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Theory of Narcissism and Schizophrenia in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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Abstract

In *Death of a Salesman*, we observe the psychological aspect which makes this play different from other plays. Through the characters of the play, we are going to analyze the narcissism and schizophrenia in the play. Arthur Miller's plays are not only the study of social issues but also the study of psychological issues. His characters resemble modern society and its problems. Narcissism and Schizophrenia are the mental disorders of man which are responsible for the destruction of man. These disorders not only affect the individual person but also affect his surroundings. The aim of this paper is to highlight the inner conflict of man and his struggle in modern time in which people are so materialistic. The feeling of grandiosity, special, lying and many others are the symptoms of narcissism. Hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, and movement disorders are the symptoms of schizophrenia.

Keywords – Narcissism, Schizophrenia, Hallucinations, Delusions, Grandiosity

Narcissism is the feeling of specialness and narcissist looks like an arrogant, self-centered and demanding because he feels superior, special, unique and egotistical attitude. Narcissist wants special attention from others and he has unreasonable expectations. It is very common nowadays. According to a dictionary, "Narcissism is extremely self-centered with an exaggerated sense of self-importance: marked by or characteristic of excessive admiration of or infatuation with oneself."¹ On the basis of the above study, we can say it is a psychological disorder because narcissists want a special admiration or attention. If they don't receive special attention, they become angry. Narcissism finds in many ages but it is very common in teenagers or early adulthood but we cannot say that it is a disorder for everyone. A person who has the feeling of sadness, depression, the problem in works and in relationships, and suicidal thoughts should be treated by doctors.

In *Death of a Salesman*, we observe this psychological aspect which makes this different from other plays. Through the characters of the play, we are going to analyze the narcissism. We have already discussed the meaning of narcissism, the behavior of narcissist

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and the narcissism as a personality disorder. Willy Loman, the protagonist of the play, and other characters have the problem of narcissism because we find the feeling of grandiosity, special, lying and many other symptoms of narcissists. Willy has no empathy because he has no ability to understand the feelings of others. He never tries to understand the feelings of his wife and other family members. He never tries to share his feelings and emotions with his family. At the beginning of the play, when Willy and Linda converse about Biff, we visualize the conflict between father and son. Linda tells Willy about the mental condition of Biff but Willy ignores the situation and tries to impose his rules upon his son, Biff Loman. He wants to fulfill his dreams and desires through his sons. He thinks himself a great and unique person. He always criticizes others because it is his egotistical attitude in which person cares only about himself and about his thoughts. At the beginning of the play, when Linda says him not to criticize Biff, Willy becomes hyper and shows his egotistical attitude, "When the hell did I lose my temper? I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism?"² Biff never follows Willy's suggestions because Willy wants to see him as a successful salesman only on the basis of his attractive personality. Biff ignores his father because he knows the reality of his false dreams and desires.

Willy always criticizes Biff but he never tries to understand the feelings of his son which is a characteristic of a narcissistic personality. Biff discusses the character of his father and says his mother, "Because I know he's fake and he doesn't like anybody around who knows!"³ This line shows that Biff knows the reality of his father in the business world and he also knows Willy's false dreams. Linda tries to show the reality of Willy's mental condition in front of her sons. When Willy listens to their conversation, he presents his specialty before them, "They laugh at me, heh? Go to Filene's, go to the Hub, go to Slattery's, Boston. Call out the name Willy Loman and see what happens! Big shot!"⁴

A narcissist feels himself a special and different from others for which they never care about others' opinion. Willy is unable to see the truth of his surroundings. He wants to show himself as a famous salesman in New England. He tells to his sons, "And when I bring you fell as up, there'll be open sesame for all of us, 'cause one thing, boys. I have friends. I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own. This summer, heh?"⁵ At the end of the play, at his funeral, no one comes which proves the above lines, false. Willy thinks that he knows all the rules and rituals of the business world. That's why he never values hard work. When Bernard talks to Biff about his study, Willy ignores the hard work of Bernard and criticizes the personality of Bernard. Willy tells his sons,

That's just what I mean, Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand but he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest the man who gets ahead.⁶

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Through these lines, we can know the arrogant behavior of a father who always appreciates the personality of his sons and ignores their faults. He knows that his sons are unsuccessful but he neglects the real situations in his arrogance. This play represents the narcissistic character of Willy Loman in many ways.

