



ORIGINAL PAPER

**The Death of Salesman Analysis as an Absurd Drama
through Social Media and the EFL Students' Attitude
towards Studying Literature**

Shaima M. Saalh*
May H. Srayisah**

Abstract

This study deals with exploring absurd drama, *Death of a Salesman* as a model through social media. The study emphasizes on sharing more than one student with their teacher for the analyzing the play. The information and details are exposed according the students' sharing in a dialogue way with their teacher and then they conclude an analysis paragraph for each section. In their analysis they focus on exploring absurd drama "Death of Salesman tragedy" to enlighten the modern literature theories. The study consists of two parts: the first is a literary analysis paper and the second is the investigation of the EFL students' attitude towards English literature after using social media.

Keywords: *absurd, Arthur Miller, social media, EFL students, studying literature*

* Assoc. Prof., Ph.D. in Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women, Department of Educational and Psychological Sciences, Email: Alhshaima@gmail.com.

** Ph.D. Student in English literature, Faculty of letters, Department of Anglo-American and German Studies, University of Craiova. 0040730487159, Email: Mhsmm.z@gmail.com.

The Death of Salesman Analysis as an Absurd Drama through Social Media ...

Introduction

Death of the Salesman a play of absurd drama written by Arthur Miller, it is a struggle of a man to find a progress in the new society of United State. In this essay, the authors present a study of applying the social media for teaching and learning. Nowadays, and with the growth of the new technology of communication, social media is a mean to encourage user, to share their experience, opinions, senses and emotions. The audience will be more connected with the drama and able to understand the events and climax clearly. Both, the teacher and the student will able to participate and analyze the play. The essay consists of two parts, the first part is to exposes the modern literature theories, absurd drama aspects and the different authors' contributions and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* through various critical interpretations of the absurd drama aspects and the tragic end of the salesman. The second part is in Finding out the EFL students' attitude towards studying the literature after using social media. The sample is represented by fourth grade students, Department of English language, College of Education for Women /University of Baghdad., an attitude questionnaire is used as a study tool after verifying its psychometric characteristics. The result shows that the students have positive attitude towards English literature after studying through the social media. Accordingly, several recommendations and suggestions have been set foreword.

Brief Biography

Arthur Miller (1915-2005) American playwright, he was born in in a Jewish family in New York. His father was a clothing business, the family moved to Brooklyn to improve their income. Miller from his early youth decided to be a writer and he joined Michigan University and study journalism. He worked in the Federal Theater Project, he married his college sweetheart, Mary Slatteryin 1940. Miller wrote "*All my Sons (1947), Death of the Salesman(1949), The Crucible(1952), A View from the Bridge(1955), The Misfits(1961), After the Fall (1964), The Prince (1968), The American Clock (1980), The Last Yankee(1993), Broken Glass(1944) and Peter's Connections(1998)*. In his last play, *Fishing the Picture (2004)*, Miller returned to the subject of Monroe. Miller published an autobiography, *Timebends*, in 1987" (Brich, Hooper, 2012: 465).

Absurd Drama and Death of Salesman

Human beings have been seen as isolated creatures in a strange world with no truth value or meaning. This is an aspect of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus existential philosophy. On the theatre, the existentialists set the people in abnormal surroundings and put the dramatist in new context, this is according to Sartre's works. For Camus, the absurd is the true state of existence (Marinaro, 2007: 2). Arthur Miller, (1915-2005) was one of the most famed writers of the absurd, has a developed social mind comes as a result of his experience. He expresses this experience in form of drama and other literary fields. Miller is consider as an author who is influenced by the context of the modern times. In his drama *Death of Salesman*, he has rejected some of the old traditions and changed them with modern concepts. The hero is presented to be lasting element, he suffers and the audience learn from his suffering. Miller explores in his writing the existential theme of isolation and alienation. Willy Lowman, in *Death of salesman*, is a man who is alienated and lives in isolation and the isolation is what drove him to his suicide. He is the perfect example of a man alienated by a society that is controlled by money and power. Further, "*he had*

