"Terror of Failure" and "Guilt for Success": The American Dream in the Great Depression and Arthur Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck*

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Abstract

So far a number of books and articles have dealt with the theme of the American dream of success in Miller's plays and explained how this theme has been developed in such plays as *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. However, not enough attention has been paid to *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, which has the same theme. This paper examines how the play could be interpreted, against Miller's intention, as a play on the American dream of success in the Great Depression. Section I discusses the protagonist's struggle signifying the critical condition of the Depression, and explains how *The Man Who Had All the Luck* can be a play of realism, reflecting a time of upheaval, and focusing on the protagonist, who seeks the new dream of success represented by mink farming, and yet gets restless after his success based on good fortune or luck, a symbol of the conventional success myth. Section II compares the play with Alger's success myth, regarding the play as a parody of a self-made man. Section III discusses the play in relation to *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, explaining that David Frieber has a lot in common with Joe Keller and Willy Loman. Section IV discusses some of the weaknesses of the play, arguing that Miller failed to add enough sense of reality, which is supposed to bring in a great impact on the play. Section V, finally, tries to evaluate *The Man Who Had All the Luck* by analyzing some of the major criticism of the play. It then concludes that Miller ended up creating a drama with an unrealistic fable-like content in a realistic style.

Introduction

The stock market crash on October 24, 1929 brought about the ensuing Great Depression, which caused a number of changes and chaos in the fabric of American society in the thirties. The Depression changed people's values and

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beliefs in those days to a great extent, and thus provided Americans with an opportunity to examine their way of life and attitudes to the American dream, that is to say, the conventional American ethos, to review the ethical and moral implications of the dream, a ligament supposedly uniting all Americans. Charles R. Hearn explains the American dream of success, to be exact, in the Great Depression as follows:

> The American myth of success has had remarkable vitality and persistence, especially on the popular level. The essential question underlying [...] is this: What happened to this deeply ingrained and wonderfully compelling dream of success during the Depression of the 1930s when the stark reality of an economic crisis seemed to belie the assumption that, in America, anyone who possessed the proper personal virtues (initiatives, perseverance, frugality, industry, reliability) could raise himself from poverty to wealth? Historically, the myth of success has been identified with our most cherished cultural values, focusing, dramatizing, and supporting the very ideals that we consider most distinctively "American."[1]

The depression, after all, affected important cultural and business practices founded on this common ground. Not a few writers were also influenced and left literary works about the Slump, and Arthur Miller is no exception. Some of his early works, in fact, deal with various issues related to a time of challenge and crisis for the American dream of success.

Miller's first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), has a theme of the American dream of success in the context of the Depression period. He calls the play "a fable," and insists that it is an assault together with *The Golden Years* (1940) on "the conventional realistic form that dominated the American theatre at that time,"[2] but it is, no doubt, realistic and narratively conventional. Actually, it was produced as a completely realistic play, which Miller considers made very little sense.[3] This is certainly a realistic play with "a doom hanging over, something that promises tragedy"[4] as a drama critic John Anderson points out. And the tragic atmosphere is embodied in David Frieber suffering in an allegorical fashion.

1. Charles R. Hearn, *The American Dream in the Great Depression* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977) 4.

2. Arthur Miller, "Introduction," *Arthur Miller Plays: Four* (London: Methuen, 1994) vii.

3. Walter Wagner, ed., *The Playwrights Speak* (New York: Dell, 1967) 6.

4. This is a comment told to Miller by John Anderson, a critic for the *Journal-American*. Arthur Miller, *Timebend: A Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1987) 104.

I thus equate Miller with an American playwright of realism and label this particular play as such, because to me *The Man Who Had All the Luck* appears to be realistic enough and should be interpreted as a play of American realism reflecting "the mood of American helplessness brought on by the decade-long Depression."[5] That is to say that this is a play on a realistic theme of the American dream, to be exact, the dream of success, focusing on its changing phase made obvious in the age of industrialism and capitalism centering around, in particular, the Depression era, which is the turning point to review the values of the dream per se.

I. The American Dream of Success in the Great Depression and Invisible Gods

Many writers have had a life-changing experience which convinced them decisively to start their creative activity, no matter whether they are novelists, poets or playwrights. In the case of Arthur Miller the dramatic experience which became the starting point of his creative activity was the Great Depression period right after the stock market crash of 1929. He was affected by the times during his youth, and he cites the years after the crash as being eye-opening. He describes the situation in "The Shadows of the Gods" as follows:

> Until 1929 I thought things were pretty solid. Specifically, I thought – like most Americans – that somebody was in charge. I didn't know exactly who it was, but it was probably a business man, and he was a realist, a no-nonsense fellow, practical, honest, responsible. In 1929 he jumped out of the window. It was bewildering [...] Practically everything that had been said and done up to 1929 turned out to be a fake. It turns out that there had never been anybody in charge. What the time gave me, I think now, was a sense of *an invisible world*. A reality had been secretly accumulating its climax according to its hidden laws to explode illusion at the proper time. In that sense 1929 was our Greek year. The gods had spoken, the gods, whose wisdom had been set aside or distorted by a civilization that was to go onward and upward on speculation, gambling, graft, and the dog eating the dog.[6] (*Italics* mine)

5. Ibid.,ix.

6. Arthur Miller, "The Shadows of the Gods," *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller,* ed. and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin (New York: Viking, 1978) 176 – 77.

