

Suicide and Escape in Miller's and Lewis' works
Asmaa Khalaf Medlul Al-Jumaily
College of Education for women

Arthur Miller (1915-) is the famous American dramatist who chooses human nature as an important arena. His choice to explore the inner spots of human life stems from his belief that from the human nature emanates the earthly violence and corruption. Thus, the common man occupies the central subject of his works. He focuses on the family conflict to unfold the responsibility of man in the destruction of our world. His strategy comes from his belief that man is a small, but significant part of the society and if he is corrupted, his disease will be spread to wreck the whole identity of the society. Miller has a great belief in man's goodness, thus he attempts to stir the hidden love in the human heart. He puts a weighing hope on love because of its ethereal ability to rebuild the human ruin. Through his exploring the human motives, he provides a remedy, if there is any, to the source of corruptions. The surprise is that he chooses death or suicide to be the sole solution to correct them. In spite of choosing suicide to be the final end to his heroes, there is a wide difference between a suicide and other.

Death of a Salesman (1949) is Miller's masterpiece in which he presents his hero, Willy Loman. He is a victim to his devoted philosophy of his life and his two son`s. His illusion is that he and his two sons especially the eldest. Biff, have unique features which allow them to be the greatest. His illusion drags him to commit other mistakes for instance telling a series of lie to nurture his wrong view. His son, Biff, suspects his father's view. He finds out that they don't have any unique feature . Willy tries to face and deaden any attempt of Biff's self realization. Willy escapes from any confrontation with the reality. Biff tells his father that.

Willy! I ran down eleven flights with a pen in my hand today. And suddenly I stopped, you hear me? And in the middle of that office building, do you hear this? I stopped in the middle of that building and I saw the sky. I saw the things that I love in this world. The

work and the food and time to sit and smoke. And I looked at the pen and said to myself, what the hell am I trying to become what I don't want to be? What am I going in an office, making contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am! Why can't I say that, Willy?¹

Willy is destroyed and causes the destruction of his two sons who turn to be failures, they don't accept any job that doesn't suit their assumed greatness.

Willy tries to feed his views in Biff's mind. Biff begins to look for the truth. Finding the truth means the destruction of Willy's dream. After painful suffers and struggling with truth, Willy finds that his views are empty from any substance. He searches for the solution to all his agonies. He resorts to death as an effective anodyne, especially when his suicide supports his previous dream, Biff, since after his death, Biff can receive the assurance sum to start a new project. When Willy finds all his dreams shatter into pieces, he finds no panacea to his injured soul save committing a suicide, and leaving his horrible world for ever. Really his society plays wolfish roles in nurturing his false goals and in forcing him to depart his world. Willy can't endure the light of truth when Biff cruelly confronts him vis-a-vis with his illusive philosophy. Willy is the victim of truth. Biff tells his father the truth that :

I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I am one dollar, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn't raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather any meaning? I'm not bringing home any prize any more, and you are going to stop waiting for me to bring them home.
[p.102]

In spite of Willy's wrong views, he proves to be a devoted believer in them. Even his suicide can't be read as a failure, but it can be regarded as a covered escape from facing and living the truth. He can't be naked easily from his illusion. Biff tells him that "we never told the truth for ten minute in this house!" (p . 100) How one expects Willy to endure the truth the rest of his life. Also Biff tells him to burn all his dreams, but Willy chooses burning himself instead for the sake of his dream. He choose to be buried with his illusion. And to support his dream this proves that he leaves seeds to be nurtured after him. Willy, to the last point of his life, fails to rid from his view and in spite of its falseness, he chooses "the pursuit of the Dream".² His suicide to gain the assurance is the deadly proof. He is aware of the effect on his sons, still his death provides another opportunity to live without his presence.

In **All my Sons** ,(1947) Miller also penetrates the familial conflict to reveal another victim of truth, and provide his sole elixir to his hero. Joe Keller's crime starts from his concern on his family safety and neglect anything beyond blood ties. His tragedy begins from this crucial point especially when he frees his soul from sensing any guilt or carrying any responsibility toward the world. Thus, his crime of shipping defective airplane cylinder heads during the war which causes the death of twenty-one pilots is excused by him. The loss of his son, Larry, and the connection between the two accidents stir his crime again in his heart and he attempts to put his crime in its actual position. Then he begins to taste the horrible bitterness of his crime. His son, Chris, faces him with the truth with all its pain, he tells Keller :

For me! Where do you live, where have you come from? For me! I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did if for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the goddam business? Is that as far as your mind can see, the business? What is that, the world-the business? What the

hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? What the hell are you? you are not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you? What must I do to you? I ought to tear the tongue out of you month, what must I do you?³

