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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Illusion and the American Dream in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*  
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Bachelor Thesis  
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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

In an early chapter the precise origins and definitions of the trope of The American Dream should be outlined. The BP author should make it absolutely clear which definition she will use in her analysis, and this description should be exemplified in an overview of the history and culture of the post-WWII period to portray how and for what purpose similar ideas have been used culturally, for example in literature and other media, even before the actual coining of the term by James Truslow Adams in 1931. Finally, the longest and most important part of the BP should be an analysis of the characters, plot and themes of DEATH OF A SALESMAN using the tools and background in the earlier chapters regarding the American dream.

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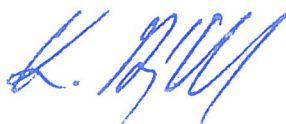
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## **Annotation**

This bachelor thesis deals with the theme of illusion and the American dream in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. In the first chapter, the trope of The American Dream is outlined and its origins and development are presented. A connection is made between the past, the post-World War II as well as today's world. The second chapter represents an analysis of the plot, themes and characters of *Death of a Salesman* using specific examples from the play to demonstrate the characters' own illusions views of the American Dream.

**Keywords:** Death of a Salesman, American dream, illusion, false ideals, social drama, personal attractiveness.

## **Anotace**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou tématu iluze a Amerického snu v dramatu Arthura Millera *Smrt obchodního cestujícího*. První kapitola pojednává o pojmu Americký sen jako takovém a přibližuje jeho historický význam a vývoj. Každý historický milník vývoje je zpracován tak, aby byly zřejmé spojitosti mezi minulostí, Amerikou v době po druhé světové válce i dnešním světem. Druhá kapitola je analýzou děje, témat a postav dramatu *Smrt obchodního cestujícího* za použití specifických příkladů ze hry, které slouží k lepšímu pochopení jejich případných iluzí a vlastních představ o pojmu Americký sen.

**Klíčová slova:** Smrt obchodního cestujícího, Americký sen, iluze, falešné ideály, sociální drama, osobní atraktivita

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## Introduction

The American Dream is an important movement that shook the world. It does not only refer to a belief of an individual; it also refers to the American society and its struggle for religious, economic and social freedom and it has a great impact on American literature as well.

Many will say that the American Dream defies definition; that is too vague or too diverse; that it means too many different things to too many different people; that too many different authors have approached it from far too many different directions. What is more, the Dream presents a moving target; a constantly evolving national vision, it goes far back and deep into in our national psyche. An odd combination of Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment individualism, the Dream came to America with first European settlers. It was then fashioned into something uniquely American.<sup>1</sup>

It is safe to say that the American Dream dates back as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century and that the notion of the term has changed and developed much during the past 500 years. From the search of new opportunity, independence and liberty, to equality and justice; to wealth and pleasure to a varied mixture of everything, it is important to acknowledge that the American Dream might never be steady and will keep on changing through time for the American society.

As in this bachelor thesis the theme of illusion and American Dream will be examined in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, the play will be briefly introduced. *Death of a Salesman* has been first performed on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1949 at Morosco Theater in New York and it has been quickly recognized as a milestone of the American theater. Miller has chosen to depict the life of a "little" man who is trying to keep up with the modern world and to live his American Dream. Willy Loman comes home from another yet unsuccessful business journey, he is getting old and exhausted. His wife Linda and his two sons, Biff and Happy are worried about him. He lives half lost in his imaginary world of fulfilling the American Dream of achieving success and wealth by means of being well liked because it is the main criteria. He gets involved with his little lies and illusions, he is unable to see the reality and to admit this fact to himself or his family. Miller concentrates mainly on the destiny of Willy Loman and his psychology but at the same time he watches his story in tight relation to his surroundings and the people around him. The play takes place mainly in the house or in the backyard of Loman family in Brooklyn, New York but also other places in New England, for example Boston. It is sometimes difficult

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<sup>1</sup> Wilber Caldwell, *Cynicism and the Evolution of the American Dream*. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc, 2011).



to distinguish between present dialogues and the daydreams and flashbacks Willy has throughout the whole play. *Death of a Salesman* is a criticism of the so-called American Dream and the notion that everyone can become rich and successful and it also criticizes the individualistic capitalism where the one who is unable to achieve the Dream is an inferior.

The first chapter of this thesis takes a close look at the very origins and definitions of the dream as they were generally known during the dream's development. From the search of a better life in the New World and the hope for independence and opportunity in general; to the desire of liberty and equality; to prosperity for all Americans and finally to achievement, success and materialism. Each of the above historical interpretations and definitions of the trope American Dream are being compared to the present as well as post-World War II interpretation of the dream. After getting to the year 1931 when the term American Dream was first coined by James Truslow Adams a more contemporary definition is developed. For the analysis, it is quite important to understand that there are two approaches to the American Dream. The materialistic dream, represented by wealth and material success; and the spiritual dream embodied in justice and freedom. Towards the end of the first chapter the definition introduced by Joseph L. DeVitis and John Martin Rich at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is presented, and this definition will serve as the building stone for the further analysis of the plot, themes and characters of Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*.

The second chapter is divided into several subchapters, each reserved for one character. Not all characters are included in the analysis as only the main ones could be considered and selected for the demonstration and analysis of the significance of the American dream in *Death of a Salesman*. Namely, the thesis analyzes Willy, Linda, Biff, Happy, Bernard, Charley, Ben and Willy's father. The characters' dreams are analyzed using specific examples from the play. The aim is to compare and contrast the dreams of the protagonists and to discuss the impact the differences have on their relationships as depicted in *Death of a Salesman*.

# 1 The American Dream through history compared to today's Dream

“The American dream has been variously described in terms of possession (house, car, boat, and money), lifestyle (leisure time, unclean family, and good job), political vision (freedom, liberty, democracy) and possible worlds (immigration, integration, mobility). These visions change across time, reflecting general economic circumstances, levels of employment, and perspectives of the viewer”.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of the American Dream has changed through the past and for sure will change in the future again. Each time of a change in the notion it is being affected by different circumstances, either economic, social or political or even all at once.

Everything started in 1492 with the discovery of the land that would be known as the United States of America, the land of the free. When the first colonists came to settle down in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 and in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620 there was no such idea known as the “American Dream” but as Samuel notes in the introduction to his book *The American Dream: A Cultural History*, the origins of the “American Dream” can be found “well before the nation was a nation”.<sup>3</sup> The first settlers had a vision of a better life, freedom and a whole better world outside the British Islands. America represented “hope for economic independence and an opportunity to profit from one’s own labor” and it certainly was “a refuge from political and religious persecution”.<sup>4</sup> America offered freedom and the desired open land. Great Britain, as an island, became overpopulated and the land was very limited, often owned and controlled by the wealthy.<sup>5</sup> The aristocracy of the 17<sup>th</sup> century did not leave much space for a self-made men and women in Europe. Given the fact that the social class was basically determined based on the descent of nobility or possession of land there is no wonder “the New World represented opportunities for the poor to prosper or for men of energy to establish themselves.”<sup>6</sup> Here is a popular song of the times:

To such as to Virginia  
Do purpose to repair;

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<sup>2</sup> Jean François Côté et al. *American dream 1930-1995* (University of Ottawa Press, 1996), 194.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel, *The American dream: A Cultural History* (New York, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Viegas, *The Declaration of Independence: A Primary Investigation into the Action of the Second Continental Congress* (New York: The Rosen publishing group, 2003), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Viegas, *The Declaration of Independence: A Primary Investigation into the Action of the Second Continental Congress*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Viegas, *The Declaration of Independence: A Primary Investigation into the Action of the Second Continental Congress*, 16.

