

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer

Jelena Orlović

**Potruga za novcem u suvremenoj američkoj književnosti**

Diplomski rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

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Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

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Osijek, 2019.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language  
and Literature – Teaching English As a Foreign Language and Croatian  
Language and Literature - Teaching

Jelena Orlović

**The Pursuit of Money in Contemporary American Fiction**

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki, Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2019.

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Scientific area: humanities

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16.9.2019.

JMBAG: 0122219776

Jelena Orlović

ime i prezime studenta

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## Abstract

This paper will present an analysis of the attitudes towards the American Dream and money in three major contemporary American novels. The analyzed novels will be *The Great Gatsby* by F. S. Fitzgerald (1925), *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac (1957) and *American Pastoral* by Philip Roth (1997). The paper will discuss the idea of the American Dream and its establishment in the American culture, the values that are connected to money and how the American Dream transformed throughout different socio-cultural periods of American history. The paper will outline a historical background of the periods in which the storylines are set. The main part of the paper will focus on the main characters of the works and their relationship with money in order to explore the role that the materialistic part of the American Dream plays in construction of their identities.

Keywords: American Dream, materialism, identity, contemporary American fiction, money

## Introduction

Money is an issue which is uniquely human. The modern society is built around it, and mere possession of it creates a hierarchy of power and oftentimes worth. American Dream is a well-known concept in the world, and in today's context, it is closely connected to money and materialism. It progressed from being a spiritual goal, which motivated European newcomers to generate changes and prosper in the New World, to the today's image of the Dream which focuses exclusively on accumulation of wealth. This great shift of moral values and ideas changed people's dreams and aspirations and, as a result, it reflected on politics, economy and culture. These changes are interwoven in fictive stories written by socially aware writers. Writers present the state of things and, more or less subtly, comment and criticize the state of things from different perspectives. S. F. Fitzgerald, Jack Kerouac and Philip Roth wrote novels which depict the state of things in their respective times. In Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the modern reader is introduced to a glamorous period of 1920s in the United States. However, the writer exposes deeper issues of the society as he tells the story of an innocent dreamer whose life crumbles because of those who are more established than him. Fitzgerald points to the corruption and unattainability of the American Dream through Jay Gatsby's failure to achieve it. In contrast, Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* is set in the mid-century United States, and it depicts characters who intentionally dismiss the all-American identity and the pursuit of the Dream as they find it to be shallow and deprived of true experiences in life. The final novel that is discussed is Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. Although written in 1997, the novel takes readers back to the turbulent 1960s and shows how Seymour Levov, a high school hero athlete, a glove factory owner, a good son, husband and father crumbles as the illusion of his perfect life is destroyed by his daughter's wrongdoings. Each of these novels shows how characters built their identities in relation to money and the American Dream, what it means to them and how do they use it. The novels present character's struggles in different periods of American history from 1920s to 1960s showing issues prevalent for the specific period. The first part of this paper will focus on the American Dream and its development through the history of the United States. This will be followed by the historical context of the 1920s, when the paper will focus on the novel *The Great Gatsby* and analyze how the American Dream is portrayed in it. The third part of the paper will set the historical context of the post-war era and briefly describe mainstream attitudes towards money and possessions, followed by the discussion and the analysis of the novel *On the Road* and the Beat generation. The final part of the paper will explore *American Pastoral* and the issues it presents with the all-American identity.



## 1. The American Dream and Money

The pursuit of money and the status it brings is a never-ending rat race in all developed countries in the world. The prominent leader in this attitude and way of living is the United States of America. Although in today's society it is something that is automatically connected to the culture of the United States, it has not always been like this. Through marketing of the American Dream, the world sees the USA as a place where: "anything is possible if you want it badly enough" (Cullen 5).

Cal Jillson, in his *Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity and Exclusion Over Four Centuries*, explains that the American Dream has always been a guide that says that American people must balance and evaluate their principles to create and preserve an open and competitive society and a country in which opportunity to succeed and thrive is available to the honest and hardworking (5). The definition and the pathway to the Dream remain constant throughout the U.S. history. Jenifer L. Hochschild gives an explanation of it in her book *Facing Up to the American Dream* (1995) when she says that: "the American Dream promises that everyone, regardless of ascription or background, may reasonably seek success through action and traits under their own control" (4). It is an optimistic attitude, a state of mind of people who refuse to succumb to adversities and instead rise up to build improved nation (Hanson, White 12). Furthermore, in his study *The American Dream: a Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*, Jim Cullen explains that the Dream is a complex idea with many implications that actualise in different ways, and some of those implications include overlooked costs of dreaming (7). The failure of many social reforms in the country that was founded on the confidence of individual citizens that they will be the ones who overcome the odds and get rich is one of the reoccurring subjects in the American politics. Simply having the Dream has sustained lives by giving the hope that there is a possibility for improvement in life (Cullen 7). The American Dream has no scientific formula or a manual that can guide a person to success. Its ambiguity creates uncertainty because success is oftentimes a combination of hard work, persistence, luck and chance. Only a minor occurrence in person's life can cause failure despite the hard work put into a goal.

Another thing to consider when discussing the Dream and its ambiguity is the fact that there is no one definition or understanding of it as people tend to accommodate it according to their aspirations. James Truslow Adams defines the American Dream as a: "dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man" (qtd. in Cullen 7). The understanding of "richer and fuller" can vary depending on who interprets it. In more recent

times, when consumerism and materialism are prevalent occurrences in the society, this has been translated to money and power (Cullen 7). While the standards for the American Dream still apply, the question is what is considered as success and what is the limit of it.

To understand the American Dream and its present-day status, it is necessary to look at its foundation. Amongst the first ones to find hope and a new beginning in the New World were a religious group of people called Puritans. Dissatisfied with the institution of the Church, with the authority of the Pope and bishops, they decided to seek refuge in the New World (“Early American Literature 1620 - 1820” 76). Their dream was to build a “holy commonwealth, to rise up a New Israel within a New Eden on Massachusetts Bay” (Jillson 15). Puritans saw themselves as soldiers in the war against the Satan, and they believed to be the chosen people, those who God would save and give to eternal life (“Early American Literature 1620 - 1820” 75). Furthermore, they believed that God’s hand was present in every human event and that His punishment and reward was given depending on their deeds. The Bible was their moral compass, and they believed that by studying it, they could confidently discern right from wrong. If God favoured a nation, His approval and blessing would be seen in the prosperity of that nation. Since every occasion and event in a person’s life had a meaning and a connection to God, Puritans were in a constant pursuit of commendable actions to please God (“Early American Literature 1620 - 1820” 77). The myth of the chosen people was created in those times, and it remained one of the fundamental ideas supporting the American way of life. Their story became an integral part of American identity and literature, the story of the: “chosen people who struggled against all adversity to bring into being the City of God on earth” (“Early American Literature 1620 - 1820” 76).

In order to sustain such way of life, they had to work hard. Happiness was not something given but earned from God. One of the central figures of the foundation of Massachusetts Bay Colony was John Winthrop. He described his model of Cristian community as a group of men and women working together for the common good, each knowing their place in the hierarchy of the social structure. In this community, there would be poor and rich people, those with and without power but connected though love and made equal by the nature of their fallen souls and their concern for the salvation and the eternal life (“Early American Literature 1620 - 1820” 82). The vision of America has deep roots in what John Winthrop imagined when he presented the idea of: “a city upon a hill”, an ideal community which must serve as a model to the world (Winthrop 111).

Regardless of the period in American history, people reaching for the American Dream always desired to have more than they started with. However, depending on the time and social circumstances of the period, different achievements were preferred. To Puritans, it was gaining the eternal salvation: “There is really no other way to understand their migration except as motivated by belief that it could procure some gain, if not for themselves in providing and reassuring sense of purpose, then at least for the good of their children and community...” (Cullen 160). Their American Dream was one of a better life in a spiritual sense. Their hard work, ethics and motivation were not necessarily about gaining money and materialistic things but rather redeeming their souls and earning eternal life.

With time, the American Dream evolved through social, political and cultural changes in the fabric of the society. In the nineteenth century, it meant having a good life in a materialistic sense. It was in this period that the “pulling oneself by the bootstraps” stories were the most popular. There was a sense that everyone can get ahead (Cullen 60). President Andrew Jackson: “promised that every white man willing to earn bread by the sweat of his brow would enjoy the full and honourable role in the civic life of his community” (qtd. in Jillson 83). This shows how the American Dream was still a strong concept and a driving force but only for the chosen people. In the twentieth century, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became a symbol of change, which was meant to give the same opportunity to pursue happiness to African Americans, who were previously denied such possibility. In this case, the American Dream was one of equality (Cullen 110). Although the Jim Crow laws have been abolished, and the laws have been rewritten to include all races and minorities, the unfair treatment and racial tensions are still present in today’s society.

