

# Men Are Also Victims at the Hand of Patriarchy: A Study of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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**How to cite this paper:** Joynal, R. B. (2023). Men Are Also Victims at the Hand of Patriarchy: A Study of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. *Advances in Literary Study*, 11, 296-305.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2023.113020>

**Received:** June 10, 2023

**Accepted:** July 17, 2023

**Published:** July 20, 2023

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## Abstract

The present paper focuses on that men are also subjugated in patriarchal tradition side by side with women. In male chauvinist society, it is a common scene that male is the patriarch of the family. He should be the representative of the whole family and should take all the responsibilities. He is also expected to lead other female family members. He should be established, job-holder and bread winner. Society always wants to see him performing the primary role. If he slips from these stereotypical standards and cannot match up to the man-made set-roles, he is considered as coward. If he is jobless and cannot provide financial support to his family or depends on others, he is considered as an outsider, outcaste and good for nothing. The paper sheds lights on the fact that patriarchy also victimizes male side by side with female that is observed in the two modern American stories *Seize the Day* (1956) by Saul Bellow (1915-2005) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949) by Arthur Miller (1915-2005). In the first story, the protagonist is Tommy Wilhelm who is a twenty-three-year-old travelling salesman. He has an old father, two loving sons and wife. One day he loses his corporate job and becomes the burden of the family. He suffers from identity crisis and tries to commit suicide and seeks an escape by self-destructive approach. Willy Loman, in the second story, is another aging salesman who cannot match up to the capitalist American dream. He is also found suffering from existential crisis and his story ends in death. In these two stories, the two protagonists are alone among crowd and try to create new identities by death. In male-dominated culture, they shifts from typical male-images and they are abused and criticized by both male and female of the same patriarchal society. Moreover society always ignores male suffocation. But this study will find out their trauma and agony in patriarchal terrain.

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## Keywords

Patriarchy, Stereotypical Roles, Marxism, American Dream, Identity Crisis

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### 1. Introduction

Patriarchy is the system or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line. The dominant ideology of patriarchy is that men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. A stereotype is a widely accepted judgment or bias about a person or group. Stereotypes about gender can cause unequal and unfair treatment because of a person's gender. In patriarchal culture, people expect that women will take care of the children, cook, and clean the home, while men take care of finances, work on the car, and do the home repairs. This present paper will investigate that not only women but also men are marginalized at the hands of patriarchy. Feminism is always concerned with female subjugation and suffocation. But the true representation of male counterparts of the society should be analyzed from more neutral and realistic approach. In fact, patriarchy victimizes both male and female. This research wants to report a bitter truth that sometimes males are dominated more than females. They are dominated both by patriarchal and capitalistic society that scenario is found in the two masterpieces of modern era, Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. To quote Mayuresh Ganapatye: "Men are brought up to shoulder responsibilities, and many give up on life when they feel they can't do." (Ganapatye, 2018: p. 1).

In the novella, *Seize the Day*, the protagonist Wilhelm is found as a frustrated hero because he is a jobless person who cannot support his father, wife, and children financially. For this reason, the modern society rejects him. Therefore, he suffers from existential crisis and turns into a failure of modern period. In this story, Tommy Wilhelm is a middle-aged, modern man who is considered to be an outsider in modern capitalistic society. Because it is the materialistic modernity which makes him isolated from the human community for being unsuccessful in his earthly life. Once he has cherished the high flying ambitions of American Dream in his mind. Therefore, he seeks the short cut way to be wealthy in his life. But in real, he is unsuccessful because he takes the wrong choices about his life.

Like the protagonist, Gregor Samsa appeared in Franz Kafka's (1883-1924) *The Metamorphosis* (Franz, 1915), he appears as a failure to the society, to his boss, and to everyone. He has been a helpless man, suffering from existential crisis and he is desperately seeking his identity and meaningful survival. He goes into many debts, seeks help to his father but his father brutal treatment put him into down in the dumps. But instead of giving a helping hand to him, his father mocking him for being unsuccessful. Thus, he realizes that only money is the matter because he has been raised in a society where people adore only money.

Wilhelm comments on money worship: "How they love money, thought Wilhelm. They adore money! Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money." (Bellow, 1956: p. 36). Secondly, his wife shows no love to him. She puts pressure on him for giving her money and she does not grant him divorce thus he cannot marry the woman Olive with whom he was truly in love. That is why, we find him frustrated who is broken both emotionally and psychologically. Throughout the novella, the protagonist Wilhelm is a drowning man who is a victim of a society where only making money is matter. Out of frustration he realizes, the society whose only god is money is not for him. He has nothing to be a part of this society; he is isolated from the society and he only finds connection of his life with a death man in a funeral procession.