And when that they shall hither come,  
Each man shall have his share,  
Day wages for the laborer,  
And for his more content,  
A house and garden plot shall have  
Beside 'tis further meant  
That every man shall have a post  
And not there of denied  
Of general profit, as if that he  
Twelve pounds, ten shilling paid.<sup>7</sup>

When thinking about the immigration of today's world it is clearly visible that well-being, independence and religious freedom are still the building stone of the idea of migration. Not much has changed over the past centuries regarding what makes people move around the globe. There is the always present hope for a better place to live than the one we are at right now. The turning point of the migration to the United States was the post-World War II era especially due to the newly developed programs and policies designed to import agricultural workers from Mexico. Also, the Asian exclusion has come to an end, refugees were admitted and the national origins quota was abolished which is the most important piece of immigration legislation. The western European immigration that prevailed in the years until the 1960s declined and the number of immigrants from other regions began to rise. Every immigrant who has come to the United States after the World War II found himself in search of employment opportunities and the immigrants were able to develop a very strong communities in urban areas and help expand ethnic networks throughout the newcomers. The less restrictive immigration policies of the post-World War II era in the United States had a great impact on American identity and domestic policy.<sup>8</sup>

In 1776 when the Declaration of Independence was signed, Thomas Jefferson claimed that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that are among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness".<sup>9</sup> From history, we understand that the Founding Fathers insisted that all men were created equal and this should authorize them for equal opportunities not only for material gain. The principles of democracy, liberty and equality were the most prominent but not all men and women could take it for granted. Many people who came to America were hoping that one day their dreams of equal chances and better life will come true. Inequality, abuse and racism however destroyed their

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<sup>7</sup> Viegas, *The Declaration of Independence: A Primary Investigation into the Action of the Second Continental Congress*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-72>

<sup>9</sup> *The Declaration of Independence*. Accessed June 19, 2017. <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>

hopes.<sup>10</sup> All men are created equal in today's interpretation would mean the guarantee that everybody can move up the social class ladder regardless of his/her financial background. The term American Dream is not to express social classlessness, a situation where individuals live together in economic and political equality, but rather to express the idea of equality of opportunity which allows one to overcome the class obstructions. If the equality of opportunity was 100% true one could only compete by hard work to get ahead the others. But all other aspects are to be taken into consideration which leads to split opinion of today's society. A national poll conducted in 2013 by YouGov shows that Americans perceive inequality as growing and 41% of all Americans think the American Dream is impossible for most to achieve, 38% say it is still possible.<sup>11</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the time of westward expansion when more and more Europeans sailed to the promised land. The eastern settlers were in search of land and chased their own vision of the "American Dream" which at that time meant "the good life in which there was the prospect of prosperity and liberty for all Americans"<sup>12</sup> It is important to understand that the Dream was not regarded positively by all; in fact, it turned into a nightmare for Native Americans. The western frontier moved rapidly during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which meant loss of land and cultural identity for them. Indians were supposed to sell their tribal lands, become farmers, forsake hunting and become 'civilized' since they were thought of as savages. The "American dream" is a contradiction to the Indian way of life as most of the Native Americans are not interested in being part of the "white man's myth."<sup>13</sup> African Americans had been enslaved for more than two hundred years which made them the outcasts of the American Dream and it was not until the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment became a part of the Constitution in 1865 that they were able to claim their right for liberty. The leaders of the United States, white leaders, "promoted America as the shining model to be adopted by other countries wishing to break free from their past histories of human oppression."<sup>14</sup> If ever the outcome of the Reconstruction period, when African Americans were granted citizenship rights, had endured it would have expunged the white supremacy system and a society based on racial equality principles could

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<sup>10</sup> Erik Olin Wright & Joel Rogers. "American Society: How it Really Works. Chapter 14. Racial Inequality: Final Draft, August 2009" Accessed June 20, 2017.

<https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/ContemporaryAmericanSociety/Chapter%2014%20--%20Racial%20inequality--Norton%20August.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://today.yougov.com/news/2013/08/07/american-dream-slipping-away-hard-work-still-count/>. Accessed June 21, 2017

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Hagger, *The Secret American Dream: The Creation of a New World Order with the Power to Abolish War, Poverty, and Disease* (London: Watkins Media, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Ricardo Miguez, *American Dreams: Dialogues in U.S. Studies* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 139.

<sup>14</sup> David Coates, *The Oxford Companion to American Politics. Volume 2* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2012), 177

have been established. Unfortunately, this did not happen and by the 20<sup>th</sup> century blacks and whites were to be segregated on race basis. The Supreme Court declared racial segregation to be constitutional (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896), trying to make a sense of it as separate-but-equal. This decision was overturned in 1954 (*Brown v. Board of Education*). The post-World War II Civil Rights Movement is the modern part of the historic struggle for African Americans liberation and with the strategy of mass, nonviolent, direct action it has succeeded in making the civil rights of African Americans the major issue in the United States for over a decade. The nation's leaders were forced to decide openly their standpoint of the citizenship rights of African Americans. The Civil Rights Movement serves as a model of successful social protest to other groups that feel oppressed – women, physically disabled, gays and lesbians, etc.<sup>15</sup> Even today there is still the need to continue making changes to give African Americans equal rights with white Americans. According to a 2015 survey results, the number of Americans who view racism as a big problem in society is growing.<sup>16</sup>

When the “American Dream” trope was first used and given a definition in 1931 by historian James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*, it was defined as:

That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. [...] It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.<sup>17</sup>

According to Samuel the so-called American Dream has always been a vague and fragmented idea that was associated with “familiar tropes” like “continually rising expectations, the entrepreneurial spirit, the sacredness of home, the seductiveness of wealth, the pressure to succeed, our perverse fascination with ‘hope’ and ‘change’, and the belief that ‘anything is possible’”.<sup>18</sup>

The term was coined in the darkest days of the Great Depression when the nation seemed to lose its way.<sup>19</sup> Adams was hopeful and he envisioned that the American Dream was to

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<sup>15</sup> David Coates, *The Oxford Companion to American Politics*, 177-180.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2015/08/05/across-racial-lines-more-say-nation-needs-to-make-changes-to-achieve-racial-equality/>

<sup>17</sup> James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New Brunswick (U.S.A) and London: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 214-215.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel, *The American dream: A Cultural History*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel, *The American dream: A Cultural History*, 13.

reemerge. He believed the Dream was much more than just an idea. For him it was “not only our most precious national possession but our only unique contribution to the civilization of the world”<sup>20</sup>. Even though the Dream was yet to be fully realized (by women, people of color) Adams’ interpretation of the incarnation was not about getting rich, working for oneself or owning a piece of equipment. It was about the “inherent right to be restricted by no barriers” outside those of one’s own construction.<sup>21</sup> But as pointed out by Eller the restriction has always been there for many Americans who have been restricted by variables of gender, language, ethnicity, race, religion, health, and more.<sup>22</sup>

From its very beginning until these days the American Dream tends to divide itself into two separate parts: the idealistic Dream and the materialistic Dream. Liberty, justice, freedom, equality, democracy and self-realization were part of the idealistic Dream while property, wealth and material success belongs to the material Dream. Even though the material side of the Dream is contradictory with the idealistic side, together they are the birthplace of the American dream of Progress. As further described by Caldwell in his book *Cynicism and the Evolution of the American Dream* “it is more than the American dream of Upward Mobility, more than the observable, measurable progress of economics, social elasticity, or politics. Rather, it is an idealized notion of progress that lies at the heart of our national Dream.”<sup>23</sup> Even though Adam’s has always concentrated more on the spiritual nature of the Dream he does not deny the materialistic dimension to it.<sup>24</sup> In comparison, Greider warns and criticizes the idealistic idea of the American for causing overstated expectations in American society. The American Dream offers a specific strength and confidence and one must be careful not to follow the American Dream in a blind faith.<sup>25</sup>

Going back to Caldwell’s theory, “the forces of the idealistic side of the dream are fragile, but resilient, while the forces of the material side are durable, but unstable”, “the ideal of the dream – liberty, equality and democracy, works to create a fertile environment for the growth of the material side... while at the same time the material side provides stability and makes the “pursuit of happiness” and a real and present hope.”<sup>26</sup> This means that the full achievement of one side of the Dream, spiritual or materialistic, would always mean missing

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel, *The American dream: A Cultural History*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel, *The American dream: A Cultural History*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Jack David Eller, *Culture and Diversity in the United States: So Many Ways to Be American* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 89.

<sup>23</sup> Caldwell, *Cynicism and the Evolution of the American Dream*.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, *The Epic of America*, 216.

<sup>25</sup> William Greider, *Come Home, America: The Rise and Fall (and Redeeming Promise) of Our Country* (New York, NY: Rodale, Inc., 2009) 62-68.

<sup>26</sup> Caldwell, *Cynicism and the Evolution of the American Dream*.

the other. Therefore, a fulfillment oriented only on one part is not an achievement as we want it. Every coin has two sides, and the American Dream is no exception.

The continuously developing definition of the American Dream tends to emphasize economic prosperity and financial security which goes hand in hand with other desires, such as a well-paying job, life insurance and the chance to retire in comfort. The following quote by Joseph L. Devitis and John Martin Rich will be used to summarize the definition of the Dream that will be used in the analysis of the play *Death of a Salesman*:

Today, the American Dream has been formulated in terms of certain basic values and character traits. Americans generally believe in achievement, success, and materialism. This combination of values, in conjunction with equal opportunity, ambitious, and hard work and the means of attaining it, could be considered the American Dream. Among the core beliefs underlying the ideology is to work hard in order to succeed in competition; those who work hard, gain success and are rewarded with fame, power, money, and property; since there is equal opportunity, it is claimed, those who fail are guilty of either insufficient effort or character deficiencies.<sup>27</sup>

According to a new research done by Public Agenda and the GALEWILL Center for Opportunity and Progress in 2012, Americans are divided in their belief that hard work is essential for achieving the American Dream. The general public say that people need good work ethic, good schools and strong values to be able to reach the Dream. It is no surprise that Americans have different definition of what the Dream means, as it has been suggested many time due to the Dream being a very subjective topic.

