

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

**Disillusion and the American Dream:**

**The impact of idealism on the characters in plays of Arthur Miller and**

**Edward Albee**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):

**Doc. Clare Wallace, PhD. M.A.**

Zpracoval (author):

**Matůš Gola**

Studijní obor (subject):

**Anglistika a amerikanistika**

Praha, 2014

## Declaration

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the source of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze dne 7.1.2014

Matúš Gola

## Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used to study purposes.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor doc. Clare Wallace, PhD, M.A. for all the guidance and support she provided me in the process of my thesis writing. I am also grateful for the two American drama seminars Ms. Wallace led that I had the chance to attend, for they provided me not only with the material for this thesis, but were also important in my personal development.



# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1 – Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2 – Context.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 The Aftermath of World War II.....	4
2.2 The Cold War.....	5
2.3 Criticisms .....	7
<b>Chapter 3 – The Ideal (The American dream) .....</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1 “I want to build something I can give myself to.” .....	12
3.2 “Someday I’ll have my own business.” .....	17
3.3 “And the cats are setting the table.” .....	25
3.4 “You look pretty complete to me.” .....	30
<b>Chapter 4 – The Family.....</b>	<b>37</b>
4.1 “Nothing is bigger!”.....	37
4.2 “I don’t know - what I’m supposed to want.” .....	40
4.3 “Good old Mom and good old Pop are dead.” .....	46
4.4 “What a masculine Daddy!” .....	49
<b>Chapter 5 – The Individual and the Society.....</b>	<b>54</b>
5.1 “You wanted money, so I made money.” .....	54
5.2 “But they do laugh at me.” .....	56
5.3 “The old pigeonhole bit?” .....	59
5.4 “People being sorry.” .....	61

<b>Chapter 6 – Conclusion .....</b>	<b>64</b>
6.1 Morality Plays .....	64
6.2 Solutions .....	67
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Key Words .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Resumé .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Klíčová slova .....</b>	<b>78</b>

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

It is quite common in critical articles to compare several works by the same author or works by different authors within the same genre. If the works of a playwright are studied by comparing them with one another, they may reveal patterns of how the writing technique developed over the years or how thematic progression happened. Also it is often the case that an author may produce a play which resembles a work by another playwright; thus inevitably the two plays are drawn together.

Such is the case with Arthur Miller and Edward Albee, respectively. Miller's plays tend to be analyzed side by side, as critical articles follow the development of his dramatic technique. Such approach is often employed also because his unpublished plays are a useful source of information on how the playwright moved towards his first successful play.

On the other hand, the work of Edward Albee is regularly considered in comparison with absurdist dramatists, although his output is varied. Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett are names that usually appear in articles dealing with Albee's early plays from the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Having studied critical articles of the two types mentioned above, I became interested in whether it would be possible to find common ground for the exploration of the American dream, examining both the plays of Miller and Albee. Arthur Miller's plays are inclined to deal with topics pertaining to the 1930s and 1940s; Albee's work is focused on the 1950s and 1960s and yet they share certain common aspects worth analysing. Being often intrigued by these two authors, I chose to examine the potential similarities and differences in the work of Miller and Albee myself. The difference between Miller's and Albee's style of writing also serves to contrast the plays and highlight their different viewpoints on the same problem.

The main objective of this thesis is to show the shift in criticism of the American dream and the loss of credibility of the American dream through a comparative in-depth analysis of *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream* by Edward Albee. The thesis concentrates on the difference of perspectives between the authors and how the critique and perception of the American dream shifted over time – from Miller’s towards Albee’s plays. The thesis also comments on what these plays were intended to communicate and also whether they are successful in providing solutions to the problems they present. The plays were chosen due to their status as being among the best and most acclaimed works from their respective authors. The early output of both Miller and Albee is also their most performed.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters dealing with the central themes on the ground of which comparison and juxtaposition of the plays can be made; these are preceded by a chapter which provides the context of the era when the plays were written. Each of the main chapters deals with the plays in chronological order of their appearance; beginning with Miller’s *All My Sons*, continuing with *Death of a Salesman* and moving on to Albee’s *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream*. Such ordering was chosen because this arrangement allows for a clearer juxtaposition of Miller’s works with Albee’s plays and it also shows the progression from Miller’s indirect critique to Albee’s open dissatisfaction with the American dream better than treating all plays in a blended fashion. Chapter 3 deals with the ideal – The American dream - itself. The analysis comprises the various manifestations of the ideal the characters in the plays believe in or try to follow. Chapter 4 concentrates on the family, which is integral to all of the plays. Family plays an indispensable role in The American dream and therefore it is important to devote a separate chapter to it.

Chapter 5 focuses on the relationship of the individual and the society; questions of conformity, responsibility and alienation are addressed, as well as matters of expectation and class differences. It is essential to look closely at these three main areas to have a complete picture of how the American dream is represented in the selected plays. As mentioned previously, the works of Arthur Miller and Edward Albee are quite different in their composition, length and style; nevertheless both of these authors critique the American dream - each of them in his own fashion. The final Chapter 6 sums up the main three chapters, providing a compact summary of the progression in critique as well as comparison of the plays. This final chapter also provides the answer to the question of what these plays were intended to communicate and also whether they succeed in providing solutions to the problems they present.

## **Chapter 2 – Context**

### **2.1 The Aftermath of World War II**

After the World War II ended, Europe and America sighed with relief. Being the deadliest conflict in human history to date, the war left no western country unaffected. Prolific change occurred throughout both continents, boundaries were shifted and power structures reconfigured. After the war Europe was devastated physically and scarred mentally. Large centers of culture and commerce like Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Warsaw or London were either completely destroyed or badly damaged during air raids. After the war had ended, Europe had to rebuild its cities and infrastructure and it also had to provide a decent life for its population, many of whom lost all of their property. Lack of food supply and basic goods meant austerity and the implementation of rationing schemes immediately after the war. The industry was in ruins; factories had to be rebuilt and there was also a shortage of materials for production.

The United States, on the other hand, survived the war physically largely unharmed - except for comparatively minor losses inflicted in the Pacific by Japan. America's manufacturing was not impaired by bombing and civilians were not under gunfire or in threat of being transported off to concentration camps. Population was spared the horrors of the holocaust and devastation by clashing armies - there was no need to provide for millions of dispossessed, putting strains on the economy. The war in America was fought in factories and in the movie theaters. United States manufacturing operations supplied weaponry for use by armies in Europe; it also provided financial aid to countries in need of rebuilding after the war. War films told American people of romanticized stories involving heroic deeds and propaganda cartoons reminded the citizens to support the war effort by buying war bonds. In

terms of military loss, United States suffered considerably less in comparison to armies of European nations and especially the Soviet Red Army, where losses amounted to millions. As Tindall and Shi comment in their excellent history of the U.S., “The United States emerged from World War II the dominant military and economic power on the world stage. Americans had a monopoly over the atomic bomb and enjoyed a commanding position in the international trade.”<sup>1</sup> To better illustrate the wealth of the country in the post-war years, let us also include an excerpt from Paul Johnson’s *A History of the American People*:

In the second half of the 1940s the United States had a productive preponderance over the rest of the world never before attained by any one power, and most unlikely to be experienced ever again. With only 7 percent of the world’s population, it had 42 percent of its income and half its manufacturing capacity. It produced 57.5 percent of the world’s steel, 43.5 percent of its electricity, 62 percent of its oil, 80 percent of its automobiles. It owned three-quarters of the world’s gold.<sup>2</sup>

Not having to rebuild its country and economy, the United States were fortunate to have a considerable head start in building a modern country with prosperous economy.

## **2.2 The Cold War**

After the Japanese were defeated with the atom bomb, the people in United States were reassured that theirs was the most powerful nation on the planet. Government spending during the war helped the economy to recover from the long-lasting depression of the 1930s and started the momentum of post-war economic boom. Jobs that were desperately needed during the depression years following the Wall Street

---

<sup>1</sup> George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) 948.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of The American People* (London: Phoenix Press, 1997) 827.

Crash of 1929 were in abundance as the economy took off. Post-war America was the wealthiest country on the planet: “By 1955 the United States, with only 6 percent of the world’s population, was producing well over half of the world’s goods.”<sup>3</sup> However, the euphoria from victory and the peace of mind it brought afterwards did not last long. In 1949, American intelligence found out that America was no longer the only country in possession of a nuclear weapon. Soviets have developed and successfully tested their own atomic device, thus marking the beginning of the so-called Cold War.<sup>4</sup> After the World War II ended, the United States and Soviet Union stood no longer on the same ground as when there was the need to fight Hitler’s armies. Very quickly it became clear that Soviet Union was America’s new opponent. The realization that there was a nuclear threat outside the United States triggered anxiety and paranoia among the population. It lasted decades, with fears of nuclear attack most prominent in the 1950s and 1960s. In the nuclear age America had to redefine itself against the Soviet Union. People were living in constant fear of the bomb and paranoia was further spread by civil defence films, which showed possible fallout scenarios and ways how to hide oneself in case of an emergency. As Charles Sellers et al. suggests in *A Synopsis of American History*, “[It] is not surprising that the American people, most of whom remembered years of apparent security, were very deeply disturbed.”<sup>5</sup> There was a need to redefine the values of the society and this was done partly by emphasizing the material wealth of the nation and also by stressing the importance of religion. In 1956, under the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower the motto ‘In God we trust’ was adopted to emphasize the absence of God in the Soviet Union. God was on America’s side. The public was reassured that

---

<sup>3</sup> George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) 948.

<sup>4</sup> Tindall and Shi, 971.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Sellers, Henry May and Neil R. McMillen, *A Synopsis of American History* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1974) 408.

America as a country had the moral and spiritual advantage as opposed to the Soviet Union where people were perceived as godless materialists.

The Cold War greatly conventionalized postwar America, it “had a major impact on the American society: among other things, it helped to create the ‘conforming culture.’”<sup>6</sup> Sameness of social conventions and fashion and the imposing repetition of the newly-built suburban housing schemes also played a major role in creating the ‘everyman.’ Anxiety and fear caused by the threat of nuclear attack “initially played a key role in encouraging orthodoxy, but suburban life itself encouraged uniformity.”<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3 Criticisms

Not everyone embraced the post-war atmosphere with enthusiasm. Intellectuals and artists were quick to recognize that there was a dark side to the widespread optimism of post-war years.<sup>8</sup> Material prosperity in the form of the newest technologies provided by the war research tried to keep off people’s minds the thought that every second of every day there is a possibility of a nuclear attack. It was easier not to analyse the problems posed by the Cold War and to distract oneself by conforming to the model patterns of life spread by television shows and advertisements. Suburban sprawl supported an ideal that had to apply to anyone who did not wish to be cast out and thus miss out on the ‘many great things’ the newly emergent consumer culture had to offer. The situation was further aggravated by the anti-communist ‘witch hunts’ of Senator Joseph McCarthy that spread paranoia even further and generated mistrust of individuals who did not adjust to the rest of the society.

---

<sup>6</sup> George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) 979.

<sup>7</sup> Tindall and Shi, 991.

<sup>8</sup> Tindall and Shi, 995.

While most of the population went with the current of mainstream and tried to live their American dream to the fullest, following the newest fashions and buying the latest automobile models; there were still problems in certain parts of the country :

It is true that in the United States the distribution of wealth was uneven. In 1947, one-third of American homes still had no running water and two-fifths no flush lavatories. This was largely a rural problem: in 1945, 17.5 percent of the population, or 24.4 million, still lived on the soil and farmed. They had cars and they ate well but many lacked amenities, let alone entertainment [...].<sup>9</sup>

Poverty in the rural and inner city areas, widespread racism and intolerance of minorities were the most important issues that needed to be dealt with :

[When] one looked into the pockets of poverty that lay beneath the rich surface, one found many people who did not share in the new well-being. Among these were small farmers, technologically displaced workers, the old, the mentally deficient, and, despite all advances, most Negroes.<sup>10</sup>

The majority of population took no notice.<sup>11</sup> After the war had ended, “[...] more than 5 million southern blacks, mostly farm folk, left their native region in search of better jobs, higher wages, decent housing, and greater social equality.”<sup>12</sup> The situation of African Americans was worsened further by the fact that white neighbourhoods supported segregation – when a black family moved in, it was often the case that it was soon driven out by white population. When a greater group of blacks moved in, the remaining white population moved out. Most often the blacks were denied accommodation or had to pay high rents for their apartments. As Tindall and Shi explain, “Slumlords gouged [blacks] for rent, employers refused to hire them, and union bosses denied them membership. Soon the promised land had become an ugly

---

<sup>9</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of The American People* (London: Phoenix Press, 1997) 827.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Sellers, Henry May and Neil R. McMillen, *A Synopsis of American History* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1974) 403.

<sup>11</sup> George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) 986.

<sup>12</sup> Tindall and Shi, 989.

nightmare of slum housing, joblessness, illiteracy, dysfunctional families, welfare dependency, street gangs, pervasive crime, and racism.”<sup>13</sup> Part of the population was aware of this problem and tried to address it. This group of people outside the mainstream includes Jerry in the *Zoo Story*, who mentions his accommodation and the kind of people living in the house he lives in. “In the 1950s, however, white middle-class America mostly ignored people and cultures outside the mainstream.”<sup>14</sup> As the 1950s progressed, the mood in the society slowly changed and the American dream had to give ground to more important issues such as racial inequality, women’s movements and the spreading influence of the counterculture movements. While Arthur Miller’s plays of the 1940s were attacked for questioning the American dream which was seen as a part of the national culture, by the end of the 1950s the response to Albee’s plays was much different – the American dream was overshadowed by other issues, political and social.

Ironically, while America of the 1950s and 1960s considered communists in the Eastern Bloc as being godless materialists, the western world supported and indulged in materialist culture of consumerism itself, for it was vital to keep shopping in order to sustain the growth of economy. However, embracing the new technology as a means for ‘better living’ did not provide a solution to social problems. One of these problems was the issue of middle-class life in the suburbs. “Like the 1920s, the 1940s and 1950s added large numbers of citizens to the complacent, suburban, moderately conservative ranks of middle class.”<sup>15</sup> The monotony of suburban life induced boredom in housewives who had to care for the home and raise children; husbands were likewise turned spiritless from the daily commute and from the corporate culture

---

<sup>13</sup> Tindall and Shi, 990.

