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**PORTRÉT AMERICKÝCH IDEÁLŮ V DÍLECH  
ARTHURA MILLERA**

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**Undergraduate Thesis**

**PORTRAIT OF AMERICAN IDEALS IN THE  
WORKS OF ARTHUR MILLER**

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**ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:**

- 1) Read and summary the ideas found in the works by Arthur Miller: All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, The Crucible (e.g. in their translations)
- 2) Find and consult an interview with the writer for better understanding of the hidden symbols and ideas in his work
- 3) Present Miller's oppinion or possible purpose of his works

**SEZNAM DOPORUČENÉ LITERATURY:**

Liukkonen, Petri, and Ari Pesonen. "Arthur Miller." Books and Writers. Ari Pesonen & Petri Liukkonen, 2008. Web. 02 June 2010. <<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/amiller.htm>>.  
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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracoval/a samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

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## ABSTRACT

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This bachelor thesis deals with American ideals in the works and life of American playwright Arthur Miller. It examines his thought based on necessity of “suffering”. This work does not aim for description of his single plays, but it focuses on motives that appear in them. The main motive of this thesis is the role of the failed father, who during The Great Depression tried to show the right way of living to his children. The idea of this thesis is supported with Miller’s biographies and opinions of many scholars. This work focuses mostly on four Arthur Miller’s works: *Death of a Salesman*, *A View from the Bridge*, *All My Sons* and *The Crucible*.

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# INTRODUCTION

In this undergraduate thesis I would like to research Arthur Miller's life, study his opinions, understand his attitude, and discover the idea of redeeming dignity and becoming noble, which he thinks is achieved by "suffering". According to the theme of "ideal", which is basic unit of Arthur Miller's work, I would like to enlighten the playwright's reasons and impulses which he has given into place as understandable work full of living or in playwright's words "felt experience" (qtd. in Martin 144). This thesis based on the premise that Miller's works were not written with random ideas, but they were inspired by Miller's observation of people's lives which formed rich life experience of this author and allowed him to produce very realistic stories about life in America.

The first thing to begin with would be chapter concerning Miller's life. It is not meant to be just interesting trip into one's social life, because the presence of author's biography is expected in such thesis, but the reason is that Arthur Miller got highly involved in his plays, and many events in his life were footstones of his writing. Miller preserved his experience in plays about American families suffering during The Great Depression in America, especially about families in Brooklyn, where he spent his youth with both parents. His biography is important for comparing considerable moments of Miller's life directly with his plays, which is important step to understand the message of this author, which is hidden and evident at the same time. Miller greatly associated his remembrances and feelings in works *Death of a Salesman*, *A View from the Bridge*, *All My Sons* and also in the work called *The Crucible*. It is no doubt that his other plays possess many deep thoughts too, but in order to keep this work topical, I aimed the thesis at these four works and tried to stick mainly to them through the whole thesis.

Next two chapters I dedicated to the most discussed Miller's themes. The first one is Business. Business played important role in many lives in America and The Depression turned this source of living down quickly. The second chapter shows Miller's attitude to business, which is based on enviousness, prejudices and longing for the past. It is about the consequences of rise and sudden fall of wealthy people and their effects on human mind and on family.

Because between business and family is very thin border and the unpredictable problems in business could mean the same thing for the whole family, the next chapter is about the archetype of Miller's typical family that in altered versions appears in his plays,



the family which is led by a corrupted father. This chapter is about treatment of American ideals and during writing I took into account Miller's attempts to create a portrait of living in this era by representing a single family. In this chapter I will talk about the customs, behavior and the relationships of members of the family. The chapter is focused on the individual role in the families which appeared in the plays, but it also gives a different look on the term "family", which Miller shifted into different meaning.

The main sources for this thesis were rich biographies and critical studies of Arthur Miller, written by various scholars, for example Enoch Brater, Christopher Bigsby and Martin Gottfried. Enoch Brater provided a valuable source for this work, because he wrote many detailed publications about Arthur Miller's life. He is the University of Michigan professor and according to website *umich.edu*, he is one of the essential Arthur Miller's scholars. Next one is Christopher Bigsby, who is at website *uea.ac.uk* regarded as fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Society of Arts and an award winning academic, novelist and biographer. Like Enoch Brater, Christopher Bigsby wrote several books about Arthur Miller, but on the contrary to Brater, his works are considered to be more critical. The last important source I used belongs to Martin Gottfried who according to *americantheatre.org* comes from New York City and who is a member of New York Drama Critics Circle and the Dramatists Guild. Among others he is famous for receiving the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism. Relevance of the sources was confirmed by many mutual quotations between them.

To summarize the content of the thesis, in the work I would like to describe the influences, which made Miller sympathetic to Marxism and Communism, reveal the examples Expressivism, the Patriarchy in families and the idea of redeeming of dignity. But the most important thing I would like to honour Miller, because he managed to show the corrupted reality at the place where others searched for the escape from it – in the theatre. He commented on this topic for example in *The Guardian* from October 13, 2000:

During the depression, the theatre was alive with anger and excitement. It was at the centre of protests and there was a real social atmosphere," he said. "The depression had destroyed the American Dream - whereas before life had been limitless, suddenly you couldn't do anything. Education meant nothing - there were no longer any givens. The depression showed that everything could be changed and the essence of life is nothingness. I wanted

to reflect this in the forms of my plays. I chose to write rather than act because writing a play is like being an actor without the embarrassment.

To end this introduction I will mention that Miller created a fascinating story which was interesting in the way that people could have found themselves in and realized that their ideals can be actually false. As best example could be Miller's Play *Death of a Salesman* written in 1949, which won The Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Award for Best Play. To the question why should this play seem so touching for us Robert A. Martin answered that "our sensibilities are enlived by imaginary characters and we become engaged in their conflicts... If the play touches our humanity, we weep, we smile, their movements move with us, and our thoughts are kindled by our feelings to them" (144).

## MILLER'S BIOGRAPHY

Arthur Asher Miller was born in New York City on 17th October 1917 and he is well-known as one of the greatest American playwrights. The reason for his fame is up for debate, but according to sources, by some Miller is best remembered due to his marriage to Marilyn Monroe. Other sources e.g. *A Playwright's Life and Works* by Enoch Brater informs about Miller's underestimated manual skills, because Miller was a skilled carpenter and his mahogany tables, chairs and such were his only companion during writing his first plays, until his whole hand-build cabin was burned down by a fire. The least frequent reason seemingly appears to be his writing skills, which is unfair.

Miller had one brother and sister, but in comparison to his brother Kermit Miller wasn't as successful at school or at sports either, which made Kermit quite an example for him. Kermit's career led to the army, which according to server *Cursumperficio.net* meant bitter consequences of random memory losses and psychological problems including "battle fatigue" for him. This illness matches the behavior of Willy Loman of *Death of a Salesman*, in my sources I found no connections of this fact with the play.

