

# The Pursuit of the Almighty Dollar: Salesmen in American Drama and Cinema

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Engleski jezik i književnost - Pedagogija, nastavnički smjer

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**Potruga za svemogućim dolarom: prodavači u američkoj drami i  
filmu**  
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Mentor: doc.dr.sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

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## Summary

This paper presents an analysis of salesmen in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* (1958), David Mamet's play *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984), and in the movies *The Pursuit of Happyness*<sup>1</sup> (2006) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), all of who were competing in a cruel world of trade and commerce with the aim of achieving the American Dream. The theoretical framework of the paper firstly discusses the political circumstances in England which consequently led to the creation of the American Dream in the New World. Furthermore, it analyzes its characteristics and shows that there were various versions of the American Dream throughout the history, depending on the political situation in the country, but also depending on the opinions and attitudes of people themselves. The main part of the paper analyzes the characters of the plays and the movies by discussing their ethics, language and communication, and attitude towards business and family, referring to Jim Cullen's versions of the American Dream, in order to show that there are characters who succeeded in the rat race of the American Dream but that there are also those who got crushed under the pressure of it. In addition, the characters of the plays and the movies show a contrast when it comes to the characteristics of the American Dream because they were all written at a different time. Lastly, the paper reaches the conclusion by stating that the American Dream corroded over the years, meaning that the realization of the dream has completely changed. Nowadays, many people resort to crime and other illegal actions in order to actually achieve the dream and live a life worthy of their labor.

**Key words:** American Dream, salesmen, ethics, language, business, success, achieve, equality, opportunity

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<sup>1</sup> The original title of the movie

## 1. Introduction

The plays *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *Glengarry Glen Ross* by David Mamet reflect the time in which they were written, the time of the flourishing capitalism. The capitalism fitted perfectly in the concept of the American Dream, whose rat race made some people rich, while others got crushed under the pressure of it. Although the plays show us examples of characters who succeeded in the rat race of the American Dream, the majority of them failed and got destroyed by the cruelty of the American business world because those characters lacked the values that both the American Dream and the business world represent, such as hard work and equality of opportunity. Nowadays, in the modern world, the American Dream is also present, but the way in which it is supposed to be achieved has completely changed. The movie *The Wolf of Wall Street* is a representation of that new American Dream. The movie portrays the life of a middle class man craving for the extravagant life that America offers to those who are persistent enough and who are ready to risk in order to profit. Similarly, the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness* also portrays the life of a man who is struggling to achieve the American Dream, but unlike the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *The Pursuit of Happyness* shows the real struggle one has to go through just to make ends meet. In contrast, while *The Wolf of Wall Street* shows how one can live large if one is competent and ready to risk in terms of legal justification of one's actions, *The Pursuit of Happyness* shows how an honest and hardworking man fights unbelievable odds just to get by. Clearly, the plays and the movies portray the cruelty of the American business world where values are twisted, equality of opportunity is somehow missing, and the competition is so tough that the competitors often find themselves in a do or die situation. This paper will first describe the American Dream and then show if and how the means of achieving the American Dream have changed and corroded over the years by analyzing the characters' ethics, attitude towards business and family, the use of language as their main selling tool, and by referring to the Cullen's versions of the American Dream.



## 2. The American Dream

To dream, to imagine for oneself a future far beyond the present reality is a concept that lays in all human beings. It is something that pushes people to go beyond their limits, something that encourages them to aim for the stars and achieve their deepest desires. This concept is present in the American Dream, a term that, simply put, refers to the belief that with hard work, everything is possible. According to Ellis and Ellen, although the phrase itself was coined by James Adams during the times of the Great Depression, as an idea, it was formed centuries ago by the Pilgrims, early in the American history.

To begin, in the year 1534, Henry VIII of England established the Church of England because Pope refused to divorce him from Catherine of Aragon. That period was called the Protestant Reformation. Among the Protestants, there were many separatists, one of them being Congregationalists, who rejected the church hierarchy – they wanted only individual churches to exist; no bishops, no pope. Delbanco states that the Puritans were regarded as precisians or precisionists by their fellow Englishmen, and that they “insisted that the Anglican Church had been corrupted with garish ceremonies and needed to return to precise conformity with pure forms of worship established by Christ’s apostles sixteen hundred years before they were born” (17). Also, according to Delbanco, the name “Puritans” was one among the names people used to mock those religious fanatics, the one that stuck, and the one used today (18). It is evident that the Puritans were not particularly liked by Englishmen, as Archbishop Richard Hooker once said that “their craving for purity made these people unfit to live amongst men, but suited them well for life in some wilderness by themselves” (qtd. in Delbanco 18). In addition, the Puritans demanded a church reform that entailed a vision of small autonomous churches in the sense of people joining together for worship, which was simply incompatible with a state church whose authority descended from a remote king, through the bishops and parish clergy who were more devoted to their masters than to God (Delbanco 17). Because of their beliefs, they were in danger during the reign of James I (1603–1625), so they fled to the Netherlands to avoid beheading. In his work “Of Plymouth Plantation,” William Bradford said:

Lastly (and which was not least), a great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundations or at least to make some way thereunto, for propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the

world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping stones unto others for performing of so great a work. (qtd. in Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 18)

In 1620, one group of 102 pilgrims decided to sail to the New World on a ship called *Mayflower*. Brooks, Lewis, and Warren state that “the place they have thoughts on was some on those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants” (18). According to Jillson, Puritans withdrew to New England to build a holy commonwealth that could be an example to others across England and Europe, an example that should encourage them to transform and purify their own societies (18). Also, according to Jillson, John Smith wrote that no place is more convenient for pleasure, profit, and man’s sustenance because of the mildness of air, the fertility of the soil, and the situation of the rivers (16). Similarly, Captain Edward Johnson, a Puritan who also travelled to America declared:

Oh yes! Oh yes! Oh yes! All you people of Christ that are here Oppressed, Imprisoned and scurrilously derided, gather yourselves together, your Wives and little ones, and answer to your several Names as you shall be shipped for His service, in the Westerne World, and more especially for planning the united Colonies of new England. Know this is the place where the Lord will create new Heaven, and a new Earth in new Churches, and a new Commonwealth together. (qtd. in Le Fevre)

Furthermore, Pilgrims wanted to point out that this “exceptionalism that America offered” (Jillson 12) was simply unavailable in the Old World, as Europe was dominated by aristocrats and national churches that had wealth and privileges that were limited and in most cases unreachable to common people, whereas the New World offered to build the society anew (Jillson 12).