<sup>14</sup> Tindall and Shi, 991.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Sellers, Henry May and Neil R. McMillen, *A Synopsis of American History* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1974) 418.

that demanded 'personality' for success. Social psychologist David Riesman argues that individuals were pressured by companies to turn into likeable extroverts: "In the huge, hierarchical corporations that abounded in postwar America, employees who could win friends and influence people thrived; rugged individualists indifferent to personal popularity did not."<sup>16</sup> Self-help publications flourished as each of them promised instant success with programmes that offered intensive counselling for successful business life and personal development. The well-known self-help personality names included Dale Carnegie, Earl Nightingale and Napoleon Hill. There were even publications for parents, instructing on how to raise their children to be successful and popular among their peers. One such book, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* by Dr. Benjamin Spock, appeared in 1946. Dr. Spock insisted "that parents should foster in their children qualities and skills that would enhance their chances" in the so-called 'popularity market.'<sup>17</sup> Thus the American dream seemed to be within the reach of everyone in post-war America. The reality, however, was quite different. The plays of Arthur Miller attest this - they are concerned with the question of success and personal popularity. The play *Death of a Salesman* demonstrates the effect of the cult of personality and it criticizes the pursuit of a vaguely defined status of an individual – the desire to be a part of the American Dream, the desire to be 'successful'. Willy Loman seeks approval of his peers and of the society, losing track of who he is and what he wants in the process.

The conformist culture would eventually slowly disappear as its critics were proved right by the rising numbers of anti-depressants sold and the increase of psychiatrist visits. The problems which were overlooked in the 1950s would eventually surface through the protests and counter-culture movements of the 1960s.

---

<sup>16</sup> George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) 996.

<sup>17</sup> Tindall and Shi, 997.

The relative peace of the 1950s was replaced by unrest and violence of the 1960s. The values coveted by post-war America were found to be corrupt and they were disposed with. The young generation did not want to become the “restless, tormented, impotent individuals who are unable to fasten on a satisfying self-image and therefore can find neither contentment nor respect in an overpowering or impersonal world.”<sup>18</sup> This attitude is well exemplified by the work of Edward Albee, who was highly sceptical of the optimism of the 1950s which spoke of a bright future and technological progress towards a better life. His plays are an attack on the conformist culture – the types presented in Albee’s plays are portrayed as incompetent and impotent, lacking humanity and direction in their lives.

---

<sup>18</sup> Tindall and Shi, 998.

## Chapter 3 – The Ideal (The American dream)

### 3.1 “I want to build something I can give myself to”

*All My Sons* was Arthur Miller’s first major and successful play. In connection to the events described in the previous chapter, it owed a deal of its success to the very fresh memory of the greatest war that humanity ever waged. Many people had a war story in their family and the play touched directly upon their war losses and traumas. After a series of failed attempts to produce a capable play the impulse for *All My Sons* came from Miller’s mother-in-law.<sup>1</sup> From her Miller heard the story of a girl in Ohio who reported her own father after she found out that he was involved in war profiteering by knowingly selling defective parts to the army.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, Miller developed the story into a play which deals with the American dream through responsibility and issues of morality. The play centers around the Keller family: Joe Keller, father; Kate Keller, mother; and Chris Keller, their son. The Kellers had one more son, Larry, but he went missing in action in the war three years before the events of the play take place. *All My Sons* opens with Ann Deever, Larry’s former girlfriend who is now Chris’ girlfriend, coming to visit the Kellers to announce that she and Chris are in love and that they want to get married. During the course of the play it is revealed that Joe Keller was accused of war profiteering during the war and subsequently exonerated. He sold defective parts to the army, causing the deaths of twenty-one pilots. The situation becomes complicated when George Deever - Ann’s brother – arrives to take Ann away from the Kellers, saying that Joe Keller is guilty of his crime and responsible for the upheaval in the Deever family and that Chris is a hypocrite

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Gottfried, *Arthur Miller: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003) 70.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 17.

for wanting to marry a girl whose father his dad sent to jail. Steve Deever, Ann's and George's father, was in business with Keller and he was also accused of the faulty shipment; however - in contrast to Joe Keller - he is found guilty and is imprisoned. The conflict is resolved when Joe Keller confesses to his crime and subsequently shoots himself after finding out that his son Larry killed himself upon learning of what Joe had done with the parts.

The play revolves around three conflicts of different worldviews and ideals among the central characters in the play. The main conflict is between Chris Keller and his father Joe. Both of them have a plan of what they want to achieve in their life; nevertheless, each of them believes in a different version of the American dream. Chris is an idealist and a person who is convinced that one should seek happiness and spiritual fulfilment in the activities that are meaningful to him – it is Chris's line which is used as the title of this section, indicating the dichotomy between Chris and his father Joe. Chris was born into an abundance provided by his father, who runs a successful business operation manufacturing appliances. Joe Keller, on the other hand, had to start empty-handed and worked from an early age to gradually build the wealth he could pass on to his sons. The difference between father and son is apparent already in Act One; the conversation about Chris' future perfectly illustrates the clash of their different worldviews:

CHRIS: I'll get out. I'll get married and live some place else. Maybe in New York.

KELLER: Are you crazy?

CHRIS: I've been a good son too long, a good sucker. I'm through with it.

KELLER: You've got a business here, what the hell is this?

CHRIS: The business! The business doesn't inspire me.

KELLER: Must you be inspired?

CHRIS: Yes. I like it an hour a day. If I have to grub for money all day long at least at evening I want it beautiful. I want a family, I want some kids, I want to

build something I can give myself to. Annie is in the middle of that. Now... where do I find it? <sup>3</sup>

The idea to build something is shared both by Chris and Joe. However, Joe has already built something – ‘the business’ – which is meant to be inherited by Chris, as he is the remaining son after Larry went missing in action during the war. Therefore, when Chris speaks of moving elsewhere, his father’s years of effort concentrated on creating something intended for Chris are in jeopardy. Joe Keller’s version of American dream was to provide for and secure his family materially – ensure that they have a decent house to live in and that they can afford middle-class life with all its comforts - even a maid. All this he has achieved, only to see his lifetime accomplishment starting to fall apart. Larry is dead and Chris refuses to live out the future his father planned for him. Joe Keller’s materialistic outlook is revealed at several places in the play – at one instance he mentions working forty years and getting a maid in relation to taking out the garbage.<sup>4</sup> His ideal is centred on being able to afford things and all his efforts are therefore subordinated to this goal. On the other hand, Chris did not live through the insecurities his father had to endure, therefore he takes his inherited wealth for granted and can live out his life according to his own ideal.

Chris’ idealism comes to clash with another of the ‘adults’ in the play – Sue Bayliss, who is Kellers’ neighbour. The belief that one should realize one’s potential to the full according to what one feels is best for him - as opposed to what is necessary and practical - is the reason Sue confronts Ann about Chris and “that phony idealism of his,”<sup>5</sup> describing the decayed morality of the Keller family for the first

---

<sup>3</sup> Miller, 69.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, 70.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, 94.

time in the play - in Act Two. Sue's religious terminology implies she could have an understanding for Chris, although her convictions about family life show the opposite:

SUE, *with growing feeling*: Chris makes people want to be better than it's possible to be. He does that to people.

ANN: Is that bad?

SUE: My husband has a family, dear. Every time he has a session with Chris he feels as though he's compromising by not giving up everything for research. As though Chris or anybody else isn't compromising. [...] <sup>6</sup>

Sue does not share the idealistic worldview of either her husband Jim Bayliss or Chris. For her, the one priority in life is to ensure the security of her family and that involves a steady income from her husband; not his going off in search of fulfilment according to what he desires to do. She once had to live through what she considers her husband's idealistic escapade and for Sue, the noble idea of doing medical research for the benefit of humanity does not mean anything; she only sees the need of her family to survive and therefore she tries to see her situation as a realist – practically. Another problem for Sue is that the Kellers are respected in the neighbourhood although no one truly believes that Joe Keller did not commit the crime - shipping defective parts to the army. This fact further worsens the relationship Chris has with Sue's husband, Jim Bayliss. He is seen as a hypocrite by Sue; she accuses him of taking the 'bloody' money from his father's factory and perpetuating the lie that Joe Keller is innocent.

Sue's conflict with Chris is an indirect one and never openly admitted; he only learns about it from Ann, for whom Chris is an authority and whom she loves and respects. Hence it is also a conflict between Sue and Ann, because Ann shares Chris' ideals and the version of the American dream where one goes to achieve what makes him complete as a person. Conversely, Sue believes the other version of the American

---

<sup>6</sup> Miller, 93.

dream, the same American dream as Joe Keller believes – that one should devote his life to provide for his family. The significance of Sue’s confession to Ann is of importance mainly because of Chris’ moral integrity. If Chris knew about his father being guilty, it would mean that Ann’s moral integrity would be also endangered; for she has, together with her brother George, forsaken her father. The idealism of both Chris and Ann would come out as a delusion. The importance of Chris’ not knowing of his father’s guilt is important also because George talked to his father Steve, who also became an idealist. In prison he recognized his failure to intercept the faulty shipment and he also became fully aware of the monstrosity of his action. Steve Deever went after the profit because it did not matter to Joe Keller whether the parts kill anyone or not. Steve eventually realized that money and the reputation of a business should never even be thought about within the context of lives of fellow countrymen involved in the war. One cannot afford to be realistic about war when lives are lost.

The final conflict concerns Kate Keller and Chris. Despite the fact that her son Larry has been missing for three years, she refuses to believe that he is dead. This makes life complicated for Chris, as he is in love with Ann - who was previously girlfriend to Larry. Kate’s dream of her son returning home after a long time needs to be sustained because she knows that Joe is guilty. It is unacceptable for her to think that Joe’s failure to scrap faulty parts has had a direct result on the fate of her son. It is Kate who eventually divulges to Chris what Joe did. The belief that Larry is still alive was an excuse for living with Joe’s guilt:

MOTHER: I’ll never let him go and you’ll never let him go!

CHRIS: I’ve let him go. I’ve let him go a long –

MOTHER: *with no less force, but turning from him:* Then let your father go. *Pause. Chris stands transfixed.*<sup>7</sup>

This revelation is the key to Kate's problem with Ann marrying Chris. The fact that Ann is Larry's girl is not as important as the fact that Larry has to come back to confirm that his father is not guilty. Kate is in full support of Joe, even though she knows the truth about the defective parts. She is not an idealist; she did not oppose her husband's efforts to tend to his business at all costs. Kate's conflict with Ann is finally resolved by the letter from Larry that confirms Kate's suspicion of Joe killing Larry, indirectly. Joe's inaction is the cause of Larry's death; not by the faulty parts in Larry's plane – rather by his inability to carry the name of a man who killed twenty-one men in the name of personal gain. After learning that he has essentially killed his own son, Joe Keller's dream of a middle-class idyll is ended. Thus Miller shows the immorality of Keller's selfishness – he also shows that the American dream is not worth the deaths of those pilots he killed.

### **3.2 “Someday I’ll have my own business”**

Arthur Miller's second play *Death of a Salesman* is also concerned with a family setting as *All My Sons*, although in a slightly different configuration. It is a move away from the guilt of war and towards corporate America and the culture of personality outlined in Chapter 2. The central figure of the play, Willy Loman, is a salesman who dreams of prosperous life for his family – for his wife Linda and his two sons Biff and Happy. As the play begins, Willy is shown struggling with the memories of his past. His son Biff has recently returned home after being thrown out by Willy some years before. It turns out that Willy always wanted Biff to be

---

<sup>7</sup> Miller, 113-114.

successful in life and he tried to accomplish this by making Biff into a personally attractive extrovert and thus guaranteeing his prosperity. As Willy's sons grew up, he taught them everything he knew about success and how to attain it. The problem with Willy is that what he knows about success is only a superficial set of values that are vaguely defined and do not provide a guide to becoming a complete person. Willy lives in the belief that personal attractiveness alone can bring prosperity to one's life. Biff eventually finds out that throughout all of his life he has been trying to make his father's bogus ideals about superficial personal attractiveness come true. He confesses this reality to Willy, who does not want to accept that his son is an ordinary worker – that Biff does not possess the 'greatness' Willy always hoped for him to have. Learning that Biff has forgiven Willy for his blind faith in him, Willy commits suicide to ensure Biff is secured with the insurance money. The play was enormously successful; it "[ran] for 742 performances, won the Antoinette Perry Award, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize," as Christopher Bigsby points out. It is widely considered to be one of the best American plays ever written.<sup>8</sup>

9

The central theme in the *Death of a Salesman* is Willy Loman's belief in the power of personal attractiveness. It is also a hope for a better tomorrow – a better future for his sons, which is embodied by the title of this section. Willy hopes for his own business and freedom from being subordinated to someone else. Yet his problem is not being subordinated to a power structure, rather it is his own belief system he is a prisoner of. To be 'well-liked' means to be successful. Willy's ideal does not see beyond the notion of success and that is what makes it ring hollow, as Bamber Gascoigne explains in his book *Twentieth Century Drama*:

---

<sup>8</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 186.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Gottfried, *Arthur Miller: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003) 149.