The question about the playwright's origin opens the background of his parents. According to Enoch Brater's *A Playwright's Life and Works*, Miller's mother was first-generation American Augusta Barnett, while father was Isidore Miller, immigrant from Eastern Europe. In connection with Miller's plays, his father is an important person. Izzy's father ran a clothing business in Manhattan and so following the father's steps, Isidore became owner of Miltex Coat and Suit Company in the Garment District (8). Miller's father ran the clothing company with great success; Martin Gottfried in *A Life* wrote that the Isidore was able to employ more than 800 workers at once (8). After moving to a six-story apartment house facing the north side of Central Park Isidore rented a car driver when going to work. Augusta was living nearby around the corner. During summer both families rented a bungalow in Rockaway Beach. Gottfried commented this action as usual ritual, which he referred to as "escape" (3-20). This act, regarded as running away from the regular world, was one of the customs of the Miller family. The importance of such trip resided in Miller's mind as part of his future work. His strong feeling about the trips was later expressed according to Brater in short story "I Don't Need You Anymore" which was

set in similar place, inspired by the destination of mentioned “escapes” (*A Playwright’s Life and Works* 8).

In the same work Enoch Brater concluded the life of Miller’s family simply: “They were well-off” (8). The Crash came in 1929 with the Great Depression. The reason for it was simple; many people made the same mistake and borrowed money for living, which they weren’t able to repay. When all the banks started to go bankrupt, suddenly at the same time owners of the factories invested heavily in the stock market and Isidore wasn’t an exception. In two years Isidore was nearly broke. There started another chapter of Arthur Miller’s life, about which Miller said “All I knew about was my family” (9).

It was two years after The Crash and the playwright’s family moved to cheaper place. Living in Brooklyn, where the wretched family moved, was significantly cheaper. This change made an impact on Miller’s mind and gave a footstone for his play *Death of a Salesman*. Miller pointed out Brooklyn as a city for the less lucky, low people. It was “Loman territory” (9), as Enoch Brater described the borough, using name of main character of Miller’s play. The simile there between Loman as Lowman is evident. Bigsby in his work *Arthur Miller: Critical Study* confirms that Miller would explain the play by reference to his father, but after Isidore had to borrow money for subway from him, Miller realized “of where [he knows that] America had failed so many of those who believed in the inevitability of success in a country which presented itself as specially blessed” (100).

Miller’s studies weren’t a walk through a paradise. Because of Miller’s starting interest in teaching he decided not to follow his brother Kermit, but he marked out that he must get into Michigan University. It wasn’t simple for Miller due to fact that he wasn’t a good student and needed four letters of recommendation from faculty members to be accepted. According to Brater he was able to find only three people and he also flunked Algebra three times, so he was twice rejected. Miller commented about this wish that “Michigan was one of the few places that took writing seriously” (*A Playwright’s Life and Works* 9). Brater added that the tuition there was cheap, which made it for a part-time worker like Miller a good choice. It is good to mention that creative writing was not popular at that time and there was no academic course in creative writing, only Harvard had course in playwriting.

Miller read a lot during his studies and he proved his facility at analyzing the literary texts. Miller studied the conceptions of writing deeply; he put most emphasis on narrative exposition and character development, which we can easily find in any of his plays. Miller felt he would like to be a writer in vague way in his school years,

and according to Martin Gottfried, his interest in playwriting started when Miller's teacher Erich Walter, a person, who "was capable of liking half of a sentence while disliking the other half", was about to read his entire 120 pages long work *No Villain* aloud in front of the class. Gottfried also commented that the success of Miller's writing was hidden in plots, which in almost every case were based on people he had known. This moment Miller considered as kind of validation of his writing skills (*Arthur Miller: His Life and Works* 27).

Anyway, Miller's playwright career wasn't exactly his first-plan decision, according to server *notablebiographies.com*, this option came into place after he graduated from high school in 1932 and read *The Brothers Karamazov* from Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The next influential name for Miller was according to server *classiclit.about.com* Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen, who was famous for writing about social issues in revolutionary ways.

If we turn back to Enoch Brater's book *A Playwright's Life and Works*, there is mentioned Miller's first stunning impression of writing, while he was a writer in Ann Arbor at *The Michigan Daily*: "I remember writing a story about a professor who made the startling discovery that people were fat because they ate too much." The success of such a story was surprising for him, and maybe the good response of the public even made him think about the purpose of writing itself in different way. Maybe he realized that people don't need a complex story, they just need to understand. And understanding reality seemed to be the best route to success. After all, Miller was most productive as an undergraduate at University of Michigan, where he wrote for example *Honors at Dawn* and *The Great Disobedience*, and previously mentioned *No Villain* (14).

Enoch Brater wrote in the same work that Miller's writing led in gaining attention from national wire services, where political and economic views were discussed by professors. Miller started working there on May 21, 1935 (17). After that, according to the book *Arthur Miller's America*, Miller's writing assignments in *Michigan Daily* significantly changed and from medical reports concerning laboratory research to more topical issues, for example: "Should a teacher bring into his classroom controversial social and economic questions?" (5). It was one of the first stadiums of Miller's mind, where he started thinking in critical and inquisitive ways; he was like a child that starts to examine the odd world.

On October 11, 1936 Miller made a response to Chrysler Corporation chairman's speech about the rightness of fascism. The name of the chairman was Fred Morrell Zeder.

Miller signed this editorial alone, which was very unusual and outstanding (6). Enoch Brater in *A Playwright's Life and Works* wrote that Miller criticized the chairman's speech, saying that "living under decent conditions is by that crime against the state" (17). Still being a student, Miller dared to criticize a person from high social class in a very satiric article. His speech had special form, from one point of view it appeared like an old man's complaint. Server *news.google.com* provides a copy of the article, which begins with the title "Mr. Zeder's talk" and continues: "Hitler is doing a great job, he's carrying on, he's putting his house in order ... What we need is a rededication to the basic values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Further in the article Miller gave an answer to this paragraph and started being satiric:

Fine! Mr. Zeder, vice chairman of the Board, Chrysler Corporation. We all thank you, our fathers thank you. Saluta! Mr. Zeder for saving the liberals of this locality the trouble convincing the people that the American Big Business is Fascists and more treasonable to the American form of government than three times the number of Communists in America today. Congratulations! Mr. Zeder and the Chrysler Corporation for explaining so precisely that is it the Big Business which is behind the "people's" demand for a bigger navy which General Smedley Butler told me had not ONE SINGLE PLAN FOR DEFENSIVE WARFARE BUT ONLY FOR OFFENSE IN FOREIGN WATERS.

