



# The Myth and Reality of the American Dream as Depicted in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*

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**Abstract**— *The American Dream, which is highly regarded in American culture, is based on the belief that anyone, regardless of their background, can achieve wealth and success through hard work, determination, and pure ambition. In fictional narratives, this dream is paradoxically portrayed to highlight the inherent struggle of the ideal. Both Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman (1949) and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (1925) provide critical insights into the illusion of this dream and the tragic repercussions of adhering to such an ideal. This paper concentrates on these two texts and how they aim to dismantle the myths surrounding the American Dream. By examining its contradictions, shortcomings, and failures, while focusing on the characters and their personal lives, relationships, and the social dynamics influencing their existence, the researchers have constructed and analyzed the primary argument regarding how these works critique the American Dream and the idea of nationalism that transcends borders. Through the complexities and dilemmas associated with the American Dream, the realities faced by Gatsby and Loman have been revealed—their profound tragedies intertwined with the broader American tragedy.*



**Keywords**— *American Dream, myth, reality, values, corruption, morality*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The concept of the American Dream began in the early 1900s when numerous immigrants arrived in America seeking financial opportunities and an improved quality of life. The American Dream embodies both the materialistic and aspirational values of society. The American Dream requires people to live flawless lives as successful, hardworking members of society. Long regarded as a fundamental myth of American identity, the American Dream is typically portrayed as the goal of upward mobility, personal achievement, and affluence gained with diligence and tenacity (Fetterley 63). But the ideal is frequently presented in literature as unreachable, elusive, and ultimately harmful. Through the lives of two protagonists, Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, whose pursuits of wealth and fulfillment ultimately lead to their terrible

demises, Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* offer critiques of the American Dream.

The American Dream has long been considered a powerful motivator for individuals in the United States. It is the belief that anyone, regardless of their origin, can achieve success through hard work and determination (Setzer 36). However, literature often critiques this ideal, highlighting the ways in which systemic issues, personal failures, and social inequalities make such aspirations difficult, if not impossible, for many. The American Dream serves as a pivotal theme in both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, although each narrative explores it from distinct perspectives. Both works explore the American Dream through the lens of their protagonists, Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, respectively, showing how the dream is often a misleading and unattainable ideal.

Through the experiences of a middle-class protagonist, *Death of a Salesman* explores the degradation of the dream, highlighting the value of charm and outward appearances above diligence and tenacity. *The Great Gatsby*, on the other hand, highlights the shallow and materialistic characteristics that are frequently connected to the pursuit of the American Dream while examining the inherent difficulty of realizing it and the resulting feelings of disillusionment. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* thinks that charm and being “well-liked” are sufficient to get money and respect, but his failure reveals how naive this notion is.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby amasses wealth and status through illegal means, yet he remains unfulfilled, clinging to an idealized past with Daisy. Both protagonists equate financial success with personal worth, yet neither finds true happiness. The pursuit of wealth leads to moral decay (Gatsby's criminal dealings) and psychological collapse (Willy's mental breakdown).

The fantasy, which was once based on possibility and self-reinvention, is warped by shallow values and avarice. Willy's fixation on looks and Gatsby's lavish parties serve to emphasize the meaninglessness of worldly prosperity. Willy kills himself in the hopes that his insurance money will ensure his family's future, while Gatsby is murdered, taking his dream with him. Both conclusions highlight the negative effects of pursuing an unattainable dream.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The concept of the American Dream—the idea that individuals from any background can attain success and prosperity through diligence and perseverance—has been a pivotal subject in American literature. Two influential works, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), provide a critical analysis of this ideal, revealing its inherent illusions and shortcomings. Although both narratives delve into the detrimental effects of an unyielding quest for wealth and social standing, they approach this theme from distinct historical and societal perspectives.