The second story, *Death of a Salesman*, is another story of male tragedy and of despair. It also tells the story of another ill-fated man named Willy Loman who is also a middle-aged road salesman. The story addresses his loss of identity and inability to survive in typical society. Like Tommy he has also a family life with his wife and two sons. But Willy realizes that he has created a false image of himself for his family, society, and even for himself. He is rejected from job by his employer. He has experienced that the American Dream is exploitative and hegemonic in nature. It controls and dominates through ideology. At last, he becomes unemployed and lost his male image in traditional society. Finally, the play concludes with Willy's suicide and subsequent funeral.

Willy's despair results from his failure to achieve his American Definition of success. At one point, Willy was a moderately successful salesman and model father to his sons opening new territory in New England. As Willy grows older, making sales is more difficult for him, so he attempts to draw on past success by reliving old memories. He gradually loses the ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, and this behavior alienates him from others, thereby diminishing his ability to survive in the present.

The stereotypical expectations impose set-roles upon males which control their life, dominate them and make them sufferers in patriarchal societies as observed in both stories. Like females, they are also marginalized by both traditional beliefs and patriarchal society. To understand their real situation it is essential to examine their life from more humanistic and neutral perspectives. Finally, this research is going to explore that males are also controlled by patriarchal culture.

## 2. Discussion

In the patriarchal societies, it is common to observe that males are the superior, superlative and earning members of the family and the females should obey them and should be dependent upon them. If a husband has an economic dependence upon his wife or holds subordinate status in comparison to his wife, he is ridiculed, criticized bitterly and considered as an incomplete person or co-

ward. He is often mocked or laughed at as half lady or chocolate boy. In this way, the patriarchal society imposes sense of inferior complexity upon his shoulder. The role of men in patriarchy should carry the image of the family lineage. He should be the model of his own family. He should be the breadwinner, top-position holder, and the man of good fortune. He should have the capacity to lead or represent. He should have a good career and position in both family and society. In a word, man should be man always. Society forcefully expects masculinity and heroism from them. Such masculine image is also present in Jane Austen's (1775-1817) wonderful creation Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813). The typical societies around the world, fix such roles for the males. But if a person does not confirm to such set-roles designed by the codes of societal law, he is treated as vagabond or outcaste. He is alienated among crowd and the sufferer of existential and identical problems.

The term "identity crisis" refers to a state of uncertainty in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure typically due to a change in their expected aims, cherished dreams or roles in society. Males are the silent sufferers and losers of identity due to the social expectations in patriarchal cultures. Patriarchy also draws margins for men. Dominant prejudices in paternal society are creating fractures in their quest of self-identity. In order to have a look into the identity crisis of male it is imperative to note the typical society's fixed set of features for manhood that force them to determine their individuality and identity in a complex juncture of patriarchy and capitalist society. As Canadian socialist Susan Rosenthal observes: "Gender roles dictate that men should never be needy. The accumulation of unmet needs causes some men to explode in frustration or in drunken rages that mask their depression and despair." (Rosenthal, 2015: p. 1).

The male counterpart who can conform to social expectations for examples by being employed, dutiful son, wealthy husband, powerful father are socially accepted and considered as "successful man" and "good man". Contradictorily, men are looked down when they fail to represent the family. They are regarded as strangers and black sheep who are fed unnecessarily. This patriarchal ideology has been promoted by a fixed set of limitations or bondages for them. Having money, power and job mean status and dignity for men. The men who do not match up to such requirements are usually considered as social outcastes or useless guys.

In capitalist society, employees are considered as machines. Capitalism is often thought of as an economic system in which private actors own and control property in accord with their interests, and demand and supply freely set prices in markets in a way that can serve the best interests of society. The essential feature of capitalism is the motive to make a profit. When a man becomes unproductive or unable to work the capitalist society throws him out like fused electronic bulb or device. They are never human beings. They are objectified and commodified. They are rejected by both family and society. The family is a violent institution that serves a violent capitalist society. It is a social system that

seeps into every fiber of our beings; there is no part of our lives or our relationships that it does not touch. To quote Susan Rosenthal it can be said: “We do get some personal choices under capitalism. We can choose to despair or we can choose to hope. We can choose to accept the world as it is or we can choose to struggle against it. We can blame ourselves and each other for our misery or we can pull together to meet everyone’s needs. We can hide in our homes or we can fight with our class.” (Rosenthal: 09).

