

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysing the Characters' Metaphoric Price for their Choices in Arthur Miller's *The Price*

👤 N. Subha Lakshmi

🏛️ Research Scholar, Erode Arts and Science College, Erode, Tamil Nadu, India;

✉️ sharonjesudas@gmail.com

👤 Dr. B.S. Arun

🏛️ Assistant professor of English, Erode Arts and Science College,
Erode, Tamil Nadu, India;

✉️ arunsadasivan83@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Metaphoric Price paid by the characters for their choices in Arthur Miller's play "The Price." It studies their choices and the resulting price or emotional damage caused by various factors like the Great Depression, a father's failure, and the burden of money and personal sacrifice, as shown through the central figures. The analysis seeks to explain the characters' choices by looking at their private conflicts and actual arguments, their ways of handling difficulty, and how their choices shape their relationships and their identities. Arthur Miller's "The Price" is not simply a tale about two brothers selling their diseased father's possessions. This article suggests that the payment for the furniture starts a more meaningful discussion about the unseen costs in each character's life. By observing the brothers, Victor and Walter, and the used furniture salesman, Gregory Solomon, the play reveals how every choice, sacrifice, and self-justification carries a high, long-lasting cost. "The Price" shows us that a life cannot be counted in dollars or by the situations encountered, but by the choices taken. Every choice has its own cost.

Keywords: identity; sacrifice; brotherhood; self-deception

FULL PAPER

Introduction

This study employs a close examination of Arthur Miller's play "The Price" to uncover its core themes. The analysis applies ideas about choices and their consequences, including Miller's concept of the American Dream as a kind of deal, to understand the characters. Its purpose is to explore the metaphorical prices the characters bear—the personal and moral prices that define the lives of the two brothers, Victor and Walter Franz. The paper will demonstrate how each brother's choices created deep, invisible burdens, exposing what they truly sacrificed in their lives. Taking place in the crowded attic of an old New York apartment scheduled for demolition, Arthur Miller's play "The Price" is a story haunted by memories and past choices. The once-fancy furniture now stands as a symbol of their vanished prosperity. The characters must confront their past itself: the choices made, the chances lost, and the sacrifices made. The play is a realistic story about a true-to-life account of a financial transaction: Victor Franz, a policeman nearing retirement, has arranged to sell his family's old furnishings to an aged dealer, Gregory Solomon. The sudden appearance of Victor's brother, Walter, a rich doctor whom he hasn't spoken to in years, sparks an old, hidden argument about their shared past.

Miller, however, uses this simple sale to ask a deeper, more uncomfortable question about the "metaphorical price paid by the characters". Every person in the story is like a list of what they have gained and lost, and the play shows their painful struggle to make sense of these accounts. This essay will examine the specific "heavy, personal cost" paid by Victor, Walter, Esther, and even Solomon, arguing that in Miller's view, we all pay a "price" to become who we are, and we often realise what we have sacrificed when it is too late.

Objectives of the study:

The objective of this research is to show how family duty and social pressure to sacrifice have resulted in a heavy price paid by the characters in the play "The Price." To prove this, the study looks at the main character, Victor Franz. His story shows the "heavy personal price of sacrificing his own dreams" to meet these obligations. The play explains how a major economic disaster, like the Great Depression, can cause pain that is passed down through a family. This is shown through the character of their father, whose financial problems show the "cost of a failed American Dream." Lastly, the paper looks at Victor's brother, Walter, who chose a very different path. It shows how Walter's chase for success and his leaving

of the family led to a separate kind of "Metaphoric Price paid by the characters", one of shame and loneliness, and how his choices in the end made Victor's future worse. Every choice has its own Price: "I am who I am today because of the choices I made yesterday." – (Eleanor Roosevelt) Every choice you make has a price. A choice is the clear, and often lasting, pick between different options, a turning point that decides your direction. The true power of choice is that it does two things together: it builds our future and forms our identity. Every choice, big or small, is like a brick used to build the life we lead.