the wrong dream. All, all wrong...He never knew who he was"(Act II: 103). Willy Loman is a man trying to realize the American Dream. However, his failure to achieve it lies in his inability to waver from his belief in its promises (Dennehy, Higgins, 2005: 1). The phrase 'Absurd Drama' coined Martin Esslin's book 'The Theatre of Absurd'. The term is useful as "A device to make certain fundamental traits which seem to be present in the works of a number of dramatists accessible to discussion by tracing the features they have in common." By 'Absurd', Camus meant a life lived solely in a universe which no longer made sense because there was no God to resolve the contradictions. According to this philosophy that Beckett created his famous play 'Waiting for Godot'. Miller mentions in this drama the belief in God who punishes man for his mistakes. The characters at absurd drama are distinguished by their vagueness and presented as puppets to convey the theme. The absurd drama theme touch the deep level of the audience's minds. It guide the audience to get the sense of non-sense, to be aware of the events and to get fun with absurdity (Hussain, 2012:1). Eradam (1978:17) describes the Theatre of the Absurd as representing the sense of senselessness of the human life and inaccuracy of the mind image for the concrete image as emerging poetic language from these images. The Theatre of the Absurd is a reaction to the lack of faith from contemporary life and an attempt to emphasize on the beauty and purity by guiding man to face the ultimate realities in his life. The Absurd Theatre leads the man to new life by waking him up to avoid the existence that has become silly, mechanical and imperious. Absurd drama aims to change the surrounded world further from the limits of human abilities. It leads man far from static life to new innovative form of life (Tiwari, 2012: 2). According to Zhu (2013: 1466), the absurd drama is a reflection of suffering, cruelty and danger in real life. This reflection forms an atmosphere of the devaluation of life in modern society and losing an identity in it. Human being in modern society feel lonely, frightened and despairing. Therefore, emptiness becomes the true essence of their daily lives and their minds full with Isolation and absurdity. The modern society produce the Theater of the Absurd to reflect the people ignorance of the real meaning and destination of their lives. They feel lonely and helpless because their suffering of little care or concern. Theater of the Absurd is unique in its ability to express the original and true features of this society.

Existentialism is the philosophy that comes up in Paris during the rise of the Theatre of the Absurd. Therefore, they are associated with each other. This association represented with calling the Theatre of the Absurd as Existentialist theatre by Esslin. The Existentialist philosopher, Albert Camus, advocates the concept of "absurdism". Absurdism is called Existentialist in the Franz Kafka's work which labels absurdism as Existentialist (Tiwari, 2012: 2). The absurd drama is defined as: "Lyrical theatre which uses abstract scenic effects, many of which have been taken over and modified from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning" (Tiwari, 2012: 5).

Stone (2017: 3) also narrates that Willy Loman is the protagonist of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman play*. He is the main unforgettable character who's lost his popularity and sales. A tragedy, depicts the downfall of the protagonist in which a tragic hero is a person of some status who falls from his or her noble position over the course of the events. However, the tragedy of Willy Loman isnot represented in his falling from any noble status because he is only an ordinary salesman, Willy Lomanis, an American modern man who fulfill the drama of America. Arthur Miller chooses the salesman as a character for "the death of salesman" play to cover some aspects of the American society. The salesman in this society works for brighter future. Willy Loman considers the

The Death of Salesman Analysis as an Absurd Drama through Social Media ...

successful life as a matter of other opinion in him. His being well liked by people, his believing that he is in the right place in the life and personal attractiveness makes him successful. However, this illusions destroyed by the pressure of reality. The success in life come from the person himself rather than seeking it through others opinion, the identity crises is the tragedy of Willy Loman. It is a social play, which focus on the consequence of man's evaluate himself, and an exploration of betrayal those values. It is a faith in the supremacy of the material over the spirit.