This apparently supports Dennis Welland's explanation on the Great Depression's serious influence upon Miller: "it was the Depression that gave him his compassionate understanding of the insecurity of man in modern industrial civilization, his deep-rooted belief in social responsibility, and the moral earnestness that has occasioned unsympathetic – and often unjust – criticism in the age of the Affluent Society."[7] Actually, many people intoxicated with the economic success following World War I suffered a severe mental blow by the sudden Depression one way or another, and it seemed to Miller that this catastrophe was brought in by "an invisible world." Christopher Bigsby mentions the link between its social effects and David Beeves (originally, David Frieber), the protagonist of the play:

> The real itself seemed problematic. A life that had seemed so coherent, so inevitable, secure in its procedures, values, assumptions, disappeared overnight. David Beeves believed someone was in charge, not a businessman, to be sure, but someone, until suddenly he could no longer believe this to be true. God, it seemed, had jumped to his death.[8]

Miller says that *The Man Who Had All the Luck* "hardly seemed a Depression play," but "the obsessive terror of failure and guilt for success."[9] However, this play was only fifteen years after the crash, and the events of the play most likely take place only after the crash. The 1930s have certainly cast their shadow over the play, and the effects of the era are quite obvious and unavoidable. Bigsby states: "After a decade of Depression, the despair voiced by so many of the play's characters could be seen as having a clear social foundation."[10] The terror and doubt of a Mid-western young man, David Frieber, dominated by "a sense of an invisible world," is well-visualized in the play, and Miller's following remark on his own experience in the Depression well illustrates David's situation.

> So that by force of circumstance I came early and unawares to be fascinated by sheer process itself. How things connected. How the native personality of a man was

7. Dennis Welland, *Arthur Miller* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961) 6-7.

8. Christopher Bigsby, "Introduction," *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) xvii.

9. Arthur Miller, interview with Christopher Bigsby, recorded at Arthur Miller's house in Roxbury, Connecticut in summer 1995, for series of four BBC radio programs transmitted to make his 80th birthday.

10. Christopher Bigsby, "Afterword," *Arthur Miller Plays: Four* 271.

> changed by his world, and the harder question, how he could in turn change his world. It was not academic. It was not even a literary or a dramatic question at first. It was the practical problem of what to believe in order to proceed with life. For instance, should one admire success – for there were successful people even then. Or should one always see through it as an illusion which only existed to be blown up, and its owner destroyed and humiliated? Was success immoral? – when everybody else in the neighborhood not only had no Buick but no breakfast? What to believe?[11]

The whole experience, in fact, is reflected in *The Man Who Had All the Luck* and it will be impossible for us to understand this play without the full knowledge of the Depression. For example, without enough background of the uncertain circumstances, we will not be able to comprehend properly the true nature of the insecurity, restlessness and uneasiness of David, who has suffered so much from painful conscience, "terror of failure," and even "guilt for success" whenever everything he does goes well in the hard times. He is convinced he must somehow pay for his success: "Does a thing really belong to you because your name is on it? Don't you have to feel you're smart enough, or strong enough, or good enough, or something enough to have won it before it's really yours?"[12] David's suffering echoes the hardships Hearn describes:

> The Depression era was a time of uncertainty and ambivalence – of cynicism and idealism, of the reaffirmation of old faiths and the search for new ones, of softness and toughness, of optimism and despair, of realism and fairly-tale illusions. It was a time of upheaval, when American values seemed to be in the process of shifting but not in a clear-cut direction.[13]

Generally speaking, a human feels restless or uneasy whenever things keep on going well and tends to feel the "terror of failure," afraid that in the future any misfortune or unhappiness will occur without fail sooner or later. It is even more so when it is the era of great economic depression. Just as the title of the play indicates, David is "the man who had all the luck" among a great number of unhappy people around him in the hard times, and feels emotionally insecure

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11. "The Shadows of the Gods," 178.
12. Arthur Miller, *The Man Who Had All the Luck in Cross-Section: A Collection of New American Writing*, ed. Edwin Seaver (First pub., New York: L.B. Fischer, 1944: rpt. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1969) 521. Further citations are given parenthetically in the text.
13. Hearn 192.

about a chain of fortunes. What should be emphasized here is that David's obsessive "terror" and "guilt" are largely attributed to the effects of the era, the American experience of the Great Depression in the thirties, as Will Rogers was prompted to declare "We are the first nation in the history of the world to go to the poorhouse in an automobile."[14]

Historically, from the end of the nineteenth century until the Depression, industrialization quickly progressed and huge industrial businesses began to pop up one after another in the United States. The Westward Movement with the "Frontier Spirit" was replaced by industrialism or capitalism, which increasingly widespread. Before the twentieth century the so-called Alger's success myth was prevalent, encouraging young people, particularly, stricken by the Civil War, to live a meaningful life so that they could climb the ladder of success from the bottom to the top of society with such virtues as honesty, diligence and hard work. The myth, however, gradually became extinct, replaced by new concepts of success. The Depression, apparently, played a crucial role in changing the conventional ideas of success.

It appeared to Miller that success then depended only upon luck or a sense of "an invisible world." In *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, it is clearly suggested as a sense of "luck," which David tries to reject. Yet the situation did not allow anybody to always win success through "luck" or "hard work," as depicted in Alger's stories. That is the very reason why David gets quite uneasy and even guilty about the luck brought to him. He cannot accept and put up with the fact that only he himself enjoys good luck. As a result, by denying the stroke of luck befalling him, he just longs to feel as hapless as the next guy and dares to put his hands on the new risky business of mink farming by his own efforts at the very last moment. Mink farming could be a solace and a source of identity and self-realization. Mink farming is the symbol of how the struggle for success is carried on in a competitive society. It is an appropriate symbol because it epitomizes both the primitive, brutal nature of the struggle and the spectacular rewards that motivate the participants to join the battle.