Today’s Dream of happiness and success is secular although, at times, the desire and the worship of material goods assume the position of a deity. As Cullen explains, today’s concept does not celebrate the idea of hard work but easy and quick accumulation of money and wealth:

A lot of people work hard for their money, but in what sense does one ever really earn a million dollars a year, never mind ten million or hundred million? In any event, very little of the wealth of rich people comes from their salaries; instead, it comes from investments whose value lies precisely in the way they produce income without labour on the part of the shareholder. It is less about accumulating riches than about living off their fruits... (Cullen 160).

In her essay „The American Dream: A Theoretical Approach to Understanding Consumer Capitalism“, Cindy Dermo argues that: “gone are the days when middle-class comfort was chased by the sweat of one’s brow” (12). The easiest way to measure the worth of possessions is through money, and money grants power and position in society. Mass media’s role in commercializing the American Dream is undeniable. With its ability to reach and influence millions of people, it started promoting “wealth as new black” (Dermo 12). All of this is amplified in the era of social media when the rich class transforms itself into symbols for middle-class people as a goal to be achieved: “How successful one has been in achieving the dream will be evident by the symbols of success (branded clothing, cars, etc.) she purchases and the leisure time she has to enjoy them” (Dermo 12).

It is clear that the concept of the American Dream in the twentieth century changed more than ever before. This paper will explore the representation of the American Dream in contemporary American literature through three novels: *The Great Gatsby*, *On the Road* and *American Pastoral*. It will focus on characters and how they participate in the pursuit of the materialistic Dream and the pursuit of money.

## 2. Historical Context of the 1920s

When talking about contemporary American fiction and its relationship with money, it is inevitable to start with F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The 1920s, period in which the storyline is set, can be considered as the beginning of the modern period. Also called the Roaring twenties, they were filled with change, movement and a newfound hunger for money. Much like today, to have money and power meant to display it by spending it and showing off.

Before the stock-market crash of 1929, the post-war period was mostly prosperous as: "wealth and power continued to be concentrated throughout this period" ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 844). Inventions of modern times were, due to the change in the structure of the market and production, available to wider masses. Appliances such as radios, washing machines and vacuums filled the homes of middle-class Americans with new sounds and commodities. Among other important products of the time was Henry Ford's Model T car, which changed the way things were produced ("Roaring Twenties"). Increased incomes and easy access to credits allowed for more spending. Previously, many of these items were available only to the wealthy. Nevertheless, there were still plenty of people working in poor conditions, making ends meet.

Following the technological revolution, the society started to change as well. Prominent issue of the period was the "woman's question" ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 846). Women's rights started to gain the spotlight and they got the right to vote. They were changing the perception and expectations for a woman:

"women's liberation" – whether the greater access to education or work, in the professions staffed by women since the late nineteenth century, would finally be translated into wider opportunities for self and sexual expression, and from the cycle of pregnancy, childbirth, and family rearing that continued to entrap many poor and working women. ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 842)

A prominent persona of the period is seen in Flappers – free spirited women who were breaking the boundaries of what was traditionally considered the right and proper behaviour for a woman.

The traditional society clashed with modern art and the changes it was introducing because, "what society often treasured as its central beliefs – in decency, in the necessity for hard work, in the desirability of order and respect – was what modern art called into question ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 842). An example which shows how the society tried to fight these changes can be seen in Prohibition, which forbade the distribution, manufacturing or

selling of alcohol. However, this only allowed for booming of the underground economy and the black market (“The Roaring Twenties History”). In his novel *The Great Gatsby*, F. S. Fitzgerald portrayed how economic changes reflected on society, more specifically on people’s aspirations and moral values.

### 3. Reflection of the Dream in *The Great Gatsby*

#### 3.1 Jay Gatsby and the Corrupted Dream

*The Great Gatsby* is a novel which perfectly describes the 1920s in the US and the class division present in the time. In *The Great Gatsby*, several characters' stories can be investigated through the lens of eagerness for money and social status. Those are Jay Gatsby, Daisy and Tom Buchanan, and Nick Carraway. To see the other side of the picture, it is important to mention the Valley of Ashes and Myrtle and Wilson – characters who play the key role in the development of the story and who belong to a different type of lifestyle than the previously mentioned characters.

Depending on the view of the American Dream, it can be said that Gatsby's story is one of fulfilling the American Dream. Jay Gatsby was an imaginative creation of a poor seventeen-year-old James Gatz, who became successful, rich and popular due to his own merit and hard work in the land of the free. However, precisely his example shows the corruption and the impossible standards of the Dream that he set for himself. This romantic version of the fulfilment of the Dream is tainted by his dishonest accumulation of wealth. Through Gatsby's shady rise in society, Fitzgerald points to the corruption of the Dream. For Gatsby, the American Dream in its original sense is just another unattainable goal, and much like the green light at the end of the pier, it loses its mystery and appeal after he realizes what it actually is.

To analyse Jay Gatsby, it is important to look back at his roots and see what traits characterised him before he became a millionaire. Gatsby started as a penniless young man eager to succeed in life who abides by the ideas and standards of the American Dream. Just like the Puritans, James Gatz saw himself as: "a son of God – a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that" (Fitzgerald 105). He was, in his mind, the chosen one. His beginnings were humble and, like Puritans again, he was a hard worker. He became a clam-digger and a salmon-fisher on the Lake Superior to ensure he had enough to eat and somewhere to sleep. In those early days, he was not earning money to become rich but to survive. Furthermore, Gatsby was very disciplined and ready to work on himself in order to improve. This was best exemplified by his strict schedule written on "a ragged old copy of a book called *Hopalong Cassidy*" (Fitzgerald 179) from his childhood. Assuming that the American Dream is a viable possibility for each person in the New World if they put in the hard work, persistence and discipline, Jay Gatsby was on the right track very early in his life.

Through luck or accident, he met Dan Cody, a multi-millionaire who soon became a role model to young and impressionable James. James saw Cody's money and possessions as the ultimate goal in life: "to young Gatz that yacht represented all the beauty and glamour in the world" (Fitzgerald 106). This is when James' hard-working, almost Puritan in nature American Dream started to get tainted and distorted by the seductive wealth. As a result, he started to equate money with happiness. Living in the shadow of wealth, he decided to reinvent his identity and gave himself a new name - Jay Gatsby. He did everything for Dan Cody showing his ambition and focus. That arrangement lasted for five years, until Cody's death, when Gatsby was left penniless again but with knowledge and mannerism of a rich man, the experience of a luxurious life and a distaste for alcohol: "a vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man" (Fitzgerald 107). Gatsby, once again poor, proved to be self-reliant, resourceful and intelligent.

After Cody's death, Gatsby had no other choice but to join the army where he proved himself to be an honourable and good soldier. In that phase of his life he met Daisy for the first time and was immediately enchanted by her beauty, and, more importantly, the splendour of her wealth. Consequently, his Dream started to change. Happiness now meant being with Daisy and thus gaining the status which she was born into. Getting Daisy's approval and love would give him an opportunity to rise in society and become validated and respected member of the Old Money. Knowing that he was unworthy of her, he constructed a fabricated version of Daisy: "...the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything" (Fitzgerald 103). To win her over, he could not be a simple penniless soldier with no name or possessions. He knew that he had to make her believe that: "he was a person from much the same strata as herself - that he was fully able to take care of her" (Fitzgerald 155). Both Gatsby and Daisy saw material possession as a sign of security and virtue: "what matters is the external, the material, that which can be appreciated by others, by anyone who knows what is fashionable or expensive, because such things can only be possessed by those at the top of the social ladder" (Matek, Poljak Rehlicki 552). However, he knew that Daisy, as a young southern belle, could not wait for him forever, so he decided to use shortcuts to wealth and status. With that, he distanced himself even more from the Dream.

At the beginning of the novel, Nick Carraway mentions an advice his father told him: "'Whenever you feel like criticising any-one,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had'" (Fitzgerald 7). This advice allows him to be open minded and listen. However, this quote explains one of the key issues with the



American Dream. In other words, it explains how the equal opportunity is non-existent and confirms the inability of lower class people, like Gatsby, to reach what is advertised as the ideal life. However rich Gatsby gets, he will never be equal to those born into the wealth. Much like stated, the Dream transformed into living a good life without putting in the effort and hard work.