Regarding religion, Puritans believed that at the beginning of time God had chosen some people for salvation, and others for damnation, Puritans themselves being the ones who are destined for salvation. For them, “church authority ascended from the laity to a pastor whose theological training and eloquence in the pulpit qualified him to serve the congregation as God’s mouth to the people” (Delbanco 17). The Puritan’s devotion to God is perfectly evident in John Winthrop’s letter to his wife:

I never fared better in my life, never slept better, never had more content of mind, which comes merely of the Lord’s good hand, for we have not the like means of these comforts here which we had in England, but the Lord is all sufficient, blessed

be his holy name, if the please, he can still uphold us in this estate, but if he shall see good to make us partakers with others in more Affliction, his will be done, he is our God, and may dispose of us as he sees good. (qtd. in Delbanco 19)

Similar to Winthrop, D.H. Lawrence asserted that a Puritan loves God with all his soul, but hate his neighbor with all his heart (qtd. in Delbanco 18). Furthermore, Delbanco states that their faith was so extreme that the average churchgoer listened to around seven thousand sermons in a lifetime, which is more than fifteen thousand hours of concentrated listening, listening for hope, where they learned to think of themselves as belonging to a lineage of the faithful whom God had taken under his protection. Moreover, they believed that “every earthly event, however seemingly causal, was a part of God’s timeless and all-encompassing plan; and, as such, it had to be scrupulously reported and carefully interpreted by men” (Brooks, Lewis, Warren 15). The proof is the voyage itself: “Their great belief in the venture helped them survive the various calamities, miseries and terrors of the voyage, and the worse ones that awaited them in the Cape Cod winter” (Brooks, Lewis, Warren 17). Therefore, they saw themselves as light – a city upon a hill:

On them rested the enormous and stirring burden of planting in the New World wilderness, a community of godliness wherein man's destiny might meet its ultimate test. Such a community, in Winthrop's words, would be as nakedly visible to the rest of the Christian world as a city perched high upon a hill. (Brooks, Lewis, Warren 15)

In order to survive in such conditions and circumstances, they had to work beyond hard. It was considered to be the key to success and happiness. They believed that if they worked hard enough on their purification and sanctification, God would grant them peace, security, and material wealth, which means that they did not work for themselves or their needs and desires, but for God, as they saw material prosperity as God’s gift in return for fulfilling the covenant with Him (Jillson 18). This urge and desire for enrichment is what we today call the American Dream, which was, according to Ellis and Ellen, perfectly described by James Adams, a popular historian, in his book *The Epic of America*:

[It] is a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement ... a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of

which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (qtd. in Ellis and Ellen)

Dermo states that this definition implies the attainment of material goods and that historically men and women had been limited in opportunity based on their social class (1). Furthermore, it implies that each person should succeed or fail based on its inborn abilities or lack thereof (Dermo 1). In addition, the same author confirms the opinions of others by saying that the significance of James Adams' definition is that an individual has the power over his own material destiny in spite of prior social position or the workings of the economic and cultural structures (1). Moreover, White and Hanson claim that it is a fact that the American Dream is deeply embedded in the consciousness of American citizens, which gives it an enduring power (7). Similar to Dermo, White and Hanson state that equality of opportunity is important to understand the dream's enduring power, because "unlike other individual rights that can be easily taken away by authoritarian governments (e.g., freedoms of speech and religious worship), it is a state of mind that is virtually impossible to eliminate" (8).

But James Adams is not the only one who described the American Dream, as throughout history "different people have meant different things, often multiple things, by 'the American Dream'" (Schudson 2). According to Schudson, Jim Cullen, in his book *American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*, insists that there are "American Dreams" in the plural (566). He begins with the Puritans and their American Dream – to build an exemplary society of believers, a dream whose main characteristic is not a sin-obsessed view of life, but a faith in reform, and a belief that, with effort, things could be different and better than they are (Schudson 567). Jim Cullen said that their dream was one of manifold ironies, not the least of which involved their clearing a space for subsequent generations to come and pursue aspirations they would have found reprehensible if they could comprehend them at all (8). This version of the American Dream is embodied in the Declaration of Independence itself, which is the second version of the dream, and which states that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" (Jillson 3). Cullen claims that "this political manifesto was the cornerstone of the American Revolution, the justification for a small group of men to seize the reins of power from the British" (8). Jillson said that "the Declaration was intended to be an expression of the American mind...a standing challenge to each new generation of Americans to do well, to do right, and always to do better" (3). This vision "of upward social mobility for people of humble origins" (Schudson 3) by Thomas

Jefferson and his colleagues, is Cullen's third version of the American Dream (Schudson 567). It is connected to the world of trade and commerce and the expansion to the west, closely followed by the fourth and fifth version which refer to social equality and 'home ownership' or suburbanization that happened after World War II (Schudson 3). The fourth version of the American Dream refers to the quest for equality, focusing specifically on the struggle of African Americans, which is according to Cullen, the most noteworthy and unsuccessful version of all American Dreams (8). On the other hand, home ownership is the most widely realized version of the dream, but it "has had consequences that have been both deeply reassuring and deeply troubling" (Cullen 9).

Lastly, Cullen's sixth version of the dream refers to the present day American society, which grows out of the gold rush and the cult of personality that Cullen identifies with Hollywood (Schudson 568). In Cullen's words:

This is also a dream of personal fulfillment, albeit of a very different kind than that of the Puritans or Abraham Lincoln. Like the others, its roots go back to the origins of American life, from the so-called adventurers seeking sudden fortunes on the plantations of Virginia to the speculators mining their prospects in western cities like Las Vegas. But nowhere does this dream come more vividly into focus than in the culture of Hollywood - a semi-mythic place where, unlike in the Dream of Upward Mobility, fame and fortune were all the more compelling if achieved without obvious effort. This is the most alluring and insidious of American Dreams, and one that seems to have become predominant at the start of the twenty-first century. (9)

Certainly, as Salmi states in her review on Gregory Nava's documentary, *The American Tapestry*, people have their own conceptions of the American Dream: "'To become rich and never have to work again', says a teenager, 'to get away from the ghetto', says a black man, 'the American Dream has nothing to do with me', argues a girl of Asian origin" (70).