“What is the American Dream, and who has achieved it?” that is one of the questions asked in the survey and the findings suggest that only 9 percent of Americans would define the Dream as rags to riches while the public’s definition of the American Dream is flexible and, often, personal. In an open-ended question about what the American Dream is, most respondents did not forget to mention the classic American ideals like freedom or things related to home and family, especially homeownership.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph L. Devitis, John Martin. *The Success Ethic, Education and the American dream* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.publicagenda.org/press-releases/hard-work-is-essential-for-achieving-the-american-dream-but-is-it-enough-americans-are-divided-according-to-a-new-survey>

## 2 The significance of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman*

Death of a Salesman ran for 742 performances, won the Antoinette Perry Award, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Beyond that, it is undoubtedly one of the finest plays ever written by an American.<sup>29</sup>

*Death of a Salesman* is a play of two acts by Arthur Miller. Like most of Miller's major dramas it explores relationship between family members, in particular fathers, sons, and brothers. "It remains one of the most definitive stage works of all time as a study of the American character and culture."<sup>30</sup> The main character of the play, Willy Loman, is a salesman with a dream of prosperous life for this family – Linda, his wife, and his two sons, Biff and Happy. Right at the beginning of the play, Willy is shown struggling with the memories of the past. Biff, his older son, has returned home after being thrown out by his father some years ago. Through Willy's memories, the reader finds out that Willy always wanted Biff to be successful in life and he thought that the personal attractiveness that Biff has will guarantee a future prosperity to him. As Biff and Happy were growing up, Willy was very much excited to teach them all he knew about success and how to achieve it. The problem is that Willy is giving them lessons on a one-dimensional set of values that are vaguely defined. He believes that personal attractiveness alone is the means of bringing wealth to one's life. Thanks to living on his own, Biff realizes that his whole life he has been trying to make Willy's bogus ideas of personal attractiveness come true leading to depreciation of his own pleasures and ideals and eventually confesses this reality to Willy. He is not ready and does not want to accept that his boy is not the extraordinary salesman Willy hoped he would become. Biff has forgiven Willy his blind faith in him which leads to Willy's tragedy of committing suicide – his last step in that blind faith of material success.<sup>31</sup>

The American Dream present throughout the whole play and diverse ideas about the dream can be identified, the same trend as we saw in the historical development of the trope. The characters share some common views but they still have different ways of chasing them.

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<sup>29</sup> Christopher Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama: Volume 2, Williams, Miller, Albee* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 186.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Lauter et al., *Heath Anthology of American Literature: Volume E: Contemporary Period (1945 to the Present) / Edition 5* (Cengage Learning, 2005), 2051-2052.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Gottfried, *Arthur Miller: His Life And Work* (Perseus Books Group, 2003), 139-149



Further in this chapter the dream of each major protagonist of the play will be demonstrated and analyzed using specific quotes from the play.

## 2.1 Willy's dream

He was naïve, not clever; and consequently, he could not understand promptly the moves and attitudes of the prosaic society, which is concerned more with the economic calculus of profit and advantage than with susceptibilities of salesman who is a dreamer and a little poet into himself.<sup>32</sup>

Willy Loman's American Dream is the dream of being prosperous and well-liked. Willy thinks that attractive personality is the way to successfully accomplish the chase of the dream. For him personal appearance is more important than hard work. That is why he wants to make sure his Biff and Happy are well-liked and popular. Willy does not mind Biff stealing a football and makes no big deal of it because the teacher likes Biff and Willy assures him that there is nothing to worry about. "That's because he likes you. If somebody else took that ball there'd be an uproar"<sup>33</sup> Willy's famous statement "Someday I'll have my own business..."<sup>34</sup> evokes Happy to compare it to uncle Charley's business. In Willy's response "Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not-liked. He's liked but not-well liked."<sup>35</sup> the reader observes Willy's obsession of being well liked again. Willy's stories of his business success are exaggerated but still the reader wants to believe in it the same way the boys do.

Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. "Willy Loman is here!" That's all they have to know, and I go right through.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, Willy's version of the American Dream never works out because "Willy accepts and blindly follows the materialistic dream."<sup>37</sup> In spite of his prominence in high school, Biff is still lost finding himself whereas Happy seems to be more content. "Happy and Biff find themselves fated to perpetuate the values instilled by their father in the present and the future"<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Meenakshi. Raman, *Critical Perspectives in American Literature*, 138.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (New York, NY: Penguin Books. 1976), 30.

<sup>34</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 33.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Sterling, *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman* (Netherlands: Rodopi B.V, Amsterdam - New York, 2008), 83.

<sup>38</sup> Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, 72.

Bigsby perceives Happy and Biff as prisoners of their father's bogus belief of personal attractiveness.

When speaking of business, Willy is trying to be a superior man all the time to make himself look important in the boys' eyes.

And they know me boys; they know me up and down New England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, there'll be open sesame for all of us, 'cause one thing boys: I have friends. I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own.<sup>39</sup>

Willy wants to become rich and prosperous. He wants to be loved and respected by everyone. He wants to have something to leave for Biff. He is looking for the answer, for the secret of success to be revealed to him by his brother Ben. In his book *Critical Perspectives in American Literature*, Meenakshi Raman states "an ordinary salesman would have remained contented with banal pleasure of life; but Willy bore within himself a sharp awareness of his being a respectable man who wanted to maintain the well-being of his family with dignity."<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that he is an ordinary traveling salesman, Willy thinks that he is a well-liked salesman that is respected by many from the business world.

Willy feels ashamed of his choices but actually dreams of being something else, albeit never very clear what exactly, whether he is thinking of becoming traveling salesman who constructs his own products, as his father had apparently been or, a more self-reliant shark like his brother Ben, or simply an independent farmer out in the west. But whatever the dream is – and Willy is not much help in clarifying for us he lacks the courage or the naiveté to pursue it.<sup>41</sup>

Sterling argues that Willy is confused when it comes to choose his direction to his dream, if to choose his father's way or his brother or to be farmhand in the west; Sterling also insists that Willy was not courageous enough to choose one method and declares it frankly.<sup>42</sup> Willy believes that selling is the only job that will allow him to achieve the American Dream through his persuasion of being well liked.

And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities,

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<sup>39</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> Raman, *Critical Perspectives in American Literature*, 139.

<sup>41</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*, 74-75.

<sup>42</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*, 84-85.

and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people?”<sup>43</sup>

For Willy Dave Singleman is the imaginary perfect salesman, who “died the death of a salesman”<sup>44</sup>; he thinks of his death as a graceful and respectable one. In his admiration of Dave Singleman Willy disregards the human side, much as he neglects his own human side. He envisions Singleman as a happy and successful man but it is not obvious to Willy that maybe he was in the same financial situation and misery just like him given the fact that he was still working at the age of eighty-four.

Since the very beginning, Willy feels disgust over his actual situation and his life. He explains to Linda “You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don’t seem to take to me... they seem to laugh at me... I don’t know the reason for it, but they just pass me by, I’m not noticed... I’m very – foolish to look at, Linda.”<sup>45</sup> It was an unpleasant finding for him that he could not achieve his plans in life. Willy is not able to gain neither the material success nor the social status. He finally recognizes this. Still, he is very self-confident about the future of his sons, especially Biff because he believes Biff has all it takes to become a successful salesman. Unfortunately, Biff is a failure in the business world and could not make thirty-five dollars a week; that what arose Willy’s disgust for him as: “Not finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace!” , “The trouble is he’s lazy, goddammit!”<sup>46</sup> and the sudden turn of the attitude only confirms Sterling’s concerns about Willy’s confusion when only few lines below he makes a note “...a young man with such – personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There’s one thing about Biff – he’s not lazy.”<sup>47</sup>

Willy is highly fascinated by his sons’ success during their high school years. Even though he loves them very much and cares for them he fails to educate them properly. Willy appreciates and highlights Biff’s physical strength but his performance at school is set apart, not being important to Willy; he rather encourages Biff to compare himself with his neighbor and classmate, Bernard, and doing so he entrenches the wrong notion of the myth of success. “Bernard can get the best marks in school, y’ understand, but when gets out in the business world, y’ understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him.”<sup>48</sup> Willy does not even care

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<sup>43</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 81.

<sup>44</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 36-37.

