

**From Pure Values to Corruption:
The Death of the American Dream**
A Study of the Process in American Literature

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Introduction

The American dream has always been an important national ethos of the United States. The American identity, unlike other national identities that are rooted in a shared history, religion or race, is primarily rooted in an idea. The American national identity is about the collective values of equal opportunity and the pursuit of happiness. The values of the American dream represent the mythology of the American experience. And what had made the notion of the American dream endure until now is the fact that it promotes an aspirational experience. Its resilience is also due to its values, traced in the discourse that preaches "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence of 1776. American success is meant to be available for everybody equally, and attainable through hard work and perseverance. Even though the philosophy of the American dream has always been present, the term was not coined until 1931 by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*. For him: "the American dream of a better, richer, happier life for all our citizens of every rank" was "the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world". He also emphasizes that: "the dream has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming it" (qtd. in Cullen 4). This American dream seems very ideal and beautiful. And Adams in his book emphasizes equal opportunity for all Americans. He sees that "it has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which have slowly been erected in older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which have developed for the benefit of classes". He also optimistically writes that "that dream has been realized more fully in actual life here than anywhere else" and it has been "a great epic and a great dream" (405). This means that the American dream supposedly embraces men, women, the old, the young, the rich, the poor, the black, the white and immigrants.. What I intend to study in this thesis is how the American dream does not provide equal opportunities for success for everybody.

While the American dream has always emphasized it is meant for all, Americans that are not white, men or already rich have less opportunities for being part of the dream. It seems that the dream has become exclusive to white rich American men. And to demonstrate this claim in my thesis, I have chosen three primary texts: *The Great Gatsby*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Invisible Man*. I will use these three texts to demonstrate how the poorer lower classes, women, African Americans and immigrants have little opportunity to achieve the American dream. The power and domination of the rich, of the white and of the American male over the

American dream excludes these groups from following their American dream. In this introduction I will at first study the concept of the American dream itself; its meaning, its different versions from Puritan to modern times and the obstacles it faces. Then in the first chapter I will start with *The Great Gatsby* and study the struggles for upward mobility of the lower classes, immigrants, minorities and women, even in the era of the so called "new woman".

In the second chapter I will explore Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* and how Willy Loman as a lower middle class salesman cannot compete with the new economic realities of mass production and corporations that overwhelm salaryman who cannot go forward, but only backwards in the dream. I will also explore how women are only present as supporters for men's dreams and not their own. And because *Death of a Salesman* is a white play, with no characters from other racial backgrounds I will also focus on how important the American dream is for the American white male and how the American white male finds it hard to keep up with a dream that has become limited to one version of success, which is making money. The white American male has also become threatened by the social changes that create more competitors for the American dream like women, freed slaves and immigrants. All these changes have put pressure on the American male to perform and prove his manly abilities for success.

In the third chapter, I will study Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* which is narrated by an African American protagonist. I will discuss the complex relationship African Americans have with the American dream and American identity in this novel. African Americans also have two different classes that compete and struggle for upward mobility in a different way. There is the peasant African American class that is the poorest and less likely to succeed. They already find difficulty in competing with the educated African American class, which creates tensions between the two. The educated African Americans, on the other hand, strive to attain the same level of success of white classes socially and economically, which turns out to be difficult. Women are also, black or white, deprived from having any real possibilities for professional or other aspirations. Even in the fifties they stay under the control of the white patriarchal society. The reason I have chosen these three texts, is the numerous stories of failed American dreams in them. All of them show that being poor, being from a lower class, being non- white or a being woman creates additional obstacles in the path to the American dream. This means that there will be feminist, class based, and race oriented readings of the texts and an attempt to diverge from the canonical perceptions of the white and rich men in the texts.

