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The American success myth: A study of the American dream in five plays

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THE AMERICAN SUCCESS MYTH:
A STUDY OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN FIVE PLAYS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of English
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Yoshiko Tanaka
October, 1971

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Accepted for the faculty of The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

As John Donne long ago wrote, "No man is an island." Man as a social entity molds and is molded by his society, which interprets its own experience and sets its values for its members. Even though great art transcends its narrow cultural milieu by appealing to people in all ages and all places, it can also be said that a situation in which a character is placed greatly influences his way of thinking and acting. This is particularly true of a work which contains a social or a historical issue: the historical background enhances the understanding and appreciation of the work.

The present study traces the impact of the American Dream or American Success Myth through five American plays, all of which contain, with varied emphasis, the theme of the American Dream. That dream has an unarticulated set of attitudes which cannot be formulated precisely, yet it has had a tremendous influence on American society. The purpose of this study is first to trace briefly the development of the American Success Dream and then to determine how that dream was portrayed in five well-accepted plays produced successively within five decades of the twentieth century. Of particular interest will be an examination of the characters in these plays in the light of their cultural milieu, a milieu which accepted the success myth as the key to American life.

In order to understand these seekers of the dream, one must understand first the dream itself--what it is, what historical or social impact it had on American life. Though the idea of the dream is simple,

its elements are varied and complex. For this reason, the first chapter begins with a brief examination of the success myth--its definition; the political, social, historical, and religious impact on the formation of the myth; as well as the subsequent changes in emphasis and details until the beginning of the twentieth century. Chapter two examines five plays individually to see how the mythology of success has been reflected on the American stage.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE AMERICAN SUCCESS MYTH

Success shall be in thy courser tall,
Success in thyself, which is best of all,
Success in thy hand, success in thy foot,
In struggle with man, in battle with brute:
The holy God and Saint Drothin dear
Shall never shut eyes on thy career;
Look out, look out, Svend Vonved!

Thus long ago a Norse mother sang to her son. In every land, in every age, success has been man's common goal. But "success," so universally sought, has not always had the same meaning for everyone: to some it meant a religious or spiritual attainment; to some it meant an intellectual achievement; to some, physical prowess or military victory; still to others success was a social or political goal. Each of these views of success has been strongly affected by the cultural background of the individual who sought to succeed in the society of which he was a part.

American society, like any other society, has formulated its own interpretation of "success." America in her own interpretation has, however, praised success probably more loudly and vigorously than any other society. Since in the land of the free, a man could move more easily than in a rigidly structured or static society, and since frontier conditions as well as democratic ideals required such characteristics as industry, independence, self-reliance and resiliency, the farther a man advanced himself in his life-time from his lowly state, the more praiseworthy he was viewed. Thus the boy "from the log cabin to the White House," the one who had not inherited wealth but had

earned a high status by hard and honest work, became the type that epitomized American "success." This particular image of success has become an American myth commonly called the "American Dream": anyone of lowly birth with such virtues as determination, honesty and hard work, could hope to raise himself to any position in society.

The American success myth contains a number of unique elements:
① firstly, the successful person usually came from a humble and poor origin. Secondly, ② the successful person reached success primarily through hard work. Most of the early immigrants from the old countries who settled down in the new land were farmers and hunters. In order to survive in this wild, vast frontier, the pioneers had to work hard: there were Indians from whom they had to protect themselves; there were rugged mountains and desolate plains to cultivate, wild animals to tame. One had to work hard in the wilderness or die. But at the same time, there were gold and silver mines and oil fields waiting to be tapped. Thus every stroke of the hoe and the hammer in the expanding frontier seemed to assure a fair return for honest work. To the frontiersman nature was an honest master who rewarded the laborer according to the sweat of his brow.

Besides a strong sense of independence, individuality, and resiliency, these conditions thus created a belief in hard and honest work. No one but himself could help a man in this isolated land. Heaven would help only him who helped himself. These rugged, hard-working pioneers were also idealists. They dreamed of a Utopia in the New World--of starting an ideal life in an ideal society. And in this

young and flexible society, everything seemed possible.

Not only frontier conditions but also the political system of democracy contributed to the uniquely American interpretation of success. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, all expressed the dream of eliminating the social barriers commonly seen in the old countries and placing faith in the potentialities of common men. They all emphasized liberty, equality, and the right to pursue happiness. Abraham Lincoln became the prototype of the American Success Myth not only because of his "Honest Abe" image of a rugged country boy who without hereditary advantage rose from the humble cottage to the White House, but also because of his political idealism. His refusal to compromise on the slavery issue in spite of the cost involved revealed the American belief in the fight against the evils of society as well as her optimism in winning the fight.

This democratic idealism combined with a frontier idealism thus gave men a firm basis for optimism and for identifying moral law with natural law. The good, they thought, must triumph and survive, while the evil must perish.

This uniquely American view of success contains yet another characteristic: it is primarily economic. America is a place where anyone, no matter how poor he may be, has the chance of becoming rich. The Constitution stated that men are created equal. It meant, however, not equality of persons, positions, or possessions, but rather "equality of opportunities" for the pursuit of happiness. The acquisition of "happiness" could be had by any one who was willing to seek it. In the

comparatively classless, simple agrarian society of the frontiers, neither political or military ability nor intellectual superiority were sufficient to distinguish men in their achievement. But the amount of material possessions was the most obvious and simple means of differentiating. Thus American "success" came to signify primarily material possessions or wealth; the "pursuit of happiness" came to mean the "pursuit of wealth." Trade and manufacturing, which appear to offer the quickest and readiest means of success, came to be looked upon as the most promising sort of employment.

Alexis de Tocqueville, while touring the United States in the early nineteenth century, observed the restlessness of Americans caused by mobility in American society. Since any one could get rich, open competition caused the rich to be afraid of losing their wealth while the "desire of acquiring the comforts of the world haunted the imagination of the poor."¹

In a country of freedom and individualism, even the government had no right to interfere with a man's pursuit of "happiness." Laissez-faire policy assured people that limitless resources and opportunities would open the doors to an unlimited share of riches for every ambitious, hard-working man.

Whether this assurance was valid or not had no particular influence on the formation of the American Dream. So long as people believed that opportunities were equal and abundant to any one who sought them,

¹Alexis de Tocqueville, "Democracy in America," The Great Ideas Today (London, 1964), p. 427.

the dream could exist.

Given the materialistic bent of the American success myth, one might wonder how the early settlers and founders of the New World, a deeply religious group of Christians, reacted to this interpretation of success, to the worship of material wealth. Did not Christ warn his followers repeatedly how difficult it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven?

Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19:23-24)

And no man can serve both God and wealth:

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Luke 16:13)

To a young man Christ pointed out the way of achieving Christian perfection:

Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:33-34)

Early American Protestants did not, however, seem to interpret Christ's sayings literally. Max Weber, in his Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, points out the striking contrast between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age in the changing attitudes toward money and money-making. The Middle Ages regarded profit-making or "unlimited lust for gain" as "socially degrading and morally and religiously

dangerous."² Money-lenders were despised and profit-seeking was "proscribed as the lowest sort of avarice and as an attitude entirely lacking in self-respect."³ The acquisition of wealth was "tolerated only because of the unalterable necessities of life in the world,"⁴ and "the pursuit of riches...was...feared as the enemy of religion."⁵

However, the Puritans, the children of the Reformation who settled in the New World, inherited a different view of material prosperity and affluence. The Reformation with social, economic, and technological changes, brought about a new outlook on money-making and religion. The discarding of the double standards of morality as lay and religious urged the Protestants to fulfill their obligations to God, not apart from the world but within the sphere of secular life. Every Christian had a calling to perform on this earth. Luther and Calvin did not disregard the Bible but brought about a psychological change in the attitudes toward money-making by putting emphasis on the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs.

Hard work and a life of frugality in normal economic conditions resulted in the accumulation of wealth in excess to what was needed for the necessities of life. These excess profits were now looked upon

²Kemper Fullerton, "Calvinism and Capitalism: An Explanation of the Weber Thesis," Protestantism and Capitalism, ed. Robert W. Green (Boston, 1959), p. 6.

³Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York, 1956), p. 56.

⁴Ibid., p. 73.

⁵R. H. Tawney, "Forward," The Protestant Ethic, p. 3.

as a sign of a man's godly principles, of God's favor, of the assurance of his being chosen, and of a proof of the fulfillment of his calling. Therefore, denial of wealth or profit-making opportunities came to mean the denial of man's calling from God to work as His steward. The early Puritans exalted this idea of stewardship and regarded piety, hard and honest work, industriousness, monastic asceticism, frugality, and self-control as cardinal virtues that opened the gates of success. This attitude of fulfilling obligations in worldly business certainly helped free pious Puritans from the worries of two conflicting forces, God and mammon. They were no longer enemies but allies, and this "inevitably gave everyday worldly activity a religious significance."⁶ As Weber asserts, pious men now fell heir to a "gloriously, one might even say, a pharisaically, good conscience in money making."⁷ In this way, religion also contributed a great deal to the formation of the American Dream of Success by giving it an ethical foundation.

American literature from the early period reflects the American Success Myth. Dr. Griswold's pioneering study on Cotton Mather, one of the most influential Calvinist ministers in Puritan America, well illustrates the Puritan attitudes toward the relationship of business and religion. Mather had a great deal to say on the interpretation of success, and his sermons support the Weber thesis. In his Essays to Do Good, Cotton Mather reminded rich men of God's blessings:

⁶Weber, p. 80.

⁷Fullerton, "Calvinism and Capitalism," p. 20.

Sirs, you cannot but acknowledge that it is the sovereign God who has bestowed upon you the riches which distinguish you. A devil himself, when he saw a rich man, could not but make this acknowledgment to the God of heaven: "Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land."⁸

God is the One who "gives power to get wealth."⁹ Since God rewards the good doers "with remarkable success in their affairs and increase of their property,"¹⁰ and punishes the evil doers with "heavy and grievous afflictions,"¹¹ to encourage good works, a man of wealth is therefore God's elect; wealth is the sign of his election.

More specifically, however, Cotton Mather discussed the relationship of business and religion in Two Brief Discourses, one Directing a Christian in his General Calling; another Directing him in his Personal Calling. Every Christian, Mather preached, has two callings: a general calling and a personal calling. The general calling is "to Serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and Save his own Soul, in the Services of Religion"; the personal calling is a "certain Particular Employment, by which his Usefulness in his Neighborhood, is distinguished."¹² Mather thought of the Christian with his two callings as "a man in a Boat,

⁸Cotton Mather, Essays to Do Good (New York, 1810), pp. 86-87.

⁹Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 89.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 28-29.

¹²Cotton Mather, A Christian at his Calling: Two Brief Discourses, one Directing A Christian in his General Calling; Another Directing him in his Personal Calling (Boston, 1701), p. 37. (micro-card)

Rowing for Heaven; the House which our Heavenly Father hath intended for us. If he mind but one of his Callings, be it which it will, he pulls the Oar, but on one side of the Boat, and will make but a poor dispatch to the Shoar of Eternal Blessedness.¹³

The good Christian must row with two oars--prayer and personal business--in order to get to heaven. A mere worshipping in prayer is not enough. A man must be useful in society as well as pious. "Labour and Success," Mather preached, "were the happy Instruments of the greatest Good unto him."¹⁴ Work on earth became a duty. "Whoever buries his talent," Mather warned, "betrays a sacred trust."¹⁵ Hence, a man should work hard to increase his talents in order "to give a Good Account of his Occupation and of his Behaviour in it"¹⁶ to God who entrusted them to him.

Achievement of success in business was thus explained as a means of giving glory to God. Therefore, the qualities necessary to fulfill his personal calling such as industry, ingenuity, determination, shrewdness, and useful skills, were equally important as religious virtues. In this way the secular work of business, the money-making element included, was elevated to a "calling."

¹³Ibid., pp. 37-38.

¹⁴Cotton Mather, Sober Sentiments: In an Essay upon the Vain Pre-
sumption of Living and Thriving in the World; which does too often pro-
ffit and poison the Children of this World. Produced by the Premature
and much lamented DEATH of Mr. Joshua Lamb, who died (of a Fall received
a few Days before) July 15, 1722 (Boston, 1722), p. 29.

¹⁵Mather, Essays to Do Good, p. 86.

¹⁶Mather, Two Brief Discourses, p. 36.