*The Great Gatsby* offers a critical examination of the materialism and moral decline prevalent during the Roaring Twenties, showcasing how the American Dream becomes tainted by avarice and insatiable aspirations. In contrast, *Death of a Salesman* reflects the disillusionment experienced by the average individual in the aftermath of World War II, illustrating how the allure of success can lead to mental despair when reality does not align with one's ambitions. Through the tragic narratives of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, both Miller and Fitzgerald confront the illusion of the American Dream, revealing its emptiness and the severe repercussions of its relentless

pursuit. This paper examines how the two texts deconstruct the notion of the American Dream, revealing it as an illusion that promotes false optimism, ethical decay, and individual failure, while also emphasizing rare instances where characters discover alternative, more authentic values.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

By analyzing the representation of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, this paper aims to uncover how both Arthur Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald critique the myth of upward mobility, success, and prosperity. The research questions outlined in this paper guide a comprehensive study of the characters' emotional and psychological struggles, their social contexts, and the larger societal forces that shape their lives. Through a combination of literary analysis, historical context, psychological theory, and comparative criticism, the paper demonstrates how these works not only challenge the ideal of the American Dream but also expose its contradictions, flaws, and ultimately its destructiveness. The research provides a deeper understanding of how both works reflect the complexities and limitations of the American Dream, offering a critique of its promise and its perils.

### 1.4 Research Questions

In examining the themes of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, the following research questions direct the analysis:

- a) In what ways do the main characters of *Death of a Salesman* (Willy Loman) and *The Great Gatsby* (Jay Gatsby) represent the ideals of the American Dream?

This question seeks to analyze the characters' personal beliefs, motivations, and desires in relation to the American Dream, examining how each character's pursuit of success aligns with or deviates from the conventional myths of the American Dream.

- b) How are the protagonists' conceptions of the American Dream influenced by the socio-economic environments of the Jazz Age and post-World War II America?

The purpose of this inquiry is to investigate how the characters' desire for the American Dream is influenced by the historical and social circumstances of the time. The study examines how Willy and Gatsby are impacted by the economic shifts that occurred in post-World War II America and the Roaring Twenties.

- c) What role do social class, wealth, and personal relationships play in the characters' failures to achieve the American Dream?

This question addresses how economic systems, class divisions, and social structures influence the characters'

pursuit of success. It considers the barriers that hinder Willy and Gatsby from realizing their dreams, focusing on the role of wealth, status, and relationships.

d) How do *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* challenge the American Dream's practicality and highlight its inconsistencies?

This research question aims to identify the critiques embedded within both texts, particularly focusing on how they challenge the very premise of the American Dream as a universally attainable ideal. It explores how the authors critique the societal emphasis on wealth and material success as the ultimate measures of fulfillment.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Undoubtedly, many individuals find the American Dream elusive. This situation is not a reflection of the American system's shortcomings, but rather a consequence of the inadequate hard work and commitment demonstrated by its supporters (Adams 21). The American system offers an opportunity to all people to nourish their American Dream; some might blame the system for their troubles when it is their fault (Helterman 103). There is no quick or easy way through life, as achieving goals involves countless hard work and dedication to reaching dreams. The system is primarily understood by unfortunate people born into complicated lives, and they seem to truly understand how the system works and succeed through hard work.

The American Dream, as an essential theme in the play *Death of a Salesman*. It explains all of the male members of the Loman family's pressure to succeed. All the Loman men wish to become successful in their jobs and live a comfortable lifestyle. Biff and Happy share a dream of going into business together as "The Loman Brothers." They believe they can create a million-dollar business, and their money worries will disappear. Willy dreams of earning two hundred dollars a week, repaying his mortgage, and seeing his sons become successful salesmen (Lawrence, 548). He is again disillusioning himself. Biff is going to try and get some money from Bill Oliver, but already Willy is boating off Biff's work on a huge deal. At the end of the play, Biff says that Willy "had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong." This statement implies that Biff thought his father had chosen a career that was very unsuited to him. It entails that Willy had set his self-expectations too high and would have only been able to be a mediocre salesman his whole life (Stanton 103). In the play, Happy, like his father, is also disillusioned by the life they pretended to lead instead of the harsh reality that they exist in (Shockley 50).

Willy spent his whole life futilely chasing the "American Dream" (Ferguson 94). Willy has been unsuccessful in

achieving the success he so desperately craves because his perception of the formula for success is fatally flawed (Becker 14). Willy believes the American Dream is only attainable for the popular and attractive few. He does not think he belongs to this elite group. Unfortunately, Willy never sees the error of his ways. To the very end, he is a firm believer in the ideology that the attractive and well-spoken individuals finish first. This conviction is the very thing that destroys him because he now realizes, in his mind, that he is not on top. *Death of a Salesman* is an outstanding play that challenges the "American Dream." We can learn from Willy Loman. We all have the urge to attain our own "American Dreams," but we must live in reality, work hard, and persist in our efforts to attain them (Scanlan 233).