Larry, keller's son, also finds no vent for his injured idealism rather than death but, Larry's suicide after the discovery of his father's crime, is a triumph of human love and universal brotherhood. Miller via Larry wants to announce that love is the magic solution to human disasters, and the first gate to heal the deadly injuries. Joe Keller shoots himself and before hearing the shot, Chris tells his mother few lines which are Miller's message to Keller and the world:

You can better! Once and for all you can know there is a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it, and unless you know that, you threw away your son because that's why he died. [p . 170]

Joe Keller's suicide is the evidence of the turning to his realization from personal to social one. Only after his death he gains his family and the human world. Larry's death turns to be a bless on his parents especially the father who realizes the meaning of living in a world, feeling its pain and mercy. His death is a vote for the universal love. Keller refuses at first to "be a Jesus in the world!" [p . 169] Now when love washes his heart, he can't endure to be evil on this world, thus to support love, he sacrifices himself.

Miller in these two plays, chooses suicide to end his heroes' lives after facing the truth as if the truth is a dangerous weapon that shouldn't be neglected otherwise one will be its victim. Though suicide is the end of both heroes of Miller's dramas, there is a vivid difference between the two states. In Willy Loman's case the death is chosen to strengthen his belief and he tries in vain to accept life that is empty from his faith and philosophy. In spite of his wrong views, still he has a deep faith in something who dies for it. While the death of Joe Keller is a sign of a bravery and triumph over his wrong belief. He pronounces his new faith which defeats his previous selfishness that

the boys in this world are “All my sons.” (p . 140) He realizes at last his wrong view, but as Oscar Wilde said “one can endure-they (faults) come from outside, they are accidents. But to suffer for one’s own fault’s, ah-there is the sting of life.”⁴

Both Willy and Joe are motivated by love for their sons who are their means to discover the truth. And both feel the horrible disgrace to commit such errors which are seen in their son’s eyes as capital errors. Also Both fail to achieve their dreams, but they gain their son’s love and are exonerated in front of their sons after their death. The important point that emerges on the surface in the study of Miller’s solution that when the individual commits wrong deeds, the society practices a heavy pressure on him without any hope of forgiveness. When the matter is reversed i.e., when the society is responsible the matter is so different and the man suffer is limited. In this case man is satisfied with escape. This draws us to a shaking result that the inner corruption is undurable and unpardonable which leads to man destruction. This leads us to cover Sinclair Lewis solution in which the society plays instrumental role in shattering man.

Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951) is the famous American who from his early childhood embarks a campaign against his country. He starts from the root, his towns people. He turns to be the voice of the rebels and a vital member of “the lost generation.”⁵ He strives for individual freedom. In spite of the American attacks against his satire which is considered as a grave betrayal, he continues in his calls that human beings should be free from all chains and unhampered by hypocritical standards which are the targets of “the American Dickens.”⁶ He unmasks the veil that hides the deadly corruption. The shallowness of urban middle class, solidarity, conformity and wide personal acquaintance are the centers that Lewis attacks.

Lewis proves that he loves his country, he engraves his name as the first noble prize winner in America. As a writer he can provide remedies to his hero's problem. The shocking surprise that he finds escape the best solution almost in his all novels. Personally, he applies

this solution first in his life when he, may be out of despair, resorts to escape as a quazi solution from the hell of his land. One of these attempts to escape is stopped by his father at the station. In his youth, he departs his country especially when he finds that the country's mind is too hard to be solved. Thus, he raises the surrender banner. The virus of escape creeps to reach his heroes. He hints that escape sometime is the best choice. The repetition of escape in Lewis' novels and life attests a grave belief that if there is no remedy, there will be escape.

In **Main Street** (1920) Lewis wants to batter the myth and illusion of the small town. He decides to educate his townspeople, through the attempts of Carol to beautify her small town. She applies different strategies and tactics to better her people without any result. Her frustration reaches its climax when her people stultify any plan to educate them. Her campaign is part of her "willing to fight in the open,"⁷ She gains the failure, hostility and isolation of her people which are the expected reactions of the country towards any creative mind. She finds her solace in escape, especially when she concedes that:

With such a small town life in a Kennicott or a Chapperry is content, but there are also hundreds of thousands. Particular women and young men, who are not at all content. The more intelligent people (aren't the fortunate widows!) flee to cities with agility and despite the fictional tradition, resolutely stay there. Seldom returning even for holidays. The most protesting patriots of the towns leave them in old age, if they can afford it, and go to live in California or in 'cities'.⁸