<sup>46</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 33.

if Biff drives a car without license, fails in mathematics exam and he even sends him to “get some sand.”<sup>49</sup> “He readily believes the popular rhetoric that everyone can achieve material success through personality and popularity.”<sup>50</sup> and by ignoring this stage he paves the way of failure for his sons. Bernard becomes a successful lawyer, whereas Biff is still finding himself.

Willy’s disability to meet the family’s needs; and his debts make him lose his mind and he starts to curse himself. He seems unable to find a solution to his current situation. He remembers his brother Ben who left home at an early age and became successful by owning diamond mines and timber jungles. Willy seems to regret the time when he refuses his brother’s offer, and now he sees him as the idol of success who turns from rags to riches.<sup>51</sup> “Why didn’t I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time! Ben! That man was a genius, that man was a success incarnate! What a mistake! He begged me to go.”<sup>52</sup> In general, Willy understands the principles of success, but his practical grounds are all wrong. He very much fails putting into practice the ideals which can lead him to pursue his desires. Speaking about Ben, he states: “The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he is rich! The world is an oyster, but you don’t crack it open on a mattress!”<sup>53</sup> That is the right success formula which Ben uses to prove his great success.

However good Willy is at looking up to Ben he still blindly follows his dreams and false ideals, attaining nothing.

Without a penny to his name, three great universities are begging for him, and from there the sky’s the limit, because it’s not what you do, Ben. It’s who you know and the smile on your face! It’s contacts, Ben, contacts! The whole wealth of Alaska passes over the lunch table at the Commodore Hotel, and that’s the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked! And that’s why when you get out on that field today it’s important. Because thousands of people will be rooting for you and loving you. And Ben! when he walks into a business office his name will sound out like a bell and all the doors will open to him! I’ve seen it, Ben, I’ve seen it a thousand times! You can’t feel it with your hand like timber, but it’s there!<sup>54</sup>

Willy’s imaginary dreams make him more reckless and hurried; while he was talking to Bernard, he could not hide his torture and misery of failure, he is a total failure in comparison

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<sup>49</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman*, 83.

<sup>51</sup> Harold Bloom, *Death of a Salesman – Arthur Miller, Updated Edition* (Infobase Publishing, 2009), 17.

<sup>52</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 86.

to Charley, Bernard's father – both successful men. This conversation between Willy and Bernard confirms the readers' suspicion of affairs with The Woman that the reader knows a little about from Willy's daydreams. His temper breaks again and Willy is making himself looking foolish. Even after being officially fired by Howard, Willy makes no sense not accepting Charley's job offer. "I don't want your goddam job!" ... I – I just can't work for you, Charley."<sup>55</sup> Still he comes to Charley to borrow money so that Linda would not find out he was not making any money.

Biff and Happy get angry but also feel agitated about Willy's horrible breakout in the restaurant which in the end reveals the whole truth about Biff's visit to Boston to the reader. Instead of having a sympathetic understanding of their father's state they leave him in the restaurant in his world of illusions while plunging into memories. Later, when Biff does not want to live in lies anymore and tells the truth about him not having an address, his feelings "Pop, I'm nothing"<sup>56</sup> and breaks into tears this is the moment when Willy has decided to do it, right here, right now but still with a false idea of admiration "Loves me. Always loved me. Isn't that a remarkable thing? Ben, he'll worship me for it!"<sup>57</sup>

It is not until the end of the play when Biff makes a point and realizes that his father's notion of the dream was all wrong and that his father was to be a carpenter, not a salesman "making the stoop; finishing the cellar; putting on the new porch; when he built the extra bathroom; and put up the garage."<sup>58</sup> But Willy wanted to be well liked and that is why he decided to pursue his American Dream by selling nameless products. "In the end, rather than admit this bankruptcy of his legacy, he sells his death to perpetuate it."<sup>59</sup>

## 2.2 Linda's Dream

In an interview, Miller talks about Linda "She regards Willy as being very brittle, very easily destroyed; and she's got to prop him up or he'll collapse. In a way it's like someone who is dealing with a sick person. She's trying to keep bad news away from him lest he be destroyed

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<sup>55</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 97.

<sup>56</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 132.

<sup>57</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 135.

<sup>58</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 138.

<sup>59</sup> Fix, *The Lost Father in Death of a Salesman. Volume XLVII, Issue 3, Summer 2008.*

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-index?cc=mqr;c=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0047.312;g=mqrg;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1>. Accessed June 24, 2017.

by it.” “At all costs she’s got to shield him from the truth. She can insinuate the truth sometimes, but not too obviously. When he says “You’re my foundation and my support,” that has a double meaning. She’s a kind of co-dependent and heroine at the same time.”<sup>60</sup> Even though Linda knows Willy is suicidal, irrational and difficult to deal with she goes along with him and his fantasies to protect him. What is admirable about her is that she does not lose her temper when Willy is being rude to her repeatedly.

WILLY: ... It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it – because personality always wins the day.  
LINDA: Oliver always thought the highest of him –  
WILLY: Will you let me talk?  
BIFF: Don’t yell at her, Pop, will ya?  
WILLY, *angrily*: I was talking, wasn’t I?  
BIFF: I don’t like you yelling at her all the time, and I’m tellin’ you, that’s all.  
...  
LINDA, *her voice subdued*: What’d you have to start that for? You see how sweet he was as soon as you talked hopefully? Come up and say good night to him. Don’t let him go to bed that way.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the fact Linda knows a lot of things about Willy he thinks she does not know – that he is borrowing money from Charley every week, that she discovered the rubber hose near the heater or that he tried to kill himself several times before she does nothing and plays his game just to make sure his mental condition does not suffer any more. She is a character driven by fear and desperation. It is difficult to determine if Linda is praising the American Dream or if she is only encouraging Willy in his attempts to succeed. However, there is only a little doubt that she is corrupted by the same value system and it is her who maintains the financial accounts to measure the success of the Loman household. Linda expresses unending faith in Willy and she is an enabler of lies in defense of Willy. All the time she assures him of his value and makes excuses for his failures. When Willy complains about his driving she claims “it’s your glasses” or “your mind is overactive.”<sup>62</sup> When Willy moans about how little money he makes, she tells him “next week, you’ll do better”<sup>63</sup> and insists “you’re doing wonderful dear. You’re making seventy to a hundred dollars a week”<sup>64</sup> (37) which she knows is a lie. When he feels concerned about how the customers perceive him she repeatedly praises him “Willy, darling, you’re the handsomest man in the world.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Bloom, *Death of a Salesman – Arthur Miller, Updated Edition*, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 65.

<sup>62</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 37.

<sup>65</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 37.

Linda never fully understands Willy's dilemma and the dehumanizing demands of the consumer culture but she owns an imposing authority. She often acts with unbending courage and fierceness in defense of her lost husband.

I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the newspaper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such person.<sup>66</sup>

None of the other characters of the play could argue Willy's case better than her as no one invested so much in him or given him such devotion. One might note that Linda delivers the first and the last word of the play – "Willy! ... free..."<sup>67</sup> She is at last freed from Willy's destructive unachievable dreams.<sup>68</sup> Linda is very surprised when there is no one from the business world to attend Willy's funeral and this can only mean that even of her consciousness she got also caught to Willy's nest of popularity stories. Even after his death, Linda makes excuses for Willy "But where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him."<sup>69</sup>

### 2.3 Biff's Dream

A different American Dream perspective can be seen through Biff, Willy's eldest son, who felt confused and angry ever since he discovered his father's adultery. Biff has everything it takes to pursue the right dream but for him it will only be possible after both his conflict with Willy and his inner conflict are resolved. Biff is stuck between two notions of the dream, materialistic and spiritual – the one of his father which is related to the business world, profits, sales, and capitalism; and another that involves nature, being outdoors, and working with his own hands. At the very beginning of the play Biff says "when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off."<sup>70</sup> Miller makes sure the reader knows what Biff wants even though he is not ready to accept it for himself yet. Biff tells Happy about his passion of working on a ranch but shows a certain level of doubt for the future.

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<sup>66</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 56.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 12, 139.

<sup>68</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*, 14-18.

<sup>69</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 137.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 22.