We can notice the word "salute", which is according to server *wiktionary.org* word borrowed from Italian. Italy is also known as home of the fascism, and if we put together the fact that Italy was original country where the immigrants of Miller's *A View from the Bridge* came from, connect it to Miller's real story about fallen tree in backyard and assume that Joe Keller who did similarly "big" business with the U.S. Army, we can deduct that there can be certain connections between this article and the play. However, in my sources I found no special remarks about this article and Miller's inspiration in it.

Turning back to Miller's life, there was another similar event which appeared in *Michigan Daily*. Miller wanted to release a report about a racist incident in Ann Arbor 1934-35. The Michigan football team including later president of The United States Gerald R. Ford was scheduled to play a match with Georgia Institute of Technology. There was one African-American Willis Ward on the Michigan team, who according to official

reports refused to play in the match after Georgia Tech protested his presence. Miller contacted the Georgia Tech team and according to Enoch Brater they told him that they would kill Willis Ward if he stepped on the Michigan gridiron (6). Even though his report on this topic was never released, it made Miller even stronger in mind and willing to care about the actual social situation in America.

To talk more about Miller's origin, it is no secret that whole Miller's family was Jewish, which was nothing special in Brooklyn. Even though they spoke Yiddish, they didn't use to maintain all Jewish rituals. They were "observing family" and they did only common Yiddish rituals, like other Jews in Brooklyn did. This kind of "observance" was kind of inoffensive way of merging with the American society. Still Miller saw betrayal of their culture in it. But it was common as well as he took piano lessons like other children did and went to the same Hebrew school that his mother attended.

If we want to talk about Miller's thinking, Arthur Miller is easy to discuss in Marxist terms, but Miller himself is vague on the subject. Miller's attitude to Marxism had roots in his own working experience. Miller did many part-time jobs, from, delivering goods to working at automobile parts shop. According to Enoch Brater, Miller was Jewish, and due to that according to book *A Playwright's Life and Works* by Enoch Brater he got the parts shop job under certain anti-racist conditions, under which the former boss recommended Miller to this company: "This young man knew more about parts than most of you guys, so if you don't give him a job there's only one reason" (11). After being accepted to the parts shop, Miller marked this place as kind of slum. His relation with his new boss was also bad, due to Miller's Jewish origin. Chris Bigsby in his work *Arthur Miller: The Critical Study* talked about this topic in Miller's anti-Semitic play *Focus*:

The nature of anti-Semitism remains a mystery. The full details of the Holocaust were not yet available and hence the deeply disturbing implications of systematic genocide not yet a part of Miller's consciousness or the subject of debate. For the moment, though he chose to confront Americans with complicity in the evil to whose defeat the country had supposedly dedicated itself, as he was seemingly willing to charge Jews with acquiescence in what they mistakenly took to be their fate (66).

According to previous quote, maybe even Miller did not realize how the situation was at that time and as lately as more information about the anti-Semitism had come to

surface, Miller started to believe that Jews could actually only blame themselves for their lack of success. While working hard and studying simultaneously Miller started to think what he was led to: “I tried going to City College at night, but I was working the day and I kept falling asleep in class” (*Playwright’s Life and Works* 11). Working under such conditions made him think about this “reverse” system which runs on in the society.

As introduction to next topic about American society, it is good to ask the question about Miller’s stance against religion. Arthur Miller clearly stated in document called *Atheism Tapes* from 2004 that he was an atheist. But it is important that his attitude to religion changed during his life, Miller talked there about his betrayal of Judaism. According to his words, he woke up one day and “it was not there”. This sentence was surprisingly followed by a smile, which appeared on Miller’s face. After this moment and also during his talk it was evident that he did not take his abandonment of Judaism seriously, which slightly contrasted with his complaining about misused religion in America. He gave a half hour conversation with British Theatre and Opera director Jonathan Miller, where Arthur commented on many things about religion and such. Some of his opinions and remarks from this document coincide with his plays, for example the question at the end of the document, about of being remembered after death. Miller stated that he believe in kind of afterlife in the sense of material possessions and actions that had impact on the world. It is possible that he does not believe that there is anything after death due to his Jewish origin, because according to server *worldofjudaica.com*, “the afterlife is almost entirely irrelevant in Judaism.”

In the same document Miller revealed his thoughts on current religion in America. According to his opinion, it is misused and dangerous in certain way:

Certainly, the religious overlay of patriotism has come into fashion. It’s always there, of course, in this country. More people go to church than, I think, anywhere. But it’s gotten heavier now. They evoke God at any opportunity, whether it’s buying an automobile. It was always here, but it’s gotten thicker, heavier. Because it’s such an easy way to cuddle up to what they think the majority is about, which is this slavish kind of worship of something.

This quotation can be on one hand kind of a key to his play *The Crucible*. Miller does not express that religion is bad thing. He points at danger of exaggerated “religion”



connected of human rights. About religion compared to the political system he noted in *The Guardian* on 13<sup>th</sup> October: "It was like living in insanity - the political system and whole grip on reality was in danger. *The Crucible* was an attempt to focus on that on stage, and demystify it". With these words he expressed that political power is being abused.

On the other hand, *The Crucible* was a masterfully hidden message concerned with Anti-Communist era which started after 1940, and which probably left a scar on Miller's mind. The practices which were used during these ten years were called "McCarthyism", which were processes based on "presumption of guilt", led by Senator McCarthy. Asking the question, why Miller would call it a crucible leads to the basis of these trials. The problem of being accused of sympathy or membership of Communism practically meant instant unemployment, sometimes the end of the victim's career, imprisonment, and as the most shameful thing, question about other Communism sympathizers. The crucible in it was not only the trial itself with all the negative consequences, but the real crucible was that people had to give names, which according to Miller, the jury had already known. Also Miller was summoned by an accusation in this era, but while standing before the House of Un-American Activities Committee, he passed this "walk through the fire" and didn't involve other people. Some years later he stultified the processes again, which we can see in the following extract published on 19 February 2005 in *The Guardian*:

"I knew perfectly well why they had subpoenaed me," he said. "It was because I was engaged to Marilyn Monroe. Had I not been, they'd never have thought of me. They'd been through the writers long before and they'd never touched me. Once I became famous as her possible husband, this was a great possibility for publicity. When I got to Washington, preparing to appear before that committee, my lawyer received a message from the chairman saying that if it could be arranged that he could have a picture, a photograph taken with Marilyn, he would cancel the whole hearing. I mean, the cynicism of this thing was so total, it was asphyxiating.