As Arthur Miller's "The Price" shows, our choices are seldom completely free. They are weighed down by our situation, family duties, and personal past. Yet, it is exactly within these limits that we show our true character. The play teaches us that the real weight of a choice is often not felt immediately, but in the lifelong burden of its results, the "metaphorical price paid by the characters", which is settled in regret, the stories we tell ourselves to feel better, or a quiet sadness for the person we might have become. In the end, choosing is the main way we write our own life story. For better or worse, it ties us forever to a past we built and a future we started. "We are a product of the choices we make, not the circumstances that we face." – (Roger Crawford)

Victor Franz - The Price of Sacrifice

Victor Franz is the moral centre of the play, a man who defines himself by his story of selfless sacrifice. When he was sixteen, and his father lost everything in the Great Depression, he sacrificed his dream of becoming a scientist to get a job and support his father. While his brother Walter left to build his own life, Victor "stayed." This one word becomes the foundation of his entire identity. The primary "metaphorical price paid by Victor" is his "unfulfilled potential". He is a smart and sensitive man stuck in a job as a police officer that he finds boring and unfulfilling. He is tired, both in body and spirit, having worked for twenty-eight years, not because he loved the job, but out of a feeling of duty. His sacrifice cost him his ambition and the chance to use his intelligence.

Another "heavy price Victor pays" is that he has trapped himself in the role of the "good son." His whole life has been a reaction to his brother's choices. This has created distance from his brother and has stunted his own emotional growth. He can't move on because his self-worth is completely tied to that one past sacrifice. The cost of his moral superiority is a life spent wondering "what if?" and seeing himself as a victim. Finally, Victor is forced to confront the potential price of "self-deception". Walter reveals that their father was not as poor as Victor believed and

had actually saved a good amount of money. This shatters the very story Victor has built his life upon. If his great sacrifice wasn't even necessary, then the ultimate cost may be the horrifying realisation that his years of suffering were pointless, and his identity was built on a lie.

Walter Franz - The Cost of Success and Denial

Walter gained everything his brother did not: riches, career fame, and a high social position. But it is soon clear that this success required a very high cost. Walter's main burden is his "separation from his family and his own history." His decision to follow his career needed a knowing, self-centred act of leaving. He described it at the time as escaping a hopeless situation, but the play reveals the deep emotional harm this choice created. His mental collapse, time in a hospital, and ended marriage are all proof of a life built on buried pain. He confesses to a "strong need to succeed" that made him ignore others, a drive that forced him to shut down his feelings. The price of his successful professional life is a powerful sense of guilt and a shattered self-identity.

Walter's return to the attic is an attempt to make things right later on. He offers Victor a job, a shared business, and a piece of his achievements. This is not simply generosity. It is a frantic effort to find "pardon and freedom from his guilt." He wants Victor's pardon to make his own life decisions seem right and to clean away his shame. He tries to change their shared past, telling a new story where their father was a fake and Victor was fooled, therefore making his own abandonment look like smart foresight. When Victor turns down his offer, Walter must face the reality that some moral bills cannot be settled with money or a chance. The consequence of his past choices is forever, and the break with his brother cannot be repaired, even in the end.

Esther Franz - The Cost of Unfulfilled Expectations

Although not related by blood to the Franz family, Esther has paid a high price just by being Victor's wife. She acts as the "unintended victim" of the brothers' fight and the frequently ignored cost paid by women in stories about male sacrifice. Esther's price is that she sacrificed her dreams of a dignified and financially comfortable life. She married a man with promise, a future scientist, and has seen him turn into a disappointed policeman. She feels the lack in their life strongly, the worn-down dignity, the absence of thrill, the "dullness." She drinks to dull her dissatisfaction and hopes for the "fresh start" the money from the furniture could provide. Her dreams of seeing the world, enjoying the arts, and having financial comfort have been given up for the sake of Victor's stubborn morals.

Esther pays the price of "being emotionally ignored." She is stuck in the middle of the brothers' war, with her own needs and wants constantly pushed aside. She begs Victor to be practical, to consider Walter's offer, seeing it as their final opportunity for a changed life. Yet, her opinion is finally not strong enough against the powerful hold of the brothers' old conflict. Her difficult situation shows how the symbolic cost is never carried alone; it reaches out to those connected by love and faithfulness to the main people in every story.