There's nothing more inspiring or - beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt. And it's cool there now, see? Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old. I oughta be makin' my future.<sup>71</sup>

Most probably Biff did not expect to experience what he is to experience when he comes home after more than 10 years. Happy tells him about Willy's daydreams, how he talks to himself "Most of the time he's talking to you."<sup>72</sup> which makes Biff concerned "What's he say about me?"<sup>73</sup> Happy insists on Biff to talk to their father the next day. "Go on to sleep. But talk to him in the morning, will you?"<sup>74</sup>

Because of the lack of proper education both from Linda and Willy, his whole teenage years Biff blindly followed Willy's false idea that being well-liked was all that is needed to succeed. He did not take any interest in anything, except football and "never trained himself for anything."<sup>75</sup> He was to be a great football player, he looked up to Willy so much that he dedicated the special touchdown at that important game to him, but because of his failure at a math exam he did not graduate from high school. During the time Biff is in town, Willy meets Bernard, Biff's classmate and they get into discussion about Biff's failure "All he had to do was go to summer school and make up that subject." argues Bernard, but Willy assures him that "I begged him to go. I ordered him to go!"<sup>76</sup> Bernard goes on with his concern...

Biff just got very angry, I remember, and he was ready to enroll in summer school.... He wasn't beaten by it at all. But then, Willy, he disappeared from the block for almost a month. And I got the idea that he'd gone up to New England to see you. Did he have a talk with you then?... And he came back after a month and took his sneakers - remember those sneakers with "University of Virginia" printed on them? ...and he burned them up in the furnace... What happened in Boston, Willy?<sup>77</sup>

After catching Willy and his mistress in Boston, Biff has rejected the relationship with Willy. For Biff, this was a betrayal not only of Linda but more importantly it was Willy's betrayal of himself. Biff was unable to "kill" the father and free himself of the idealized image

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<sup>71</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 22.

<sup>72</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 21.

<sup>73</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 21.

<sup>74</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 27.

<sup>75</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 92, Bernard.

<sup>76</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 93.

<sup>77</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 93-94.



of Willy and the false belief in business success. This is the reason why Biff had always been dissatisfied with the life in the west that he loves the most.<sup>78</sup>

In the final confrontation between Biff and Willy, Biff makes Willy face the truth as he sees it now with his mind cured from the false ideals. He explains to his father what he really loves “I saw the things that I love in this world. The work and the food and time to sit and smoke... What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am!”<sup>79</sup> This helps Willy to discover the true nature of his son, even though he does not understand his desires because for him the image of individual identity outside the boundaries of the business world does not exist. Biff is confident and feels at ease even though he is “a dime a dozen.”<sup>80</sup> and realizes that he can be happy only if he remains far from those boundaries. After he escapes from his father's delusions to follow his passion and aligns his life with his own American dream, Biff will be able to succeed.

## 2.4 Happy's Dream

Even though Happy invested great deal of his identity in Willy's false ideals and he shares the belief of achieving success in business by the means of being well liked he is not getting the recognition that he deserves from his father. He works as one of two assistants to the assistant buyer for a local store, which grants him a position in the sales area. He makes enough money so that he can live on his own, he has a car and an exciting social life.<sup>81</sup> All those things should earn him at least a bit of respect from Willy but it is not the case.

HAPPY: Pop, I told you I'm gonna retire you for life.

WILLY: You'll retire me for life on seventy goddam dollars a week? And your women and your car and your apartment, and you'll retire me for life! Christ's sake, I couldn't get past Yonkers today!<sup>82</sup>

The trouble is that Happy has not achieved the big success yet. He wants to be a merchandise manager but according to him “All I can do now is waiting for the merchandise

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<sup>78</sup> Lois Tyson, *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-century American Literature* (Columbus, Oh.: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 77

<sup>79</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 132.

<sup>80</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 132.

<sup>81</sup> Tyson, *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-century American Literature*, 74.

<sup>82</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 41.

manager to die.”<sup>83</sup> And even though Happy mentions that they are good friends, the reader tends to believe it is not so true. Making enough money is not the big success Willy has imagined for his boys to achieve. It is wealth, power and a prestigious title that would make his father appreciate him personally and socially. At first, Happy seems much more content in his life than Biff but soon he admits “I don’t know what the hell I’m workin’ for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment – all alone. And I think of the rent I’m paying. And it’s crazy. But then, it’s what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I’m lonely.”<sup>84</sup>

Happy gets very excited about Biff’s idea of buying a ranch, raising cattle, using their muscles. “That’s what I dream about, Biff. Sometimes I want to just rip of my clothes off in the middle of the store and outbox that goddam merchandise manager.” He would like to get away from the place and the people he “can outbox, outrun, and outfit.” But still he wants “to walk into the store the way he (the manager) walks in.”<sup>85</sup> because he is chasing the material dream and he feels disappointed and cheated in the unjust world.<sup>86</sup> His feeling of inadequacy in business is the reason why he tells Biff that “maybe, I just have an overdeveloped sense of competition or something, but I went and ruined her, and furthermore I can’t get rid of her.”<sup>87</sup> Happy’s womanizing is a clear sign of his struggle to compete with his coworkers, especially the executives who are wealthier and more successful than him so Happy decides to at least punish them by “ruining” their girlfriends.<sup>88</sup>

Willy has always been more interested in Biff thanks to his “success” during high school. In his flashbacks, Willy never touches Happy and he is never the object of their father’s pride. Linda neglected Happy too. She often acts as if he was not even there, as if he barely existed. She never makes use of the same nice language when talking to Happy, she never says dear or darling in a positive connotation, she only uses it to express contempt when Happy makes a remark that he was not aware of Willy financial troubles “You never asked, my dear!”<sup>89</sup> Linda is the first one to be blamed for Happy’s compulsion to seduce the fiancées as he wants to punish her for ignoring him.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 23.

<sup>84</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 23.

<sup>85</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 24.

<sup>86</sup> Tyson, *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-century American Literature*, 74.

<sup>87</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Tyson, *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-century American Literature*, 75.

<sup>89</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 56.

<sup>90</sup> Tyson, *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-century American Literature*, 75.

Happy has more desire to please and impress his father because he too often suffers from his father's expectation about him and Biff. Even after Willy kills himself, Happy wants to “fight in vain to achieve Willy’s misguided dream.”<sup>91</sup>

All right, boy. I’m gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It’s the only dream you can have – to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I’m gonna win it for him.<sup>92</sup>

## 2.5 Bernard’s Dream

“Bernard is closer to the myth of the American dream that so much preoccupies Willy than to the world of business and he probably embodies the ideal of social success more than any other character in *Death of a Salesman*.”<sup>93</sup>

Bernard is Charley’s son, and Biff’s classmate from school. He has always been a responsible and a hardworking man, and helped Biff with school. He was never a fan of Willy’s means of bringing up his boys and his never-ending focus on being well liked.

WILLY: Bernard is not well liked, is he?  
BIFF: He’s liked, but he’s not well liked.  
HAPPY: That’s right, Pop.<sup>94</sup>

Bernard lacks personal and social attractiveness which makes him incompetent to attain any success in the business world according to Willy’s false ideals. Luckily for Bernard, his father did not make the same mistake as Willy and he did not let Bernard believe that personal attractiveness is the only way to gain success. Through hard work and dedication Bernard proves Willy wrong and without being well liked he ends up being a successful lawyer at an early age. He becomes far more successful than anyone from the Loman family could have ever imagined.

Charley is very proud of his son and when he meets Willy and Bernard at his office he likes to make the point “How do you like this kid? Gonna argue a case in front of the Supreme Court.”<sup>95</sup> this leaves Willy in shock, pained but happy. Not only was Willy jealous of Bernard’s

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<sup>91</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman*, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 138-139.

<sup>93</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman*, 67.

<sup>94</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 33.

<sup>95</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 95.

friend who has got a tennis court “Don’t say. His own tennis court. Must be fine people, I bet.”<sup>96</sup> because he has always dreamt of such friends of his own but also because Bernard’s success did not make much sense to Willy since he was never well liked, as Biff was for example. Bernard’s success is discussed in a very few words between Willy and Charley where he suggests that he always expected Bernard to make his own decisions and choices.<sup>97</sup>

WILLY: And you never told him what to do, did you? You never took any interest in him.

CHARLEY: My salvation is that I never took any interest in anything. There’s some money – fifty dollars. I got an accountant inside.<sup>98</sup>

## 2.6 Charley’s Dream

Charley is a longtime neighbor of the Loman family. In the world that is full of illusions and dreams he represents the voice of reason and practicality. Unlike Willy, Charley has an excellent sense in business and owns his own successful company in which he has offered Willy a job even before he found out that Willy was fired. Charley chooses not to talk about the big deals but he rather acts on them which bore him the fruit.<sup>99</sup> Charley’s success is one of the main reasons why Willy constantly criticizes him for not being well liked, for having a nerdy son, for not being interested in football and for not being a real man. It is very plain and simple to see that all the negatives about Charley are a pure product of Willy’s jealousy.