Since we will "not get Gain by Buying and Selling, except GOD smile upon" us, and since if we "honor the Lord with our substance... so shall our barns be filled with plenty,"¹⁷ "ought you not then," Mather asks, "to seek His favor...so that we may not labor in vain"?¹⁸ Since we cannot "expect that our Business will succeed without God's Blessing,"¹⁹ Mather persuaded his audience, is it not better to "maintain your Morning and Evening Devotions...religiously to observe the Lord's Day...liberally to Disburse upon pious Uses...in order to obtain the Blessing of GOD upon your Business"?²⁰ It is, therefore, easy to understand that Puritan merchants reached an expedient conclusion, as Professor Griswold observed: "Practice the Christian virtues; kneel daily in prayer, and all your Business will go on the better, all the day, for your being thus faithful to God."²¹ Piety thus came to be a practical means to supplement lack of business acumen. Mather explored this idea when he preached:

Acknowledge thy Dependence on the Glorious GOD,
for thy Thriving in the World. It is what we
are minded of; Deut. VIII, 18. Thou shalt
remember the Lord thy God; for it is He that
gives thee Power to get wealth. Be sensible of
this; Riches not always to them who are sharpest

¹⁷Mather, Essays to Do Good, p. 89.

¹⁸Mather, Sober Sentiments, p. 26.

¹⁹Mather, Two Brief Discourses, p. 23.

²⁰Mather, Sober Sentiments, p. 26.

²¹A. W. Griswold, The American Gospel of Success (Connecticut, 1933), p. 11 (microfilm)

at inventing the most probable Methods of coming at it. Be sensible of this; the way to succeed in our Enterprises, O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself! Be sensible of this; In our Occupation we spread our Nets; but it is God who brings unto our Nets all that comes into them.²²

Since "Riches not always to them who are sharpest at inventing the most probable Method of coming at it," Dr. Griswold concludes that this paradoxical statement provided a democratic hope for any humble, common man to succeed in the business world.

Thus the diligent use of one's life for the pursuit of earthly goods became a duty. People began to view wealth as God's reward for man's piety, industry, honesty, and self-denial.

After Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin added a utilitarian twist to the Puritan interpretation of success. As the representative of American democracy and common men in the familiar image of a merchant with bifocal spectacles, Franklin became the national image of success. His Autobiography clearly portrays his own rags-to-riches success story. He declared that his Autobiography was written by a self-made man of success to instruct youth in the way to succeed in this world--a way which he thought "fit to be imitated":

From the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and in which I passed my earliest years, I have raised myself to a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world. As constant good fortune has accompanied me even

²²Mather, Sober Sentiments, p. 25.

to an advanced period of life, my posterity will perhaps be desirous of learning the means, which, I employed, and which, thanks to Providence, so well succeeded with me. They may also deem them fit to be imitated.²³

Franklin drew up a set of rules "necessary or desirable" to become a success. Such virtues were industry, frugality, temperance, determination, chastity, cleanliness--all practical virtues with which the way to wealth is paved.

In the above passage Franklin revealed his deep insight into the psychology of the masses. He did not forget to show his humble beginnings as well as his improved station and reminded the readers that in this free country any one could do the same if he tried. He portrayed himself as a penniless, run-away apprentice in dirty clothes wandering aimlessly through the streets of Philadelphia and commented, "I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, and shall be so of my first entry into the city, that you may in your mind compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there."²⁴

In Advice to a Young Tradesman Franklin's philosophy of life and his view of success are clearly revealed. Being a merchant himself, Franklin focused his advice on the acquisition of wealth, which his success signified:

...the way to wealth, if you desire it, is as simple as the way to market. It depends chiefly on two words, industry and frugality; that is,

²³Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography and Other Writings, ed. Russell B. Nye (Boston, 1958), p. 1.

²⁴Benjamin Franklin, "Autobiography," Benjamin Franklin and the American Characters, ed. Charles L. Sanford (Boston, 1955), p. 9.

waste neither time nor money, but make the best use of both. Without industry and frugality nothing will do, and with them everything. He that gets all he can honestly, and saves all he gets (necessary expenses excepted), will certainly become rich, if that Being who governs the world, to whom all should look for a blessing on their honest endeavors doth not, in his wise providence, otherwise determine.²⁵

The same advice was given also in The Way to Wealth: Make a living by the sweat of your brow and save all you can; industry and frugality are the two main ways to lead a man to success.

Franklin, who advised people to hold to the Puritan ethic of industry and frugality, also insisted that industry is good because it brings along with it the confidence and support of others. Get up early, Franklin urged: the sound of your hammer heard from your shop early in the morning will soften your creditor's heart. Time is money; therefore, do not waste money by idling. Prompt payment is good because "the good paymaster is lord of another man's purse."²⁶

Franklin's view on character as a vital factor for success clearly resembles Mather's. Franklin himself admitted that he was influenced by Mather: "Essays to Do Good has an influence on my conduct through life; for I have always set a greater value on the character of a doer of good, than any other kind of reputation."²⁷ Franklin was likewise

²⁵Franklin, Autobiography and Other Writings, p. 167.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 166-67.

²⁷Mather, "Preface," Essays to Do Good.

influenced by his background; he was reared in a Calvinist family in a Puritan society in Massachusetts and knew well the Puritan interpretation of success and wealth. Poor Richard's maxims, "Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise"; "Heaven helps those who help themselves"; "He that hath a trade hath an Estate; and he that hath a Calling, hath an office of Profit and Honor"; "Honesty is the best policy,"--all recognize the importance of a virtuous character for success. Once this character is achieved, success is inevitable, since there is little room for chance or luck: "Diligence is the Mother of Good Luck" and "God gives all things to Industry," Poor Richard says. Once you have the magic passwords, the door of success will open automatically.

Franklin's promise of success is based on pragmatic reasoning. Franklin succeeded in enhancing American idealism in its identification of moral virtues with material rewards. He presented in writing a cult of material success and succeeded in making it a quasi-religion. Franklin's maxims in reaffirming the sanctity of individual prosperity within the frame-work of Christian teaching challenged the restless energy of young men who wanted to get ahead. His maxims are deeply inbedded in American business traditions.

With the aid of an expanding industrialism, the spirit of this uniquely American Success Dream swept nineteenth century America more powerfully and vigorously than ever and secured a conscious and definite place in American folklore, in spite of frequent objections raised by concerned thinkers.

The philosopher, William James, scorned America's "exclusive worship of the bitch-goddess SUCCESS. That--with the squalid cash interpretation put on the word success--is our national disease."²⁸ More dissident voices against material success came from the New England transcendentalists. Emerson in his essay "Success" expressed his hatred of the "shallow Americanism which hopes to get rich by credit,"²⁹ and feared that "the popular notion of success stands in direct opposition in all points to the real and wholesome success."³⁰ To him "the passion for sudden success is rude and puerile"³¹ and disgusting. Henry David Thoreau spoke against "incessant business" where men had "nothing but work, work, work," and "are commonly ruled for dollars and cents."³²

Nevertheless, these voices were too feeble to change the course of the tide. People were now openly professing their faith in the attainability of success. The mood of the age was especially favorable for the upsurge of the American Dream. The triumph of the industrial North over the agrarian South provided a suitable ground for the Success Dream: factories and towns were growing rapidly. Partly as a result of rapid economic growth America was experiencing unprecedented restless-

²⁸William James, The Letters of William James, ed. Henry James (Boston, 1920), p. 260.

²⁹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Success," Success in America, ed. James J. Clark and Robert H. Woodward (Belmont, California, 1966), p. 173.

³⁰Ibid., p. 176.

³¹Ibid., p. 173.

³²Henry David Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," Success in America, p. 180.

ness and fast social mobility. Many boys were leaving their farms for factories. Newly developing industries were producing many empires of wealth and countless nouveau riches. It was the age of the common man; chances to get rich were greater. The future seemed bright; success, people dreamed, was within their reach.

This longing and optimism of the masses also appeared in the popular fiction of the latter part of the nineteenth century. The theme of success was fully and specifically exploited in books for young boys. Oliver Optic was writing success stories for Student and Schoolmate; William M. Thayer, the pastor of the Congregational Church in Ashland, Massachusetts, was describing in such popular success stories as The Poor Boy and the Merchant Prince, certain principles which, once adopted and carried out, would bring success to everyone.

However, none of these success books surpassed in their popularity Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches stories. No accurate record has been kept of the number of Alger books sold and circulated, but estimates run from fifteen million³³ to two hundred million.³⁴

As many critics have pointed out, Alger's stories are basically alike. His hero is about twelve to sixteen years old, a poor country lad supporting a widowed mother. He goes to New York to seek his fortune; with pluck and luck he pulls himself up, lifts a mortgage which was held by a villanous, miserly squire who was prepared to foreclose, and firmly

³³Robert Falk, "Notes on the 'Higher Criticism' of Horatio Alger, Jr.," Arizona Quarterly, XIX, ii (Summer, 1963), 151.

³⁴Norman Holland, "Hobbling with Horatio, or the Use of Literature," The Hudson Review, XII, iv (Winter, 1959-60), 549.

places his foot on the first step of the success ladder. All the Alger stories contain this male-Cinderella theme. With the magic stick of a benefactor, the hero is carried from poverty to a luxurious castle on Fifth Avenue where the nineteenth century prince, a captain of industry, resides. Alger's nineteenth century version of the Cinderella story, however, possesses a twist: it replaces love with a dollar sign.

Alger's hero is "slenderly but strongly made," is "of a cheerful temperament," and has "a frank, straight-forward attractive face and a winning smile." Even in poor clothes, Alger's hero always looks neat and clean. Even the streetarab like Ragged Dick, a shelterless boot-black and baggage "smasher," after he acquires the success formula, abandons his "dirty Napoleon pants" and "Washington Coat" and takes particular care of his personal appearance.³⁵ He is popular among his peers and well liked by the young and the old.

Alger's interpretation of success can be easily measured from the titles of his books: Rags to Riches, Strive and Succeed, Struggling Upward, Luck and Pluck, Sink or Swim, Bound to Rise, and many others. All of Alger's heroes are poor but ambitious. They all know well, as Ben in The Store Boy did, that "most of our rich men were once poor boys"³⁶..."Franklin, Webster, Clay were poor boys once...even Vanderbilt and Astor--some of the richest men of New York."³⁷ These poor heroes

³⁵Horatio Alger, Fame and Fortune or The Progress of Richard Hunter (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 26.

³⁶Horatio Alger, "The Store Boy," Strive and Succeed, intro. S. N. Behrman (New York, 1967), p. 24.

³⁷Alger, "Julius," Strive and Succeed, p. 30.

are determined to rise in the business world. Alger teaches his readers that "one who wants to climb the ladder of success must...commence at the lowest round,"³⁸ and that the reason Roswell failed was that he "did not like to start from the bottom" but "half way up at the least."³⁹ To be born in wealth is a piece of ill luck according to Alger, because there is no room to climb upward. When Ben in The Store Boy "looked at a well-dressed gentleman" and "thinks it must be pleasant to be born with a gold spoon in his mouth...", Alger steps in and lectures:

If Ben had been wiser he would have judged differently. To be born to wealth removes all the incentives to action, and checks the spirit of enterprise. A boy or man who finds himself gradually rising in the world, through his own exertions, experiences a satisfaction unknown to one whose future is ready-made.⁴⁰

Holy Horatio as his playmates called him, never stopped preaching; first from the pulpit of the Unitarian Church in Brewster, Massachusetts; next from the pulpit of his writing desk. In his heroes Alger personified the Calvinistic virtues which Cotton Mather had preached. His hero is a loyal disciple of the good old Puritan principles. He views work as a calling, works hard, saves as much as he can, and lives by the golden rule. Even the bootblack like Ragged Dick, who swore, drank, gambled and frequented the theatres in the Bowery, conforms rapidly to the middle-class, Puritan way of living once he discovers what it is to

³⁸Alger, Fame and Fortune, p. 118.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Alger, "The Store Boy," p. 46.

occupy an honorable place in society. Once the hero conforms to the success formula, success is inescapable.