Gregory Solomon - The Cost of Survival

At eighty-nine years old, Gregory Solomon, the furniture dealer, seems to be a funny side character, but he acts as the story's voice of wisdom, showing a different kind of price, the cost of survival. Solomon is someone who has accepted the challenges and endured hardships. He has lived through many jobs, marriages, and times of wealth and poverty. His tales about the past are not used as attacks, like the brothers' stories, but as teachings in the skill of releasing the past. Solomon's way of thinking is captured in his story about the acrobat who couldn't release his grip on the ladder: "If you can't let go of the ladder, you can't fly."

For Solomon, the price of getting through life is the readiness to accept defeat, to change, and to continue forward. He has paid his own dues through a long life of difficulty and has come out with a tired, practical understanding. Solomon, who has his own setbacks and survived in life, tells Victor, "The price of used furniture is nothing but a viewpoint." Since he knows that the furniture is not just things, but "a lifetime of work and memories connected to their emotions," and that tying your whole self-worth to it is a type of jail. His own energy, in spite of his age, is a sharp difference from the brothers' emotional stiffness. The price he has paid through countless losses and fresh starts has, surprisingly, given him a liberty that Victor and Walter are missing terribly. Cautious of one's choices: one should be careful about the choices they make. Because everything in one's life is a reflection of the choices they make in their life.

The unfortunate outcome in "The Price" might not have happened if the two brothers had thought more thoroughly about their actions. Victor decided to stay and look after his father, but he never truly admitted that it was his own choice. Instead, he allowed himself to feel like a casualty of his family's demands, which left him resentful and trapped for decades. Meanwhile, Walter chose to leave and create a prosperous career. However, he never confronted the shame of leaving his family behind. He attempted to cover up these feelings with wealth and achievement, and when he eventually tried to fix the situation, it was too late and seemed more like a

transaction than a sincere apology. Both brothers made a swift choice when they were young and never revisited it. By not examining their own motives, they allowed that single decision to destroy their possibility of happiness and a healthy brotherly connection for many years. "You are free to make whatever choice you want, but you are not free from the consequences of the choice." - Unknown.

Suggestions to make the right choices:

Making the right choices is most important, as it helps us achieve our goals and avoid bad results. A choice that has been carefully thought about and examined can lead to good results, while one that has not been thought through well can cause unwanted problems. There is still a cost to every choice, but there is also happiness in the meaningful decisions we make. This pushes us to make many difficult and deliberate choices. But it also lets us make decisions that add meaning to our lives and allows us to live without wishing we had chosen differently later.

As Sigmund Freud said: "When making a small, unimportant choice, I have always found it helpful to think about all the reasons for and against it. However, in very important matters, like choosing a partner or a job, the decision should come from a deeper place within us, from our unconscious mind. In the big decisions of personal life, I think we should be guided by the deep inner needs that are part of who we are." The more recent research from brain scientist Antonio Damasio also shows how important our emotions are when making choices. So, when facing hard decisions, learning to pay attention to your emotions and feelings is a strong way to know what you really want.

Conclusion:

In "The Price," Arthur Miller skilfully shows that the most important exchanges in a person's life do not involve money. The literal arguing over furniture between Victor and Solomon is just the visible sign of a deep personal struggle happening inside the characters. Victor has paid with his ambition and potential for a sense of being right that might not even be real. Walter has paid with his family connections and peace of mind for a success that feels empty. Esther has paid with her own dreams for a life lived in the shadow of her husband's sacrifice. Even Solomon has paid the price of many losses to gain the wisdom of how to survive.

The play does not end with a simple solution. Victor and Walter are left in a deadlock, their relationship shattered by old choices that cannot be resolved. The real tragedy is that the characters are finally trapped by the very stories they have used to justify their decisions. We do not fully grasp everything we do in life, much less everything that other people do. The cost that we and others bear for our choices

is just as unclear. And time does not permit us to go back and alter what has been done. Time is a constant, pressing force in "The Price." There is no clear resolution or happy ending here, in spite of the humour that is woven into the story and the fact that the play both begins and closes with the sound of laughter. In the end, Miller suggests that the constant calculation of wins and losses may be a pointless effort. The symbolic price cannot be paid because it is made up of life itself, the collected cost of every decision, every sacrifice, and every compromise that makes us who we are. The conclusion is that one has to pay the Price for their choices and can never escape the consequences of their choices.

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