

The Concept of the American Dream in S. Fitzgerald's Great Gatsby and A. Miller's Death of a Salesman

Hocenski, Tina

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2015

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:838598>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-05**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet

Preddiplomski studij: Engleski jezik i književnost i Njemački jezik i književnost

Tina Hocenski

The Concept of the American Dream in S. Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* and A. Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

Završni rad

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Sanja Runtić

Osijek, 2015

CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
1. Creation and the Decline of the American Dream	3
2. The Two American Authors which Deal with the Concept of the American Dream	4
3. The Concept of the American Dream in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	5
3.1. The Character of Jay Gatsby	5
3.2. Daisy Buchanan as Jay Gatsby's Representation of the American Dream	6
3.3. The Importance of the Social Status in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	8
3.4. The Symbolism of the "Green Light"	9
3.5. The Decline of the American Dream in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	10
4. The Concept of the American Dream in <i>Death of a Salesman</i>	11
4.1. The Character of Willy Loman	11
4.2. Willy Loman's American Dream	12
4.3. The Other Characters and their Dream	13
4.4. The Symbolism of "Seeds and Diamonds"	15
4.5. The True Values of the American Dream	16
Conclusion	17
Works Cited	18

Abstract

The American Dream was created by the first settlers who came to America. For them the Dream was connected to God and religion, and they believed that if they worked hard enough, God would elect them when the apocalypse came. Yet, when they began connecting the Dream with the ability to succeed and accumulate material wealth, the Dream started to be corrupted. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1940) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) both deal with this topic. Fitzgerald connects Gatsby's Dream not to material wealth, but to the love of his life, Daisy. Just like the Dream, Daisy is desirable, materialistic, selfish, careless, beguiling, and haunting. Fitzgerald also places emphasis on social status and implies that the Dream stopped being achievable for an individual when it became corrupted. Therefore, poor people never get their chance to achieve the Dream. Like Fitzgerald, who emphasizes the detrimental effect of materialism, Miller also points at the corruption of the Dream and its values. Through his main character, Willy Loman, he shows a man who believes in all the wrong values of the Dream, which leads to an unsatisfactory and dysfunctional life of both himself and his family. On the other hand, through the character of Charley, Miller depicts a man who understands the system and therefore succeeds. Miller implies that some parts of the Dream that were later created, such as individualism or competition, have caused the downfall and the disintegration of society. He also implies that people need to start working together towards greater good to be able to restore the true values of the American Dream.

Keywords: American Dream, *The Great Gatsby*, *Death of a Salesman*, social status, true values

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explain the concept of the American Dream and to present the American Dream through two literary works which both deal with this topic – Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* (1940) and Francis Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925). This paper compares how these two authors represent the concept of the American Dream.

The first chapter explains the genesis, evolution, and the decline of the American Dream. It deals with the true values that once existed and puts across how the values became corrupted in the first place. The second chapter discusses the life and work of Arthur Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The third chapter interprets Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* in light of the author's view on the American Dream. It analyzes the main characters of the novel, Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan, as well as the importance of the social status and the symbolism of the Green Light. In the last section the decline of the American Dream is explained. The fourth chapter of this paper interprets Miller's views on the American Dream through his play *Death of a Salesman*. It analyzes the conceptualization of the American Dream in the play through the characters of Willy Loman, Biff, Happy, and Charley. This chapter also deals with some symbols from the play, such as seeds and diamonds, and attempts to define the true values of the American Dream.

1. Creation and the Decline of the American Dream

The definition of the American Dream can be found in all dictionaries nowadays. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, the American Dream is an American social ideal that stresses egalitarianism and especially material prosperity, but it can also mean the prosperity or life that is the realization of this ideal ("American Dream"). It is believed that the concept of the American Dream was created when the first settlers came to America. These first settlers were mostly Puritans, i.e. Calvinists who believed in the "Doctrine of the Elect," which states that "mankind is doomed to eternal damnation," except for the "Chosen Ones," who were elected by God (Pidgeon 178). The Puritans wanted to find out who the "Chosen Ones" or "the Elect" were and they started to think that "the possession of material things might be [some kind of] an indication. . . . Since hard work was associated with God, and since hard work often resulted in wealth, it was not long before these two things became associated" (Pidgeon 178). They started to believe that one had an equal chance of success if one worked hard enough and that they would eventually be awarded by God. They also believed that if they worked hard enough, everything that they had done wrong in their life would be forgotten. Consequently "[s]triving for wealth [became] a way for Americans to ease their consciences" (Pidgeon 178), and the concept of the American Dream was created.