From all these versions of the American Dream, it is evident that the dream itself has changed, and, by extension, the means of realization have changed. As Dermo argues, the days when middle-class comfort was chased by the sweat of one's brow are gone (11). Today, the American Dream "is connoted by ownership of representations of wealth without the sweat" (Dermo 11). Whether one has been successful in achieving the dream is measured by the symbols of success such as branded clothing and expensive cars, and the time one has to enjoy them (Dermo

11). The sign value of the items has replaced the exchange value of the commodities system which means that the Americans no longer have to be anything because they can simply represent whatever message they want to convey through the purchase of the consumer goods (Dermo 11). In other words, “the American Dream is a dream indeed” (Dermo 11). Not only did the dream change throughout the years regarding the ways of achieving it, but so did the expectations of people. According to White and Hanson “the Dream itself has been broadened to include a greater sense of personal well-being and quality-of-life issues (such as having access to quality health care, working toward world peace, and reducing the harmful effects of global warming)” (10). In his book, *The American Dream: A Cultural History*, Lawrence R. Samuel states that the dream had gone from a kind of self-reliance to being about something completely different:

The willingness to do almost anything – join a quasi-religious organization selling shampoo and vitamins, drive a cab for eighteen hours a day, or send one’s child a thousand miles away – revealed the degree which the American Dream had become about making money, preferably a lot of it. (qtd. in Zaidan 1361)

Despite these various versions of the American Dream, and the fact that it has changed, there are characteristics that unite them and that are rooted in the dream, regardless of the situation and the circumstances. All of them are about freedom, equality, and agency, for what Cullen writes as something that “lies at the very core of the American Dream, the bedrock premise upon which all else depends” (qtd. in Schudson 3).

### **3. *Death of a Salesman***

#### **3.1. Ethics and Attitude towards Business**

The main protagonist of Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman, is a character who strongly believes in his concept of the American Dream. He believes that being well-liked, attractive, and having a good personality is all that is necessary to acquire material wealth. He values that over making an effort or working hard: "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" (Miller 33). As Price points out, Willy has a fractured vision of the American Dream. He thinks that if you are good looking and well-liked, you will not have to work hard (18). Willy is blinded by the rewards and material gain the American Dream offers that he cannot see that his obsession with being well-liked does not conform to the hardworking ethic of the American Dream. It is evident that he is wrong because he earns little money. Willy comes to that conclusion after conversation with his wife Linda who calculated that they barely cover their expenses with his salary: "My God if business don't pick up, I don't know what I'm gonna do!" (Miller 36). Willy's self-confidence, a belief that he is well-liked and recognized as an extraordinary salesman in New England is evident in a conversation with his sons:

WILLY: You and Hap and I, and I'll show you all the towns. America is full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding 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. This summer, heh? (Miller 19)

The time and the social circumstances in which Willy lives correspond both to the fifth and sixth version of the Cullen's six versions of the American Dream. It is a mixture of homeownership and the craving for the material wealth of the contemporary American society. As Cullen said, the home ownership version of the dream is most widely realized, and it refers to Willy as well, since he owns a home. But, Willy has another problem, that of his false belief. As already mentioned Willy values his personality over hard work, which is precisely what gets him into financial

trouble. The proof that his belief is false are other characters in the play, who succeeded, such as Willy's neighbor Charlie, who has enough money to pay his son's college tuition and to loan Willy money. This shows that Willy and his belief system present the problem or the obstacle on his way to success, and not the society. Therefore, Willy is unable to gain material wealth which places him somewhere between Cullen's fifth and sixth version of the American Dream, since he owns a home, but is unable to acquire material wealth.

Furthermore, Price states that Willy has an intense desire to show success even if he is not successful, and he continues to follow the path he believes in, no matter what (19). This is evident in Willy's conversation with Charley, from whom he takes money but does not want to accept his job offer (Price 20). Willy goes even further by accusing Charlie of insulting him: "I got a job, I told you that. What the hell are you offering me a job for? Don't insult me" (Miller 43). Bigsby suggests that imagination is the problem. It is easily usurped by fantasy, urbanization, and the satisfactions of the material world which all cause the failure of will (218). Also, Willy's ethic is clearly present in conversations with his son Biff. When Biff steals the football from the locker room to practice, Willy says that the coach would congratulate him on his initiative, and when Biff says that the coach congratulates his initiative all the time, Willy replies: "That's because he likes you. If somebody else took that ball there'd be an uproar" (Miller 30). Not only does Willy fool himself with his beliefs, but he fools his sons, too. Price implies that neither of his sons knows who they are because their foundation is based on lies. Because of that, they are lost and they cannot pursue their own dreams (21). It could be said that they are a reflection of their father, because they have been raised on the values Willy presents and thinks are right. Similar to the scene when Biff stole a football and was congratulated on it by his father Willy, Biff also stole material from a construction site, believing it was the right thing to do, as the opportunity presented itself. He did it because he was raised in such a way, a way that he does not see that what he did is wrong. As was the case with the football, Willy also sees nothing wrong with Biff stealing the material, as he even bragged about it to Charley:

WILLY: You shoulda seen the lumber they brought home last week. At least a dozen six-by-tens worth all kinds a money.

CHARLEY: Listen, if that watchman...

WILLY: I gave them hell, understand. But I got a couple of fearless characters there

(. . .)

WILLY: There's nothing wrong. What's the matter with you? (Miller 35)



Centola states that Biff learned such behavior from Willy, as he values office work more than he values manual labor in the country (qtd. in Leath 3). That explains the reason why Biff does not understand the weight of his act.

Biff believes that his former boss Oliver will lend him money to build his own farm just because he liked him when Biff worked for him. But that is far from the truth, since Oliver does not remember Biff at all: “Well, I waited six hours for him, see? ... Finally, about five o’clock, he comes out. Didn’t remember who I was or anything. I felt like such an idiot, Hap” (Miller 104). As Price claims, “Willy's vision of the American Dream is a very small box with rigid rules; no one is allowed to have a dream that doesn't fit in that box” (24).

As explained above, there are salesmen in the play who succeeded, which shows that it is possible to gain material wealth to some extent, that it is Willy who is a problem, and not the society. Besides Willy’s brother Ben, Charlie is a typical “rags-to-riches example of success” (*Subverzivna* 61). He is Willy’s next door neighbor and his only friend. As Nikčević points out, Charlie did not get his hands on a big fortune, but he has enough money to organize his life and to live it happily (*Subverzivna* 61). He owns a private business which enables him not only to live on it, but also to lend money to Willy, and even to offer him a job. Charlie is a complete opposite of Willy because he is not as talkative as Willy, he does not like football, he looks at things objectively, and he lives in reality, unlike Willy, who is nothing but delusional. Charlie’s traits are visible in his conversation with Willy after Charlie saw Bernard, his son, off:

CHARLIE: Willy, when are you going to realize that them things don’t mean anything? 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 (. . .) Why must everybody like you? Who likes J. P. Morgan? Was he impressive? (Miller 97)

Apart from that, it is unknown how Charlie became rich. The author only states the fact that he has enough money, but it is not evident whether his actions made him rich, or something else for that matter. Here, the American Dream still stands firm on the ground of the fact that hard work brings success, and not having a delightful personality, as Willy thinks.