Furthermore, in her paper “Discovering the American Dream: The Colonial Foundations of American Identity”, Rachel Cremona argues that American Dream is a chance to redo things in life and choose a life path from the beginning:

While, however, the American Dream embodies many defining principles of American identity - freedom, equality, opportunity - its most pertinacious characteristic may be the belief in new beginnings – the idea that the past does not define us determinately, that the future is limitless, that tomorrow can always be better. Historically, this conception of new beginnings is inseparable from the image of America as the New World – a promising new paradise in the West. They were ultimately in search of new beginnings – of opportunities to succeed that had eluded them in the Old World. (3)

This was another way that the American Dream gave hope to Gatsby. With a new beginning and the benefits of his hard but illegal work, Gatsby longed for recognition in society. He became the New Money, a class of people perusing respect and status that money gives to already established families. He created a new identity for himself which was based on the American Dream, but Gatsby saw further than that as he desired social affirmation. Thinking of his accomplishments, it is clear that Gatsby was not only after the money – he was after status, and most importantly class – the Old Money. Gatsby’s dream was something that belonged to the past and could not be redone. His example shows that the American Dream, in its core, is a noble concept that got tainted by the greedy society of the early twentieth century.

### **3.2 Stratification of Social Classes**

As mentioned, Gatsby tried to achieve the Dream through shady business because breaking through the glass ceiling was not possible otherwise. One of the things necessary was being recognised and acknowledged by the Old Money. Gatsby’s way of achieving that was supposed to be through Daisy, the only woman he saw worthy: “She was the first ‘nice’ girl he had ever known” (Fitzgerald 154). He romanticised her life and the place she was raised making her even more desirable. She was wanted and: “it excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy – it increased her value in his eyes” (Fitzgerald 156). He was aware that wealth

can preserve youth and mystery and that Daisy was: “gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (Fitzgerald 156).

Gatsby idealized Daisy and her life. He saw her splendid roots and status, so he presumed that she was happy because she was living the American Dream. However, Daisy exists on two levels in the book – the reality in which she lives, and in Gatsby’s vision of her. Her main character-making trait is her ostensible emptiness. Daisy seems to have little to no humane substance to her: “an emptiness that we see curdling into the viciousness of a monstrous moral indifference as the story unfolds” (Bewley). It is unusual then that she would harbour genuine emotions toward Gatsby. Their relationship is peculiar as neither of them saw the other one for what they truly were. Namely, as Bewley suggests, Daisy saw in Gatsby an escape from the reality. During their love affair, he offered her a safe haven from all the cares of the world but she did not realise the scope of what she was accepting:

What she fails to realize is that Gatsby’s gorgeous gesturings are the reflex of an aspiration toward the possibilities of life, and this is something entirely different from those vacant images of romance and sophistication that fade so easily into the nothingness from which they came. But in a sense, Daisy is safe enough from the reality she dreads. (Bewley)

What makes her aware that she belonged to the real world was her daughter. She was an undeniable, material and physical proof of existence of Daisy’s feelings, from which she desperately tried to escape. This was yet another proof of the corruption of the transformed Dream. Daisy belonged to the Old Money – she was wealthy, secured and respected. However, she sought happiness in material things, which could not bring her long-time happiness.

Although Gatsby’s possessions were immense, he was surprised and amazed coming to Tom and Daisy’s house and its richness. It was not just its appearance, but also its atmosphere. Their house was in the East Egg, the established and the rich Egg. Their name had history and value in itself unlike Gatsby’s name, which had to carry a mystery to conceal the fact that it does not come from the same class. When describing Daisy and her surroundings, the author often uses colours such as white, silver and gold, whimsical air and curtains, grand gestures and sophistication. Her aura of richness makes her unattainable as she is not only wealthy but also embodies that lifestyle: “She’s got an indiscreet voice’ I remarked. ‘its full of – I hesitated. ‘Her voice is full of money’, he said suddenly... It was full of money – that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals’ song of it...” (Fitzgerald 126). Or as

stated earlier in the novel: “It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again” (Fitzgerald 15). Daisy’s posture and way of carrying herself entranced everybody around her, she played her role well. Even her well-off cousin, Nick, was flabbergasted around her: “You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy’ ... ‘Can’t you speak about crops or something?” (Fitzgerald 19).

Tom and Daisy belonged to the Old Money, and that made their marriage secure and lives easier than others. Still, their lives were not perfect but that was a sacrifice they made in order to make the world play by their rules. Both of them were destructive forces which could always retrieve into their security, their money: “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money..., and let other people clean up the mess they had made...” (Fitzgerald 186). Daisy and Tom, and the alike, did not appreciate the work it took to get that prosperous. Their success in life was already set and secured by family legacy. They were given their statuses and wealth which they recklessly enjoyed. However fun, their lives were empty and useless as they never did anything productive or worthy: “Buchanan fits into the category of the leisure class...Their main features, as depicted by Veblen, are their manifest consumption and their equally obstructive leisure” (Lena 23).

Tom was a short-sighted, rich man who felt that his class was endangered by any progress of other people so, as a form of self-defence and boosting his ego, he took on a racist attitude that he was of Nordic race, which was responsible for all the major progress in the society. As a self-righteous and a hypocritical man, he condemned marriages between African American and Caucasians under the excuse that it ruined the moral grounds of the society. Yet, he broke his vows to Daisy and betrayed her on more than one occasion. Furthermore, he allowed himself more freedoms than he did for other people on the basis of his money. There is a big discrepancy between who he is, and who he thinks he is. This shows that he thinks that money is virtuous, and by that, he is virtuous as well. This way, Fitzgerald reveals that the Old Money are nothing but careless, ruthless, dishonest, and conceited group of people. Indirectly, the author suggests that the Dream is corrupted by those who have already achieved it in order to secure their status.

Nick Carraway, the narrator of the story and Daisy’s “second cousin once removed” (Fitzgerald 11), was Tom’s college friend and Gatsby’s neighbour, and the mediator between the characters and the readers. Nick was a part of the comfortable middle class. His family was well established and made a name for itself in a Midwestern city. As many other people in the

early twentieth century, he migrated to New York - the centre of capital - to make his own money by becoming a broker. He could not afford what New Money and Old Money could, but he was far from being poor. This portrayal of a young person chasing money in the new economy was aligned with the social and economic standards of the Roaring twenties: "Everybody I knew was in the bond business" (Fitzgerald 9). The truth was that the New Money people, like Gatsby, were getting richer, and the Old Money were not following the trend as successfully with their old models of business. Seeing the success of people who created something out of nothing, as many others, Nick was inspired to venture into his pursuit of money. While trying to cure his restlessness after the Great War, he went East. His hunt for money was not necessarily one for wealth, because he could have had that anyway. It was the turbulence of the period that brought him to that lifestyle: "Instead of being the warm centre of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe" (Fitzgerald 9). At the end of the novel, Nick points out that the Dream in which Gatsby believed was a thing of the past; everything that the Dream stood for – honest work for progression in the society, opportunity, new beginnings and possibilities – was not possible anymore. The only thing that the American Dream still provided was hope in a better future:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... And one fine morning — So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (Fitzgerald 188)

Nick was the only character who truly realised the corruption of the society and the injustices that could not be amended for because those who had money, had power, and they would not give it away even if they were inept to contribute to the society.

Finally, the novel, to a lesser degree, focuses on the other end of the society - the Valley of Ashes: "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat... where ashes take forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke, and finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (Fitzgerald 29). There is no greenery to be seen, in nature or in money. The colourless place filled with poor people – the workers - gives off the impression of hopelessness and depression. While the middle class of the time blossomed in luxuries available to them, the lower classes were struggling to survive. Their pursuit was not of money, but of survival. Tom's relationship with Myrtle is a good example of how the rich treated the poor. He was cruel and (mis)used Myrtle as he pleased: "Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand" (Fitzgerald

43). When in his presence, she was completely depended on him, however, it was her conscious decision to please Tom in order to move up the social ladder: “I’m going to make a list of all the thing I’ve got to get. A massage and a weave, and a collar for the dog, and one of those cute little ash-trays where you touch a spring, and a wreath with black and white silk bow for my mother’s grave that’ll last all summer” (Fitzgerald 43). There seems to be a power imbalance in their relationship due to their status, but Myrtle was using Tom as well.