In addition to the Puritan virtues, Alger's success heroes are faithful followers of Franklin's utilitarian maxims. Herbert recognizes that piety alone does not lead to success since "God helps them who help themselves."⁴¹ Honesty is invaluable because it brings the confidence of others. Hence Luke Walton, a poor newspaper boy, brings the change to Benjamin Afton, who tries Luke's honesty by giving him a \$5 bill. Julius wins his benefactor's confidence by returning the pocketbook containing \$267, which he found in the carriage. "You began in the right way," Frank Whitney encourages Ragged Dick, "when you determined never to steal, or do anything mean or dishonorable, however strongly tempted to do so."⁴² Julius also discovers as Franklin did that "an honest life is the easiest in the end."⁴³ Saving money is also another practical virtue in capturing a benefactor's trust. Ragged Dick secures the confidence of Mrs. Browning, the landlady, by showing her his savings book. "I am sure I can trust you," Mrs. Browning says, "Boys who formed so good a habit of saving can be depended upon."⁴⁴

All of Alger's heroes started poor and ended up well-to-do. All of them searched for money and made it quickly. Moreover, "well-merited retribution" came to the villain for his violation of these

⁴¹Horatio Alger, Do and Dare or, A Brave Boy's Fight for Fortune (Chicago, n.d.), p. 36.

⁴²Frank Gruber, Horatio Alger, Jr. (California, 1961), p. 44.

⁴³Alger, "Julius," p. 23.

⁴⁴Alger, Fame and Fortune, p. 15.

virtues. The good always won money, while the bad lost it. The virtue or bravery of our hero was measured by how much he earned. Money, not the hero, appears to be the center of Alger's stories. "Money," Alger commented in The Store Boy,

is said, by certain moralists, to be the root of all evil. The love of money, if carried too far, may indeed lead to evil, but it is a natural ambition in any boy or man to wish to raise himself above poverty. The wealth of Amos Lawrence and Peter Cooper was a source of blessing to mankind, yet each started as a poor boy, and neither would have become rich if he had not striven hard to become so.⁴⁵

Here Alger implies that poverty is a sin; in this bountiful country, no one sinks into deep poverty except by laziness and vice.

Monetary success in Alger's stories, however, always results from luck. The heroic virtues of hard work, thrift, honesty do not indeed achieve success but a lucky incident does; a wealthy man or his child is saved from a run-away carriage, or from drowning in a river, or from a pickpocket. Those saved are always wealthy and appreciative and lavish praises and a handsome sum of money on the protagonist which enables our hero to start climbing the success ladder.

Even though luck plays the dominant part in Alger's stories, Alger denies luck as the source of the hero's success. What seems to be luck is divine providence, as Frank's mother explains: "Do not forget, Frank, who it is that has raised up this friend for you. Give him the thanks."⁴⁶ God sends the benevolent steward to reward our hero for his

⁴⁵Alger, "The Store Boy," p. 68.

⁴⁶Horatio Alger, Frank's Campaign (Chicago, n.d.), p. 218.

virtues. Money becomes the outward manifestation of inward grace. Only the hero who is ethically ready can recognize the lucky opportunities as such and move ahead.

What appears to be luck is also the achievement of character, or certain qualities of mind and heart. Alger comments: "Those who represent themselves as born to ill luck can usually trace the ill luck to errors or shortcomings of their own...in nine cases out of ten the success or failure may be traced to a difference in the qualities of the boys."⁴⁷ Character is the "artificer of your own fortune." With Franklin, Alger enforced the strong American belief in the worth of work, the test of character, and a popular personality in achieving success. Thus, sound morals in a well-liked, sturdy character became "the whole equipment for success in life."

Horatio Alger spelled out the motive and the elements of the Dream telling many a youngster that America is indeed the land of opportunity and wealth. His prophecy echoed in the restless gilded cities as well as in rural America as Alger affirmed that success was near at hand and that it was in the form of money. His sermons encouraged the democratic hope that "if Ragged Dick could do it, so can I."

In the course of thirty years, more than a hundred Alger books were written and widely read. Many successful self-made men credited Alger for their success. With this unfailing formula for success, Alger captured the fundamental, crucial element of American culture and stirred

⁴⁷ Horatio Alger, Jr., Driven from Home, or Carl Crawford's Experience (New York, n.d.), p. 48.

the uncritical fantasy of youth. His paradoxical ending of rewarding a poor, virtuous boy with money, as Dr. Griswold puts it, "converted virtue into cash."⁴⁸

With these simple didactic tales of poor boys who made good, Alger became the most influential contributor to the dreams and the ambitions of nineteenth century America. Even after his books ceased to be read, the idea lingered on into the twentieth century. Alger's name became a synonym for the American symbol of success, and the success codes by which Alger's heroes advanced themselves are still considered valid by many people today.

Along with Alger's success books, a great many churchmen of the nineteenth century helped keep this dream aglow by delivering sermons on the success gospel. These leaders of American morals, who inherited the Puritan concept of success, saw no dilemma between choosing God and mammon. The most popular and influential prophet of success was Russell Conwell, a Baptist minister, who preached his "Acres of Diamonds" over five thousand times throughout the United States, urging Americans to get money. "You ought to get rich," Conwell persuaded, "it's your Christian and godly duty to do so,...because to make money honestly is to preach the gospel";⁴⁹ you can do more good with it than you could without--money can print the Bible, money can build churches, and send forth missionaries. "It is all wrong to be poor," Conwell emphatically

⁴⁸Griswold, p. 73.

⁴⁹Russell H. Conwell, Acres of Diamonds (New York, 1915), pp. 18, 20.

stated, since "there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings, or by the shortcomings of some one else."⁵⁰ Since honesty is necessary to get rich, Conwell's logic proceeded, the men who get rich are the most honest men. And "that is why they are rich;...that is why they are trusted with money."⁵¹ Any one can be the trustee of God's property because "the opportunity to get rich, to attain unto great wealth, is here...now, within the reach of almost every man and woman...."⁵² Diamonds are everywhere and for everyone. What is needed to dig them out are the Christian virtues and hard work.

Conwell explicitly equated religious virtues with qualities necessary to business success. To him "the foundation of godliness and the foundation principle of success in business are both the same precisely."⁵³ Success in itself became almost a religion to Conwell. His message was simple but persuasive to many pragmatic Christians. In his sermons he sanctioned man's natural craving for wealth and comfort.

Acres of Diamonds as well as the Alger success books challenged poor but ambitious boys and enhanced the dream to succeed. However, their influence would not have been so great without the glitter of the real acres of diamonds discovered by self-made men of industry. Alger's stories were a partial record in fiction of what actually happened in

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 21.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., p. 26.

fact. Like Alger's heroes who rose from obscurity and poverty, many men were rising in the world. Andrew Carnegie, the son of poor immigrants, started as a \$3-a-week messenger and rose to become the titan of the steel empire; Rockefeller left a farm to strike it rich; Ford, who began as a poor mechanic, reigned over the auto industry.

Popular magazines such as Success, Outlook, and World's Work presented a series of elaborate articles on how self-made men succeeded in business. Among these rags-to-riches successes, Andrew Carnegie was the most eloquent in his interpretation of the success dream.

Carnegie along with most of the contemporaries in the business world shared the traditional Puritan view of wealth and property. The biblical parable of the talents was quoted as a justification for wealth. The rich, Carnegie explained, are the custodians of wealth and God's stewards; they are the sacred trustees and administrators of wealth for their poor brothers.⁵⁴ Rich men, Carnegie elaborated with an analogy, "are the bees that make most honey, and contribute most to the hive even after they have gorged themselves full."⁵⁵ Carnegie's gospel echoed other Puritan prophets of the success dream that rich men have a duty to acquire millions in order to do more good on earth during their lifetime. His Calvinistic heritage also urged rich men to self-discipline by setting "an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him; and after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues

⁵⁴Andrew Carnegie, The Empire of Business (New York, 1933), p. 115.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 116.

which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer...."⁵⁶

Carnegie was a better prophet of the American Dream than Alger or Conwell because Carnegie in reality reached the top of the success ladder. "Be king in your dream,"⁵⁷ advised Carnegie; "there is no line of business in which success is not attainable."⁵⁸ The secret of success, according to Carnegie, is "a simple matter of honest work, ability, and concentration," which require no patronage.⁵⁹ Success comes out as an inevitable and direct result of honest and hard work; it is based solely on a utilitarian cause-effect relationship.

"A business career," Carnegie agreed with Conwell, "is a stern school of all the virtues"⁶⁰ and is favorable not only to making money but also "to the development of the powers of the mind, and the ripening of judgment upon a wide range of general subjects; to freedom from prejudice, and the keeping of an open mind."⁶¹ Therefore, "the struggle for more money was completely separated from selfish motive and became a noble pursuit."⁶²

⁵⁶ Andrew Carnegie, The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays, ed. Edward C. Kirkland (Cambridge, 1962), p. 25.

⁵⁷ Carnegie, The Empire of Business, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 188.

⁶¹ Carnegie, The Gospel of Wealth, p. viii.

⁶² Ibid., p. 72.

Carnegie's Calvinistic concept of the rich as God's elect went along harmoniously with his economic view of the law of competition. As a few elect become trustees of God's property, the leadership of business passes into the hands of a few who survived in the competition. As an intense advocate of progress and individualism, Carnegie accepted whole-heartedly Spencerian Darwinism to justify the "regime of competition." The parable of the talents and the competitive business world were explained by the law of evolution, or social struggle.

Instead of Darwin's pessimistic and brutal application of human competition for existence to the struggle of the animal world, Carnegie followed Herbert Spencer's interpretation of the Darwinian theory with a more optimistic implication of evolution. He admitted the deplorable conditions of the factory workers, low wage, long hours, miserable and inhuman living and working conditions, which represented the "tooth-and-claw" Darwinian struggle for existence. However, he optimistically thought that by natural selection only the fit would survive, the fit being the strongest and the best, and the unfit, the weak who would be better off eliminated. "The strong" are equivalent to "the industrious, frugal, and good" and "the weak" to the idle, the extravagant, and bad. The rich for their diligent endeavor are God's elect.

Ruthless business rivalry and competition which might seem un-Christian were defended and justified by this survival theory. "The law may...be hard for the individual," Carnegie remarked, "but it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department."⁶³ He agreed with Spencer that evolutionary forces

⁶³Ibid., p. 16.

would carry mankind slowly but surely toward a state of perfect adaptation. What we call evil and immorality must disappear. It is certain that man must become perfect...always toward perfection...towards a complete development and a more unified good.⁶⁴

The American virtue of progress was reassured by this theory of gradual social selection. Carnegie found comfort and hope in the future:

"All is well since all grows better" became my motto, my true source of comfort. Man was not created with an instinct for his own degradation, but from the lower he had risen to the higher forms. Nor is there any conceivable end to this march to perfection. His face is turned to the light; he stands in the sun and looks upward.⁶⁵

Both Carnegie and Spencer were also earnest advocates of laissez-faire individualism and maintained that "aid of any kind interferes with the natural process of selection."⁶⁶ This idea of industry with no regulations and a society without social welfare fitted well with the American traditional ideology of individual freedom, self-help, and independence.

However, free competition brought on by a laissez-faire policy in reality produced the "survival of the trickiest, most cunning, greediest, most ruthless...the inversion of the Protestant ethic."⁶⁷ The strong were frequently the shrewd and crooked. Dishonest and ruthless misdeeds practiced by businessmen were being revealed; dishonesty in advertising, the shrewd handling of the stock market, the bribery of politicians for

⁶⁴Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought: 1860-1915 (Philadelphia, 1945), p. 52.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 52.

⁶⁷Paul F. Boller, Jr. American Thought in Transition: The Impact of Evolutionary Naturalism; 1865-1900 (Chicago, 1969), p. 96.

the advantage of business--these practices by robber barons like Jay Gould, Commodore Vanderbilt, Daniel Drew, and many others were coming to the surface. Such business practices together with the impersonality of big trust corporations secularized the Dream.

The dawn of the twentieth century thus unveiled the American Dream with its traditional frontier and democratic idealism symbolized by Lincoln, and the Puritan ethic marked with a growing secularization and with utilitarian characteristics. The survival of the fittest interpreted within the framework of Christian doctrine explained success in business enterprises. In the struggle for existence in the gilded age, money was the sign of success. Rich men were still admired by the masses; they were viewed as the products of natural selection as well as of divine election.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MYTH ON STAGE

The Boss

The Boss, by Edward Sheldon, was first produced in 1911 and was one of the great theatrical successes of the year. Michael Regan, the hero, is an "Irish up-start"; having survived in the struggle of the competitive business world, he has risen from the poor alleys of New York to become a successful business man who shrewdly monopolizes the grain transport industry in that city. Endowed with physical strength and volcanic energy as well as craftiness, Regan is depicted as the typical American captain of industry whose roots go deep into the frontier American soil.