The whole life of the Loman family is dominated by this man's idea of 'success,' which he sees as a ladder leading from a brilliant athletic career at school to a good job and life surrounded by scores of influential friends and admiring neighbours. He is mesmerized by two romantic images of this success: one of his brother Ben, who walked into the jungle at seventeen and walked out again, rich, at twenty-one; and the other of an eighty-year old salesman who was still so popular that in any of thirty cities he could just pick up the phone and wait comfortably in his hotel room for the buyers to come to him.<sup>10</sup>

Willy's ideal is fuelled by these two images; his dead brother is not really the perpetrator of the myth of success – he is rather a reflection of Willy's mind; as he provides the advice Willy wants to hear. The second image of success is Dave Singleman - a salesman who built his career only on being a likeable person. This is what Willy tries to instill into his sons – to be liked by others. This notion of success through personal attractiveness very likely stems from the various self-help books that started appearing at the beginning of the twentieth century, as pointed out in Chapter 2. One of the authors of such books was Dale Carnegie, as Henry Popkin comments: “[Willy believes], with Dale Carnegie, that success is the reward of making friends and influencing people – being impressive, persuasive, being well liked. One becomes successful by being confident, by thinking of success, and therefore success is all Willy knows, all he believes.”<sup>11</sup> These two images, or ideals, to which Willy aspires, provide him with the vision in his mind with which he brings up his two sons so that they arrive into maturity “rugged, well-liked, all-around.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast to this, Willy senses that his life and the lives of his sons, especially Biff, did not turn out quite to his expectations. While reminiscing, he asks Ben directly about the nature of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Bamber Gascoigne, *Twentieth-Century Drama* (London: Hutchinson, 1967) 176.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Popkin, “Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter,” *American Drama and its Critics: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alan S. Downer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 233.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 157.

success that always seemed to elude him: “What’s the answer? How did you do it?”<sup>13</sup> It is the simplistic approach and the apparent foolishness (to which Willy himself confesses) of the assumption that there is a single correct answer to one’s success in life, whether it is personal or financial success. Ben epitomizes the latter, while Dave Singleman, the eighty-year old salesman, symbolizes the former kind of success – being well-liked despite being old and incapable of delivering the goods himself. This fact is in stark contrast with Willy’s standing as a salesman - he is at the end of his strength and he says so right at the beginning of the play, just after he climbs out of his car. Compared to the legendary Dave Singleman, Willy is only sixty years old and yet he cannot sell anymore. The realization that something in his life has failed him does not bring Willy any consolation either; he cannot find the answer to the question ‘Where did I go wrong?’ The recurring image in the play is Willy’s reminiscence and his coming to terms with his past life, which, it seems, he wasted away by chasing an elusive ideal that proved to be false – for him. Willy had chosen the wrong values early in his life and worshipped them too eagerly<sup>14</sup> to turn back and change all that had been stained by his belief in the infallibility of the success scheme. In his 1960 essay *Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter*, Henry Popkin writes that

The various formulations of the idea of success, whether created by Horatio Alger or Herbert Spencer or Dale Carnegie, have contributed to the state of mind that makes failure a crime. Success is a requirement that Americans make of life. Because it seems magical and inexplicable, as it is to Willy, it can be considered the due of every citizen, even those with no notable or measurable talents. One citizen is as good as any other, and he cannot be proved to be a natural-born failure any more than he can be stripped of his civil rights.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Miller, 156.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Popkin, “Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter,” *American Drama and its Critics: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alan S. Downer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 223.

<sup>15</sup> Popkin, 233.

Willy believed that if Ben was able to get rich quick, his sons could too. He also tried to sustain the dream of becoming Dave Singleman; to be a well-known and respected salesman in many cities. His realization that he is not a successful salesman came too late. Throughout the play there are references to manual work Willy had done around the house, especially when Charley comes to play cards with him:

WILLY: Did you see the ceiling I put up in the living-room?

CHARLEY: Yeah, that's a piece of work. To put up a ceiling is a mystery to me. How do you do it?

WILLY: What's the difference?

CHARLEY: Well, talk about it.

WILLY: You gonna put up a ceiling?

CHARLEY: How could I put up a ceiling?

WILLY: Then what the hell are you bothering me for?

CHARLEY: You're insulted again.

WILLY: A man who can't handle tools is not a man. You're disgusting.

CHARLEY: Don't call me disgusting, Willy.<sup>16</sup>

The solution to Willy's problem is not being held back by Ben or Dave Singleman – the answer is in his home - in the form of his new ceiling and a front stoop and other things he made on his own. The most accurate explanation of Willy's mistaken life objectives appeared in 1949, in *The New York World Telegram*:

The failure of a great potential could never be so moving or so universally understandable as is the fate of Willy Loman, because his complete happiness could have been so easy to attain. He is an artisan who glories in manual effort and can be proud of the sturdy fine things he puts together out of wood and cement.<sup>17</sup>

Willy suffers because he does not realize that what he is trying to achieve is not at all something he would be happy with, as it does not make him satisfied. Being an extroverted salesman is a very demanding job for someone who has a talent for

---

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 154.

<sup>17</sup> W. John Campbell, *Death of a Salesman: Notes* (Toronto: Coles, 1983) 76.

patient, manual work. Willy Loman “brings tragedy down on himself, not by opposing the lie, but by living by it;”<sup>18</sup> and thus becomes exhausted in the process of trying to be what he really does not want to be, even though he never admits it openly. Willy’s dream is amiss; he has no connection to what he is doing. He only follows an ideal he acquired without questioning its validity in relation to his skills and therefore is alienated from his work: “To possess himself fully, a man must have an intimate connection with that which he deals as well as with the person he deals with. When the connection is no more than an exchange of commodities, the man himself ceases to be a man, becomes a commodity himself, a spiritual cipher.”<sup>19</sup> This is exactly what happened to Willy – as a salesman he is spent. Like a product that wears out, Willy is finally worn out and cannot sell himself any further, “[he] assumed a character other than his true one. He sacrificed himself to the great gods, Popularity and Success. What the salesman was attempting to sell, it would seem, was himself.”<sup>20</sup>

Willy Loman’s mistakes are reflected in his sons Biff and Happy. Biff, Willy’s favourite, had always had all his attention while Happy strived to get recognition from his father. As the sons grow older, Biff finds out about the falsity of Willy’s values and his inability to become what Willy wanted of him; and he tries to explain this situation to Willy. Biff is unable to employ himself properly; he goes from state to state doing menial jobs and stealing things. The accusation, or revelation, is harsh:

BIFF: Pop, I’m a dime a dozen, and so are you!

WILLY, *turning on him now in an uncontrollable outburst*: I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

*Biff starts for Willy, but is blocked by Happy. In his fury, Biff seems on the verge of attacking his father.*

BIFF: I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest

---

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966) 104.

<sup>19</sup> W. John Campbell, *Death of a Salesman: Notes* (Toronto: Coles, 1983) 79.

<sup>20</sup> Campbell, 54.

of them! I'm one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn't raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!

WILLY, *directly to Biff*: You vengeful, spiteful mut!<sup>21</sup>

Biff's outburst shows that unlike Willy, he has matured and saw through the lies that have been told in their household all the time; he has woken up from the dream Willy has been dreaming all his life. For Willy, Biff's confession is unacceptable. If he were to accept what Biff is trying to communicate, it would mean that Willy has lived his life in vain. It would mean a personal failure of such an extent Willy simply cannot admit. All his life he struggled to affirm himself in the light of his brother Ben, who patronized him – "BEN, *chuckling*: So this is Brooklyn, eh?"<sup>22</sup> - and addressed him 'William,' implying the distance he kept from his unsuccessful younger brother. The above exchange between Biff and Willy shows another aspect of Willy's effort to be well-liked, as Bamber Gascoigne concludes in *Twentieth-Century Drama*, "The respect which Miller's heroes long for is not so much their own as society's. Give me my 'name,' they all insist. The individuality they crave must be endorsed by their neighbours."<sup>23</sup> Willy naturally refuses to accept that he is nobody after he had believed in the ecstasy of success all his life. He desires to be respected and accepted, not only by his neighbour Ben, but by everyone; this is also the reason why Willy refuses Charley's offer – if he accepted the job Charley offered him it would hurt his pride; he would have to admit defeat.

Opposed to Biff, the other son Happy is a reflection of Willy's ideals. Biff being his father's favourite, Happy always strived to live by his father's ideals in hope that Willy would shift his attention to him; he shared his "desire to be 'well-liked,' his

---

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 217.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, 155.

<sup>23</sup> Bamber Gascoigne, *Twentieth-Century Drama* (London: Hutchinson, 1967) 176.

effort to go through life on a smile and a shoeshine.”<sup>24</sup> Even though he is living by Willy’s philosophy, Happy senses that something is wrong with his life:

HAPPY: [...] 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, goddamit, I’m lonely.<sup>25</sup>

Although he does not realize it, Happy has essentially identified what is at the core of Willy’s and his problems in their lives. They pursue a vision of life that is not life itself, but only an image of it; it is a surface, there is no content underneath. Although Happy has a job, an apartment, a car and all the female company he wants, he still lacks something which even he cannot define, for his father only taught him the vocabulary of commerce – “Willy’s language reflects his resoluteness in the pursuit of success. It is devoid of words for anything but the necessities of life and the ingredients of symbols of success [...],” remarks Henry Popkin and goes on to conclude that “[it] is the only play I know that could stock a mail-order catalog.”<sup>26</sup> Although Miller did not state explicitly that *Death of a Salesman* is a critique of the American dream, it does show that something in this model of an ideal life is corrupt – this dream is not for everybody to dream. The play was seen as an attack on something that was considered a privilege by many Americans when *Death of a Salesman* was premiered. To be born in the United States and live the American dream was believed to be the heaven on Earth – a suburban idyll with a car in the driveway, a TV-set and a refrigerator in every house.

---

<sup>24</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, “Arthur Miller: The Moral Imperative,” *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 88.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 139.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Popkin, “Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter,” *American Drama and its Critics: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alan S. Downer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 234.

### 3.3 “And the cats are setting the table”

Opposed to Miller’s plays, Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story* is quite different from *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* – yet it shares certain aspects of the critique of the American dream that also appear in Miller’s work. Contrary to the suburban family setting of Miller’s plays, *The Zoo Story* takes place in New York’s Central Park. In contrast to Miller’s plays the stage design for this play is minimalistic – there are only two benches and a background of park foliage and the sky. The play begins with a middle-aged man, Peter, sitting on one of the benches, reading a book. He is approached by a slightly younger man, Jerry, who starts a conversation, much to Peter’s discomfort. Jerry gradually tells Peter about his life and the unusual experiences he had in the past. The tension between the two characters grows after Jerry touches Peter – he starts out by tickling him, gradually becoming more aggressive. As the situation escalates, Jerry pushes Peter off the bench and challenges him to a duel, throwing a knife at his feet. The play reaches its climax when Peter picks up the knife and holds it against Jerry, who runs toward Peter and impales himself on the knife. Jerry collapses on the bench and dies, while Peter runs away in a shock.

Although the setting is limited and there are only two characters, the dialogue provides sufficient material for comparison with aspects of Miller’s work. In *The Zoo Story*, the American dream is represented by Peter, the middle-class conformist, who leads a safe existence without suffering too many intrusions his life until he meets Jerry. Unlike Miller’s characters who are individuals, Albee presents types or stereotypes – representatives of a class. Peter’s standing in life is well summarised by Gerald Weales, who compares Peter’s life to the bench he is sitting on in the park:

Peter's bench is a kind of sanctuary, both a refuge from and an extension of the stereotypical upper-middle-class existence (tweeds, horn-rimmed glasses, job in publishing, well-furnished apartment, wife, daughter, cats, parakeets) with which Albee has provided him – a place where he can safely not-live and have his nonbeing.<sup>27</sup>

His appearance tells his class and background. As Jerry calls him, he is “a nice married man”<sup>28</sup> who is genuinely unbothered in his life; a man who, according to Christopher Bigsby, “has made too many final choices too soon.”<sup>29</sup> Peter, in a sense, is the embodiment of the American dream. Although he does not live in his own house in the suburbs, in every other way he complies to the middle-class image of a conformist – moderately successful, with a family and a property to call his own. ‘Not making waves’.

Jerry, on the other hand, is Peter's opposite. He is a non-conformist, he can never blend into the society as Peter does, he is a ‘wavemaker’ - an outcast. Jerry lives in a cramped room in an unsightly brownstone house in “upper West Side between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West.”<sup>30</sup> The accommodation is the opposite of what Peter imagines as suitable living conditions, although he does not provide the details of how the cats and parakeets he mentions live together. Everything Jerry tells Peter about genuinely bewilders him; the colored queen who always keeps his door open;<sup>31</sup> the “lady living on the third floor,” who “cries all the time.”<sup>32</sup> This is a radically new perspective for Peter, who never imagined that the world outside his safe zone could be as colourful and idiosyncratic as Jerry describes it. Peter is isolated

---

<sup>27</sup> Gerald Weales, “Edward Albee: Don't Make Waves,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 14.

<sup>28</sup> Lee Strasberg and Gordon Davidson, *Famous American Plays of the 1950s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988) 390.

<sup>29</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 257.

<sup>30</sup> Lee Strasberg and Gordon Davidson, *Famous American Plays of the 1950s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988) 393.

<sup>31</sup> Strasberg and Davidson, 393.

<sup>32</sup> Strasberg and Davidson, 397.

and safe from all these strange things Jerry describes. Jerry, on the other hand, is amid the dangerous world of outside; while Peter has his haven at home, Jerry is isolated in a society of conformists where he does not and cannot fit in. He is “an animal who fights separation from the other animals,” as Rose Zimbardo explains, “his isolation is forced upon him. But in large measure it grows out of his need for truth.”<sup>33</sup> Jerry’s life is very different from Peter’s and he does not believe in the validity of the American dream and its attainability by all. Through harsh childhood and turbulent adolescence, Jerry has learned that he is not like the majority of the society and the fact taught him to look upon the world around him differently. He seeks the truth about the conformity and the American dream because what is commonly believed to be the ‘right way to live’ proved to be unattainable for Jerry. George Wellwarth proposes that “Jerry is an outsider – rootless and aimless, he is the absolute antithesis of Peter. Nothing protects him and, consequently, he feels the full agony of knowing the world as it *really* is [...]”<sup>34</sup> The agony Wellwarth describes is an alien feeling or state of mind to Peter; for his life is secured by the myth of conformist values that sterilize his vision. The natural variation of the good and bad that exists in the society is not included in the ideal of American dream he is living, therefore he is naturally bewildered by Jerry’s world and he comments that for him it is “[...] unthinkable. [Peter finds] it hard to believe that people such as that really *are*.”<sup>35</sup> For Jerry, the reality of the world such as it is has always been there, as he is an exceptionally sensitive person; he possesses “[...] a sensitivity so unbridled that he eventually

---

<sup>33</sup> Rose A. Zimbardo, “Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story*,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 47.

<sup>34</sup> George E. Wellwarth, *The Theater of Protest and Paradox*, (New York: New York University Press, 1964) 277.

<sup>35</sup> Lee Strasberg and Gordon Davidson, *Famous American Plays of the 1950s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988) 398.

destroys himself,”<sup>36</sup> as claims Lee Baxandall. Having a troubled life, Jerry has always struggled and this he also shares with Peter in the park. Their meeting is the climax of Jerry’s life; he came to a conclusion when he realized the isolation most people live in through observing the animals in the zoo. Animals are separated from each other and from people and essentially everyone is separated from everybody else. Jerry grasped the nature of human condition and therefore his isolation; and he tries to communicate this to Peter. It is in the process of telling Peter when Jerry “[elaborates] a myth which he himself only seems to understand through the process of narration.”<sup>37</sup> Peter has to be awakened from his lethargy and this Jerry achieves through the story of his landlady and her dog and afterwards by tickling and physically attacking Peter. When tickled, Peter begins to communicate using Jerry’s language:

PETER [*as Jerry tickles*]. Oh, hee, hee, hee. I must go. I...hee, hee, hee. After all, stop, stop, hee, hee, hee, after all, the parakeets will be getting dinner ready soon. Hee, hee. And the cats are setting the table.