Next point related to the narcissistic personality of Willy Loman, we examine that he lies many times with his family and his friends. Willy also tells a lie with himself. He always hides the real problems in his life. Charley, the neighbor and the friend of Willy, offers him a good job many times but Willy hides the truth from him. We can see in the first act when Charley offers him a job, Willy answers, "I got a job, I told you that. What the hell are you offering me a job?"⁷ In his arrogance, he forgets the relation with Charley and he tells a lie with confidence. The narcissistic persons feel insulted when other persons give them any suggestions because they think themselves different and special. As in the second act when Willy again borrows the money from Charley to pay an insurance policy, Willy shows him that he will return it soon. Charley again offers him a job but at this time, Willy warns him strictly and says, "You big ignoramus, if you say that to me again I'll rap you one! I don't care how big you are!"⁸

The narcissists are self-centered or selfish. They think always about themselves and never care for others. Willy is a self-centered person in the play. He always wants to fulfill his desires and dreams in anyway. He fails as a father and a salesman in his life due to his self-centered character. To achieve his all dreams and desires represents him as a selfish. He thinks about a high status and wealth which makes his relations bad with his friends, family, and colleagues. He wants to impose his desires on his sons and in his selfishness; he neglects the feelings of his family. He loves his elder son, Biff so much but their close relationship affected by Willy's forceful views onto Biff. Willy tries to use his sons to hide his own failure in the business world.

Ben is as an object for Willy through which he can express his dreams and desires because Ben is the embodiment of Willy's desires. The narcissistic personality expresses their inner thought with the help of an object. That's why in the whole play, Willy usages Ben and the woman to reveal his secret of success and his loneliness who is his delusion.

We find these elements not only in Willy's personality but also in other characters like Linda, Biff, and Happy. Happy Loman is just like his father, Willy because he never criticizes the ill behavior of his father but follows his path. We can see the devotion of Happy Loman to his father's dreams. He always talks like his father as his views about success. We can understand his thoughts through his speeches in the whole play. When Happy Loman converses with Biff Loman about his carrier, he focuses on the personal attractiveness and professional achievement. At the beginning of the play, Happy tells,

I gotta show some of these pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade. I want to walk into the store the way he walks

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in. Then I'll go with you, Biff. We'll be together yet, I swear. But take those two we had tonight. Now weren't they gorgeous creatures?⁹

In these lines, Happy expresses his likings related to his business life. His character represents the narcissistic personality as Willy Loman because he also wants to compete with others salesman on the basis of rank. He needs power and superiority which are the characteristics of narcissists. Happy Loman is chasing his dreams and desires like Willy Loman without caring. We see at the end of the play, at the funeral of Willy Loman, Happy opposes to Biff's thinking about his father. Biff says that his father had many wrong dreams and desires but Happy Loman forbids him. Happy Loman denies going with his brother and his mother because he wants to complete the dreams of his father after his death and he says, "All right, boy. I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have- to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him."¹⁰ Thus, his lines represent the image of success and narcissism of Willy Loman. In his opinion, he is a well-liked salesman and better than another common salesman which is another point to prove his narcissism as his father.

The next point is Schizophrenia which is also found in *Death of a Salesman*. Schizophrenia is a serious psychotic disorder in which a person may hear voices or see things that are not real. Sometimes, a person thinks that other people are controlling his mind. A person with Schizophrenia lost his sense of humor or stability in his behavior. Our unconscious mind is responsible for this problem. Suicidal behave is very common in schizophrenic person. According to a dictionary, "Schizophrenia is a chronic and severe mental disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels and behaves. People with Schizophrenia may seem like they have lost touch with reality. Although Schizophrenia is not as common as other mental disorders, the symptoms can be very disabling."¹¹ Willy Loman talks to himself and to the unreal characters in the whole play which proves him as a Schizophrenic personality. Hallucinations, suspiciousness, false beliefs, odd behavior, and delusions are the main characteristics of the Schizophrenia in the character of Willy Loman. Willy feels those things which are not as real as the character of the woman and the character of Ben. Willy is depressed in his real life because of his poor financial condition of the family. That's why he becomes psychologically affected person. We can see his Hallucination first time in the starting of the play; he talks to himself when Biff and Happy are upstairs in Act I. And second time, he starts to talk to a woman who is not real when a conversation lies with his wife, Linda. We can observe the condition of his unstable mind when he suddenly sees the woman. Willy says, "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 outa you."¹² Then he listens to the laughter of the woman who is not real and starts to talk to her without knowing the real situation. He says, "Cause I get so lonely – especially when

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business is bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys."¹³ In these lines, we can see the rapid change in Willy's mind and it is very common in the whole play.

The family of the schizophrenic person also suffers because this type of personality not only affects himself but also his surroundings because of his odd behavior and rapid change in mind. Sometimes family member thinks that it may be a supernatural power or black magic behind his condition but it is not so. The patient can be cured with the support of family members, relatives, friends, and the diagnoses. The suicidal act is the last stage of Schizophrenia.

At this point, we can say that Willy Loman is a Schizophrenic personality because he hears the voice of his dead brother; Ben and he can see him at any place and at any time. When Willy Loman is playing cards with his friend, Charley, he starts hallucination about Ben but Charley is unable to understand the mind of Willy Loman. Willy completely lost in his past memories at any time. Miller usages the flashback in the play to show the memory of Willy Loman of his past in the present but these memories are affected the present life of Willy Loman and his surroundings which shows his unstable mental condition. In the conversation of Willy with Charley and his sudden hallucination about Ben which can prove him Schizophrenic personality. Willy says in his delusion of Ben that he is tired. But in reality Charley unable to understand Willy. He thinks that Willy calls him Bem. Through this conversation, we can guess the confusion created by Willy Loman because it is the ill mental condition of Willy. Willy tries to show that he is alright and there is no problem. In that reference, Willy says, "That's funny. For a second there you reminded me of my brother Ben."¹⁴ Here, we can see the real situation and can say that the schizophrenic personality is unaware towards his deeds as Willy who seems as he is ignoring the truth but psychologically, he is unaware and psychologically affected.

