



Research Paper

## The Concept of “BECOMING” in “Seize the Day” and “Death of a Salesman”: the Urge of Searching Own Entity.

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper seeks to highlight the concept of “Becoming” in the novella “Seize the Day (1956)” and “Death of a Salesman (1949)” where both protagonists are experiencing their respective identity crises. There is the same drama of the heart under the burdens of baffled love, aspiration, and guilt, paying for confusion and mistakes (Selvam et al., 2018). This paper will help to explore the new aspects of these novellas and play through the theory of Heraclitus, Parmenides, Deleuze, and Guttari. Heraclitus’s and Parmenides’s theory of “BECOMING” through the protagonists Tommy Wilhelm and Willy Loman and his son Biff Loman from the novella and the play “Seize the Day” and “Death of a Salesman”. There are similarities between Heraclitus’s theory of Heraclitus’s “Becoming” and the theory of Deleuze and Guttari’s theory of “Becoming.” This paper will interpret how materialism and capitalism in post-war American society evaporated the value and morality of humans after the Second World War. People in America were getting vastly preoccupied with self-interest and losing the family values and social integrity (Kolita) communication gap in the father–son relationship and selfishness in the relationship. This relationship is based on the reciprocity condition. That ended up making the person lose his own entity, being lost and restless, along with all the negative transformations which includes the idea of rebirth.

**KEY WORDS:** *Becoming, Existential Crisis, Escapism, Struggling Relationship/s, Identity.*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Bellow’s *Seize the day* deals with the inner turmoil of Wilhelm, a man in his early forties, a jobless, struggling, and a dreamer who wanted to be a Hollywood actor, escaping from his burdens and responsibilities, a man who failed in every aspect of life. The character Wilhelm matches the surface characteristics of Willy Loman but his ambition isn’t only bounded with himself but he also imposed his dream upon his son Biff as well. Here Willy is trying to become a successful salesman and also wants his son to be a salesman from the very beginning of his career; on the contrary, his son wanted to be a sportsman. Here, the contrast arrives at the father figure is pushing the driving force towards his son Biff and his choices, even though the Biff was intended to be a sportsman, but luck drove him somewhere else. In a sense, they are all flawed characters who made mistakes; they are all also the victims of their own choices in one way or another, and they are forced to build some characteristics among themselves. After all these findings, this paper will give ideas about post-war societal norms, issues, and how all these affected communication, relationships, and mentality as well. The development of mind growth and the advancement of science were almost in a conflicting stage.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many findings regarding the character analyses of Willy Loman and Tommy Wilhelm. This paper sheds light on a literary analysis that explores the life and race of two protagonists whose lives are unstable. How they are desperately in search of their respective identity in the play and novella “Death of a Salesman” and “Seize the Day.” Heraclitus-Parmenides, along with the theory of Deleuze and Guttari, aims to critically examine the key arguments, strengths, and weaknesses of the article, focusing on its contribution to the broader understanding of how these theories reflect on these plays and dramas. How do they face a materialistic capitalist society and try hard to go on with it? The step towards becoming one’s own self. It shows the constant irresolution in their relationship with their wife, father, mother, and burdened destination towards

becoming a successful person. Heraclitus and Parmenides had contrasting views on the concept of “Becoming” in ancient Greek philosophy.

Heraclitus believed in the doctrine of constant change and flux. He stated that “everything flows” and argued that the fundamental nature of reality is in a state of continuous change. He emphasized that nothing remains the same and that the world is in a constant process of becoming something different. It will not be the same as it was at the initial moment and at the end, such as at variable moments. This will be seen in Wilhelm’s character. He had different driving forces of change along with the pressure of father, career, wife, extramarital affairs, and unknown future directions.

Parmenides gave the opposite opinion, holding the opposite view. He argued that change and illusions were not true. According to Parmenides, only being or existence is real and change is merely a result of sensory deception. He commented that true reality is abstract, and that the idea of things coming into being or ceasing to exist is a misconception. This theory will quite appoint the character of Willy Loman, who was not changing his dedication or direction towards being a successful salesman from the beginning of his life until the end, and he imposed this dream on his son Biff as well. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari built the concept of becoming in the context of philosophy and social theory in their collaborative work “A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.”