Stimulated by an uncontrolled appetite for pecuniary gains, Regan reveals himself as one of the dominant figures of the age--the robber barons, those aggressive, unscrupulous, and masculine individuals who seize economic power and sometimes act without established moral principles. In the "tooth-and-claw" world of the laissez-faire economy, Regan acquires all the money he can by hook and crook, stealing contracts away from his competitors, pushing the "old rich" out of business, and squeezing laborers by underpaying and keeping them drunk.

Just as with Alger's heroes, Regan's zeal and determination for success is strong. Success for him, of course, is money, as he explains to Mrs. Cuyer: "[Diamonds] give the wealthy look, an' ain't that wot everybody's after?"¹ He knows very well that money talks; actually

¹Edward Sheldon, "The Boss," Representative American Plays, ed. Arthur H. Quinn (New York, 1953), Act II; line references will hereafter appear in the text.

money is the only means he knows to measure his own value. The grotesquely decorative diamond frog with ruby eyes that Regan selects for Emily, his own diamond scarf pin and elaborate clothes symbolize the newly acquired status he has long dreamed of. Money has brought him an opportunity to associate with the leading men in the city; money can bring everything—even respectability and the girl he yearns for.

Nothing deters him from the pursuit of success. In his thirties his relentless drive has finally brought him victory over the handling of the grain industry. His ambition has made him willing to sacrifice everything else in life. Regan tells Emily that he has been so busy climbing the success ladder that he has not had time for anything else:

I never gamble nor play the races, fer the simple reason they seem kind o' slow 'long o' my business. An' I never got mixed up with women..., 'cause I been on the jump, I s'pose, an' they tell me women takes a lot o' time. (Act I)

Regan is a robust man of about thirty-six. Edward Sheldon speaks of him as

the Irish American bull-dog type, who talks and looks like the tough who has risen to a great position and is not yet at home in it. He is apt to be too polite and ceremonious, but when he is moved or excited this drops easily away. (Act I)

Clearly there is a visible unbalance between his economic achievements and his degree of refinement.

As one of the young, arrogantly proud "nouveaux riches," Michael Regan possesses Babbit-like energy, coarse strength, and ruthless violence. Being alert, intelligent, self-reliant and manly, he takes

advantages of the opportunities that passed others by. His persistent fighting spirit never diminishes even after all the papers report his defeat: "I don't like to get licked...I won't quit while I got the life still in me." (Act II) His persistence leads him to find the surprising solution of moving the grain traffic to Montreal and importing cheap Negro laborers from the South.

The upward struggle of a rugged and competitive society in which Regan is placed makes him sharp, quick, strong, alert and aggressive. He is the strong character who survives in this battle of a fluctuating, modern business world, sometimes by tricky means, but nevertheless always within the limits of the law. This school of struggle has made his conscience free from those prescriptive, restraining codes of the old Puritan age. In all respects Regan seems to be a typical robber baron.

However, under the surface is the image of the Algerian hero who has been honed in the rough life of New York. He is ambitious as well as competitive and takes every chance to improve himself. In order to fit himself for the high position he now has, he teaches himself to read and to "get lit'rary." (Act I) His marriage to Emily, the daughter of a socially established, refined family, reveals his ambition to climb to the top of the success ladder and his search for respectability.

But the New York in which Regan works is not the glamorous, wonderful world of Alger's heroes where "streetarabs" shined shoes, sold newspapers, saved a wealthy benefactor's child from a run-away cart, but the city nevertheless conveys, under the more realistic scene of sweatshops, and flophouses, a hidden mysterious charm that titillates poor but ambitious

boys into believing that there are abundant opportunities to get rich.

While Regan can boldly and arrogantly stand up to the unionists and competitors, when it comes to handling women he is very much like Horatio Alger's hero--timid, awkward, and clumsy. The daring-do, ruthless captain of industry is as puritanical and naive as a teenage Algerian hero. When he talks to Emily, he is shy, stiff, and sensitive, hesitating and embarrassed. Under his tough appearance, as Emily tells her father, he shows a sweet, attractive personality: "Of course he was tough. But there was something--nice about him....Really there was... something--oh, I don't know, dad, but--why he was just like a little boy!" (Act I) Even after their nominal marriage, Regan's attitude toward Emily remains the same.

Even after he has attained success himself, Regan, the shrewd, ruthless businessman, is in his personal life a soft-hearted, sympathetic "boss" toward his men; he helps David and Porky through financial hardships, showering his warm consideration on their families; he slips some money to Scanlan, the union representative, when he hears of the condition of Scanlan's sick wife and hungry children; and finally he takes upon himself the crime of Porky who had flung a brick at the union leader, Donald Griswold, and critically injured him.

Thus the man who cunningly plans to replace the union strikers by cheap Negro laborers from the South, contradictorily is faithful to his word and neither violates his marriage contract with Emily nor interferes with Griswold's business which Michael has given away as a part of the marriage bargain, even when he realizes that Donald Griswold, Emily's brother, is heading the union strikers to destroy him.

Regan's attitudes toward these men are something totally alien to the methods he uses in acquiring his money. He robs men of their money in business and then returns it generously to others as a gift. The Algerian hero thus retains something of his Puritan heritage.

If Mike Regan does not resemble the Algerian hero in his cunning business practices, it is because of the difference between Alger's budding businessman and Regan who has survived in the battle of the modern business world. Regan's contradictory behavior is not only his but also symptomatic of the modern business world as Sheldon interprets it. In this world, there is one moral code for the market and another for personal life. Business "honesty" contains the elasticity to stretch the conscience of a personal moral code. With profit as a motive, the business world has made "honesty" different from the strict honesty prescribed by personal morality, Puritan or otherwise. Business exaggerations are no longer condemned as the loss of moral integrity, but are simply considered as necessary devices to compete and succeed in the market. Since one is expected to discount them in business transactions, they are not lies or deceptions.

In an article published several years before The Boss was produced, O. K. Stuart confirms such an attitude. He observes that since the ultimate object of business is the creation of wealth by an individual which is attained through exchange of values, no transactions are regarded moral or immoral, honest or dishonest, right or wrong, but simply as proper or improper depending upon whether the transactions facilitate the exchange of values.²

²O. K. Stuart, "The Business Honesty--Honesty," Independent, LX (March 19, 1903), 676.

Thus Michael Regan, with his ideal of individual success and his code of business competition and rivalry, feels no guilt in hiring men at the lowest obtainable scale of wages, keeping them drunk, then arranging cheap Negro laborers from the South to replace his men when they strike. His conscience is stretched as far as it can in his business practices. But the author implies that it is not Mike Regan who is to blame, but the vicious system. One's business practice is "honest" when it is within the limits of the law or when he is not "caught" or unless others think otherwise. "Tain't what you do that counts in this world," says Regan to Emily, but "it's what folks think ye done!" (Act I) Here is expressed his Franklinean way-to-wealth business principle; the appearance of honesty, frugality, industry, thrift is what counts in this world.

The happy ending of the play--the affirmation of Regan's heroic action as a "boss" by taking upon himself the guilt of another, his determination to start anew, and Emily's realization of her love for him--all these reveal the naive optimism and romantic dream of Alger's stories. The hero struggling against odds is finally redeemed by financial success, and after many complicated incidents wins both the girl and social respectability as well as money.

It is true that in the course of the play Regan has lost contracts and it seems as though he is completely defeated, but his business future is not destroyed. Optimism or hope still colors the ending of the play. Emily encourages Mike: "...now we're going to look up! We're going to look ahead!...." (Act IV) His union strikers who appear to have won, cannot make a living without their boss's business. What

Sheldon implies at the end is that after the heroic action of taking Porky's crime on himself, Regan not only proves himself to be a good man but also maintains the character and personality necessary for business success.

Sheldon's Boss does not embody the essence of the American Dream in its purest form as do Alger's heroes. Love complicates the story; time has transformed the image of the self-made Algerian hero to fit into the new, complex social circumstances of the class and ethical conflict between the nouveaux riches and the established families who maintain a strong sense of honor and responsibility as God's stewards.

Thus Regan's unscrupulous business activities do not remove him from the hero's pedestal. It is the hard-working, single-minded Regan, however shrewd he may be in his business practices, who is the protagonist of the play and wins the heroine whom he has longed for. He is the man of talent who contributes to the world by creating jobs and wealth. The refined, attractive, good-hearted Lawrence Duncan, a man of inherited wealth and leisure, is treated by Emily as a shadowy character:

I wish you'd wake up, Laurie! You've been asleep all your life. Oh, I know you've had a good time...but there is something more. I wish when you walk down the street, everybody would turn and say: "There goes Lawrence Duncan. He's done a lot to help this city...."
(Act I)

Compared to Mike, even the distinguished, brilliant, hard-working Donald Griswold is merely a man of vengeance because of the loss of his business and of his sister, Emily, to Mike.

In this survival-of-the-fittest world, material prosperity

signifies strength; money earned means the reward of one's courage, industry, wisdom, and shrewdness--the qualities of mind and character needed for success. When the eye of a strong man is set on a purpose, it sometimes happens that he neglects other considerations; he occasionally overrides the weak who are helpless. This is inevitable; it is not the fault of strong men like Regan.

In spite of these changed circumstances and a more secularized outlook, the dream of Mike Regan shines forth almost as brightly as in Alger's stories.

The Adding Machine

The theme of the Success Dream in the twentieth century appears also to be illustrated effectively and vividly by a figure of failure. The Adding Machine, written in 1923 by Elmer Rice, presents a pathetic character who embraced the Dream of Success and, after twenty-five years of hard and diligent work as an adding clerk, is reduced to "zero" as a human being.

Mr. Zero, who is a representative of the common man and believes that he is "as good as anybody else,"³ started out his business career with high hopes of getting ahead. However, after twenty-five years, Zero is still sitting in the same office adding figures. Mrs. Zero levels an accusing finger at her husband in a long, sarcastic monologue, recalling his youthful dream as well as hers when she married him:

³Elmer Rice, "The Adding Machine," Three Plays (New York, 1968), Scene ii; line references will hereafter appear in the text.

You was goin' to do wonders, you was!
 You wasn't goin' to be a bookkeeper
 long--oh, no, not you. Wait till you
 got started--you was goin' to show 'em.
 There wasn't no job in the store that
 was too big for you. Well, I've been
 waitin'--waitin' for you to get started--
 see? It's been a good long wait too.
 Twenty-five years! An' I ain't seen
 nothin' happen. Twenty-five years in
 the same job. Twenty-five years tomorrow!
 You're proud of it, ain't you? Twenty-
 five years in the same job an' never
 missed a day! That's somethin' to be
 proud of, ain't it? Sittin' for twenty-
 five years on the same chair, addin' up
 figgers. What about bein' store manager?
 I guess you forgot about that, didn't
 you? An' me at home here lookin' at the
 same four walls an' workin' my fingers to
 the bone to make both ends meet. Seven
 years since you got a raise! An' if you
 don't get one tomorrow, I'll bet a nickel
 you won't have the guts to go an' ask for
 one. I didn't pick much when I picked you,
 I'll tell the world. You ain't much to
 be proud of. (Scene i)

Once a young man dreaming dreams, Zero now is an unattractive middle-aged man. His physical appearance is also an indication of his failure: He is "thin, sallow, undersized and partly bald," (Scene i) worn out by a patterned and dull life. He does not possess the masculine strength of Michael Regan nor the slender, boyish attractiveness of Alger's heroes. The possibility of the fulfillment of his dream seems to have fled with his youth.

As one of Franklin's faithful followers, Zero has worked hard without complaining about the dull days and the low pay. His belief in Franklin's maxims has also made him refrain from the pleasure of smoking because "a penny saved is a penny earned....Everytime I feel like smokin' I just take a nickel and put it in the old sock." (Scene ii)

But the success formula which has worked well for Franklin and Alger's heroes does not work for Mr. Zero. In spite of being scrupulously faithful to its precepts, the myth seems to have betrayed him. His "sensible" philosophy of industry, thriftiness, and self-denial has only brought him a dingy house with cheap furniture purchased on the "installment plan."