Miller expressed his sympathy to Marxism retrospectively during his conversation with Chris Bigsby. They were talking about the Crash and Miller clearly stated: "Therefore it was always better to be the boss than the worker because boss represented the end of your striving, your perfection. So that day I recall very clearly thinking... My god, the whole thing is upside down. I should be wanting to be a worker." (*Arthur Miller and*

*Company* 18) In another work by Bigsby called simply *Arthur Miller* he described, how the idea of Marxism felt at that time:

Marxism was a philosophy that reinvented the future, a future that the Crash had seemed to nullify or foreshorten. And that, too, had an American feel to it, and it is important to realize the extent to which those drawn if not to the Communist Party then to the ideas it propagated could find in Marxism a familiar utopianism. It was a philosophy of causes. It stood for that great abstraction, the working man. It was not a substitute for religion; it was religion, though drained of the irrational, for the same time this was science, history restructured as process (57).

According to previous paragraph it is possible to say that Marxism is yet another utopia that can never be reached.

In the same book he remarked that Miller was always led to other side of this thinking, away from the Marxism. He said he was raised to “think that workers belonged where they were” (18). The change of life was also described by Kermit’s son, who was an academic and biographer. His family met the same problem as Arthur’s and noted that moving into Brooklyn was a blow for his father. On the other hand he said that his mother divided families into two: “Working class families sacrifice for their children; middle class families expect their children to sacrifice for them,” (Kazan 435) which perfectly describes Willy Loman’s family from Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, people from middle class who lived with conceit of the working class.

In *The Guardian* from 13<sup>th</sup> February 2005 appeared Miller’s summary:

Miller never gave up his tempered idealism or his commitment to humane values and the prospect of a better, more just society. He was outspoken on the political and social questions of the day... Over the years, he developed into something more than just a playwright. He became, for better or worse, a keeper of the liberal conscience, an elder statesman of the theatre and the literary world. He embodied and had written about so much of the experience of the 20th century - the Depression, the Holocaust, the

McCarthy era, the Cold War - and was at once a survivor, a historian, an imaginative interpreter and a counsellor.

In short, Miller was the kind of person who achieved more than is expected from a single playwright. His endeavor changed from the entertaining purpose of plays into a pessimistic message about social situation in America and particularly in Brooklyn, the epicenter of Miller's inspiration.

The next chapters will be concerning different topics, detached from Miller's biography, where I would like to address the phenomenon in America called Business. The main focus will be on the impact of the Great Depression, behavior of people, ways of saving money and finally the destroyer and also the healer of American business – the failed father.

## BUSINESS

During depression, Brooklyn was known as the place for people who were less lucky. This place is frequently mentioned in the Miller's plays, because Miller lived there for some time too. In the sense of an omen, Miller remembers planting a pear and apple tree in the backyard when he was young. After some time the apple tree fell in a storm. The same moment occurs in the play *All My Sons*. From another point of view it is possible to see relationship between this play and misfortune of his father's business. There is broken hope, for which stands the felled tree; it shows the destructibility of endeavor, because it reveals a weakness in thing which alone appears to be nearly indestructible. Simply said, everything can be destroyed by a bolt from the blue, in both metaphorical and literal meaning. And the same could have been said about living in America, like Miller said in an article of *The Guardian* from Saturday 19 February 2005: "America was promises, and The Crash was a broken promise in the deepest sense." In book *Arthur Miller* by Christopher Bigsby Miller gave an even more passionate statement about hope in America:

“What the hell was there to hope for? Yet at the same time hope remained a cultural imperative: “Americans hope even when it does not work. You keep the hope alive. That is why the movie industry is always so good.” Indeed, to his mind it was not irrelevant that the movie industry was the product of Jewish immigrants: “These guys really believed that you could magically transform yourself into anything you could imagine.” Isidore Miller had lost his faith in that possibility (65).

Saying that the rumor of success in America was made by Jewish immigrants is Miller's daring opinion, eventually it could be said that Miller's father was one of them – before he failed and lost almost everything. From Miller's history we can judge that he became pessimist about America due to this - American business. Taken from simpler way, it could be called usual to start hating a favorite subject after failing the exam, but Miller felt much more serious about the situation in America. He hated and loved the American versatility, according to website *pbs.com* exactly like president Calvin Coolidge, whose phrase was used by Willy Loman's boss Howard in *Death of a Salesman*: “Cause you gotta admit, business is business” (80). Bigsby also remarked in connection with *A View from the Bridge* that “The business of America is, indeed, it seems, business (*Arthur*

*Miller: Critical Study* 79). This confusion became Miller's "signature" and appeared in many of his plays. Arthur Miller realized his confusion in a certain way, but he never admitted without long explanations. Example of Miller's mind set is shown in next excerpt from the previously mentioned article of *The Guardian* from 2005. With a little knowledge of his works we can see his imaginary characters talking:

Americans in general live on the edge of a cliff... waiting for the other shoe to drop. It's part of the vitality of the country, maybe... They're always working against this disaster that's about to happen." Then he stopped, looking up at the bridge. "These are our cathedrals," he said. "I thought those were," I said, pointing across the river to the business district and the twin towers of the World Trade Center (this was before 9/11). "Oh sure. 'The business of America is business', that's what Calvin Coolidge used to say. He was the first president I can remember." Then he stared at the buildings. "None of them was here when I lived here as a young man. Not one. And in all those windows there'll be somebody counting figures. Piling up money." Then he smiled ruefully. "And snorting cocaine, I guess."

During later interviews he admitted that he sometimes felt some certain unity between himself and his characters from plays. He also mentioned that this unity changes with his age, the older he is, the more it changes. When he remembers his youth, he would name himself Biff, but later, he said, he became more conscious about being more like Willy Loman. Comparing the previous excerpt from *The Guardian* with Willy's speech about old times in *Death of a Salesman* will make a better picture:

The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? . . . They should've arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighborhood. More and more I think of those days, Linda...There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of

control. The competition is maddening! Smell the stink from that apartment house (17)!

If we put these paragraphs together, they would support each other. They would say that there are more people making business, more young people who challenge the older ones and they don't care how the city looks or even smells. Also, after a closer look there is an interesting fact, which comes out while comparing last sentences of the texts—“snorting cocaine” versus “Smell the stink”. Both concerns nose and it appears as if Miller got a flashback from writing the play. It may be evidence that Loman's words are actually Miller's. We can see that Arthur Miller complains about history; he isn't satisfied with the direction America has taken and gives a powerless cry different dimension by implementing it into poor old man's speech. We can only guess if it is an intended resistance or unreachability of self-indulgence.

The relation between rich and poor was one of Miller's main themes, but the question about which way is right remains uncovered. Miller maintains the righteousness of poor while he shows the worst image of them. For example Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman*, who talks about himself as kind of a slave to the rich, he, who had always worked hard, must die as a poor man for the salvation of family. Miller's points out another corruption of reality and society.

Ernest Hemingway in one title of his book *To Have and Have Not* clearly divided America into two groups of people. Families during The Great Depression really could have been characterized as the people who “had” and the people who “have not”. We are talking about money, because according to [allabouthistory.org](http://allabouthistory.org) a sudden wave of unemployment raised the number of unemployed from five million to thirteen million in years 1930 – 1932.

