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Dreams Deferred: A Critique of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*

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Abstract

This paper offers a comparative Marxist analysis of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman (1949) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925), focusing on the psychological and social toll of pursuing the American Dream. It highlights how both authors expose the commodification of identity and relationships under capitalist ideology, despite the differences in historical context and genre. Willy Loman's downfall illustrates the alienation of the working class in a post-war, productivity-driven society, while Jay Gatsby's tragedy reveals the rigid class barriers and illusion of social mobility in the Jazz Age. By examining symbolic elements such as the jungle and the green light, this study demonstrates how both works critique the ideal of meritocracy and reveal the emotional and existential disillusionment beneath material success. The analysis contributes to understanding how literary representations of economic failure challenge the dominant capitalist narrative and portray the American Dream as a powerful yet ultimately contradictory cultural ideal, which is capable of both motivating ambition and perpetuating social inequality.

Keywords: American Dream, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Great Gatsby*, Alienation and Identity, Class and Capitalism in Literature

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1. Introduction

The American Dream, a concept deeply instilled in the ethos of American society, has long served both as a source of aspiration and controversy. Promising boundless opportunities, upward mobility, and personal fulfilment through hard work, this ideal has captivated generations for ages. Nevertheless, as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) demonstrate, the pursuit of this dream often reveals its darker dimensions—disillusionment, societal alienation, and personal ruin. When examined through a Marxist lens, the American Dream emerges as an ideological construct that reinforces capitalism's exploitative nature by promoting the illusion of meritocracy while perpetuating systemic inequalities. Both *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* critique this dynamic, revealing how their protagonists are trapped within a socio-economic framework that commodifies human relationships and reduces individual worth to material gain.

Arthur Miller's Willy Loman embodies the plight of the common man who is seduced by the dream's guarantee of economic security and societal respect. Yet, as the story unfolds, Willy's obsessive belief in salesmanship as a path to success and his inability to adapt to a changing economic landscape lead to his downfall. Similarly, Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* exemplifies the self-made man who achieves material wealth, but is unable to gain the social acceptance or personal fulfilment he desires. Gatsby's tragic quest to reclaim a romanticized past highlights the unattainable nature of the dream he pursues eagerly.

Through an exploration of these two iconic characters, this paper argues that Miller and Fitzgerald use the stories of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby to critique not only the personal consequences of chasing the American Dream but also its societal implications such as inequality of money and social stratum. These works expose the moral and psychological costs of a culture rooted in materialism and competitive individualism, offering a timeless reflection on the human cost of ambition. In analysing their journeys, this study sheds light on the enduring tensions between idealism and reality, success and integrity, and aspiration and disillusionment—issues that remain largely relevant in contemporary discourse.

While *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* differ in form and were written in distinct historical contexts—the Jazz Age of the 1920s and the post-World War II era of the late 1940s, respectively—both works serve as pivotal critiques of the American Dream. Their comparison offers a comprehensive exploration of how this ideal evolves across time; yet retains its inherent contradictions and flaws. Fitzgerald's novel captures the decadence and disillusionment of the Roaring Twenties, a period marked by economic excess and social lamination, while Miller's play reflects the anxieties and alienation of the post-Depression Era, where capitalism becomes increasingly ruthless. Despite their differences in genre, both works employ powerful symbolism, compelling characters, and narrative depth to expose the human cost of materialism and societal pressures.

By analysing Jay Gatsby and Willy Loman, two tragic figures who embody the pursuit and ultimate failure of the American Dream, this study bridges the temporal and formal gap between the works to reveal a broader cultural commentary. It demonstrates that the critique of capitalism, class disparity, and individual alienation transcends genre and

historical moment, underscoring the enduring relevance of these themes in understanding the American society.