Willy is regarded as a heroic figure because it is believed that he has nothing to offer but his personality and appearance. Even in the face of failure as a salesman, he feels a strong urge to carry on, since dreaming is the only way for a salesman to endure. After Willy's death, Charley says of Willy, "he's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they stop smiling back, – that's an earthquake ... A salesman is got to dream boy" (Miller 138). Charley understands that the profession of a salesman is challenging, and that prolonged periods of struggle and disappointment can diminish both his smile and the shine on his shoes. In this play, the American Dream is portrayed as the adversary, contributing to Willy's decline, madness, and ultimate downfall (Jacobson 255).

The American Dream is basically a subjective notion, granting individuals the freedom to determine their interpretations, definitions, and experiences of this ideal. Although the ethical dimensions of the American Dream advocate for truth and justice, the competitive nature of capitalism frequently results in a divergence from these values (Vanderbilt 23). Fitzgerald himself presents the subjective nature of perceiving success and the American Dream when he states, "life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all" (Fitzgerald 6).

Even though Gatsby is a self-made millionaire, the community in which he lives does not embrace him, which corrupts the notion of the American Dream. Gatsby appears to be a calm individual who nevertheless embodies the American Dream until the book's conclusion. However, he is never fully accepted as a morally acceptable figure by the society in which he lives. Even after attending his parties and having a good time, people continue to rumor about his wealth (Fetterley 46). As Gatsby resides in West Egg, whereas "East Egg is reserved for the elite members of the upper class born into old

money,” he is excluded from the “inherited” elite class (Pumphrey 116). Jay Gatsby is “... the guy who seems at first to symbolize the American Dream and the hope capitalism consequently offers to all, reveals, upon closer scrutiny, the hollowness of that ideal” (Tyson 73).

By making frequent allusions to racism throughout his book, Fitzgerald further develops the notion that the American Dream has turned into a social ill within the American way of life (Stallman 31). The idea of “colored people” achieving their social standing is a terrible one for the privileged, who are living the “inherited” American Dream of the Jazz Age. Even while *The Great Gatsby*’s example of contempt for the colored race is more subtly expressed, it also exemplifies the evil that American imperialism inflicts on the “inherited” wealthy. “... It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things,” says Tom Buchanan (Fitzgerald 13). Then his wife Daisy Buchanan replies to him by saying, “We have got to tear them down” (Fitzgerald 13).

Tom’s arrogance is evident in his refusal to attend Gatsby’s parties. Although the upper class and the bourgeoisie frequently join these gatherings, Tom thinks that he should not participate unless he receives a personal invitation from Gatsby. This excessive pride is a manifestation of the corrupt allure of the American Dream, which fuels Tom’s animosity towards Gatsby. Nick Carraway, the narrator, perceives the participants showcasing their riches without restraint (Eisinger 24). For them, the American Dream represents a distortion of their self-respect, characterized by feelings of contempt and envy towards Gatsby, even as they indulge in the champagne and luxuries he provides. Consequently, this idea evolves into a morally compromised interpretation of humanism, ultimately undermining the American Dream through materialistic pursuits. In contrast, Tom remains unfazed by this concept, as he perceives himself to be of superior status and pride compared to Gatsby (Lewis 16).

The key transformation in the tale that highlights the negative implications of the corrupted social interpretation of the American Dream is centered on the relationship between Gatsby and Daisy. Although Gatsby’s role as the central character of the narrative remains ambiguous, Daisy fails to demonstrate the qualities necessary to be considered a protagonist. Marius Bewley states that:

Gatsby is a character of mythic proportions, and no other term can adequately describe him. He represents, as Fitzgerald emphasizes from the beginning, the struggle between illusion and reality that lies at the core of American existence; he is a heroic representation of the American

romantic hero, the genuine successor of the American Dream (Bewley 226-227).