In *All My Sons*(1947) and *Death of a Salesman*(1949), Miller shows his social concern and is thus considered a playwright of social problems. And in this first debut work on Broadway, he deals with a serious social phenomenon, although the work does not seem to openly contain social implications, as the subtitle "a

14. Elizabeth Bennett, "The Man Who Had All the Luck – Study Aids," Finesilver Shows and The Antaeus Company, 2000, 4. Will(iam) Penn Adair Rogers (1879 – 1935) was an American actor and writer of humor.

fable" indicates. Furthermore, what should be pointed out is that at the same time, Miller is wrestling with the conventional theme of the Greek tragedies concerning the universal theme on the fate of human beings: whether human actions have any influence on their fortune in life or fate is beyond their control, and whether human fate is determined predominantly by an invisible god's power or rather developed by an individual's efforts. This is a question pondered by the Greek dramatists and is exactly what Miller refers to as "the ulterior question […] how much of our lives we make ourselves and how much is made for us."[15]

Bothered unbearably by the contrast between his own success and the failures of those around him, David tries to understand his unmitigated good fortune. In doing so, he painfully faces up to the question of the justice of fate. This could even be a reverse of the story of Job.[16] The reason why David tries to escape from the "invisible world" and establish his own true identity implies that the above-mentioned Greek theme must have constantly occupied Miller's mind. Judging from the fact that he is dealing with this Greek proposition, it would be possible to conclude that to Miller the Depression was the year of the invisible gods of Ancient Greece. This is what he means by his statement that "1929 was our Greek year."

Miller makes it clear that the struggle fought by David, his friends and family, is not tied to a specific era or social problem. In his autobiography, he describes *The Man Who Had All the Luck* as "seemingly a genre piece about mid-America that has no connection with any […] political questions."[17] And the stage directions only tell us that the play takes place "not so long ago."[18] Judging from these comments, it seems that Miller originally wanted to create a new Greek tragedy with unanswerable questions on human fate, or destiny, trying to dramatize enduring struggles of the soul and human will. It is a fact that Miller has often referred to the Greeks in his writings.

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15. "Introduction," *Arthur Miller Plays: Four* ix.

16. Miller himself recognizes this and says: "Hearing *The Man Who Had All the Luck* read after four decades, it only then occurred to me that I had written the obverse of the Book of the Job." Arthur Miller, "Introduction," *The Golden Years* and *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (London: Methuen, 1989) 8.

17. *Timebends: A Life* 86.

18. Arthur Miller, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 1. Miller rewrote the play several times, and this is its latest version. However, for this paper, I stick to the original version, simply because, in my opinion, it reflects David's suffering and relief at the end, and is more related to the dark period. In other words, in the original version David has no peace of mind until he escapes the influence of the invisible world and has the initiative to establish himself.

II. Alger's Success Myth and the Dream of Success

It is not an exaggeration to say that this play starts when David Frieber wonders about Shory's view of life: "A life isn't like a house that you can lay out on blue paper and say, a brick here on Tuesday and pipe here on Wednesday. Life is another word for what happens to you" (489). What Shory here means is that we cannot live our own life by our hands, but let it take its own course. He further says: "A man is a jellyfish laying on the beach. A wave comes along and pulls him back into the sea, and he floats a while on a million currents he can't even feel and he's back on the beach again never knowing why" (501). David at first challenges this view and tries to pursue his life on his own, saying: "If people don't receive according to what they deserve inside then we're living in a madhouse(517). Despite a chain of fortunate events, he seeks to consider its meaning, and achieve the true success by his own hands. That is the reason why he dares to bet his own life on the business of mink farming, declaring his determination to Gus.

> The mink. That's where I work. They're all mine; nobody's going to touch them but me. They'll call me a fortune; if they live it's my doin', and if they die… I'll know for sure…That nothing came to me because of what I am, what I myself am worth; and that everything can go smashing down the same way it came – for no reason. I'm going to measure myself, Gus, once and for all. And mink can measure a man. Funny, ain't it, that I never thought of this before? It seems … *so natural* now. Don't it to you? I mean, don't you sometimes feel that something big … is about to go? (537)

Concerning the success based on "luck" in the United States, we notice that David's story has the same pattern of a series of Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches success stories, and "an orphan, David, is in the improbability and sentimentality of his young aloneness, a small parody of the self-made man."[19] In fact, it seems as if Miller had written the drama to consider some men's cornucopia of success, by utilizing the pattern. We, therefore, would like to examine the similarity and its dimensions.

To begin with, David has the same kind of quality with the main characters of Alger's success myth. There are two types of heroes in Alger's stories. The first and most popular type indicates that they are poor and uneducated, often an

19. June Schlueter and James K. Flanagan, *Arthur Miller* (New York: Ungar, 1987) 7.

orphan or widow's child. Despite their unhappy surroundings, they are honest and work hard, and as a result, climb the ladder of success. The second type is that even though they are brought up and well-educated in a middle class happy family, their father's sudden death forces them to live an independent life. Sometimes, an evil relative, not so close to the main character, deceives him and steals his inheritance. However, in the final stage the hero gets it back and continues an honest life towards a successful one. The hero as in *Ragged Dick* (1867) learns professional virtues such as loyalty, punctuality, polite obedience, together with traditional one, such as hard work, thrift, justice, etc. Alger, in particular, emphasizes professional virtues among other things. David is undoubtedly the first type.