Even though Charley admits that they are not in very much of love, him and Willy “Willy, I know you don’t like me, and nobody can say I’m in love with you, but I’ll give you a job because – just for the hell of it, put it that way.”<sup>100</sup> he is very generous and helpful, offering advice, money and even a job. Charley interprets Willy’s refusal of the job offer as a personal insult and gets angry while they argue and accuses Willy of being jealous, nonetheless he gives Willy more money “You been jealous of me all your life, you damned fool! Here, pay your insurance.”<sup>101</sup> Charley’s most important significance in Willy’s life is that he tries to bring

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<sup>96</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 91.

<sup>97</sup> Bloom, *Death of a Salesman – Arthur Miller, Updated Edition*, 76.

<sup>98</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 95-96.

<sup>99</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman*, 85.

<sup>100</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 97.

<sup>101</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 98.

Willy into reality, to make him understand that the business world works based on a different rules than human relationships.<sup>102</sup>

At the funeral, Charley does not agree with Biff saying “He had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong.”<sup>103</sup> Charley explains that being a salesman bearing the uncertainty of the future it is not easy not to dream big because it can happen to be the only hope that drives the salesman forward. By saying so, Charley helps elevate Willy to be regarded as a truly tragic figure, a model figure of a man of failed dreams that could be found all around America.

Nobody dast blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there's no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple spots on your hat and you're finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream boy, it comes with the territory.<sup>104</sup>

## 2.7 Ben's Dream

Ben is Willy's older brother who has always been very adventurous and incredibly lucky in Willy's eyes. In the play, he appears only through Willy's troubled imagination and is very much idolized by him. For Ben, the American dream is the ability to start with nothing and make fortunes by one means or another and it is never clear to the reader nor Willy how what is behind Ben's saying “when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And by God I was rich.”<sup>105</sup> There is a slight hint of iniquity or wickedness regarding his great success. When Ben and Biff are sparring, all the sudden Ben comes in, trips Biff, stands over him pointing his umbrella over Biff's eye and tells him “Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way.”<sup>106</sup>

Willy always asks for advice when he is to talk to Ben, either in his flashback or his daydreams. The answers Willy is given towards the end of the play are often the product of his own imagination and so it is not relevant to judge Ben based on those pieces of advice. Other

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<sup>102</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*, 141

<sup>103</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 138

<sup>104</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 138

<sup>105</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 48

<sup>106</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 49

than that, Ben has always tried to persuade Willy to follow his steps to become rich and to free himself of the illusion of success in selling.

You've a new continent at your doorstep, William. Get out of these cities, they're full of talk and time payments and courts of law. Screw on your fists and you can fight for a fortune up there.<sup>107</sup>

To keep Willy from following Ben, Linda defends him by losing herself in an unreal depiction of their lives and of Willy's potential at the sales telling Ben "He's got a beautiful job here." and imitates Willy's language she declares to Willy "You're well liked, and the boys love you." Turning back to Ben, she goes on "why, old man Wagner told him just the other day that if he keeps it up he'll be a member of the firm, didn't he Willy?"<sup>108</sup> She instinctively fears Ben and feels much concerned in his presence.<sup>109</sup>

## 2.8 The Father's Dream

Willy's lost father is at the center of *Death of a Salesman* and even though he never physically appears on stage, this character is genuinely embedded in the play's structure which helps Miller to "exhume the ghost of our lost national character, probing our cultural ambivalence about identity and vocation and offering only uneasy resolution."<sup>110</sup> Willy's father presence is omnipresent with the melody of the flute being heard "small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon."<sup>111</sup>

He was a craftsmen version of a salesman, both making and selling the flutes. Willy only has one memory of his father and remembers him as "a man with a big beard, and I was in Mamma's lap, sitting around a fire, and some kind of high music."<sup>112</sup> and he begs for more from Ben, not only for him to know more but his boys to hear about the great man. Ben adds to Willy's memory one of his own.

Father was a very great and a very wild-hearted man. We would start in Boston, and he'd toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he'd

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<sup>107</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 85.

<sup>108</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 85.

<sup>109</sup> Sterling, *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman*, 15.

<sup>110</sup> Charlene Fix, *The Lost Father in Death of a Salesman. Volume XLVII, Issue 3, Summer 2008.*

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-index?cc=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0047.312;g=mqrg;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1>. Accessed June 24, 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 11.

<sup>112</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 48.

drive the team right across the country; through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western states. And we'd stop in the towns and sell the flutes that he'd made on the way. Great inventor, Father. With one gadget he made more in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime.<sup>113</sup>

Willy's father personalizes the extension of the frontier. He moved as far west as he could, just like the frontier.<sup>114</sup> He took the advantage of the situation right before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and happened to be the first one from the Loman's family to achieve his American Dream making a considerable amount of money. He was able to achieve his dream thanks to determination and hard work he put into making of the flutes.

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<sup>113</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 49.

<sup>114</sup> Fix, *The Lost Father in Death of a Salesman. Volume XLVII, Issue 3, Summer 2008.*

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0047.312;g=mqrg;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1>. Accessed June 24, 2017.

### 3 Conclusion

Once the New World was discovered in 1492 there was no way back, now way of stopping the westward expansion of people from the Old Continent. The reasons behind their escape to the new unknown land differed and were dependent on their social status, their religious belief or their willingness to make sacrifice for the vision of the promised land.

The hope for economic independence and a new opportunity available for everyone made the very first newcomers to cross the Atlantic Ocean and they could enjoy the life with no political or religious persecution. There was plenty of free space for everyone which meant that even the poorest family who made it across the Ocean could easily establish themselves and start a new prosperous life. However, not all people who were brought to the New World were able to enjoy themselves. The slaves were not granted any rights; not even after the *Declaration of Independence* signed by the Founding Fathers established the principles of democracy, liberty and equality. It took long decades, even centuries before the African Americans were considered humans in the American society. The Native Americans were not a big fan of the White men either. The White men made them change their way of life, the White men invaded their tribal lands and the White men declared themselves superior to them.

When the newly established idea of a dream explored in the first part of the first chapter was first used as the collocation between the word America and the word dream, making up the American Dream, it was not new at all. The only new thing was that people suddenly knew how to call this dream of their own. Suddenly there was a common name to be used for one's means of the pursuit of happiness. It made no difference to the individuals but it made a big difference to the American society and it had a great impact on the American society. From now on we could observe the Dream being turned into something uniquely American. The coining of the term in 1931, during the time of the Great Depression, one could say that the American Dream, as a movement, shook the United States and the world as well just in time before the World War II hit. For some, the materialist part of the dream was more important the spiritual aspects of the dream. It is important that one does not forget to keep both aspects in mind when chasing his/her American dream.

Today, Americans generally believe in achievement, success and materialism. A combination of those values with connection of hard work, ambitious and equal opportunity, this could be considered the American Dream. To work hard in order to succeed is one of the core beliefs to the ideology and those who do work hard are rewarded with fame, money, power and property; all of those are means of becoming successful in its full definition. Due to the



assurance of equal opportunity, people tend to believe that those who fail to achieve the American Dream, whatever it may be, are to be blamed of lack of efforts or personal deficiencies.

This thesis' second part deals with the characters of *Death of a Salesman*, one by one being characterized using specific examples from the text to demonstrate the significance of the American dream and to show how different views of the Dream impact the relationships of the protagonists.

Willy's main focus is of course on the material side of the Dream. He dreams of success, wealth and respect. For Willy, there is no other way of achieving his American Dream than being well liked and have personal and social attractiveness. If one is not well liked or does not create any personal interest there is no way for him to succeed in life. Willy's illusion of the American Dream, especially the false idea of how to best achieve it, is the tragedy of the American Dream at the same time. The greatest profession to take him through to attain the Dream is of course selling. Because what other job's success is based of popularity and what other job would let you make a living at the age of eighty-four? None. There is indeed no other job Willy would prefer than selling. Even though Willy recognizes the fact that he will never gain the desired success and social status he is too lost and caught by all of his illusions that he fails to distinguish between the reality and his imagination. All his hopes are now on Biff's shoulders and Willy feels an obligation to leave something for Biff. Since he has nothing and thinks of himself worth more death than alive he starts playing with the idea of killing himself again. It is after Biff breaks in tears trying for the last time to explain his father what the reality looks like asking him to finally accept it as it is, suggesting that he will be leaving again in the morning. That evening Willy commits a suicide thinking that Biff will get \$20.000 from the insurance company that will help him get to the world of successful people. Miller never makes it clear whether the money was provided or not.

Linda is Willy's carrying and loving wife. She is very protective of Willy, making sure he only hears the truth that would not harm his mental condition any more. Linda, same as Willy, is corrupted by the value system and she is the one who keeps record of the finance in the Loman household. Her relationship with Willy is based on keeping up the game that Willy unintentionally starts whenever he is lost in his flashback or a daydream. As she does not know the whole truth of Willy's life, she does not understand why he had to kill himself or what was his real intention to do so.