Success seems to have left him behind. After an unsuccessful career of twenty-five years, he still dreams that one day his boss will say, "I've had my eye on you, Zero. Nothin' gets by me....You're a valuable man...and I want you right up here with me in the front office. You're done addin' figgers. Monday mornin' you move up here." (Scene ii) This dream becomes intensified by his boss's visit to the office. However, Zero's boss is not like Horatio Alger's benevolent, all-seeing benefactors. Zero's dream for economic advancement gets completely shattered when he discovers that the boss does not even know Zero's name, does not appreciate Zero's twenty-five years of loyal and diligent service "without missing a day." Instead the boss announces that the installation of an adding machine makes Zero replaceable. (Scene ii) To the impersonal business world, efficiency is more important than loyalty, diligence, or honesty.

Infuriated by this astonishing "reward" for services, Zero kills his boss. Ironically this action in a pathetic way fulfills his desire for fame: his name finally appears in the newspaper. Before his execution, Zero is pleased with his scrapbook now "full of clippings about himself." (Scene v) This is the only "fame" his dream of success brought to Zero.

During his lifetime Zero's puritanical, middle-class morality, which is supposed to have led him to a happy Algerian kind of success, binds him to a world of suppressed, joyless prudery. Weary of his drab life with his menial job and nagging wife, he yearns for freedom, dreaming about a way to kill his wife and marry Daisy. Nonetheless, the superficial rigid rules of his morality prevent him from acting in accordance with his desire.

Even after his death, the earthly codes of moral and social norms persist in the Elysian fields. Zero's first declaration of love for Daisy and the short happy moment with her are interrupted by the thought that "it ain't right" to be alone with Daisy because he questions, "Ain't I got a wife?" (Scene vii) He feels uneasy in heaven which, he understands, is for the righteous and the successful, not for failures and murderers like himself. Even in "heaven" Zero is still conditioned by a puritanical code of respectability and is very concerned about what other people might think and say. Hearing someone approach after a happy moment with Daisy, Zero hastily sits upright and tells Daisy to fix her hair and pull down her skirts since "we don't want people talkin' about us." (Scene vii) Zero's "honest and moral life" also makes him careful about mixing "with people that ain't respectable." (Scene vii) Ironically Zero's uneasiness in the Elysian fields becomes enhanced when he finds out that the place is filled with idle people "so unlike the good people," who

seem to think of nothing but enjoyment or of wasting their time in profitless occupations. Some paint pictures from morning until night, or carve blocks of stone. Others write songs or put words together, day in and day out. Still others do nothing but lie under the

trees and look at the sky. There are men who spend all their time reading books and women who think only of adoring themselves. And forever they are telling stories and laughing and singing and drinking and dancing. There are drunkards, thieves, vagabonds, blasphemers, adulterers.... (Scene vii)

The practical world of the American Success Dream in which Zero lives has no place for unprofitable activities such as love or art. These Elysian fields where nobody disturbs anyone else and everyone is free is not a heaven to Zero who is not used to engaging in nonprofitable activities, not accustomed to love, happiness, or freedom.

Moreover, when he discovers that Dean Swift and the Abbé Rabelais, whom Zero identifies as the writers of "smutty stories," are the most beloved and admired individuals here, he hurriedly runs away from "rummies an' loafers an' bums," whom Zero considers worse than any other failures.

The Elysian fields, a place of pastoral tranquility and loveliness with a meadow dotted with trees and carpeted with rich grasses and flowers, is not a heaven for Zero who desires urban success in the noisy, windowless, bare office room of a department store, and the promise of eternal peace in heaven, makes him feel uncomfortable.

The machine civilization, which was brought forth by twentieth century technology, has enslaved man, dehumanized him, turned him into a small machine, conditioned him to respond uniformly without thinking. Man has lost his identity and dignity in this machine age and has become what Anita Block calls a "white-collar slave."⁴ Six men and women

⁴Anita Block, The Changing World in Plays and Theatre (Boston, 1939), p. 218.

coming to visit the Zeros have no names--only numbers. Men "are all shapes and sizes, but their dress is identical with that of Zero in every detail....The women are all dressed alike too...." (Scene iii) Not only do they look alike and act alike, their conversation also expresses a uniformity of life and thinking. They exchange a collection of clichés about weather, dresses, movies, gossips; then they all sing in unison:

My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty! (Scene iii)

The "Sweet land of liberty," Rice seems to be saying with irony, is not free any more. Commercialized society has stripped from its members individuality and the freedom to think, leaving them within the sphere of rigid conformity. The men in The Adding Machine are the products of a mechanized civilization, "slave souls" who cannot accept love and affection because their feelings are also mechanized. They can only understand success and failure.

Clearly Zero is "a failure," Elmer Rice tells us through Charles, "a waste product." (Scene viii) However, Zero is depicted as a failure not because of his success dream; he is a failure in spite of his dream. Even though The Adding Machine appears, at first sight, to reject the American Dream by revealing a disgustingly pitiful failure; a further study reveals that Elmer Rice takes the same stand as Sheldon in his evaluation of the myth, looking at the dream from the opposite side--from the side of failure. The lack of compassion for Zero, who is viewed as a worthless, insignificant victim of the machine age, is a clear indication that the author is attacking not the Success Dream itself but rather a machine civilization which destroys the worth of

an individual as a human being and diverts his aspirations for success. This is a cry against a horrible "system which creates Zeros"⁵; this is a cry for restoration of human dignity, freedom, and dreams. The Adding Machine, in short, is a criticism of those who could not live up to the Dream because they were not aware of their plight or were too feeble to fight against the threat to that "Great American Success Dream."⁶

Of Mice and Men

The Wall Street crash of 1929 and the Depression of the early thirties brought with it a decrease in economic activities and consequently widespread unemployment. People became increasingly aware that opportunities were getting scarce; the Dream they had cherished was becoming more and more difficult to attain. Ambition, industriousness, frugality, and piety, the presupposed criteria for success, were no longer enough for achieving business success.

The theatre of the thirties, reflecting this social and economic turbulence, presented a significant change in its selection of themes and characters. Class conflict, unemployment, the injustices of society became frequent themes of the thirties; rebels, outcasts, failures--the underprivileged members of society--occupied the center of the stage.

⁵Robert G. Hogan, The Independence of Elmer Rice (Carbondale, 1965), p. 35.

⁶Frank Durham, Elmer Rice (New York, 1970), p. 141.

Angry writers of the thirties, such as Clifford Odets and John Steinbeck, pointed out the ills of American society, depicting victims of injustices and inequality, analyzing the psychological motives of characters through their social, economic and political backgrounds.

Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, first produced in 1937, is one of these socio-economic plays about underprivileged working men in the depression period, who are left behind in the harsh reality of a money-centered culture. The play achieves a realistic depiction of the transient ranch hands, interplaying it with dream visions. These ranch hands are all lonely, homeless men who form the lowest layer of American society. Their transiency and rootlessness, which is the cause of their deep loneliness, are symbolized by the recurring scenes of blanket rolls, bunkhouse and suitcases. Candy, an old bunkhouse keeper, is clinging to his blind, old, stinking dog as a companion; a Negro stable buck, Crook, who lives alone in a stable, complains to Lennie, "A guy needs somebody...to be near him....A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who it is as long as he's with you."⁷ Loneliness is devouring the hearts of these rough ranch hands. George tells Lennie, his weak-minded protégé:

Guys like us that work on ranches is the loneliest guys in the world. They ain't got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch and work up a stake and then they go in to town and blow their stake. And then the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothin' to look forward to. (Act I, Scene i)

⁷ John Steinbeck, "Of Mice and Men," Twenty Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, ed. John Gassner (New York, 1945), II, ii.

But "we are different," he continues emphatically:

With us it ain't like that. We got a
future. (I, i)

Pressed by Lennie, George explains what their future will be:

Some day we're gonna get the jack
together and we're gonna have a
little house, and a couple of acres
and a cow and some pigs....And have
rabbits.... (I, i)

Their dream of a farm with a little house and "a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens...a kitchen orchard...cherries, apples, peaches, 'cots and nuts...a place for alfalfa and plenty water to flood it." (I, i) is also a pioneer dream of independence and freedom where "nobody could can" them; where they are free to invite or reject their visitors. (II, i) This dream emphasizes "home" and "brotherhood"; nevertheless, it is also a dream for material possessions and security.

Even though George believes that he and Lennie are the only ones among the ranch hands with a dream and a future, Crooks tells Lennie scornfully that every ranch hand he has met had a dream unfulfilled:

I seen hundreds of men come by on the road
and on the ranches, bindles on their back
and that same damn thing in their head.
Hundreds of 'em. They come and they quit
and they go on. And every damn one of 'em
is got a little piece of land in his head.
And never a goddam one of 'em gets it.
Jus' like heaven. Everybody wants a little
piece of land. Nobody never gets to heaven.
And nobody gets no land. (II, ii)

For a farm hand, the dream of getting ahead and possessing a piece of land is like an attempt to get to heaven, as Crooks puts it. "It's jest in your head. Guys all the time talkin' about it, but it's jest in your head." (II, ii) Yet, these poor, lonely laborers are all

dreaming dreams. The dream of George and Lennie, however, is a little different because they dream together and work together. It is a sacred dream that gives them repeated assurance and hope for their future happiness which compensates for their present misery and pain. It is a dream of escape to "a safe place," away from the "mean" surroundings of the hired men and the big impersonalized ranch. The ranch where these men are working is not privately owned, but owned by a "big land company" managed by a superintendent. (I, ii) Industrialization has already affected the agricultural world, forcing it to become more factory-like than the pioneer image of a private ranch.

Their dream inspires other lonely hearts on the ranch, bringing them together to share the same dream. Candy, an old bunkhouse keeper, who is afraid to be "canned," is the first one enchanted by the dream and offers the \$300 he has saved up for the dream farm. This offer and the actual farm land George has in mind bring to them a sense of wonder and a realization that the fulfillment of their dream may be possible. The dream which seemed so far beyond the horizon, all of a sudden is realizable. George full of awe and amazement exclaims:

...I bet we could swing her....I bet
we could swing 'er....

We'll do 'er! God damn, we'll fix
up that little ole place and we'll go
live there.... (II, i)

Now, freedom, home, a piece of land with cows, chickens and rabbits-- all they have long yearned for--can be envisioned on a practical level, not through their individual efforts but through the efforts of a group.

Crooks, a cynical Negro stable buck, sneeringly tells Lennie that every farm hand has a dream but no one has attained it:

Guys all the time talkin' about it, but it's jest in your head...(brutally) You guys is just kiddin' yourselves. You'll talk about it a hell of a lot, but you won't get no land. You'll be a swamper here until they take you out in a box. Hell, I seen too many guys. (II, ii)

However, the dream has the power to convert even a cynic like Crooks into optimist. After he finds out about the unusual companionship of Lennie and George and their sincere efforts to make the dream come true, Crooks begins to believe that their dream may be achieved. Timidly he offers his service: "If you guys would want a hand to work for nothin'--just his keep, why I'd come and lend a hand." (II, ii) All four men realize that as individuals they cannot attain the Promised Land, but with each other's help their dream may be realized.

Along with the dream comes a sense of human dignity. Soon after their conversation on the dream farm, Candy angrily says to Curley's wife, the Boss's daughter-in-law:

You ain't wanted here. We tole you, you ain't. Callin' us bindle stiffs. You got floozy idears what us guys amounts to. You ain't got sense enough to see us guys ain't bindle stiffs....You don't know we got our own ranch to go to an' our own house an' fruit trees. An' we got friends. That's what we got. Maybe they was a time when we didn't have nothing, but that ain't so no more. (II, ii)

But in spite of the feeling of dignity the dream brings with it, Steinbeck asserts that for some the dream is unattainable. He does so by using an analogy: just as Burns' mouse, these "small" men "living in a kennel" are, though suffering "grief and pain," making plans for their future and dreaming of the "Promised joy." Just as the mouse's nest is overturned by a ploughman's hoe, the plans of these ranch hands

for their future happiness are ruined by an unforeseen event--Lennie's accidental murder of Curley's wife, which results from his innocent fondness for touching "soft and furry things" and the destructive strength of which he is not aware. Crooks' observation proves to be correct: everybody wants land but nobody gets it. Lennie's lack of intelligence in foreseeing and avoiding dangers destroys not only Lennie, but the dream as well.

But in Of Mice and Men Steinbeck upholds the "individualistic survival of the old American dream."⁸ He seems to be saying through the portrayal of Lennie that the dream is worth having because it gives hope and happiness to everyone, even to those whose lack of wisdom and foresight lead them to a failure at the end. In the last scene on the river bank, George tells Lennie to "look acrost the river" for the rabbit farm, retelling the story of their dream:

George: We gonna get a little place....