[...]

JERRY [*mysteriously*]. Peter, do you want to know what happened at the zoo?

PETER. Ah, ha, ha. The what? Oh, yes; the zoo. Oh, ho, ho. Well, I had my own zoo there for a moment with...hee, hee, the parakeets getting dinner ready, and the...ha,ha, whatever it was, the...<sup>38</sup>

This exchange shows as if Peter was beginning to gain consciousness of his world, joking about having his own home zoo with cats and parakeets; Rose Zimbardo maintains that “[the] pleasure-pain emotion has enabled Peter to see clearly for a brief moment the emptiness of his life, a life in which cats, children, wife, and parakeets are interchangeable because they are all merely props whose function is to disguise

---

<sup>36</sup> Lee Baxandall, “The Theater of Edward Albee,” *The Modern American Theater: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alvin B. Kernan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967) 84.

<sup>37</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 257.

<sup>38</sup> Lee Strasberg and Gordon Davidson, *Famous American Plays of the 1950s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988) 407-408.

nothingness and isolation.”<sup>39</sup> The title of this section derives from the fact that Peter really has little to come home to. He has to be awakened by Jerry who comes to teach him through the account of his life and the story of the dog; with the newly acquired consciousness of the outer world comes pain but also freedom:

What [Peter] has come to understand is that his isolation has merely served to grant him ‘solitary free passage’ through life, that the immunity from experience which he imagined to be a necessary protection was in fact a self-imposed imprisonment; that a life lived without pain is a life without consciousness.<sup>40</sup>

What Christopher Bigsby argues is that by living an isolated life well within his comfort zone, Peter is not aware of himself. He only gains consciousness of the real world when Jerry forces him to. The dream is ended, Peter’s American dream has to fade away to make room for the harsh reality of the world if he wants to regain consciousness and experience a wholesome life, not only the select few aspects of it that happen to fit into the idealized version of it. The connection between Peter and Jerry is that of an apprentice and master, as Ruby Cohn holds in his 1969 book *Edward Albee*; “With gesture and language, Jerry teaches Peter. The relationship of the two men is not simply conformist versus nonconformist, but student and teacher, illusionist and realist.”<sup>41</sup> The dispossession of Peter from his bench is the awakening from the dream; the brining about of the consciousness that is necessary to see the sterility and artificiality of the dream.

Through juxtaposition and subsequent comparison of Miler’s plays with Albee’s *The Zoo Story* one can see that they share a common theme of blindness – Peter’s blindness towards people like Jerry and his world is not very different from Joe

---

<sup>39</sup> Rose A. Zimbardo, “Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story*,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E.Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 49.

<sup>40</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, “Edward Albee: Journey to Apocalypse,” *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 131-132.

<sup>41</sup> Ruby Cohn, *Edward Albee* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969) 10.

Keller's inability to see the monstrosity of his actions. Also in *Death of a Salesman* Willy Loman cannot admit that he has lost his way and quite literally, he cannot see well anymore – all the accidents he had and the visions of Ben and hallucinations of the past demonstrate this only too well. Both Miller and Albee show that this shared ignorance is characteristic for anyone pursuing the American dream. The dream becomes invalid in these plays as the characters commit numerous transgressions against life, morality and dignity. The price for this kind of 'better life' – the American dream - comes in the form of sacrifice. In these three plays, as well as in Albee's *The American Dream* itself, all the main characters make a sacrifice – in case of *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* the sacrifice is quite literal; Joe Keller and Willy Loman kill themselves for the ideals they hold dear. Jerry also sacrifices himself, however, by the time of Albee's writing the critique of the American dream changes shape. Albee suggests the falsity of the dream; although unlike Miller, he does not provide an answer to what is wrong and what is the significance of Jerry's suicide. The distinctions between right and wrong that Miller presents in his plays through opposing characters are not present in Albee's work, yet in all of the plays the American dream is successfully portrayed invalid and superficial, as Albee's *The American Dream* goes to show.

### **3.4 “You look pretty complete to me”**

Unlike in *The Zoo Story* and similarly to Miller's plays, in *The American Dream* the action revolves around a family, albeit a dysfunctional one. All of the family members are presented as types, similarly to *The Zoo Story*: Mommy, Daddy and Grandma. The setting is typically domestic: a living room with a sofa, two chairs and a small table. The play opens in medias res with Mommy remarking that she and Daddy are waiting

for someone to come visit them. While waiting, Mommy passes time by telling Daddy about how she went to buy a new hat. After a while Grandma appears; she eventually joins the conversation that reveals further facts about the family. The guest Mommy and Daddy have been waiting for eventually arrives – it is Mrs. Barker. All of the characters in the play except Grandma appear to be extraordinarily impotent – neither the parents nor Mrs. Barker know why she has come to visit them. It is only when both Mommy and Daddy leave the stage and Grandma is left with Mrs. Barker alone that it is revealed that Mrs. Barker works for an adoption agency. Mommy and Daddy adopted a child some time before, but it died after Mommy expressed her dissatisfaction with the adoption. Meanwhile the Young Man arrives, nicknamed ‘The American Dream’ by Grandma. Grandma eventually devises a plan where the Young Man becomes the new adopted child Mommy and Daddy have always wanted and Grandma disappears, pretending to be taken away by a ‘van man’ – a fictitious character invented by Mommy to frighten Grandma into obedience. The play closes with Grandma, now out of the living room, breaking the fourth wall and remarking that the characters in the play should be left with what they had always wanted while they are happy.

Similarly to *The Zoo Story*, *The American Dream* attacks the myth of prosperous middle-class life, enjoyed through the acquisition of property that is supposed to make one content. In *The Zoo Story* it was Peter who represented the conformist idleness and acceptance of the values put forward by media and advertising; in *The American Dream* it is Mommy and Daddy who stand as caricatures of what is supposedly the desirable arrangement of the basic building unit of a healthy society. As Martin Esslin puts it in his remarkable book on absurd drama,

*The American Dream* [...] fairly and squarely attacks the ideals of progress, optimism, and faith in the national mission, and pours scorn on the sentimental ideas of family life, togetherness, and physical fitness; the euphemistic language and unwillingness to face the ultimate facts of human condition that in America, even more than in Europe, represent the essence of bourgeois assumptions and attitudes.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike in Miller's plays, everything about the family in the play is reversed – Mommy is the head of the household; she is the authority, as opposed to this role being traditionally held by the husband. As the ideal of the 1950s domestic life advocated, the wife was supposed to be the “tender of the hearth and guardian of the children.”<sup>43</sup> Mommy is anything but the two qualities – she is infantile and arrogant towards Daddy; she is unable to have children; and she disposed of the adopted child in a graphic way because it was not to her liking.

In contrast to Miller's plays where the father is the dominant figure, Daddy is weak and disabled; his lack of strength is accentuated by being constantly domineered by Mommy, who treats him as a child. Daddy is ‘gutless’ - to use a term in line with the language used to describe the mutilation of the child; he “has tubes, now, where he used to have tracts,”<sup>44</sup> meaning that he has no strength to stand up to Mommy - he is literally gutless - even though he would like to break away from Mommy's tyranny: “[...] perhaps I can go away myself.”<sup>45</sup> For Daddy, the domestic arrangement is a prison; as the society was to Jerry in *The Zoo Story*; he saw it as a “humiliating excuse for a jail.”<sup>46</sup> Daddy and Mommy are both impotent, sexually as well as mentally.

---

<sup>42</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Eyre & Spottiswode, 1962) 231.

<sup>43</sup> George B. Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) 992.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Albee, *The American Dream: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 2005) 20.

<sup>45</sup> Albee, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Lee Strasberg and Gordon Davidson, *Famous American Plays of the 1950s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988) 405.

The only one who has any substance as a human being is Grandma; who is Albee's mouthpiece. According to Albee, Grandma represents the true American dream, "the vigorous old frontier spirit" and it is also the closest Albee comes to identifying an alternative to the corrupt American dream portrayed by Mommy and Daddy and the Young Man. Grandma "resembles Jerry in her independence, but her age has made her crafty, and she has learned to roll with the punches."<sup>47</sup> As Mommy is her daughter, Grandma knows her all too well and openly disapproves of Mommy and Daddy. According to Grandma, Daddy doesn't have "any feelings, that's what's wrong with [him],"<sup>48</sup> and Mommy supposedly has all the wrong feelings. Another character who is made a caricature of the type she represents is Mrs. Barker. It is likely that after the performance of *The American Dream* the audience is going to remember Mrs. Barker's phrase "I don't mind if I do," which appears a total of six times and most brilliantly shows the superficial nature of middle-class manners and speech. The language in *The American Dream* is like the dream itself; it is an exterior – empty, without substance. Mrs. Barker is also openly arrogant and rude which directly contrasts with her apparent politeness: "My, what an unattractive apartment you have."<sup>49</sup> Throughout the play, the language plays an important part because it goes to demonstrate well the ineptness of the characters and their attempts at appearing respectful and dignified:

DADDY. It's a very interesting answer.

MRS BARKER. I thought so. But does it help?

MOMMY. No; I'm afraid not.

DADDY. I wonder if it might help us any if I said I feel misgivings, that I have definite qualms.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Ruby Cohn, *Edward Albee* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969) 11.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Albee, *The American Dream: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 2005) 8.

<sup>49</sup> Albee, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Albee, 15.

Mrs. Barker, too, is impotent. She has no idea as to why she came to see Mommy and Daddy, who are equally at a loss. After a failed attempt at a conversation Mommy and Daddy disappear and it is up to Grandma to clarify the situation to Mrs. Barker. After Grandma explains what happened years ago with the adopted child, the Young Man appears; he is the most direct indictment of the ideal of middle-class idyll.

The Young Man is like the language Mommy and Daddy use in addressing each other – empty, with no feelings. “As his twin brother was mutilated physically, the American Dream is mutilated emotionally.”<sup>51</sup> Having no means to relate to anyone or anything, he is unable to love or think with a conscience; he is only capable of working for money. The Young Man represents everything Albee sees as wrong with the society of the day, the decay and disfigurement of the original American dream that became the “simple acquisitiveness”<sup>52</sup> of the post-war years of economic boom. The title of this section is a line Grandma addresses to the Young Man after he discloses his situation – a metaphor for the superficiality of the ideal. The original American dream became an appearance-based materialism, which in many cases veiled the reality of the world with all its unpleasant things and situations as it is in *The Zoo Story* with Peter; and, as Gerald Weales observes in relation to Mommy, to her, reality is dangerous.<sup>53</sup> The bundle of joy Mommy hoped for when she adopted the child years ago did not turn out according to her expectations. The problem emerged when Mommy found that the reality is quite different from what she imagined as the ideal child; the situation being in line with what the American dream stands for and what the real life is like. As the child was gradually mutilated, its counterpart – the Young Man also lost the characteristics Mommy did not like; the imperfections that a

---

<sup>51</sup> Ruby Cohn, *Edward Albee* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969) 13.

<sup>52</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, “Edward Albee: Journey to Apocalypse,” *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 131.

<sup>53</sup> Gerald Weales, “Edward Albee: Don’t Make Waves,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 16.

human being has when born tend to adjust by age so that one grows up a complete person. As Mommy made sure that all the expressions that were human were destroyed, the twin Young Man ended up being an empty shell – he only appears to be complete; there remained nothing inside him to feel with. The Young Man stands in contrast to Grandma, who, according to Bigsby, represents the real values<sup>54</sup> which were displaced by a new version of the ideal. The real values are not gone; one only needs to see the false ones and reject them, as Grandma does. The new values are really negative, despite their self-proclaimed positive effect, as Wellwarth relates:

The “American Dream,” the principle of freedom and individuality for which the country was founded has, as any clear-thinking and courageous person cannot hesitate to admit, become thoroughly corrupted by precisely the things Albee is attacking in his play: by misplaced hero worship; by values based exclusively on the crassest commercialism; by flabby, unthinking complacency; and by brutal destruction of human emotions.<sup>55</sup>

Mommy and Daddy are unable to see the falsity of their lives, being both impotent and far from clear-thinking and courageous. The Young Man is the direct embodiment of the commercialism – he immediately offers himself ‘for sale’ when he declares he will do anything for money – “I do what I am paid to do. I don’t ask any questions.”<sup>56</sup> The Young Man is the capitalist who is concerned only with profit, for him there is no right or wrong; he doesn’t struggle with personal preferences for he has not any. He is a truly valueless man, doing anything for money, ‘no questions asked – satisfaction guaranteed.’ His inability to relate to anyone or anything makes him the perfect commodity because he is able to assimilate to the situation; he accepts

---

<sup>54</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 263.

<sup>55</sup> George E. Wellwarth, *The Theater of Protest and Paradox*, (New York: New York University Press, 1964) 279.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Albee, *The American Dream: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 2005) 36.

“the syntax around him”<sup>57</sup> Therefore it is easy for Mommy to accept him – she literally buys him; the perfect child she had always hoped for. When Grandma comments at the end of the play, it is in fact Albee himself speaking: “it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy keen;”<sup>58</sup> for Mommy and Daddy only think they have what they have always wanted. They believe in the fiction of their lives because they do not know what they want. The fiction is all they know due to their lack of clear thought. Similarly to the previous section, both Mommy and Daddy possess the blindness necessary to believe the American dream – their ignorance is a literal blindness when they cannot find things in their own apartment, not noticing that Grandma has been gradually moving out. As in Miller’s plays and as in *The Zoo Story*, there is human sacrifice in *The American Dream*. Even though it is a different kind of sacrifice than in these plays, it is nevertheless the price paid for the American dream. Once again the American dream is shown as invalid through Mommy’s actions – the price for the ideal is too high.

---

<sup>57</sup> Albee, 35.

<sup>58</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 262.

## Chapter 4 – The Family

### 4.1 “Nothing is bigger!”

In Miller’s plays the family plays a major role. As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, the family had an important role in post-war America. The ‘normal’ arrangement for domestic life was to be married with usually two or perhaps more children. Typically the American family resided in the suburbs, as the automobile had made it possible for towns and cities to spread out into large suburban sprawls. In *All My Sons* the family is the central unit around which the story is organized; characters often justify themselves and their actions with regard to the family. There are four families in *All My Sons*, the central one of which is the Keller family. To Joe Keller, his family is everything. The crime he has committed during the war was in the name of the family. To him, the business is important not in itself but to support his family and secure a future for his son Chris. Therefore it is incredible for Joe to hear his son talking about leaving his parents’ house and moving away:

CHRIS: I’ll get out. I’ll get married and live some place else. Maybe in New York.