The American Dream is the ideology that believes that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success in a society in which upward mobility is possible for everyone. The American Dream is believed to be achieved through sacrifice, risk-taking, and hard work, rather than chance. But in disguise it is hegemonic and exploitative. It creates influence upon American capitalism. One of the cornerstones of the American Dream is capitalism that is the very idea that America holds sacred has become a lie and it turns into a nightmare. “The American Dream was established in the collective consciousness of America through the capitalistic pursuit of happiness, which pursuit constitutionally guaranteed.” (Dermo, 2014: p. 13). He continues: “The American dream inspires the worker to social mobility, but it is a mobility that he is not supposed to achieve. The function of the American dream is to instill a sense of hope and purpose in the American working class, a hope for social mobility. The members’ continued participation and belief in the dream serves to perpetuate the dream, thereby perpetuating stratification of a class system.” (Dermo: 09).

*Seize the Day* and *Death of the Salesman* are the potential records of identity crisis and existential problem of Tommy Wilhelm and Willy Loman respectively. The two texts are the record of human exploitation and male tragedy in the American consumerism and patriarchal set-up. In a materialistic society where competition for existence goes on without any bindings, to exist is to fit and the fit only survive. Others also survive with humility and dishonor. So, tension prevails every time. To live a standard life, one has to move fast or he will fall back and never stand. In the race of competition, everyone wants to go ahead and doing so, he will not consider what is right and wrong. Society is uncomfortable for the two heroes, indifferent to them, at odds with their behavior and with their ideals and antipathetic to their imaginations.

A capitalistic system always corrupts individuality, friendships and family values. The society in which Tommy belongs to is consumed by economic success. American dream and stereotypical male image in orthodox society detach Tommy from others. As Tommy fails to respond to the social expectations, he is deprived of other people’s love or relation and is bound to live by himself. Modern life is a life of selfishness. In this life, nobody cares for nobody. Especially in a capitalistic society, people are more self-centred and do not take into account how others live. It is a society based on competition, deprivation, and exploitation. Again, in an orthodox society, when a man cannot make economic success is criticized. A man who depends on others financially and cannot support his

family is looked down upon. His masculinity is also questionable. Because in patriarchal society a man should be man always. They are patriarch, father, husband and bossy figure of the family. So their status is above women. He is not considered as complete human being if he cannot uphold his family image in terms of money. A jobless man becomes burden, outsider and stranger always. He becomes alone among crowd.

The only heavenly relationship on earth is the child-parent relationship. But in reality there is no existence of such relation. It is also corrupted in terms of money and by myth of success. The successful children are always apple of the eye to their parents subconsciously or consciously. But the unemployed sons are always an eye-shore to their parents and black sheep of the family. In the novel, *Seize the Day*, the protagonist is found living alone without cooperation from others. He has father, wife, sons and friends. Yet he is isolated and suffers alone the spurns of life. In this story, Tommy is a burden for his father. Neither he has a good career nor does he have properties. In his relationship with his father Tommy is figuratively an orphan. In this case, his rich, successful father, Adler is physically present but emotionally distant. There is a psychological gap between father and son. His father, Dr. Adler, lives happily with gorgeousness as he has enough money. But their father-son relationship lacks affection, love, sympathy and humanity. Dr. Adler refuses to become involved in his son's desperate loneliness. Tommy needs money which his father could easily supply; but Dr. Adler is greatly pained, even shies away, when the subject is mentioned. More than money, Tommy needs emotional comfort and communication with an understanding heart; again and again, he appeals to his father for compassion. But the appeal proves failure, for his father's response is ever cold, indifferent, yet bitter and angry, analytical denunciation of Tommy's past failures and present agony: "He behaved toward his son as he had formerly done toward his patients, and it was a great grief to Wilhelm; it was almost too much to bear. Couldn't he see—couldn't he feel? Had he lost his family sense?" (Bellow: 11). Tommy is found arguing with his father most of the time. Their relation is quarrelsome and his father is emotionally restraint. In real, Dr. Adler is ashamed of his son. To quote Bellow: "What a selfish old man he was! He saw his son's hardships; he could so easily help him. How little it mean to him, and how much to Wilhelm! Where was the old man's heart?" (Bellow: 26).