These failures of the American dream have triggered critics to discuss its versions and dysfunctions in a different way. While a few celebrated and still believed in the optimism of the dream the way Adams did, others attacked its divergence into purely materialistic aims. While Adams claimed that : "it is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable" (404) Donna Packer-Kinlaw, disagrees and declares that a change has happened in the American dream, and that its values are not the same anymore: "For eighteenth century Americans, success was inextricably tied to religion and morality; thus, success was measured, not only by the accumulation of material wealth, but also by one's moral code, one's standing in the community, and the contributions that an individual made to the community". This shows that the dream has become morally corrupt and centred around money. Packer-Kinlaw continues to trace when and how the values of the dream started to shift : "By the nineteenth century, though religion and morality were still important, material success and work itself became the most important aspect of the American dream . . . They wanted money in the bank"(2). The dream of material wealth only grew with time and by "mid twentieth century, some began to question whether or not it was even possible to attain the American dream" (2). The dysfunctionality of the American dream and the failure of the modern self-made man are also expressed by Jim Cullen's article "Problems and Promises of the Self-Made Myth": "The lack of focus on the self-made man in recent times is remarkable when one considers how intensely, and how long, it has functioned as a central trope of the American experience" (11). This confirms how much the idea of the dream itself is struggling and struggled already since the turn of the twentieth century. Unlike in the past, the modern American dream is failing to survive. Critics have also tackled the relationship between the American dream and certain groups in society, such as women, African Americans, immigrants and the poor.

While Adams claims that all Americans are " recognized by others for they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth and position" (404), Lois Tyson for example, in her book *Psychological Politics of the American Dream* depicts the ways women use to attain upward mobility: "women are represented as marriage commodities who sell themselves to the highest bidder in their attempt to move up the American dream's socioeconomic ladder" (17). And this happens because they are valued only as commodities by men, and because other paths towards mobility have become difficult. The lower classes also struggle to thrive and get fair opportunities because of the capitalist American society that has become too

powerful, controlling and racist. Jim Cullen in his book *The American Dream* explains this problem of: "the Darwinian theory of "the survival of the fittest" to human affairs", which was a "popularized a notion of freedom as the right of the individual entrepreneur, like John D. Rockefeller, to make as much money as he could without interference that would drag down the progress of the human race as a whole". For him "freedom meant freedom to dominate and freedom from regulation. Equality, by contrast, was a base levelling instinct that restricted freedom by insisting that everyone, even those who were evidently superior, had to play by the same rules, respect the same limits". And what made getting equal opportunities more difficult was the fact that "Any assertion that people should be more equal than they theoretically already were smacked of socialism, and socialism, like other "foreign" ideas, was thoroughly beyond the pale. Such logic became the cornerstone of Republican ideology in the closing decades of the nineteenth century" (107).

Meanwhile, immigrants and African Americans faced even bigger hurdles. Not only were they disadvantaged because of racial issues, but also because of the inequality already existing between the classes in America. In their article "The State of the American Dream: Race and Ethnic Socioeconomic Inequality in the United States, 1970-90", Charles Hirschman and C. Matthew Snipp, discuss immigrant and African American opportunities in the United States: "Despite the massive immigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the image of American society as an extension of English society persisted throughout the first six decades of the twentieth century" and because of that "the patterns in the first half of the century" was expecting "the exchange of cultural conformity for a chance at upward mobility", which made "the American Dream-seem obsolete" (90). This means that the American dream started to create a racial definition and norm for the dream, which meant excluding races that did not conform to white Anglo-Saxon norms. This already undermines the idea that the dream is for all. On the contrary, the American dream, mainly at the turn on the century, has excluded immigrants on racial grounds, and demanded cultural assimilation in exchange for opportunity. Hirschman and Snipp also confirm that "there remain wide socioeconomic gaps between minority populations and the majority"(90) and that African Americans, even though have undergone cultural assimilation, "had not experienced large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of the host society, that is, structural assimilation" (92). Actually African Americans have been the most prevented from attaining the American dream, a truth that Malcom X expresses very clearly when he says: "I am speaking as the victim of this American system. . . . I don't see any American Dream; I see an

American Nightmare" (qtd. in Campbell 100). All these groups from women to immigrants, the poor and racial minorities will be studied in the three coming chapters. But for us to understand how the American dream has changed and arrived at these struggles, we must go back and dig into the beginnings of its history. It is important to understand how the philosophy started, developed and endured, and how it shaped the American national psyche in various ways through different stages of American history.