To summarize, Fitzgerald criticized this turbulent era and the direction it was heading to. Daisy and Tom, who were representatives of the Old Money, were respected even though their morals were dulled by the money they were born into. On the opposite side of the social ladder were Myrtle and George Wilson, whose efforts for exceeding in life were futile. They were unable to afford a decent life through hard work or even through a patronage. Furthermore, using a character like Gatsby, who managed to acquire great amount of wealth, the author shows that money, in the end, is not important. Nick did not condone strange and criminal ways in which Gatsby gained his fortune because he admired Gatsby’s creativity and persistence. Gatsby’s story shows how unattainable true American Dream is, and although he obtained his money illegally, the reader feels for him and his determination. Gatsby led an efficient life, was faithful to the country, yet he had no opportunity to reach the desired heights in a legal way even in the time when prosperity was blooming all over the country. Fitzgerald criticizes the corruption of the American Dream because hard work, persistence and strong moral values no longer guaranteed a good and respectable life. The fulfilment of the Dream in the early twentieth century no longer depended on the merits of the person, but their connections and status in society which went against the original idea of opportunity and equality.

#### 4. The Post-World War II Period – Historical Context

The post-World War II period was a period of significant change and turbulence in the United States. Those changes influenced politics, economy and culture thus shaping the lives of ordinary Americans. In his book *Grand Expectations*, James Patterson explains that the optimism of American people was immense – it seemed that there were no limits to what American people can achieve outside or within the country. This positive attitude was not new as most Americans, living in the country of opportunities and freedom, always had a great hopes for the future (Patterson 9). From the end of the war era to the mid-‘60s, most Americans had a similar vision of their country and their lives.

The results of the War had a beneficial impact on the American economy because the USA emerged from the War as the dominant military, cultural, political and economic power of the world (Jillson 196). The combination of people putting in the hard work toward the vision, technological innovation, organisation and cheap energy shifted a great amount of people from penniless to middle-class (Yankelovich 39). The US economy became a large part of the world’s economy. Patterson explains that:

American workers produced 57 percent of the planet's steel, 43 percent of electricity, 62 percent of oil, 80 percent of automobiles. Per capita income in the United States in mid-1949, at \$1,450, was much higher than in the next most prosperous group of nations (Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Sweden), at between \$700 and \$900. Urban Americans at that time consumed more than 3,000 calories in food per day, including about as many fruits and vegetables per capita as forty years later. This caloric intake was around 50 percent higher than that of people in much of Western Europe. (52)

Due to the patriotic spirit of the nation, the political scene was governed by the republicans. Moderate republican president Dwight D. Eisenhower enabled policies which lead to increased salaries, blooming of the consumerism and innovation. This was referred to as the “Eisenhower Era” (“American Prose since 1945” 1954). GDP (gross domestic product) grew by 150% in the period from 1945 to 1960. In the 1950s, the USA was the largest producer of the world’s manufactured products with only seven percent of the world’s population (Patterson 52).

In this economical heaven, white Americans were able to own houses and cars. People owned a part of the land, which made them feel secure and satisfied. It was a period in which

suburbs were gaining popularity due to the: “1948 Housing Bill, which loosened billions of dollars in credit” and enabled new mortgages (“Levittown, the prototypical American suburb – a history of cities in 50 buildings, day 25”). The best example was Levittown. Levittown was a project of mass-produced houses available at reasonable prices (“Levittown, the prototypical American suburb – a history of cities in 50 buildings, day 25”). However, they were stripped of humanity. “Levittown rules at first required home-owners to mow their lawns every week, forbade the building of fences, and outlawed the hanging of wash outside on weekends“ (Patterson 60). Analyst and critic of this arrangement of housing structures, Lewis Mumford characterised them as:

a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold, manufactured in the central metropolis. (Mumford 486)

The economic boom allowed for the technological revolution in everyday objects and technology, which allowed for the growth of consumption rates. A household was becoming more and more cluttered with objects intended to make life easier: vacuum cleaners, refrigerators and freezers, frozen food, electric clothes dryer, cheap food wraps, polaroid cameras, the long playing record and many others (Siegel 93). Money was easy to earn and easier to spend. Overall feelings of the 1950s and 1960s were security and content. The American Dream was realised in the form of: “a high-consumption, leisure-oriented, and pleasure-filled private life” at least in the ranks of the white-collar workers who were able to climb the career ladder (Jillson 203). However, most blue collar workers had to work long hours on an assembly line and stay afloat in big corporations which aimed for cheaper products which would gain more profit (Jillson 204).

The booming economy and financial security allowed for cultural growth, more freedom and movement, but only for a specific group of people. There were issues in society which were not addressed and as a result culminated in the 1950s and 1960s. People oppressed by the system wanted the progress that only some had access to (Patterson 9). African Americans had been fighting for their rights for a long time, but it was only in 1950s that the issue entered the mainstream awareness. Namely, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in 1955, the event was widely reported and people started to become more aware of the unfairness of segregation

("Rosa Parks"). As a consequence, the civil rights movement made: "the most sustained and effective attempts to remedy the evils of racial discrimination" ("American Prose since 1945" 1955). Additionally, women rebelled against expectations and limitations set for them, creating the second wave of feminism, and the youth protested against the war in Vietnam ("American Prose since 1945" 1956). Those were the times that brought the rock 'n' roll and the further development of the television. The youth liked the idea of rebelliousness and sexual exploration that it got from the music, which was disapproved of by the adults ("Popular culture and mass media in the 1950s").

Overall, the '50s were a period of striking opposites. On the one hand, a picture-perfect family with a house in the suburbs, a nice car, a stay-at-home mother and a working father was advertised as an ideal life. Moreover, this lifestyle included enough money to allow for a comfortable life, neat fashion, household inventions and the ability to choose the workplace. On the other hand, the turmoil of the civil rights movement revealed social, racial and generational gaps in the US. The period is characterised by the growth of consumption rates and materialistic mind-set. To be worthy started to mean to have, that is to own. It seemed that money was able to buy happiness. Consequently, that meant that the focus of one's life was put on working and earning money. People were expected to behave and live in a certain way and play by the given rules creating a rat-race and a fast-paced lifestyle devoid of individuality, exploration or self-discover. This idea of conformity, uniformity and the pursuit of money in the 1950s and 1960s will be explored in two novels: *On the Road* and *American Pastoral*.



## 5. *On the Road*

### 5.1. The Beat Generation

An important part of contemporary American literature are the writers of Beat generation. It was Jack Kerouac who coined the term “beat” along with Herbert Huncke and gave it multiple explanations. In his book *The view from On the Road : the rhetorical vision of Jack Kerouac*, Omar Swartz explains the meanings of the name. The first was that “beat” was connected to rhythm and music, specifically jazz that has always been a sort of a secret language of the underclasses of America. The second meaning of the name was that they were literally beaten down, broken: “This sense of the word refers to people who, like Cassady or Herbert Huncke, were from the streets, petty criminals, the children of street urchins and other marginalized victims of American society” (Swartz 11). The third explanation meant that: „to be “beat” was to be in another time—to be in your body physically but to be outside of the solidarity that people generally feel for one another“ (Swartz 12). Kerouac, among others, was a cultural “hero” or a symbol, who gave an identity: “to those resisters who struggled against the forces of conformity” (Swartz 3). The Beats sought novelty and freedom from the cookie-cutter lifestyle and mind-set of the 50s. They were countering the culture not only with what they wrote, but also with the way they behaved. Furthermore, the Beatniks were prone to sexual experimentation and liberation, drugs, spiritual exploration and rejection of any kind of traditional values. Uninterested in the political side of things, they searched for the essence of life.

The Beat writers revealed that youth was discontent (Patterson 286) with the lives they led, which seems odd considering the image of security and wealth in 1950s and 1960s in America. Their movement was in great contrast to the general state of things at the time: “It's impossible to think of the Beat Generation without being reminded of its straight-and-narrow breeding ground: post war Eisenhower America, also home of the Silent Generation and the House Un-American Activities Committee” (Wolitzer). For that reason, Kerouac and the Beat writers existed for decades on the edges of academic scholarship and institutional respectability (Swartz 4). The movement faded by the late 1950’s but it remained “a symbol of greater unrest that was yet to come” (Patterson 285).

While the nation was presented with the picture-perfect American life, many people were still “beaten down” and unable to break the glass ceiling. The participants of the Beat movement refused to identify with the average American chasing the American Dream which, particularly in this era, started to develop into a dream of wealth and possession of goods. As

part of the modern art, they questioned and opposed the central beliefs of the society such as hard work, decency, order and respect (“Modern Period: 1910-1945” 842). The Beat writers were, through jazz, aware of the issues of lower working classes. They refused to live in materialistic comfort which numbed their experiences in life. Jack Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* presents a different ideology and lifestyle which were in opposition to the normative attitudes. The novel focuses on self-exploration and living in the moment.

