

The Metamorphosis of Home Concept in Capitalist Imperialism: A Critical Analysis of Death of Salesman by Miller

Mahmoda Khaton Siddika¹

¹ International Islamic University Chittagong

Received: 10 December 2018 Accepted: 5 January 2019 Published: 15 January 2019

Abstract

Death of Salesman by Arthur Miller delineates the imperialistic aggregation of money which leads to the tragic dénouement of a life. Money like imperialist controls everybody's everything in this play. How much does anybody earn? "It is the main criteria of success in this play. This structure of society treats human being like a disposed of commodity, after using it is thrown out. Willy Loman, a man of sixty, becomes valueless in his company at this age, though it considers his worth in his youth. Materialistic sense devoid of humanitarian values entangles him tightly. He is always looking for a home with optimism which turns into pessimism with his tragic death for giving financial security for his family. His visionary ideas and all emotional needs by the blow of imperialistic tactics of money face treats continuously for money-making weapons. This paper aims at how his continuous looking for a home without true mental happiness with love and sympathy makes a metamorphosis of home built by the wall of money and turns into an ending of life-giving uncertainty of any security to his family.

Index terms— capitalist imperialism, home.

1 I. Introduction

Death of Salesman by Arthur Miller expounds the clutches of money around all characters' life. They are running towards earning money and all kinds of material gaining. They are all moving around the ferocious claws of capitalist imperialism. So, this money-based society blinds them to develop their humanitarian qualities. Willy Loman, the protagonist of this play, and his family have to face pain wounded by the attack of capitalist imperialism. They easily ignore the attainment of humanitarian quality. When we have studied the play, we have seen that Willy is always busy with building a concrete home for his mental peace and happiness. After coming from a trip and on Sunday, he engages himself in working with brick and cement. For capitalist imperialism, his whole life is to fulfill his desire to have the home by material gaining which makes a metamorphosis of the home concept found in Robert Frost's poem "The Death of Hired Man."

2 II. Capitalist Imperialism

Capitalist imperialism refers to an concept in which imperialistic characteristics are prominent to contemporary capitalism which shows the aggression of money in the world and the country's relation. Christian Fuchs says that "imperialism has re-emerged and been qualitatively transformed, that through capitalist development and crisis, new qualities of capitalism have emerged and others been preserved and that the new qualities, on the one hand, constitute a return to capitalist imperialism" (Fuchs, 2016). For David Harvey, "Capitalist imperialism is a dialectic of political actors that command a territory (the logic of territory) and capital accumulation in space and time (the logic of capital)" (Harvey, 2005). The basic characteristics of capitalist imperialism -the concentration of earning capital/ money, the dominance of finance capital and the monopolistic possession of money are apparent. Though the capitalist imperialism is applied in the world and country's relation, I want

2 II. CAPITALIST IMPERIALISM

to apply this in a personal relationship in *Death of Salesman* by Arthur Miller. On the basis of these three facets, I want to reread this play and want to present the life of Willy Loman, protagonist of this play, who is in suffocation of capitalist imperialism and is constantly in search of home, because the imperialistic attitude of money everybody's life control and everybody are forced to adore money. Aswathi (2013) rightly states that "the working principle of Capitalism is money: the acquisition and consumption". Its primary concern is to satisfy the individual by materialistic gains. Its main target is success in terms of wealth.

Arthur Miller, in an interview with the *New York Times*, unearths that "Willy Loman is not a depressive. He is weighed down by life. There are social reasons for why he is where he is." Pentola (2004) finds that "Willy Loman's self-delusion and moral confusion in relation to Miller's indictment of the competitive, capitalistic society that is responsible for dehumanizing the individual." So, Willy is always trying to get money for his home. I will try to analyze the personality of Willy Loman at first and through which I expose the characteristics of capitalist imperialism. Then, I will try to show how he does a metamorphosis the concept of home presented in Robert Frost's poem "The Death of the Hired Man" for the clutches of money in capitalist imperialism. Home varies from person to person as Mary says in this poem "It all depends on what you mean by home." Following the reference of this poem "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, There have to take you in," I am overwhelmed with three sense of home-one is-the connotative meaning of home is the fenced house we live in, that is, a material house.

Another one is the denotative and literal meaning of home where anybody feels comfort and happiness, where love and respect dominates everything. The persons in the home without blood relation keep one another safe and secure. Everyone in here feels for everyone truly.