Another exception is Charlie’s son Bernard, who is also successful. A parallel can be drawn here, since the relationship between Bernard and Willy’s son Biff is the same as the relationship of Willy and Charlie. In high school, Bernard, who was considered to be a geek, was always helping Biff, who was a popular sportsman: “Where is he? If he doesn’t study! ... If he doesn’t

buckle down he'll flunk math!" (Miller 40). Years later, Bernard becomes a successful lawyer, while Biff becomes a mirror image of his father Willy. Clearly, it is a situation of "like father like son", since Biff's ethics and values reflect Willy's, and Bernard's those of his father Charlie's ethics and values. Bernard's success is evident in Charlie's conversation with Willy, in which he tells Willy that his son is going to Washington: "How do you like this kid? Gonna argue a case in front of the Supreme Court" (Miller, 95). Apparently, not everything is in good looks and popularity, and as Bigsby notes, Charley and Bernard show that full-hearted commitment to capitalism is not incompatible with human values and that Willy's desire to be 'well-liked', his effort to go through life on a smile and a shoeshine, is evidence of his confusion and illusion of reality, which made him a product in a system in which the self is carefully sculpted to serve social needs (84).

### **3.2. Language and Communication**

Communication and the use of language have a major role in portraying the personality of characters in the plays and the movie, but also in determining their success. In *Death of a Salesman* Willy is so obsessed with his belief that being well-liked is a key of success that he does not see that his language and a way in which he communicates with his clients is the real issue. He is very talkative, and he talks about unimportant things with his clients. Although he is a man with a great personality, it will not help him to conquer the business world, a cruel fact that Willy himself starts to understand when he talks to his wife Linda: "Other man – I don't know – they do it easier. I don't know why – I can't stop myself – I talk too much. A man oughta come in with a few words" (Miller 37). Willy realizes that people do not like his appearance because someone called him a walrus, and that they do not like his jokes. Consequently, he realizes that not everything is about appearance and about joking with people, but that sometimes, being a man of few words is the one thing necessary. Willy states Charley as an example: "One thing about Charley. He's a man of few words, and they respect him" (Miller 37). Kilic states that Willy realizes he has been conducting business incorrectly his whole life. It is not about entertaining people with conversation and making jokes but simply about making money, and a successful salesman does that by selling with a few words, by only discussing the product being sold and not shooting the breeze (5).

### **3.3. Family and women**

The play also reflects the time in which it was written, the times of the flourishing capitalism. The capitalism fitted perfectly in the concept of the American Dream, whose rat race made some people rich, while others got crushed under the pressure of it. The capitalism also had a great impact on the family itself, and the way a family functions. Once, families' houses had backyards with trees and a lot of grass where children could play. But now, there are only huge apartment buildings surrounded by tons of concrete. Willy comments on this by saying:

WILLY: The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them?  
(Miller 8)

Besides changing the way in which a family normally functioned in the past, the capitalism also greatly influenced the relationships between family members themselves. Thinking that being well-liked is a key to business success in the world of trade, Willy further alienates himself from his family, as his belief does not actually turn out to be true, so he has to work long hours (ten to twelve hours a day as he admits to his wife Linda) and often travel in order to earn for a living. This separates family members, as they are unable to form strong bonds with each other.

When it comes to male-female relationships, Willy feels like he has control over the household, including his wife Linda. While talking to his son Biff, Willy constantly tells his wife Linda to stop interrupting:

WILLY (wildly enthused, to Linda): Stop interrupting!

(. . .)

WILLY (to Linda): Will you stop!

(. . .)

WILLY: Will you let me talk?

(. . .)

BIFF: I don't like you yelling at her all the time, and I'm tellin' you, that's all.

(Miller 46)

By being interrupted by Linda, Willy feels as if he will stop being the man in the house, so he yells at her out of fear that he will lose the only thing that makes him feel he is in charge of something, since he has lost control over his job. Moreover, Willy's son Biff is again adopting his father's worldview by treating women like trophies, someone to show off. Biff makes that clear by saying that his mother Linda should dye her hair: "BIFF: Dye it again, will ya? I don't want my pal looking old". (Miller 38)

## 4. *Glengarry Glen Ross*

### 4.1. Ethics and Attitude towards Business

Similar to Willy in *Death of a Salesman*, whose concept of the American Dream is an unfortunate mix of the contemporary dream of chasing a wealthy lifestyle and one of home ownership, the salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* value hard work, but in spite of that, they are failures. Their version of the American Dream is also a contemporary one, the one that craves for the excessive material wealth, no matter the cost. It is similar to Willy's, but unlike Willy, they work beyond hard in order to achieve the dream, what they are ultimately simply unable to do because of the tough competition. As Nightingale thinks, "economic life in America is a lottery. Everyone's got an equal chance but only one guy is going to get to the top. 'The more I have the less you have'. So one can only succeed at the cost of the failure of another" (95). In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, a group of salesmen compete for the best position on the board, a contest in which the first one wins a Cadillac, and the last one gets fired. The "extremes of fear and rivalry" (Nightingale 95) are shown when Roma, who is the most successful of all, talks to Levene because his almost closed deal failed: "We are the members of the dying breed. That's ... that's why we have to stick together" (Mamet 105). But as Nightingale clarifies, Roma intends to take most of the profit to himself, which shows that salesmen have to be selfish and deceitful in order to earn for living (95). Roma's fear of losing the first position on the board, together with his social status of a top salesman, results in him flattering Levene, whom he does not like, but who managed to close a great deal, in order to deceive him, and consequently take half of his profit:

ROMA: I've wanted to talk to you for some time. For a long time, actually. I said, "The Machine, there's a man I would work with. (. . .) Hey, I've been on a hot streak, so what? There's things that I could learn from you. You eat today? (. . .) Hey, hey, hey, easy friend. That's the "Machine." That is Shelly "The Machine" Lev. (. . .)

ROMA (to Williamson): I GET HIS ACTION. My stuff is mine, whatever he gets for himself. I'm talking half. You put me in with him. (Mamet 91)

Here, it can be noticed that the American Dream became a bit corrupted. Not only do the salesmen have to be extraordinary in their job, but also deceitful, selfish, or even commit a crime if they want to earn a living. In addition, the fear and obvious deceit are evident when Moss intentionally puts Aaronow in a difficult position. He wants Aaronow to steal the “leads” while he is in the movies, but also says that if he does not accept this, he will do it himself, and accuse Aaronow for being his helper, just because he told him about the plan: “Well, to the law, you’re an accessory. Before the fact” (Mamet 45). Bigsby concludes that “the salesmen’s own fraudulent activities, by contrast, in deceiving their customers, is regarded simply as good business, sanctioned by the ethics of a world in which success is a value and closing a deal an achievement” (219). Moreover, Nikčević claims that the author shows how the salesmen actually sell the American Dream, not things, land or property: “They are selling the possibility of making their dreams come true, the possibility to change their life and to go even beyond their limits” (*Gubitnički* 82-83). The losers buy things in order to lose the “loser” status, which is clearly evident from Levene’s monologue:

LEVENE: You have to believe in yourself ... You look around, you say. ‘This one has so-and-so, and I have nothing’ ... ‘Why? Why don’t I get the opportunities? ... You do get the opportunity ... You get them. As I do, as anyone does ... What we have to do is admit to yourself that we see the opportunity ... and take it. (Mamet 72)

Even Williamson, the chief person in the office is trying everything he can to earn some money. At the beginning of Act I, he tries to trick Levene into giving him a certain percentage of commission:

LEVENE: I’ll give you ten percent

(. . .)