2. Discussion

2.1. The Sale of a Dream: Willy Loman's Capitalist Conundrum

Arthur Miller's well-known play *Death of a Salesman* depicts the situation of America in the post-war period which coincides with the Great Depression. The social play uses the protagonist, Willy Loman—a traveling salesman in his sixties—and his family, including his wife Linda and their two sons, Biff and Happy, to portray the hardships they face, particularly Willy, due to the economic challenges posed by transforming capitalist society. Willy's personal depression, his constant flashbacks, fragmented state of mind, inconsistencies in his speech, loosened ties with his elder son and destroyed self-confidence are all in close relation to the depression that the society faces, to the changes in the market and in the salesmanship profession and to the priorities of people. As the American economy became "consumption-oriented rather than production-oriented, and society was turning more and more materialistic" (Benziman, 2005, p. 20), the socioeconomic shifts affected many families and individuals who were in pursuit of the American dream. As an outcome of the Great Depression between the years of 1923-1933 caused by the Wall Street crash in 1929, farmers and the black community were forced to leave the countryside and to turn to city life, which started the formations of the suburbs (Ansarey, 2013, p. 152). This unplanned urbanization led to the rise of all-concrete buildings and to the lack of green areas, which creates disappointment, agony and frustration in those who originated from rural life and felt more belonged there, but hoped to realize their American dreams in the city centers.

The term 'American Dream' was defined in 1931 by historian James T. Adams, who is believed to have initiated the term and gave place to it in his book entitled *The Epic of America* as a "better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank" (Adams quoted in Benziman, 2005, p. 22). According to Harold Crulman, as he put forward in 1958, the original American Dream creates the image of a "land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all" (p. 23) in people's minds. Later, some other definitions focused on brotherhood, unity, success, opportunities and wealth, so the definition has undergone slight variances. Despite this, the widely believed and still valid in the 21st century definition of the American Dream as Adams also implied in the first place is that it is "a vast country with ample opportunities, provides every citizen irrespective of cast, creed or religion with a chance to become rich through hard work and diligence" (Hadiuzzaman & Kabir, 2018, p. 72) because "American democracy legitimates achievement and naturalizes the pursuit of success, educational attainment, and the acquisition of wealth and resources" (Jordan, 2005, p. 47).

Willy is one of those who focuses mainly on the opportunities America provides ignoring the importance of education, dedication and hard work. He cannot be labelled as a lazy man since he worked for the same company for over a quarter of century, but was unable to keep up with the changing demands of the sector. He holds an unrealistically high opinion of himself and lives in a world of fantasies clinging to past when being a salesman meant to have a satisfactory salary, a respectable position and being rich was possible with acquiring a charisma. He states early in the play: "Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for

instance. 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, 1949/1998, p. 21). He is not able to comprehend that these are the temporary charms life presents and he obsessively believes salesmanship is the only profession that could provide him. Just as the past and present overlap in his mind through memory and hallucinations, he mixes the roles and duties that the society and family are responsible for. He is in constant need to prove himself to his family particularly to Biff, so he tries to show that the old glamorous days are still prevailing, which stems from his "delusory mode of thinking" (Benziman, 2005, p. 25) and from a play of his mind to him. This condition of Willy is not only a consequence of the misguided American dream but also his demand from the market and from his profession that is "some real return physically" as Miller himself acknowledges (Miller quoted in Otten, 1999, p. 288). He is looking for "self-dignity and with it something more, […] to recover the lost love of Biff and preserve the family" (p. 288). He holds the opinion that material wealth and success are means to declare his love to them. When this is the case, his point of view towards his job gains a transitionary feature as he loads too much meaning and significance to it and uses it to reach reconciliation with the family members.

In a symposium on the play, Miller expresses: "I think Willy Loman […] is seeking for a kind of ecstasy in life, which the machine-civilization deprives people of. He is looking for his selfhood, for his immortal soul, so to speak" (Miller, Vidal, Watts, Beauford, Dworkin, Thompson & Gelb, 1958, p. 66). While trying to survive in the newly constructed competitive market and a dehumanizing society, he also struggles for compensating what he has lost in his life on personal level. He implicitly and instinctively blames himself for Biff's wrong decisions and failures in life as after witnessing his adultery in a hotel, Biff puts up walls between him and his father and leaves home not continuing his university education. On that issue, it is Willy's misdirecting his son again saying that it is being well-liked that matters and opens doors at work rather than being well-educated like Bernard, who has become a successful lawyer, but is only liked, not well-liked. As a result, Biff ends up stealing items from every decent job he has, and he loses them one by one leaving himself with a lack of regular income.