They introduced the idea of “becoming” as a dynamic process that goes beyond fixed identities and boundaries. Deleuze and Guattari argue that becoming involves a continuous flow of change, transformation, and multiplicity. This relates to the thought of Heraclitus as well, where he said that nothing remains the same; it will change along with its time, situation, and environment (Heraclitus). They proposed that individuals can undergo various modes of becoming, breaking away from rigid categorizations and fixed situations or structures. This includes changes to Tommy Wilhelm. According to their theory, becoming is not limited to human experiences, but is a fundamental aspect of the universe. They explored the idea of “becoming-animal,” “becoming-machine,” and several other “Becomings” to highlight the fluid nature of identity and existence. The becoming concept of Deleuze and Guattari challenges traditional notions of identity and offers a more fluid and broad perspective on how individuals and entities relate to the world and each other. Their work has had a significant influence on postmodern philosophy and critical theory.

### III. CONCEPT OF BECOMING

Becoming can be defined as the search for self-identity and establishment of a lost entity. This concept encompasses the urge of a human being to search for the self. The real soul is the freedom of living. Saul Bellow, in his novella “Seize the Day” explores several thoughts, it includes the concept of “Becoming” in the context of the main character, Tommy Wilhelm. In the novella, Tommy Wilhelm is a man who is going through a personal crisis, grappling with his past decisions and present circumstances. Unable to face the challenges of life and falling down to their own mistakes stepping in the dark in search of light.

**Self-transformation:** Throughout the novella, Tommy is in a state of flux, trying to figure out who he is and what he wants to become. His journey involves self-discovery and personal transformation, as he confronts his failures and regrets. He was jobless, struggling with his own, and was unable to seek help from father because of his father’s refusal behavior characteristics. who denied helping his own son as he chased after his own dream instead of following Tommy’s father’s instructions for taking the life boat. Here, represents the contrast between Tommy Wilhelm and Biff Loman. Because Biff wanted to be a sportsman, but under his father’s influence, he ended up becoming a salesman, just as his father struggled, who is unable to settle down. However, Tommy decides to chase his desires. If they were noticed, both needed their fathers’ support and affection, which was common.

**Self-Realization:** Tommy’s quest for financial success and societal acceptance pushed him to feel unfulfilled and empty. He yearned for something more meaningful, a deeper understanding of himself, and a sense of purpose in life. Purpose in the sense that he wanted his life in a better way. He was afraid of losing the loved ones his wife, children, and pet. Here, his wife and her actions showing the power or supremacy of money and success as she would have stayed with the condition, which is the presence of Tommy’s asset either job or money as Tommy was jobless and could not bear the cost of their child and other expenses. She wanted Tommy to provide money for her Ph.D.. After all, Tommy was searching for financial success along with the position where he would be appreciated by society, a meaningful life that will give some outcomes. He is trying to change; he is not stuck in the same place, which gives the changeable thought of Heraclitus, which holds the theory of Heraclitus, Deleuze, and Guattari.

On the contrary, Willy Loman is chasing after the same ambition, thrusting him downward, and pushing towards torment. Willy Loman is failed to realize the actual mistake that taking him towards tragic destruction in future. Even after drastic failure, Willy Loman pushed his son Biff in this position and continued to treat him as his little boy who would follow his footsteps and become a successful businessman. Willy Loman’s conceit did not let him work as subordinate of his neighbour Charley which could help his position financially. Even though

Tommy Wilhelm had some self-realization of his mistakes, who was trying to eradicate his suffering and have a meaningful and peaceful life. However, Willy Loman was not the same as Tommy; he was after one ambition from the very beginning until the end of his life, even though he was struggling with salesmanship, which gives appreciation to Parmenides.