In traditional societies, parents' expectations are much more on sons than on daughters. It is a common expectation in patriarchal society that the sons will support their parents in their old age. After marriage, the daughters usually cannot take such responsibility as they go to their in-law's house. In this story, the protagonist fails to fulfill both social and familial expectations. His family could have become the source of comfort and consoling one in his odd times. But in reality, it is the source of mental torture and torment.

Marriage is the financial security for girls in typical societies. Males are the protection givers in such patriarchal hierarchies. Marriage is also a corporate institution between the bride and bridegroom in traditional societies. When a

married man cannot support his wife he is abandoned and suffers a lot. It is a culture in patriarchal setting that both marital bond and separation between husband and wife are based on some conditions. It is one of the most ancient traditions of the human family relations that at the time of marriage the man pays a dowry to the woman. In addition to that, he undertakes to bear the expenses of his wife and children during the entire period of his life. The right of maintenance extends not only to the wife and dependent children, but also to indigent parents and divorced wives. After marriage, as a registered wife, she becomes the owner of her husband's half property. At the time of divorce, still her husband has to pay the cost of her maintenance. In this case, men are the sufferers and women are the privileged ones.

The protagonist, Tommy has his wife whom he married out of sincere love. Margaret, his wife loved him in his heyday and they were blessed with two sons. Both Wilhelm and Margaret could make a happy family, had his wife been sincere human being but she is a bird of happiness. She plans how to make money by delaying the proposed divorce. The author says: "Wilhelm was still paying heavily for his mistakes. His wife Margaret would not give him a divorce, and he had to support her and the two children. She would regularly agree to divorce him, and then think things over again and set new and more difficult conditions." (Bellow: 29). She capitalizes every opportunity to oppress Tommy when he lost his job. In his miserable state, she appears as a symbol of oppression. Margaret is extremely hostile to Tommy Wilhelm and tries her best to victimize him and ruin him both financially and emotionally for her self-interest. To notice Tommy begs to her uttering: "Margaret, go easy on me. You ought to. I'm at the end of my rope and feel that I'm suffocating. You don't want to be responsible for a person's destruction." (Bellow: 113). His two sons are detached from him as the result of his wife's conspiracy. It is also common scenery in patriarchal tradition that when there is a conflict between father and mother, the kids usually take the sides of mother. So he is totally out of family bondage. His fault is that he cannot earn and cannot make relationship with economics. In this way, Tommy is isolated from everyone whom he wants to love and with whom he wants to live. He suffers from identity crisis and existential problems in every sphere of his life. As he cannot conform to the stereotypical set-roles like other people belonging to the same society he becomes outcaste gradually.

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is another record of males' tragedy in patriarchal society. Willy Loman, the protagonist of the story has been caught in the net of stereotypical set-roles and American consumerism. He represents the modern individuals who try to survive and quest for identity in a capitalistic commercialized world. For this reason, this play can be classified as bourgeois tragedy.

The American Dream is a national ethos of the US in which democratic ideals are perceived as a promise of prosperity for people. They can achieve a better, richer, and a happier life which fully explains the American Dream ideal. But, in real, American Dream is an illusion and nightmare for Willy. The contemporary

capitalistic America absorbs extreme forces of materialism. The Americans are guided by the so-called myth of material success. Materialism dominates all corners of American life. Pursuit of money is the only motto for each American. In modern capitalistic society money has become a substitute for religion and the only ritual existing in such society is money worship.

The protagonist, Willy Loman, is an old sales executive, caring father, and loving husband. Willy believes that all you need to live the American Dream is wealth which comes from being well-liked by others. The following sentence expresses his fascination for American Dream while talking to his sons: "You see what I been talking about? The greatest things can happen!" (Millar, 1949: p. 37). American Dream is the new tool of capitalism. Capitalism for its own interest pursues people to follow a luxurious life to be a member of upper class people. Besides, capitalism controls world market and mass people's identity. It makes people to compete such a way that is unhealthy. In addition, the competition makes people into two groups: central and marginalized; suppressed and suppressors. So, capitalism is a trap to destroy someone's identity and existence.