Biff 's relationship with Willy has gone wrong after he found Willy's mistress in the hotel room in Boston. Until then, Biff has looked up to Willy following the same false ideals

of success achieved only by personal appearance because no one ever taught him differently. He was supposed to become a football player so he did not take interest in anything else but after failing the math exam and not attending the summer school because of Willy's betrayal, Biff goes to the west to work on a farm and he finds the outdoors something he really enjoys. He does not approve to chase his own American Dream until the end of the play when he finally realizes that to be happy he must stay far from the boundaries of the business world.

At first Happy seems to be content with his life as it is because he makes enough money to pay rent, he has a car and enjoys the attention of many women as he always wanted but then he admits that even though having it all, he feels lonely. Happy has been put aside by both Willy and Linda, it is apparent that they did not care about him as much as they did about Biff. Interestingly enough Happy does not seem to be jealous of Biff but for sure he is jealous of his co-workers. The executives are the type of people Happy want to become to finally gain respect from his father. Making enough money has never been enough for Willy to recognize Happy's "success".

If there should only be one person to prove Willy wrong in his view of the American Dream of achieving success, it would be Bernard. He had never been well liked and had never made a great personal appearance and yet, he has become a successful lawyer at an early age. Approximately the same age when Biff was still finding himself. Bernard is not a man of words, rather he is a man of actions. He has achieved his American Dream through hard work and dedication. His father Charley never took any interest in showing him which way in life to choose or what decision to make, it was Bernard himself to decide about his own journey of success.

Charley is the only friend of Willy, a longtime neighbor and a supporter. He is also a salesman, with the difference that he is successful and owns his own business. He is the voice of reason and practicality throughout the play, the two commodities that Willy needs so much in his presence. After Willy kills himself Charley makes sure Willy is regarded as a tragic hero rather than a fool who killed himself for nothing, supposing the insurance company refused to pay the money.

Willy's brother Ben is the one who reminds him of the possibilities he had had in the past, such as going to Alaska and very often Willy is caught regretting his decision not to go with his brother. Ben does not support Willy in his blind faith in business success and wanted to see him becoming rich the way he did himself. It is Linda's love, or fear of losing Willy, that keeps him from leaving for Alaska with his brother. Ben is there for Willy to tell stories of their father not only to please Willy personally because he does not remember much about their

father but also Willy wants his boys to hear all about their grandfather because he was a great man.

Willy's father is brought to the stage only via the melody of a flute that is heard at the opening of the play and few more times later during the scenes. Old Mr. Loman made a living making and selling flutes all around the United States but when Willy was not even four years old he abandoned his family in the pursue of his American Dream and he made it thanks to determination and hard work.

Looking back at the summary of the dreams and illusions, it is clear that personal attractiveness and being well liked is not the best way to take in the chase of the American Dream. Willy's story does not tell about the success but about failure. Not only about his own failure but about the failure of the American Dream itself. Joshua Polster, President of the Arthur Miller Society, wrote in his book *Stages of Engagement: U.S. Theatre and Performance 1898-1949* "The success of Loman's brother Ben, Charley, Charley's son Bernard, and David Singleman demonstrate that success is indeed possible, but – despite the promises of the success myth – it is not accessible to all."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Joshua Polster 2015 195.

## 4 Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem iluze a amerického snu v dramatu *Smrt obchodního cestujícího* (*Death of a Salesman*) od dramatika a esejisty Arthura Millera. *Smrt obchodního cestujícího* je jedno z nejvýznamnějších děl americké dramatiky 20.století vůbec. Ve svých společenskokritických hrách se Miller snažil rozbít mylné představy lidí o Americe jako o ráji. Ještě dříve, než vydal *Smrt obchodního cestujícího*, přineslo mu uznání rodinné drama *Všichni moji synové* (*All my sons*), které se vrací k tématu druhé světové války a pojednává o svědomí a odpovědnosti. Mezi Millerovi další významné hry patří *Zkouška ohněm* (*The Crucible*), v češtině i pod názvem *Čarodějky ze Salemu*, která se odehrává v městečku Salem ve státě Massachusetts a vychází ze skutečných událostí, které se odehrávaly ve Spojených Státech na konci sedmnáctého století. Hra poukazuje na pronásledování komunistů v USA v době Mccarthismu. *Pohled z mostu* (*A View from the Bridge*) je tragikomicky laděná hra, která čtenáři přiblíží, co se může stát zavítají-li do brooklynské rodiny příbuzní přistěhovalci. Téma přistěhovalectví je aktuální i v dnešní době a Miller poukazuje na sobectví či snahu pomáhat.

Hra *Smrt obchodního cestujícího* byla poprvé představena 10.února roku 1949 v Morosco Theater v New Yorku a rychle se stala jednou z nejvýznamnějších děl americké dramatiky 20.století vůbec. Miller se zde zaměřuje na osud „malého“ člověka, který se snaží žít svoji verzi „amerického snu“. Hlavní protagonista, Willy Loman, se navrácí domů do Brooklynu z neúspěšné pracovní cesty. Willymu je 63 let, se cítí unavený a nedaří se mu. Po tom, co jde Willy za svým nadřízeným požádat o přeložení na práci v kanceláři, aby nemusel ve svém věku cestovat stovky mil týdně, dostane výpověď. Willy žije svůj život omezen představami o naplnění amerického snu a hlavním kritériem je pro něj oblíbenost. Podle Willyho jsou to právě oblíbení lidé, kteří dosahují v životě úspěchu a bohatství. Jeho falešné představy a drobné lži si ho omotávají do pevných sítí a velmi brzo není Willy schopen přiznat pravdu ani sám sobě, ani svým nejbližším. Autor se soustředí na Willyho osud a psychologii, zároveň se ale zaměřuje na jeho příběh v souvislosti a spojitosti s prostředím, kde žije. Tento vnější svět kolem Willyho reprezentuje všudypřítomný pokrok – mrakodrapy, úspěšní lidé, kteří se snaží co nejrychleji zbohatnout nebo rychle se zdokonalující technika.

S objevem Ameriky v roce 1492 bylo jasné, že lidé ze Starého kontinentu budou expandovat na západ, aby se mohli vydat objevovat Nový kontinent. Důvodů, které je k tomu vedly, bylo hned několik. Pro některé to byla touha po ekonomické nezávislosti a nových příležitostech, pro jiné to byl únik před politickou nebo náboženskou opresí. Lidé se také museli rozhodovat co všechno chtějí cestě do neznáma obětovat – většinou to bylo všechno nebo nic.

K dispozici bylo spousta volného prostoru pro všechny, což znamenalo, že i ty nejhudší rodiny, které se dostaly přes oceán, mohly snadno založit farmu nebo usedlost a začít nový prosperující život. Avšak ne všichni lidé, kteří se doplavili do Nového světa si mohli užívat svou volnost a nový život. Otroci neměli dlouhá léta žádná, ani ta nejmenší práva na svobodný život. Toto se bohužel nezměnilo ani po tom co přišla v platnost Deklarace nezávislosti Spojených Států Amerických, která byla podepsána mimo jiné také Georgem Washingtonem, Benjaminem Franklinem nebo Thomasem Jeffersonem. V Deklaraci nezávislosti byly zavedeny a popsány principy demokracie, svobody a rovnosti v Novém světě. Trvalo dlouhá desetiletí, dokonce i století předtím, než byli Afroameričané v americké společnosti považováni za lidské bytosti. Původní obyvatelé Amerického kontinentu také nebyli velkým fanouškem bílých mužů. Bílí muži je přiměli změnit způsob života, napadali jejich kmeny a prohlásili se za jejich prezidenty.

Když se nově vytvořená myšlenka snu, která byla zkoumána v první části první kapitoly, poprvé použila jako spojení mezi slovy Amerika a sen, nebylo to vlastně nic nového. Jedinou novou věcí bylo to, že lidé najednou věděli, jak nazývat jejich vlastní sen. Univerzální pojem „americký sen“ byl konečně stvořen. Najednou existovalo společné pojmenování, které mohl kdokoliv použít jako definici honby za štěstím. Nezáleželo na jednotlivcích, pro každého to znamenalo něco jiného, ale pro americkou společnost to znamenalo hodně, protože to na ni mělo ohromný dopad. Od této chvíle můžeme říct, že ten sen dob minulých se začal měnit v něco čistě a jedinečně amerického. V roce 1931, kdy ještě stále probíhala Velká hospodářská krize, americký sen jako významné hnutí otřásl Spojenými státy a světem právě včas před druhou světovou válkou. Kdo ví, co by se ve světě stalo, kdyby se Adamsovi nepodařilo pojem amerického snu pojmenovat právě v této době? Pro některé byla materialistická část amerického snu důležitější než ta duchovní. Je důležité, abychom měli na paměti, že oba aspekty amerického snu je třeba mít stále na paměti.