The first glimpse we get of a philosophy that embraces values of self-reliance and success can be traced back to the first Puritan pilgrims who arrived on the North American continent from the European continent fleeing religious persecution. Puritans actually came up with the spirit of American optimism and exceptionalism based on religious values. In 1630, while still on the ship towards America, John Winthrop gave the sermon entitled "A Model for Christian Charity", preparing his fellow pilgrims for a new life and expectations in the colonies. He imagined that his community would live with love and solidarity. He emphasized the importance of creating a community "knit together by the bond of love", and the importance of kindness from the rich towards the poor. He tells his followers: "that every man might have need of others, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection". He also reminds them that: "From hence it appears plainly that no man is made more honorable than another or more wealthy out of any particular and singular respect to himself, but for the glory of his Creator and the common good of the creature". Winthrop sees love and solidarity as a tool to keep people from different socioeconomic backgrounds united in one society. He also reminds them that all people are equal and nobody is more honourable than the other. This sermon shows us that the American dream started as a philosophy based on biblical and religious values and compassion instead of material principles. Winthrop reminds his followers that the world and God will be watching them like "a city upon a hill" (3). Therefore it is important to succeed, set a good example and please God. This city upon a hill become New England where the pilgrims lived and applied Winthrop's teachings. Because the pilgrims started their lives in the colonies with the influence of Winthrop's religious sermon about a holy city, America becomes in the eyes of its new residents and its folklore God's country. And because it was believed to be God's county, it become an exceptional place. This created a sense of American exceptionalism in the pilgrims who felt that their land was an exceptional place also in the eyes of God. Everett Carter in his book *The American Idea* emphasizes this sentiment: "Filled with the sense of

mission, these migrants felt themselves a chosen people building a new Jerusalem in the wilderness" (12).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this Puritan confidence, optimism and exceptionalism continued to exist, but time has drained these ideals from their theological justifications. And while Puritanism denied man's possibilities in the physical world, Calvinism came to make worldly success one form of self-confidence in God's salvation. Calvinist philosophy changed the structure of American Puritanism into a religion that could express vocation to God by occupation or trade in addition to the church. This change in American Puritanism was the first step that gradually makes the American dream a dream about wealth and material goods. Calvinist Protestants actually saw poverty as a sin and a burden on society. They believed that hard work and the acquisition of wealth was a virtue and that God rewarded the dedicated, and cursed the idle with impoverishment. Hard work was the essence, because it saved people from the temptation of Satan. Puritan Clergyman Cotton Mather believed, in the words of Louis B. Wright: "The very fact that the poor had not prospered was indicative of their failure to live in accordance with Christian injunctions (qtd. in Lawson xvii). This Calvinist influence has transformed the American dream from a dream totally embedded in puritan religious values into a dream that blends Puritan values with materialistic gain, a concept Max Weber criticized very much. He called it "The Protestant Ethic". In his book *The Protestant Ethic*, he attacks this philosophy:

It is thought of so purely as an end in itself, that from the point of view of the happiness of, or utility to, the single individual, it appears entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational. Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs. This reversal of what we should call the natural relationship, so irrational from a naive point of view, is evidently as definitely a leading principle of capitalism as it is foreign to all peoples not under capitalistic influence. At the same time it expresses a type of feeling which is closely connected with certain religious ideas. If we thus ask, why should "money be made out of men," Benjamin Franklin himself, although he was a colorless deist, answers in his autobiography with a quotation from the Bible, which his strict Calvinistic father drummed into him again and again in his youth: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings." (18)

In his criticism, Weber clearly relates the importance of the acquisition of wealth to Americanism. He classifies it as an American puritan principle that is "foreign" to people "not under capitalistic influence". He defines the acquisition of wealth as an expression of virtue in the American psyche. He continues demonstrating the centrality of this philosophy to the American culture when he mentions Benjamin Franklin, a symbol of the American dream. He explains that even Franklin, who is a Deist and who writes about the self-made man in his

Autobiography uses references from the Calvinist narrative, a thing that proves the importance of this philosophy to the American psyche.