We'll have a cow. And we'll have
maybe a pig and chickens - and
down the flat we'll have a little
piece of alfalfa....

Lennie:(shouting) For the rabbits!

George: And you get to tend the rabbits!

Lennie:(giggling with happiness) And live on the fat
o' the land!

George:It's gonna be nice there. Ain't gonna
be no trouble, no fights. Nobody ever
gonna hurt nobody, or steal from 'em. It's
gonna be--nice.... (III, ii)

⁸Frederic I. Carpenter, "John Steinbeck: American Dreamer," Steinbeck and His Critics, intro. E. M. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker (Albuquerque, 1957), p. 76.

While Lennie looks intently across the river for the dream farm, George shoots Lennie, who is shouting with joy and triumph:

I can see it, George, I can see it!
over there! I can see it! (III, ii)

Lennie who is shot while ecstatically wrapped in the dream vision is the happiest of men. He dies with his dream and his dream continues forever.

On the other hand, George's situation is more tragic. As one critic has pointed out, the dream originates from Lennie,⁹ who persistently asks George for a more detailed description of their dream. George reveals his own "dream" whenever Lennie gets into trouble, by spelling out the life he would lead if he were alone:

God Almighty, if I was alone, I could live so easy. I could go get a job of work and no trouble. No mess....And when the end of the month come, I could take my fifty bucks and go into town and get whatever I want. Why, I could stay in a cat-house all night. I could eat any place I want. Order any damn thing.... I could do that every damn month. Get a gallon of whisky or set in a pool room and play cards or shoot pool. (I, i)

George's "dream" is a shallow one, typical of the drifting ranch hand he himself described at the beginning of the play.

George is a realistic man. Even when he describes to Lennie the details of the rabbit farm, he is well aware of the impossibility of attaining it. After Lennie's murder ruins their future plans, George tells Candy:

⁹Warren French, John Steinbeck (New York, 1961), p. 75.

I think I knowed it from the very frist.
 I think I knowed we'd never do her. He
 [Lennie] used to like to hear about it
 so much I got fooled to thinkin' maybe we
 would. (II, i)

He is well aware of the injustices and the inequality of opportunities in society; he knows very well that ambition, diligence, frugality are useless among such underdogs like ranch hands, who lack intelligence, skills, and capital to compete with big land companies and shrewd business men.

George recognizes that as Lennie is dependent upon him, he is also dependent upon Lennie for the inspiration of the dream. By describing the dreamland for Lennie, George also could put himself into the world of illusion. With Lennie, the source of his dream, gone, George acutely feels that his life is meaningless.

Thus Steinbeck, in presenting the hopes and sorrows of Lennie and George, insists on man's basic need for a dream, even though the dream may never reach fruition. As Blake Nevius points out, even if the dream is a mere illusion, "there is a saving grace in illusion because without it life may be insupportable."¹⁰ Through Lennie who represents the "inarticulate and powerful yearning of all men,"¹¹ Steinbeck expresses his compassion for society's underdogs and failures who continue to cling to the success dream even when success in their conditions is not attainable.

¹⁰Blake Nevius, "Steinbeck: One Aspect," Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 199.

¹¹Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1958), p. 134.

Death of A Salesman

The Depression, which created doubts about the possibilities of realizing the success dream, was followed by World War II and an era of economic prosperity. The rise of the United States as the leading nation economically as well as politically stimulated internal economic activities, producing prosperity that America had never experienced before. Expanding economic activities brought material satisfaction to many; material success now seemed even more attainable by the common man. With more opportunities for material gratification at hand, optimism for the future and the dream of material success again surfaced on the American scene.

The American stage also reflected this social trend. However, in the forties the presentation of the success myth and its treatment took a different direction. Even though the plays of the first three decades, analyzed earlier in this paper, dealt with the American Dream, the dream was not the primary theme of these plays. Sheldon's major interest in The Boss was the love between Michael Regan and Emily Griswold; Elmer Rice in The Adding Machine focused his attention on a dehumanizing machine-civilization which threatened to destroy human dignity; Steinbeck concerned himself chiefly with the plight of the helpless and the homeless underdogs of society. In these plays the success dream was given a secondary but nevertheless significant position.

The stage of the forties produced a play that revolved directly around the success myth. That play was Arthur Miller's popular Death of A Salesman produced on Broadway in February, 1949.

The hero of the play, Willy Loman, is a salesman carrying two

large sample cases and "riding on a smile and a shoeshine"¹² through his New England territory. His work is to sell commodities for his company, but he is not content with merely passing merchandise from one hand to another; he is intent on selling his personality as well. The sale of his personality, Willy believes, is essential to his work because business success depends on the impression one makes with his personality and the contacts he creates by these good impressions.

As a man reared in the American cult of success, Willy embraces the dream as a sacred American ideal. In this classless society, with abundant opportunities, anyone can climb the ladder of success. And the secret of success lies in a well-liked personality. For a salesman in particular, personality is the key to success, since it will open the doors of customers. "It is not what you say," Willy teaches his son Biff, "it's how you say it--because personality always wins the day." (Act I) And he'll have his sons, Biff and Happy, understand that his formula of success has been working:

...I'll show you all the towns. America is full of beautiful towns and fine; up-standing people. And they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, there'll be open sesame for all of us, 'cause one thing, boys: I have friends. I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own....(Act I)

His sons whom Willy has brought up according to his success formula, are also popular. They are "well built...tall, powerfully made..."; (Act I) he proudly talks of them as "Adonises." (Act I) Particularly

¹²Arthur Miller, Death of A Salesman: Text and Criticism, ed. Gerald Weales (New York, 1967), Requiem; line references will hereafter appear in the text.

Biff, who was a high school football champion, has personality as well as physical attractiveness. Wherever Biff goes, "there's a crowd of girls behind him..." (Act I); his admirers are eager to obey his every wish and whim. To his brother Ben, Willy explains how bright Biff's future is, what his "success" means, and how vital an element personality plays on the way up:

Without a penny to his name, three great universities are begging for him, and from there the sky's the limit, because it's not what you do, Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face! It's contacts, Ben, contacts! The whole wealth of Alaska passes over the lunch table at the Commodore Hotel, and that's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked! (He turns to Biff)...thousands of people will be rooting for you and loving you. (To Ben)...And Ben! When he walks into a business office his name will sound like a bell and all the doors will open to him! I've seen it, Ben, I've seen it a thousand times! You can't feel it with your hand like timber, but it's there! (Act II)

Willy's success dream contains essentially the same naive elements as Alger's: humble origin, physical attractiveness, hard work, manly courage, and self-confidence. Only personality has been more emphatically added to the formula.

Willy has worked as a sales representative for thirty-six years spending "ten, twelve hours a day," (Act I) exploring the New England territory. Willy's boys are also hard workers, helping their mother around the house, and simonizing the Chevrolet for their father.

In order to walk the rough road of success, Willy brings up his sons to be rugged individuals. Remembering the way his father would "toss the whole family into the wagon, and then...drive the team across

the country," (Act I) Willy tells his brother Ben, "That's just the way I'm bringing them up,...rugged, well liked, all around." (Act I) This is why Willy is not only proud of Biff's popularity among girls but also his roughness in dealing with them, (Act I) since for Willy roughness is equated with manliness. He considers Biff's "driving the car without a license" as a sign of courage; his "borrowing" a football from the school locker room, as an indication of his well-liked personality; his stealing lumber and sand without being caught, (Act I) as fearless masculinity and determination to "lick the world." He censures his wife, Linda, who objects to Biff's actions:

There's nothing the matter with him!
 You want him to be a worm like Bernard?
 He's got spirit, personality.... (Act I)

To Willy, Bernard who wears glasses and has no "manly characters" lags behind Biff and Happy:

Willy: Bernard is not well-liked, is he?

Biff: He's liked, but he's not well liked.

Happy: That's right, Pop.

Willy: That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. (Act I)

Even though his dreams are strong and persistent, there are times when doubts cloud Willy's convictions. After thirty-six years of loyal service to his company, he is discharged because of his age and

inefficiency by the young president, Howard.

His sons, too, whom he firmly believes to be the embodiment of success are not making good: Biff has been working as a ranch hand in Texas for a meager \$30 a week; Happy is an ordinary store clerk in New York interested in his car and in girls. Bernard, however, whom Willy once called a worm-like character, is now a prominent lawyer, "defending a national case in the Supreme Court." (Act II) In times of need and want, Willy realizes that his well-liked personality finds no one but Charley to lend him money. (Act II) This unexpected turn of events brings Willy loneliness as well as insecurity.

During one of these moments of doubt Willy complains about his loneliness to Linda:

...on the road I want to grab you sometimes
and just kiss the life outa you. 'Cause I
get so lonely--especially when business is
bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the
feeling that I'll never sell anything again,
that I won't make a living for you, or a
business, a business for the boys. (Act I)

He is lonely not only because the business is bad, but also because:

...you know, the trouble is, Linda, people
don't seem to take to me.

...They seem to laugh at me.

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

I talk too much...I joke too much!
I'm fat. I'm very--foolish to look at,
Linda.... (Act I)

But he struggles on to overcome the fear of failure:

I gotta overcome it. I know I gotta overcome
it. I'm not dressing to advantage, maybe. (Act I)

And each time Willy breaks down, Linda gives him support and reassurance:

...you're doing wonderful, dear. You're making 70 to a hundred dollars a week.

Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world....To me you are....The handsomest....

And the boys, Willy. Few men are idolized by their children the way you are. (Act I)

However, when Willy feels insecure and "kind of temporary" about himself, he evokes the image of his dead brother Ben and asks for guidance: Ben, who is to Willy "a genius...success incarnate...", (Act I) a man who "started with the clothes on his back and ended up with diamond mines,...the only man...who knew the answers." (Act I) Willy asks his brother for the secret of the success formula: "How did you do it? What's the answer?" (Act II) because he is convinced that success is dependent upon the right technique which once employed inevitably brings results. He also asks him for directions on how to raise his sons to be successful:

...sometimes I'm afraid that I'm not teaching them the right kind of--Ben, how should I teach them? (Act I)

When his career as a salesman is cruelly terminated, Willy again turns to Ben:

Ben, nothing's working out. I don't know what to do. (Act II)

Ben assures him that all is well:

William, you're being first-rate with your boys. Outstanding, manly chaps! (Act I)

Then Ben continues to give his own success story:

William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out, I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich! (Act I)

Ben's words are reassuring and restore Willy's high hopes:

...was rich! That's just the spirit I
want to imbue them with! To walk into
a jungle! I was right! I was right!
I was right! (Act I)

Linda's and Ben's reassurance of his way of life helps keep Willy's dream burning more brightly than ever, even though his career is already waning.

After he loses his job and the dream of his own success, Willy's dream is solely focused on his son, Biff. Willy fondly remembers Biff's past glory as a football hero when success seemed a matter of time, and still clings to his belief in Biff's future:

Like a young god. Hercules--something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him. Remember how he waved to me? Right up from the field, with the representatives of these colleges standing by? And the buyers I brought, and the cheers when he came out-- Loman, Loman, Loman! God Almighty, he'll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!

When Willy complains about his being dismissed by Howard, Charley, a successful businessman, tries to open Willy's eyes to reality:

When the hell are you going to grow up?
Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that. (Act II)

In the cold business world, Charley is saying, a well-liked, impressive personality is not necessary. He continues:

Why must everybody like you? Who liked J. P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked.... (Act II)

Willy's son also tries to make Willy realize what Biff and Willy really are:

We've been talking in a dream for fifteen years.

They've laughed at Dad for years....Because we don't belong in this nuthouse of a city! We should be mixing cement on some open plain, or--or carpenters. (Act I)

Success, Biff adds, is not for him:

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 of them! I am one dollar an hour....I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home! (Act II)

To Willy who still will not listen, Biff shouts:

Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that?...I'm just what I am, that's all. (Act II)

However, Willy refuses to abandon his dream and to admit that both he and Biff are only ordinary men. To Biff, who cries out, "Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!" (Act II) Willy's answer is:

I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

...you got a greatness in you, Biff, remember that. You got all kinds a greatness.... (Act II)

The only way that he can understand Biff's tears is that Biff loves him and approves of his dream, and he shouts with joy: "That boy--that boy is going to be magnificent." (Act II)

Willy rushes to his suicidal death in order to leave Biff \$20,000 life insurance for a new business, dreaming till the end that Biff will be "Number One," and that his own "funeral will be massive." He tells

Ben that for his funeral people will

come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont,
New Hampshire! All the old timers with
the strange license plates--that boy will
be thunder-struck...because he never
realized--I am known! - Rhode Island, New
York, New Jersey--I am known, Ben, and
he'll see it with his eyes once and for
all. He'll see what I am. (Act II)

The insurance money is now the only "diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough" night that Willy can really pick up and touch in his hand. And he dashes into the dark jungle of the streets of New York to bring it out.