*Parmenides held that the multiplicity of existing things, their changing forms and motion, are but an appearance of a single eternal reality ("Being"), thus giving rise to the Parmenidean principle that "all is one." From this concept of Being, he went on to say that all claims of change or non-Being are illogical.*

which is applicable to Willy Loman. For Willy Loman, hard work is not going to help to become successful, and you should run after your dream. He perfectly fits with Parmenides' theory. Willy dragged his son, putting off his dream of becoming a sportsman. This gives rise to a huge difference between the two characters Willy Loman and Tommy Wilhelm.

**Choices and Regrets:** The choices we make in life shape our becoming. Tommy reflects on his past decisions and how they have led him to his current state of disillusionment and failure. There are two aspects of life: working hard on passion or going after something that is going to make oneself successful. Two of the characters, Willy Loman and Tommy Wilhelm, and their choices made their present.

In the choice fact for two characters, some aspects are quite contrastive. Willy Loman's wife Linda always supported him but she never inspired him to change the profession and move on to something else as a result Willy was totally stuck with the ambition of same professional success and growth. And it is contrastive so Tommy Wilhelm's father was asking him not to rush after acting profession rather choosing something fruitful for future and this is where Tommy Wilhelm didn't follow his father's opinion rather he wanted to fulfil his ambition to become a successful actor and that gave birth to tragic relationship between father and son even though Tommy was suffering a lot yet his father didn't help. Both Tommy and Willy are in a position where there are no other answers, except for deploring. Here, the theory of Heraclitus is quite applicable, as their perspective on emotions is changing; they are actually regretting over their emotions rather than being proud.

According to Heraclitus,

"On those stepping into rivers staying the same other and other waters flow."

It compares existence to the flow of a river, meaning everything is always changing and that fact is vital to the universe. Heraclitus' concept of becoming which emphasizes on the fact of constant change of the universe, which can be applied to certain aspects of Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* and Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*, particularly in the context of Willy Loman, Tommy Wilhelm and the broader themes.

Heraclitus believed that everything is in a state of continual change it's not constant all the time as Parmenides said, and this idea resonates with the evolving circumstances in Willy Loman's life. Willy's situation is marked by instability as he grapples with a financial crisis, changing family dynamics, and his mental state.

**River Metaphor:** Heraclitus famously used the metaphor of a river to illustrate the constant flow and change of reality. Willy and Tommy's lives can be seen as a turbulent river, with their respective hopes, dreams, and circumstances constantly shifting, making it challenging for them to find stability and contentment in their lives. As they actually responsible for being in this vast and formless present. They maybe tried to follow Heraclitus' river theory to the point as river water flows in formless way and their destination is towards the vast and endless ocean so now at this point Tommy Wilhelm and Willy Loman are actually went through a formless situation and they ended up fell into the vast painful and endless ocean of suffering where they had turbulent life from beginning to end and had hope of better situation but instead of better situation they are now in a worst phase of life.

**The Illusion of Success:** Willy Loman's relentless pursuit of the American Dream reflects Heraclitus' notion of becoming. Willy is caught in the illusion that success is a static, achievable state, despite the ever-changing nature of his circumstances and the shifting economic landscape. Maybe this is the reason why Willy thought that maybe not changing the profession will be the best idea as someday the condition of the situation can change and Willy Loman can be a successful salesman. He couldn't help himself neither he could change his mind to shift his job. He wanted success desperately even though he was unable to go near or attain that. Biff Loman contains the best matching for Heraclitus' theory, because from the very beginning of his job life as he almost changed thirty jobs as he couldn't find the job which is suitable for him, the constant changing and shifting for finding stability.

**Tragic Consequences:** The tension between Willy's aspirations and the reality of his life embodies the tragic consequences of failing to accept the impermanence inherent in Heraclitus' philosophy. His inability to adapt to change and confront his own illusions ultimately leads to his tragic downfall. In "*Death of a Salesman*," the concept of Heraclitus' becoming can be observed in Willy Loman's character and his struggles to come to terms with the changing world around him. Arthur Miller explores the disillusionment that can result from clinging to static and constant ideals of success and the tragic consequences of failing to embrace the impermanence and fluidity of life.