One of the elements of the American Dream that was created when trying to "free [the] man from the burden of the old Puritan conscience" (Pidgeon 179) is individualism. Due to the common thought that God and man were equal entities, people strove to behave honorably to represent elements of God within them. Consequently, the American Dream focused on the individual: "The Puritan wealth/goodness concept gave Americans a goal to pursue; our political philosophy freed us to pursue this goal, and Transcendentalism showed men that they, as individuals, were to lead the way" (Pidgeon 178). Being an individual in America in that time meant being free to pursue whatever you wished for. The term "rugged individualism" (Pidgeon 179) was coined, which focused on the competition in which everyone starts from the bottom. Consequently some people managed to gain material wealth, but some failed in their attempts and the Dream started to decline.

The decline of the American Dream meant that the Dream became corrupted. The values that were firstly connected to hard work and God gradually began to be connected to material wealth as a sign of power. The more people got rich during the first generations, the less possibility was there for the newer generations to reach their goals. When people realized that money can buy almost anything, social status became everything.

2. The Two American Authors which Deal with the Concept of the American Dream

Since the term "the American Dream" was coined, many authors have felt the need to give their view on it. One of them is Francis Scott Fitzgerald, whose novel *The Great Gatsby* could be argued to display one of the best representations of the American Dream. Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota. He attended St. Paul Academy where he first started to write, and then went to the Newman School, where his talent was recognized. Later he started to write scripts for Princeton University. In 1917 he joined the U.S. army. While being in the army, he met Zelda Sayre, an eighteen-year old girl, who he later married and who became a great inspiration for him. His most famous works were short stories like "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz, " and "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," and novels such as *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned*, *Tender is the Night*, and the most famous one *The Great Gatsby* ("F. Scott Fitzgerald"). One of his great inspirations was Willa Cather. According to Quirk, Cather had exerted a greater influence upon him than even he seems to have realized, in matters of incident and story as well as style and technique" (576). Fitzgerald was always a heavy drinker and when his wife died because of a mental illness, he was heartbroken. He died of a heart attack in Hollywood on December 21, 1940 ("F. Scott Fitzgerald").

Another American author who decided to focus on the theme of the American Dream is Arthur Miller. He was born on October 17, 1915 in Harlem. When he attended the University of Michigan, he started to focus on writing and finished his first play *No Villain*. Some of his famous plays are *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, and *All My Sons* and *The Price*, but his most famous play is *Death of a Salesman*. According to Bigsby, Miller had a lot of literary influences and "derived from Ibsen and Shaw the significance of social causation; where he felt they fell short was in the degree to which they believed this to offer a total explanation" (Bigsby 72). He was also influenced by the Great Depression, "which exposed the economic and social determinism of the capitalist system" (Bigsby 72). That is why some of his plays offer a sharp critique of the capitalist society. He had three wives, one of whom was Marilyn Monroe. Miller died of heart failure on February 10, 2005 ("Arthur Miller").

3. The Concept of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby was published in April 1925 and was Fitzgerald's first successful novel. It "enjoyed enthusiastic reviews, and won Fitzgerald warm praise from writers he deeply admired" (Lass 158). The novel's main protagonist is Jay Gatsby, a young man who gives everything to get his girl back. The major themes that Fitzgerald covers in this novel are money, relationships, social status, and love. *The Great Gatsby* is also a novel about America's identity and its values, "the withering of the American Dream" (Lass 159) and its relationship to the Jazz Age (Lass 158-9).

3.1 The Character of Jay Gatsby

Jay Gatsby was born James Gatz. He was a Midwest boy who met a millionaire, Dan Cody, for whom he worked. From him, he learned everything that he needed to know about the aristocratic gentleman behavior. After Cody's death, James does not receive the money that he thought he would get. He changes his name and goes to war. There he meets Daisy Fay with whom he has some kind of a relationship. Eventually, Daisy marries Tom Buchanan, an aristocrat who can give her something that Gatsby cannot, which is money. After some time, Gatsby earns a lot of money by bootlegging and pursues his dream of repeating the past and having Daisy in his arms again, by showing her his material wealth. He then moves to West Egg right across Daisy's mansion. At that time, he is an "elegant young roughneck, a year or two over thirty" (Fitzgerald 48). After a few attempts of showing her his love and his wealth, Jay realizes that his dream is crumbling. Daisy cannot lie and say that she does not love her husband and, consequently, Gatsby takes responsibility for her action and eventually gets killed.

