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Manipulation of Emotions Arising out of the family in the play *Death of a Salesman*

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Abstract

The aim of the proposed study is to depict the family where emotions are manipulated at various contexts. Arther Miller imbibes the world in the thread of the American dream where feelings are woven at the rate of materialism. A salesman named Willy, his wife Linda and two sons- Happy and Biff show the American family in which father plays the role of center to be revolved around. The instinct of common human behavior compels Willy to have the dream of prosper material status and his sons to be well settled. But this study will delve into the fact that how his hunger traps him on the web made by him. Miller does not show the ending of the play as only the end of the story, but seems to create the world of emotions which can only be inscribed with the family in golden words as made by Willy even after his death. Emotional bonding with family can never be compared with other parts of society.

Keywords: Emotions Arising, family, *Death of a Salesman*

1. Introduction

Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* presents the web of relations where family members build the intensity of feelings to grab each other in this web. But the materialistic approach entangled in the fulfillment of American dream leave the people in the coherence of selfishness as demonstrated by Willy's wife and his both the sons. Willy is not at home in spite of living at his home. Both his family and the social implications are deeply interlaced in response to Willy with a cruel indifference. Now here he gets the emotional pabulum and the play "is relentless in its manipulation of emotions arising out of family life.... Mr. Miller is out to break our hearts and he comes perilously close to doing so, for here in all their troubled mingling of affection and antagonism are the relationships that bind and divide father and son, mother and son, husband and wife and brother and brother. Only a daughter and her assortment of connections within a family group have been omitted. (Gill 121). Willy and Linda are husband and wife yet they do not seem to have very solid emotional link between the two. Linda as being a passive listener to Willy's sufferings cannot chip in his agony. Linda remains loyal, but her constancy cannot help Loman as "She can play no significant role in her husband's dream; and although she proves occasionally capable of dramatic out-bursts, she lacks the imagination and strength to hold her family together". (Jacobson five1) He has high aims while his resources are limited and wants his sons at higher post. Being a common man, He has faced failure yet he tries to show to Linda as if he is really great. Linda knows his strengths and weaknesses and has a clear understanding of Willy's position. It is only family relation that is imbibed deeply in her heart. On the one hand, she shows the indifference towards her husband, but at the very other place she seems to preach the moral lesson of humanity to her sons to respect their father. She tells Biff: "I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. But he's a human being so and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person."(Miller 44)

She has the same understanding as Mrs. Alving's has in Ibsen's *Ghosts*. But Linda is not an active participant in the tempestuous longings of her husband. Linda she is little comfort to Willy in his loneliness when he is out on business; she only pays attention towards herself.

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That is why he slips into the hands of another woman in Boston. This shows effectively the fact, when a woman loses her circle of emotional grab on her husband, he starts seeking the shelter elsewhere. Illicit relation with the woman and his moral looseness comes in the way of his normal conjugal family relations with his wife. "Willy (With great feeling): You're the best there is, Linda, you're a pal, you know that? On the road-on the road I want to grab you sometimes and just kiss the life out of you". (29)

Real human behavior reveal the true self in the family environment, family is the only place where emotions are manipulated according to the depth of the feelings. When a woman's laughing at his home haunting his 'self' he feels the prick of his guilty conscience and is therefore not in his normal self before his wife. In order to hide his real self from her he makes big talks to impress her whereas she knows the reality. But wife is the coordinator in every family to prepare the tomb of manipulation; Linda, Wife if Willy does so. Linda's true heart and deep cares is seen when she justifies Willy's cause of frustration and tells Biff: " And what goes through a man's mind, driving seven hundred miles home, without having earned a cent? Why shouldn't he talk to himself? Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it is his pay?" (45) Linda can see through the bluffs of Willy. In spite of knowing the reality of her husband, she tries to polish the behavior or her sons toward their father. She is not ready to live in the airy castles made by Willy.

