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The American Dream versus Family Dream in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

Marsela TURKU, "Aleksandër Moisiu" University of Durrës, Albania

marselaturku@yahoo.com

Abstract

The Great Depression brought about chaos in the American society of the thirties and provoked changes in people's values and beliefs, in their way of life and attitude to the American dream, to their ethical and moral implications of the American dream of success apparently uniting all Americans before the thirties. According to Charles R. Hearn (1977, 4) the essential underlying question is: "What happened to this deeply ingrained and wonderfully compelling dream of success during the 1930s?" This paper will indirectly try to answer this question by analysing the transformation of the American dream in Miller's play *Death of Salesman*.

This paper will also try to address the question of how this play can be interpreted as a play about the American Dream versus Family Dream. The historical conditions that brought about the creation of the American dream and the influence it had on the society and literature will be briefly discussed first. Then the focus will be precisely on the main protagonist, Willy Lowman, whose American dream is closely connected with his profession, his idealized business world and his relationship with his family. These three levels of connection give us a clear panorama of this aging salesman who embodies the anxieties of a culture, the failure of a society which apparently values only success and the distortion of the American dream, which encourages people to exchange material success for spiritual fulfilment.

Key words: *American dream, social drama, failure, material success, conflict*