WILLIAMSON: Twenty percent

LEVENE: Alright

WILLIAMSON: And fifty bucks a lead

LEVENE: (. . .) Okay. We’ll...Okay.

Fine. We’ll...Alright, twenty

percent, and fifty bucks a lead.

That’s fine. For now. That’s fine.

A month or two we’ll talk. A month

from now. Next month. After the  
thirtieth. (Mamet 8)

This shows that even those who are on top and should not worry about money still want more and more money, as they are also afraid of losing their position in the future.

## 4.2. Language and Communication

In contrast to *Death of a Salesman*, in which we see the failure of only one character, the play *Glengarry Glen Ross* efficiently portrays failures of several characters, all due to their language and communication issues. When they speak, the characters almost always leave out certain words, they swear, repeat words, and their grammar is anything but correct. As Nikčević asserts, the main loser of the play is Levene who is unable to sell and close deals (*Subverzivna* 94). His inability to communicate properly is shown when he tries to talk Williamson into giving him good “leads”. He basically repeats Williamson’s name: “John...John...John. Okay. John. John” (Mamet 15). In Kilic’s words, he sounds like he is grasping for straws. He is at a loss for words because he is stifled by the fear of competition, and he worries that he has already lost Williamson’s interest. All he is able to do is repeat Williamson’s first name over and over again, as if he were a dog barking frantically at its master (2).

As Bigsby acknowledges, Levene is “afraid to stop speaking in case the answer is the one he fears” (219). So if the communication fails, so does the sale. That is the reason for Levene’s constant repetition of Williamson’s name. As Nikčević says, the formula – personality plus arrogance, which the salesmen think is the key of success, actually does not work. Without proper education, the personality fades and the salesmen end up with limited vocabulary out of which many are curses, because a curse is an emotional blow to the co-speaker (94). When a salesman does not have the right argument, he curses. Levene’s language incompetence is also evident when he talks to Roma about a deal he managed to close:

LEVENE: I sat there. Five minutes. Then, I sat there, Ricky, twenty-two minutes by the kitchen clock. Twenty-two minutes by the kitchen clock. Not a word, not a motion. What am I thinking? "My arm's getting tired?" No. I did it. I did it. Like in the old says, Ricky. Like I was taught... Like, like, like I used to do...I did it. (Mamet 58)

This time, clearly, Levene even lost his ability to utter the words. He just sat there, using a different method in an attempt to close the deal. By sitting with his clients for a long period of time, he probably made the situation uncomfortable so the clients signed, just to get rid of him. As Kilic said, Levene does not use the two most important tools of a salesman. His desperation has caused him to totally give up on verbal communication; now, like an animal, he relies purely on physical communication (3). The salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* mostly focus on business, losing the basic thing that enables them to have a job: their language, so they have nothing left but to curse and repeat the worn out phrases (*Gubitnički* 85). Levene is also the character who has the worst language of all: “You fucking asshole, I haven’t got it. I haven’t got it John. (. . .) I haven’t got it, when I pay, the gas... I get back the hotel, I’ll bring it in tomorrow” (Mamet 25). Besides Levene, Moss is another loser because, just like Levene, he has been unable to close the deal for a month (*Subverzivna* 94). According to Nikčević, Moss is aware of that: To say ‘I’m going on my own.’ Cause what you do, George, let me tell you what you do: you find yourself in thrall to someone else. And we enslave ourselves. To please. To win some fucking toaster ... to ... to ... and the guy who got there first made up those ... (Mamet 35)

In addition, language is also a means of deceit and manipulation. In the second scene, Moss tries to trick Aaronow into breaking into the office and stealing “leads.” As Bigsby indicates, their conversation starts off in a friendly tone, and ends with Moss threatening Aaronow as an accomplice to a not yet committed crime, on the grounds that he just listened: “Why? Why, because you only told me about it? That’s right” (Mamet 45). To Cullick, the “real crime here is that by listening” (31). Lacking the appropriate skills, “Aaronow has placed himself in a passive, feminine position (Cullick 31). So language is a trap, simply to listen makes you guilty, and the friendly relationships between the salesmen are obviously a deceit, because if there was a relationship, betrayal would not be so transparent (Bigsby 220). Cullick says that the salesmen are fueled by the drive for the advantage over others and she describes their language as interjectional, oppositional, and monodirectional, and she thinks of it as a language of manipulation, deception, and self-interest (23). This deceitful language could also be seen at the beginning of the same conversation between Aaronow and Moss, in which Moss, by constantly suggesting something, but not clearly stating it, tries to trick Aaronow into doing something he does not want to do:

MOSS: I want to tell you what somebody should do.

AARONOW: What?

MOSS: Someone should stand up and strike back.

AARONOW: What do you mean?



MOSS: Somebody . . .

AARONOW: Yes ...?

MOSS: Should do something to them.

AARONOW: What?

MOSS: Something. To pay them back. Someone, someone should hurt them. Murray and Mitch.

AARONOW: Someone should hurt them

MOSS: Yes.

AARONOW: How?

MOSS: How? Do something that hurts them. Where they live.

AARONOW: What?

MOSS: Someone should rob the office (Mamet 23).

Cullick states that each characters tests the intentions of the other by uttering statements of double intention and then checking the reaction of the other, a method that proved to be useful for Moss, as he succeeded in his intention (28). According to Nikčević, Aaronow is another loser. He is unable to close deals and he is not on the board anymore (*Subverzivna* 94). This is evident in Aaronow's conversation with Roma: "I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm fucked on the board. You. You see how... I ... I can't ... my mind must be in other places. 'Cause I can't do any..." (Mamet 56). One can conclude that the ability to speak properly and persuasively determines how well the salesmen do in business.

In contrast to Levene and Aaronow, Roma is a salesman who is successful in his job. Nikčević says that in the third scene, Roma sells some land in Florida to Lingk while they were having a conversation in a restaurant (*Subverzivna* 95). His urbane and witty talk enables him to sell anything: "What is that? Florida. Glengarry Highlands. Florida. 'Florida. Bullshit' And maybe that's true; and that's what I said: but look here: what is this? This is a piece of land. Listen to what I'm going to tell you now" (Mamet 50-51). Nikčević continues and says that Lingk is also a loser because he was tricked into buying worthless land, but his wife saved him and forbade him to talk and negotiate about that land.