The American dream changed its spirit again with the American Revolution and American independence. The revolution led Americans to think more about their identity and what it meant to be an American. The whole country started embracing a new identity. One can consider the first and clearest verbalization of the philosophy of the American dream, written long before the term was coined, is Thomas Jefferson's statement from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." This statement presents a romantic understanding of human nature and the American dream. It shows trust in human nature and its goodness. This statement is also anti-Calvinistic and has no roots in any puritan or Christian discourse, which makes it the first secular definition of the American dream. The declaration of independence has actually secularized the American dream from its previous Puritan and Calvinist influences, which was an important turning point. Also in this period comes another major work that is considered the foundation of the American dream values, and that is the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin. In his book, Franklin tells his own success story. It is a story of a young man who succeeds in making something of his life despite all the odds. In his autobiography, Franklin promotes the idea that his own idealism and success can be achieved by any American regardless of his background. His narrative celebrates individualism and self-reliance. This idea of the rise from poverty to success influenced American national literature, and became the blueprint for the successful American. It was something to follow and imitate. Franklin presents his success as a model for all Americans: "Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world. . . . the conducting means I made use of. . . . they may find some of them suitable to their own situations and therefore fit to be imitated" (5).

In his book, Franklin also parallels his path to success with America's new status as a nation. Franklin calls himself "The American" many times in his autobiography in an attempt to nationalize his experience, and to solidify the fact that his story is as a suitable example for young Americans. He includes the letters of Abel James and Benjamin Vaughan. Vaughan, who thought Franklin's story sets a good example for others in a rising nation, wrote to Franklin saying: "All that has happened to you is also connected with the detail of the manners and situations of a rising people" (63). James also thought that Franklin's story would

be useful for educating the new generation. He writes that Franklin's work: "would be useful and entertaining not only to a few, but to millions. The influence writings under that class have on the minds of youth is very great, and has nowhere appeared to me so plain, as in our public friend's journals" (62). These statements show how much Franklin's success story of the self-made man is related to the spirit of the new nation and the new American identity. The simple language of the book also contributed to its success because it made the content and message behind it accessible to all classes of people. In addition, Franklin describes himself as a common man, a term that makes his story closer to the common American. Franklin also gives real instructions in his work when he lists the virtues needed for success, which makes the book a suitable and a real template to follow. He lists thirteen virtues, among them temperance, silence, industry and humility. Then Franklin also adds a progress chart to track how well he practiced each virtue of them during the whole week. He actually describes this process in a very practical way: "I cross'd these columns with thirteen red lines, marking the beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues, on which line, and in its proper column, I might mark, by a little black spot every fault I found upon examination to have been committed respecting that virtue that day" (73). This method of listing goals and chartering progress demonstrates that Franklin's purpose in writing his book is to use it as a model for creating a path for success in the emerging American culture and society. Franklin when mentioning the virtue of humility, defines it by saying: "Imitate Jesus or Socrates". About this definition, Stephen Carl Arch comments: "In his remarks on each of the thirteen virtues, Franklin commented about humility: "Imitate Jesus or Socrates". The injunction to imitate is, to my mind at the heart of Franklin's method throughout the *Autobiography*. . . . his posterity may find some of the means of his success suitable to their own situations". He also confirms that "imitation is central to the way which Franklin imagines both life and art" (164). Carla Mulford and Nian-Sheng also discuss Franklin's relationship in shaping the values of the American dream. They explain that "Franklin represented the possibility of personal success to aspiring common people who were passionate about individual freedom and personal success". They add that "Franklin was the personification of American national character in a world of change, where an individual's hard work and self-determination for upward mobility were as important as all citizens collective striving for independence and self-government" (150-151).