Jay Gatsby is a total opposite of James Gatz. According to Quirk, "Jay Gatsby, as opposed to Jimmie Gatz, is an invention which Nick says 'sprang from his Platonic conception of himself' . . . and to this immutable conception, we are told, Gatsby was faithful to the end" (584). Furthermore, he is a mystery. Nobody actually knows where he came from, or how he has that much money and fortune; people can only guess: "Well, they say he's a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's. That's where all his money comes from" (Fitzgerald 22). He is a mystery for the reader as well. The readers get to know him better than other characters from the novel. Yet, the readers can also notice that "there is also a fascinating division between Gatsby's public personality and his private, sinister business dealings which Fitzgerald wisely decided to keep mysterious" (Quirk 584). Moreover, Gatsby also makes sure that nobody suspects anything, so he uses the knowledge Dan Cody passed onto him and behaves like a real "old" aristocrat: "In

erecting other men's desires as his standard of value, and negating the reality of his own impulses, Gatsby entraps himself in an endless pattern of imitation" (Donaldson 207). Due to his negation of the reality, he cannot be a calm person. According to Nick, Gatsby "was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand" (Fitzgerald 40). Moreover, another characteristic that defines Jay Gatsby is his obsession with past. He thinks that he could repeat every single moment he had with Daisy and that particular obsession costs him his life: "You can't repeat the past. Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" (Fitzgerald 70).

Due to the fact that Gatsby was a bootlegger and got rich illegally, one could claim that he was also a dishonest man, a criminal, and therefore not so innocent. Yet, Gatsby's actions and behavior reveal that "despite all the corruption there is a quality of innocence about Gatsby, the quality that believes, and lives in the belief" (Handley 35). It is precisely that quality that differentiates him from other characters and connects him to the American Dream. In the end, Nick is one of the rare characters who is aware of Gatsby's innocence and tells Gatsby that he is "worth the whole damn bunch put together" (Fitzgerald 98). Daisy makes him uncivilized

3.2 Daisy Buchanan as Jay Gatsby's Representation of the American Dream

Gatsby's love towards Daisy is endless, and everything he does is because of her. It is evident from the beginning of the novel that Daisy represents Gatsby's American Dream. According to Handley, Gatsby's: "own dream for himself is modified somewhat when, as an officer waiting to go overseas during the war, he meets Daisy Fay and falls in love with her, while realizing that she lives in a rather different social world" (33). She was so desirable to him, just like the American Dream is to some people, that he decided to dedicate his life to her: "The officer looked at Daisy while she was speaking, in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at some time, and because it seemed romantic to me I have remembered the incident ever since" (Fitzgerald 48). Due to Daisy's materialism and need for money, she does not stay with Gatsby, but marries another man. From then on, the concept of Daisy starts to haunt Gatsby and getting her back becomes his life quest, which urges him to get rich quickly, i.e. illegally. Yet, the main goal of Gatsby's Dream was not to get rich per se, but rather to be everything Daisy ever wanted him to be. Due to the fact that Daisy cared a lot about money, Gatsby "is driven by an overwhelming ambition to make money, motivated by only one reason – the need to win Daisy back" (). Accordingly, Gatsby is a complete opposite of Daisy as his Dream is not materialistic but spiritual, motivated by his love for Daisy and his wish to win her back. It is precisely this

difference that makes it impossible for him to survive in Daisy's materialistic world. He does not want to accept the fact that Daisy's one true love is money, and that "she shows more emotion for . . . [his] possessions than for . . . [him]" (Donaldson 208). In other words, he does not want to accept that his Dream could be so superficial. In that sense, Daisy represents the distorted value of the Dream, whereas, Gatsby embodies the everlasting innocence of the Dream.

Daisy, on the other hand, incorporates the negative characteristics of the American Dream such as selfishness and carelessness. As a product of social conditioning, just like the American Dream, Daisy is devoid of compassion and emotions. She is one of the "careless people" who "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (Fitzgerald 114). Likewise, the American Dream is also "careless;" it is not interested in the prosperity of all but the prosperity of the individual.

What is more, the American Dream is beguiling. At first it is innocent, just like Daisy was the first time Gatsby saw her: "She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville. She dressed in white and had a little white roadster..." (Fitzgerald 48). Gatsby started to fall in love with this innocent vision of her and idealize her, and when he met her again, he realized that his vision was far more beautiful than Daisy ever was: "There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion" (Fitzgerald 61). Daisy was a part of the idealization, a part of his vision, but when he got what he wanted, when he met her again, the significance of her and the Dream "vanished forever" (60 Fitzgerald). Daisy, therefore, also represents the beguilement of the American Dream, which may seem attractive at first but leads a person towards destruction.