Flashback is the core of the play, most the events are not related to the current setting. Willy go back with his memories to the times that his two sons were younger. He remember them when Biff and Happy were at high school. However, they are in their thirties at the time of the play. Miller uses different literary devices to provide hints and clues about what will occur in the future. Miller puts Willy Loman on the stage and once carry him back to his memories and other time open his mind to the future. Willy's wife Linda tells Biff and Happy about Willy's many automobile accidents. These accidents give hints for Willy Loman suicide because a witness says that Willy intentionally drove towards the bridge. We can say that the dominant, main theme is that Willy's distorted idea of the American dream brings about his demise. Success can be realistic with American dream and determination. Loman believes that success is the result of being social human, so he transfers this idea to his sons Charley and Bernard and there wear able to achieve success through determination. Willy Loman was the hero that he did not come to understand himself or make the correct decisions in the end. He was willful about his deep beliefs, against of the truth which was in front of his face, and his competition sense of arrogance and jealousy prevented him from leading his life correctly. He did not at all achieve what he wanted to, he attempted to live through his sons, but he was disappointed again when they did achieve their aims, he did not accept that it was his. In the end, Willy reached in a grief or depression, so committed suicide.

Miller and the New Tragedy

Arthur Miller is considered one of the greatest play writers in America after WWII, in this play, he focuses on the falling of a great man with high value. The works of Miller have independence of event, they stand in contrast of American tradition, but he as a playwright knows that the theater must dedicate itself to the public matters. He recognizes his audience as a person, his play ought to make sense to the common-sense people. The dominate theme in general drama of the twentieth century is a tragic apprehension about the human condition. The American drama tries to light and record the kind of crises in our times. As a result of living in a capitalist society that emphasizes material values, Miller had written a short story about a failed salesman when he was young, he transformed the story into one of the most successful dramas in the history of the America. He conveys one of the major themes in this drama, Loman denies his present and takes pleasure in his past. He believes that it is difficult to accept the present as he is and so he spent more time to restore his life system and make himself an alternative reality even if he had to live in the past only. Miller focuses on the relationship between society and the individual's concept of self, Willy Loman has a flawed sense of self. He is obsessed not only with financial success but also, more specifically, with appearances and impressions and with an important mind and "loved" by others. Willy passes these surface values on to his sons, Biff and Happy. In a play, Biff becomes more aware of his real needs and feelings and frees himself from this upsetting concept of himself that his father caused. Miller aims to describe the real life of people in society and ordinary American

family, with the effect of economic and politics changes. Willy Loman falls down, but also his family. In this idea, Miller writes about the modern tragedy rather than the classical one. He changes according to the new culture needs after 1930s, When American dream changed to be a nightmare, the chance to live in peace turn to be of despair. He conveys to us how capitalism moves people to false dreams and vaults that leads to the tragic death and reveals that America, which demands freedom and consolation, passed through dark ages of persecution and abuse. In reading *Death of the Salesman*, it's important to get the message of how life should be lived, it depends on the idea of realism. Nobody can imagine and live, we should accept shocking and good, and face the worst circumstances to avoid reaching to the pessimistic end.

Social Media and the EFL Students' Attitude towards English Literature.

The Problem of the Study

Learners' attitude is an important factor that has a significant effect on learners' language learning. It has a distinguished influence on the learners' behavior and on their performance. Accordingly, the learners who have positive opinions and ideas about language learning, have positive attitude towards language learning (Abidin et al., 2012: 119). Last decades give birth to new ways of communication that influence all parts of life. These ways are called social media. Social media impacted the interaction of people around the world and the way of getting the information (Allam, Elyas, 2016: 1). Because of its ability to deliver immediate and varied samples of language to a wide audience, many teachers are looking to the Internet for content to use in the language classroom. While it is fairly common to use online resources, such as video, still images and audio, social networking sites are just beginning to make their way into the language classroom (Sorensen, 2013: 4). The use of Social Media for teaching and learning has been connected to the theory of connectives as the basis of its implementation, suggesting that the ability to access information when needed has become the main feature of learning in this information era. He further explains that the emphasis of learning has shifted from the accumulation of knowledge to the capacity to know more through an individual's connection to a particular source of knowledge. The theory of constructivism could also serve as the basis for social media use in education, as its application allows pedagogy designs with meaningful social interaction and community sharing. In ELT contexts, socio-cultural theory has also been related to the use of social media in the instruction process (Inayati, 2014:778).