Willy's disorientation is linked to his feeling of inefficiency as a father figure, which is "coupled with his misguided effort to measure his self-worth by the expression of love he thinks he can purchase in his family" (Centola, 1993, p. 32). He desires to be counted both in business and family, but the contradiction between his words and actions causes him to be underestimated and to vanish from the market through a kind of natural selection. Similarly, he tries to fill the gap in his life after his father leaves his family and says to his brother Ben: "…I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel—kind of temporary about myself" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 36). He seeks a filler to feel more completed and strives to compensate for the emptiness inherited by his father. Every time he focuses on his job, he is betrayed by the rejection of his offer to work in the office without travelling. Ultimately, his sense of betrayal culminates when he is dismissed by someone young enough to be his son, with the justification that, as a physically aging and mentally outdated man, he no longer meets the demands of the job.

From a Marxist perspective, such struggles of Willy Loman following the discharge from his job epitomize the alienation of the working class under a capitalist system. Marx

identifies alienation as the worker's estrangement from their labor, a consequence of being reduced to a mere cog in the machinery of production (Marx, 1844/2007, pp. 86-90). Willy, once a believer in the dignity of labor, finds himself dehumanized and discarded when his physical and mental capacities can no longer meet the demands of a profit-driven society. The system commodifies his existence, as seen when his decades of loyalty to his company are dismissed with indifference, reducing him to economic surplus. For Marx, "the crux of capitalism lies in the specific type of relationship whereby one class (bourgeoisie) is able to extract surplus value from the labor of another class (the proletariat)" (Tucker-Abramson, 2012, p. 293). In accordance with that, Willy's tragic insistence on salesmanship as the only viable path reflects his internalization of such capitalist ideology, which equates personal worth with productivity and financial success. Marx's critique of capitalism as inherently exploitative is mirrored in Willy's fate: A man whose value is measured solely by his utility in the market, which presents "a subtle picture of the birth of a new kind of American person, one for whom everything is at stake at every moment and nothing of true value is for sale" (Siegel, 2012, p. 30).

Willy's deeply held values—rooted in emotion, memory, and personal dignity—stand in stark contrast to the impersonal, results-driven culture of his professional world, leaving his personal struggles unnoticed and unacknowledged. "Society responds to him with an indifference that can only seem cruel in juxtaposition to the hopes he carries with him even to the point of death" (Jacobson, 1975, p. 249). The materialistic attitude of the American society paves way to the emergence of a rather selfish, target-oriented and insensitive community. In response to that as an ultimate act, he chooses death "not simply as an escape from shame but as a last attempt to re-establish his own self-confidence and his family's integrity" (p. 255). Ironically, although the audience is never informed of the specific product Willy sells, it becomes evident in this scene that he has, in effect, been selling himself. His decision to sacrifice his life in the hope of providing financial security for his family, particularly for Biff, highlights the extent to which capitalism commodifies human existence.