In conclusion, the main problem of the salesmen is inability to establish proper communication. The ones who lack ability to persuade a client to buy something are the ones who are unable to sell (*Subverzivna* 96). As Nikčević summarizes, the author of the play *Glengarry Glen Ross*, David Mamet, says that every communication founded upon the American Dream is false because the dream itself is false. By letting the American Dream to become the center of their

lives, they are losing their self, their thoughts, and like that, they are no longer needed (*Subverzivna* 96).

### 4.3. Family and Women

In *Glengarry Glen Ross* there is almost no mention of family. Salesmen only work, so business is the only thing on their mind. But there is an exception to this. There is a mention of Levene's daughter in a conversation between Levene and Williamson:

LEVENE: Don't

WILLIAMSON: I am sorry

LEVENE: Why?

WILLIAMSON: Because I don't like you

LEVENE: John, John ... my daughter

WILLIAMSON: Fuck you. (Mamet 90).

Clearly, from Williamson's words, it is evident that salesmen do not care for other people, they lack empathy and compassion. Most of them behave like machines, losing their human side in a capitalist society which pressures them to act accordingly if they want to survive. In this case, Levene lacks what it takes to be a successful salesman. He is not like the others who do not have a family. Unlike Levene, who lacks the strength of character, others have nothing to lose, no one who depends on them, so it is easier for them to act like machines. Furthermore, the salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* think of women as mere objects, especially Roma, who thinks of women only in terms of satisfying his needs:

ROMA: I don't know. For me, I'm saying,  
what is is, it's probably not the  
orgasm. Some broads, forearms on  
your neck, something her eyes did.  
There was a sound she made...or,  
me, lying, in the, I'll tell you:  
me lying in bed; the next day she  
brought me café au lait. She gives  
me a cigarette, my balls feel like

concrete. Eh? What I'm saying,  
what is our life (Mamet 34)?

In addition, the way Roma thinks of women is also evident when he talks to Lingk about Lingk's wife:

ROMA: It's a common reaction, Jim. I'll tell you what it is, and I know that that's why you married her. One of the reasons is prudence. It's a sizable investment. One thinks twice...it's also something women have. It's just a reaction to the size of the investment. Monday, if you'd invite me for dinner again. (Mamet 67)

Here, Roma implies that Lingk's wife is just a trophy, that he married her for prudence, as someone who will look good next to him, someone who shows his success both as a man and as a salesman. Roma's attitude is a reflection of the harsh effect capitalism has had on society, as he is incapable of understanding that men and women should be equal in a relationship, that women are not an alive proof of someone's success and position. According to Leslie Kane, women are products, used and exchanged by men (112). Moreover, Kane states that women's position and the attitude towards women themselves is also evident in the language that salesmen use: "Fuck is a constant, and the usual insults are contemptuous of any sexual position perceived as inferior. Having balls is superior, whereas someone sold, or unable to sell is a 'cocksucker', a 'cunt', or a 'secretary'" (Kane 112). Roma uses this kind of language when he yells at Williamson: ROMA: You stupid fucking cunt. You, Williamson...I'm talking to you, shithead...You just cost me six thousand dollars (Mamet 81).

## 5. *The Pursuit of Happyness*

### 5.1. Ethics and Attitude towards Business

The protagonist of *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner, goes to great lengths just to make ends meet. His version of the American Dream is also a contemporary one, but lacks the value of the equality of opportunity, because he is African American and this fact puts him at a different position from the start. Because of the unfortunate position of African American people in the American history, and the society's attitude towards them, Chris does unimaginable things just to earn for a decent living. His dream is not to achieve excessive material wealth, as is expected from salesmen in a contemporary world of trade and commerce, but only to earn enough to provide for his son. Chris' only chance of making it is through an unpaid internship, where others are in a much better position, not having to worry about food, family, or tragically, a place to sleep. But despite all the difficulties he faces throughout the movie, he never gives up. He is so determined to succeed and give his son a life he deserves. His work ethic is best described by Chris himself, after playing basketball with his son:

CHRIS: Hey Don't ever let somebody tell you ... you can't do something. Not even Me. All right?

CHRISTOPHER: All right

CHRIS: You got a dream... You gotta protect it. People can't do something themselves... they wanna tell you you can't do it If you want something, go get it. Period.

Furthermore, Chris' astonishing determination and commitment to earn money is evident in basically everything he does. He does so because he wants the best for his son. And to achieve that, he has to do extraordinary things. They do not have a home, but yet Chris does everything he can to come to a shelter for homeless people in time to get a room. He pretends that the bathroom in a subway station is a cave where they had to hide, all in a desperate attempt to make his son happy. There were a few instances in the movie when Chris' scanners were stolen. He did

everything to get them back, running across the city, chasing the people who stole the scanners and then running back to the company where he was an intern. Also, there was a time when Chris had to run away from a cab driver, not paying for the ride, simply because he did not have money, but he wanted to take the opportunity to talk to Mr. Twistle, one of the company's chiefs. Chris knows it is wrong, and he would not have done it if he had the money: DRIVER: Where are you going? Come here! No! No, no, no! You asshole, give me my money! Give me my money, please stop! ... CHRIS: I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

In addition, while he was chasing the people who stole his scanner, he got knocked over by a car. He was not hurt, but he kept looking for his shoe, which fell off in the impact:

CHRIS: Where's my shoe?

(. . .)

You knocked off my shoe!

(. . .)

Where is my damn shoe?

(. . .)

Did you see it? I lost my shoe

His shoe was very important to him, as it is necessary for his job. Since he cannot afford new shoes, in a state of shock, he kept looking for the lost one as if it is the most important thing in the world. Tragically, at that point, it felt like it is. Moreover, when Chris get a call from Mr. Twistle who tells him a number he should call the next day, he cannot find a pen to write it down so he runs all the way to his friend's shop to write it down. While running, he keeps repeating the number aloud:

CHRIS: 864-0256

4796. Janice

(. . .)

You didn't see that? 118, 1...?

(. . .)

864-2

## **5.2. Language and Communication**

Although Chris does not talk much as a salesman in the movie, he is trying to sell himself by showing his intelligence, wit, humor, and determination in those rare chances he gets to talk to important people of the company. In one instance, he stumbles upon one of the members of the internship committee, Mr. Twistle, whom he talks to in a taxi. There, Mr. Twistle is trying to solve a Rubik's cube, so he is not paying attention to what Chris is saying. But when Chris says that he is able to solve it, and actually succeeds, Mr. Twistle realizes Chris' potential:

MR. TWISTLE: Listen, we can drive around all day. I don't believe you can do this.