The next characteristic of "luck" in Alger's stories could be exactly applied to that of David. In addition to the main character's admirable nature in Alger's tales, he is almost always obsessed with luck. The chapter in the story's turning point is usually titled "luck" of so and so. The hero's chances of gaining good fortune are usually accidental. Alger portrays the American society where prosperity comes to the hero as if it falls down from heaven. The luck Alger describes does not, however, contain any religious elements like God's will. As a writer of success stories regarding "a self-made man," Alger attributes both success and failure to an individual's own nature. The hero must show his own nature good enough to prove that he is a qualified person in climbing the success ladder. This is again quite applicable to David. Yet one distinctive difference is that David never accepts any of his success as a result of his own efforts, even though he has won it with no less effort of his own backed up with a chain of good fortune. He always gets insecure, restless and uneasy, fearing some kind of retribution for the luck he has enjoyed. David Madden argues: "Even those who make the Horatio Alger dream come true become restless, heartsick, ulcer- and anxiety-ridden."[20] David is definitely one of them.

Another characteristic of Alger's success myth is that a young character, in marked contrast to the pivotal one, appears in the story. The contrast enhances the effect of making the story dramatic. In *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, in an effort to make David's luck more conspicuous than his valuable personality, Miller also puts another character in quite contrasting circumstances. In this sense, Amos' existence is important, who fails to be scouted in the Major League

20. David Madden, "Introduction: True Believers, Atheists, and Agnostics" in *American Dreams, American Nightmares* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1970) xxvii.

Baseball. In addition to Amos, there appear several other characters, placed under similar unhappy circumstances: Shory in a wheel-chair half numb owing to a boiler explosion, J.B. Feller who lost his wife with an unborn baby and is still suffering from it, Gustav Eberson who cannot own his shop, an industrious worker, and so on. The typical pattern of Alger's success myth is that the main characters make it with "luck" and "effort," and another key element with this is that behind their success there are always good-natured, kind supporters. In this play there are such persons as Shory, J.B. Feller, Gustav Eberson as well as Harry Bucks who helps David's mink-raising. Particularly, J.B. takes care of David, just like his own father.

> …Look at him out there. No father, no mother, no education, no nothin'. And yet, by Jesus, every time I set eyes on him something happens to me. I suddenly feel that everything is possible again. Isn't that crazy? I swear to you, Shory, I look at that boy and for some idiotic reason I feel sure for a minute that I'll … well that I'll be a father before I die. Isn't that the wildest thing you ever heard? (490)

As we have seen, in the play there are two plots, one centering around David and the other focusing on Patterson and his son Amos. The latter also deals with the theme of the dream of success. This, however, has nothing to do with Alger's myth, but is one concerning twentieth century commercialism or industrialism. Patterson remakes the room in the basement into a training place in an attempt to make his son, Amos, a pitcher in big-league baseball, and has been training him since his childhood. Unfortunately, it turns out to be a failure. For the scout has found a big flaw in Amos' pitching. With a runner on a base Amos becomes nervous and loses control of the ball. Augie Belfast attributes part of the problem to the isolated training regimen the father developed. In the end Amos's trial of the professional sports ends in vain and Patterson's long-time dream turns into a nightmare. When Amos is turned down, David gets so rattled that he begins to wish for his own hardships. His shame becomes so vast that it affects not only his wife, Hester, and the couple's son, but also the future of the mink ranch he has built on his father-in-law's property. He waits for misfortune or catastrophe, which he feels must balance his luck, if there is such a thing as true justice in the world. This is what we call "paranoia" his very success breeds.

The fact that *The Man Who Had All the Luck* contains two types of views regarding success indicates that Miller has a strong coherence to this theme. Here he describes the changing aspects of the dream of success and at the same time,

gives the audience warnings about it. That is to say, he examines the fall of Alger's success myth in modern society through David's restless and uneasy psychological aspect. Furthermore, he criticizes the modern society as well through the emptiness and vainness of the twentieth century view on success. This is exactly a satire on the American dream of success, and thus David's "luck" and "success" become ironical. Thus, the entire play of David Frieber is an embodiment of what happened to the myth of success as it existed during the worst economic crisis in American history, and it also echoes Hearn's explanation about the influence of the Depression on the success myth: "The Depression decade provides a dramatic focal point for an analysis of this important aspect of American culture because it was in those years that desperate economic conditions challenged the traditional myth of success as it had never before been challenged."[21] Here we could hear Miller sounding a note of warning on the modern version of the values of the "success dream".

This theme is succeeded to *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* directly, in which Joe Keller and Willy Loman are set as a main character. In both plays Miller details how they are obsessed with the modern version of success dream and as a result, how it has become a nightmare and eventually, they have become its victim. Joe is outwardly a successful businessman, and Willy, conversely, an unsuccessful salesman. And yet, what is common with them is that they are finally forced to commit suicide. Morris Freedman argues as follows:

> The first records the destruction that comes to the successful man in America, for success came to him only through criminality; the second records the destruction that comes to the unsuccessful man who has dedicated himself to pursuing only the appearances of American success.[22]

III. A Trilogy on the Dream of Success

David reminds us of a typical hero appearing in Alger's stories, as we have already seen. The obvious difference, though, is that he is worried about his luck believing there must be a reason for things happening the way they do, and yet finding no valid cause for his luck. Thus, this fact drives him mad.[23] Suppose David had been

21. Hearn 18

22. Morris Freedman, *American Drama in Social Context* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1971) 85.

23. Sheila Huftel, *Arthur Miller: The Burning Glass* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1965) 82.

in Alger's times, he would not have been in such an emotionally unstable and insecure condition. He strives to escape from the luck befalling him and challenge the dream of success in the risky business of mink farming. The mink furs sell good at high prices and its farming is enormously attractive. However, they are rather a nervous animal and need careful watching. Although risky and yet challenging, it is worth trying. David at least thinks that way and tries to bet his life on the task despite Hester's opposition. Through the success of the task, he expects to cut himself off from the shadow of the success which he cannot believe he has made by his own ability and capacity. He talks about the thrill in the mink business:

> Can't you see the thrill in it? When you send a load of skins to New York you know you did something. It's not like owning a store or a … I mean like making your money out of something you happen to own. It's because of you, or what you are that they don't die; you can't bluff a mink into staying alive. Yeh, a thing like mink … that sizes a man up, tells him what he's made out of. (520)

David's determination is something extraordinary. He makes the transfer of ownership on the properties of his name into others.' He explains to Gus:

> DAVID (Steps to the door and stands against it. Stares long at Gus. When he speaks it as though he were reading from a scroll unwinding within him): You'll come with me tomorrow. We'll go the lawyer and I'll sign the shop over to you. (Gus is silent. He does not move.) I don't want it on my name any more. I'll take forty per cent. You take sixty. But from now on, it's on your name. (Gus is silent.) After we finish with the lawyer I want you to come with me out near Chelsea. There's a gas station on the main highway. I want you to look at it.
> GUS: What do I know about a gas station?
> DAVID: I'm going to buy it. I want somebody along. (Gus is silent.) From there we'll go to Harry Buck's place and you'll help me load the truck with mink. I'm taking fifty to start with.
> GUS: Also on my name?
> DAVID: No. Only the shop's on your name. The gas station is for my kid … he on Hester's name till it's born. Same with the tractor agency, quarry shares and the farm. All for Hester. I gotta do a lot of things for Hester now. I just want the mink for myself. The rest don't belong to me any more. You understand? Got nothing to do with me from now on. (536-37)

David's denial of success brought by "luck" and his search for the "dream of success" in the true sense of the word based supposedly on his own caliber is reflected in the main characters of *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. We now take a look at them and study their connection with *The Man Who Had All the Luck*.

In both *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* Miller portrayed the vainness of the modern version of the dream of success in the United States. Joe Keller and Willy Loman are representatives struggling to realize the dream in the competitive, industrialized society of the twentieth century U.S., Joe as a successful businessman and Willy as an unsuccessful salesman. Miller's attention, though, is not paid apparently to whether they are successful or not. A decade ago success meant the achievement of hard work and effort, and it was itself the object to be respected. In the competitive society of capitalism and industrialism, what Miller calls "dog-eat-dog society," the form of success, on the contrary, transformed into that of the survival of the fittest, and it has become impossible to define the dream of success in the optimistic sense any longer. A new theory connected with the new business ethics has come to surface. This is the main reason why Joe does not care about others for his own success in business and also why Willy has suffered greatly between the traditional view of success and the modern one.

It is likely that David's pursuit of success in the mink business is basically similar to those of Joe Keller and Willy Loman in their respective occupations. However, as we have already examined, David is not so desperate as his counterparts. We could see this in the scene when David explains the reason to Hester why he devotes himself so much to the mink business to the point where he begs his excuse not to care about the family: "I don't want you to worry, Hess. I promised you'd live like a queen, remember? "(540). What is the root of coherence of the three pivotal characters to the secular success? To answer this question, we should take a closer look at the background of the Depression period when they cannot help but behave like that. They are in the hard times after World War I when the sense of values was changing rapidly in people's mind in the competitive society based solely on industrial civilization and materialism. People then were seeking a new sense of values, but could not abandon the old traditional one. This is the very reason why Willy tries to think and behave in a rather practical way and at the same time, keeps the traditional sense of values, such as respecting and adhering to human connection, for instance.

David Riesman calls the modern man's character "other-directed" in *The Lonely Crowd*[24] and argues that it is different from the traditional "inner-directed" character. The "inner-directed character" means a type of social character in which the goal of human life is built in his own mind. The person with this type of character proceeds straight to the object or goal, and it is quite individualistic. On the other hand, in the American cities of the twentieth century, there appeared a new type of people in the upper-middle class, according to Riesman. This type was rather finicky about human relationships with others, and respected cooperation with a group. This is, as often pointed out, seen in Miller's main characters, in particular, Willy Loman who strives to pay as much attention as possible to being "well-liked."

Furthermore, Erich Fromm argues in *Man for Himself*[25] that the characteristic of modern people makes them deal with themselves as a seller as well as an object to be sold, and consider their own value changeable just like a commodity. He defines this character as "marketing orientation," and says that in the industrialized modern society a new market appears named the "personality market." This is the background where Willy gets obsessed with the mystery of the dream of success and ends up selling himself as a commodity.

The viewpoints of both Riesman and Fromm adequately explain the phenomena of alienation seen among people in modern society at large. They are absorbed in searching for a secular dream of success urged by their surroundings, as if success were the sole reason for their existence in this world. This condition, basically, applies in common to Joe Keller and Willy Loman as well as David Frieber. Gus's following dialogue with Hester illustrates his intention to win secular success through mink farming in an attempt to show his own caliber or capability to the outside world. He argues if he fails the mink business, that means the lack of his own individual competence and the downfall of his own life.

> …he is trying to find out how good he is; an honest man, he don't want what he don't deserve. These mink will die in his hands, he will know for sure then – then he will first know he was never any good, that everything came to him only from his luck! – and you will have not a husband but a wreck, a broken dwarf crawling under the sky, waiting for what will hit him next, It will break him in his heart, Hester! (548)

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24. See David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961).

25. See Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Enquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1947).