The aim and limitations

The study aims at finding out the students' attitude to study literature by using social media (fourth year EFL students at the Department of English, College of education for women, University of Baghdad; academic year 2015-2016; literary text: "Death of Salesman").

Definitions of Basic Terms

Attitude

Montano and Kasprzyk (2008: 71) defines the attitude as "the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behavior". Conversely, a person who holds strong beliefs that negatively valued outcomes have a negative attitude.

The Death of Salesman Analysis as an Absurd Drama through Social Media ...

Social Media

Social media is defined by Inayati, (2014: 777) as "one of the current phenomena in the technology advancement that touches many aspects of life, including education". Social media has developed to be an essential part in our life. It is a tool for people to share information and communicate in wide world.

Literature in EFL Classes

Yimwilai (2015: 14) says that "studying literature in an EFL classroom is beneficial for many reasons: it involves a profound range of vocabulary, dialogue, and prose; appeals to the imagination and enhances creativity.

Literature Review and Related Previews Studies. Attitude towards Language Learning

The psychological and social aspects are as important as intellectual perspectives for language learner. Motivation and attitude are psychological aspects for language learning. Abidin et al. (2012: 121) illustrate this by saying that: "Besides the intellectual perspective, the nature of language learning has psychological and social aspects and depends primarily on the learners' motivation and attitude to learn the target language. The ability of the students to master a second language is not only influenced by the mental competence or, language skills, but also on the students' attitudes and perceptions towards the target language"

Social Media in Language Classes

With the rapid development of tools for language learning both on and offline, technology has become a vital part of language instruction. Indeed, the use of technology is so engrained into language curricula that it has become normalized and even expected. The development of these capabilities comes with the implication that they are constantly evolving with no end in sight. We can easily observe that within the last ten or fifteen years, the power and mobility of technology has increased exponentially, making its way into users' homes, cars, classrooms, and even their pockets (Sorensen, 2013:12-13).

Literature in EFL classes

Literature is vital context for teaching languages, Healy (2009: 179) lists several reasons behind the necessity of using literature in language classes: "Firstly, for pleasure. Most people enjoy good stories, and so literature is motivating, often more interesting than the texts in proprietary EFL course books. Secondly, literature encourages students to exchange their thoughts and feelings and interact with one another in a meaningful way, as they share the story and the characters, and suspend disbelief in tandem with their peers. Thirdly, it encourages students to think about concepts and ideas and to develop attitudes towards them." In short, literature can be an important factor in promoting the study of English literature, developing students' academic, cultural, linguistic and intellectual learning" (Healy, 2009: 179). The role of literature in language teaching has been interpreted in past years, during the stage of structural dominance, literature had a narrow effect in teaching EFL. The emphasize was on the good writing and illustrations of the grammatical rules of the language. The new teaching methods focus on remarkable revival of interest in literature as one of the resources available for language learning.

Previews Studies

The study: *EFL Students' Attitudes towards Learning English Language: The Case of Libyan Secondary School Students*" (Abidin et al., 2012) aims at investigating

Libyan secondary school students' attitudes towards learning English. The students' attitude is investigated according to the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects. It explores if the demographic variables gender, field and year of study have significant differences in the students' attitudes towards English language. The sample is represented by 180 students. The students are selected from three grades from three specializations of Basic Sciences, Life Sciences, and Social Sciences. The study instrument is an attitude questionnaire of constructed by the researcher. After ensuring its psychometric characteristics, validity and reliability, it is given to the study sample. The analysis of gathered data show the following results: the students show negative attitudes towards learning English three aspects of attitude i.e., cognitive, behavioral, and emotional; there are statistically significant differences according to gender and field of study but there are not statistically significant differences according to the year of study.