Contrary to his expectations Willy's funeral is ironically small. At Willy's grave, Miller contrasts three different views of the success dream. Biff comes to the full realization of "the wrong dream" Willy has embraced up until his death; "he never knew who he was." (Requiem) Happy, however, defends Willy and affirms the dream: "Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have--to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win for him." (Requiem) Charley realizes that Willy had the wrong dream, but he has compassion and understanding for Willy. He interrupts Biff who blames his father:

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

Willy's sales territory of New England with its historical and traditional background has influenced him to embrace this dream--the dream whose victim he became. But Willy's success dream is not only his, but it is America's Success Dream, also.

The geographical areas Miller presents in the play, New England, New York, and Africa and Alaska are symbols of the three main sources of American values. George de Schweinitz explains them firstly as "American history and tradition," secondly as

...the frontier, which by the beginning of the twentieth century had largely become fantasized and associated with a folklore by which the citizen rationalized and covered over his naked drives for power and 'success,'

and thirdly as "the city, a complex reality which...had achieved so dominant a place in the totality of twentieth century American experience...."¹³

The New England territory that has been Willy's sales ground for thirty-six years is, as Willy describes it, "the cradle of Revolution." As George de Schweinitz points out, New England is a place of historical significance in America, symbolizing her imperishable ideals and dreams. Willy is a New England man, because he feels that "they don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England." (Act I)

Africa and Alaska, on the other hand, represent the frontier "in the crudest, most materialistic form"¹⁴ where the opportunities to explore for quick riches are abundant, where Willy's brother Ben made

¹³George de Schweinitz, "Death of A Salesman: A Note on Epic and Tragedy," Death of A Salesman: Text and Criticism, p. 274.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 277.

millions as a typical robber baron. Ben tells Willy that he walked into the jungle and walked out rich, but he never explains how he found these hidden diamonds. However, the dark jungle, full of diamonds, implies the dark dealings in the business world of the robber barons. The fight for a fortune in this area knows no law.

New York, where the Lomans live, is the center of American business; this is a place of business negotiations and money transactions. There can be no warm human relationships but only business relationships, Miller implies. Furthermore, the "diamonds," which Conwell had persuaded his nineteenth-century audience to find in the place they lived, have now become scarce, Miller seems to be saying. They can only be found in such far-off lands as Africa and Alaska. Willy is vaguely aware of this futility of New York when he says that New York is a place "where no plant grows" and which "is the last place to make a man whole." The trees, "lilac and wisteria...peonies...and the daffodils," whose fragrance and beauty used to give the Lomans pleasure, do not get enough sun any more and are cut down. Willy is also vaguely aware that he does not belong to New York--the symbol of the hard-and-cold twentieth century business world:

They don't need me in New York. I'm
the New England man. I'm vital in New
England. (Act I)

He still clings to the naive idealism of the nineteenth century business success. He tells Howard, a young, typical twentieth century businessman:

In those days there was personality in it,
Howard. There was respect, and comradeship,
and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and
dried, and there's no chance for bringing
friendship to bear--or personality. (Act II)

Willy refuses to grasp the cold business-is-business attitude, which pays little heed to his cry:

I put thirty-four years into this firm...
 You can't eat the orange and throw the
 peel away--a man is not a piece of
 fruit! (Act II)

What does Miller have to say about the American Dream in this play? He asserts, first of all, that the dream is false. This theme is clearly spelled out by Biff who cries out in desperation:

Pop! I'm a dime a dozen and so are you...
 Will you take that phoney dream and burn
 it before something happens! (Act II)

Next Miller seems to be saying that in America the vision of the dream has become blurred, to say the least, and that only outside of the country can the great success story be realized. Hence Ben makes his millions in the jungles of Africa and is pictured as a character who was confident, satisfied, and reasonably happy.

However, if the playwright punctures the dream itself, he still maintains a sympathetic attitude toward the dreamer. "No one dast blame him," Charley says, because Willy is a salesman who was struggling to conquer "the 'unchangeable' environment" and was willing to throw all he had into "the battle to secure his rightful place in his world."¹⁵

Miller likewise hints why the dream failed--failed, at least, in one individual case. The first reason is Willy's tendency to ignore the present and live in the future. Linda, for example, tells her sons:

Dad is never so happy as when he's looking
 forward to something. (Act II)

¹⁵ Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," Death of A Salesman, pp. 144, 146.

The other reason is that Willy has deliberately missed doing his "thing" in life, because of his preconceived attitudes toward the meaning of success. Even though he is "so wonderful with his hands... a happy man with a batch of cement," (Requiem) for him real success is business success achieved through one's personality. He might well have become a successful carpenter, but for him a trade of this kind is not the way to the top; and so he neither enjoys this talent nor develops it beyond the stage of a hobby. Thus Willy Loman's own version of the dream neither conforms to his inherent nature nor provides sufficient "success" in his business ventures. He has failed-- and death seems the only answer.

The American Dream

Twelve years after Arthur Miller's Death of A Salesman examined the American Dream, another playwright stirred the American stage by a play which also centered around the theme of the success myth: Edward Albee's The American Dream. In the "Preface" Albee clearly states his intention:

The play is an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity; it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen.¹⁶

Albee's technique in attacking the American Dream, however, is quite different from Miller's. While Miller attacked the "wrong dream"

¹⁶Michael Rutenberg, Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest (New York, 1969), p. 61.

in a straightforward and down-to-earth manner, in what Miller claims to be a tragedy, Albee ridicules the false dream in a comedy, revealing the absurdity of the dream through dialogue, characterization, and actions.

The play contains six characters: Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, the "Bumble," the American Dream, and Mrs. Barker. These characters have no individual names since they are portrayed as types in American society. Grandma, Mommy, and Daddy represent the basic members of society; the "Bumble" which is supposed to become a "bundle of joy" to Mommy and Daddy in reality is like a "bumble-bee, that annoying, stinging little insect" which is "more of a pain...than a joy";¹⁷ the American Dream represents the new image of success; and Mrs. Barker, the professional career woman, is the "barker" of society.

The play begins with Mommy and Daddy sitting in their living room, waiting for an unidentified "them" who are late. Daddy and Mommy complain that everything in their apartment is broken: refrigerator, door bell, bathroom, and so on. Dr. Rutenberg has pointed out that these broken facilities in the apartment symbolize the need of immediate repair in American society:

...the refrigerator represents our hunger drive, which is at the moment not being taken care of adequately. The broken-down bathroom suggests that waste is piling (sic) up in this comically grotesque household. The broken doorbell symbolizes the family's isolation....Mommy and Daddy are completely removed from their immediate surroundings.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

Then Mommy tells Daddy about her hat which she recently purchased at a downtown store. Her description of the shopping scene reveals that Mommy is a conformist; she has no opinion of her own. When Mrs. Barker, the chairman of her women's club, says the hat is wheat-colored and not beige as the salesman told Mommy, Mommy goes right back to the store, creates a scene, and demands a beige hat, for she believes that Mrs. Barker is an authority, a know-all. What other people say is most important even if what they say is obviously wrong.

The first short scene also conveys a sense of isolation between Mommy and Daddy: there is no real communication between them; they are separated emotionally as well as physically:

Mommy. ...I said, I went to buy a new hat yesterday.

Daddy. Oh! Yes...yes.

Mommy. Pay attention.

Daddy. I am paying attention, Mommy.

Mommy. Well, be sure you do.

Daddy. Oh, I am.

Mommy. All right, Daddy; now listen.

Daddy. I'm listening, Mommy.

Mommy. You're sure!

Daddy. Yes...yes, I'm sure. I'm all ears.¹⁹

Grandma appears in this scene, carrying boxes that are "neatly wrapped and tied." She is eighty-six years old, but still able to work. She does all "the cooking and the house work, polishing silver, moving the furniture." Having worked hard all her life without com-

¹⁹Edward Albee, "The American Dream," Three Plays by Edward Albee (New York, 1962); the whole play consists of one scene.

plaining, Grandma is now threatened with being put away because of her age and uselessness. Each time Grandma's words or actions are offensive to Mommy, Mommy warns Grandma that a van man will take her to a nursing home.

Then suddenly the broken door bell rings. The visitor whom the three thought to be the van man turns out to be Mrs. Barker. Mrs. Barker is the representative of an efficient modern society, and a do-gooder who is busy running from one committee to another. Actually she is too busy and too "efficient" to remember what brought her to the apartment of Mommy and Daddy.

While Mommy and Daddy are gone off stage to break Grandma's television set, which is the only source of communication with the outside and which Mommy thinks is the cause of Grandma's bad language, Grandma lets Mrs. Barker know why she is here. Twenty years ago,

...there was a dear lady very much like you, only younger then, who did all sorts of Good Works...And one of the Good Works this dear lady did was in something much like a volunteer capacity for an organization very much like the Bye-Bye Adoption Service....

And at that time Daddy and Mommy who "had never been blessed with anything very much like a bumble of joy" because both "couldn't have one, wanted to buy something very much like a bumble." But the "Bumble" they bought did not give Mommy and Daddy satisfaction; it was not what they expected. Firstly, "it didn't look like either one of it's [sic] parents...." And "one night it cried its heart out...it only had eyes for its Daddy...." Each time Daddy and Mommy found something wrong with the "Bumble," they cut its parts out. This gradual mutilation

brought on the final stage of dissatisfaction: the baby betrayed Mommy and Daddy and died. They called up the Adoption Service because "they wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back." And that is why Mrs. Barker is here.

While Daddy, Mommy, and Mrs. Barker are off stage looking for Grandma's television set and a glass of water, a young man in search of a well-paying job comes in. The man possesses a Hollywood kind of handsomeness and masculinity. And Grandma recognizes him:

...you're the American Dream, that's what you are. All those other people they don't know what they're talking about. You...you are the American Dream.

The American Dream is looking for work--"almost anything that pays." Grandma soon discovers that this young man is the twin brother of the "Bumble" Daddy and Mommy adopted twenty years ago. The wily old lady suddenly hatches a plan: she leaves the apartment with some carefully wrapped boxes, which she says:

...don't have much in them...some old letters, a couple of regrets, Pekinese... the television...my Sunday teeth...eighty-six years of living...some sounds...a few images....

It was hard for Grandma to wrap up these old memories and values, but she knew well that "it had to be done." These boxes contain her eighty-six years of life itself. Before she leaves, however, Grandma instructs Mrs. Barker to present the young man to Daddy and Mommy as a substitute for the "Bumble" that did not give them satisfaction.

Mommy and Daddy, when they see the young man, are delighted. Mommy jubilantly says:

Yes. Why, yes! Of course!
 (Rises and crosses to Young Man.)

Yes! oh, how wonderful!

...Now this is more like it.

Yes, Siree! Now this is a
 great deal more like it!...

(to Mrs. Barker) He's very nice.
 Really top notch; much better than
 the other one.

Mommy, Daddy, Mrs. Barker, and the American Dream are all happy and satisfied, and so decide to drink to their "satisfaction." The comedy ends "while everybody's happy...while everybody's got what he wants... or everybody's got what he thinks he wants."

In this unique and stimulating play, Edward Albee comments anew on the status of the American Dream in the 1960's. First of all, in the person of Grandma he indicates that the "old dream" is dying. Grandma represents America's first dream; she is of "pioneer stock," a person with a sense of dignity:

...that's all that's important; a
 sense of dignity. And it doesn't
 matter if you don't care, or not,
 either. You got to have a sense
 of dignity, even if you don't care,
 'cause, if you don't have that,
 civilization's doomed.

She is likewise independent, individualistic, straightforward, and diligent; even at eighty-six she is still full of life and still able to work. Thus she exemplifies the qualities peculiar to the original American Dream--the one that grew in the soil of diligence, honesty, frugality, and hard work.