#### IV. BECOMING MAN

In both Saul Bellow's novella *Seize the Day* and Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* the concept of becoming a man is explored in the context of the main characters and their personal journeys.

##### 1. **Seize the Day (Tommy Wilhelm):**

In *Seize the Day* the protagonist, Tommy Wilhelm grapples with the idea of becoming a man throughout the novella. He is going through personal crisis, struggling with searching for his identity and self-worth. His journey toward becoming a man poses a bond among his own identity responsibility and the consequences of his choices.

**Self-Discovery:** Tommy's path to becoming a man is marked by a process of self-discovery. He confronts his failures, regrets, and illusions about success, which leads him to a deeper understanding of himself searching for his own existence and needs.

**Facing Responsibility:** Part of becoming a man for Tommy involves facing up to his responsibilities, both financial and emotional. He must take charge of his own responsibilities for example his own child's expenses, he couldn't carry out those he had to seek money from his father who denied to help. According to Tommy's father he will never be a responsible person if he keeps helping his son. Tommy will be dependent on his father. Where Tommy was unable to find out how he can earn money he was also carrying out another relationship with a girl Olive. There is little bit similarity found in Willy Loman at his young age how he was with in a relationship with another woman to escape the pressure of financial crisis and life. Even though he loved Linda a lot. Tommy unable to face the responsibility at all because of his joblessness and for Willy Loman he wasn't earning that much but couldn't meet the need of his family.

**Confronting Failure:** Tommy's journey also involves confronting his past failures and mistakes. Becoming a man in his case, means acknowledging his shortcomings and finding a way to move forward.

##### 2. **Death of a Salesman (Willy Loman and Biff Loman):**

In *Death of a Salesman* the concept of becoming a man is explored through the characters of Willy Loman and his son Biff.

**Willy Loman:** Willy's understanding of becoming a man is closely tied to the American Dream and financial success. He believes that being a successful salesman and provider is what makes a man. However, his relentless pursuit of this ideal leads to his downfall, as he fails to adapt to changing circumstances and grapple with his own insecurities. His ideal of being a good looking instead of being a hardworking person will be a smoother path towards success. But this is the only reason of his shortcomings in his life "stuck with one ideal". This logic mostly gave him the tragic aggravation of his life. To some extent he followed the footsteps of Parmenides where he said, "nothing changes everything is invariable".

As "the man who makes an appearance in the business world. The man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead" (Arthur Miller 25)

**Biff Loman:** Biff, Willy's son takes a different path toward becoming a man. He rejects the false ideals of success and chooses a simpler more authentic life. His journey involves breaking free from the illusions of his father and finding his own sense of self and purpose. He confronted the excited reality the actual mistake and presence of acceptance in his thought. It was visualised when he remembered that throughout the time he was delivering speech that he used to be a salesman whereas he was a shipping clerk and decided to reveal this in front of his father. Though they are father son but are quite opposite in a manner same goes for Dr Adler and his son Tommy Wilhelm.

#### V. THE THEORY OF HERACLITUS IN THE NOVELLA AND DRAMA

In both drama and play the concept of becoming a man is portrayed as a complex and deeply personal journey. It involves self-discovery and self identity, facing and escaping from responsibilities, confronting failures, and, in some cases, rejecting societal ideals in favour of more authentic values. These characters' struggles with masculinity and identity serve as central themes in their respective stories.

In summary, the concept of **becoming** in "*Seize the Day* and *Death of a Salesman*" revolves around the personal and existential journey of the main characters Willy Loman and Tommy Wilhelm, as they grapple with his identity crisis consequences of right and wrong choices, and the search for meaning in life. These explore the human condition and the quest for self-realization.