KELLER: Are you crazy?<sup>1</sup>

It is an unacceptable situation for Joe, because all his life he has worked towards the one dream he had – that of a beautiful and prosperous family. To Joe, as his line borrowed for the title of this section implies, the family is all: “KELLER, *desperately, lost*: For you, Kate, for both of you, that’s all I ever lived for...”<sup>2</sup> However, both Joe’s and Kate’s ignorance only aggravated the effect of his actions, even though they

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 69.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, 121.

openly admit their ignorance several times during the course of the play. They stand in contrast to their sons Larry and Chris, who are idealists and are willing to sacrifice themselves for their ideas; as Larry is the proof of it. The belief in the moral imperative is strong enough to kill Larry and to convince Chris that it is necessary to put his own father to justice; even though the pilots Joe Keller killed cannot be brought back to life. Morris Freedman in his book on social drama summarizes the father-son relationship as a generation gap that is more like an abyss between different value systems:

[Keller's] own corruption has not extended to his family. The sons are extravagant idealists unlike their father, an uncomplicated materialist. One son kills himself on learning of his father's crime. The other has talked a life of such high-minded devotion to ideals that he becomes offensive to a neighbour [...]. The two boys are guilty of nothing, not even of being their father's sons. Keller's wife sustains the fantasy that her son is not dead, in order to continue supporting and loving her husband.<sup>3</sup>

Joe Keller does not have the capacity to see beyond family affairs like his sons do; a disaster is inevitable to happen sooner or later - in Keller's case years later. The parts have been shipped, the crime has been committed; the aftermath of Joe's action, or rather inaction comes down on his family harder than on the family he has destroyed – the Deevers. Joe has failed not only in respect to his family, but also as a human being, as Bamber Gascoigne suggests: “The enormity of Joe Keller's dishonesty is brought home to him most strongly by the disastrous effect it later has on his family life. It is above all his responsibility as a human being and as a father which he has betrayed.”<sup>4</sup> What Joe intended as a way not to jeopardize his business operation in order to continue supporting his family had in fact the opposite effect.

---

<sup>3</sup> Morris Freedman, *American Drama in Social Context* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971) 44.

<sup>4</sup> Bamber Gascoigne, *Twentieth-Century Drama* (London: Hutchinson, 1967) 50.

Joe Keller's ignorance put not only his family in jeopardy, but also the Deevers. Steven Deever was sentenced for negligence and jailed, his children had forsaken him and his wife almost left him. Joe's indifference in regard to sending Steve into prison goes to prove that to Keller, it is not the concept of family as a priority in one's life – it is *his own* family that is a priority in *his* life. Nothing else matters. The pursuit of Joe's dream of a perfect life does not take into account the consequences wrought on others. Christopher Bigsby insists that “[until] the final moment of his life he refuses to accept his responsibility to a wider community than that constituted by his own family, to ideals beyond the pragmatics of business.”<sup>5</sup> The dichotomy between realistic and idealistic view of life also echoes through the family theme of the play. The adults, or parents, are the realists – except Jim Bayliss, who sees both sides of the argument. Kate and Joe Keller, together with Sue Bayliss are concerned with pragmatics of life. Chris and Ann are idealists, as was Larry – they see the humanity in one's actions and the consequences they have on one's life. This is evident mainly in the conversation Sue has with Ann; she is asking Ann if she can do her a favour by moving away, because Sue will not let Chris' idealism 'destroy' her family:

SUE: [...] When you take up housekeeping, try to find a place away from here.

ANN: Are you fooling?

SUE: I'm very serious. My husband is unhappy with Chris around.<sup>6</sup>

Sue does not see the deeper meaning in Jim doing what he truly wants to do in his life, she is only concerned with taking care of the family – she shares Joe Keller's view that family comes first. This 'blindness' to the outer world causes Keller to react surprised while talking to Kate after his guilt was revealed to Chris: “KELLER: I'm askin' you. What am I a stranger? I thought I had a family here. What happened to my

---

<sup>5</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, “Arthur Miller: The Moral Imperative,” *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 78.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 93.

family?”<sup>7</sup> The idea that there is a larger framework of ideals and morals that every individual must answer to is an unacceptable one to Keller:

MOTHER: There's something bigger than the family to him.

KELLER: Nothin' is bigger!

MOTHER: There is to him.

KELLER: There's nothin' he could do that I wouldn't forgive. Because he's my son. Because I'm his father and he's my son.

MOTHER: Joe, I tell you –

KELLER: Nothin' is bigger than that. And you're goin' to tell him, you understand? I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!<sup>8</sup>

To Joe, his family is the ultimate excuse for his actions. The love he has for his son, however, cannot excuse the death of twenty-one sons of others, who died because Joe Keller in his selfishness was unable to see the consequences of his actions.

#### **4.2 “I don't know - what I'm supposed to want”**

In *Death of a Salesman*, there are two families in the focus of the play. Similarly to Miller's *All My Sons*, there is also a dichotomy in the *Death of a Salesman*; although of a different nature. The Loman family is not divided by the generation gap into realists and idealists - it is rather a division between Willy and his son Biff who realises that the values which Willy worships are false and not his own. While “[aware] of a profound sense of insufficiency,” the Loman men “seek to remedy or at least neutralise it in the public world of consumerism and status. For the most part they are blind to the consolation and even transcendence available through personal relationships.”<sup>9</sup> Due to the value system Willy follows, his family suffers

---

<sup>7</sup> Miller, 119.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, 120.

<sup>9</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 174.

considerably. Similarly to *All My Sons*, Willy has been trying to provide for his family all his life, to make “[...] a business, a business for the boys.”<sup>10</sup> As Willy himself was left on his own at an early age, he wants a better future for his sons. Influenced by the culture of success and popularity outlined in Chapter 2 and also having no true father figure, Willy fabricated an image in his mind; the ideal of a ‘success incarnate,’ modelled on his brother Ben and a popular salesman figure - Dave Singleman. His father neglected him and his older brother Ben never respected Willy; because of this he had to seek approval elsewhere. By succumbing to the vision of becoming a successful salesman, Willy thought he was on the right way to be respected by others. However, as he never had the respect of his father and brother, Willy does not know what it is like to be truly successful, therefore he is at a loss at identifying what exactly he must do. Lois Gordon in an essay on *Death of a Salesman* reveals that

Willy has searched for a father’s approval throughout his life, through living out his fantasy of what his father was and would have wanted. So, too, Willy’s sons are trapped by their father’s fantasy, even more hollow for them, and its fulfilment remains their means to gain his love.<sup>11</sup>

Willy cannot successfully communicate what he has never known himself; therefore he can only pass his fantasies on to his sons as a substitute for the real values he was supposed to learn from his father. Willy was never accepted by the people he admired nor was he content with himself as a person; and, accordingly, he cannot teach his two sons to be accepted and content themselves. Willy only knows what the successful businessman looks like, not what is the substance of becoming one. As he fails to build the business he dreams of, he has to rely on his sons to bring his dreams to fruition, according to Bigsby

---

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 150.

<sup>11</sup> Lois Gordon, “Death of a Salesman: An Appreciation,” *The Forties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*, ed. Warren French (DeLand: Everett/Edwards, 1969) 279.

Willy has lost the space which he needs for his dreams to assume any reality, for his identity to resist the impress of a public world which recognises only role. Forced at moments to concede his own failure, his own inability to mould himself into an acceptable form, he has to fall back on his sons to fulfil the dreams which he himself has failed to realise.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly to Joe Keller, Willy puts all his hopes into his sons. He wants them to be successful in life, only he cannot provide them with advice that would be more than a recommendation of how to achieve the 'success look.' Happy himself admits that he has done everything his father taught him, and yet he cannot find comfort in his life: "I don't know what the hell I'm working for."<sup>13</sup> He does not know what he is supposed to want, as the title of this section suggests; perhaps the problem is not what the Loman men are supposed to want, but how are they to look upon themselves and subsequently choose what they want to do with their lives. Happy's brother Biff is also disconcerted – he has spent most of his life travelling around the country, trying different jobs with no success of improving his pay. He comes to realize that what his father had taught him is a false belief in his own greatness, a quality that neither he nor his brother ever possessed. He also realized that by not telling them the truth, Willy has been bringing them up to believe in a false picture of themselves. In a conversation with Happy, Biff's frustration is voiced clearly: "BIFF: I'll tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is. I don't know – what I'm supposed to want."<sup>14</sup> Willy's sons do not know how their lives ought to look like, for Willy himself never had any instruction. He did not have the family assurance and now he cannot pass it to his sons, for he never knew what it looked or felt like. Bigsby confirms that, "[Willy] has communicated his values only too completely to his sons whose lives have

---

<sup>12</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 184.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 139.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 138.

accordingly been warped and whose own identities have been threatened.”<sup>15</sup> Biff and Happy do not know what are they supposed to want, yet only Biff transcends the routine of his insignificant existence and finally sees the ‘phony’ idealism of his father. Happy, on the other hand, even though he admits to Biff that he is dissatisfied with his life, continues to live by the values with which Willy has imbued him:

Willy is blind to the fundamental contradiction between his progress as a salesman and his self-realization as a man, and his blindness is almost allegorically reflected in his children. Like Willy, Happy lives the life of the business ethic. Like his father, he fails to understand that the smile is no safe-conduct pass through the jungle. Significantly, he is incapable of fruition; he is a philanderer, and wastes himself in a succession of casual, fruitless unions.<sup>16</sup>

The Loman sons have no sense of a proper family life due to the fact that they never witnessed it at home. While Linda loves Willy, he was unfaithful to her and has no respect for her. She shares his ideals and supports him in believing them, for she is not a strong character like Biff to stand against the lie in her life. The life of the Loman family is lacking, because the value system of that family was built on the dream of being ‘well-liked’ and having a material abundance in one’s life. Instead of focusing on personal relationships and the comfort of having each other to rely on; the sons fight for recognition outside the family circle. Once again, Christopher Bigsby correctly concludes that

[the Loman men] are denied peace because the philosophy on which they have built their lives involves competition, a restless pursuit of success, a desire to register a material achievement which they can conceive only in financial terms because they have neither the language nor the capacity to assess its significance in any other way.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, “Arthur Miller: The Moral Imperative,” *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 88.

<sup>16</sup> W. John Campbell, *Death of a Salesman: Notes* (Toronto: Coles, 1983) 73.

<sup>17</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 177-178.

It is difficult for them to grasp the reality of their situation, for they have never known an alternative. Although Biff awakes to the reality of his life, he is only able to identify another 'dream' that he experienced briefly while working on a farm. Fantasizing about becoming a cowboy, Biff wants to do a job that is rapidly vanishing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century America:

Biff has acquired a crucial insight into himself. Presumably the striving is over, and he can now accept that simple harmony with the natural world which had always foundered on his persistent need for a material success which would appease his father and free him from his guilt. Certainly that is the only real value which has been identified – a lyricism strongly contrasted with the diminished world of urban America.<sup>18</sup>

Biff has thus found something he feels he can do that has meaning to him. Happy, on the contrary, continues where his father left off. He wants to marry, he even consciously admits that he wants “[somebody] with character, with resistance!”<sup>19</sup> although he himself has no character – he is a philanderer.

The dream of success ends tragically for the Loman family. Willy refuses to admit his mistakes not because he does not see them, but because if he did so, he would admit that the value system he built his life on was bogus; Bigsby asserts that “[he] cannot allow the fact of his betrayal of wife and sons (let alone himself) to enter his soul because the price of doing so is the dissolution of a world whose substantiality he can never question.”<sup>20</sup> Willy did not have a loving father and he realized how lonely he felt; accordingly, he wanted to be a good father for his sons and mainly to bring-up Biff in a way so that he will be ‘well-liked.’ In the end, he does not see his family in ruins, as it is; rather, he is keen on congratulating himself on successfully devising a

---

<sup>18</sup> Bigsby, 185.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 140.

<sup>20</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, “Arthur Miller: The Moral Imperative,” *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 102.

plan that will secure Biff's future. It is important to Willy that Biff loves him, because Willy's feeling of guilt over Biff finding him with a woman never went away. Willy's redemption, in his mind, lies in Biff's forgiveness, as claims Arthur Miller himself in his introduction to *Collected Plays*:

In terms of his character, he has achieved a very powerful piece of knowledge, which is that he is loved by his son and has been embraced by him and forgiven. In this he is given his existence, so to speak – his fatherhood, for which he has always striven and which until now he could not achieve.<sup>21</sup>

As for Willy's family, it never occurred to him that he effectively destroyed it together with himself. Selfishly, he left Linda behind, only confirming Biff's words that he "always wiped the floor"<sup>22</sup> with her in order to keep his dream alive. For Willy Loman, the investment he made into the pursuit of success and popularity proved to be more important than his own family.

Once again, the American dream is proved to be unsound – Willy Loman destroys his and the life of his family by succumbing to the vision he thought would bring him happiness. Similarly to Larry Keller in *All My Sons*, he has sacrificed himself for an idea he held dear – the difference being that Willy had the wrong idea he held on to. Juxtaposing this section with the previous one, it becomes clear that both fathers – Joe Keller and Willy Loman – die at the end of the plays each sacrificing themselves to their ideas and dreams rather than give their false beliefs up. Although the American dream is supposed to include a happy family, both of the Miller's plays show that too great a devotion to the ideals is destructive.

---

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 34.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, 162.

### 4.3 “Good old Mom and good old Pop are dead”

Compared to Miller’s plays, in Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story* the family is an important theme that may not be prominent, but it helps to understand the difference between Peter and Jerry. It also helps to see beyond the surface of Jerry’s actions and therefore it is important to focus on this theme. Peter comes from a well-established middle-class family – a stereotypical arrangement for the majority of Americans at the time. By his appearance Peter is easily classified by Jerry, who has the experience of being familiar with the various social types needed to ‘guess people.’ By coming across the topic of marital status, Jerry quickly guesses, or rather uncovers Peter’s domestic arrangement:

JERRY. You’re married!

PETER [*with pleased emphasis*]. Why, certainly.

JERRY. It isn’t a law, for God’s sake.

PETER. No...no, of course not.

JERRY. And you have a wife.

PETER [*bewildered by the seeming lack of communication*]. Yes!

JERRY. And you have children.

PETER. Yes; two.

JERRY. Boys?