Willy also feels insulted whenever anyone tells him the truth. Willy tells lie much time about his job. When he is conversing with Charley and hallucinates about Ben, he completely lost in his past memories and forgets the present time with Charley. He thinks that he is with Ben and his family where Ben tells him about the business rituals to Willy's sons and Willy discusses his financial problems with Ben. Willy also takes advice from Ben about the business rules to teach his sons to be successful into the business world where Ben tells him, "William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich!"¹⁵ After this long conversation, we can observe that Ben leaves him but Willy still thinks him real and Linda calls him but Willy's mind is not accepting the reality. The whole scene is related to his hallucination which is not real but Willy thinks it real. On the basis of this scene, we can see the instability of Willy's mind which proves him a schizophrenic personality.

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Whenever Willy feels lonely, depressed and under pressure, he lost his consciousness and we can see his schizophrenic personality. In schizophrenia, we can see different personalities into a man and he is far away from reality. The schizophrenic personality is unable to understand his own behavior which makes his condition critical. Willy is disturbed by his regular problems in his life and there is no one to support him. We already highlighted that there are many problems like financial and personal which makes him a mentally ill person. A psychologically affected person may improve with the support of his family but in Willy's life, his all family members are living in their own world and they are unaware of his condition. We know the conflict between Willy and his elder son, Biff which completely disturbed Willy's life and the atmosphere of his family. His present time is not good and he struggles for money that is a reason for his hallucination because he wants to be happy but his problems are not under control.

All psychological problems are created by unconscious thoughts when we can't express them. According to psychological principles, we have many mediums to express our unconscious thoughts but when they can't be expressed easily, they change into hallucination, delusions, dreams, nightmares and many other mediums which become the psychological problems. Lack of communication is also a part of Willy's problem. His thoughts also live in his unconscious mind which converts into psychological problems. Biff never realizes the fact behind his father's problem but Linda tells him openly when Biff becomes angry on Willy in front of Linda. Linda tells him the reality of Willy,

When you're coming, he's all smiles, and talks about the future, and – he's just wonderful. And then the closer you seem to come, the more shaky he gets, and then, by the time you get here, he's arguing, and he seems angry to you. I think it's just that may be he can't bring himself to – to open up to you. Why are you so hateful to each other? Why is that? ¹⁶

Linda knows the reality of Willy and the root of his problems but the situation is not in her hands. When Biff and Happy don't understand the reality, she tells them the reality of Willy. She says that he walks in the late night and now he starts to talk to himself because none is to support him and respect him in his business life. Linda also tells them that he is trying to commit suicide many times to receive insurance money. We can observe that Willy tries to commit suicide many times according to Linda which proves the last stage of schizophrenia. We have studied the symptoms of schizophrenia which finally tend us for suicide.

Willy never tries to communicate his problems to anyone which can improve his ill mental condition. In modern time, people are busy in their own world and they have no time to share feelings with their friends and relatives which makes us mentally ill. Social withdrawal, lack of enthusiasm, materialism, and lack of communication are responsible for psychological problems. We can see in the play, the consequences of busy life and

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commercialization of human relationships which destroy the whole life of Willy. He never tries to feel the happiness and peace of mind because his mind never accepts the truth of his life. There is a conflict between self and soul. Willy always tense about his future and he never tries to see his present happiness which affects him all the time and he starts hallucination. He can improve his life with the help of his family and friends because we have observed that Charley offers him job much time but he rejects his offer and never values of his suggestion which makes him struggle for money. Willy is self – centered, self – deluded and self – destructive person. According to Osho:

That is the simple secret of happiness. Whatever you are doing, don't let past move your mind; don't let future disturb you. Because the past is no more, and the future is not yet. To live in the memories, to live in the imagination is to live in the non-existential. And when you are living in the non-existential, you are missing that which is existential. Naturally, you will be miserable, because you will miss your whole life.¹⁷

In the old time, people were connected with their family and friend but at present, people become more substantial and materialistic with make them psychologically ill personality. They believe in wealth and status in society. The sense of spiritualism is destroying day by day and people are losing their consciousness which makes them more passive or inactive. People are addicted to the materialistic world for which they are ignoring the fact and reality of their life. Human being wants to achieve his aim without realizing the peace of mind. The happiness of the soul is very important to defeat our problems in life but there is no place for openhandedness, kindheartedness, goodness, and forgiveness. we should improve our lifestyle to save our life and for our mental health. People are conscious regarding their physical health but they are ignoring their mental health. That's why we should give time to our self.

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