This means that Benjamin Franklin is the personification of the American national character, and his popularity is rooted in his success story that inspires every young American. Franklin

became the one who created and constructed the ideology of the American dream in the American national psyche. He also developed the sense of American optimism and belief in one's success, a concept that thrived in a new republic looking for a bright future. Franklin's ideas thrived in the culture of early nineteenth century America, where many young Americans enjoyed reading his book. As an important part of the American literary canon, Franklin's *Autobiography* is a great example of how literary expression can maintain the values of the American dream in a new nation.

And while Franklin promotes imitation as means of success in life and art, Ralph Waldo Emerson regards imitation as suicide. Unlike Franklin, Emerson explores the individual experience as the means for a real American dream. Emerson also rejected European literary aesthetics because he believed that people developed from their individual experiences and not from longstanding traditions. In his essay "Self-Reliance", Emerson demonstrates what constitutes in his opinion the American dream. Emerson represents Transcendentalist philosophy. He believed that the self-reliant American is an American who seeks to manifest his own personality through unique and different experiences. With his Transcendentalist philosophy, he creates a romantic version of the American dream that should in his opinion embrace individual uniqueness. In "Self-Reliance", he writes: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better or worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till" (176). In this passage, Emerson is encouraging people to embrace their own individual uniqueness and genius that reside within the soul. He encourages them also to enjoy their own journey of self-realization because no one else can do it for them. An individual must follow his own path, and not an imitated path that will oppress them and deprive them of true freedom. Emerson insists that trusting one's own experience is crucial to fulfil one's dreams.

David Lyttle explains Emerson's philosophy of the individual attaining his own genius in his article "Emerson's Transcendental Individualism": "The individual's true uniqueness is what Emerson called true "genius" and his calling in life is to realize his genius. . . genius does not originate in biology or in the environment. It is, for Emerson given at birth; it is spiritual or transcendental". He also discusses that: "since genius is innate, and since each individual, in his genius, is different from any other individual, only the individual can discover what his genius is; society cannot inform him" (90). Emerson actually created a new philosophy for the

American dream; he created a spirit James Truslow Adams hails and regards important to American identity: "In no other author can we get so close to the whole of the American spirit as in Emerson. In him we sense. . . . the high value placed on the individual, the importance ascribed to the very act of you and me, the aspirations towards the stars and the calm assurance that the solid earth is ours. . . . the insistence on a strenuous individuality" (199). Emerson believed that success was already innate and that a person was born with the qualities necessary for success and the pursuit of American dream. He created a romantic spirit for the idea of the American dream by the inclusion of nature in his philosophy about the dream. He always paralleled the values with the natural, like when he compared the plot of ground with the individual. He also insisted that success came from trust in oneself and not in traditions or customs. It is this trust that creates the spirit of optimism in the American dream of individual self-reliance. This is why Emerson insists so much on the value of trust: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place divine providence has found for, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. . . . And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny" (177). Emerson confirms that trust is important and the value that will create possibilities for the common man. Frederic I. Carpenter in his book *American Literature and the Dream* presents Emerson's values of self-reliance, self-trust and individualism as a philosophy with big symbolic value that freed the American dream from collective imitation into democratic individual liberty: "Emerson did dream that America would develop new ways of life different from the old ways of Europe. He dreamed that the new world would progressively realize the ideals of freedom and democracy enunciated by the declaration of independence". Carpenter also adds that: "he believed that these American ideals would be realized, not because they were ideal, but because they were appropriate to the facts of American life" (25). Emerson always imagined that the real America would be a country that separated itself from its feudal European past, to celebrate the democratic values of the new nation. He believed that a real man "must be nonconformist"(178).

Emerson also believes that the American individual should resist any institutional authority, be that the government or the church because the individual should develop his own thought and not what institutions dictate. He insists that: "Your genuine action will explain itself and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing. Act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify you now. Greatness appeals to the future" (184). He believes that being preoccupied with consistency leads you only to fail the

American dream. It is newness and trusting oneself that sustain the American dream.