The third one is that the symbolic meaning of home is not the place, but a moment when anybody can express anything to anybody, he feels get relaxed from any burden of exhaustion of mind, a moment when a mind finds a consoling and soothing thing, when it gets a safe harbor to sleep tranquilly. These three meanings of home from this poem catch my brain to apply in the play, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. The first meaning of home in this play that Willy Loman desires to have commented house for safety, "he was a happy man with a batch of cement" (110). Always he is busy with "making the stoop, finishing the cellar, putting on the new porch"(110). The second meaning in this play that Willy Loman is always looking from his sons, his company so that they can feel for him. He tries to own home full of happiness, comfort, and peace. The third meaning of home is a safe harbor to rest for relieving the exhaustion of his body and mind.

So, I want to show how this Willy Loman tries to find out the second meaning of home with the first meaning which makes a metamorphosis of the third meaning of home for the surroundings of the Capitalist imperialism. Now I have discussed this play by the three definition of home.

Willy Loman, the protagonist of this play, lives in a concrete house which is related to the first meaning of home. But it is irony of fate that for the fulfillment of his desire to own this house, he has to pay the installment of this house up to his age of 60. It is the weapons of capitalist imperialism that everybody's life rounds with own apartment, a car and plenty of women. He in this society rushes towards to build a concrete home, but he feels lonely as like as Happy, his son, does. In a real sense, everybody who is successful builds an estate "and then hasn't the peace of mind live in it." (18). Capitalist imperialism does not make anybody satisfaction with what he has or what he can do. He only wants more material gain. The ingredients of mental peace like Willy's New York job, his advance from Howard, his successful attempt with Bill Oliver are not available because in the business world "everybody' gotta pull his own weight" (62). This Capitalist imperialism makes people over ambitions, so they are so satisfied with little salary, so as for Willy "he was a happy man with a batch of cement."(110). Everybody is in search of some home by making money. The result is that he entangles himself with this capitalist imperialism's fence that he has to commit suicide to give the assurance of getting insurance premium. After his death, Linda, his wife, can pay the last installment of the house. It belongs to them at last. But, what is a dream to belong to the house by them is fruitlessly vacant to live in here since "there'll be nobody home." (112).

Willy Loman always tries to build a concrete home, form a family and work in a company for attaining comfort and happiness. Capitalist imperialism treats an aged person like a stone as Willy's company does. It wants to suck the blood from youth which is not possible to get from aged persons. It considers the human being as fruits, after eating it throws "the peel away" (64). He continues his journey to a long way to chase money even at this age. His devotion to whole life is valueless in capitalist Imperialism. Two-week vacation suffers him his whole fifty weeks of the year. He always has to "get ahead of the next fella" (16). Anyone should think over only future build-up. In a whole, "it's a measly manner of existence"(16) in this society.

The father-son relationship is only rounded with money-making. His son does not satisfy him "to make thirty-five dollars a week!"(11). He expects more from him a lot "to tramp around take a lot of different jobs."(11). He only thinks about his sons whether his sons can make money. His son, Biff is not successful "at the age of thirty-four"(11) which is a disgraceful matter to him. Father is always happy when he hears about his son's coming but when he comes home "he's always the worst"(42). Mother shows tensed about his son. Her hair becomes grey from his high school day. Willy is such a man who "is the dearest man in the world" (43) to his wife but he "never had an ounce of respect" (43) for his wife. To his son, "he's got no character" (44). Physical attractiveness is a way of money-making. Money as an imperialistic diverts him from any humanitarian value. It covers his mind with outward appearance. Always he optimizes for his son Biff to make money not taking

care of his label of ability to do any work. He does not care about his sons, their basic demoralization and their inability to adopt the humanitarian value. He overlooks his son's smoking habit and the lapse of his character. Biff's stealing of a "carton of basketball" (20) is not a matter to his father. Willy is very much proud of running plenty of girls towards Biff. To him, outward appearance is the main element of success. His only thinking are to make money in life. His tactics for this is to make "an appearance in the business world"(25) and create "personal interest" (25). He as a father teaches them that kicking out oneself from the business line is the main target in the money-making race. Willy is neglecting Biff's habit of stealing without any Volume XIX Issue II Version I 28 (A)

punishment. It structures Willy in a way that it throws away anybody who knows his fakeness. Willy throws Biff out of the house because he knows his fault. His son knows to calm down his father by giving money. Biff is moving seven states and cannot raise himself what his father desires. He is only capable of earning one dollar an hour. However, he does not bring 'home any prizes any more" (105) and everybody in his house stops to think of him "to bring them home!" (105).