Lewis attacks in this novel "the tragic futility", (p. 264) which refers to the identifying signs of the deadly disease of the small town. Not only Carol relinquishes and finds no loopholes save escape, but there are many in the same novel who share Carol's view. Erik Valborg, a tailor's assistant, is a victim to the town's mockery for his effeminate manner. They call him Elizabeth and practise a heavy pressure on him to find no panacea sole escape. Fern Mulling, a a

teacher, is accused falsely of seducing her student. Under the town's attacks she leaves the town without return. Miles Bjorn stow, a radical thinker, is rejected by his townspeople because of his different class. They shoulder him the

responsibility of the death of his wife and son. He flees from this unthinking blame of his people. And there are other stances which are evidence of Lewis great belief in the escape as an effective solution. Lewis, for all his heroes' suffer, finds escape the only one paved road to rid there problems.

In **Arrowsmith** Lewis injects his view into his hero, Martin. They are unified to be one voice and character. Through him Lewis unfolds the medical corruption. He reveals for the first time the scientific corruption. The white hand of some doctors are stained with the blood of the poor. The materialism creeps and spreads to attack various fields like "a creeping paralysis."⁹ The corruption turns to be like a developed cancer, no remedy stops it save surgery cutting. Thus Martin finds no elixir except escape from the corrupted parts. He wants to save the remain of his broken soul, since he "will not accept quarter truth".¹⁰

Lewis and Martin unmask the materialism that turns even the doctors, whose job is to quieten the pain, anguish and suffers of humanity, into savages. The professors tell their students, the future doctors, that knowledge is nothing in front of money which is so necessary to them to be decent and civilized at the profit of their honesty. Their professors tell their mates that:

Knowledge is the greatest thing in the medical world but it's no good whatever unless you can sell it, and to do this you must first impress you personality on the people who have the dollars whether a patient is a new or an old friend, you must always use salesmanship on him. Explain to him also to his stricken and anxious family, the hard work and though you are giving to his case, and so make him feel that the good you have done him or intend to do him. [p., 83]

Martin finds it impossible to endure the corruption in the white field that is a symbol of mercy. The solution to his dilemma is to escape and ran away with his science only. His escape is a victorious step since he refuses to compromise like other. He leaves the luxury and the soft bed for the hard life only to remain pure. His departure of the human society with his friend, Terry wickett, who also chooses the same path, reflects the cruelty of human society this society wages a bitter campaign against them using various weapons like pressure and temptation. Their society fails in front of their iron will especially when they witness the moral corrosion even their teachers think that:

Well-these darn studies, they aren't trying to learn science; they're simply learning a trade. They just want to get the knowledge that'll enable them to cash in. They don't talk, about saving lives but 'losing cases' – losing dollars! And they wouldn't even mind losing cases as if it was a sensational operation that'd advertise en! [p., 27]

Lewis in his above mentioned novels tries to rebuild the mind of his people, he finds out that the corruption goes so deep in their life. The appalling result is that Lewis finds no panacea for the social diseases sole escape which proves to be an effective anodyne. Escape can't be regarded here as a surrender, but as a defense to save the tatter of the pure soul from the complete loss. Lewis and his heroes fear the deadly infection. The escape in this state is for the favour of their people. The manifest example is Lewis' escape. After his escape, he continues in reforming the world. Especially when the society imposes certain kind of pressure and turns to be his enemy. Even if one reconciles after escape with his society, that doesn't mean that he loses his faith in his case. Even this compromise can be regarded as another form of escape particularly when this return is done under pressure and he still has a great faith in his views.

Notes

¹Arthur Miller, The Death of a Salesman (London: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd. , 1949) p. 101.[All the subsequent quotations are taken from this edition]

²Jerom Beaty and J. Paul Hunter, The Norton Introduction to Literature (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1998), P. 486.

³Arthur Miller, All My Sons (New York: Penguin Books, Ltd.,1947) p. 158.[All the subsequent quotations are taken from this edition]

⁴Reza Deeddari and Mozhgan Mansuri, Linderstanding Drama (Tehran: Rahnama, 2001), P. 725.

⁵Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, Background of American Literary Thought (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, INC.,1950), p. 322.

⁶Sheldon Norman Grebstein, Sinclair Lewis (New York: Teayne Publisher, INC., 1962), p. 29.

⁷James Oppenheim, The Nine. Tenth. A Novel (New York: Harrand and Brothers, 1954), p. 168.

⁸Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), pp. 264-65. (All the subsequent quotations are take from this edition)

⁹Geoffrey Moore, American Literature (London : Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 988.

¹⁰Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1961), p. 267. [All the subsequent quotations are taken from this edition]

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