Emerson teaches transcendental self-emancipation and optimism to the common man. He is an important figure that affirms the spirit of the American dream in a whole new way. He has actually democratized the American dream.

But until now all these idealistic values and philosophies about the American dream have been perceived in a very romantic and optimistic way. None of the figures discussing the dream and the concepts of success and self-realization have tackled the concrete realities in the American society. Actually all these ideals are undermined by slavery and inequality. There became a need to shift from the idealistic and romantic dreams into discussing the harsh realities of the American experience. Mark Twain was the first to take a realistic approach to the American dream. He set the tone for twentieth century versions of the American dream that started depicting the American dream turned nightmare. In his Novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain explores the struggles of the American dream at the time of racial discrimination. The novel treats the process of seeking freedom and one's own path. And by telling the story of Huck who is adopted by a slave owner family who try to "civilize" him, Twain exposes the hypocrisy of the American society and the lack of equality in the American culture. Huck in the novel recognizes the African American Jim's humanity, which sends a message to the readers that doing what is right and following traditions do not always go together. Huck's and Jim's quest for individual freedom makes Twain examine the notions of equality and American culture in the process. He discovers the racism and hypocrisy of a society that prides itself for the values of universal freedom and equality. Twain uses the character of Pap, Huck's father, to expose the deep racial prejudices in the American society. When Pap encounters a free well-educated and well-dressed African American he goes into a drunken outburst: "There was a free nigger from Ohio. . . . He had the whitest shirt on you ever see . . . the shiniest hat . . . he had a gold watch and a chain And what do you think? They said he was a p'fessor in a college They said he could vote Thinks I, what is the country a coming to"? He adds that: "when they told me there was a state in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drewed out" (34). Pap presents the white uneducated white man of the time. The way he criticizes an educated black man creates an ironic contrast to him who is uneducated and a drunkard. And while Pap represents the lower class white man of the south, he still feels superior to the free educated and well-dressed African American he encounters. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a good example of the racial and social boundaries that keep many from attaining the American dream. The book also shows the

American moral journey and its quest for identity. Neil Schmitz depicts this struggle when he declares that: "The distance between the boy and the man, between the black man desperate for a secure and honorable place in society and the white youth in desperate flight from that same society, is here sharply defined" (105). This shows the conflict between feelings, expectations and the real pressures of the American society. By using Huck's conscience, Twain skilfully depicts how hypocritical society has been in giving opportunities of the American dream for all. He also sheds the light on the racial ambiguity of the dream. In reality, the dream during the reconstruction era is not totally emancipated and democratically available for every individual regardless of his condition. Instead the real American dream is still to be realized.

The quest for the American dream did not become any easier with the coming of the Gilded Age; in fact it would become even more difficult with the rise of capitalist and laissez faire philosophy in American society. In *The Great Gatsby* these new obstacles will appear. A passage from F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story "The Swimmers" actually sheds light on cruel reality of the American dream:

- "That young lady may be a stenographer and yet be compelled to warp herself, dressing and acting as if she had all the money in the world."

- "Perhaps she will have, some day."

- "That's the story they are told; it happens to one, not to the ninety-nine. That's why all their faces over thirty are discontented and unhappy." (139-145)

Chapter One

Looking for the Other Americans:

The Suppressed Dreams of *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby has always been a novel associated with the failed American dream and the materialism that shaped the nation at the time of the roaring twenties. The setting is an America that it witnessing big changes in social and economic values. It is a period of economic growth, increasing capital, powerful corporations and mass industries. The consumer society emerges and immigrants arrive on the eastern shores of the United States. Cities become fuller with crowds and factories thrive. The automobile becomes the new status symbol for the successful American and the "New Woman" appears. Jay Gatsby, the central character in the novel, is seeking to gain back an old love, Daisy Buchanan. He does all he can to become rich and conform to the image of success society expects. With the success and money that he acquires, he tries to win Daisy's heart again. He seems at first to succeed in that, but he ultimately fails. This central story hides other failures too, not only Gatsby's. And those failures I am aiming to study. I will examine the failed American dreams in the novel. And while the success of the American dream is highly romanticized, reality shows that the poor, racial minorities and women face many hurdles on their way to success. The American dream is only for the already rich and white American men. Others do not get an equal chance. In this chapter, I will explore these three categories and why they fail to attain their American dreams. I will study how the poor like Myrtle and Wilson find it difficult to compete with the rich and attain upward mobility. I will look for the immigrant and ethnic minority voices that have almost no presence in the novel and no chance for success due to racial and social prejudices. I will also present the realities in the lives of women that are still controlled by patriarchal society. Despite the emergence of the New Woman, women are still depicted as too irresponsible to appropriately manage their own lives. I will also explore the relationship between American identity and the American dream and how it influences the values of the American dream.

1.1 American Anxieties: Revisiting Identity, Doubting the Dream

In *The Great Gatsby*, symbols of the American dream are powerful and present. These symbols blend with the symbols of American national identity to build powerful images of

Americanism and success. What, where and who represent American success are powerfully depicted in the novel. But there is also the doubt in the dream and questions about its validity. There is also a geographical definition of the dream, as well as figures that embody the successful American man. These definitions of identity give insight into the limitations of the American dream and its exclusionary spirit.

In the novel two very American landscapes are contrasted many times. There is the Midwestern identity struggling to keep up with the eastern one. The Midwest is portrayed as a place of stability, and beautiful nature, but not as the place for big success stories. The east and New York are portrayed as the place where everybody goes to pursue success, business and the American dream. Nick at the beginning describes the Midwest as "the ragged edge of the universe", which made him decide to "go east and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I supposed it could support one more single man" (3). This shows how much the new American identity is facing re-identification and how success has become a thing found only in the east and New York particularly. New York is the city that has monopolized the American dream. Those who stay in their hometowns are at risk of being left behind by the dream. Nick leaves his romantic "country of wide lawns and friendly trees" for "an office" and a "commuting town" (4). Nick then starts romanticizing New York when he describes Fifth Avenue as "warm and soft, almost pastoral, on the summer Sunday afternoon" (29). This romantic description shows that Nick has made a geographical shift in what symbolizes American identity for him from the Midwest, that was supposed to be the pastoral place, to New York.

New York is powerfully present throughout the novel. There are mentions of "Pennsylvania station" (40), "Fifth Avenue" (29), "128th street" (32). New York is also portrayed as being the centre of American identity. It is the cradle of success stories but also the grave for those who do not know how to fit in. Actually New York has become the new version of western frontier life, the "pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon" (107). This statement shows a renewal in American pioneer philosophy. It has shifted from the cowboy world in the west to the eastern business world in New York. Geographically both worlds may be different, but they still have similarities. Both worlds are harsh, violent, immoral and ruthless in their own way. And by the end of the novel, Nick discovers the violence of the eastern dream and nostalgically longs for the stable Midwest once more. After Nick discovers the immoral lifestyle and material values of New York he gets disappointed. He also finds it

hard to fit in the harsh world of the city, a world that destroys the lives of those who cannot compete with the powers that control it. After this realization, Nick starts missing his Midwest.

One of my most vivid memories is of coming back west from prep school and later from college at Christmas time. Those who went farther than Chicago would gather in the old dim Union Station at six o'clock of a December evening, with a few Chicago friends, already caught up into their holiday gaieties, to bid them a hasty goodbye. . . . And last the murky yellow cars of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St Paul railroad looking cheerful as Christmas itself on the tracks beside the gate. When we pulled into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch out beside us and twinkle against the windows, and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild brace came suddenly into the air. We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour, before we melted indistinguishably into it again. (186-187)