As "the essence of capitalism, of a transactional society, is its chameleonlike nature" (Siegel, 2012, p. 29), for the sake of providing satisfaction and fulfillment to his customers, it is highly possible that Willy sells multiple and various products to fit in, which are referred as "an unidentified product" (Otten, 1999, p. 287) or an "empty signifier" (Barker, 1995, p. 88) at times. This non-identification of the product whose exact value is unknown and negotiable hints Marx's "estrangement of laborer who lacks a direct relationship to the product he toils to sell" (Gleitman, 2015, p. 8). He carries everything in *The Inside of His Head*—the initially intended title of the play by Miller – including his sense of alienation, desperation, failures, expectations, and dreams in his salesman's bag along with the tangible products; thus, he is on sale, as well. He gives away a part of himself every time he makes a deal in order to keep the real humanistic interaction with people and to be accepted by them apart from conducting his business. It is what he does to fix his relationship with Biff when he offers himself to be consumed completely. In a way, he becomes a victim of his own dream and of the capitalist society by being in constant battle with the industrialized world that "allows a man to succeed only to the extent that he give up what makes him most himself: His freedom, his personality […] his belief that there is something worthwhile about being well-liked, his love for his son which finally he feels he can prove only at the cost of his life" (Lawrence, 1964, p. 548). However, what Willy does not take into account is that Biff, who is still unsure regarding

what to do with his future, may not want such money costing his father's life. He may not even receive it since Willy's is not a natural death—it is a suicide. Willy's reasoning and way of thinking are majorly materialistic in that sense making his death a capitalistic end. He dies believing in the power of money strictly "crushed by the American juggernaut" (Cardullo, 2007, p. 587).

No matter how misinterpreted and mistakenly formulated the idea of the American dream turning it into a juggernaut, Willy is a firm believer of the term to the core; he is a true romantic, who feeds his soul with nature and open skies. Feeling claustrophobic among the recently rising buildings in his surroundings, Willy feels trapped and deprived of the relaxing atmosphere of nature which he thinks is his right to maintain. During a conversation with Linda, Willy, increasingly frustrated, exclaims, "Why don't you open a window in here, for God's sake!", to which Linda patiently replies, "They're all open, dear" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 6). Upon this, Willy complains as such: "The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks" (p. 6). He feels that his humanly right to breathe fresh air has been taken away from his hands and has difficulty in accepting the situation. He goes on commenting on the scene:

> The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighbourhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? […] They should've arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighbourhood [Lost] (p. 6).

Even from the very beginning, indeed, the reader or the audience gets the clue that it is not only the neighbourhood that has been massacred, but it is also the common man's soul. The reason to live has been invaded by the rapid changes taking place in everyday life. In Willy's case, the symptoms seem to be more severe than the majority because seeing the collapse of his hopes and the meaning he attached to his American Dream make him start to prepare his own end by getting lost in this chaotic environment. Stephen A. Lawrence explains the duality that puts Willy in tragedy as such:

> The apartment buildings closing in on Willy are not closing in only on his house or his family. They represent the crushing of freedom, of individuality, of personality, and most of all, of love. Willy's problem is that he is human enough to think that the same things that matter in the family-especially his love for his son-matter everywhere including the world of social success (Lawrence, 1964, p. 548).

He is not a person who is open to changes. Still, the fact that he is not a person of principles leads him to experience the situation and its effects more deeply than anyone else in the play showing that he is a man of dreams, but not realistic ones especially when his stubborn character is added to the case. Though Biff believes his father "had the wrong dreams" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 111), Charley drops the charges made on him by summarizing his condition: "A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory" (p. 111). This hints that on this land, everyone somehow chases the American Dream, but Willy's problem is that he is not contented with the success itself and does not want it for the sake of having success itself, he wishes economic freedom, a respected position and reconciled relationships with his son in a collective and compiled way like a package offering

all these together. For this reason, as being someone who inherited the salesmanship profession from his ancestors trying to stick to the old traditions, Willy Loman can be identified as a "bourgeois romantic, an odd synthesis of Joe and Chris Keller, or of Everyman and Faust" (Jacobson, 1975, p. 247). He touches the audience with his "mediocrity and failure but with the frustrated energies of his outreach beyond mediocrity and failure toward a relationship to society constantly denied him" (p. 247). The emotional and ideological rupture between father and son reaches its most revealing moment in the restaurant scene, when Biff pleads with his father: "Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it anymore" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 105). In this emotionally charged confession, Biff relinquishes the illusions of success his father clings to, hoping Willy might finally accept the truth. The repetition of "I'm nothing" is not an admission of defeat, but a breakthrough of self-knowledge—one that highlights how deeply Willy's distorted vision of the American Dream has harmed not only himself but his son. His inadequacy and lack of capacity to combine or adapt his own values to those of the society compose the main clash of the play through the false implementation of the American Dream. To Miller himself, "the less capable a man is of walking away from the central conflict of the play, the closer he approaches a tragic existence" (Miller, 1996, p. 118).