CHRIS: Yeah, I can

MR. TWISTLE: No, you can't

(. . .)

MR. TWISTLE: Holy cow. Look at that.

### **5.3. Family and Women**

In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris' family is the main thing around which everything else revolves. The family is that precious thing that keeps the salesman going and the family relations are the most important aspect of the movie, because the movie leaves a message of hope, optimism, and hard work, as the main character struggles incessantly to provide for his family. The importance of family is evident at the mere beginning of the movie when Chris, the main protagonist, argues with his wife Linda about the difficulties at his job:

LINDA: Just sell what's in your contract. Get us out of that business

CHRIS: Linda, that is what I am trying to do. This is what I'm trying to do for my family...

For you and Christopher.

Chris is trying his best to sell bone density scanners to various doctors, but has not been successful so they cannot pay rent and Linda has to work double shifts. They are simply doing everything they can to take care of their son Christopher. He is so important to them that they buy him a basketball as a birthday present, even though they do not have money for that:

CHRISTOPHER: That's a basketball!

CHRIS: Hey, hey, you don't know that that's a basketball. This could be an ant farm. This could be a microscope or anything ... All right, come on. Open him up. Open him up.

Unlike in the plays, where women are treated as objects, in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Chris treats his wife Linda as an equal. He asks her for advice, he is trying to reassure her that everything will work out eventually, and he is never picking a fight:

CHRIS: Look Linda, relax. We're gonna come out of this. Everything is gonna be fine, all right?

LINDA: You said that before, when I got pregnant. "It'll be fine".

CHRIS: So you don't trust me now?

LINDA: Whatever. I don't care

Unfortunately, *The Pursuit of Happiness* is also an example of how capitalism tears families apart. In the course of the story, Chris constantly fails to meet his wife's expectations, as he often comes late home, he is unable to pick his son up from the daycare center etc. That is the reason his wife decides to leave him:

LINDA: I'm leaving, Chris. I'm leaving

CHRIS: What?

LINDA: Did you hear what I said? I have my things together, and I'm taking our son...and we're gonna leave now.

When Linda, Chris' wife left, his son Christopher became the only thing he has. The fact is that his mother abandoned her only son, leaving Chris to take care of their son. That moment had a great impact on Chris, as he realized that it is up to him, and only him, to give his son an opportunity to live a decent life. In other words, Christopher became his source of strength. Chris wanted to set an example to his son, teach him that by working hard enough, he can do anything he sets his mind to. And it is exactly what he does in the movie, as he battles incredible odds just to get an opportunity to show his will and determination. This is a complete opposite of Willy's attitude and belief, as he teaches his sons that being well-liked is all that is necessary to succeed.

## **6. *The Wolf of Wall Street***

### **6.1. Ethics and Attitude towards Business**

In comparison to the plays, the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street*, released in 2013, shows another version of the American Dream. The modern world one, connected to Hollywood madness and excessive material lifestyle. It is a dream of having many cars, a house on the hill, wearing designer clothes, all of which the salesmen in the movie are trying to achieve, and not satisfy for anything less than that. The movie portrays the life of a middle class man craving for the extravagant life that America offers to those who are persistent enough and who are ready to risk in order to profit. The main character in the movie, Jordan Belfort, started out as a typical middle class man with a dream to become rich. As Jordan said in the movie:

My name is Jordan Belfort. Not him. Me. That's right. I'm a former member of the middle class raised by two accountants in a tiny apartment in Bayside Queens. The year I turned 26 is the head of my own brokerage firm I made 49 million dollars, which really pissed me off because it was three shy of a million a week.

It is evident that people want to be filthy rich, but in order to achieve such wealth, they have to do it illegally. They know that it is illegal, but they still do not care. The idea of becoming rich is stronger than anything. Jordan himself admits that: "JORDAN: Was all this legal? Absolutely not, but we were making more money than we knew what to do with". Also, there is a scene in the movie when Donnie approached Jordan to ask him about his earnings:

DONNIE: How much money you make?

JORDAN: 70 000\$ last month.

DONNIE: Get the fuck outta here!

JORDAN: Well, technically, 72 000\$ last month

DONNIE: You show me a pay stub for 72 000\$, I quit my job and work for



you.

Clearly, Donnie would do anything for a better job. Indeed, he did quit his job, and he started to work for Jordan: “DONNIE: Hey Paulie, what's up? No, everything's fine. Hey listen, I quit!” Also, when Jordan tries to sell something to his client, all he has to do is convince the client that he is going to become rich. Actually, Jordan is selling the American Dream itself. All he has to do is convince the client that they need a house with a view, where the client can have a family to raise etc. “JORDAN: Kevin, you give me one shot here, on a blue chip stock like Kodak. And believe me... Kevin. The only problem you gonna have is that you didn't buy more. Sound fair enough? KEVIN: Shit... My wife might divorce me, but yeah ... let's do it.” As Lisi said: “The sad reality isn't that Belfort screwed over innocent people for a profit, but that it actually worked” (“In defense of ‘The Wolf of Wall Street’”). This proves that the American Dream presented in this movie is even more corrupted than the one in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

Ultimately, as Lisi argues, *The Wolf of Wall Street* shows that we are all at fault. Our culture is so greedy that we're willing to trust other “professionals” with our hard earned money in the hope that we will make more. We don't want to be the one who takes the subway to work. We want to be the one who rides the Porsche. However, as the film demonstrates, not everyone can have the Porsche. As a result, we're all left with a choice (“In defense of ‘The Wolf of Wall Street’”).

But unlike the characters in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Jordan is not a loser in the end. Although he ends up in jail, because of his enormous wealth and valuable information about the stock market, it was only for three years. Jordan is not a loser because of the society's attitude towards successful people. Since Jordan was once enormously rich, and then he lost all of that, and became rich again by turning his story into a book, people think of him as a capable individual who can turn anything he touches into gold. Because of such attitude of the society, who also value material excess, Jordan will never be a loser. Consequently, as Lisi states, Belfort continues to profit off of the average person's desire to become wealthy, and he sells his “expertise” in get-rich-quick seminars around the world. The final shot of the film—of Belfort's “students” looking to him for answers in the seminar—brilliantly illustrates the discomfiting truth that we are all implicated in Belfort's actions (“In defense of ‘The Wolf of Wall Street’”).

In contrast to Jordan, there is an FBI agent Patrick Denham who serves the law and who is trying to unravel the crimes concerning money laundering. The ironic thing is that Jordan is filthy rich while Patrick is not. Although he has enough money for a decent living, he is not like Jordan, which is tragic because Patrick's job is noble, while Jordan's is nothing but illegal.