The study: *Perceptions of Using Social Media as an ELT Tool among EFL Teachers in the Saudi Context*" *English Language Teaching* (Allam, Elyas, 2016) focused on the development of the technology and the wide spread of the social media among the youth, particularly, university students. The study aims at investigating impact of using the social median in language classes on the way people learn and interact with each other. This study is a descriptive quantitative one. It uses a survey instrument to gather the data. The participant consist of (75) randomly chosen male and female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at two Saudi tertiary institutions. The questionnaire, the study instrument, consist of 14 items where each item had five Likert-type responses. The results show that: the participants agree strongly with value of social media in language classes in the Saudi context; the using of social media may work as distractor for the students' intention, consequently, result in the opposite of the intended effect of their usage.

The study: *Student Attitudes toward Social Media Technology as a Enhancement to Language Acquisition* (Sorensen, 2013) This study aims at finding out: the students' attitudes toward technology in general; the students' attitudes toward online language learning tools in a social media context. A design based research approach is used for implementing teaching method of a social networking environment. Thus, the students could study in authentic language samples and practice using the language in real life situations. The results show that: the students have positive general attitudes toward technology in general; the students have positive attitudes toward online language learning tools in a social media context.

Discussion of Previews Studies

The previews three studies share the present study in aims, the first one aims at investigating the attitude of the students towards studying English language. The second and third studies explore the using of the students to the technology and social media in studying English language. The sample of the present study is female university students compering with the first and third studies mixed students and the second one a sample of teachers. The tools of the present study as well as the previews studies are questionnaires. The results of the first previews study has supported the problem of the present study in that the students have low attitude towards studying English language. The other studies show that the students using of technology and social media affected their attitude towards studying English language in general. Accordingly, the present study investigates the attitude of EFL students' attitude towards studying English literature through social media.

The Death of Salesman Analysis as an Absurd Drama through Social Media ...

Methodology

Participants

The participants are 60 female students. They are selected from fourth class\ Department of English Language, College of Education for Women \University of Baghdad.

Design

This study is a descriptive one in which a questionnaire is employed as a measuring instrument.

Instrument

The measuring instrument is an attitude questionnaire which focused on the attitudes towards learning English. It is modified to measure the attitudes towards learning English literature. The items are adopted from the attitude questionnaire which is constructed (Abidin et al., 2012). There are 45 items concerning language attitudes, 30 items are positive and 15 items are negative. The items are put in a 5-point Liker scale from Level 1: Strongly Disagree to Level 5: Strongly Agree.

Reliability

By using The Statistical Package for the Social Science Program (SPSS) version 17.0, an analysis of item reliability was determined through the reliability coefficient test. The acceptable value of Crombach Alpha is 0.878 which shows acceptable consistency of reliability.

Validity

To investigate the validity of the questionnaire items, the questionnaire is given to the jury members (see table 1)and they advocated that the items of the questionnaire are valid to investigate study aim.

Table 1. The Academic Ranks, Names, and Locations of the Jury Members

No.	Academic Rank	Name	Field	College
1	Professor	Al-Rifa'i , FatinKhairy, Ph.D	ELT	College of Education/Ibn Rushd, University of Baghdad
2	Professor	Sa'eed, Mu'ayad M. Ph.D	ELT	College of Education/Ibn Rushd, University of Baghdad
3	Professor	Shaimaa Al-Bakri	ELT	College of Education/Ibn Rushd, University of Baghdad
4	Assistant Professor	Al-Timimi, Salam Hamid, Ph.D	ELT	College of Education/IbnRushd, University of Baghdad

Source: Authors' own compilation

Administration

After teaching the students by using social media for teaching literature (The Death of Salesman), the researchers are required to explain the instructions of the questionnaire form to the students. They are asked to signify the extent to which they agree or disagree with the items of the questionnaire. The total administration to complete answering the questionnaire lasted about 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed by the SPSS Program aiming to answer the research questions quantitatively. To achieve the study aim, descriptive statistics is conducted to determine the frequency, the mean, the variance and the standard deviation of the gathered data.

Results

The result shows that the t-test computed value of English literature attitude (9.56) is higher than tabulated value (2.02) at the level of significance (0.05). This result reveals that the participants have a positive attitude towards learning English table (1).