PETER. No, girls...both girls.<sup>23</sup>

The only deviation from the 1950s ideal of a middle-class family is the absence of a male child. The all-American boy was a popular image among the marketers and advertisers of the 1950s and it found its way into the subconscious of the population, therefore it was slightly unusual to have two daughters and no son. Jerry openly mocks Peter that he was not able to produce a male child, therefore also ridiculing his

---

<sup>23</sup> Lee Strasberg and Gordon Davidson, *Famous American Plays of the 1950s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988) 389.

conformity – the image of an ideal life is somewhat altered. Continuing his questioning, Jerry manages to guess more information about Peter:

PETER [*lightly laughing, still a little uncomfortable*]. And am I the guinea pig for today?

JERRY. On a sun-drenched afternoon like this? Who better than a nice married man with two daughters and...uh...a dog? [PETER *shakes his head*.] No? Two dogs. [PETER *shakes his head again*.] Hm. No dogs? [PETER *shakes his head, sadly*.] Oh, that's a shame. But you look like an animal man. CATS? [PETER *nods his head, ruefully*.] Cats! But, that can't be your idea. No, sir. You wife and daughters? [PETER *nods his head*.] Is there anything else I should know?<sup>24</sup>

Peter's family is ordinary and unremarkable in this respect, except for one fact – it is not altogether Peter's conformity that shapes his domestic life, but also the fact that his wife is the one who 'wears the pants' in their household. Peter would like a dog but his wife and daughters wanted a cat – thus they have two cats; presumably one for each daughter, as they have each their own parakeet and a television just for themselves. This arrangement tells about Peter's submissiveness and inability to take control in his life – that is why Jerry confirms Peter's suitability for being 'the guinea pig for today.' Completely unaware of his lack of authority, Peter is prone to be controlled even by a stranger – he answers all of Jerry's questions and patiently listens to Jerry's story. When it comes to Jerry's family, Peter assumes that what he is accustomed to from his domestic arrangement is also true to a degree about Jerry. Despite Peter's best efforts, Jerry's family turns out to be the exact opposite of Peter's:

JERRY. You're a very sweet man, and you're possessed of a truly enviable innocence. But good old Mom and good old Pop are dead...you know? ...I'm broken up about it, too... I mean really. BUT. That particular vaudeville act is playing the cloud circuit now, so I don't see how can I look at them, all neat and framed. Besides, or, rather, to be pointed about it, good old Mom walked out on

---

<sup>24</sup> Strasberg and Davidson, 390.

good old Pop when I was ten and a half years old; she embarked on an adulterous turn of our southern states...a journey of a year's duration...[...]<sup>25</sup>

Jerry's family is the antithesis to the domestic arrangement presented by the American dream; much to Peter's discomfort. Although Jerry admits being upset about his parents, in reality he is not so much upset himself as he is reflecting Peter's feelings. In reality, Jerry does not care for his parents, as they made his childhood and adolescence a terrible experience for him. It is at such an early age that Jerry has gained a different perspective on life; as opposed to Peter, who was spared the turbulences:

[...] At any rate, good old Pop celebrated the New Year for an even two weeks and then slapped into the front of a somewhat moving city omnibus, which sort of cleaned the things family-wise. Well no; then there was Mom's sister, who was given neither to sin nor the consolations of the bottle. I moved in on her, and my memory of her is slight, excepting I remember still that she did all things dourly: sleeping, eating, working, praying. She dropped dead on the stairs to her apartment, my apartment then, too, on the afternoon of my high school graduation. A terribly middle-European joke, if you ask me.<sup>26</sup>

Jerry's life at the moment of his encounter with Peter is also the exact opposite to Peter's domestic setting. The grotesque characters living in the apartment house which is managed by a repulsive landlady are an eye-opening experience for Peter, whereas for Jerry it is the everyday reality he has to face and cope with. Jerry's life serves as a high-contrast mirror to Peter, who has to be shocked out of his ignorance of the possible world outside his own. As Rose Zimbardo correctly observes in her essay on *The Zoo Story*, "[Peter's] life of things and prejudices protects him from himself and from the world. While it provides no gut-pleasures, neither does it allow for gut-pain. Peter's is a kind of middle-class stoicism. But while genuine stoicism

---

<sup>25</sup> Strasberg and Davidson, 394.

<sup>26</sup> Lee Strasberg and Gordon Davidson, *Famous American Plays of the 1950s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988) 395.

raises a man above pleasure and pain, this middle-class variety protects by anaesthetizing him in the commonplace.”<sup>27</sup> Peter’s comfortable life is that of isolation in which he cannot experience the world fully, as compared to Jerry. However, the awareness Jerry possesses comes at a price – the family structure is damaged and there is no security in form of a haven at home. Peter’s life may be arranged according to the ideal, but it is only keeping a status quo for its own sake. It does not allow for perception of things and experiences as they truly are.

In contrast to *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, there is no family involved directly in the events of *The Zoo Story*. However, it is present in the dialogue. Peter has an organized family while Jerry’s relatives are all dead. Even when his family were alive, it was a dysfunctional arrangement. The American dream is represented by Peter – a type, the conformist; and the reality, often far from untroubled, is represented by Jerry – also a type. There is a dichotomy between the imagined and the real, similarly to the opposing polarities of Joe Keller and Chris Keller and Willy and Biff Loman. Whereas in Miller’s plays the family remains a valid structure even though mismanaged; in *The Zoo Story*, as the title of this section implies, Albee proclaims the family dead – the integral part of the dream is dismantled and with it the American dream itself has to come apart. The critique shifts from the inept individual in Miller’s plays to the inefficient domestic arrangement in Albee’s *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream*.

#### **4.4 “What a masculine Daddy!”**

In contrast to *The Zoo Story*, where the family is in the background of the main storyline, in *The American Dream* the family is central to the play’s events. The

---

<sup>27</sup> Rose A. Zimbardo, “Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story*,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 47.

dysfunctional family is Albee's device for communicating his critique of the American dream; he achieves this by caricature and sarcasm. He turns the traditional family upside down and presents it in its distorted form that it has assumed since the war. George Wellwarth explains that "[the] happy family becomes an emasculated money supplier dominated by an emotionally sterile, nagging wife; [...] the idealistic hero becomes a handsome, empty-headed, hollow shell of a man with the outlook and philosophy of professional pimp."<sup>28</sup> Albee attacks the widespread image of the typical American family of the time, which, as Brian Way notes, "has become a political slogan and a commercial vested interest [...], and is maintained through a conscious process of image-building carried out mainly by the mass-media of communication."<sup>29</sup> The images which are presenting the domestic ideal are cleverly reused and satirized by Albee, who furnishes his play with dialogue based on phrases:

MOMMY. You're my sweet Daddy; that's very nice.  
DADDY. I love my Mommy.<sup>30</sup>

The phrases usually carry a meaning behind them; however, in *The American Dream* these phrases have surface value only, they do not carry any deeper meaning. They are acquired gestures, which "have been simultaneously canonized and deprived of meaning."<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere, Albee mocks the family roles often presented as typical:

DADDY (*moving to L of Mommy*) And masculine? Was I really masculine?  
MOMMY. Oh, Daddy, you were so masculine; I shivered and fainted.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> George E. Wellwarth, *The Theater of Protest and Paradox*, (New York: New York University Press, 1964) 279-280.

<sup>29</sup> Brian Way, "Albee and the Absurd: *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story*," *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E.Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 27.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Albee, *The American Dream: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 2005) 8.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Way, "Albee and the Absurd: *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story*," *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E.Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 37.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Albee, *The American Dream: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 2005) 11.

Father, typically seen as the head of the household, is mocked and ridiculed. He is emasculated, impotent and unable to stand up to Mommy, who dominates him. Daddy is gutless physically and ‘gutless’ as a person; he does not have the courage to defend himself against Mommy. Ironically, while Mommy dominates Daddy and treats him like a child, she also constantly seeks affirmation from Daddy. Mommy is domineering because she lacks confidence and thus she has to fall back on Daddy, who regurgitates her speech and only then she feels she is fully in control. Lee Baxandall holds that Mommy is

[Mean] spirited, immoderate, insincere, and inclined to hysteria, [she] makes up with wildness what she lacks in confidence. Long relegated to a subordinate family function, Mommy cannot instantly acquire leadership qualities. Yet Daddy has abdicated, for some reason not apparent to her, and someone must govern.<sup>33</sup>

Daddy has abdicated because of growing oppression from Mommy, who is, paradoxically, unable to see herself as the head of the household, even when in reality she has taken over. However, he is not the only one who is treated like a child by Mommy. Grandma and Mrs Barker are also ‘children’ to Mommy - she is a mother to all.

The deformation of the family is best seen in Mommy’s mutilation of the adopted child. Mommy is determined to have her way and subsequently she forces the child to comply with her demands by violence. The idiomatic phrases Albee uses to give Mommy reasons for the mutilation stand for common sense, courage, strong character and lack of weakness; all of which Mommy demanded the child had to have. Ironically, while all these qualities are seen as desirable, Mommy and Daddy do not possess any of them. The mutilation of the child is “Mommy’s more insidious

---

<sup>33</sup> Lee Baxandall, “The Theater of Edward Albee,” *The Modern American Theater: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alvin B. Kernan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967) 82.

castration, nagging the child into a diminutive Daddy.”<sup>34</sup> The instant gratification Mommy hoped for when she ‘ordered’ her child from the adoption agency is echoed throughout the play:

DADDY. That’s the way things are today: you just can’t get satisfaction; you just try.

MOMMY. Well, *I* got satisfaction.

DADDY. That’s right, Mommy. You *did* get satisfaction, didn’t you?<sup>35</sup>

The satisfaction Mommy is intent on getting is a consumer’s satisfaction, as known from the common slogan of companies presenting their products: ‘Satisfaction guaranteed. If not, money back.’ It is the materialistic notion of satisfaction that has replaced the genuine family love and the desire to have a child with a loved person. In *The American Dream*, the relationship between Mommy and Daddy is a purely formal one, because they are impotent and therefore unable of having and loving a child. Bigsby remarks that “[the] family, an icon of the American system, is exposed as the heart of its venality and inhumanity. Thus the parents in the play systematically destroy an adopted child, being particularly sure to annihilate any sign of vitality and potency.”<sup>36</sup>

The adopted child cannot have the qualities Mommy desires; if it is to be normal it has to develop with all the positive and negative personality traits in order to find out by itself the balance between the good and the bad. It is not possible to live the sterility Mommy desires, because what she wants is incomplete; it is a perfected reflection of an ideal, not the wholesome life experience with all of its particularities.

Brian Way explains that in Albee’s play,

---

<sup>34</sup> Ruby Cohn, *Edward Albee* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969) 12-13.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Albee, *The American Dream: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 2005) 4.

<sup>36</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 262-263.

[the] gestures of love, sexual attraction, parental affection, family feeling and hospitality remain, but the actual feelings which would give the gestures meaning have gone. To show this in sharp dramatic terms, Albee constructs a situation of gestures which are normally supposed to have meaning, but, as transposed by him, are seen to have none.<sup>37</sup>

The family is commercialized; instant gratification is seen as the standard behaviour and the gestures and turns of language are taken from advertising copy used to sell detergents. The ideal of an American family is a sterilized, superficial picture of it; not a family with all its little flaws and the warmth of a home. Albee's plays show a move towards direct criticism of the family and the American dream, as opposed to Miller's approach of using individuals to criticise the American dream. While *The Zoo Story* mentioned decay in the 'basic building block of a society,' *The American Dream* mocks and ridicules the family itself.

---

<sup>37</sup> Brian Way, "Albee and the Absurd: *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story*," *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 33-34.

## Chapter 5 – The Individual and the Society

### 5.1 “You wanted money, so I made money”

With one’s actions comes a responsibility for those actions and their consequences, be they intended or unintended. This means that one’s responsibility is ultimately the realisation and the conscious acknowledgement of being accountable for the outcome. No matter what Joe Keller had been thinking while agreeing to ship out the defective parts, he could not distance himself from his responsibility of taking part in the war. The American population was urged to buy war bonds to help in the war effort, as suggested in Chapter 2; but also women had to take part and join the manufacturing force. Thus it is impossible to accept Joe Keller’s excuses for his misdeed, whatever they may be. In *All My Sons*, the conflict between Joe and Chris Keller arises because of Joe’s loss to acknowledge his failure in the judgment he made years ago during the war. What Joe Keller failed to see is, in Miller’s own words, that the “consequences of actions are as real as the actions themselves,” and that “his cast of mind cannot admit that he, personally, has any viable connection with his world, his universe, or his society.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, Joe Keller’s selfish perception of the world made him answerable only to himself; he simply justified his action in relation to his need to protect the business operation to support his family and build a future for his sons.<sup>2</sup> Keller’s mind can only see as far as the business, anything beyond is out of his capacity to comprehend, as the play’s climax goes to show:

KELLER: For you, a business for you!

CHRIS, *with burning fury*: For me! Where do you live, where have you come from? For me! I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the Goddamn business? Is

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 19.

<sup>2</sup> Morris Freedman, *American Drama in Social Context* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971) 44.

that as far as your mind can see, the business? What is that, the world – the business? What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? What the hell are you? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you? [...]<sup>3</sup>

The fundamental difference between Keller and his son is that Chris was in the war, where he saw all his friends die while Keller was safely at home, tending to his factory. Chris' idealism stems mainly from his experience in the war; he saw the inhumanity and horror that people are capable of, therefore he is sensitive to the blatant materialism of his father. Joe Keller was spared the experience of the war; he could not relate his actions directly to what was happening thousands of miles away on the battlefronts. The fact that he killed twenty-one men by allowing the faulty parts to be shipped out did not matter to Joe until it affected him personally. It is only when he is told that his other son Larry killed himself that Joe does acknowledge his responsibility for the crime he committed. The death of his son is not an unrelated situation for Joe anymore, the proverb 'out of sight, out of mind' does not apply - it is his own family that has been affected by his own hand. The simple materialism of Joe Keller is what is seen as evil and inhuman; and, as Bigsby reports, the play "is an assault on a materialism which is seen as being at odds with human values, on a capitalist drive for profits which is inimical to the elaboration of an ethic based on the primacy of human life and the necessity to acknowledge a social contract."<sup>4</sup> In *All My Sons*, Miller shows that the individual has to answer to society, for there are other human beings who are directly affected by our actions. Without acknowledging this fact, there cannot be a civilization that provides the basic securities and a decent life for most. Henry Popkin notes that "[...] little people cannot live up to big standards [...];" and as Joe Keller's action is absolutely selfish and inconsiderate, it is important

---

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 116.