Furthermore, the American Dream can also be haunting. People can start obsessing over it, and eventually lose their way. That is what happened to Gatsby. Gatsby made a mistake by letting his Dream, and consequently Daisy, define him. Even though he was disappointed in Daisy, he still could not give up on his Dream. He became so obsessed with it and his idealized picture of Daisy that he even took responsibility for her actions by not telling the truth of who actually killed Myrtle. Yet, by that time, Gatsby was into deep and could not give up anymore. This became visible when he was in front of Daisy's house waiting for her and Nick asked him how long he was going to wait; Gatsby responded: "All night, if necessary" (Fitzgerald 92). The only thing he could have done was to continue obsessing over Daisy, as he had been doing for the

last couple of years, because that defined who Jay Gatsby was. He could not live without his Dream, because it became a part of him. As Handley puts it, Gatsby "has 'thrown himself into ... [the dream] with creative passion,' and it has, in fact, become more than Daisy herself. Gatsby is true to the dream – he has this fine capacity for imaginative wonder – but the reality cannot measure up to it" (34). Gatsby let the Dream define him, which in the end cost him his life. Daisy haunted Gatsby like the American Dream haunts some people, and for him there was no way out.

3.3 The Importance of the Social Status in *The Great Gatsby*

The importance of the social status in the pursuit of the American Dream is evident in *The Great Gatsby*. There are three types of characters in this novel. Firstly, there is the Old Money class (Poljak Rehlicki). The Old Money are aristocrats who inherited the money. These people do not work; they only drink, attend parties and have fun: "they play polo, watch investments; they have a habit of authoritative arrogance to which everyone except their wives yields; they are socially prominent" (Mizener 135). Members of the Old Money group do not care about love, which makes them resistant to emotions. Daisy, for example "cannot stand emotions. After all, sophistication is merely an emphasis on ritual without emotion. In fact, it leaves no room for emotion because emotions are dangerous; they are demanding and cannot always be controlled" (Pidgeon 181). The Old Money class also represents pure materialism. They are "careless people" (Fitzgerald 114) who do not have a need to achieve the American Dream because they were born with it. Due to arrogance and feeling of superiority they do not know how to behave properly. According to Chase, "their manners (perhaps one should say their mannered lack of manners) are a clearly minted currency as readily negotiable as the money they have such a lot of" (162).

Furthermore, another class is the New Money (Poljak Rehlicki). Gatsby represents that class by being "the eternal outsider, the man who never makes it into the inner courts of acceptable society though he could buy up that society and forget it" (Handley 35). These people have gotten rich illegally, by selling alcohol during the Prohibition, like Gatsby, or by doing some other illegal activity. They are trying to fit in, and be like the Old Money, but that is not possible. They were not raised like the Old Money, and the difference will always be visible. What these people do, is "imitate the ways of wealthy people" (Mizener 134). Due to the fact that these people mostly got rich by doing illegal activities, they are "surrounded by an air of underworld notoriety" (Mizener 135). The Old Money and the New Money cannot stand each other, even though, as Mizener explains, both groups "are morally and imaginatively infantile"

(135). The only difference between them is that "East Egg's manners are more refined than West Egg's and less honest" (135).

The class that has the least amount of money is called No Money (Poljak Rehlicki). The Wilsons represent this class. They are people who want to achieve the American Dream, but will never get a chance to reach their goals, no matter how hard they try. They are "victims of the society that lives to extremes" (Handley 42). These people are "dependent on buying and selling to survive" (Handley 42).

Nick Carraway stands between the Old Money and the New Money. He is someone who understands both sides, but in the end the readers can sense that he is more in favor of Gatsby. According to Mizener, Nick is "torn between the superficial social grace and the unimaginative brutality of the wealthy and the imaginative intensity and moral idealism of the socially absurd and legally culpable self-made man" (135). He does not approve of Tom's and Daisy's behavior, which is visible in the chapter when he is having dinner at the Buchanan's and does not feel comfortable talking to them, saying that Daisy makes him uncivilized (Fitzgerald 10). He can understand why Tom and Daisy behave the way they behave because Nick is, as Mizener explains, "in manner and in superficial feeling, an Easterner, but his moral roots, though he does not fully realize it until the end of the novel, are in the Middle West" (131). When it comes to the American Dream, Nick is a working man, has some money, and therefore might be able to achieve the Dream.