Happy, his other son is two years older than Biff." Sexuality is like a visible color on him."(14). He is also unsuccessful, but he is strong enough to face his defeat. In his attitude always prevails "seemingly more content"(14). Willy is hopeful of his and son's bright future, but he does not understand that "nothing'll grow anymore"(55) in this hard-shell of Capitalist imperialism. Happy is expert enough to tell a lie convincingly and eulogizing way. Everybody is unwilling to face reality. He hides it with an unfair and simple speech. Success through earning money has covered anybody in the way that he is dreaming if he does not attain it. Happy is dreaming of becoming merchandise manager for "fiftytwo thousand dollars a year" (18) though he is unable to attain that.

Willy has to earn seventy to a hundred dollars in a week by working ten to twelve hours a day. People do not want to receive him at his age of sixty, so they "laugh at him" (28). He always considers how much he is loved than respected by all. Though he understands "life is short" (28), he searches for happiness leaving aside the immutable matters like fidelity, honesty and other humanitarian qualities. His mind becomes "overactive" (9) for too much expectation. Linda is so much obedient to his husband, but he easily falls prey into a woman during his business, though he shows his love for his wife. His wife is mending stocking, but he gives new stockings to another woman. We have seen the mocking laugh when he tells about the whipping to his son, Biff that "all the matters are afraid of him" (31) and "he is too rough with the girls"(31). It is because he himself is guilty of the same fault. Loos (2011) expresses that "for Willy, [being well liked] takes on enormous proportions at the expense of other key characteristics or skills."

Availing opportunity is a way to be successful. Willy's brother Ben is in search of opportunity. So, he goes to Alaska with many enterprises, but even he does not know about his mother's death. At last, he stops in African diamond mines "when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out?And by God I was rich"(37). In a crooking way, everyone has to be rich. So, Ben knows that "never fight fair with a stranger" (38). He learns from his father who goes around town to town and sells flutes and has to fight with reality. He inherits his father's essence. Sometimes he understands his false way of running towards making money and of bringing up his sons, but soon afterward he falls prey into the claws of Capitalist imperialism. He tries to imbue on his sons the spirit of walking into the jungle in seventeen and walking out in twenty-one by being a rich man. But it is the irony of fate that as in capitalist imperialism, everything is brand new is broken or collapsed before paying its installment although everyone is fascinated with the eye-catching advertisement. This way of success halts in the midway without reaching its destination.

Willy Loman tries to own a concrete home, develop a family tree and earn from a company without any strong foundation lacking humanitarian values which makes a metamorphosis of the third meaning of home for the clutches of capitalist imperialism. Capitalist imperialism pretends to bring springtime all the time, but it does not know that "a man is not a bird, to come and go with the springtime" (43). Whenever anybody. Dream surrounds everyplace of his house which is rising out of reality. The exterior of the house shows the inner sense of reality. "The draped entrance" (7) to the living room signifies the draped entrance between his dream and reality. We have dimly seen the reality from any side. Walking through dream up to the age of 60, he becomes exhausted. His old body only sighs "Oh, boy, oh, boy" (7). Imperialistic aggregation of money makes him forget the beautiful condition and dreamy thoughts. This situation throws him out of reality.

Merchandise company thinks of business for earning money; it does not consider any employee's inability to travel far away from his living place at his age. An old person valueless in the Wagner Company. Willy is doing the business of this company by commission as a beginner. Young and energetic person, Howard, "was a prince" (10) after his father's death. This Capitalist imperialism is so inhumane that Willy works for his company thirty-six years but "now in his old age they take his salary away"(44), even his sons are not willing to mind for their father. But his whole life he spends for his sons' good. But it is his reward that "no one knows him anymore, no one welcomes him" (45).

Father-son relation, Willy and Biff, is not out of love and affection but out of a money-making sense that is the way of success in life. Willy always mocks him not to be successful, even having physical attraction. So, his son "can't get near him" (15). Biff is not a person who does not know whether he feels home at the age because he cannot "take hold of some kind of a life" (42). He is moving about three months without any address. Biff is always running for making his future from here and there up to thirty-four years but "there's nothing more