Miller shows the father- son relationship in *Death of a Salesman* to explore the fact that the generation gap in the family member is the fact of the matter in every family. Willy loves his sons deeply and for their sake he is compelled to work as a salesman. There is no any sin in dreaming high, so the same Willy does. Miller says that at its heart salesman is "a love story between a man and his son, and in a crazy way between both of them and America." The American dream to settle down honorably in the American society corrupted Willy's sense and crippled his Self. The question arises here, who is responsible for this? Are this Willy's fault or his sons'? No doubt, being a devoted father, Willy takes full interest in his sons. "He is every bit as sun-fixated as Joe Keller and while the boys are young, nearly all his hopes are pinned on their future". (Hayman 39) His tricks of making his sons vain boasters and feeding on illusion make them emotionally indifferent. Willy does not want to spoil them, but he his feelings to see his sons in higher place compel him to do anyhow. Instead of sending Biff to summer school for the latter's extra coaching, helps him in getting a pass in Math by wrong means, Later on Bernard tells Willy that the cause of Biff's failure is that "he never trained himself for anything. Willy is always praising his sons. He tells Biff: "Because you got greatness in you, Biff, remember that you got all kinds a greatness..."(53) In another place he says about Biff, "That boy-that boy is going to be magnificent". He feels jealous for the neighbor's hard working and intelligent boy Bernard. He tells the boys: Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're, both built like Adonis's. Because the man who creates personal interest in the man who gets ahead. (25)

In this way he is feeding his son on what is far from reality. His jealousy for her neighbor's son reveals her love for her sons. "He has encouraged their weaknesses and inflated their

image of themselves so high that when they grow up, it is an unforgivable and almost intolerable, let down to find that being personable and being good at sports are not enough to ensure financial security and popularity in the adult world". (Hayman 39-40)

In the end when Biff realizes this thing blames Willy for his failure by saying "And I never got anywhere because you blew me, so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody: That's whose fault it is!"(104). Willy provokes Biff's kleptomania. It can be seen when Biff steals a ball. Willy does not ask him strictly to return it; rather he laughs away the whole matter.

Biff	:	Well, I borrowed it from the locker room (He laughs confidentially)
Willy	:	... Coach 'LL probably congratulate you on Your initiative:..... That's because he likes you. If somebody else took the ball there'd be. An uproar..... (22-23)

Now the habit of stealing takes roots in Biff provoked him to steal Bill's fountain pen from the table. To make the matters worse Willy is proud of the fact that he has made his sons fearless and Charley his neighbor friend rightly points out: "Willy, the jails are full of fearless characters" (39). Later on we come to know that Biff has spent three months in jail because he stole a suit in Kansas city.

The indifference of his family members results in the filial love, blurred by Willy's loose moral conduct. The image father is broken when Biff gives the woman "mama's stockings". (Porter 143)

Willy is sowing seeds at the ripe age of sixty. These are the seeds of family's emotional manipulation and personal attention towards him. Left alone in the restaurant he rushes back home and tells (Waiter) Stanley: "Oh I'd better hurry. I've got to get some seeds.....Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground."(96)

In fact the Willy's relationship with the woman has soured the father son relation. Kenneth Tynan rightly points out: "This encounter, with its implied destruction of the father – god, stunted Biff's career and left Willy with a load of remorse redoubled by the fact that he too was the unsuccessful one of two brother". (Tynan 37) The Father and Mother present the real figure for their children in the family. The sins of the father are transported to the sons. The difference is that while the father feels guilty for the relation, the sons proud of the fact that they have many girlfriends. Biff has come home after spending three months in jail and with a realization. "I'm one dollar an hour, Willy: I tried seven states and could not raise it". He wants to have a celebration of the golden future. But the sons are no more interested in living in an illusory world as their father does. They know what is what.

Biff	:	Pop: I was a dime a dozen, and so are you!
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Willy (turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst): I am not a dime a dozen: I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman. (p. 105).

As far as Willy's relations with his younger son, Happy are concerned Willy pays little attention to Happy. Every member of the family plays his own role, whether in silence or directly and bind the emotions to manipulate him. He is treated like an extra and subordinate follow in the family.

Nowhere in the play, Willy is found talking to Happy intimately. So he seeks the fulfillment of this complex in sex. He is proud of the fact that he has seduced many “gorgeous creatures” including the fiancées of company executives. Miller writes about Happy:

Happy is tall, powerfully made. Sexuality is like a visible color on him, or.. Since he has never allowed himself to turn his face towards defeat and is thus more confused and hard-skinned, although seemingly more content. (14)

Neglected at home Happy goes out to seek satisfaction in the company of women. In the restaurant he neglects his father and goes away with the tart. Instead of introducing the girl to his father, he says: “No that is not my father. He’s just a guy”(48). The mother-son relationship in *Death of a Salesman* is free from mother fixation and the Oedipus complex. In family, one person is always there holding the center of feeling, the same role plays Linda. The mother, Linda, is happy at home with her husband. She knows his limitations and her sympathy is with Willy. She is always rebuking and sometimes requesting her sons as they do not pay sufficient attention to the father.