Gatsby’s devotion to Daisy and his love for her can make him an American romantic hero as Bewley suggests. The illusion of his senseless love for a woman that is outside his social class tempts him to follow a morally corrupt path in achieving a status which is already tainted by the evils of the socially materialistic American Dream. If Gatsby symbolizes the American Dream in the novel, it is evident that this dream is tainted, as he attains it through illicit means, which undermines the ideal of the diligent and virtuous individual that the dream is meant to represent (Tyson 73). From this viewpoint, readers may interpret Gatsby’s actions as driven by love. Consequently, they might argue that “all is fair in love and war,” suggesting that Gatsby had no alternative. In contrast, Daisy’s options were less constrained. Coming from a wealthy background, she could have easily chosen to marry Gatsby when he was impoverished; however, due to societal expectations within her class, she dismissed Gatsby as a potential partner capable of providing the affluent lifestyle she desired (Solomon et al. 16).

Gatsby explicitly expresses his perception of Daisy as an individual. To him, she is preoccupied with wealth and a materialistic lifestyle, leading Gatsby to question whether, if she were to return to him, it would be due to her affection for him or because he can now provide her with the material possessions, she has always desired. Gatsby expresses his thoughts on Daisy, mentioning that:

“Her voice is full of money,” he said suddenly. That was it. I’d never understood before. 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... high in a white palace the king’s daughter, the golden girl ... (Fitzgerald 92).

In this context, the American Dream and the pursuit of it undermine love, the most genuine emotion in human existence.

### III. RESEARCH METHODS

A combination of historical context, psychological theory, and literary analysis has been used to answer the study issues. The primary research techniques that have guided the study are listed below:

#### 3.1 Literary Analysis

This method includes close readings focusing on characters, themes, symbols, and narrative techniques. The researchers have examined both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* to see exactly how the American Dream is illustrated and examined in characters’ actions, speech,

and private thoughts. In order to determine how these people define success and failure, some of the key events such as Willy with his family and his death in *Death of a Salesman* and Gatsby's lavish parties and eventual retribution in *The Great Gatsby* have been examined.

### 3.2 Comparative Literary Criticism

The research has utilized comparative literary criticism to analyze the resemblances and distinctions in the representations of the American Dream by Miller and Fitzgerald. By contrasting the thematic issues and character developments of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby, the study has aimed to illuminate how both writers critique the same concept from differing perspectives. This analysis has also involved examining the protagonists' aspirations and the various methods they employ to misunderstand or manipulate their circumstances in their quest for success, ultimately leading to their downfalls.

### 3.3 Historical Contextualization

This study has placed the works into their historical context in order to better understand how the socio-economic circumstances of post-World War II America and the Jazz Age influence the protagonists' conceptions of the American Dream. This involves analyzing the era's social structure, economic climate, and cultural trends. The study has examined how Willy Loman's definition of success was shaped by the rise of corporate America, consumerism, and the demise of conventional business models in the 1940s and 1950s, while Gatsby's quest for money and prestige was shaped by the extravagance and materialism of the Jazz Age.

### 3.4 Psychological Analysis

This analysis has investigated the emotional and psychological aspects of the characterizations of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby. By employing psychological theory, the paper has delved into the internal conflicts faced by each character, including Willy's fixation on being well-liked and Gatsby's unattainable desire for Daisy. This methodology has examined how these internal struggles reflect broader societal pressures and lead to their tragic fates. The research has utilized psychological concepts such as self-deception, cognitive dissonance, and the psychology of aspiration to elucidate the reasons behind Willy and Gatsby's intense focus on their dreams and how these aspirations skew their understanding of reality.

### 3.5 Thematic and Symbolic Analysis

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* incorporate significant symbols to critique the American Dream, such as the green light in *The Great Gatsby* and Willy's seeds in *Death of a Salesman*. This analysis aims

to explore the symbolism in these texts to understand how Fitzgerald and Miller employ metaphors and symbols to fortify their critiques of the American Dream. For instance, the green light in *The Great Gatsby* represents Gatsby's unreachable aspirations, while Willy's endeavor to plant seeds symbolizes his urgent wish to cultivate something lasting and meaningful in a life filled with failures. A close examination of these symbols will clarify how both narratives contend that the American Dream is ultimately a deceptive illusion.