Along with fear and suffering connected with poverty, many opinions and sayings about humility and saving money were spoken in family circles. These “rules”, particularly about money, are topical for Miller's plays, because Miller gave special nature to some of his characters, in which some kind of fear can be felt, especially fathers in his plays have such behavior while they talk about money. We can judge that this kind of “fear” can be caused by success of older family members; an example can be seen in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman is longing for the secret of the success of his unknown father and also his brother Ben, a man who walked into the jungle and when he walked out, he was rich (52). The story of Ben seems almost romantic, compared to rules, which were kept

during depression. If we search the web for common rules about saving money during Depression, on *Allabouthistory.org* we can read selection of such sayings:

- Credit mentality instead of paying cash. “Don’t spend money you don’t already have in your pocket.”
- Rich grew richer at the expense of others. “Don’t pay someone else to provide something that you can learn to do or to make yourself.”
- Abandonment of traditional values and frugality. “Never buy anything you can use – only what you can’t live without.”
- Self-Indulgence and self-gratification by immediate acquisition of possessions. “Don’t buy anything until you have twice the purchase amount.”
- High Expectations by gambling in the stock market. “It’s doesn’t matter how much money you can make, but how much money you can save!”

The main theme of these sentences is humility and self-sufficiency, which fits into Miller’s figures; it is imaginable that those are words of Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman*, Eddie Carbone from *A View from the Bridge*, or Joe Keller from *All My Sons*. From today’s view, such denial of everything that costs money, which would mean deprivation of entertainment, new technologies and such, creates pessimistic picture of a family, which lives somehow isolated from the outside world. But many sources say that this was kind of manual of life during The Depression, because living was not simple and exaggeration or violation of those rules could have been a problem. It is possible that some people may hold those rules till today. Chris Bigsby, while talking about *Death of a Salesman* wrote that “it is about paradoxes of being alive in a technological civilization . . . it is about alienation brought by technical advance . . . the price we pay for the progress” (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 101).

According to Miller’s plays, the most affected people were by all means men, who were "manipulated by the vision of success, a fata morgana which is spread by the merciless god called American Business. This fact was confirmed for example by literary critic Kay Stanton in e-book *Critical Insights*. She marked Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* as masculine play and complained that “American Dream itself as presented in *Death of a Salesman* is male-oriented” (156). On the same page she commented on three virtual world dimensions in which according to her opinion people think, and these were the world of

business, green world and home. She says that Willy Loman travels into all these dimensions. The dimension of business is meant to be competition, pursuit of success and overtaking others in the means of money and possessions, while the green world stands for the housework and other domestic works that makes men from boys and helps men increase their wealth, though even by growing vegetables. The last dimension can be called the world of failure despite its name is home. It is the safe place; the solid castle built during the fight in the world of business, where like a monument stands a silver athletic trophy, mentioned in *Death of a Salesman*, a lonely physical evidence of success (Stanton 120 – 127).

From this point it can appear that the world is in fact ideal, because there is always a way “home”, but we can barely say that Miller was that optimistic. And this fact I would like to prove in the next chapter.



## THE FAILED FATHER

The survival of family ideals in the hands of the failed father, which includes excessive denial of possessions and happiness in order to support the family, can hardly lead elsewhere than in sorrowful life. This was destructive principle of living, which can be according to Miller called “suffering”. It was one of the main things in Miller’s focus. He elaborated the term suffering in a video called *The Meaning of Suffering*. The purpose of this document was Miller’s explanation of the term “suffering”, which had nothing common with physical torture. He explained that people in America are sick in their mind, because their deliberation is destroyed by the afraid of failure. On one hand his preconception is “that suffering is a mistake, or a sign of weakness, or a sign even of illness.” But with these words he did not want to say, that this “suffering” should be avoided, he claimed that “in fact, possibly the greatest truths we know, have come out of people’s suffering.” That is one of the main purposes of his plays, we see unlucky people “suffering” under conditions of regular life and we should try to identify ourselves inside the happening, and imagine unspoken solution of such problems. It was Miller’s way, how to put people closer to the American problems during the Depression. Actually Miller said in the previously mentioned document that a certain amount of “suffering” has positive consequences, and as a matter of fact, we should not want “to undo suffering, or to wipe it off the face of the earth, but [we should want] to make it inform our lives, instead of trying to “cure” ourselves of it constantly, and avoid it, and avoid anything but that lobotomized sense of what they call happiness.” Because it is impossible to make people experience the real “suffering” to become “better” humans, Miller in inoffensive way made people feel the “suffering” in the theatre, which had enough authority to make people think and discover the hidden message of the play.

The word happiness opens the next chapter in family lives during The Depression. The happiness could barely exist between the thousands of broken people. According to Miller’s talk about inevitableness of suffering, people wanted to escape from the corrupted world in various ways. Enjoyment, which was the major instrument of escape, included doing free stuff like playing board games, ball games and so, which were mostly children activities. Adult people had to use alternatives, which can be generally called “escapes from reality”. Fathers organized trips to the nature, picnics miles from the city and other escaping tours, because they were justifiable as family trips for fresh air and beautiful

nature. But there was also one way, which Arthur Miller maybe took example from, and it was theatre. According to server *stocks-simplified.com*, theaters, especially movie theaters, were kind of paid way of “escaping”, because “people who were not happy with their lives sought shelter in the comfort of an entertaining movie.” “An escape” became the way of solving problems and relaxation. But Miller’s plays had different effect. According to *The Guardian* from 6<sup>th</sup> March 2011, a critic while reviewing his new plays in 1971 remarked that it was “like going to the funeral of a man you wish you could have liked more”. In the same article was explained Miller’s attitude to theatres:

He still subscribed to “a national dream that proposed the inevitability of success”. Sermonizing in a wilderness, Miller complained that the contemporary theatre had “no prophetic function”. The truth was ruder, and less flattering to his vatic pretensions. A theatre is a civic arena, and the people who turn up to see a performance will only go to the trouble if their own urgent contemporary concerns are being addressed. ... “[But] Nothing I have believed has turned out to be true”.

Miller formed those “escapes” into greater context than mentioned trips to the nature. We can see many of his characters escaping only in minds while sitting in the kitchen, talking to imaginary people, hiding their problems deep inside them. A great example is again Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman*, where he exits the stage to the Kay Stanton’s green world in remembrances of his sons’ youth, while being still sitting on the kitchen chair.