I tell you he put his whole life into you and you’ve turned your backs on him. (She is bent over in the chair, weeping, her face in her hands). Biff, I swear to god! Biff, his life is in your hands. (47).

In the play the readers don’t find her even a single time talking to her sons on any other topic than Willy Loman. She wants a sweet relationship between her husband and sons. “Although she may not know the exact reasons for Biff’s disillusionment in his father, she encourages Biff to try and understand Willy’s difficulties. She uses oblique feminine ways to arouse his sensitivity”. (Partridge 47) At another place Linda tells: “Biff, dear, if you don’t have any feeling for him, then you can’t have any feeling for me... (p. 43).

Linda seems to have the moral courage to rebuke her sons as in the final scene she gets very angry as the sons have left their father alone in the restaurant. She reprimands them severely and asks them to leave home. “Get out of here, both of you and don’t come back! ... You’re a pair of animals: Not one, not another living soul would have had the cruelty to walk out on that man in the restaurant (p. 98).

Unlike the father, the mother wants to impose some discipline on the sons. She cannot see that the sons should denigrate the father. Thus the mother’s attitude to the two sons is more discrete.

Happy likes the mother so much that, Referring to the kind of woman he would like to marry, he says: “Somebody with character, with resistance! Like Mom, y’know?” (P. 19) On another occasion, this is how he talks about his mother: “What a woman! They broke the mold when they made her. You know that, Biff!” The sons appreciate their mother because of her stability. She is constant and loyal, whereas the girls who come into contact with them were tarts and whores. So their mother is the model for them.

Biff and Happy relationship is important in that both of them try for a family reunion. The synthesis they try to create collapses because of lack of money. They fail to bring unity in the family and Willy’s single action of committing suicide too is a step in that direction.

Similarly, in *The Price*, *All My Sons* here in *Death of a Salesman* Miller has introduced two brothers. Both present a different way of living. In the childhood days Biff was puffed up and so he is a failure. Happy was neglected, so his

attention is diverted and ultimately he seeks solace in the company of tarts. But here too he is not happy. He feels lonely and frustrated. Naturally, one cannot get peace and satisfaction through the wrong means. Willy neglected Happy and so he is being neglected by Happy in the restaurant. Happy leaves him alone and goes away with the girls he has picked up. Biff knows his limitations; he knows he is “dime a dozen” but happy is willingly unaware of this fact.

Thus the introduction of the two sons is emblematic of the tension within the playwright. Biff takes his father’s ideas more seriously. The difference between the two is that Biff is able to come out of the illusory world whereas Willy dies in illusion. “Biff at least comes out of the experience with enhanced self-knowledge. “I know who I am, Kid”. Willy dies still self-deceived. He had hoped that millions of people will come to attend his funeral, but we see there are only Charley and his family members at the requiem.

In *Death of a Salesman* the ‘learning’ is not on the part of the father. He commits suicide in the name of love for his sons. He is still hopeful that Biff may make his career with the help of insurance money. The realization or the learning has dawned upon Biff.

Willy confines himself to the interest of his son and dies, whereas in *All My Sons* the father learns a lesson. Willy’s suicide is a sacrifice for his sons’ success. Biff’s demand is for truth. “We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house” (p. 104).

He commits suicide so that Biff may get the insurance money and go into the business world and attains prominence and convert the outer world into a home. Willy loses his clutch at life in order to make a home for his sons. Thus the familial bond is broken while striving for the social bond. In Jacobson’s words “His death changes nothing, it imposes instead that a man’s frantic attempt to make the world a home can defeat the viability of his private home, even cost him his life”. (Jacobson 52)

Thus the proposed study delves into the truth of an American family of Willy Loman to explore the fact how emotions are manipulated in the family environment. Man’s lives are influenced by not only the social, economic and the cultural contexts, but also manipulated by family at the very deepest level. Arthur Miller depicts the feelings and emotions of family member in ever changing in the hunger of fulfillment of the American dream. Blood relation pays always the truthful bond either directly or indirectly as Willy did even after his death.

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