversations from other times and places.

The fifth is *The Death of a Salesman* gets great responses from audience and market. The play is getting a lot of awards in 1949. *The Death of a Salesman* gets great responses from audience and market. It has many awards from many categories. Broadway revivals *The Death of salesman* have many awards there are in 1949 have seven Tony awards and in 1975 it has one award George C. Scott as nominee of Tony Award Best Actor in Play. Then in 1984 Broadway revival *The death of a salesman* have four awards and one nominee there are Drama Desk Award Outstanding Revival, Dustin Hoffman in Drama Desk Award Outstanding Actor in a Play, Tony Award for Best Reproduction, John Malkovic in Drama Desk Award Outstanding Featured Actor in a Play David Huddleston as nominee. The third revival in 1999 there are many awards in this year's there are Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play Drama Desk Award Outstanding Revival of a Play Brian Denney as Tony Award Best Actor, Kevin Anderson and Howard Witt as nominee, Play Tony Award Best Featured Actor in a play, Elizabeth Franz as Tony Award Best Featured Actress in a Play, Robert Falls as Tony Award Best Direction of a Play, Drama Desk Award Outstanding Revival of a Play, Brian Denney as Drama Desk Award Outstanding Actor in a Play, Elizabeth Franz as nominee Drama Desk Award Outstanding Actress in a Play, Kevin Anderson and

Howard Witt as nominee, Robert Falls as nominee Drama Desk Award Outstanding Featured Actor in a Play Drama Desk Award Outstanding Director of a Play, Drama Desk Award Outstanding Music in a Play Incidental music by Richard Woodbury. The last in Broadway revival there are seven awards two as winner and five as nominees.

Based on the theme of this play which tells about the decision making in Willy Loman's life, the writer will observe *The Death of a Salesman* by using Existentialist theory. So the writer constructs the title **MAKING A MORAL CHOICE IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN* DRAMA (1949): AN EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH.**

B. Literature Review

Before analyzing it, the writer has read other papers that are relevant with her analysis.

First, Ulfah Izzawati with the title *Deixis in Drama Script The Death of a Salesman* (UMS, 2005). The aim of this research is to analyze *deixis in drama script The Death of a Salesman* play.

Second, with the title *Non-Observe of Grice's Maxims found in The Death of a Salesman Script by Arthur Miller* (UMS, 2009). The aim of this research is to describe the types of non-observance maxims in *The Death of a Salesman* Play.

The literary reviews above show that the first researcher uses a different approach with the researcher although using the same subject that is *The Death of a Salesman* drama. And the second researcher uses a different approach with the researcher although using the same subject that is *The Dearth of a Salesman* drama.

Based on review research the writer tries to analyze this drama with a different theory. The researcher wants to analyze Willy Loman's decision of his life.

C. Problem Statement

Based on the reason of background of the study. The writer proposes the problem of the study as the following: "How is making moral choices reflected in Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman*?"

D. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyze the structural elements of the play by finding character and characterization, setting, plot, and theme.
2. To expose the dilemma of Willy Loman in making a Choice based on Existentialist Approach.

E. Benefits of the Study

From this research, the writer hopes that this study has some benefits.

1. Academic Benefits

- a. This research can give contribution in literary study especially in Existentialist theory
- b. This research finding will enrich the theories in literary study especially in Existentialist theory

2. Practical Benefit

This research paper has a practical benefit, which is to give deeper understanding about the content of the drama, especially from the existentialist aspect.

F. Research Method

The writer will divide the research method into five points:

1. Types of the Study

The researcher uses descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive qualitative method is a type of research which result the descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from the observed object.

2. Object of the Study

The object of the study is *The Death of a Salesman* play which is written by Arthur Miller in 1949. The date premiered is 10 February 1949 with 105 pages. It is analyzed by existentialist approach.

3. Type of Data and the Data Source

The types of data study are the text which forms such like words, phrases and sentences in a dialogues and monologues. The writer takes two kinds of data. And they are as follows:

- a. A primary data is a main data obtained from all the worlds, dialogues, phrases, and sentences occurring in the script related to the topic.
- b. Secondary data source is the other sources related to the primary data such as information about the writer's biography, includes books, homepage, research approach books, and other relevant books, websites about the play and other sources supporting the analysis.

4. Technique of the Data Collection

The method of data collections is note taking. The steps of collecting the data are as follows:

- a. Reading the play script.
- b. Determining the character that will be analyzed.
- c. Taking noted of important part in both primary and secondary data.
- d. Taking noted from the material and some other resources related to the play and the analysis.

5. Technique of the Data Analysis

The writer uses descriptive analysis. The steps of analyzing data are as follows:

- a. Reading the play script
- b. Analyzes the structural elements of the script
- c. Analyzes the object of the study by finding the meaning of symbol which is applied.
- d. Drawing conclusion from the analysis.

G. Paper Organization

The research paper is divided into five chapters:

Chapter I is the introduction, covering Background of the Study, Literature Review, Problem Statement, Limitation of the Study, Objectives of the Study, Benefits of the Study, Research Method, and Paper Organization. Chapter II is Underlying Theory, consist of Notion of Existentialist theory, Jean-Paul Sartre point of existentialist theory, Structural Element of Drama, and Theoretical Application. Chapter III is this chapter explains Existentialist analysis of Structural Elements of Drama, and it consists of Character and Characterization, Setting, Plot, Style, and Theme. Chapter IV is Existentialist of analysis in The Death of a Salesman drama, its consist of Being, Existence before essence, Cogito (Consciousness), Freedom, Anxiety, Transcendence of Ego, and Nothingness, Chapter V is Conclusion and Suggestion.