**Materialism and individual struggle for self identity:** Searching for self in the context of America was confiscated because of the rude impact of ruthless materialism which defines the value of society and brings disaster in common people's fate. The second world war brought in more selfishness and self interest along with losing the values and morals. The situation turned as father didn't care about son, wife made an reciprocity condition in front of her husband and their relationships assumed an unusual dimension that was based on reciprocity condition instead of the normal loving and usual relationship these are the interpretation of materialism in aftermath of the second world war (Kolata). They almost slaying the humble heart of individual and self whether physically or mentally.

"but the money made me guilty. Money and Murder both begin with 'M' Machinery, Mischief". (Bellow 69). In the novella "Seize the Day" Saul Bellow is trying to portray this plight of modern man who is failed but at the same time striving for American dream sticking with the mentality of becoming a successful person. Same portrayal comes on the play "Death of a Salesman". As Willy Loman was also wanted to be a successful salesman striving the American Dream. Which is quite contradictory according to their perspective and choices. On that time the most demanding contemporary society was founded success on the basis of fulfilling American dream. Without fulfilling American dream it was nearly impossible to become a successful person. Striving the American Dream and dreaming of becoming a successful human on that contemporary society was nearly impossible and this is visible among the protagonist of the play and novella. They needed success but not with American dream.

The basic standard American Dreams possess

1. Hard work
2. Earn money
3. Success/ be successful
4. Have a happy family

So, the criteria contains the idea that, if you can fulfil these four most important and basic standard of American dream only then you can be a successful person. Because the society set the roadmap regarding success based on these steps. In the play "Death of a Salesman" Arthur Miller brings a hero and the hero who was 62 years old here the author is upto break the convention of hero is from upper class society and noble birth. Here Miller brings aged hero, without noble birth, a middle class to working class, a tragic hero who is working hard to be a successful person. Arthur Miller in his play shows

- How a common man can be a hero
- The materialistic approach of society puts everything in harder position than usual
- How the human being and class selected and valued by the amount they earn
- The communication gap within family
- The different perception of hero than the society
- Repentance and realisation
- After suffering and repentance the person will be hero.

The materialistic approach doesn't let the society to treat in the way they are supposed to. The play "Death of a Salesman" and the capitalistic materialistic society and at the very beginning it is quite visible where the sun rays are orange in colour and representation of fire, a small fragile home surrounded by skyscrapers is the representation of Willy Loman's and his fragile dreams are surrounded by the strong economic society. The fragile house is the house of dream which is clinging and bearded by Willy Loman and the dream is rising without reality, Willy possessed the mercurial nature, his massive dreams and inability to touch the dream which is contradictory among the will power and the need of the society. His wife Linda Loman was effected by the mercurial nature of Willy Loman, Linda implies how the materialistic and capitalistic society was treating the woman and how they were facing the contemporary situation.

The struggle is also visible in the drama "Seize the Day" where Tommy Wilhelm grapples with middle age crisis which was profound for his jobless financial instability. The materialistic society forced him to become a penniless man as his so called guide Dr. Tamkin took away his last means as he showed Tommy the greed of becoming a successful businessman by investing little amount. Tommy wasn't acknowledged about that fraud and cruel reality of humans. He didn't make any choice or decision worth of doing anything else except actor, Tommy was always busy with good looks, dressing up etc. He was almost away from the reality of life and future attractive materialistic society took away all the attention of Tommy. Tommy went towards the wrong direction yet no one can deny he tried to follow his heart. But following heart needs the brain as well to live and keep running with the capitalistic materialistic society.

**Materialism Leads to Death:** The materialistic society Tommy lived in he couldn't keep it up with them and he failed miserably. He almost abused by them. It was a type of society where there was value of feelings, friendship, relationship, love, attachment etc.