In the "Introduction" to the *Collected Plays* (Vol. 1), Miller discusses *Death of a Salesman* and explains "the law of success" as the concept of value dominating the modern society.

> […] *the law of success* is not administered by statute or church, but it is very nearly as powerful in its grip upon men […] rather, a deeply believed and deeply suspect "good" which, when questioned as to its value, as it is in this play, serves more to raise our anxieties than to reassure us of the existence of an unseen but humane metaphysical system in the world. My attempt in the play was to counter this anxiety with an opposing system which, so to speak, is in a race for Willy's faith, and it is *the system of love* which is the opposite of *the law of success*.[26] (*Italics* mine)

"The law of success" is in sharp contrast to "the system of love," and Miller persists that their conflict is the major theme of *Death of a Salesman*. "The latter is embodied in Biff" and the entire conflict dominates Willy's "inner head."

While "the law of success" is brought into the family, there arises the conflict with the fundamental ethics in the family, which is what Miller refers to as "the system of love." By setting up dramatic scenes in the family relations on the stage, Miller attempts to depict humans both as a social existence and an individual entity. This is also, without doubt, the case with *All My Sons* as well as *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. That is, in the former, "the system of love" Joe conflicts with is his son, Chris, and in the latter it is Hester. Amid the thunderstorm, Hester gets a phone call from Harry Bucks saying the food David gave the minks this morning is poisonous. When David is informed of the news and is ready to go out all confused, Hester cries out to her husband: "Swear to me, Davey, swear one thing. If you save them tonight you'll never wait again for something to strike. I'll know tomorrow if you lie!" (551).

Between Patterson and his son Amos, a conflict like this is recognized, and yet their mental picture is not painted deeply enough. This is a flaw of this drama. Obviously, the confrontation between "the law of success" and "the system of love" is a more effective technique when it is employed in the relationship between the father at work in actual society and the son with a strong sense of justice or pure heart, rather than the relationship between husband and wife.

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26. Arthur Miller, "Introduction to the *Collected Plays*," *Collected Plays* (New York: Viking Press, 1957) 35-6.

We have so far studied the similarities among the main characters in the three early plays of Miller in that they are a seeker of the dream of success in the twentieth century industrialized American society. Since all three plays deal with the common theme, we could call them as a unit, the trilogy of the dream of success. Miller, as a matter of fact, mentions that both *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* are family plays born out of *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, and they certainly treat his major themes such as the morality of family and individual responsibility. Moreover, more than anything else, the theme of the "dream of success" is the main one, treated further clearly and deeply by the following two plays.

What should be emphasized is that the failure of *The Man Who Had All the Luck* is largely due to the fact that it does not treat the central theme of the dream of success in a direct manner and that here "individual responsibility is not really connected to man's social responsibility."[27] The play deals with another major theme, whether human fate can be decided by invisible 'good luck' beyond human capacity or rather by one's efforts or hard work for that matter. The theme of the dream of success, which should be the main one, gets hidden behind, as it were, the afore-mentioned second theme. Furthermore, what Miller refers to as the third theme of "retribution"[28] has also given unfavorable effect in terms of consistency.

IV. *The Man Who Had All the Luck* as an Apprentice Play

When we take an overview of Miller's works from *The Man Who Had All the Luck* to *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), we notice the first group including *A View from the Bridge* (1956) and the second starting with *The Misfits* (1961). According to Robert W. Corrigan, the first group centers around "a crisis of identity" and the second focuses on "otherness."[29] As a matter of fact, there is a major thematic difference: the first basically treats the solidarity between an individual and society, and the second an individual and humans in general, above all, the issue of crime and evil. When we put *The Man Who Had All the Luck* in what Corrigan refers to as the first period, we notice some of the characteristics with this piece.

27. Robert Hogan, *Arthur Miller* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964) 13 - 4.
28. "Introduction to the *Collected Plays*," 14.
29. Robert W. Corrigan, "Arthur Miller" in *Contemporary Dramatists*, ed. James Vinson (London: St. James Press Ltd., 1973) 542 – 43.

First of all, Corrigan explains some of the features of the plays in the first group as follows:

> The central conflict in the plays of the first period grows out of *a crisis of identity*. The protagonists in these plays is suddenly confronted with a situation which he is incapable of meeting and which eventually puts his "name" in jeopardy. In the ensuing struggle it becomes clear that he does not know what name really is, and, finally, his inability to answer the question "Who am I?" produces calamity and his downfall.[30] (*Italics* mine)

The main characters in this period are not able to find where they are when faced with the situation they cannot handle, and as a result, get into "a crisis of identity."

Corrigan also defines the crisis as "a conflict between the uncomprehending self and a solid social or economic structure,"[31] and continues:

> The drama emerges either when the protagonist breaks his connection with society or when unexpected pressures reveal that such connection has in fact never existed. For Miller the need for such a connection is absolute and the failure to achieve and/or maintain it is bound to result in catastrophe.[32]

Actually, when we are born, we become a member of a family and come to recognize that gradually we are a member of a society, a country and then the whole world. It is impossible that we can live without some connection with the environment around us. Therefore, without being able to establish a proper relationship between the society we belong to and ourselves as its member, we, as a result, cannot help feeling that we are thrown into an insecure, restless and uneasy condition.

In "The Family in the Modern Drama" Miller says that the most crucial thing in our life is to ask "how may a man make of the outside world a home?"[33] In his early works, above all, the main characters' connection with society at large is a focal point. However, most of them do not know so much about themselves, and they are not able to understand society correctly and eventually commit suicide.

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30. Corrigan, "Arthur Miller" 542.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Arthur Miller, "The Family in Modern Drama," *Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism*, ed., Travis Bogard & William I. Oliver (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965) 223.