<sup>4</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 167-168.

that he realizes he “cannot walk away from certain of [his] deeds.”<sup>5</sup> The tragic end is necessary, according to Miller; because in order to grasp the situation fully, Joe must live out the conflict to its conclusion.<sup>6</sup>

## 5.2 “But they do laugh at me”

Similarly to *All My Sons*, the relationship between Willy Loman and the society is a destructive one. Although the suicides of Joe Keller and Willy Loman are for different reasons, neither of them is able to establish a healthy relationship with the society. Willy succumbs to the popular image of the self-made man – success through personal attractiveness and the unacceptability of failure – to use Miller’s own words, in Willy’s estimate “to fail is no longer to belong to a society.”<sup>7</sup> The success that Willy puts so much emphasis on can be attained otherwise; his neighbour Charley is the proof that one can be successful “without that frenzy, that ecstasy of spirit which Willy chases to his end,” as Miller puts it. Furthermore, “[success] is a state of mind and has nothing to do with material trappings, money and social prestige,” as W. John Campbell correctly observes; noting that “[one] can be successful, according to one’s own definition of success, without any of these external possessions.”<sup>8</sup> Willy’s problem is that he never thought about what is it he wants to do with his life, he has adopted and always adhered to the image of his idols – Ben and Dave Singleman were his models and Willy never questioned their validity. Particularly Ben, who never respected Willy, was in Willy’s eyes a worthy example of a successful businessman. Bigsby suggests that

---

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 19.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 36.

<sup>8</sup> W. John Campbell, *Death of a Salesman: Notes* (Toronto: Coles, 1983) 65.

[The] irony of Willy's life is that he has accepted other people's estimations of his value. He has the power to construct himself as he has the skill to fashion wood but he cannot bring himself to believe in the worth of a sensibility so constructed and a life forged out of nothing more substantial than an honest perception of the real.<sup>9</sup>

His inability to see himself for what he is makes Willy destroy himself eventually, because without acknowledging who he is he cannot find his place in the society. The conflict arises between "the uncomprehending self and a solid social or economic structure – the family, the community, the system,"<sup>10</sup> to use Robert Corrigan's words. The pressure of a materialistic society is detrimental to one's happiness, especially if it colours the notion of success in one's life.<sup>11</sup>

Willy Loman's submission to the pressure of societal expectations is also the reason for the play's success in the late 1940s and early 1950s. For the audience, the situation Arthur Miller presented in the *Death of a Salesman* with "[Willy Loman] groping for stability and status mirrored their own attempts to establish a rooted identity in the uncertain post-Depression and postwar landscape."<sup>12</sup> It was the confirmation of Miller's words that he only showed people what they already knew, but what was not voiced yet;<sup>13</sup> it proved that Willy Loman and the anxieties he represents are authentic and that the problems the play presents do occur in the real world. Willy Loman is not a valueless man, he has values, but "the fact that they cannot be realized is what is driving him mad, just as, unfortunately, it is driving a lot of other people mad;"<sup>14</sup> as Miller himself maintains in an interview from 1958. In his critique of the society and the values it worships, Miller uses Willy as an instrument

---

<sup>9</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 176.

<sup>10</sup> Robert W. Corrigan, *The Theatre in Search of a Fix* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1973) 327.

<sup>11</sup> Bamber Gascoigne, *Twentieth-Century Drama* (London: Hutchinson, 1967) 177.

<sup>12</sup> Morris Freedman, *American Drama in Social Context* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971) 85.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 11.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Gelb, "Morality and Modern Drama, interview by Phillip Gelb," *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin (Dallas: Penguin Books, 1979) 198.

for his social criticism; “[Willy’s] problems are much less personal dilemmas than they are public issues.”<sup>15</sup> By identifying the problem society faced at the time and still faces today, Miller pointed in the direction not towards but away from the American dream. Willy’s dreams and their collapse “were made to embody the collapse of national myths of personal transformation and social possibility.”<sup>16</sup> The problem with the myth Willy believed is that it is not for everyone. It is up to the individual to face the pressure of the society and resist the myths by knowing oneself and where one’s capabilities lay.

In both *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* there is an individual trying to build his reputation by following a borrowed vision. This borrowed vision eventually takes the lives of both fathers because they loved their sons so much so that they did not see through the American dream. Unlike Willy Loman, Joe Keller does sober up at the end; nevertheless the price has to be paid. People did not laugh at Joe like they did at Willy (as the title of this section suggests), because they knew his guilt and it was something not to be joked about. Miller’s critique of the selfish pursuit of the American dream is harsh in Joe Keller’s case – he pays with his own life. Yet in Willy’s case it is perhaps even harsher – he is not even allowed the dignity of admitting his mistake – he cannot lose face, even though people around him know he is ‘a phony.’ They laugh at him because they know that what Willy is after is unreasonable.

---

<sup>15</sup> Henry Popkin, “Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter,” *American Drama and its Critics: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alan S. Downer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 231.

<sup>16</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 174.

### 5.3 “The old pigeonhole bit?”

Unlike in Miller’s plays where both fathers try to be part of the society, Jerry in *The Zoo Story* is an outcast who stands at the edge of it. It is a society that he cannot adapt to. He is the direct opposite of Peter, who represents everything the society expects of a respected citizen. George Wellwarth explains that Peter fulfils the multiple roles that qualify him as such – he is a “family man; a business executive; registered voter; college graduate; civic, social and fraternal club member.” He is protected from the realities that worry Jerry – “Peter is granted immunity from the discomforts and anxieties of real human condition. Man in society need no longer recognize that he is really naked and afraid, that he is really a helpless mote drifting in a hostile void governed by the elemental forces of the ‘Savage God.’”<sup>17</sup> The societal organization which provides protection for Peter is not available to Jerry, who happened to be born into circumstances which did not provide him security; but on the other hand gave him a crucial insight into the world as it really is; uncolored, exposed. Ruby Cohn notes that Jerry is the “[outsider] who suffers at the hands of the Establishment – social, moral, or religious – which announces itself in ‘peachy-keen’ clichés that indict those who mouth them” – in *The Zoo Story* the establishment is represented by Peter.<sup>18</sup> As Jerry has a sensitivity strong enough to discern the clichés, he cannot be taken as a part of that society – he can no longer find a meaningful existence in a society that does not permit deviations from the pattern it is built on. Individualism is not supported by the society of the time and this is what Albee is criticising. Bigsby in his *Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* explains that “*The*

---

<sup>17</sup> George E. Wellwarth, *The Theater of Protest and Paradox*, (New York: New York University Press, 1964) 277.

<sup>18</sup> Ruby Cohn, *Edward Albee* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969) 44.

*Zoo Story* is a parable. [...] the description of Jerry could equally be applied to [Albee's] sense of an America which has become flaccid and enervated, which has lost its clarity of outline, its energy and its vision [...]."<sup>19</sup> The mediocrity that Peter represents does not allow the type Jerry is – an individual with a different and possibly new, invigorating perspective on things – to be accepted. Bigsby continues that *The Zoo Story* is not so much an absurdist drama, but “an articulate assertion of the need to break out of an isolation which is socially rather than metaphysically derived, which is self-imposed rather than determined.”<sup>20</sup> Ironically, Peter and Jerry are both isolated, but each of them is in a different position. Peter is isolated from the realities of the human condition – the clichés of his life do not allow him to see the truth of his life; Jerry is isolated by being an outcast. However, it is Jerry, who is ‘outside looking in’ that is the voice of Albee himself, mocking Peter and his stereotypical opinions; trying to ‘pigeonhole’ Jerry into a category. The prophecy that Albee voices through dying Jerry is that of the coming unrests of the 1960s which were an inevitable outcome of the social situation of the 1950s. The middle-class in its ‘non-being’ was “dispossessed,”<sup>21</sup> they will never be able to return to their bench that provided that safety of ‘non-being.’

In contrast to Miller, Albee provides not individuals, but types, as mentioned previously. The critique of the American dream moves away from inside the family to include the family and the society – conformity and warped perception of the reality are the focus of Albee's plays, unlike the particular anxieties of individuals in Miller's plays. The anxieties produced by not being able to fit into the expected social norms are a product of the American dream. While Miller points to the unreasonableness of

---

<sup>19</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 257.

<sup>20</sup> Bigsby, 258.

<sup>21</sup> Lee Strasberg and Gordon Davidson, *Famous American Plays of the 1950s* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988) 414.

the American dream through the effects blind faith in it has, Albee critiques and ridicules the American dream itself – through Jerry’s mockery of Peter and of all he stands for. The mockery continues in *The American Dream* starting with the title of the play itself through Mommy’s and Daddy’s ineptitude right up to the point when The Young Man introduces himself to Grandma.

#### 5.4 “People being sorry”

Unlike in *The Zoo Story* where Peter is the representative of the society and all that is amiss in it, the society in *The American Dream* is presented mainly through the language. Albee uses clichés extensively and these are organized in such a way so that he can turn them around into commentaries about their use. Such language use exposes the meaninglessness of most of the communication in the play. Grandma’s comment on people being sorry demonstrates this technique well – Grandma is being sarcastic, people are not really sorry – the phrase is used because of a convention that is agreed on. Nonetheless language use in *The American Dream* honestly shows the nature and everyday reality of the dysfunctional family in the play:

MOMMY. Would you like a cigarette, and a drink, and would you like to cross your legs?

MRS BARKER. You forget yourself, Mommy; I’m a professional woman. But I will cross my legs.

DADDY. Yes, make yourself comfortable.

MRS BARKER. I don’t mind if I do.

GRANDMA. Are they still here?

MOMMY. Be quiet, Grandma.

MRS BARKER. Oh, we’re still here. My, what an unattractive apartment you have.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Edward Albee, *The American Dream: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 2005) 13.

Mrs. Barker's commentary regarding the apartment is deliberately designed to be negative, so that the usual meaning and its original form are apparent ('my, what an attractive apartment you have). The usual cliché of politely complimenting something is transformed into absurdity because it doesn't correspond to the speaker's actual feelings. Thus the convention of being polite is also ridiculed as absurd. Brian Way notes that "[Albee] sees the absurd localized most sharply in conventions of social behaviour. [The] normal currency of social intercourse – of hospitality, or courtesy, or desultory chat – has lost its meaning;"<sup>23</sup> There is a complete absence of human contact – communication is superficial, there is no content to it. The language has been debased; it is used merely to conceal the emptiness of everyday existence. Bigsby further explains that "Mommy and Daddy, like Peter in *The Zoo Story*, are role-players. They enact the fictions offered to them by society, willingly reducing their complexity to stereotype and moving in a linguistic world constructed to deny the power of reality."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, by reducing the reality, the 'role-players' admit its complexity and try to obscure it in order to have control over it. Mommy attempts to control everybody with her simplistic language; she even succeeds in controlling the people around her - except for Grandma, who is immune to Mommy's verbal attacks. Mommy's language lacks humanity, it is composed of clichés and phrases and it is also devoid of any real feelings. The stereotypes Mommy expresses - either in their true form or purposefully reversed by Albee – are essentially what kills the adopted 'bumble of joy'. As Brian Way puts it, "Albee has given us a fable of his society, where all the capabilities for connection – eyes to see, sexual organs with which to

---

<sup>23</sup> Brian Way, "Albee and the Absurd: *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story*," *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 31.

<sup>24</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 263.

love, hands to touch, and tongue to speak – are destroyed, and the victim of the socializing process of the American Way of Life, humanly speaking, dies.”<sup>25</sup>

The mutilation of the child reflects what Mommy desires – a stereotype, without substance. The only character in the play who is able to speak freely is Grandma. She is not constrained by clichés and phrases; she openly condemns Mommy’s hypocrisy and the attitude towards old people perpetrated by the society that presents itself as a part of the American dream – “almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way.”<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to Miller’s plays where the critique of the American dream is indirect – through the individual collapses of Joe Keller and Willy Loman, Albee uses Grandma as his mouthpiece to denounce the American dream openly – he uses the phrase ‘insultingly good-looking’ to emphasize its illusory nature. Albee condemns the American dream as an insult; an idea that has no place in the American culture.

---

<sup>25</sup> Brian Way, “Albee and the Absurd: *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story*,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 36.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Albee, *The American Dream: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 2005) 30.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion

### 6.1 Morality Plays

Even though the previous three chapters looked upon the distinction between Miller's and Albee's plays, all of the selected plays critique the same notion of the American dream. Both Miller's and Albee's plays can be considered morality plays, mainly because both playwrights set out to urge a message through their plays. As Miller said in his *Introduction* to his *Collected Plays*, "[...] the drama and its production must represent a well-defined expression of profound social needs, needs which transcend any particular form of society or any particular historic moment."<sup>1</sup> Miller condemns the American dream as a dangerous notion – blind idealism is what is critiqued, not the American system or capitalism – in *Death of a Salesman* there is a prosperous capitalist – Charley, who is able to be successful in the same climate in which Willy struggles to find his place. Bigsby argues that

*Death of a Salesman* is no more an indictment of the American system than *All My Sons* had been. The latter called, if anything, for a kind of moralized capitalism while the former offers two characters – Charley and Bernard – who show that a full-hearted commitment to capitalism is not incompatible with humane values.<sup>2</sup>

What Miller criticizes in both *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* is the personal failure of Joe Keller and Willy Loman respectively – men who sacrificed everything in order to follow the ideal – to be successful. Their failure in regard to their families is enormous – Joe Keller has failed as a father, citizen and a human being; he neglected his duties in regard to the society. Willy Loman has failed mainly as a father because his failure stayed within his family – he neglected his wife and one son in order to make his dreams come through Biff. Both men have failed because they

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 3.

<sup>2</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, "Arthur Miller: The Moral Imperative," *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 88.

chose the wrong value system – that of the American dream that colored their vision; Miller points out that “[he] was trying in *Salesman* [...] to set forth what happens when a man does not have a grip on the forces of life and has no sense of values which will lead him to that kind of grip [...].”<sup>3</sup> The problem of blind devotion to an idea and relentless pursuit of it is also the reason for the popularity *Death of a Salesman* endured around the world; the play “has had no difficulty finding an international audience, often being produced in countries whose own myths are radically different, where, indeed, the salesman is an alien and exotic breed,”<sup>4</sup> as Bigsby observes. It is easy to get lost in one’s own unrealistic aspirations and this rings true no matter the nationality. Joe Keller and Willy Loman did not have the capacity to live up to the American dream as it is unrealistic and corrupt; and as argues Warren French, “it was priced too low and attracted too many bargain seekers.”<sup>5</sup> This is exactly what Albee’s Grandma said in *The American Dream* – ‘insultingly good-looking.’ While Miller’s Joe and Willy had to find out about the unrealistic nature of the American dream through their own death, Albee’s characters realize the falsity of it while they are still alive – Jerry died only after he commented on Peter’s life and Grandma merely left Mommy and Daddy.