## **5.2. The Pursuit of Money in *On The Road***

Jack Kerouac published his novel *On the Road* in 1957. Initially, the book was not well received, but today it is considered one of the classics of the American literature. Critic of the time, Gore Vidal, stated that: “it was not writing, it was typing” (qtd. in Wolitzer). However, nowadays critics say that his spontaneous prose was seeking to understand the moment and the movement (Carmona 86). It was a way to self-understanding that was not offered in the mainstream culture guided by materialism.

*On The Road* is a story written in a period of conformity and social and cultural turmoil. While the American Dream seemingly flourished in the US, Jack Kerouac protested, criticized, and rejected it in his novel. As Erik Mortenson explains in his article “Beating Time: Configurations of Temporality in Jack Kerouac's "*On the Road*””, the novel is “an attack on the corruption of time by capitalism” (52). Mortenson argues that during the mentioned economical boom the rationalization of time, mechanization and production of goods started to govern individuals’ lives. Jack Kerouac and the Beat writers protested that by living in the moment and choosing the instant gratifications. The novel was written as a fictional travelogue looking back on the author’s travels with Neal Cassady in the late forties and early fifties, and portrays a young generation which refused to submit to the idea that the presented materialistic ideals were a sure pathway to happiness. Instead, they sought spirituality and freedom.

The novel illustrates that money is a necessary evil, but it is not crucial to one’s existence. In other words, the main protagonists of the novel did not see value in money. They were more about the experience than anything else, and this life philosophy was led by Dean. Money was just a tool necessary to pursue their movement. It was needed for pure survival, gas and even drugs and alcohol. The protagonists had to stop their travels and participate in the world around them when they ran out of money. However, even when they started working, it was never truly according to norms, as they would be late for work or exploit their positions.

The motor of the “friend” group was Dean Moriarty, a man from Denver, Colorado born on the road and brought up partially by his drunken father and partially by reform schools and prisons. His energy and vigour led him on many adventures seeking something more from life. Dean jumped from one coast to the other reckless in his behaviour by any standard of that society “all you think about is what’s hanging between your legs and how much money or fun you can get out of people and then you just throw them aside” (Kerouac 183). Dean felt stifled even by the traffic rules, which he expresses after driving in Mexico: “This is the traffic I’ve always dreamed of! Everybody *goes*” (Kerouac 286). Furthermore, the novel describes him as sexually liberated and prone to experimentation with drugs: “finally he got hold of some bad green... and smoked too much of it” (Kerouac 173). He was an example of a generation that ignored the norms of the society. Dean’s relationship with money is one quite straight-forward; he used it only as a tool for more pleasure and never saw happiness in collecting it.

Dean did have several attempts to settle down and lead the “normal” life. At one point he settled down with Camille, a “well-bred, polite young woman” (Kerouac 164). Ironically, in the pursuit of a normal life and being a part of the rat race, Dean took the most consumerist job there was – he became a salesman: “He got a job demonstrating a new kind of pressure cooker in the kitchens of homes” (Kerouac 164). He provided somewhat for his family, but an injury complicated his life. At this point, he was not only physically ill, but also his spirit was broken. He tried to persuade Sal, as well as himself, that he was fine: “I’ve never felt better and finer and happier with the world and to see little lovely children playing in the sun... and I know, I know everything will be all right” (Kerouac 175). Dean attempted to live out the American Dream, but it drained him. In other words, the cycle of work and home life was pointless to him – it had no other purpose than surviving. Dean wanted to live in the moment, something that the consumerist society of the 50s did not allow. He did not have the patience for the world with little to no thrills and excitements, and repetitive days. Mortenson explains that Dean: “accepts the belief that life must be lived in the present and practices this knowledge by filling each of these moments with as much activity as possible” (56).

One of Kerouac’s definitions of Beat generation was that they were beaten, broken down, and Dean Moriarty was a perfect example of that. As previously stated, he had far from ideal upbringing:

Dean was the son of a wino, one of the most tottering bums of Larimer Street, and Dean had in fact been brought up generally on Larimer Street and thereabouts. He used to plead in court at the age of six to have his father set free.

He used to beg in front of Larimer alleys and sneak the money back to his father, who waited among the broken bottles with an old buddy. (Kerouac 34)

Dean's other family, like his cousin Sam, also had a violent and turbulent youth: "In my childhood Sam Brady my close cousin was my absolute hero. He used to bootleg whisky from the mountains and one time he had a tremendous fist fight with his brother that lasted two hours..." (Kerouac 204). Dean had no role model in his early life or an idea of what a stable household looked like. According to research which explores the effects of neglect of children, it shows that young boys who were put in a group of 'rejected', 'neglected' or 'abused' children had harder lives and more negative consequences in their lives than those grouped in 'loved' category:

Approximately half the abused or neglected boys had been convicted for serious crimes, become alcoholics or mentally ill, or had died when unusually young. Although paternal alcoholism and criminality were not related to the occurrence of child abuse, they were related to damage from such abuse. (McCord)

Dean fits in all three categories on the list, and this puts him in an unfavourable position to reach the American Dream from the start. Despite that, Dean was able to climb the social ladder to a point where the consumerist society could benefit from him and his work. Instead, he completely rejected the American Dream because: "he realized that the material and social glories of the world are nothing but obstructions to viewing life" (Mortenson 56). The irony is that by rejecting the American Dream and the pursuit of money, they were able to choose their life paths, and Dean was aware of it:

You mean we'll end up old bums? Why not, man? Of course we will if we want to, and all that. There's no harm ending that way. You spend a whole life of non-interference with the wishes of others, including politicians and the rich, and nobody bothers you and you cut along and make it your own way... What's your road, man? - holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road. It's an anywhere road for anybody anyhow. (Kerouac 239)

Although Kerouac criticised the capitalist, consumerist society of the 50s through Dean's character, he also presented some downsides of the mentioned hedonistic life. Living in the moment resulted in a fragmented life without order. Dean lived in the extreme and because of that, he was unable to maintain any kind of healthy relationships. As a result, he got married three times, but those marriages were all but conventional or necessarily good. Furthermore,

Dean had no friends. Sal was closest to him, but even he was let down by Dean several times. To exemplify, he left Sal in Mexico while he was sick, to marry Inez: “When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes” (Kerouac 288). Dean’s eccentric lifestyle was hard to maintain – the pleasures in which he indulged took a physical and mental toll on him.

Another character in the novel had a specific connection to money and the American Dream - the narrator Salvatore Paradise. Salvatore, known as Sal, is a middle-class student living in New York who enjoys writing. In the beginning of the novel, the reader sees him as a person to whom everything is dead. Sal is bored and uninspired, but it all changed when he met Dean Moriarty. No matter how many times he used him, Dean made him feel alive.

Sal is the mediator between what was perceived as traditional and acceptable and the Beat philosophy. His descend into the beatness began when he became interested in Dean and his madness. Sal’s first trip to the west coast was very disappointing and eye opening. Before going on his first venture, he planned it out as if it was a tourist trip. Sal did not understand the road in a true sense. At first, he was very disappointed because nothing went the way he wanted. He quickly spent all of his money, which he took very seriously because he was still dependant on it, and he saw it as a security. However, after traveling the country for the first time and taking a step back from the way of life he used to lead, he was in awe:

Suddenly I found myself on Times Square. I had traveled eight thousand miles around the American continent and I was back on Times Square; and right in the middle of a rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream - grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City. (Kerouac 98)

Sal realized the shallowness of the life which was advertised as normal or proper. He started to romanticise poverty, and created an American Dream for himself that did not include fast paced pursuit of money. In other words, he stopped having traditional goals in life. Instead, he looked up to Dean and made living in the moment his goal. Progression in this mind-set is more evident with each of his travels across the continent. His first journey to the West started with pink coloured glasses which were shattered on the first day of his trip.