Overall, each of Miller's early works portrays the struggle between the main characters and the society they are in. In general terms, it is feasible for us to regard *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible* as works depicting an individual's self-sacrifice imposed by social pressure. On the other hand, *All My Sons* and *A View from the Bridge* treat an individual's crime affecting society seriously. In which group does *The Man Who Had All the Luck* belong? The play has a main plot of David who struggles to establish a right connection with his surroundings and eventually denies the luck which is on the way to his purpose or goal. So it is proper to say that the play does not belong to either of the above-mentioned groups. This implies that in this play there is no crucial relationship between the main character and society, in other words, the distinct social background found in other plays. Because of this, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* lacks reality, which brings us a great impact. Recognition of solidarity and consciousness of guilt are based on the believable social background in the early plays.

True, in *The Man Who Had All the Luck* the consciousness of guilt is depicted in David who hopes his baby will come out dead and feels uneasy, unless he makes this expectation the price of his own happiness, but this is not based on the actual social settings. Therefore, this is in part the reason why the entire drama gives us the impression that it is unrealistic and superficial. When we put the play on the stage as a realistic drama, it does not reach the true climax simply because of the unnaturalness reminding us of a fairy tale or a juvenile story for that matter. In addition, except for this play, all the protagonists in the early plays end up dying, which appropriately applies to Miller's theory on tragedy, "Tragedy and the Common Man," in which he argues:

> I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing – his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society.[34]

David, however, does not remind us of these characteristics at all. And this gives us the impression that *The Man Who Had All the Luck* does not have much appeal for the audience. Sheila Huftel's comment properly illustrates this point:

> The difference between *The Man Who Had All the Luck* and the later plays is that you

34. Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," *New York Times*, February 27, 1949, Sec. II, 1,3.

> are drawn into the later plays but are merely looking at *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. It is a difference of depth and color, something like the difference between, say, a Munnings and a Van Gogh.[35]

Since the play is short of the concrete social background as I have pointed out, the audience, to their regret, have the feeling that it lacks a sense of reality. By reality I do not mean a random succession of real incidents and events one after another. If that is the case, the play might be a simple work of manners and customs. Reality in drama increases its significance all the more when it deals with not only social phenomena, but also their real entity and true nature in terms of theme, characterization and setting, altogether. In this sense, the lack of reality in *The Man Who Had All the Luck* is a fatal flaw. As a good example, David Finkle argues that "David's plight registers as less than real. It is more the stuff of myth engineering to explain human behavior than a dramatization of reality."[36] Actually, Miller originally attempted to write a myth and ended up making the hero more ordinary than mythical.[37]

Additionally, in *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* what makes these plays "dramatic" is the close relationship between the society and the men and women or their tense relationship. However, it is a shame that in *The Man Who Had All the Luck* no such dramatic tension is found, and worse, it does not paint a mental picture of the characters. As Robert Hogan rightly points out, this is a "well-made play" with some unnatural connotation.[38] Another problem with the play is the repetitiveness in it, which reveals a young playwright's mistakes, as Matthew Murray comments:

> It's divided into three acts, and the structure is astonishingly similar in each: David overcomes something previously perceived as insurmountable adversity, while others cripple with failure around him. This happens time and time again, the cycle broken only by the ringing down of the final curtain.[39]

This is just one of the critical comments of the revised version of the play, but also

35. Huftel 78 – 9.

36. David Finkle, "Review: *The Man Who Had All the Luck*," Theater Mania. Com, May 2, 2002. (http://www.theatermania.com/content/news.cfm?int_news_id=2128).

37. *Arthur Miller and Company*, ed. by Christopher Bigsby (London: Methuen, 1990)40.

38. Hogan 12 – 3.

39. Matthew Murray, "Talkin' Broadway's Broadway Reviews: The Man Who Had All the Luck, May 1, 2002. (http://www.talkinbroadway.com/world/ManLuck.html).

applies to the original one. Finally, Lewis Nichols points out "the confusion of the script," "its somewhat jumbled philosophies," and "the ridiculous now and then."[40] This might be the most appropriate comment concerning the weaknesses of the play.

V. Concluding Remarks

We have looked into some of the premature aspects of *The Man Who Had All the Luck* in terms of both theme and technique. However, it is not well known that the play won the Theater Guild Award for new dramatists. It is not possible to know how it was evaluated simply because there is no material available. Probably the reason would be that the play reflected the atmosphere of the time well when it was published. Another reason, of course, might be that not a few people recognized Miller's talent despite his not so lucky debut on Broadway. Anyway, most of the reviews of the play were rather critical and even negative. A favorable one among the few is found in the *New York World-Telegraph* by Burton Rascoe. His comment supports the very reason why the play won the above-mentioned award.

According to Rascoe, first of all, this play treats the most popular superstitious idea, using tactful dramatic method: "all the good things which happen to you in life will necessarily be balanced by an equal number of bad things, [...] the great calamity must inevitably follow a long streak of "good luck" or vice versa."[41] Secondly, he states "he (Miller) put over his argument in a faultlessly convincing manner," that is, the Ancient Greek themes of "fate" and "predestination" is recreated quite naturally with common people in the American Middle-East. And he concludes as follows:

> "The Man Who Had All the Luck" is not only a touching, realistic play, with some especially fine characterization in it, but, as I have stated, a play with a challenging new idea in it – something very rare in the theatre. It is as American as an ice cream cone; and just refreshing, emotionally and intellectually, as an ice cream on a hot day. It is a challenge to all the defeatism and self-pity of 19th century European literature and drama, from the Romanticists to the Surrealists and from Chekhov to O'Neill.[42]

40. Lewis Nichols, "The Philosophy of Work Against Chance Makes Up 'The Man Who Had All the Luck," *New York Times* (Nov. 24, 1944) in *New York Theatre Critics' Review* V, 73.