### 3.6 Qualitative Content Analysis

A qualitative content analysis has been carried out on a variety of pertinent secondary sources, including peer-reviewed academic articles, critical essays, and analytical commentaries that explore *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The goal of this analysis is to identify, interpret, and synthesize common themes, viewpoints, and discussions regarding the portrayal of the American Dream in these two significant literary works. By investigating how different scholars have approached the topic—from socio-economic, psychological, and cultural perspectives—this research aims to outline the broader landscape of existing academic dialogue. Additionally, this analytical framework offers a substantial basis for contextualizing the present study, allowing it to critique and align with the prevailing scholarly debates concerning these novels and their representation of the American Dream.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1.1 The American Dream in *Death of a Salesman*

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* offers a poignant critique of the American Dream, particularly the version that is built upon material success, popularity, and individual achievement. Willy Loman, the protagonist, embodies the ideal of hard work leading to success. A salesman by profession, Willy believes that personal connections and being well-liked are the keys to achieving the American Dream. He continually instills this belief in his sons, Biff and Happy, but as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Willy's dream is flawed and unattainable.

Willy's misguided faith in the American Dream is seen in his obsession with superficial success—success that is defined by appearances, social standing, and material wealth. This narrow view leads him to ignore the importance of self-worth, personal satisfaction, and integrity. His constant failure to achieve his goals, despite his relentless efforts, highlights the limitations of the American Dream. Willy's belief in the dream leads to his

downfall, as he becomes increasingly disillusioned with his inability to succeed. His tragic end, a suicide, represents the ultimate collapse of the ideal he had clung to.

Furthermore, Miller critiques the societal forces that contribute to Willy's failure. His inability to adapt to changing business practices and his misplaced reliance on being well-liked rather than on skills or professional development reflect the economic and social challenges faced by working-class Americans. Through Willy's tragic end, Miller demonstrates that the American Dream is often a myth, offering false hope and unattainable promises, particularly for those at the lower rungs of society.

#### 4.1.2 The American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*

In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald presents a more complex and romanticized version of the American Dream through the character of Jay Gatsby. Gatsby's dream is one of self-reinvention, wealth, and love. Born into poverty, he strives to become wealthy and achieve the status he believes will win him the love of Daisy Buchanan, a woman from a higher social class. Gatsby's obsession with Daisy and the idealized version of the American Dream that she represents drives him to accumulate vast wealth and throw extravagant parties in hopes of rekindling their past romance.

Unlike Willy Loman, who believes that hard work and being liked are the keys to success, Gatsby believes that wealth and material possessions will give him the social acceptance he desires. However, like Willy, Gatsby's pursuit of this dream leads to his ultimate downfall. His wealth, built through questionable means, fails to win Daisy's love, and his illusion of achieving the American Dream crumbles. In the end, Gatsby's tragic death symbolizes the failure of the American Dream to deliver the happiness and success it promises.

Through Gatsby's story, Fitzgerald critiques the notion that wealth alone can bring happiness and fulfillment. Gatsby's success is ultimately hollow, as his pursuit of an idealized version of the past prevents him from seeing the reality of his situation. Fitzgerald uses the character of Gatsby to show that the American Dream, as a pursuit of material wealth and social status, is a flawed and elusive ideal that leads to disillusionment and despair.

#### 4.2 Effects of the Socio-economic Environments of the Jazz Age and Post-World War II America

Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* and Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* both chase the American Dream, but their conceptions of it are deeply shaped by their respective socioeconomic environments—Gatsby by the opulence and illusion of the Jazz Age, and Willy by the

conformity and consumerism of post-World War II America.

##### 4.2.1 Jay Gatsby and the Jazz Age

Gatsby's version of the American Dream is rooted in the 1920s—a decade marked by rapid economic growth, speculation, and a loosening of traditional social norms. The Jazz Age promised upward mobility and self-invention, particularly through wealth. Gatsby embodies this: he reinvents himself from James Gatz, a poor Midwesterner, into a wealthy, mysterious figure. His dream is not just about material success, but also about reclaiming a romanticized past with Daisy. Gatsby's pursuit reflects a belief that money and status can buy happiness and acceptance in elite society. However, Fitzgerald critiques this dream by showing that Gatsby's wealth cannot truly erase his origins or grant him the social legitimacy he desires.

##### 4.2.2 Willy Loman and Post-War America

Willy's American Dream is shaped by the post-WWII economic boom, which emphasized stability, home ownership, and corporate success. Unlike Gatsby's romantic and extravagant vision, Willy's dream is grounded in middle-class ideals: being "well-liked," having a stable job, and providing for a family. Yet, the same economic environment that enabled widespread prosperity also created rigid standards of success and conformity. Willy clings to outdated notions of charisma over hard work and resists adapting to a changing economic landscape that values skills over personality. His failure to achieve success—and his inability to reassess what success means—leads to his psychological decline and eventual suicide.

