
Comparison Of Death Of A Salesman Vs. Crime And Punishment

According to Sigmund Freud, 'to represent the sense of guilt as the most important problem in the development of civilization and to show that the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt' (Carveth). Guilt is a feeling that one experiences when he or she regrets or feels bad about a wrongdoing. Those who have studied Freud's view of guilt have reported that "like other emotions, there is no one explanation for guilt. The traditional Freudian view is that guilt resides under the surface veneer of our behaviour. The psychodynamic theory of Freud proposes that we build defence mechanisms to protect us from the guilt we would experience if we knew just how awful our awful desires really were" (Whitbourne). Those experiencing this feeling express it through depression, anger or even insanity. In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, the protagonist, Willy Loman, is blatantly suffering from madness derived from guilt. Much like Willy, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* suffers from his guilt and shows in the form of physical illness as well as insanity. It is the guilt of Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* actions that results in these emotions and which ultimately cause them to do things they may not have done with a clear conscience.

Those experiencing guilt express it through depression, anger or even insanity. In the case of Willy Loman, his guilt is expressed through madness. Willy had an affair with a woman, and even 16 years later, the remorse haunts him. Willy hallucinates and hears the woman's laugh while out at a restaurant with his sons. Willy tries to get the woman's laugh out of his head and tells her to stop, but the laughing continues. Her laugh does not cease because Willy's feeling of liability is still present. On Page 113, the woman's laugh started to distract Willy from reality, and he starts to talk as if the woman is really there asking him who is at the door. Willy experiences many flashbacks due to his insanity. One of these flashbacks was when Biff and Happy were in High School, Willy was a successful salesman, and the family was happy. (Harvey) These flashbacks show Willy when he was sane. However, the rest of the flashbacks are to traumatic events in Willy's life such as Biff discovering the affair. The reliving of this guilt sends Willy into a tizzy and he lashes out on Biff. If Willy did not cheat on his wife, he would not be experiencing this regret. However, due to his mistakes, and his regret for those mistakes, Willy thinks and acts differently than he normally does. Willy yelling at Biff in the restaurant caused a domino effect of events. For instance, after Willy leaves to go to the bathroom, Happy gets embarrassed and lies to some girls that he trying to impress. He lies about Willy not being his father. Being the lesser of the two sons, Happy craves the attention of others because he does not receive any from his father. and ironically is unhappy. The guilt one feels may directly affect that person, but his or her action affect others.

Willy's remorse for his actions caused a deterioration in his relationship with his family. Even though his wife, Linda, has no idea about the affair, Willy still feels culpable. Through dramatic irony, he says to Linda "I'll make it up to you, Linda. I'll..." (39). Willy tried to adjourn for his wrongdoing, but his madness takes over before he had the chance to fix it. Willy feels awful about what he did to his wife, but he shows his remorse in a few different ways that are not normal ways of showing remorse. This is due to Willy's madness from his guilt. For instance, at

the beginning of Act I, Linda is mending her stockings and Willy yells at her telling her that she is not permitted to do this in his house and that she must throw them out. Critics believe that “because reparations for immoral acts focus on cleansing the individual who committed the acts, immoral behaviour should prompt similar levels of reparations regardless of the recipient of the reparations. In contrast, because reparations for guilt focus on repairing the damaged relationship, guilt should prompt reparative behaviour only toward a person whom the guilty person has wronged (Cryder).” Due to the setting of the play, late 1940’s, Linda obeys what her husband says. The reason why Willy acts this way is that the stockings are symbolic of his guilt and reminds him of the affair. Willy acts out of anger because his guilt made him act differently than he normally would. Not only does Willy’s shame affect his relationship with his wife but with his son, Biff. “The Woman is shown to be the cause of alienation of Willy and his son Biff. . . In a way women in this play are all like Eve who tempted Adam to commit sin and caused his downfall” (Emami). When Biff caught Willy cheating, it drove a wedge in their relationship. Biff went from admiring his father to barely tolerating him and getting into arguments with him. Due to his madness, Willy switches between being angry with Biff to praising Biff. These contradictions are a result of Willy’s guilt-caused madness. At one moment Willy states “Biff is a lazy bum!” but then moments later he Willy brags “And such a hard worker. There’s one thing about Biff—he’s not lazy” (Cardullo). Willy contradicts himself like this all the time, such as the time after his accident in Yonkers when Willy contradicts himself about the windshield of the car.