The roles in the family received major changes during The Depression. In contrast, around 1920, relationship between men and women tended towards equality of both genders. A “Fifty-fifty marriage” was according to an article of Professor Peter Filene, found on server *dlt.ncssm.edu*, becoming popular in the middle class people, and it meant that both sexes take part in social and economic questions. The family had more democratic rules and the role of father was becoming less important in the sense of upbringing the children. The role of mother differed depending on class; upper-class women understood the employment as opportunity and right, while the middle-class women worked because they simply had to. Then, after The Crash came, men, after massive losses of jobs had come with an idea of sending women away from jobs, because they earned less money than men and because “woman’s place is not out in the business

world competing with men who have families to support,” which were according to Peter Filene the words of American Congresswoman Florence Kahn. This sentence virtually started the era of fathers as the leaders of families, because it was meant to be absolutely serious, it had no ironic context like today’s politic speeches can have.

With a look back at Miller’s work, the faulty conception of Patriotism appeared in many other plays and it became one of the main topics of this playwright. Another evident example of patriotic destructive aftermath can be seen in *All My Sons*, where Miller shown this problem on a father, whose frustration transforms into law-abiding action of selling faulty motor parts to the Army Air Force. Sever different family by malicious prosecution to shake down own guilt and sustain own family was the solution which Miller expressed in the play. Bigsby commented on *All My Sons* in his work called *Arthur Miller: Critical Study*:

[Keller] does so rather than risk losing his contract and thus possibly his business, the business he wishes to pass on his sons ... *All My Sons* is a play in part about the individual’s responsibility for his own actions and in part about the obligations he has to his society. The crime at its centre raises in stark form in clash between the self-interest and human solidarity (78).

He concluded his thought by saying that there is a “conviction that idealism and justice shatter on materialism and corruptions which seem to shadow desire for success” (78). In short, Bigsby wanted to say that people are easily corrupted by a good opportunity.

Miller had always put American fathers into the worst life positions and expressed their belief in indispensability in the crudest way. Christopher Bigsby wrote that Miller’s father is always a “victim of his place and time” (*Arthur Miller* 69).

If we look at fathers who appear in the plays, then we get considerably different people. Miller’s conception of a father is mid-class man, who ought to take care of his family. He raises his children to face the cruel future, but still pretends bravery to show them that there is always reason to go on. The thing he hides is that he needs or later will need their help too. Father should be the example of success, lead the children to higher quarters of society on the wheels of business, “because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead” (*Death of a Salesman* 33). He must not fail, he must redeem his dignity at all costs, and Miller doesn’t let any father to admit the failure. But those men are not actually honest;

they have a stain on their conscience which they think is hidden, but the fright of being revealed as wasters, is devouring them from inside. They know crime, but crime which does not harm family is a tolerable crime. American fathers beg for the past, hate the future and dream false dreams of hope. After they wake from them, they are not afraid to risk and become prepared to die for the family's good, even in means of suicide.

Sons and daughters have quite straight mission in Miller's opinion. No matter which sex they are, they are made to follow the father's will. They honour their father, but actually understand him rather in their mother's words. The siblings do not fight each other; on the contrary they challenge each other and wish they had the other one's experience. When these children grow up, they will reveal the false face of their father, see the shadows of the world and became fed-up with life and lose their ideals. Reference can be found in Biff and Happy from *Death of a Salesman*.

Miller tended to use his own parents' ambitions and spirits through his plays. He tended to be closer to his mother, but he admired them both and he shared the positives, and the negatives of them in his plays. *The Guardian* from 12 February 2005 indicates that Miller once said that "everything he had written was based on somebody he had seen or known, and although *Death of a Salesman* is not strictly autobiographical, it is hard to imagine without the lives of Izzie and Gussie Miller". During a discussion with Chris Bigsby, he admitted that this play was the most lyrical play he ever written and the play's moral solution, which he gave to the Biff's self-realization, was pessimistic. On the other hand, he said that he did not want to tell people what to think, because "there is a rift in it in that sense" (*Arthur Miller and Company* 55).

Despite the family was Miller's frequent theme in his plays, after closer study it appears, that Miller surprisingly didn't care much about his own family. The evidence is his marriage and divorce of two women. According to *The Guardian* from 12 February 2005, Miller's first wife, Mary Slattery, was Catholic daughter of insurance salesman, from what we can guess that her father took place in *Death of a Salesman*. There is also little information about his children; Miller didn't use to talk about them too much. According Brater, his college friends said he was always involved with one cause or another, so he may have forgotten about his family while solving other problems (*A Playwright's Life and Works* 17).

In his works the character of the mother appears in certain way, which on one hand is neutral, but on the other hand she is somehow indispensable. Miller's mothers are surrounded by masculine neighborhood of which they are always aware. As mentioned

above, according to Kay Stanton, Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* is "undoubtedly very masculine" (156). Major female character Linda doesn't participate much in the story line, because she is passive, and serves mostly as a link between her husband and her sons. In this play Miller highlighted women's ability to understand, give advice and prevent arguing. It would be excessive to say that, he is discriminating female characters, but there is lack of personality in them. Role of women in Miller's plays is support of men, justification and glorification of their husbands who are getting old and weak:

Willy: ... You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me.

Linda: Oh, don't be foolish.

Willy: I know it when I walk in. They seem to laugh at me.

Linda: Why? Why would they laugh at you? Don't talk that way, Willy.

Willy: I don't know the reason for it, but they just pass me by. I'm not noticed.

Linda: But you are doing wonderful, dear. You're making seventy to a hundred dollars a week.

...

Willy: I'm fat. I am very foolish to look at, Linda ...

Linda: To me you are. *Slight pause.* The handsomest  
(*Death of a Salesman* 36-37).

Miller supported their roles by examples of Expressivism, understanding the pain of others and avoiding the torture of innocent. Example can be found in memorable sentence, when Linda defends Willy's health: "He's not to be allowed to fall in his grave like an old dog! So attention must be paid" (*Death of a Salesman* 56). British dramatist Arnold Wesker wrote in Bigsby's book *Arthur Miller and Company* an article, where he says that his own line "if you don't care you'll die" in *Chicken Soup with Barley* had its line age in previously mentioned sentence from *Death of a Salesman* (*Arthur Miller and Company* 65). Miller was also asked about this sentence in interview with W. Ferris published in 2001 on website *neh.gov*. The response was following:

I suppose she was speaking about the care and support that his family might give him, in that context. Of course, there is a larger context, which is social and even political-that a lot of people give a lot of their lives to a company

or even the government, and when they are no longer needed, when they are used up, they're tossed aside. I guess that would encompass it.

In this reply we can find a lot of pessimism, Miller believed living for career is man's very bane in America. The scenario when people find themselves old and useless is according to Miller gloomy American nightmare. The question why people angle for career can be discussed variously, but Miller's opinion is in this case fairly straight - to make some living, which was Willy Loman's mission from *Death of a Salesman*: "Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it" (15).