Therefore, the movie shows that we have to work hard if we want to be rich, but that we also have to do it illegally, because otherwise, we would only be average individuals. So it is up to us whether we take the noble path like Agent Denhem and miss out on the perks, or screw people over like Belfort and experience the high life (“In defense of ‘The Wolf of Wall Street’”).

## **6.2. Language and Communication**

While language and communication brings salesmen of the plays to failure, it makes the salesmen in *The Wolf of Wall Street* enormously rich. Jordan learned the tricks of the trade at his first job, so when the company he first worked for went bankrupt, he easily found another job, where other salesmen could not compare to Jordan. Jordan’s excellent speaking skills, witty in language, and promising their clients that they are going to be rich, brought enormous wealth for both him and his co-workers, whom he taught to do the same. Jordan’s speaking skills are evident in his first sale at a new company:

JORDAN: . . . Well, the reason for the call today, John, is. Something just came across my desk today John. It is perhaps the best I’ve seen in the last six months. If you have sixty seconds, I’d like to share this with you. You got a minute? The name of the company, Aerotyne International. It is a cutting edge tech firm out of the Midwest, awaiting imminent patent approval, on a new generation of radar detectors that have both huge military and civilian applications. Now, right now John, the stock trades over the counter at ten cents a share, and by the way John, our analysts indicate it could go a heck of a loft higher than that. Your profit, on a mere six-thousand-dollar investment would be, upwards of sixty thousand dollars. (. . .)

JORDAN: John, one thing I can promise you. Even in this market, is that I never ask my clients to judge me on my winners, I ask them to judge me on my losers, because I have so few.

On the contrary, just like in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, when a salesman does not have the right argument, he curses. In the movie, when Jordan was speaking to an FBI agent Patrick, he could not persuade him to leave him alone, so he started to curse:

PATRICK: Hey, you wanna know what I was just thinking too? The hero I’m going to be back at the office when the Bureau seizes this boat.

JORDAN: Alright, get the fuck off my boat. Good luck on that subway ride home to your miserable, ugly wives.

So, when nothing else works, salesmen have to curse in order to keep the language going, otherwise, they would feel like failures.

### **6.3. Family and Women**

In the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street* women are also seen as trophies and sexual objects, since they are only portrayed in that manner. As Zeisler notes, women are the real spoils of the untold wealth, they are anything other than a service capacity, and service is defined as anything from getting double-teamed by Belfort and his partner Donnie Azoff, to volunteering for head-shaving in return for 10 000\$. This perverted attitude towards women is seen clearly in Belfort's words:

JORDAN: And to celebrate with a weekly act of debauchery, I have offered our lovely sales assistant Danielle Harrison ten thousand dollars to have her head shaved! ... FYI, Danielle tells me she's using the money for breast implants! Is this a great company or what?!!

As it can be seen, Jordan thinks of women as objects, sexually attractive objects with big breasts as a representation of his wealth and power, as he can dispose of them and "get" new ones anytime he wants. Herbs states that Barbie-doll figures, hookers, and strippers serve simply as props for the male protagonists as they carry on with their debauched antics, drawing plenty of laughs from the audience. Herbs exemplifies this by saying that Naomi wears a dramatic skintight blue mini dress with a cutout revealing a good part of each breast, when she met Jordan for the first time. Sadly, women themselves start acting in an inferior way, because they know they would not have all that wealth without their husbands. As Herbs exemplifies, in one scene, Naomi tries to punish Jordan for cheating on her by withholding sex but is ultimately humiliated:

NAOMI: Ohhhh poor, poor Dada. He loves to say how wrong he is when he's ready to come in his own pants. Isn't that right Dada? Mommy loves Daddy so, so much and there's nothing she wants to do more right now than to make love to Daddy all day long. Well, I guess it's time for Daddy to be taught his first lesson.

(...)

JORDAN: Now because he was very security-conscious, The Daddy hired two full-time guards, big hairy men both named Rocco, and they installed security cameras all around the house. And one of those cameras is right over Daddy's shoulder.

Here, Naomi was embarrassed while trying to play a trick on Jordan, which just led to the sad justification that women are sexual objects, and should act accordingly. Moreover, this objectification is also evident in the fact that Belford's company employs sexual workers:

JORDAN: In Stratton parlance, there were three kinds of hookers. There were blue chips, the top of the line. Model material. They were priced between \$300 and \$500 and made you wear a condom unless you gave them a hefty tip, which I always did.

In addition, the extent to which this demeaning attitude goes is evident when Jordan want to smuggle huge amounts of money into Switzerland by taping it onto a woman who should board an airplane with all that money on her. The sad thing is that, in this case, it was Brad's wife who willingly accepted such proposal: "With \$20 mil in CASH on the bed, Jordan and a stoned Donnie watch as Brad tapes stacks of cash to his wife CHANTALLE, a bombshell in panties, bra and sneakers".

## 7. Conclusion

The American Dream, a strong belief, or craving for a better, richer, and wealthier life is probably deeply embedded into every human being in America. Each person dreams his or her own dream, each person follows his or her own different path towards achieving the dream. Throughout the years, from the foundation of the first American states up until now, the dream has changed. It went from the Puritan version of the dream, which referred to building an exemplary society which shows that with hard work, everything is possible, to a contemporary one which refers to obtaining material wealth, no matter the cost. The fact that the dream has changed is simply a reflection of the society's needs and desires. Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, David Mamet's play *Glengarry Glen Ross* and the movies *The Pursuit of Happyness* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* each present a different version of the American Dream. The one in *Death of a Salesman* values being well-liked and having a good personality over hard work, while the American Dream presented in *The Pursuit of Happyness* lacks the equality of opportunity, because of Chris' African American origins, but values hard work and determination. The protagonist of the play *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman, is a perfect example of an individual dream, since his strong belief in having to be well-liked pushes him towards the desire for something greater. On the other hand, the ones in *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* present the corrupted American Dream. The one you can only accomplish by working hard and by doing things on the other side of the law. As the years passed by, the American Dream became corrupted, forcing people to both work hard and to commit crime if they want to become rich. The ironical thing is that the characters in the plays end up as losers, except Chris in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, while the ones in *The Wolf of Wall Street* end up as winners, all because of their enormous wealth which signifies the ultimate corruption not of the American Dream per se, but the society that allows such actions to go unpunished and by that enables the further devolvement of their beloved myth. Moreover, the difficulties that this corrupted contemporary version of the dream brings tear the families apart, as people have to work extra hard in order to earn for a living in the harsh competitive society. This leaves little time to spend with the loved ones, leaving families deprived

and lost. The question is: Are we willing to follow a different path, a path of crime, in order to experience the perks of living a high life?

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