41. Burton Rascoe, "Good Luck at the Forrest," *New York World-Telegraph* (Nov. 24, 1944), in *New York Theatre Critics' Review* V, 74.

42. Ibid.

The review may sound too favorable and rather extreme. However, considering that the play basically deals with the myth of the dream of success in the transitional period from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, thus putting fresh air into the American theater, Rascoe's admiration of *The Man Who Had All the Luck* might not be a sheer exaggeration.

We have already seen how the myth of the dream of success miserably broke down by the Depression, and was, as a consequence, replaced by the new emerging view of success as depicted in Miller's early plays. Here it could be said that in *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, Miller chiefly deals with the demise of Alger's dream of success, in *All My Sons* the new aspect of the dream of success in the dog-eat-dog society under capitalistic America, and in *Death of a Salesman* the conflict of the old and new concepts of the American dream of success. This is the main reason why I call them, as a unit, the trilogy of the American dream of success. Now here a question arises: what is Miller's real intention of pursuing this theme in these plays? As Masunori Sata argues, the reason could be that Miller wanted to warn people of the negative side of the dream of success during the Depression in the United States.[43] All the protagonists such as David, Joe and Willy in those plays are alienated from society, suffering from a loss of identity, and at the same time, losing confidence in their personal lives. The cause is, undoubtedly, their innocent obsession with the illusion of the dream of success per se.

Of the theme of *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, Robert Hogan argues: "Several themes touched vaguely upon in this play become the clearly enunciated ones of *All My Sons*, and *Death of a Salesman* – the themes, for instance, of money and morality and individual responsibility."[44] Certainly, both in *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, the themes and issues are dramatized adequately through the main characters' inner psychological conflict. On the other hand, in *The Man Who Had All the Luck* the themes are not well-organized into a unity, and thus, there is no conceivable dramatic development. Overall, the action feels rushed and crowded with many disasters among the supporting characters that not all of them pay off emotionally for the audience. Consequently, we cannot find Miller's own unique dialogues of characters, revealing their emotional, psychological conflicts on the stage. A good example, in particular, is David's

43. Masunori Sata, "Arthur Miller's Warning Concerning the American Dream," *American Literature in the 1940's: Annual Report 1975*, The Tokyo Chapter of the American Lit. Society of Japan (Tokyo: Kyodo Obun Center Co., Ltd., 1976) 219 – 25.

44. Hogan 13.

inner psychological phase with the backdrop of the Depression period, which is not fully portrayed, and this is quite obvious, compared with Joe Keller. Benjamin Nelson even argues that "David is a semi-realized composite of Chris and Joe Keller," concluding that "David works out his destiny in a social vacuum."[45]

David's stated torture at watching the constant suffering of his friends, his darker demons, the sense of being at the brink of despair because of his good luck – all these are not fully developed by young Miller. No wonder that Miller uses the "fable" designation and the play calls itself "a fable" with a bittersweet allegorical air, though, to be found nowhere in Miller's later works. The unique feature of a fable is that the story has didactic elements, and in the case of *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, the lesson Miller gives to the audience is the revision of the dream of success through David's pang of conscience. It is widely said that Miller is a writer of morals and conscience. It is quite symbolic that Miller made his debut with this play, a rather forgotten existence, among his works, in which he makes quite a conscientious protagonist, David Frieber (later David Beeves), appear on the stage.

Overall, in the whole play Miller attempted to describe what is believable or what is not believable as a subject in a possible realistic fashion. As a result, there occurred an inescapable contradiction between them. That is, he created a drama with an unrealistic fable-like content in a realistic style. The irony here is that the more he tries to make the drama realistic, the more the gap gets wider between the world of the drama and the reality, and thus brings about the strange unnaturalness.[46] As a matter of fact, Miller himself noticed this when he saw the first performance of the play, saying "in *The Man Who Had All the Luck* I had tried to grasp wonder, the wonder, I had tried to make it on the stage, by writing wonder. But wonder had betrayed me."[47] He failed to make "wonder" on the stage obviously because of his immature technique. What made this play difficult to digest is the fact that he has created a fable in a realistic and yet commonplace situation, and eventually the stage direction has become too wordy and the plot too complicated.

Concerning the play he revised after its initial debut, Miller has said: "It was through the evolving versions of this story that I began to find myself as a

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45. Benjamin Nelson, *Arthur Miller: Portrait of a Playwright* (London: Peter Owen, 1970) 52.

46. Terry Otten argues: "Miller attributed the failure of the original play in part to the production itself, but mainly to his failed attempt to marry myth and realism." *The Temptation of Innocence in the Dramas of Arthur Miller* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2002) 11.

47 "Introduction," *Collected Plays*, Vol. I, 15.

playwright, and perhaps even as a person."[48] In retrospect, we can as well understand that the subject (dream of success) and other issues (father-son conflict, formation of two brothers, etc.) in *The Man Who Had All the Luck* laid the groundwork for his two important plays that followed: *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. In conclusion, after having examined *The Man Who Had All the Luck* from various aspects, it would be possible to say that although flawed, amateurish and immature, the whole play contains the seeds of Miller's ensuing major works in the light of both theme and technique. This is literally the prototype in Miller's entire canon, and should have its right place in the body of his work, not just as a mere minor work.

48. *Timebends* 88.