Rapid lifetime along with lack of money was Miller's speciality. In his plays we can find way out of this suffering, it is the hope hidden in sons and daughters. There is a lot of hypocrisy and pretending of equanimity, which can be best demonstrated by Willy Loman:

Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such-personal attractiveness gets lost. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff – he's not lazy... My god! Remember how they used to follow him around in high school? When he smiled a one of them their faces lit up. When he walked down the street . . . (17).

Miller's fathers encourages their sons like shown in previous quotations, they are preserving the hope in them by certain amount of criticism and admiration.

Special care is given to women – daughters and wives. The thing which Miller emphasizes in woman characters is their passion. It is that kind of passion, which in a certain way belongs only to their husband, which is put into contrast with the husband's tendency for promiscuity shown again in *Death of a Salesman*. In his plays, he demonstrates men's lack of understanding for women, which we can see in men in Loman family. Biff and Happy talk about women in sense of enjoyment and Willy often roughly interrupt Linda's speech, saying she is interrupting him. Bigsby stands up for undervalued role of wife, when he writes that among men there is a woman offering redemption, which is not noticed. (*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 101). According to literary critic Kay Stanton, Miller is even discriminating the female gender, even declaring that there is an "unacknowledged dependence upon women as well as woman's subjugation and exploitation" (156).

Concerning daughters, men are afraid of their daughter's sexuality. This can be seen especially in Miller's *A View from the Bridge*. Eddie Carbone's dissatisfaction with his daughter's success is hardly comprehensive from different way than woman subjugation. Eddie's attitude to Catherine is a reversed example of Willy Loman to Biff from *Death of a Salesman*. Catherine is about to take a job where she will receive fifty dollars per week and even Beatrice, Eddie's wife, emphasizes "Fifty dollars a week, Eddie" (18), which is considered as sufficient, maybe quite big salary for a student. From the context of two plays we can deduce Miller's point that this money would be sufficient for an adult person, for example like Biff Loman: "What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses . . . [I am] thirty-four years old man with twenty-eight dollars a week" (22). Miller wanted to say that unexpected success of children can sometimes result in some kind of nightmare for a father. The fear comes from the fact that being a father means having children which must feel respect of their dad. The attempt of "repayment", he considers as insult of their father role: "Look, did I ask you for money?" (19). The worse it is when it comes from a woman. One of the other arguments concerning this problem which Miller put into place in *A View from the Bridge* can be associated even with xenophobia:

EDDIE: I don't like the neighbourhood over there

CATHERINE: It's a block and half from the subway, he says.

EDDIE: Near the Navy Yard plenty can happen in a block and a half. And a plumbin' company! That's one step over the waterfront. They're practically longshoremen (19).

Miller shows the distrust of men and reveals the behavior which makes them isolated from the surrounding world: "most people ain't people . . . The less you trust, the less you will be sorry" (21).

Another Miller's prejudice regards school. The problem consists in depreciation of time spent during studies, in this example it is mixed again with afraid of daughter's sexuality: "she'll be with a lotta plumbers? And sailors up and down the street? So what did she go to school for?" (19).

In accordance with the mentioned speech of Florence Kahn, there is a hidden message in *A View from the Bridge*, which is about roles that man and woman should have. In this play it is revealed when character Eddie enthuses upon work on fragrant coffee

ships as a longshoreman (20). When he realize that his daughter – a woman – would be doing there is terrific for him, because it is the man – the father, who should foster the family, which means that he should work and woman should take care of him and their children. The impropriety of idea of women interfering in men business is one of the “truths” that Miller expressed in his plays.

If we remind Miller’s almost neutral stance to afterlife mentioned in first chapter, this fact can be answer to topical question of honorable deaths in his plays. According to his speech we could judge that Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* did by his suicide the right thing, despite according to server *personalinsure.about.com* is now suicide for the insurance money within two years of suicide provision prohibited and no money would be paid. Other honorable suicide can be seen in *All My Sons* where Keller’s son Larry ashamed of his father’s coldblooded business with faulty aircraft parts crashes his plane, which was act of disagreement with his father. The suicide, which is committed by Joe due to the disclose of this event, Christopher Bigsby particularly commented in book called *Arthur Miller: Critical Study*. While in the play Joe sustains his own family by virtually sacrificing another, Miller says that the guilt comes even from his second son:

It is precisely Chris Keller’s sense of betraying his old comrades that makes him feel guilty, a guilt that he is, finally, all too ready to project entirely on to his flawed father . . . It is equally about the death of the ideal, the failure of society, as it is constituted, to offer the meaning which the individual seeks (80).

Miller makes suicide a redeemer of dignity and that’s why Joe Keller after recognizing his failure commits suicide too. From this point we can see that Miller marks the reveal of father failure crucial and suicide is the only way out.

Miller’s interpretation of man was confusing for American directors. If we try to imagine such person, some people would imagine themselves. But the problem is that this kind of person would look like a fool, like a person who is not sane. And that was the mistake that was done during introduction of one of the film adaptations of *Death of a Salesman*, directed by László Benedek and produced by Columbia Pictures in 1951. The main character Willy Loman was made by actor Fredric March and the film was introduced to be about a mad, old and poor, totally Un-American person, which drove Miller mad. He said that they totally missed the idea, the essence of the play and made a



film about a madman which American people would not like to see, because who would go to film about an Un-American American while the American Dream was everywhere? After Miller saw it, he started to wonder if he wanted to entitle it with *Death of a Salesman* at all and noted: “You’ve just destroyed the film you’ve made, because if this is true then my film must be some aberration of an idiot” (*Arthur Miller and Company* 59). According to website *pbs.org*, it is Miller’s opinion, that the final face of the film was influenced politically.

Another problem of misinterpretation appeared in China, according to *The Guardian* from 13<sup>th</sup> February 2005, “his work was never put at the service of propaganda,” but “while producing *Death of a Salesman* in China, he had to give his local cast a sympathetic lesson in American social history so they could understand what a commercial traveller actually did.”

This work has already described many rather physical aspects, but the term which hasn’t been explained yet, no matter how self-evident it appears, is the term “ideal”. The notion of an ideal is very wide. According to server *definitions.net*, ideal as a noun can be for example “a conception of something in its perfection, the idea of something that is perfect” or “something that one hopes to attain”.

To not rely on only Miller’s opinion, I supported the explanation by D. Hansen’s work, which clearly explains the basic stand-points of it.

David Hansen wrote that critics argued that ideals should be limited in the means of teaching and so in other practices as well (2). According to his work, critics insist on two concerns: “the power of ideals to develop a momentum of their own, and their prosperity to lead people to substitute hypothetical goals for real possibilities” (2). John Malkovich said about Miller’s plays that they were prophetic and criticized Miller’s antagonists that his plays always addressed the principal feelings and dilemmas and morality of this time. Over the course of a life time, he has taught, in the true sense” (Bigsby 75).