Additionally, the fact that Willy's brother Ben is depicted as a symbol of the traditional American Dream through his constant remark, "...when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. […] And by God I was rich" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 33), and that his appearances occur only as hallucinations, underscores the illusory nature of such success. The use of the word 'jungle' metaphorically evokes a ruthless, lawless environment where only the strongest survive, reflecting the brutal and predatory aspects of capitalist ideology. Ben's mythic journey thus becomes a critique of a system that glorifies wealth acquired through conquest rather than ethical labor, revealing the darker undercurrents of the American Dream. If one follows the dream with such aspirations, s/he is bound to get only temporary and unrealistic results just as Ben's appearance in the play, which is only for a few minutes every time he arrives proving its temporariness. Also, it is only in Willy's daydreams, not anyone else's showing its unreality and fantasy. In other words, Miller implies that the American Dream needs to be reconstructed in such a way that it should not drive people to mental distortion or to chase a vain dream. Rather, it should include a certain sense, logic, reality, hard work and good education presented through Charley-Bernard relationship as well as the sincerity, likeability and some humanistic values displayed through Willy-Biff relationship. Any intense inclination to either of the sides results in one's destruction demonstrated through Willy, who is sold on dreams and bankrupted by reality.

2. 2. Mr. Nobody in the Land of Opportunity: Gatsby's American Dream

Willy Loman's story in *Death of a Salesman* reveals the deep human cost of chasing an ideal that often feels just out of reach—a theme echoed in many portrayals of the American Dream in literature. F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby in his highly reputed novel *The Great Gatsby*, offers another poignant example of a man who, like Willy, becomes consumed by his pursuit of an unattainable dream. The two share quite similar characteristics and almost the same fate in the end with slight differences. Gatsby is a man who lives in a

mansion in the West-Egg and is famous for the flamboyant parties he holds for the upper-class society. The unclear details about Gatsby's origins, his family, and how he earns his fortune fuel rumors among the crowd, suggesting that he is involved in illegal underground activities. This implies that he is an outcome of the American Dream as someone who has not been born into aristocracy, but gets wealthy through the effortless way. However, "no matter how shadowy the origins of his riches can be, Gatsby has actively taken part in the construction and liveliness of the American dream of happiness and fulfilment of the period" (Dieng, 2016, p. 103). He is a decent example that fits into the widely accepted definition of the American Dream in regard to welcoming and embracing anyone on the land of freedom.

Unlike Willy, Gatsby does not have economic problems influencing his mental state, but he is obsessed with achieving something that is not material just as Willy's passion to regain the love of his son. By using his material wealth, he targets to get in touch with Daisy once again, whom he has been in love for years but lost contact with. Willy attempts to shape his son's future through ideals of success and financial security, while Gatsby seeks to win Daisy's affection by flaunting his wealth, lavish parties, and extravagant lifestyle. However, Daisy responds with only "insincere" and "artificial" attention (Yılmaz Kurt, 2007, p. 76), ultimately contributing to Gatsby's tragic downfall. As a symbol of old money and the aristocratic elite, Daisy represents the social class Gatsby yearns to join—a class marked not only by material wealth but also by inherited privilege and emotional detachment. Her allure lies not in genuine affection, but in what she represents: Status, refinement, and acceptance into a world forever closed to Gatsby, regardless of his success. Her character embodies the exclusivity and entitlement of inherited status, reinforcing the idea that true entry into the upper-class cannot be earned, only born into. Daisy's inability to reciprocate Gatsby's devotion and her eventual retreat into the comfort of her class highlight how entrenched social hierarchies resist the ideals of meritocracy. Her presence in Gatsby's dream underscores the American Dream's inherent contradiction: While it promises equality, it ultimately preserves the very boundaries it claims to dissolve. In this sense, Willy Loman's romanticism and emotional idealism find a parallel in Gatsby's devotion to Daisy, who becomes both his dream and his fatal flaw. Shama Rangwala notes: "The dreamer is on the one hand constructed as a figure of desire, a romantic and creative visionary who looks beyond convention; yet the American Dream is definitively conventional and sets the parameters for the cruel optimism that sustains hegemonic structures" (Rangwala, 2017, p. 100). Both Willy and Gatsby are victims of this cruel optimism, haunted by a past they idealize. In Gatsby's case, this is poignantly captured in Nick's observation: "He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then…" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 118).