Sal romanticised the life on the line of poverty through the whole story. He lived it periodically, but as soon as he was bored or fed up, he would move on. For example, at the end of his first crossing of the continent, Sal spontaneously created a family with a Mexican girl Terry. At one point Sal and Terry had to join the competition for jobs in LA, and they got rejected: “Terry and I were finally reduced to trying to get jobs on South Main street among the beat countrymen and dishgirls who made no bones about their beatness, and even there it was a no go” (Kerouac 81). His plans were to get to New York with Terry and make her his girl but those plans fell through as he saw what being Mexican meant. They were struggling and ended up living in a tent. In the end, he earned money by picking cotton. A job which he envisioned to be easy and relaxing. The truth that it was hard work that required skill and patience surprised him. He felt humiliated when Terry and her son had to help him out to fulfill the norm of: “three dollars per hundred pounds of picked cotton” (Kerouac 88). This example shows that being skilled and hardworking did not guarantee money or the fulfilment of the propagated life. Sal did start to enjoy the family love and a type of stability that three of them had. That temporary period of love made him despise the suffering that he romanticized: “I swore and swore. I looked up at dark sky and prayed to God for a better break in life an better chance to do something for the little people I loved“ (Kerouac 89). At this point Sal fell into the pursuit of money for survival. He earned a dollar and a half a day and managed to feed his family. However, this period of a routine life and survival did not last for long. After bringing Terry and Johnny back to their family, he went back to his comfort zone where he did not have to answer or provide for anybody: “I could feel the pull of my own life calling me back. I shot my aunt a penny postcard across the land and asked for another fifty” (Kerouac 90).

Another instance where he came close to creating a family was between his first and second travels. Sal temporarily satisfied his need for movement and excitement, went back to school and met Lucile: “a beautiful Italian honey-haired darling that I actually wanted to marry” (Kerouac 107). Sal admits that he could not be with a girl without asking himself: “what kind of wife she would make” (Kerouac 107). He was searching for the right one, and perhaps that is why he could never be with somebody like Mary Lou – he actually desired normalcy and stability. Sal was ready to marry Lucile. Yet again, he was involved with a woman who had a child, who was dependant and did not have secure income of money. At one point, Sal was complaining: “how poor my family was, how much I wanted to help Lucille, who was also poor and had a daughter” (Kerouac 111). All of those well wishes fell through yet again as Sal caught the travel bug when Dean got back to him at his brother’s house. Sal romanticised Lucille and

her troubles. He liked the idea of stepping up and helping until something more interesting come up.

As previously stated, Dean was living his life to extreme. In comparison to him, Sal found himself in between the two ideologies. On the one hand, Sal enjoyed living life in the moment with no responsibilities and worries, constantly pursuing enjoyment. However, that meant that his life would be fragmented and unstable. On the other hand, he craved stability, normalcy and intimacy that the traditional life offered, but he disliked the emptiness of the routine life. Through the whole novel, he juggles the two ideas using parts of both. To fund his travel excursion, Sal relied on the government money from the GI bill. He did not enjoy the rat race, but he was willing to work at hard jobs. Through Sal, Kerouac criticizes the mindless pursuit of money for the sake of having money. The author shows appreciation for the blue-collar workers who manage to enjoy life despite the hardship that the consumerist society created.

Besides the two main characters, there are a few situations which illustrate the pursuit of money for people who seemingly have it all. During his trips, Sal showed interest in people who worked in blue-collar jobs and often worked in them, at least temporarily. One of his best rides was when cowboy brothers drove him and six or seven other passengers in their pick-up truck. They were: “two young blond farmers from Minnesota... the most smiling, cheerful couple of handsome bumkins you could ever wish to see” (Kerouac 22). Those brothers had money because they transported farm machinery from Las Angeles to Minnesota. Sal often mentioned workers following the harvest season: “A lot of men were in this country at that time of the year: it was harvest time” (Kerouac 25). The boys travelling with him in the mentioned truck did the same thing, and they were poor. As Patterson explains, at the time the American agriculture was not profitable for workers and small farm owners:

Life on the farm continued to be especially hard. Mechanization, isolation, and poverty had already driven millions of farmers and farm workers off the land in earlier decades of the twentieth century. ... Most smaller farmers, however, struggled to make a living. And farm workers (many of them black or Hispanic) suffered from widespread exploitation: their poverty rates remained much higher than the national average. (53)

Kerouac mainly portrayed characters like these because they were interesting unlike the people who did not struggle, whose lives were established and secured.

On his first trip, Sal lived with Remi Boncoeur and his girlfriend Lee Ann in Mill City. Their home was in a housing-project: “a collection of shacks in a valley...the only community in America where whites and Negroes lived together voluntarily” (Kerouac 55). Sal and Remi worked as guards in barracks to earn money for the basic needs. However, their paychecks could not sustain them so Remi persuaded Sal to steal food and supplies. Remi and Lee Ann were unable to move out or afford proper living with money from blue-collar jobs.

To expand on Kerouac’s critique of the capitalist society, it is important to mention Old Bull Lee’s postulation about the production and longevity of goods. Old Bull Lee presented a borderline conspiracy theory in which he explained that goods that were produced were not made to last for a long time. He claims that government invented sustainable, long-lasting materials but they did not want people to have them: “They prefer making cheap goods so’s everybody’ll have to go on working and punching timeclocks and organizing themselves in sullen unions and flundering around while the big grab goes in Washington or Moscow” (Kerouac 139). This means that ordinary workers, like Remi and Lee Ann, were not able to afford luxuries, and even when they could, those luxuries were poorly made and designed to break very easily. This shows that the comfortable life which was advertised was unattainable to the workers.

Another job position that gave Sal access to money was lugging “watermelon crates over the ice floor of reefers into the blazing sun” (Kerouac 169). In this passage, Sal expresses his dissatisfaction with the mainstream white culture and with what it has to offer to him:

wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music... I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a “white man” disillusioned. All my life I had white ambitions; that was why I’d abandoned a good woman like Terry in the San Joaquin Valley. (Kerouac 170)

This paragraph highlights another problem with the American society of the time. The cookie cutter American way of life was reserved for white people, but it did not ensure happiness. Racial tensions were on their peak at that time as it was before the civil rights movement of the sixties. However, this story did not go into politics as neither the fictional characters or their real life counterparts were interested in it. Kerouac was interested in the culture of those less-privileged and more often than not, those people belonged to minorities. African Americans



and Mexicans are races which are most commonly mentioned in the book besides Caucasians. The author borrows from them the music which deeply influenced not only the characters in search for their IT, but the whole Beat movement and generation. Kerouac presents people of colour only in the social classes of hardship as if that pain and suffering is part of their identity. It seems as if he cannot separate poverty from people of colour but romanticises their situation as still being better than of those white, dull people. In other words, he admired the fact that despite being excluded from the American Dream, people belonging to minorities were able to find enjoyment in the moment and happiness in life.

Through its characters, *On the Road* opposes the mainstream thought presented by the government. In the era which was preparing the nation's mentality for the Cold War by provoking the fear of Communism, everything was about being American (Swartz 63). People needed clear guidelines which would help them navigate the turbulence. In that sense, the ideal was referred back to the American Dream as the key part of the identity – and money allowed it. However, there was not much freedom as any rebelliousness was considered to be directed against the nation and it was deeply condemned. At the same time, young people brought up in good conditions wanted more from the Dream than just material things. Kerouac's characters were not interested in the pursuit of money but in their self-exploration, establishment of their souls and enjoying the moment. Both Sal and Dean were flawed characters who tried to find purpose and meaning of life, which transcended the ideology of continuous work for the purpose of having money. He showed the country in a different light – appreciating those often overlooked. Kerouac presented an array of blue-collar workers who struggled to live decent lives because they could not earn enough money. Despite their lack of income for a decent life, those workers still managed to believe in “manana – Everything'll be all right tomorrow,” (Kerouac 87) and find enjoyment in their lives. Kerouac opposes wasting life in a dull, unfulfilling workplace surrounded by people who are not interesting.

## 6. *American Pastoral*

The last novel to be discussed is Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1998 ("In memoriam: Philip Roth (1933-2018)"). The main focus of the novel is Seymour Levov's moral breakdown and an identity crisis. Through telling Seymour's complex story, the author touches upon different issues such as immigration, life of the Jewish community and the economic state of the US in the '60s. In this novel, the pursuit of money is not the main theme, but it plays a major role in the development of the characters and the story. The novel's name *American Pastoral* is an ironical interpretation of events that were a life of a regular, well-behaved citizen loving the American identity and suffering when those closest to him reject it.

Philip Roth's alter ego Nathan Zuckerman, who appears in several of his novels, is the narrator in the beginning of the novel. Zuckerman describes a boy called Seymour Irving – Swede, a teenage hero to the Jewish community of the time. After establishing the myth of this all-American, always-do-right person, Nathan finds out about terrible tragedy that has befallen Swede. Namely, Swede's daughter, Merry, blew up a general store and a post office killing a man and brought chaos and decay to his life. The novel contrasts the idyllic time of Merry's childhood and Swede's perfect family life with the events after the bombing. Beside depicting the Jewish community of Newmark, and the beginning and growth of the Newman Maid Glove factory, the story focuses on the most important aspects of Swede's and Dawn's lives and Merry's progression from a well-behaved stuttering child to an antagonist of the American society.