3.4 The Symbolism of the "Green Light"

There is one symbol in *The Great Gatsby* that could also be connected to the American Dream and Daisy, and that is the symbol of the Green Light. The Green Light is a light that burns all night at the end of Daisy's dock (Fitzgerald 60). It represents the inability to reach the Dream. Gatsby is fascinated by it because he feels closer to Daisy while observing the light: "he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward-and distinguished nothing except a single green light" (Fitzgerald 16). Moreover, that particular light is also something that defines Gatsby because it is also a part of his dream and it "becomes the dominant symbol of Gatsby's emotional complex" (Quirk 583). The green light, which can also represent curiosity, excitement, and Gatsby's past with Daisy, was a part of the idealization, a part of his vision, and even though he feels closer to Daisy while observing the light, she is too far away. Therefore, when Gatsby

gets what he wants, when he meets Daisy again, and the light becomes just a regular light and the "colossal significance of that light . . . [vanishes] forever" (Fitzgerald 60).

Even though Gatsby ends up being disappointed in Daisy, he does not give up. The green light becomes a symbol to which he dedicates "the last ounce of his 'romantic readiness,' his extraordinary gift for hope" (Quirk 584). By continuing to believe in his dream, in Daisy and in the Green Light, "the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us," Gatsby represents an individual, who does not want to live in the world without love. For Gatsby, Daisy is out of reach, just as the American Dream is for some, and many people can only stare at their green light from a distance just like Gatsby did.

3.5 The Decline of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*

In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald has shown how the values of the American Dream, that were innocent at first, turned out to be corrupted. Originally, the Dream was considered to be possible for nearly everyone who had made an effort to make something out of nothing, believing that in that way they would be considered better people in the eyes of God. Yet, as time passed by, people started to care less about the religious meaning of the dream and cared only about material wealth. The Dream became desirable, individualistic, materialistic, selfish, careless, beguiling, haunting, and out of reach for some. The Dream can be very desirable at first, just like Gatsby found Daisy desirable when he met her. Once a person gets infatuated with the Dream he/she consequently starts obsessing over it. That particular person later realizes how beguiling the Dream can be and that the Dream was a total opposite of what one expected. Fitzgerald draws attention to those negative elements of the Dream by emphasizing that money can destroy a person and that materialism, which dominates most of today's societies, only destroys these societies. He also implies that while some people are born living the Dream, some will never have the opportunity to achieve it. Some people, like Gatsby, try to achieve it, but fail: "The boy from small town in the Midwest makes it to the big time and falls as quickly, and as unnoticed, as the stars who shot to drunken prominence at his parties..." (Handley 35). Gatsby could not achieve his Dream, because of the distorted values of the American Dream. Fitzgerald presents us with these values of the Dream through the character of Daisy and implies that sticking to them will eventually "lead [] to the wasteland of money without humanity" (Handley 35).

4. The Concept of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman*

Death of a Salesman was published on February 10, 1949. It was very successful and consequently won the Pulitzer Prize, the Critics Circle Award, and the Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award (Harris 48). The play covers the themes of family and success, but also of guilt and innocence, two questions that, according to Harris, Miller was always concerned with (81) Even though the story is about a salesman, who fails to achieve his goals, due to a belief in distorted values, Miller also stated that this play is "a love story between a man and his son, and on a crazy way between both of them and America" (Harris 82). Due to the fact that he was influenced by the Great Depression, Miller "began with a frontal assault on the evils of capitalism" (Harris 74). He strongly criticizes it in *Death of a Salesman* by showing that the American Dream is not possible for everyone.

4.1 The Character of Willy Loman

Willy Loman is a salesman from Brooklyn, New York. Due to his age, his whole life, which has been full of disillusionment, is on the decline, and he creates a vision of himself in which he believes. He has convinced himself that he is very successful and well liked, which is far from the truth: "I never have to wait in line to see a buyer, 'Willy Loman is here!' That's all they have to know, and I go right through" (Miller 33). Willy is not even good at his job. He cheated on his wife in the past, which caused a lot of tension between him and his son Biff who caught his father cheating: "Willy betrays himself and others. Desperate to sustain his self-esteem, he has an affair with another woman, buying her attention with a gift of stockings while his wife sits at home mending her own" (Bigsby 175). Nothing is good for him: "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" (Miller 17), and so he creates a world that makes him feel good about himself. Willy believes in achieving the American Dream, and due to his failure, he pressures his sons to achieve it. His view on how someone can achieve the dream is also one of the delusions. He believes that popularity will lead one towards success. Even though the two boys are aware of their father's mental problem, his wife, Linda, supports his dangerous illusions (Bigsby 146). In the end, he kills himself, anticipating that the family will use the insurance money, which they will get for his death, and in that way achieve the American Dream: "Increasingly anxious to justify his life and expiate what he sees as his responsibility for his son's willful self-annihilation, he plans a suicide which will create the fortune that his life could never accumulate" (Bigsby 175-176).