In both works, the protagonists are tragic heroes. In *Crime and Punishment*, “Raskolnikov’s tragic flaw is his error of judgment, his conviction that there is a quick, sure-fire way to wealth; easy solutions to his personal problems; and an easy way to bring about equality in society” (Umagandhi). A few examples of Raskolnikov’s lack of judgment occur in the initial few chapters of the novel. Raskolnikov meets a drunkard at a bar by the name of Marmeladov who tells him about the misfortunes of his life. Raskolnikov walks home with Marmeladov and gives him money for him and his family. Additionally, in the following chapter, Raskolnikov, while walking home, witnesses a young, drunk girl being harassed by an older man. Raskolnikov gets a policeman involved and gave the policeman some money for a cab to take the young girl home. As he leaves, Raskolnikov realizes that as soon as he leaves, the policeman will let the man continue to harass the girl, and the policeman will pocket the money. This misjudgment demonstrates the tragic hero’s tragic flaw, but the characterization of the hero. Raskolnikov’s character is best described by critic Shikha Sharma who says that “his psychological condition is depicted on the onset of the novel, he is presented to the readers as sickly, hungry and short of money who is socially withdrawn.” Raskolnikov is a dropout student, with no money, in lots of debt, especially to his landlady, and he has isolation issues. This characterization enlightens one of Raskolnikov’s other flaws; his desire to quick-wealth. This flaw was one of the motives for Raskolnikov’s crime, which in theory is the cause of his guilt and the reason why he turned himself in.

Like Raskolnikov, Willy’s tragic flaw is his false idea of success and “The American Dream.” Willy defines success in a materialistic manner. In other words, the more money and things one has, the more successful he or she is. Willy also defines success as how well-liked one is. An example of Willy’s misinterpreted definition of success was the death of one of his role models, Dave Singleman, “...when he dies-- and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of New York, New Haven and Hartford going into Boston-- when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral” (81). Willy views Dave as a success because he was well liked by others, and lots of people showed up at his funeral.

Willy became infatuated with success, so much in fact that it drove him to commit suicide. Willy would borrow money from his neighbour Charley to pay off his life insurance. “[Willy] dies believing in money. In fact, he kills himself for money. Because he confuses materialistic success with a worthiness for love, he commits suicide to give his son Biff the insurance benefit as a stake for more business” (Cardullo). Willy believed that he would have a funeral like Dave’s and that the money from his policy would help Biff out.

The Crime in Crime and Punishment is obvious. However, the Punishment part of the title goes beyond time in prison. Raskolnikov’s punishment is his self-inflicted illness. This physical illness is derived from his guilt, which is why when the murder was mentioned at the police station, he fainted. Based on Freud’s psychodynamic theory, guilt is not a recognizable feeling to Raskolnikov. He does experience guilt which affects his ability to make decisions and to act upon the situation. However, to Raskolnikov, he experiences illness (Carveth). In an online article, “Dostoevsky and Freud: Exploring the Relationship Between Psyche and Civilization,” the author mentions that “the remorse that he experiences after carrying out the murder further amplifies his irritable condition, thus plunging him into a period of illness and delirium. A reader would conclude, therefore, that Raskolnikov’s mental state is directly linked to the guilt about the crime” (Washington.edu). Raskolnikov becomes ill which is a contributing factor to his confession. In fact, he basically admits to the Zamyotov that he committed the crime. This need for retaliation for his crime is another side effect of guilt. He feels the need to be punished for his wrongdoing, but at that point of time in the book, his conscience had not been fully taken over by remorse. On the contrary, at the end of the novel, Raskolnikov’s guilt had fully consumed him and caused him to turn himself in. This action of confession is Raskolnikov’s way of putting himself out of misery. On the contrary, one critic suggests that “...crime will be understood by the awareness by the subject himself of some moral norm which he has violated...” (Leone). This critic’s view suggests that Raskolnikov was already experiencing guilt before the crime and that he had to commit the crime to justify this feeling of liability. This idea is plausible because according to the Freudian view, guilt is the underlying reason for one’s action. This guilt caused Raskolnikov to commit a violent act that he would not dare to commit had he not suffered from it.