### 6.1. The Pursuit of Money and the Establishment of a Business

The two main businesses mentioned in the novel were established by Lou Levov and Dawn Levov. Their pursuit of money influenced relationships in the novel and identities of the characters. The narrator retold the story of Seymour's father, Lou Levov, and described his journey from a poor worker in a tannery to a successful owner of a factory. Lou Levov was a second-generation immigrant in the US: "Swede Levov's grandfather had come to Newmark from the old country in the 1890s and found work fleshing sheepskins fresh from lime vat" (Roth 11). Lou's heritage is important not only because being Jewish was a part of his identity, but also because he managed to build his business without any initial capital. Due to Lou's humble beginnings, he paid other Italian immigrants to cut skin and produce gloves for him. He would go around homes organizing people and finding the best material and the best

craftsmen. Lou was an expert, and he was able to notice any slight irregularity in the making of a glove. With the help of his wife, Sylvia, he wanted to ensure that what they sold was of premium quality. Even after managing to get to a point where he had an established factory and loyal people working for him, Lou Levov still had a hands-on approach to his craft making sure that every worker was working efficiently. After negotiating a business deal with Louis Bamberger, Lou was able to bring his company to a new level. He was not only skilled at manufacturing gloves but also at asserting himself in a world of powerful people:

Alert to the opportunity of a lifetime- the opportunity to cut through all obstructions and go right to the top – Lou Levov brazenly talked his way into an introduction, right there at the Ellenstein dinner, to the legendary L. Bramberger himself, founder of Newmark’s most prestigious department store... (Roth 13)

Lou Levov manifested all of the characteristics of the American Dream necessary for success; he was proactive, competent, hardworking and diligent. To specify, his goal was to create something durable, a legacy which would reach further than himself. Money was important, but it was not the final goal. His dedication was what set up Seymour and Jerry, his sons, for success:

Mr. Levov was one of those slum-reared Jewish fathers whose rough-hewn, undereducated perspective goaded a whole generation of striving, college-educated Jewish sons: a father for whom everything was an unshakable duty, for whom there is a right way and a wrong way and nothing in between... men for whom the most serious thing in life is to keep going despite everything. (Roth 11)

Through his craft, Lou Levov built the grounds for the future of his family members. For Lou Levov, money meant success and represented a progress in the right direction – upward mobility in the society. Although he was determined and persistent in his pursuit of money, the most important thing to him was his family:

Don’t let anybody kid you tonight. I enjoy working, I enjoy the glove business, I enjoy the challenge, I don't like the idea of retiring, I think it's the first step to the grave. But none of that bothers me for one big reason--because I am the luckiest man in the world. And lucky because of one word. The biggest little word there is: family. (Roth 119)

Another hardworking person in Swede's life who proved to be a good entrepreneur was his wife Dawn. Dawn entered Miss America competition to earn a scholarship to pay for her brother's education. Afterwards, she despised the fact that everybody saw her only as a pretty face. Therefore, she ventured into the milk-production - a radical shift for a beauty-pageant contestant as it was far from a glamorous ordeal. Being completely new in the world of business, she chose a job which was connected to her ancestors as a confirmation that she was supposed to pursue it: "That idea, too, went back to her childhood--way back to her grandfather... [who] became one of the first independent milkmen in Elizabeth" (Roth 198). She was, in a way, continuing the family business that skipped a generation. However, she did not do it completely independently as she was using Levov's money as the starting capital. Still, Dawn was able to recognize the finest bulls. Again, she was selling beauty and talent, but this time it was animal's rather than hers. Marketing the bull and using it only for its genes and looks is almost an ironic representation of her venture into the Miss America contest. Much like Lou Levov, she was able to fulfil a business dream and create a legacy for her family. Her pursuit of money enabled her to detach herself from the image of a pageant winner and prove that there was more depth to her: "after Merry started at nursery school, Dawn set out to prove to the world of women, for neither the first time nor the last, that she was impressive for something more than what she looked like" (Roth 197). However, after Merry's bombing, she could not continue with her business. She ended up selling the cows and completely moving houses to avoid any memories connected to the daughter that rejected her. From Swede's recollections, the reader discovers how Dawn included her daughter Marry in her work, yet Merry disproved of her mother and dismissed her hard work.

## **6.2. Seymour Levov – the Pursuit of Money as a Part of His Identity**

As previously stated, Seymour Swede Levov and his identity are focal points of the narrative. He saw himself as a true American but fell into a crisis when his identity was questioned and rejected by his daughter. There are several parts to his identity that are important to the story, and the pursuit of money is one of them.

The reader first learns about Seymour through the narrator, Nathan Zuckerman. For Nathan and the Jewish community, Seymour was a beacon of hope during the Second World War and a prime example of being an American:

I lifted onto my stage the boy we were all going to follow into America, our point man into the next immersion, at home here the way the Wasps were at home

here, an American not by sheer striving, not by being a Jew who invents a famous vaccine or a Jew on the Supreme Court; not by being the most brilliant or the most eminent or the best. Instead by virtue of his isomorphism to the Wasp world he does it the ordinary way, the natural way, the regular American- guy way. To the honeysweet strains of "Dream". (Roth 89)

To add to this, he looked very "American": "Of the few fair-complexioned Jewish students in our preponderantly Jewish public high school, none possessed anything remotely like the steep-jawed; insentiently Viking mask of this blue eyed blond born into our tribe as Seymour Irving Levov" (Roth 3). The narrator emphasized the fact that Swede was a handsome and a strong man, and explained why he got the nickname. Similarly to Gatsby's name change, Seymour's nickname casted a veil on his identity, more particularly, it concealed the fact that he was Jewish.

To further prove his loyalty and his love for the country, Swede joined the marines after high school. However, instead of getting engaged in a combat, he became a military athlete. Finally, he married Dawn -- Ms New Jersey. Because Dawn was a Christian, this marriage was against his father's will. Debra Shostak described this defiance as "most blatant symbol in the novel since the man who 'loved America. Loved being an American' has essentially tried to wed his country in Dawn, the would-be Miss America" (242). He embodied an identity of a successful Jew who went through his life with dignity and reason, accommodating everybody but himself.

Although Swede was happy and content with his business and life, he craved an even simpler life. As he described, he wanted to be Johnny Appleseed in order to truly be an American:

Johnny Apple-seed, that's the man for me. Wasn't a Jew, wasn't an Irish Catholic, wasn't a Protestan Christian -- nope, Johnny Appleseed was just a happy American. Big. Ruddy. Happy. No brains probably, but didn't need 'em-- a great walker was all Johnny Appleseed needed to be. All physical joy. Had a big stride and a bag of seeds and a huge, spontaneous affection for the landscape, and everywhere he went he scattered the seeds. (Roth 316)

However idyllic Johnny Appleseed may have seemed, he had no real identity or purpose but to serve the nature, or as Rubin Dorsky puts it, he is "devoid of any defining characteristics of

identity, whose sole joy in life is to make love to the landscape” (99). In other words, Swede loved the country and wanted to fully belong.

At the same time, the author criticized the perception of assimilation by pointing out that it only lasts twenty-four hours a year: “And it was never but once a year that they were brought together anyway, and that was on the neutral, dereligionized ground of Thanksgiving, when everybody gets to eat the same thing... It is the American pastoral par excellence and it lasts twenty-four hours” (Roth 402).