According to Bigsby, the relationship between Willy and Biff is a crucial part of this play "because it focuses on the question of inherited values and assumptions, it dramatizes deferred hopes and ideals, it becomes a microcosm of the debate between generations, of the shift from a world still rooted in a simpler rural past to one in which that past exists simply as myth" (176). Willy's life is full of regret. He feels bad for cheating on his wife, but even more for his son's failure. When Biff caught his father cheating in a Boston hotel room, his life turned upside down. He refused to retake a mathematics examination, and therefore could not get into university and have a better career. By trying to help his son, Willy controls him, tells him what to do, how to behave, and criticizes him. According to Bigsby, for Biff "to survive he has to release himself from his father and the values which he promulgates" (179). One more problem is that the whole family cherishes material success more than anything else. They never show that they are happy to be a family, that they love each other, which leads them towards spiritual failure as well. According to Greenfield, "In the Loman family, love, sex, religion, and all other conventional familial bonds have been superseded or eliminated by the several halftruths or false beliefs that make up the family's philosophy of work" (105).

Moreover, Willy and Linda's relationship is also very important. Linda loves Willy, which is evident from her attitude towards him. As Bigsby explains, "Her actions are motivated by a compassionate concern" and therefore she encourages his dreams (182). She is aware of the fact that she cannot do anything and that she is "simply too passive a force" (Bigsby 182). Linda is also stuck in this big delusion and cannot get out of it even if she wanted to.

4.2 Willy Loman's American Dream

At the beginning of the play, Miller depicts "the Salesman's house," describing the "air of the dream" that "clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality" (Miller 11). From the beginning, the readers are aware that there is something wrong with this house and the dream.

Willy Loman grew up believing that the American Dream exists. His father left his family to get rich, and his brother went to Africa and presumably got rich: "Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he's rich!" (Miller 41). As Bigsby explains, Willy was born in a world in which "the pressure of the material was already unmaking the pastoral myth" (184). Under that particular pressure he fought his whole life to achieve the Dream, but nobody ever explained to him what its true values are and how to achieve it. In his state of disillusionment he talks to his dead brother and asks him: "Oh, Ben, how did you do it? What is the answer?" (Miller 84).

Willy is also unrealistic when it comes to his dream because he still believes that he can achieve something more, even though he is quite old: "Someday I'll have my own business, and I'll never have to leave home any more" (Miller 30). Moreover, pride is also what Miller criticizes through Willy's dream. Even though he is a salesman, he does not sell anything and therefore does not have money, so every now and then he loans money from Charley, who wants to help him by offering him a job. Willy replies by saying: "What the hell are you offering me a job for?" (Miller 43). He is aware of the fact that he does not have any money, but he is too proud to work for Charley.

Willy's constant skidding off the road can also be interpreted as a symbol of the inability to reach the Dream: "And then all of a sudden I'm goin' off the road! I'm tellin' ya, I absolutely forgot I was driving" (Miller 14). Furthermore, Willy's inability to reach his Dream could mean two things. It could mean that he had a wrong way of trying to achieve it, or, as Bigsby suggests, it could mean that "Miller implies that Willy had the wrong dreams" (181).

One more mistake that Willy Loman does is that he does not believe that hard work is most important when it comes to achieving the Dream. He believes that one should behave according to certain rules and behave the way other people expect of you to behave: "Walk in very serious. You are not applying for a boy's job. Money is to pass. Be quiet, fine, and serious. Everybody likes a kidder, but nobody lends him money" (Miller 64). He gives too much emphasis to personality by saying "that personality always wins the day" (Miller 65). Greenfield also claims that his "primary mistake in work and ultimately in his life is the belief that success in work is contingent entirely upon appearances" (106).

Yet, at the end of the play, Willy does not give up on his dream, but rather pursues it even more. He does not die as a man who failed in life, but as a man who kept being persistent until he died: "I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman" (Miller 132). Knowing that his family needs money, he commits suicide in hope that the family, mostly Biff and Happy, will use the money to achieve something in life.