The madness in the men also derives from them forcing themselves to be someone he is not. It is undeniable that Willy Loman is good with his hands. However, due to Willy’s obsession with money and success, he is blind to the fact that his real talent lies within carpentry. Willy does home improvements around his house such as putting up a ceiling, gardening and fixing the porch. Throughout the play, Willy wants to get seeds and plant them in the garden. The seeds are symbolic of Willy’s potential beyond being a salesman. When Willy was at the restaurant after losing his job, he asked the waiter Stanley where he could get carrot seeds. Stanley replied with “well, there’s hardware stores on Sixth Avenue, but it may be too late now” (122). This is significant of Willy wasting his life on a profession that he is not passionate about. At this point, he cannot get back the time that he spent being a salesman and he is too manic to change his life.

Raskolnikov, on the other hand, is someone who is good with his brain. He is an extremely bright man and was an astute student. However, he dropped out of University and lives away from his family in St. Petersburg. Raskolnikov’s true colours show through his cowardness towards others, especially his landlady, Raskolnikov shows fear. Some of this fear is actually paranoia from the crime he committed. However, even before the crime, Raskolnikov was a coward. In the first part of the novel, before the crime, Raskolnikov tried to avoid his landlady

because he knows that he owes her months worth of rent. This cowardness is who Raskolnikov truly is. When there are flashbacks to his time as a student, that is who Raskolnikov truly is. The man who feigned courage in Iovana Petrovich's apartment and killed her and her sister, that is not Rodion Raskolnikov. By not staying true to himself, Raskolnikov dug himself a grave and gave himself an eternal punishment: guilt. Raskolnikov's temporary punishment is paranoia. After committing the crime he fears being caught and becomes paranoid and doubtful. For instance, after Raskolnikov wakes up from being unconscious for four days, he starts to panic over his blood-stained clothes. He thinks to himself, "What, is it beginning already, is it my penalty approaching?... Then a strange thought occurred to him. Maybe all of his clothes were bloody, maybe there were stains all over, and he could not see them, did not notice them, because his mental powers were failing, splitting up, his mind clouding..." (97). Raskolnikov worries about the blood on his clothes because he knows that he has committed a crime, this feeling of culpability is also what causes him to think that he has gone insane. Raskolnikov recognizes that he is suffering from guilt, and knows that this feeling is his punishment. In addition to Raskolnikov's illness and paranoia, he also expresses his guilt through anger and agitation. On multiple times during his mother's and sister's visit, Raskolnikov becomes randomly annoyed with his family's presence. This agitation is a result of his anxiety from the crime he committed, and his regret causes him to become angry and take it out on those he loves. This would not occur if the feeling of guilt was not present.

The feeling of remorse can cause one to act differently than he or she would if innocent. Both protagonists and tragic heroes suffered from the regret of their actions. They have lashed out on those they love and they have performed acts that are abnormal had they been of a clear conscience. Willy Loman had an affair with a woman in Boston, and discovery of that affair by his son, Biff ruined Willy. From that point on, Willy has been consumed by his madness. Raskolnikov, on the other hand, suffered from the liability of his crime through paranoia and illness. According to Sigmund Freud's psychodynamic theory, guilt is the underlying motivation for one's actions (Carveth). This is the reason why Willy's relationship with his son is ruined and why he committed suicide at the end of the novel, and why Raskolnikov was paranoid and why he turned himself in. These men suffered from their guilt and sought the best way to escape it. In Willy's case, it was death, but for Raskolnikov, it was doing the right thing and turning himself in. The protagonists of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* support Sigmund Freud's Psychodynamic Theory. Guilt is the reason behind one's actions, and in an effort to avoid this feeling, the mind reacts in various ways such as sadness, anger or insanity. As Enlightenment thinker, Voltaire once said, "Every man is guilty of all the good he did not do" (Sarkis).

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