Table 2. T-test Value of Attitude Questionnaire

N	mean	St.D	Test value	Df	t-test		significance
					computed	tabulated	
45	167.64	22.908	135	44	9.56	2.02	0.05

Source: Authors' own compilation

Conclusion and Recommendations

The goal of this study is to explore the university students' attitude towards English literature after studying it through social media. The results of the study suggest the students have positive attitude towards English literature after studying it by using social media. Based on these findings, some implication could be dawned. First, the ELT educators' could employ social median the education institution to promote blended learning, or learning using both face-to-face and on-line platforms, thus also promoting the better integration of technology in education. Second, the students could use the social media for continuous professional development. This particular attitude should be best employed by the education institution management by including more aspects of social media use in teaching and learning in their professional development programs.

References:

Abidin et al. (2012). EFL Students' Attitudes towards Learning English Language: The Case of Libyan Secondary School Students. *Asian Social Science*. 8(2). Retrieved from: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/16f0/9055f4243f2ece59d0b270f746467dc547c8.pdf>.

Allam, M., Elyas, T. (2016). *Perceptions of Using Social Media as an ELT Tool among EFL Teachers in the Saudi Context*, English Language Teaching; 9(7). Retrieved from: <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/view/59731/31988>

Dennehy, B., Higgins, C. (2005). *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman* Teacher's Resource Pack, London: Lyric Theatre. Retrieved from: <http://www.cje.ids.czest.pl/biblioteka/Death%20of%20Salesman%20-%20about.pdf>.

Eradam, Y. (1978). *The Theatre of the Absurd and Jean Genet*. Retrieved from: <http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/13/1185/13698.pdf>

Healy, S. (2009). *Literature in the EFL Classroom*. Retrieved from: https://ksurep.kyotosu.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10965/347/1/AHSUSK_HS_42_178.pdf.

The Death of Salesman Analysis as an Absurd Drama through Social Media ...

- Hussain, T. (2012). Theatre of Absurd and Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' as an Absurd Drama. *International Journal of Science and Research*, Volume 3, Issue 11, November, 1470-1480.
- Inayati, N. (2014). *English Language Teachers' Attitude towards Social Media in Higher Education: Indonesian Perspective*. The 3rdUAD TEFL International Conference. Retrieved from: <http://utic.pbi.uad.ac.id/proc/075-Nina%20Inayati-ENGLISH%20LANGUAGE%20TEACHERS%20ATTITUDE%20TOWARD%20SOCIAL%20MEDIA.pdf>.
- Marinaro, F. (2007). *Theater of the Absurd: Definition & Characteristics*. <http://study.com/academy/lesson/theater-of-the-absurd-definition-characteristics-quiz.html>.
- Montano, D. E. and Kasprzyk, D. (2008). *Theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior, and the integrated behavioral model* in Glanz K., Rimer, B. K, Viswanath, K. (eds.). *Health Behavior and Health Education: Theory, Research, and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 67-96.
- Sorensen, M. M. (2013). *Student Attitudes toward Social Media Technology as an Enhancement to Language Acquisition*. Retrieved from: <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4782&context=etd>
- Stone, M. (2017) *Literary Devices in Death of a Salesman*. Retrieved from: <http://study.com/academy/lesson/literary-devices-in-death-of-a-salesman.html>
- Tiwari, C. S. (2012). Harold Pinter and The Theatre of the Absurd. Lapis Lazuli. *An International Literary Journal*.vol: 2, no: 2. Retrieved from: <http://pintersociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Chandra-Shekhar-Tiwari-15.pdf>.
- Yimwilai, S. (2015). *An Integrated Approach to Teaching Literature in an EFL Classroom*. *English Language Teaching* 8(2). Retrieved from: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1075195.pdf>.
- Zhu, J. (2013). *Analysis on the Artistic Features and Themes of the Theater of the Absurd*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*,. 3(8). 1462-1466. Retrieved from: <http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/tpls/vol03/08/24.pdf>.

Article Info

Received: March 29 2017

Accepted: October 20 2017