Both characters are ultimately destroyed by their dreams, which are built on illusions. Gatsby's downfall reveals the emptiness of wealth without social authenticity or emotional fulfillment. Willy's tragedy lies in his misplaced faith in a dream that no longer matches reality. The socioeconomic forces of their times feed these illusions—Gatsby's world offers the fantasy of unlimited self-reinvention, while Willy's promotes a narrow definition of success that punishes failure harshly.

In sum, Gatsby and Willy are tragic figures shaped—and ultimately undone—by their historical moments. Their dreams, while emblematic of broader American ideals, are deeply flawed responses to the promises and pressures of their respective socioeconomic environments.

#### 4.3 Roles of social class, wealth, and personal relationships in achieving the American Dream

In both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*, social class and the allure of wealth mislead protagonists into

pursuing a version of the American Dream that is neither attainable nor fulfilling. Willy Loman, confined to the lower-middle class, treats material success and popularity as the ultimate markers of worth; yet the economic system he serves offers diminishing returns for aging salesmen, and his lack of inherited status leaves him permanently excluded from the elite networks he romanticizes. *Gatsby*, by contrast, amasses extraordinary wealth, but his nouveau riche status places him in the glittering margins rather than the inherited core of East Egg society. In each text, social stratification exposes the hollowness of the dream: Willy's small house and mounting debts mock his boasts of prosperity, while *Gatsby's* mansion, dazzling yet socially suspect, underscores how money alone cannot purchase the legitimacy required to enter "old-money" circles. Thus, both characters' failures are rooted less in insufficient effort than in a rigid class hierarchy that keeps success tantalizingly out of reach.

Personal relationships amplify that failure by revealing how deeply the dream is tied to interpersonal validation. Willy's vision of success is inseparable from his desire to be "well liked," a goal he projects onto his sons; when Biff rejects that metric, Willy's identity collapses. Similarly, *Gatsby's* accumulation of wealth has a single aim: to rekindle his past romance with Daisy. Yet Daisy's loyalty to her own class—and Tom's brutal defense of their privilege—turn *Gatsby's* romantic ideal into a fatal delusion. In both works, then, relationships expose the flaw in equating personal worth with external approval: Willy's family refuses to sustain his illusions, and Daisy cannot transcend the social calculus that originally led her to abandon *Gatsby*. The American Dream falters not merely because of economic limitations but because the emotional bonds that might redeem material striving prove contingent, fragile, and ultimately corrosive.

#### 4.4 The Corrupted Vision of the American Dream

The American Dream, initially envisioned as a promise of equality, opportunity, and advancement through hard work and determination, undergoes a significant transformation in the 20th century, particularly in the context of industrial capitalism and consumer culture. In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, this dream is illustrated not as an achievable ideal but as a corrupted, illusory pursuit that results in personal and moral decline. Both authors critically engage with the myth of success in American society, revealing how its distortion drives their protagonists—Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby—toward inevitable disillusionment and tragic conclusions.

In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman represents the average American worker who becomes

entrapped in a mythologized version of the American Dream. Willy does not aspire to success through personal growth, skill, or innovation. Instead, he is obsessed with being "well-liked" and believes popularity and surface-level charm will bring prosperity. This shallow understanding of success reflects a societal shift in post-war America, where image and reputation increasingly overshadow substance and integrity.

Willy's vision is further corrupted by his refusal to accept change—both in himself and in the world around him. He remains emotionally tied to the past, idolizing figures like his brother Ben, who "walked into the jungle and came out rich." This narrative glorifies wealth acquired quickly and mysteriously, underscoring how the American Dream has become less about honest labor and more about luck, inheritance, or manipulation.