However, Grandma is no longer a part of the age; she has gone out of fashion. Mommy and Daddy are irked at her presence and embarrassed

by her language. They are forever threatening to remove both her belongings and her person from the scene. But if Grandma's existence is reluctantly tolerated for the time being, there is no interest at all in what she has to say nor what she possesses. When Grandma asks if anyone is interested in the boxes she has so carefully wrapped up, Mommy snaps, "Nobody is interested!" The old values that were so much a part of the original American Dream are no longer relevant; they have had their day. There is no place for Grandma; her departure with all those boxes from the apartment of Daddy and Mommy symbolizes the inevitable passing of the pioneer dream.

Mommy and Daddy who represent the new generation have a new dream quite different from the old one. The qualities of this dream become evident when we examine the character of the ones who fashioned it. Grandma, for instance, reveals Mommy as an ambitious social climber:

When she was no more than eight years old she used to climb up on my lap and say, in a sickening little voice, "When I gwo up, I'm going to mahwy a wich old man; I'm going to set my wittle were end right down in a tub o' butter; that's what I'm going to do."

But Mommy is not ambitious in the Franklindian or Algerian sense; her goals are attained by deception. This trait appears already in her childhood:

When I was a little girl, I was very poor, and Grandma was very poor, too, because Grandpa was in heaven. And everyday, when I went to school Grandma used to wrap a box for me, and I used to take it with me to school; and when it was lunch time, all the little boys and girls used to take

out their boxes of lunch, and they weren't wrapped nicely at all, and they used to open them and eat their chicken legs and chocolate cakes; and I used to say, "Oh, look at my lovely lunch box; it's so nicely wrapped it would break my heart to open it." And so, I wouldn't open it....

I used to eat all the other little boys' and girls' food at school, because they thought my lunch box was empty. They thought my lunch box was empty, and that's why I wouldn't open it. They thought I suffered from the sin of pride, and since that made them better than me, they were very generous.

The truth is that the lunch box was not empty because Grandma "never ate the dinner she cooked the evening before...and gave...all her food" to Mommy the next day. Daddy, too, becomes a convenient part of her success formula when she says,

We were very poor! But then I married you, Daddy, and now we're very rich.

...I have a right to live off you because I married you...and I have a right to all your money when you die.

Marriage has now become a means to material "success" in Albee's play.

Strength and virility, too, are not a part of the new dream. Daddy is wealthy, but he "has been sick." He just wants "to get everything over with." In contrast to the traditional success hero, Daddy has no determination, masculinity, or decisiveness. When Mommy tells Daddy to answer the door bell, which they think announces the van man there to put Grandma to a nursing home, Daddy hesitates:

I think we should talk about it some more. Maybe we've been hasty...a little hasty, perhaps...I'd like to talk about....

Here Albee ridicules the success hero, Daddy, and at the same time the empty American Dream, by bringing up some characteristics of the traditional success hero which Daddy does not have:

Mommy. There's no need. You made up your mind; you were firm; you were masculine and decisive.

Daddy. We might consider the pros and the....

Mommy. I won't argue with you; it has to be done; you were right. Open the door....

(Pushing Daddy up out of his chair.)

Daddy. (...turns back to Mommy)
Was I firm about it?

Mommy. Oh, so firm; so firm.

Daddy. And was I decisive?

Mommy. So decisive! Oh, I shivered.

Daddy. And masculine? Was I really masculine?

Mommy. Oh, Daddy, you were so masculine; I shivered and fainted.

Daddy. I shall now open the door.

Mommy. What a masculine Daddy!...

Daddy. All right. Watch me now; I'm going to open the door. Watch. Watch! (Crosses to Arch R.)

Mommy. We're watching; we're watching.

Mommy dominates Daddy; Mrs. Barker not only dominates her home-- she has "an absolutely adorable husband who sits in a wheelchair all the time"--but her community as well:

I've got my fingers in so many little pies...I know I'm here because you

called us, but I'm such a busy girl,
with this committee and that committee,
and the Responsible Citizens Activities
I indulge in.

Albee seems to be saying that the success myth has passed into the hands of women. The heroes are now in the wings; the heroines have taken over the stage.

The new American Dream that replaced the "Bumble" is handsome and masculine in appearance--qualities that were peculiar to the original dream: he is a

Clean-cut, midwest farm boy type,
almost insultingly good-looking in
a typically American way. Good
profile, straight nose, honest eyes,
wonderful smile....

However, the inward qualities differ greatly from those of the original dream: the new American Dream will do almost anything for money. Now money is no longer the reward for one's diligence and hard work; it is the goal of life. He explains why he will do anything for money:

It's that I have no talents at all,
except what you see...my person;
my body, my face. In every other
way I am incomplete, and I must
therefore...compensate.

The American Dream also tells why he is incomplete, why he is so cold and heartless, why he has no compassion for others: he is the identical twin brother of the mutilated "Bumble":

We were identical twins...he and I...
not fraternal...identical; we were
derived from the same ovum; and in
this...we had a kinship such as you
can not imagine. We...we felt each
other breathe...his heartbeats
thundered in my temples....

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....But we were separated when we were still very young, my brother, my twin and I...inasmuch as you can separate one being. We were torn apart...I don't know what became of my brother... I have suffered losses....A fall from grace...a departure of innocence... loss...loss...it was as if all at once my heart...become numb....

As a result of this separation, the young man continues:

...I have been unable to love...since that time I have been unable to see anything, anything, with pity, with affection...with anything but...cool disinterest...since then I have not been able to love anyone with my body. And even my hands...I can not touch another person and feel love...I no longer have the capacity to feel anything. I have no emotions, I have been drained; torn asunder...disemboweled. I have, now, only my person... my body...my face. I use what I have... I let people love me...I accept the syntax around me, for, while I know I can not relate...I know I must be related to. I let people love me...I let people touch me...I let them draw pleasure...from my presence...from the fact of me...I can feel nothing...And so...here I am....

The American Dream has become emotionless, cold, and calculating. It is no longer for others, for the group, for the community; it is there for the pleasure of the individual who reaches out to grasp the dream.

Thus depicting three generations in the play, Albee traces the gradual deterioration of original American ideals. Lee Baxandall calls these three generations "then," "now," and "nowhere": "then, the epoch of a still-dynamic national ethic and vision" represented by Grandma, "now, a phase which breaks down into several tangents of decay," presented by Mommy, Daddy and Mrs. Barker, and "nowhere, a darkly

prophesied future generation,"²⁰ portrayed in the American Dream. Grandma's "pioneer stock" values are gone; the rough but self-sufficient, hard-working days are over. The original purity of the American ideal has now become as sterile as Daddy and Mommy, who produced the future generation that will "do anything for money."

By means of a series of absurd dialogues, characterizations, and scenes, Albee presents his interpretation of the success dream and of socially accepted norms and mores. "We live in the age of deformity," Albee says through Grandma, and we need reform for the betterment of American society. Since Albee's attack of the dream is bitterly negative and seems to have no positive solution, he has been accused of nihilism. However, it should be admitted that a positive attitude may rise only after the dream has been recognized as wrong and cast aside. Albee's task here lies in the destruction of the dream, making man see what he really is, what values are real, instead of what one thinks he is and what our society holds as its value. In this sense, The American Dream further delineates the "phony dream" which had led to Willy Loman's death.

By the use of the techniques of the Theatre of the Absurd, Albee tries to destroy the illusion man has created through his moral, religious, political and social structures and makes his audience see how absurd it is to live in such a world of illusion, how absurd it is to strive for a success of this nature. He agrees with Martin Esslin in that man must

²⁰ Lee Baxandall, "The Theatre of Edward Albee," Tulane Drama Review, IX (Summer, 1965), 20.

...endeavor to come to terms with the world in which he lives...face up to the human condition as it really is, to free himself from illusions that are bound to cause constant maladjustment and disappointment. For the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions--and to laugh at it.²¹

²¹ Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York, 1961), p. 316.

CONCLUSION

These five plays produced within five decades (1911-1961) present images of both success and failure. It is interesting to note that as the curtain falls on each play the "successful" characters live happily ever after, while the failures meet death. Mike Regan in The Boss, a business success, wins the heart of Emily and is cleared of the accusation of injuring Donald Griswold. There is an optimistic future--personal as well as business--waiting for him. The young man in The American Dream also possesses a bright future, since he is welcomed by Mommy and Daddy and will eventually inherit their wealth.

On the other hand, death awaits the failures of the dream: Mr. Zero hopelessly entangled in a machine civilization is victimized and executed. Of Mice and Men presents Lennie shot to death by George in order to save him from lynching. Willy kills himself believing to the end that his dream is the only dream worth having, and that his death will bring the fulfillment of the dream to Biff. All these men of failure end their lives while still clinging to their dream. It seems as though in a society saturated with the success mythology, there is no room for failure.

These five plays also reveal a progressive deterioration of the American Dream and of the supposed means of attaining it. In The Boss Mike Regan achieves his goal by his own pluck--by hard and persistent efforts, shrewd business practices that result from his

intelligent study of business transactions, and by his independent and manly actions. He advances not only in business but also in morality. His acquired moral uprightness is equated to his business as well as to his personal success. The pathetically unattractive Zero, however, can never be a business success because he does not possess the right qualities--the qualities of determination, independence, self-reliance, manliness, attractive personality, and intelligence. The same statement can apply to Lennie. However hard working and enduring he may be, his lack of intelligence eliminates him from the race.

In the second stage of the dream, however, the dream and the way of attaining it take a different direction. The dream of success in The Death of A Salesman becomes more intensified than the dream in the first decades. The center of Willy's interest lies solely in the acres of diamonds, a success symbol, which he feels can be attained by an attractive personality and the "right contacts." Hard work, intelligence, honesty, and independence are now given a secondary position for achieving success.

The third stage described in The American Dream reveals a further deterioration of the success dream and the method of achieving it. The young man's dream is now money and money only; he will do "anything for money," even sacrifice his own moral integrity. He reaches the success ladder by complete dependence on someone wealthy and by the sale of his handsome appearance and attractive personality. Now hard and honest work, intelligence and frugality are no longer essential for success. The attainment of success by depending upon successful

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men is easier, faster, and more effective than the old formula of diligence and hard work. The original dream was mutilated because it failed to reach the top of the ladder and failed to satisfy. Now moral deterioration rather than moral integrity is equated with business success.

As the dream itself deteriorates, the playwrights' attitude toward success mythology becomes progressively bitter. Sheldon in The Boss, though he made a feeble protest against the robber barons, nonetheless glorified the Algerian rags-to-riches myth. Michael, the poor boy who made good, is treated as the protagonist of the play; his weaknesses are sympathetically explained by the author not as his own fault, but as the result of his lowly upbringing. All ends well as in Alger stories and the hero with the heroine lives happily ever after. Elmer Rice caricatures a man of failure who has been molded by the machine age. He has no sympathy toward the man who cannot succeed. John Steinbeck expresses his awareness of the impossibility of fulfilling the dream, but treats the dreamers kindly and asserts that the "dream" is a practical means for the masses to maintain hope amid the harsh reality of the depression.

Arthur Miller's voice against the dream is loud and explicit. It is the wrong dream which leads the Lomans to a tragic end. At the same time, however, Miller possesses an understanding and sympathetic attitude toward Willy, a victim of society who blindly accepted the success myth, equating the pursuit of money with the pursuit of happiness. In The American Dream the attack reaches its peak. Edward Albee ridicules the dream itself; it is false and empty. He has no

sympathy for those who put forth their utmost efforts to attain success.

In general, the dream in these plays indicates man's desire to escape from reality. It is also an indication of his inability to face his true self as well as his unwillingness to accept his environment as it is. Willy was a man who "did not know who he was"; Lennie was unable to see the disparity of his dream and the life of his age.

The dream so widely accepted as attainable, however, remains an unreachable cloud in the skies to most Americans. The formula of success for everyone--hard, honest work and a frugal life, the qualities that were once considered as certain to bring one to the top of the ladder does not necessarily bring everyone to the top. Success is reserved only for the selected few. But even for the selected few, success does not always bring happiness and fulfillment; the joys of success lie not so much in the attainment as in the climb upward.

In the past Americans have painted a picture of their dream. With each succeeding generation the picture has changed; people have gone on touching up the canvas they inherited and have thought they could make it better. Undoubtedly the painting will go on, for there is evidence that many Americans still believe in the dream and still hold in their hands a brush that they are quite sure will produce the masterpiece of the American myth--even though modern playwrights have tried to dispel such beliefs.

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