Albee’s *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream* can also be considered moral plays. In contrast to Miller’s *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* the critique that echoes throughout Albee’s plays is different – the American dream is attacked directly as an ideal that has degenerated under the influence of mass media and the emergent consumerism after the end of war. Contrary to Miller’s indirect indictment through Joe’s and Willy’s misfortunes, Albee instantly identifies the American dream

---

<sup>3</sup>Philip Gelb, “Morality and Modern Drama, interview by Phillip Gelb,” *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin (Dallas: Penguin Books, 1979) 208-209.

<sup>4</sup>C.W.E. Bigsby, “Arthur Miller: The Moral Imperative,” *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 89.

<sup>5</sup>Warren French, *The Forties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama* (DeLand: Everett/Edwards, 1969) 271.

as offensive and sets out to ridicule it openly. What Albee criticizes in *The Zoo Story* is the inherent danger the American dream brings – while it provides a comfortable existence, in reality it is a deception – a fantasy manufactured to veil the vision of its followers. To use Albee’s words, life is not as ‘peachy-keen’ as the American dream paints it. In its nature *The Zoo Story* is a play with elements of existentialism in it. The American dream is an insult because it prevents Jerry from asking questions about the deeper, underlying problem of human existence – the American dream does not permit questions such as ‘Where is my place in this world?’ to be asked, because it already implies the answer. Rose Zimbardo reveals that this is exactly the question echoing through *The Zoo Story*:

What Albee has written in *The Zoo Story* is a modern Morality play. The theme is the centuries old one of human isolation and salvation through sacrifice. Man in his natural state is alone, a prisoner of Self. If he succumbs to fear he enforces his isolation in denying it. Pretending that he is not alone, he surrounds himself with things and ideas that bolster the barrier between himself and all other creatures [...].<sup>6</sup>

The American dream is the ideas and things Albee is attacking – it is an outcry against the hypocrisy that everything is okay and that people should not be bothered by questioning the things and events that surround them.

In the *American Dream*, as the title suggests, the indictment could not be more direct. Once again the credibility of the American dream is rebuked. The characters are impotent, devoid of feelings, concerned only with commercial values – hence the Young Man’s willingness to do anything for money. Similarly to *The American Dream*, such materialism can also be found in Miller’s plays – Joe Keller killed for money and Willy Loman died for money – he actually sold himself so that Biff can

---

<sup>6</sup> Rose A. Zimbardo, “Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story*,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 53.

have the insurance. Both Miller and Albee try to awaken the audience by showing that the American dream is not a credible set of values; they aim to change or at least influence the society through theatre stages by presenting what is amiss.<sup>7</sup>

## 6.2 Solutions and the Shift in Critique

While problems and criticisms in the selected plays are defined, there is a question at the end of each of them that prompts the audience ask themselves: ‘What is the solution to the presented problem, then?’ Miller’s plays are resonating a morality of 1930s and 1940s – there is a confidence in his plays that “life has meaning,”<sup>8</sup> as Miller himself explains. In an interview from 1958 he further clarifies that his plays are constructed on the assumption “that the audience will be compelled and propelled toward a more intense quest for values that are missing.”<sup>9</sup> However, this does not provide the answer to the question put forward earlier. The answer can be found in the plays themselves: in *All My Sons* the solution is already in the play – Joe Keller kills himself; there can be no excuse for his actions and the guilt would follow him through the rest of his life. His crime is a moral issue of such magnitude that Joe has to pay with his own life. In *Death of a Salesman*, the alternative to Willy’s way of life is recognized by Biff – he realizes his true worth. However, similarly to *All My Sons*, there might be another question in regard to Biff – will his desire to become a cowboy fulfil his expectations? Miller does not provide an answer as to whether it is reasonable for Biff to follow an occupation that is quickly losing its place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Perhaps that is not for the audience to decide – what is important is

---

<sup>7</sup> R.S. Stewart, “John Gielgud and Edward Albee Talk About the Theater,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E.Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 114.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967) 8.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Gelb, “Morality and Modern Drama, interview by Phillip Gelb,” *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin (Dallas: Penguin Books, 1979) 195.

that Biff shows Willy the truth about himself and that is the solution to his problems - if only he were to accept it. It was necessary for Willy to take his life in order to show the unsoundness of the American dream and the 'success chasing,' for if Miller let him live, the American dream would appear to be valid. Nevertheless, Miller's plays provide us with a relatively satisfactory answer to their dilemmas and problems – there is a clear sense of 'right' and 'wrong'. The message of his plays is to identify the real and important values by identifying the false ones.

In contrast to Miller's plays that provide us with an answer, in Albee's plays the situation is quite different. Both *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream* were written at the end of the 1950s, the pre-war confidence and sense of right and wrong that lingered for a few years after the war is gone. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the nuclear age brought about an existentialist outlook – if the bomb is to drop, it is reasonable to look at the way we live so as not to live in vain. The old certainties were replaced with anxiety which was attempted to be anaesthetized by a newer version of the American dream – an image of conformity, consumerism and apparent happiness through consumption. It is the conformity through the American dream that Albee is attacking – the dream anaesthetised not only the fears of living in the nuclear age, it also incapacitated the people as human beings, as is evident in *The American Dream*. In a 1965 interview, Albee insisted that “the audience primarily wants a reaffirmation of its values, wants to see the status quo, wants to be entertained rather than disturbed, wants to be comforted,”<sup>10</sup> which is what can be applied both to *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream* – Albee wanted to shock the audience out of their delusion in order to make people aware of the false values they followed to comfort themselves. Yet despite this, as Gerald Weales suggests, in *The Zoo Story* it is not clear whether Peter

---

<sup>10</sup> R.S. Stewart, “John Gielgud and Edward Albee Talk About the Theater,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 117.

has been fully awakened by Jerry or only temporarily shocked; “[at] the end, Peter is plainly a man knocked off his balance, but there is no indication that he has fallen into ‘an awareness of life.’”<sup>11</sup> Similarly in *The American Dream*, Albee does not provide an answer to the problem he introduces; Bigsby is correct in saying that “[the] problem of *The American Dream* is that [Albee] is more successful in dramatizing Mommy and Daddy and their vapid lives than he is in identifying any alternative.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, there is an indication of a solution in *The American Dream* and it is represented by Grandma. –There is the old version of the American dream in the past which is uncorrupted compared to its modern version and it is the possible source of a solution; the American dream with the language corresponding to reality – “somewhere in the past is, [Albee] implies, a world in which language once aligned itself with social fact.”<sup>13</sup> However, he does not provide any specific clues as to how can this be achieved.

Looking back at the three main chapters and the juxtaposition of Albee’s plays with Miller’s works that came before, the aforementioned shift towards a more open indictment of the American dream becomes clear. Miller’s plays present individuals who lost their way because they sought respect and approval as well as they wanted to make their mark on the world by leaving something for their sons to inherit. Joe Keller did not see further than keeping his American dream together – the factory he owned had to be protected at all costs so that Chris could continue where Joe left off. Likewise, Willy Loman saw only as far as the things needed for ‘well-likedness’ and ‘success’ were concerned. Willy was unable to question the value system he believed

---

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Weales, “Edward Albee: Don’t Make Waves,” *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 20.

<sup>12</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 263.

<sup>13</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, “Edward Albee: Journey to Apocalypse,” *Modern American Drama 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 131.

in let alone abandon it. The phrase Biff used – ‘a dime a dozen’ – was to say that Willy’s American dream was cheap; there was no meaning behind superficial phrases such as ‘well-liked’ and ‘success incarnate.’ The American dream was priced too low and attracted too many bargain seekers like Willy and Joe who wanted to gain a lot without paying much.

While Miller’s critique of the American dream is indirect and through individuals like Joe and Willy; in Albee’s works there is a notable shift in criticism. Even the titles of his plays carry a meaning – *The Zoo Story* implies the animal-like unawareness of own existence that the American dream brings about – the ‘non-being’ that was mentioned in Chapter 3. The title *The American Dream* itself signals that the term is used satirically. Unlike Miller’s individual characters who are relatively defined, by the time Albee writes in the late 1950s there are no individuals, only types that represent classes and whole segments of the society. Therefore while Miller wrote about the misfortunes in a life of an individual who has lost his way; Albee’s critique is shifted towards a greater scope; he is unforgiving and includes all of the society by choosing types such as Jerry and The Young Man to represent the values he sees as corrupt or missing. Moreover, in Miller’s plays there is a sense of order when compared to Albee’s *The Zoo Story* and especially *The American Dream*, mainly because Albee uses language as a tool to expose the clichés and abnormalities of human exchange to a greater degree that Miller does.

The shift in critique was also echoed in reception of the plays. When Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was adapted for a moving picture, the producers included a short film that was screened before the main feature and it assured the viewers that the salesman profession is not as destructive as the film depicts it; in fear of public reaction to such a sensitive topic as the American dream. Several critics saw Miller’s

plays as an attack on a phenomenon that is sacred and integral to the American culture. By the time Albee started writing in the late 1950s the nuclear age and the beginning of various subculture protest movements shifted the attention to issues such as racial equality and eventually gender equality, as outlined in Chapter 2. The mood has changed and the population was becoming more concerned about their future in a country that was under constant threat of nuclear crisis – a scenario that became reality in 1962. The American dream gave way to social and political change, which included the newly ‘discovered’ environmental issues, among other things.

## Bibliography

- Albee, Edward. *The American Dream: A Play*. London: Samuel French, 2005.
- Baxandall, Lee. "The Theater of Edward Albee." *The Modern American Theater: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Alvin B. Kernan. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967.
- Bigsby, C.W.E. "Arthur Miller: the Moral Imperative." *Modern American Drama 1945-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Bigsby, C.W.E. "Edward Albee: Journey to Apocalypse." *Modern American Drama 1945-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Bigsby, C.W.E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Campbell, W. John. *Death of a Salesman: Notes*. Toronto: Coles, 1983.
- Cohn, Ruby. *Edward Albee*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969.
- Corrigan, Robert W. *The Theatre in Search of a Fix*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1973.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. London: Eyre & Spottiswode, 1962.
- Freedman, Morris. *American Drama in Social Context*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971.
- French, Warren. *The Forties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*. DeLand: Everett/Edwards, 1969.
- Gascoigne, Bamber. *Twentieth-Century Drama*. London: Hutchison University Library, 1962.

- Gelb, Philip. "Morality and Modern Drama, interview by Phillip Gelb." *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. Ed. Robert A. Martin. Dallas: Penguin Books, 1979.
- Gordon, Lois. "Death of a Salesman: An Appreciation." *The Forties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*. Ed. Warren French. DeLand: Everett/Edwards, 1969.
- Gottfried, Martin. *Arthur Miller: His Life and Work*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003.
- Miller, Arthur. *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*. New York: The Viking Press, 1967.
- Popkin, Henry. "Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter." *American Drama and its Critics: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Alan S. Downer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Stewart, R.S. "John Gielgud and Edward Albee Talk About the Theater." *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. C.W.E.Bigsby. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975.
- Strasberg, Lee and Gordon Davidson. *Famous American Plays of the 1950s*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1988.
- Tindall, George Brown and David Emory Shi. *America: A Narrative History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997.
- Way, Brian. "Albee and the Absurd: *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story*." *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. C.W.E.Bigsby. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975.
- Weales, Gerald. "Edward Albee: Don't Make Waves." *Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. C.W.E.Bigsby. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

Wellwarth, George E. *The Theater of Protest and Paradox*. New York: New York University Press, 1964.

Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1966.

## Summary

The main objective of this thesis is to show the shift in criticism of the American dream over time and the loss of credibility of the American dream through a comparative in-depth analysis of *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream* by Edward Albee. The thesis focuses on the difference of perspectives between the authors – from Miller’s plays towards Albee’s plays. The thesis also comments on what these plays were intended to communicate and also whether they are successful in providing solutions to the problems they present. The plays were chosen due to their status as being among the best and most acclaimed works from their respective authors. The analysis itself is preceded by an introductory Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 which gives a brief view of the historical and social background of the post-war era during which the plays were written. Chapters 3 to 5 present the analysis itself, always proceeding in dealing with the plays in the following order: *All My Sons* – *Death of a Salesman* – *The Zoo Story* – *The American Dream*. Chapter 3 concentrates on idealism – the American dream itself; Chapter 4 discusses the importance of familial bonds in relation to the American dream; and Chapter 5 examines the relation of the individual with the society. Chapter 6 provides the conclusion and answers whether the playwrights were successful in providing solutions to the problems they posed in their plays.

## **Key Words**

Arthur Miller, All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, Edward Albee, The Zoo Story, The American Dream, Shift in critique, Progression of criticism, Idealism, Individual, Society, Family, Alienation, Human Condition

## Resumé

Hlavním cílem práce je poukázat na posun v kritice amerického snu v průběhu času a také poukázat na ztrátu hodnověrnosti amerického snu pomocí srovnání děl *All My Sons* a *Death of a Salesman* od Arthura Millera a *The Zoo Story* a *The American Dream* od Edwarda Albeeho. Práce se zaměřuje na rozdílný pohled autorů na stejnou problematiku – od her Arthura Millera k hrám Edwarda Albeeho. Práce také vysvětluje záměry autorů v jednotlivých dílech a komentuje zda-li se autorům daří poskytnout řešení k problémům, které předkládají. Díla byly vybrány na základě jejich charakteru – jsou to nejznámější a také nejvíc uznávaná díla od výše uvedených autorů. Samotnou analýzu předchází úvodní kapitola 1 a kapitola 2, která podává stručný obraz doby, ve které hry vznikaly. Kapitoly 3 až 5 se zabývají samotným rozbořením děl a vždy postupují v pořadí *All My Sons* – *Death of a Salesman* – *The Zoo Story* – *The American Dream*. Kapitola 3 řeší problematiku idealismu a samotného amerického snu. Kapitola 4 rozebírá rodinu a vztah mezi rodinou a americkým snem; kapitola 5 se zabývá vztahem mezi jednotlivcem a společností. Kapitola 6 obsahuje závěr a také dává odpověď na otázku, zda-li se autorům daří poskytnout řešení k problémům, které ve svých hrách předkládají.

## **Klíčová slova**

Arthur Miller, All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, Edward Albee, The Zoo Story, The American Dream, posun v kritice, postup kritizování, americký sen, idealismus, člověk, společnost, rodina, odcizení, stav člověka