Miller emphasizes the tragic cost of this illusion through Willy's relationships. He alienates his son, Biff, who eventually sees through the lie of his father's dream. Biff recognizes that he was never meant for the corporate world and that living according to Willy's vision would be a betrayal of his true self. This generational conflict highlights how the dream, when corrupted, not only destroys individuals but fractures families. Willy's suicide, framed as a final attempt to secure financial success through insurance money, encapsulates the ultimate irony: he values himself more dead than alive, a chilling commentary on how capitalism dehumanizes individuals and reduces their worth to monetary terms.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* similarly critiques the American Dream, though from the perspective of wealth and social status in the Jazz Age. Jay Gatsby, unlike Willy Loman, has achieved material success. Born James Gatz, he reinvents himself and amasses a fortune—albeit through dubious means—with the singular aim of winning back Daisy Buchanan, the woman he loves. *Gatsby's* dream is both personal and emblematic: it reflects a belief that the past can be reclaimed and that wealth can buy love, acceptance, and identity.

Yet *Gatsby's* dream is fundamentally unattainable because it is based on illusion. Daisy, the embodiment of *Gatsby's* desire and the American Dream itself, is shallow, self-serving, and ultimately loyal to her elite class. *Gatsby* fails to recognize that the social barriers that once separated them have not been erased by his wealth. In fact, his nouveau riche status, flamboyant displays of affluence, and mysterious background only alienate him further from the established aristocracy that Daisy and Tom Buchanan represent.

Fitzgerald uses the symbol of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock to represent *Gatsby's* dream—ever visible

but always out of reach. The novel ends with Gatsby's death and the hollow aftermath of his once-glittering life, suggesting that the pursuit of a corrupted dream leads not to fulfillment but to ruin. Fitzgerald portrays the 1920s as an era of decadence and spiritual emptiness, where the original ideals of the American Dream—freedom, self-determination, and moral integrity—have been supplanted by materialism, privilege, and moral decay.

#### 4.5 Comparative Analysis: The Myth and Reality of the American Dream

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* present powerful critiques of the American Dream, though they do so in different ways. While Willy Loman's failure is rooted in his inability to adapt to the realities of the business world, Gatsby's failure is tied to his obsession with a romanticized past and the belief that wealth can buy happiness (Pumphrey 23). Despite their different approaches, both characters embody the dangers of chasing an idealized version of success without acknowledging the complexities and limitations of the real world.

One key difference between the two works is the type of dream each protagonist pursues. Willy Loman's dream is focused on professional success and social acceptance, while Jay Gatsby's dream revolves around wealth and love. However, both characters share a belief in the transformative power of material success and the myth of social mobility. Both works ultimately reveal the harsh reality that the American Dream is not as attainable or rewarding as it may appear. In both texts, the protagonists' efforts to achieve the dream result in personal failure, disillusionment, and death.

Furthermore, both Miller and Fitzgerald critique the American Dream as being inherently flawed due to its reliance on superficial measures of success, such as wealth, popularity, and social standing. They suggest that the pursuit of these goals often leads to the neglect of deeper, more meaningful values, such as personal integrity, self-worth, and genuine human connection.

## V. CONCLUSION

The American Dream presented in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* is a failure of returning from the myth in which their offer is based. Both Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby are victims of pursuing a warped vision of success that selfishly prizes money and high social position, rather than true personal satisfaction. Through the characters, Arthur Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald make strong attacks on the American Dream, uncover their fundamental paradoxes and limitations.

In both works, the quest of the American Dream is deadly. While the value of the American Dream is deemed huge by these works, the people who are victims of their own society which are a result of their limitation of social, economic, and personal without return in surveying their ability in gaining the American Dream. In dissecting the myth of the American Dream, *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* act as warnings about the perils of adopting a goal that is rooted in falsity instead of truth.

Both *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* reveal the American Dream as a "participated fantasy" that sustains societal order but eventually leads to disillusionment. Gatsby's parties and Willy's visions of majesty are both performances meant to validate their pursuit of success, yet neither achieves genuine happiness or fulfillment. The tragedies of these characters emphasize the troubles of conflating material wealth with particular worth and the impossibility of retrieving an idealized history.

Ultimately, these works function not only as critiques of the American Dream but also as cautionary tales regarding the personal toll of chasing it. As illustrated in Miller's play, the dream's disintegration can be as ordinary as it is tragic—Willy meets his end not as a hero but as an obscure individual, much like Gatsby's death goes unnoticed by the very society he aimed to impress. While the concept of the American Dream persists, these narratives highlight its frequently ignored truths: disparity, ethical compromise, and the vulnerability of human ambition.

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