V dnešní době Američané obecně věří v úspěch a materialismus. Kombinace těchto hodnot se spojením tvrdé práce, ambic a rovnocenných příležitostí by mohla být považována za ten pravý americký sen. Pracovat tvrdě a usilovat o úspěch jsou jedněmi z hlavních myšlenek v budování amerického snu a ti, kteří tvrdě pracují, jsou odměněni slávou, penězi, mocí a majetkem; Všechny tyto ať už hmatatelné nebo nehmatatelné věci jsou prostředkem pro dosažení vysněného úspěchu. Díky slibovaným rovnocenným příležitostem mají lidé tendenci věřit, že ti, kteří nedokážou dosáhnout svého amerického snu, bez ohledu na to, co to pro ně znamená, jsou obviňováni z nedostatku úsilí nebo osobních nedostatků.

Druhá část této bakalářské práce se zabývá postavami ve hře *Smrt obchodního cestujícího*, a jedna po druhé jsou charakterizovány pomocí konkrétních příkladů z textu pro demonstraci významu amerického snu pro každou postavu zvlášť a poté jsou rozdílné názory užity na ukázkou toho, jak různé názory na americký sen můžou ovlivnit i dříve kladné vztahy mezi hlavními postavami.

Willy se především soustředí na materiální aspekt amerického snu. Sní o úspěchu, bohatství a úctě. Pro Willyho neexistuje žádný jiný způsob, jak dosáhnout amerického snu, než že tak že ho budou mít lidé rádi, že bude oblíbený, že bude vyzařovat osobní atraktivitou apod. Pokud se člověk příliš nelíbí nebo nezanechává žádný pozitivní dojem, není pro něj místo ve světě úspěšných podnikatelů a nemá ani nejmenší šanci na úspěch. Nejlepší povolání, které může jedinec mít v souvislosti dosahování amerického snu je samozřejmě odvětví prodeje. Které jiné zaměstnání slibuje úspěch z velké části díky oblíbenosti, díky kontaktům, které člověk má? A která jiná práce by vám mohla zajistit, že budete schopni vydělat si peníze až vám bude 84 let? Žádná. Neexistuje žádná jiná práce, kterou by Willy dělal raději než prodával. I když Willy uznává skutečnost, že nikdy nedosáhne požadovaného úspěchu a společenského postavení jaké by si přál, je příliš ztracen ve svém světě iluzí, že už nedokáže rozlišit mezi skutečností a jeho představami. Všechny jeho naděje jsou nyní předány Biffovi a Willy cítí povinnost něco pro něho zanechat. Jelikož nemá nic a myslí si, že stojí má vyšší hodnotu mrtvý než živý, začne si opět hrát s myšlenkou sebevraždy. Biff rozbere vyčerpáním kvůli přehnané snaze o nějakou rozumnou domluvu a naposledy se snaží Willymu vysvětlit co je pravda, a jak to všechno doopravdy je. Nakonec ho požádá o to, aby ho nechal v klidu odejít, aby ho konečně přijal takového jaký je i s tím co mám rád. Ten večer Willy spáchá sebevraždu s myšlenkou, že Biff dostane 20.000 dolarů od pojišťovny, které mu pomůžou dostat se do světa úspěšných lidí. Miller nikdy neprozradí, zda byly peníze poskytnuty či nikoliv, ale spíše ne.

Linda je Willyho starostlivá a milující manželka. Je velmi opatrná a ochránuje Willyho tak at si je jista, že slyší jen pravdu, kterou slyšet má a která nebude škodit jeho duševnímu zdraví. Linda, stejně jako Willy, je zkorumpovaná systémem hodnot v americké společnosti a Linda je vlastně ten, kdo v domácnosti Lomanů vede záznamy o financích. Její vztah s Willym je založen na udržování hry, kterou Willy neúmyslně zahazuje, když je ztracen v jeho vzpomínkách nebo ve snu. Protože Linda neví celou pravdu o životě Willyho, nerozumí tomu, proč se musel zabít nebo jaký je jeho skutečný záměr. Biffův vztah s Willym se pokazil, když našel Willyho milenkou v hotelovém pokoji v Bostonu. Do té doby Biff vzhledl k Willymu za stejnými falešnými ideály úspěchu dosaženými pouze osobním vzhledem, protože ho nikdo jiným neudělal. Měl se stát fotbalovým hráčem, takže se nezajímal o nic jiného než po tom, co

se nedostavil na matematickou zkoušku a nechodil na letní školu kvůli Willymu zradě, Biff jde na západ, aby pracoval na farmě a zjistil něco venku Má opravdu rád. On neschválil pronásledování svého amerického snu až do konce hry, když si konečně uvědomí, že je šťastný, že musí zůstat daleko od hranic obchodního světa. První se zdá být spokojený se svým životem, protože je to proto, On dělá dost peněz na zaplacení nájemného, má auto a těší pozornost mnoha žen, jak vždycky chtěl, ale pak přizná, že i když má všechno, cítí se osamělý. Šťastná byla odložena jak Willym, tak i Lindou, je zřejmé, že se o něj nestarali stejně jako o Biffovi. Zdá se, že je zajímavé, že Happy není z Biffu žárlivý, ale jistě žárlí jeho spolupracovníky. Vedoucí pracovníci jsou typem lidí, kteří se chtějí stát, aby konečně získali úctu od svého otce. Dosažení dost peněz nikdy nebylo dost pro Willyho, aby uznal Happyův "úspěch". Pokud by měl být jen jeden člověk, který by dokázal, že Willy je špatný ve svém názoru na americký sen o dosažení úspěchu, bude to Bernard. Nikdy se mu nelíbilo a nikdy se neuskutečnilo skvělý osobní vzhled a přesto se v raném věku stal úspěšným právníkem. Přibližně ve stejném věku, kdy se Biff stále nacházel. Bernard není člověk slov, spíše je mužem jednání. Dosáhl svého amerického snu díky tvrdé práci a odhodlání. Jeho otec Charley se nikdy nezajímal o to, jakým způsobem si v životě zvolí, nebo jakým rozhodnutím udělá, že sám Bernard rozhodne o vlastní cestě úspěchu. Charley je jediný přítel Willyho, dlouholetého souseda a stoupence. Je také prodejcem, s tím rozdílem, že je úspěšný a vlastní vlastní podnikání. On je hlas rozumu a praktičnosti během hry, dvou komodit, které Willy potřebuje tolik v jeho přítomnosti. Poté, co se Willy zabije, Charley se ujistí, že Willy je považován spíše za tragického hrdinu než za blázna, který se zbytečně zabíjel, předpokládat, že pojišťovna odmítla platit peníze. Willyův bratr Ben je ten, kdo mu připomíná možnosti, které měl v minulosti, jako je například cesta na Aljašku, a velmi často je Willy zaujat politováním nad svým rozhodnutím nejít s bratrem. Ben nepodporuje Willyho v slepé víře v obchodní úspěch a chtěl vidět, jak se zbohatne tak, jak se sám udělal. Je to Lindova láska, nebo strach, že ztratila Willyho, což ho brání v odchodu do Aljašky se svým bratrem. Ben je pro Willyho, aby vyprávěl příběhy o svém otci nejen proto, že Willy osobně potěší, protože si o otci moc nevzpomíná, ale i Willy chce, aby jeho chlapani slyšeli všechno o svém dědečkovi, protože byl skvělý muž. Willyův otec je přiveden na jeviště pouze melodií flétny, která se slyší při zahájení hry a ještě několikrát později během scén. Starý pan Loman živil výrobu a prodej flétny po celých Spojených státech, ale když Willy nebyl ani čtyři roky, on opustil svou rodinu v pokračování svého amerického snu a on to udělal díky odhodlání a tvrdé práci. Shrnutí snů a iluzí, je zřejmé, že osobní přitažlivost a dobře se líbí, není nejlepší způsob, jak se dostat do pronásledování amerického snu. Příběh Willyho neřekl o úspěchu, ale o neúspěchu. Nejen kvůli jeho selhání, ale také kvůli selhání samotného amerického snu. Joshua

Polster, prezident společnosti Arthur Miller Society, napsal ve své knize Stages of Engagement: Americké divadlo a představení 1898-1949 "Úspěch Lomanova bratra Ben, Charley, Charleyho syn Bernard a David Singleman prokazují, že úspěch je skutečně možný, ale - navzdory slibům úspěšného mýtu - není k dispozici všem. "



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