Notably, the only person who made Swede feel inferior was Bill Orcutt, a well-established member of the community whose family members had deep roots in the local history. Orcutt showcased this to Swede by taking him to a graveyard where he could see his ancestors. Bill’s family members were educated at Princeton, as was he. This is what differentiated Swede from him. Although he was more successful, more respected, and better looking man, Swede felt that Bill was more American because of his heritage:

His family couldn't compete with Orcutt's when it came to ancestors--they would have run out of ancestors in about two minutes. As soon as you got back earlier than Newark, back to the old country, no one knew anything. Earlier than Newark, they didn't know their names or anything about them, how anyone made a living, let alone whom they'd voted for. But Orcutt could spin out ancestors forever. Every rung into America for the Levovs there was another rung to attain; this guy was there. (Roth 306)

The final part of his identity, which was not yet discussed, was his pursuit of money. Although Seymour had a promising career in sports, he had to contend with a more conventional job at his father’s request. Seymour inherited his father’s position as the president of the glove factory. At first, this could be considered nepotism, but Swede was more than capable to lead the company. His knowledge about the glove industry was thorough, and he was a competent leader of the factory:

Very adroit businessman. Knew how to cut a glove, knew how to cut a deal. Had an in on Seventh Avenue with the fashion people. The designers there would tell the guy anything. That's how he stayed abreast of the pack. In New York, he was always stopping into the department stores, shopping the competition, looking for something unique about the other guy's product, always in the stores taking a look at the leather, stretching the glove, doing everything just the way my old

man taught him. Did most of the selling himself. Handled all the big house accounts. The lady buyers went nuts for Seymour. (Roth 67)

Swede went into the pursuit of money and power as a part of the package of a perfectly normal and content life. He represented a well-integrated American living within the social rules and fulfilling the expectations. His brother, Jerry, who was more rebellious, described Swede as: “nice, that is to say passive, that is to say trying always to do the right thing, a socially controlled character who doesn't burst out, doesn't yield to rage ever” (Roth 72).

However, Swede's idyllic life was disrupted after Merry's bomb detonated and consequently killed a doctor. It created an internal fight in Swede, which was present until his death. The main question that burdens Seymour is the question that the novel is built around: “how Merry could have become a terrorist by rejecting her family's values” (Varvogli 103). The way that Roth described his own life in an interview for *The Paris Review* can be applied to Swede's life after the bombing:

The image that teased me during those years was of a train that had been shunted onto the wrong track. In my early twenties, I had been zipping right along there, you know—on schedule, express stops only, final destination clearly in mind; and then suddenly I was on the wrong track, speeding off into the wilds. I'd ask myself, “How the hell do you get this thing back on the right track?” Well, you can't. I've continued to be surprised, over the years, whenever I discover myself, late at night, pulling into the wrong station”. (Lee)

The person whom he loved the most, his daughter, was a criminal who killed four people. This tragedy opened up his eyes to the fact that normal does not exist: “And how odd it made him seem to himself to think that he who had always felt blessed to be numbered among the countless unembattled normal ones might, in fact, be the abnormality, a stranger from real life because of his being so sturdily rooted” (Roth 329). The identity issue of people pursuing the American Dream arises in this novel very clearly. All the lives of the people who managed to reach the full potential of the Dream were more or less the same. There was no individuality or space for person's identity in its scope (Belting 4). To blend in meant to get rid of anything that differentiated one from others, be it religion or a strong temper. Through Swede's identity issues, Roth presents similar issues that Kerouac pointed out but from a different perspective.

Merry rejected everything her father stood for, and amongst those things was his involvement in the capitalist world. She was well educated, loved, and brought up in an affluent

family that gave her the support and every opportunity she wanted – even the opportunity to rebel against everything she came from. What Roth described for his generation, he applied to Merry's. He stated that his generation had “so much to swallow, and that it was stuffed into us by the most ingenious methods of force-feeding yet devised to replace outright physical torture” (Roth 414) in regards to propaganda spread by mass media. The turmoil of the 1960s together with her teenage years and discontent built her into a new person.

The most turbulent era for Seymour's business was in the '60s. Swede's mental state after finding Merry in Newark reflected the state of the beloved industrial city during the riots. In an interview for the *Partisan Review* from 1973, Roth described the sixties as a “demythologizing decade” and further explained it as a period when everything was questioned:

Much that had previously been considered [ ... ] to be disgraceful and disgusting forced itself upon the national consciousness, loathe-some or not; what was assumed to be beyond reproach became the target of blasphemous assault; what was imagined to be indestructible, impermeable, in the very nature of American things, yielded and collapsed overnight. (Roth, *The Partisan Review*, 414).

In the story, Swede recollected the uprisings and protests that were happening at the time – the destruction of factories and public property which was pointless. He described Newark as a dead city. His father urged him to move his factory abroad, as many other factories and corporations have done, to lower the cost of the production and to ensure the safety of the factory. Swede refused that only because he was sure that if Merry found out about the move, it would confirm her opinion of him as a capitalist, ruthless man. His pursuit of money was directed and shaped by his love for his daughter. He tried to accommodate her even though he should not care what his murdering daughter thinks of his business decisions.

Swede explained the moral side of his business when he confronted Rita Cohen, a strange persona who blackmailed him. He explained how he led his business as ethically as possible:

You have no idea what you're talking about! American firms make gloves in the Philippines and Hong Kong and Taiwan and India and Pakistan and all over the place--but not mine! I own two factories. Two. One of my factories you visited in Newark. You saw how unhappy my employees were. That's why they've worked for us for forty years, because they're exploited so miserably. The factory in Puerto Rico employs two hundred and sixty people, Miss Cohen--people we



have trained, trained from scratch, people we trust, people who before we came to Ponce had barely enough work to go around. We furnish employment where there was a shortage of employment, we have taught needle skills to Caribbean people who had few if any of these skills. You know nothing. You know nothing about anything--you didn't even know what a factory was till I showed you one!  
(Roth 134)

By leading his factory ethically, Seymour assured that his pursuit of money was untainted and justified. He was a wealthy man due to his own merit, but he managed to keep his morals uncorrupted by money. Seymour was, like Gatsby, uncorrupted and his pursuit of money was influenced by his loved one, but he was able to acquire his wealth in an ethical way.

This novel shows the pursuit of money of several characters. Lou Levov and Dawn Levov started their business as a chance for a better life. Lou Levov defied the odds and built a factory that was successful for many years. His reason for the pursuit of money was to improve his family's life. Dawn however, built her business to show her skills and determination. She wanted to be more than a beauty queen and was quite successful at it. In his pursuit of the American Dream, he dismissed his cultural background and tried to assimilate as much as possible. His mild temper, good looks and intelligence led him to a path of success. He pursued the money because it was the right thing to do to achieve the Dream in its fullness. By having the money, he was able to marry Ms New Jersey, own a piece of America and enjoy the simple life. What shakes him from a dream-like state is his daughter's bomb. Merry was as much of an American as he was, yet she hated everything her father represented. This was torturous for him as he led his business as ethical as possible, seeking her approval long after she was gone. Seymour embodied everything that American Dream is supposed to be and, unlike Gatsby, he earned his money in an honest and hardworking way. Most of the mentioned characters in the novel were well-off citizens. They were placed relatively high on the hierarchy and they lived comfortable lives. However, much like in *The Great Gatsby*, there is a difference between groups and heritage. Even though Levov family achieved a high degree of the Dream, they were still less American than those who achieved less but were born into the land like Bill Orcutt.

## Conclusion

The American Dream is a deeply rooted, ambiguous idea which gives hope to people searching for a better life. Throughout the American history, there were different versions of the Dream, depending on the social context - from being a deeply spiritual idea which enabled the first settlers to find motivation to build an exemplary society, to the modern worship of material possessions which prove high status and power in society. The pursuit of the American Dream started to equate with the pursuit of money because money guaranteed power, social position and security. However, through the observation of the discussed novels, it can be seen that the concept in its original sense – pursuit of happiness, equality and opportunity is corrupted and somewhat unattainable. In today's world, progress is viewed through pursuit of money and accumulation of wealth. In the novel *The Great Gatsby*, the author exposes the corrupt society which did not recognize hard work and persistence as legitimate ways to rise in society. The Dream of a better life was tainted while money and possessions were celebrated. Jack Kerouac presented a different perspective on the pursuit of money in the '40s and the '50s. *On the Road* presents a new movement which questioned and opposed the mainstream thoughts. Chasing the “normal” life could not satisfy the characters who sought more from life than just the material. Finally, *American Pastoral* explored the relationship of the American Dream and the pursuit of money with one's identity. Seymour Levov craved the ultimate normalcy; however, he was devastated after his daughter rejected the identity he built through the Dream. In addition, these novels show the importance of the starting point in the pursuit of wealth, happiness and stability. While Seymour was able to further develop his father's factory and achieve financially stable life in a legal way, Gatsby, or Dean, were not able to gain that privilege because they were starting from the nothing. To summarize, the novels showed a person can lose their character and identity in the pursuit of money – Jay Gatsby's Puritan-like nature was tainted by shady business, Sal Paradise pointed out that the rat race and chasing money as the goal was pointless, and Seymour Levov realized that chasing perfection in every aspect of one's life, including the pursuit of money, dilutes one's identity. However, they did not claim that money is necessarily evil, but that the pursuit of money should not be the main goal in a person's life.

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