4.3 The Other Characters and their Dream

Biff's problem is that he does not know what his dream is: "I tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is. I don't know-what I'm supposed to want" (Miller 22). For Willy that is completely unacceptable because a man at his age should know what he wants. That is also one of the problems that Miller emphasizes. Biff cannot find what he really wants because he is

under constant influence of his father, which never allows him to develop his character and know himself. What is more, he constantly compares himself to others: "I want to walk into the store the way he walks in" (Miller 24). He is also fighting against himself and against the expectations of others: "We should be mixing cement on some open plain, or – or carpenters. A carpenter is allowed to whistle" (Miller 61). He wants to go West and find a job there, but for his father that is not good enough: "Go back to the West! Be a carpenter, a cowboy, enjoy yourself!" (Miller 61). When Biff tries to please his father and work for Bill Oliver again, he gets disappointed because he has been living in an illusion that his father made for him: "Dad, I don't know who said it first, but I was never a salesman for Bill Oliver" (Miller 106). At the end of the play, Biff gives us hope that he will maybe do something with his life by saying to Happy: "I know who I am, kid" (Miller 138).

Happy is very similar to Willy, even though Willy likes Biff more. He is relatively good at his job, but his life is also full of delusions: "He, like his brother, is lost, but in a different way, for he has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat and is thus more confused and hard-skinned, although seemingly more content" (Miller 19). He is not happy as his name implies. He also did not get a chance to discover himself and to find out what he likes the most and what he would like to do in his life. He was also influenced by his father and thought that material wealth was the most important thing in life, which consequently made him a sad person: "I don't know what the hell I'm working for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment-all alone. And I think of the rent I'm paying. And it's crazy. But then, it's what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I'm lonely" (Miller 23). At the end of the play, Happy gives us hope for the family as well by saying that Willy Loman did not die in vain.

Charley is Willy's family friend and he is a successful businessman. He knows that hard work pays off and tries to give Willy a wake-up call by telling him that the things he believes in are not important: "Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything?" (Miller 97). Willy is the complete opposite of Charley: "It is Charley who boasts that his son's success had been a consequence of his own lack of concern, announcing: "My salvation is that I never took an interest in anything" (Miller 96). Because of the guilt, he always took interest in everything, and he does not understand that Biff is a grown man who can take care of himself. Charley's son Bernard is also successful and Miller implies that he did finish school and the university, unlike Biff, and that "his success is certainly a consequence of hard work" (Biggsby 180).

Another problem is that the characters criticize other people's dreams. The American Dream does not necessarily need to be connected to being a business man, earning a lot of money, but it can also be connected to doing what you love. At the beginning of the play, Willy talks to Linda about Biff who was working on a farm, and discriminates that job – "How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life?" (Miller 15) – not realizing that for some that particular job could be their American Dream.

4.4 The Symbolism of "Seeds and Diamonds"

There are two symbols in the play *Death of a Salesman*, which are connected to the American Dream. The first symbol is the symbol of seeds. It might seem that Willy constantly plants something because he has a feeling that he fails in everything else. At the end of the play, when he is getting more and more into his fantasy, he flips out because he did not plant anything: "I've got to get some seeds, right away. Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground" (Miller 122). He has a feeling that he is giving something to his family when something that he planted with his own hands grows. On the other hand, this symbol could also be connected to the fact that the job of a salesman is wrong for him. Willy is aware of his "adeptness at carpentry and construction" (Greenfield 107), and that is something that even Charley acknowledges. He is far better at doing work with his hands than selling things. Yet, by choosing the profession of a salesman, he fails to recognize his talents, as well as his Dream. As the planting is also done with hands, Willy feels good doing that. However, for him, a job of a salesman is far better than the job of a carpenter. According to Greenfield, "Willy is so taken with his work fantasies . . . that he never recognizes that he has the potential to work successfully and well as a carpenter, producing competent work without any of the glamour and romance attached to it" (107).

Another important symbol in the play is the symbol of diamonds. Diamonds could represent money in general, but they could also represent some kind of a financial security that the family never had. Ben, on the other hand, got rich by discovering diamonds in the African jungle. For Willy, therefore, diamonds could also represent some kind of a failure to reach the American Dream because he did not achieve what his brother managed to achieve. At the end of the play, Willy is talking to his dead brother in a state of disillusionment and Ben encourages him to go to the jungle and get the diamonds: "The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy" (Miller 134). By saying that the jungle is "dark," he persuades Willy to commit suicide in order for his family to get the insurance money and for his life to finally make sense.

4.5 The True Values of the American Dream

In his play, *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller emphasized the wrong values of the American Dream in order to show what its true values should be. Everything Willy believed in was wrong, and a lot of his beliefs could be also found in today's society. In Bigsby's words, Miller's play is a "requiem for a country which, no less than Willy, had all the wrong dreams as it is a gesture of absolution towards those who allow themselves to be too fully known" (176).