"The money makes the difference". (Bellow 55)

Human beings were somehow treated like lifeless objects. People from that society never bothered anymore about the people they lost in the past. When Tommy Wilhelm asked his father whether he remembers or not when his mother died, Dr. Adler couldn't reply properly he mentioned "wasn't it nineteenth thirty one?". This reply proves how wrong his answer was though he was bit forgetful but it actually proves that he didn't care a fig about his wife. Money was much more important to him than anything else. People who had money was accepted more and got priority everywhere. The materialistic society Tommy lived in was almost killing him. The society was too much attached to materialistic, unemotional and cold hearted. Because of his father's materialistic behaviour he could not accept his own father's advice. He realized that this society only cares for

money, position and fame, otherwise you will never get the value anywhere. The society soul below trying to depict in his novella is focused how the society is overwhelmed by materialism which drags the destruction of common peoples fate. All the characters except Tommy Wilhelm grapples with materialistic environment and they are prepared for material success, spiritual world is invisible to them or maybe they are acknowledged about it. They busy with gaining the material success even if it is necessary destroy a whole soul of a human. The growth of disillusionment, depression, anxiety, chaos were the mostly accounted areas to control people's life and future as well. These were focused on the literary analysis of "Death of a Salesman" as well the growth of the tall buildings were the representation of the growing of materialistic society. While keeping up with that the death knocked the door of Willy Loman and Tommy Wilhelm. Physically and spiritually. A modern man is imprisoned within his own self.

## VI. REBIRTH

**Tommy Wilhelm:** "I guess so. But I think I inherit more from my mother's side, and she died in her fifties" (62). Tommy uttered this when he somehow acknowledged how he is dying. He was living in a materialistic society which was unemotional and cold. He was almost killed by the people around him. "Here, the word "murder" doesn't mean "the unlawful killing of one human by other, especially with premeditated malice;" rather it is symbolically used to express the slaying of human sense, belief, love and passion, in a word humanity" (Deb 59).

Living a life full of mistakes, Tommy never seemed to correct himself or even be bothered about repeating the same mistakes over and over again. But, losing everything he had and reaching the state where he had nothing else left to lose, he started to have a different kind of self-actualization. Psychologically, he started to dig deeper and deeper within himself (Karmakar). He regretted, He realized that he should have listened to his father when he warned him about Tamkin. He also realized that he should have listened to his mother Florence Adler, who tried to stop him many times when he was making all those mistakes. He thought, "I'll try to start again with Olive. In fact, I must" (115). His self-realization led him to his spiritual rebirth (Karmakar).

**Willy Loman:** In "Death of a Salesman," Willy Loman faces a form of rebirth through his death. His tragic demise represents a final attempt to achieve success and validation, though in a distorted and misguided manner. Through his death, Willy seeks to leave behind a legacy and provide for his family, believing that his life insurance policy payout will offer them financial security. However, his death ultimately serves as a catalyst for his family's introspection and self-realization, prompting them to confront the harsh realities of Willy's illusions and the American Dream. In this sense, Willy's death symbolizes a rebirth of awareness and understanding for those left behind.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the characters of Tommy Wilhelm from Saul Bellow's "Seize the Day" and Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" both grapple with the complexities of the human condition and the pursuit of the American Dream. Despite their divergent circumstances, both characters formed the disillusionment and struggle inherent in chasing elusive ideals of success and happiness. Tommy Wilhelm, with his perpetual quest for financial stability and self-worth, undergoes a journey of self-discovery throughout "Seize the Day." His realization of the importance of inner fulfillment over material gain serves as a poignant reminder of the pitfalls of placing one's value solely on external achievements. Similarly, Willy Loman's tragic narrative in "Death of a Salesman" illustrates the devastating consequences of clinging to a distorted version of the American Dream without moving towards other goal. His relentless pursuit of success as defined by societal standards ultimately leads to his demise, highlighting the detrimental effects of delusion and denial. Both characters experience moments of reckoning, where they must confront the harsh realities of their lives and reassess their priorities. Tommy's decision to embrace the present moment and find meaning beyond material wealth contrasts sharply with Willy's tragic inability to escape the confines of his own illusions. In essence, the stories of Tommy Wilhelm and Willy Loman serve as cautionary tales, urging readers to reevaluate their own aspirations and recognize the importance of authenticity, self-awareness, and genuine human connection. Through their struggles and eventual reckonings, they teach us valuable lessons about the true nature of success and the pursuit of happiness in a world fraught with challenges and illusions.

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