No matter how Gatsby seems to have climbed the social ladder, he does not manage to get full admission to the upper-class community since he cannot erase the image of a "bootlegger" (p. 66) from their memories. As he has been approached as a threat by Tom—Daisy's husband, he verbalizes what most of the guests attending Gatsby's parties have in mind even though they keep exploiting the opportunities he provides for them. He views Gatsby as a "pale, well-dressed Negro" (p. 149) while he and the others belong to the "Nordic

race" (p. 16), which is obviously a superior status when compared to "a pale Negro" before their eyes. Despite Gatsby's wealth and public image, he remains excluded from the inner circles of old money. When Tom confronts him, he delivers a devastating blow: "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 138). This line reduces Gatsby to a social nonentity, dismissing his achievements and humanity by referencing his vague, lower-class background. The contempt embedded in "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" reveals the novel's brutal class dynamics where pedigree trumps merit and where origin defines worth. Despite all Gatsby has achieved, he is still treated as an outsider, someone who has trespassed into a world that will never truly accept him.

As an additional mark of his humiliation and exclusion, Gatsby is also vaguely associated with marginalized identities. He is described as "suggestively Jewish" (Meehan, 2014, p. 78), reinforcing the notion that he is never quite at home in the world of East Egg's inherited privilege. This aligns with Willy's outsider status, as well. Playwright David Mamet famously described *Death of a Salesman* as "the story of a few told by a Jew and cast in 'universal' terms." He continues: "Willy Loman is a Jew in a Jewish industry. But he is never identified as such. His story is never avowed as a Jewish story, and so a great contribution to Jewish American history is lost. It's lost to culture as a whole, and, more importantly, it's lost to the Jews, its rightful owners" (Mamet quoted in Cardullo, 2007, p. 583). Mamet supports his idea with Miller's approval of the Jewish identification (p. 583) and Cardullo shows the Lomans' Brooklyn Jewish diction as a plus to uphold the view (p. 584). Based on the perspectives above, one could argue that Willy and Gatsby are linked by another point in that the reason of their rejections by the transitionary societies of their times—the Great Depression and the Jazz Age periods—are not only because of their individual flaws or the need to recreate the American Dream, but also of being 'othered' by the society as minorities. As a result of this, their funerals share the same destiny by being left empty by the corrupted societies.

Gatsby's rise and fall leading to such tragic end, which occurs even before the novel is finished, can be examined through the Marxist critique of capitalist ideology and its emphasis on wealth accumulation as the ultimate marker of success. Although he achieved immense material wealth, Gatsby remains an outsider in the eyes of the established upper-class. His illegal ventures, while ethically questionable, display a structural flaw within capitalism: The unequal distribution of opportunities and resources. According to Marx, capitalism creates an illusion of meritocracy, promising upward mobility while preserving the entrenched power of the bourgeoisie (Marx, 1848/2002, pp. 219-222). Gatsby's inability to transcend his "bootlegger" label reveals this fallacy, as his wealth cannot erase the stigma of his humble origins. His pursuit of Daisy symbolizes his desire not only for love but also for full societal acceptance—an impossible goal in a system that privileges heritage over individual achievement. Gatsby's ceaseless attempts to achieve a reunion with Daisy places him symbolically "beyond the pleasure principle into the realm of *jouissance*, which functions as a surplus desire not unlike Marx's surplus value" (Meehan, 2014, p. 84). This insatiable desire is also encapsulated in the recurring image of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock, which for Gatsby represents both the promise of reunion and the unreachable