Miller also criticizes America as a whole and its values when, at the beginning of the play, he emphasizes that America is the greatest country in the world: "In the greatest country in the world a young man with such – personal attractiveness, gets lost" (16). He implies not only that America may have been a great country when the values and the Dream were not corrupted but also that there is still a chance for the people and the society to change and for the Dream to become innocent again. What he also criticizes is the value system based on the appearance of a person, which during the last century became very important. Willy's belief that one needs to look good is considered wrong; but what Miller actually emphasizes is that people started to be superficial, and that there are a lot of people who get a job because of their appearance.

Competition, as one of the important elements of the American Dream, is another focus of this play. It points out that competition does not make people work towards greater good, but rather towards their own good, which makes people selfish and effects the country and the whole humanity badly: "There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening!" (Miller 17).

To conclude, we do not know what will happen to the Loman family after the play has ended; they can change and achieve their dreams, or they can continue to fail at it. Yet, by ending with the sound of the flute, Miller gives us hope to believe that the Dream is achievable, but only if the whole society goes back to the start and reestablishes the values that were firstly established for the greater good.

Conclusion

The concept of the American Dream is one of the oldest foundations of American cultural identity. At first, it was based upon innocent, religious values. People wanted to work hard to prove themselves to God, but the pressure to gain material wealth corrupted people, who then corrupted the true values of the Dream.

Death of a Salesman and *The Great Gatsby* both detect and explore the corruptive effects of the Dream. In *The Great Gatsby*, it is evident that the Dream is achievable only for some people, who were either born with it like the Buchanans, the ones like Gatsby who will get the money by doing illegal activities, or by those like Nick who have some financial support that can help them achieve it. People who do not have any money, like the Wilsons, never get the opportunity to achieve the Dream. Fitzgerald gives emphasis to the spiritual, more than the materialistic values, by implying that Gatsby was not a happy man, even though he had tons of money.

Miller, on the other hand, focuses on the negative psychological effects of the Dream, by emphasizing that the values of the Dream have become so corrupted that they started to affect how people think, what they expect etc. Willy's beliefs are generally wrong, but these beliefs have been rooted in today's society and it will be hard to get them out. Furthermore, Miller implies that the Dream is different for every individual and that comparisons should not be made because that only leads to the destruction of one's own individual desires. He also implies that people should not create expectations because eventually nothing turns out as you expect it to be. Willy should not have had expectations of his sons because it only pressured them into doing what they did not want to do. Thereupon, Miller wants the values to become exactly as they were when they were firstly created, and that is how the Dream could again become the innocent and proud part of the American society.

Works Cited

- "American Dream." Merriam-Webster. *American Dream*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 June 2015
<<http://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/american%20dream>>.
- "Arthur Miller." *Bio*. A&E Television Networks. 2015. Web. 6 June 2015.
- Bigsby, C.W.E. *Modern American Drama 1945-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.
- . *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. Print.
- Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. New York: Gordian Press, 1978. Print.
- Donaldson, Scott. *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*. Boston, Massachusetts: G.K.Hall & Co, 1984. Print.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. Print.
- "F. Scott Fitzgerald." *Bio*. A&E Television Networks. 2015. Web. 6 June 2015.
- Greenfield, Thomas Allen. *Work and the Work Ethic in American Drama 1920-1970*. Missouri: U of Missouri P, 1982. Print.
- Handley, Graham. *Brodie's Notes on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and Tender is the Night*. London, Sydney, Auckland: Pan Books, 1989. Print.
- Harris, Andrew B. *Broadway Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge. 1994. Print.
- Lass, Abraham H. *A Student's Guide to 50 American Novels*. Washington: Washington Square Press. 1966. Print.
- Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1976. Print.
- Mizener, Arthur. "F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*." *The Voice of America: Forum Lectures, The American Novel*. Ed. Key House et al. Washington DC: The American Cultural Centre, 1977. 129-137. Print.
- Pidgeon, John A. "The Great Gatsby." *Modern Age* 42.9 (2007): 178-82. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 3 June. 2004.
- Poljak Rehlicki, Jasna. Survey of American Literature II – undergraduate course. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek. March 2015. Class lecture.
- Quirk, Tom. "Fitzgerald and Cather: *The Great Gatsby*." *American Literature; A Journal of Literary history, Criticism, and Bibliography* 54.4. Ed. Leo Levy et al. Duke: Duke UP, 1982. 576-592. Print.