To explain the character of the ideal, it is best to make a comparison between the ideal and the real. Hansen explains that “the ideal is better than real because it is —pure, distinct, unadulterated, uncompromised, and untainted” (3), while the real is bad, because it is “complex, frustrating, unpredictable, opaque, overwhelming in its human variety” (3). Since that there is no doubt that that ideals grow very easily and even more easily we can fall for them:

People can end up treating ideals as more important than actual human beings. In other words, people might come to prefer the ideal to the real . . . As a response, people may privilege the ideal, rather than keeping their vision clear in order to appreciate the needs, the circumstances, and the hopes of others. Eventually, they might come to see only the ideal, with potentially harmful results (3).

One of the results is that “ideals can inspire people on the basis of passion rather than on careful foresight” (2). So according to Hansen, having an ideal can be a dangerous thing.

Going back to the term of “happiness”, mentioned above, we can deduct that Miller wanted to say a very similar thing as we now know from Hansen and it is possible to say that his happiness stands for the term ideal. He said that there is too much of an attempt in controlling man rather than freeing him. He said that it more defines man than frees him. And to what is the most extended ideal he said that it is the power-mad. Hansen defined the line between the promise and perils of the ideals; he said that they point to “territory beyond the familiar, the known, the previously attainable. They embody possibilities which the human spirit can generate. Even though they may be out of reach, ideals can provide a source of guidance and courage” (Hansen 2).

But how do we prevent this thing, how to cure us from the ideals? To answer this question Hansen mentioned only one idea. To prevent the negative impact of ideals and he said that “human beings need and deserve education in thoughtfulness” (3). Michael Oakeshott remarks that “ideals have a valuable price in individual lives, spurring people to act better or to strive harder in developing themselves than they otherwise might” (qtd. in Hansen 5). Again he points to the danger which ideals are capable of, they “can lead to harm if they are not carried with critically enough on the social and political level” (qtd. in Hansen 5). People in some cases carry their ideals as weapons and wield them “to combat the opposition and to mask the exercise of their power and ambition” (qtd. in Hansen 5). Oakeshott expressed this in one sentence: “Every moral ideal is potentially an obsession” (qtd. in Hansen 5). After that Hansen mentions the project of becoming tenaciously humble, which appears to be something like “anti-ideal” training:

The project of becoming tenaciously humble does not render a person into a hardened or fixed character. Rather, it illuminates how a character or

personhood can genuinely emerge and grow, even in the face of any number of societal, cultural, familial, or psychological constraints and forces. Like all ideals, tenacious humility is not attainable in any final or penultimate sense. In metaphorical terms, it is always receding, always just over the horizon no matter how much one strives to realize it in practice (Hansen 11).

After putting Professor Hansen's ideas together with Miller's, we will realize that there is no cure or manual, how to behave without being obsessed by our ideals. Like Miller said, we just need to "suffer" to be good. According to *The Guardian* from 12<sup>th</sup> February 2005, "[Miller] was always a critic of society who retained an unshakable belief in the possibility of human goodness," and so we just have to know, that all we do is after all good for us.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize this undergraduate thesis I could use one sentence from 12<sup>th</sup> February 2005 from *The Guardian*: “Miller documented an imperfect world without ever sacrificing his liberal idealism.” Miller’s plays appear to be something, which could be called theory in practice, or to be correct practice in theory. Many people with very similar ideals lived in the same period as this playwright did, and I would remark that the main reasons of his plays are documentation about how bad the situation was in America and how families lived during The Great Depression. Arthur Miller, deliberately or not, made a great observance of living in America.

According to the sources used for this thesis, one of Miller’s motives for writing was his insatiable dissatisfaction after seeing the unstoppable fall of the accustomed American Dream. Within his plays he constructed a living portrait, shamefully realistic frame of something which one would call “standard” American life. Topics of his plays slightly varied, but Miller’s idea had always been connected to the rumors about America, which were talking in superlatives and widespread around the world. He didn’t strictly criticize that just living in America was supposed to lead to richness or happiness, but the concept of this idea was interesting, because he mainly focused the problem on a single family, which made great contribution to the real feel of the play.

If we use Christopher Bigsby’s words, Miller wanted to say that between father and the rest of the family in America was some kind of magnetic force that paradoxically pulls them together and at the same time throws them apart (*Arthur Miller: The Critical Study* 102).

Another point of view can think about Miller as an idealist or realist and optimist and pessimist. According to J. Seiden’s article “When Ideal Doesn’t Mean Ideal” the verdict can be hard to pronounce:

The difference between an idealist and a realist is not the same as that between an optimist and a pessimist. Whereas the optimist and pessimist disagree about whether to use can or can’t, idealists and realists disagree on whether to use should or will.

The previous quote matches also Miller's style of writing. Miller puts his figures right into middle of the struggle of The Great Depression, so they are taken by surprise and confused by cruel American business. People, especially fathers of families, do not know how to face The Depression. They cannot decide which stance they should engage. They try to appear like optimists, but they are still lost in pessimistic thoughts. They dream like idealists, but wake up as realists. This contradiction results in conflicts inside their families, corruption of their ideals, and finally in the suffering.

On one hand Miller wanted to say that suffering is noble, but on the other hand his work describes corruption, disappointment and failure of American people. But why there were so many broken ideals and failed fathers, is suffering really a mistake like Miller said? The message which I found in Arthur Miller's work is that people in America suffer too much. Their failure is the result of overdose from suffering which according to Miller's plays has negative consequences. This suffering is caused by the American Dream which is actually a propaganda that attracts American people by promises of good life. But in fact it is a drug with ugly side effects. So what is the right amount of it? How much should people suffer and why? These questions were not directly explained by Arthur Miller, but like he said, we should not want to undo suffering, we should just overcome it, thinking that it is actually noble and it will bring be good experience to us.

From Arthur Miller's plays we can deduct that the suffering is supposed to be the cure of the American Dream, because it should cure people from its symptoms of weakness and illness. But on the other hand it is actually treatment of fire by fire and the results are not stable.

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## SUMMARY IN CZECH

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá zkoumáním amerických ideálů v dílech i životě amerického dramatika Arthura Millera a zkoumá jeho myšlenku, která je založena na nutnosti takzvaného „utrpení“. Tato práce nemá za úkol doslovně popisovat děj jednotlivých her, ale snaží se zaměřit na motivy, které se v jeho dílech vyskytují. Hlavním motivem této práce je v první řadě role neúspěšného otce rodiny, který se snaží během velké hospodářské krize jít svým dětem příkladem. V práci hrají vedle Millerovy biografie a názorů světových kritiků významnou roli jeho hry Smrt obchodního cestujícího, Pohled z mostu, Všichni moji synové a také Čarodějky ze Salemu.