future. As Nick observes, "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 180). This sentence captures Gatsby's persistent hope and tragic idealism. The phrase "recedes before us" signals the ever-elusive nature of his dream—always visible, never reachable. The green light thus symbolizes not only Gatsby's longing for Daisy, but also the larger illusion of the American Dream, forever deferred by class barriers and economic myths. The light operates as a powerful symbol of false consciousness—Gatsby's belief in a better future sustained by the illusions of capitalism and romantic idealism, even as the reality remains out of reach. Through the character of Gatsby, Fitzgerald exposes how capitalism fosters alienation by commodifying relationships and reducing human value to monetary worth. Gatsby's tragedy lies in his belief that material success can buy happiness and legitimacy, a myth perpetuated by the very system that ultimately rejects him. Moreover, depending on Nick's character, his portrayal and admiration of Gatsby, Fitzgerald "was not entirely hostile toward capitalism, free markets, and the proverbial American dream […] whose fundamental orientation toward Marxism was that, at best, it could serve as a reminder of capitalist disillusionment" (Abu-Snoubar, Attiyat & Aldawkat, 2022, p. 191). This implies that though he may not be a devoted Marxist, Fitzgerald sensed that there was something going wrong with material capitalism and it was failing gradually as an outcome of opulent America, which is in rapid decline (p. 189).

3. Conclusion

Death of a Salesman and *The Great Gatsby* dwell on the idea of the American Dream and its devastating effects on its followers when it is overloaded with various values not related to succeed or to survive in the community. Both Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby serve as cautionary figures, embodying the traps of such an idealized pursuit of illusionary success. Associating the American dream with some personal expectations or hoping magical transformations in life without hard work result in failure as well as anguish indispensably.

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* serve as Marxist critiques of the American Dream, revealing its complicity in maintaining systemic inequality and alienation. Marx argued that capitalist societies sustain themselves by promoting ideologies that obscure class conflict and exploitation. The American Dream functions as such an ideology, promising success through hard work while masking the rigid class barriers that prevent true social mobility. Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby embody the tragic consequences of believing in this illusion. Willy's adherence to the outdated notion of salesmanship as a path to dignity leaves him disillusioned and alienated, while Gatsby's pursuit of wealth and social status exposes the hollowness of material success. Both characters' downfalls highlight capitalism's inherent contradictions: Its promise of equality and opportunity is undermined by its exploitation of the working class and preservation of class hierarchies. By reviewing the duality of the American Dream with its power to inspire and potential to destroy, Miller and Fitzgerald challenge the reader to recognize the destructive forces of a capitalist system that prioritizes profit over humanity and perpetuates the myth of limitless opportunity.

Therefore, the vision of the American Dream calls for a fundamental transformation, one that prioritizes values extending beyond mere personal gain. It must be reimagined to encompass principles such as social responsibility, moral awareness, generosity, fairness, and integrity. The novels in question criticize society for its cold-hearted materialism and overwhelming capitalist tendencies, portraying them as corrosive forces that undermine human connection and ethical conduct. However, they simultaneously acknowledge that material success remains an essential component of an individual's sense of security and fulfillment. This duality suggests that while financial stability is important, it must be pursued in balance with a broader commitment to ethical and social ideals to create a more humane, sensible and sustainable dream. Any kind of overemphasis on the material attainment results in one's experience of dehumanization. Likewise, too much commitment to emotions or humanitarian values entails disappointment blocking the way to success in such competitive environment. As Miller and Fitzgerald argue, living on the edges may lead not only to psychological but also to physical destruction of the self if balance is not managed; otherwise, no matter how 'Great' one's life seems outside, being a 'Lo(w)man' may be the utmost consequence.

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