Arthur Miller creates a character named Willy Loman, the protagonist of *Death of a Salesman*, in which, Loman feels his crisis of identity in his last age. Willy Loman, here, fails to be a typical American. He lacks the qualities of Americanism. He slips from the attachment or allegiance to the traditions, cultural identity and national ideals of the United States. He starts his career as a travelling salesman and has been working for Wagner Company more than thirty six years and has contributed to the company's economic progress. He dreams he must be appointed in the corporate office in New York as he is unable to move on the road with his car selling the goods. Strangely, when he approaches to Howard, the Chief of the company, he is directly fired and denied to get the acknowledgement of his labour. Rather his corporate boss says that he doesn't want him to represent the company any more. They have a road business. Only few road salesmen are there. So, they need road salesman not corporate officer for this company. He is trapped by Capitalism and its new version, American dream. So, at the age of sixty he realizes that he has no freedom of will, choice, no way of seeking rights in struggling to establish his individualism. The torture of capitalism and his identity crisis is clear in the following conversation with his wife:

Willy: They don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England.

Linda: But you're sixty years old. They can't expect you to keep travelling every week. (Arthur: 10)

Willy's tragedy is the part of social system. Willy has his roots in American society, a society that sets store by initiative, industry and the drive to run the show of life by overcoming obstacles through one's own ingenuity and caliber. It is highly materialistic, commercialized, callous society. For a man like Willy, who is at sixty when the play takes place, this is a brave new world in which he feels alienated and lost. Willy is everyman who has struggled with his identity,



looking for external cues to define his existence, and perceiving material success as the confirmation of the legitimacy of the American Dream. His confrontation with his employer Howard brings to surface the simmering discontent the old man has been nourishing all along these years in the cockles of his heart. To quote Willy: "I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see—I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit." (Arthur: 64). It is the cruel nature of capitalistic system, when a person becomes unproductive it throws him out like the useless-damaged machines.

Willy now fails to take his responsibilities and is about to be dependent on the man-made cruel circumstances. Moreover, his individuality cannot control social values and structures. Rather, he is structured by so-called social design. Now he slips from the patriarchal set-roles. His character loses the qualities of social consistency. Being a failure to fulfill his dream, he expects his sons will do great things. In this play, parents' deluded definition of the American Dream can affect their relationship with their children and can affect their children's choices in adulthood. In this story, the relationship between Willy and Biff is not pleasant. Most of the time, they are found to blame each other. A successful father is always a model for his children. But an unsuccessful father, like Willy, cannot influence or motivate his sons any more. To a certain extent, Biff blames his father for him not succeeding in the cult of personality, and not being able to get an ideal. It also creates a strain in father-son relationship. Everywhere from family to society, he suffers from existential problems. In fact, the way in which Loman's dreams are demolished and the manner in which his company has treated him are deemed to be the major motives behind his decision to end his life instead of living with a sense of dejection and despair. In the end, he tries to find a solution. Willy kills himself realizing that he had achieved nothing. He wants to create a new identity through death.

### 3. Research Outcome

Feminist theory cannot detect the identical problems of males in the typical societies. Feminist study is concerned with female subjugation. But the reason of choosing this study is to find out male subjugation in patriarchal culture. Men should be justified from both in patriarchal and capitalistic societies. Many article writers shed light only on American capitalism, materialism, human relationships like son-father and husband-wife relationships in *Seize the Day and Death of a Salesman*. Some researchers focused on complexities of modern or urban life. A few of them shed light on frustration and self-destruction of the protagonist. But this study will focus on the reasons of their identity crisis, male subjugation in patriarchal society. It will also find out that males are also dominated at the hands of patriarchal culture. The research will make a note on that male subjugation present in all patriarchal societies. It will be significant in the regard that this study aims at differentiating male and female subjugation at the

hands of patriarchy. This research will shed lights on how expectations from different levels like familial, social and national impose burdens on the shoulder of male counterparts. This paper wants to invent “male experience” from male’s eye and male suffocation by exploring the complexities of their life. Finally, it will say that the males are also dominated in patriarchal tradition and sometimes more than females.

#### 4. Conclusion

Both Saul Bellow and Arthur Miller are rationalists and humanist thinkers who seem to find out the crisis that the men from pater families have to undergo. The two protagonists desire to be successful in terms of money, wealth, name and fame in orthodox patriarchal culture. They fight for identity, existence but fail to survive in the traditional patriarchal set-up. As they slip from the superlative position from both family and society and become unable to earn handsome salary and fail to fulfill national dream, they are considered as parasites in the society. Out of frustration they want to escape. In most cases, they choose to die as seen in the characters of Tommy Wilhelm and Willy Loman.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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