inspiring or beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt”(16). He does not find the home and cannot build himself in anywhere. After running, he comes back home only thinking over that “all I’ve done is to waste my life”(17). This condition makes him think of wasting his life. For the play of capitalist imperialism, no idealist finds his place in society. Everybody is busy with success or making money. He cannot divert this prime business to any other matters in life. He forgets about attaining any humanitarian values which are very important to sustain life in the world. He always neglects his familial responsibilities which are equally important for any human being. Biff is conscious of whether he is successful or wasting his life. He does not care about his marriage, his responsibilities towards his parents and family. His family even Biff, his elder brother, encourages Happy to be bashful with girls and “taught me(him) everything. I know about a woman” (15). Till death, anybody does not satisfy for anything, like Happy’s friend, merchandise manager. He makes an estate, lives only two months and at last sells it. He starts to build another one again, but it is a fate that “he can’t enjoy it once it is finished” (17). Anybody does not respect any human being. He considers others “petty sons-of-bitches” (18). Everybody thinks of “outbox, out-run, and outlift anybody”(18). He hankers after money which makes him false. Anybody with ideas has to comply with false by lowering his ideals. There is no one to trust. To live in this society is “to grub for money”(18). But Biff and Happy do not know “how to do it”(18). Capitalist imperialism is always in a tendency to murder anyone in a business line, “business is bad, it’s murderous” (40). Even, girls also in this reign are not static in character because they stay with a boy one night, but they are “engaged to be married in five weeks” (19) to another boy. Happy mocks at his outward honesty though “I hate myself for it” (19). “Still, I take it and I love it!”(19).

Linda is an ironic figure in the hand of Capitalist imperialism that even having a humanitarian sense she is useless to do any. She understands everything that his husband “is not the finest character that ever lived” (44), but he is her idol. She wants to treat him as a human being, not as an old dog.

Capitalist imperialism only considers one’s value, one’s money, and one’s capacity, own business and above all, own self. It controls the relationship with parents-son. By Biff’s comment on Willy’s company “ungrateful bastards!” (44), Linda’s reply is “are they any worse than his sons?”(44). It is so selfish that it is glad when anyone brings good to it. But when it does not see anything like that, it establishes the situation that “no one knows him anymore, no one welcomes him” (45). It entangles everything such a way that even anybody hates it to live in here; he has to stay with it. Suppose, he does not feel fit for business, he has to try to do that. This Capitalist imperialism teaches everyone only to kick others for his good. This society blurs anybody’s humanitarian value in a way that he does not understand its necessity in life. He forgets of this sense and ignores its importance. He does not demarcate what is right or what is wrong as a human being. This society imbues the sense that only building guest house, making a large sum of money will bring “some peace of mind” (56). But it makes a fence around anybody’s house that they cannot go out from it, because his everything like an insurance premium, the installment for refrigerator, car, payment on the mortgage of the house around twenty-five years snatches his mental peace. So, “he’s only a little boat looking for a harbor” (59). Running towards money makes everybody lonely and full of nothingness. Willy’s imperialistic circumstances make him “tired to the death” (8). The haunting attitude of money does not help him to take rest at the time of his physical exhaustion. He several times tries to commit suicide. He connects rubber pipe to the gas heater to suicide. At last, he dies meaningless death for giving safety with the money of “twenty-thousand-dollar” (107). Capitalist imperialism controls anybody’s life in a way that to pay the mortgage the house: he has to work for his lifetime. It is pathetic that when it is owned, “there’s nobody to live in it” (10). Emani (2011) said that “therefore, as Willy has not achieved any material gains he has no place in the society and must give up his dreams. It is this vision that leads him to suicide since it means he has sold himself for 20000 dollars and that is exactly what society wants him to do because Willy has nothing left to sell in his life other than his life itself.”

3 IV. Conclusion

Willy’s continuous search of home entangles with the facets of capitalist imperialism, but he cannot go outside of it. He is not able to find the right path to achieve home. He amalgamates material home with the feeling of home because he binds for the gorgeous outward offering of capitalist imperialism. He cannot adopt the way how Charles and Bernard make a bridge with money and humanitarian qualities. So, he makes a metamorphosis of home which leads to his tragic ending of life leaving any home for anybody.

31
Volume XIX Issue II Version I
(A)

Figure 1:

-
- 218 [Harvey ()] *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, D Harvey . 2013. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 219 [Emami and Khodambashi ()] ‘An Anti-social Socialist: A Critical Reading of Arthur Miller’s Death of a
- 220 Salesman’. Kaveh Emami , Khodambashi . *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 2011. 2 (2) p. .
- 221 [Aswathi ()] ‘Capitalistic Discourse and Individual: A Social Study of Arthur Miller’s Death of Salesman’. M
- 222 Aswathi . *The Criterion* 2013. 4. (II)
- 223 [Christan ()] ‘Critical Globalization Studies and the New Imperialism’. Fuch Christan . *Critical Sociology*. 36
- 224 2016. 6 p. .
- 225 [Centola ()] ‘Family Values in Death of a Salesman’. Steven R Centola . *CLA Journal* 1993. 37 p. .
- 226 [Frost ()] *The Road Not Taken and Other Poems*, Robert Frost . 1993. Dove Publication: USA.