In this passage Nick contrasts images from the Midwest with earlier images he has discovered in New York. While New York is mysterious and scary, the Midwest is safe, stable and familiar. While he has before celebrated New York, now he explores the symbols of Chicago. The dim "Union Station" contrasts his earlier discovery of Pennsylvania Station. And while New York had fancy Fords and Rolls Royces, Nick remembers Chicago's "murky yellow cars". Unlike the gloomy railroads of the Valley of Ashes, the railroad of St Paul is "looking cheerful". He also describes the Midwestern snow as "real snow" and "our snow", as if New York's snow was fake and unreal. This shows how much he regards his Midwestern identity as his authentic identity, that he feels is familiar in all its aspects. He confirms and declares that in the Midwest he is "aware of our identity". On the other hand, this means that the identity New York offers is fake and superficial. And because of this, he feels that he and other Midwestern Americans are "unadaptable to eastern life" (187). This statement as well as Gatsby's identity crisis shows that following the American dream in the east too eagerly can cost you your identity in the process. Nick's statement shows that there are struggles in the self-identification process of American identity and that there is ambiguity about the real meaning and boundaries of the American dream. Nick's nostalgia for the Midwest shows his doubts about the validity of the eastern American dream that is supposedly the one and only path to the success.

This process of rediscovering American identity has preoccupied Fitzgerald, and his concerns about it were made clear in his essay "How to Waste Material: A Note to my Generation". "During the past seven years," he writes here "there has been. . . at least half a dozen

treatments of the American farmer, ranging from New England to Nebraska "and "at least a dozen canny books about youth, some of them with surveys of the American universities for background; more than a dozen novels reflecting various aspects of New York, Chicago, Washington, Detroit, Indianapolis, Wilmington, and Richmond. . . . and finally several novels". He portrays these literary works as "dead as if [they] had never been written" and identifies the problem in their lack of authentic "American instinct" (qtd. in Mallios 361). He confirms that writers have failed to write "significantly about America" (qtd. in Mallios 360). Representing correctly an authentic American identity and spirit has become an issue. And with the emergence of the modernist trend, what once was taken for granted has become the subject of re-discovery.

American identity and values of the American dream are subjects Fitzgerald tries to rediscover by experimenting in form and plot. Peter Mallios in his article "Undiscovering the Country: Conrad, Fitzgerald, and Meta-national Form" explains Fitzgerald's method in doing that. He confirms that the character of Gatsby is portrayed in the novel as "only empty, hollow projective tableaux, vague surfaces and phantasmal mirrors in which others see idealized reflections of themselves, and through whose fictive mediation those others are able to fantasize themselves in collective social relation" (358). This is true because Gatsby is struggling to build an authentic identity, and his position of ambivalence is clear throughout the novel. The process of observing Gatsby is a means of analysing how national imagining takes place. Gatsby is the centre of the novel and he marks the border between two worlds. He represents a constant in between-ness; he is from a humble social origin, yet lives with the upper class. He can be found intimate with Wolfsheim, the Jewish gangster, as well as, with Daisy Buchanan, the golden girl who represents the upper class and old money. Gatsby is portrayed as an immigrant with a threatening ethnic background, but also as an Oxford student playing cricket with the Earl of Doncaster. All worlds collide in Gatsby, but still he does not have one single world that defines him precisely. He hosts big parties, but cannot be found there. This means that he physically exists but his real identity stays ambiguous. Gatsby is there, but always unidentified. This parallels the American success story that is facing a crisis of identification in the novel. In his article "Race and The *Great Gatsby's* Cynical Americanism," Benjamin Schreier emphasizes that there is always a constant search for America and the American in *The Great Gatsby*: "The presumption that this text means something specific has structured interpretation of this great American novel's great American. Indeed, this textual Gatsby is always presumed to represent the meaning of

"America" but "Gatsby resists these readings" (173). This means that American identity has been taken for granted and a process of rediscovery of American identity and the American dream is happening with Gatsby's character.

Gatsby is not the only tool in shaking the definitions of the American dream and identity with his ambiguous and various identities and different speculated pathways to success. Nick also plays an important role in the process of looking for the meaning of the American dream and its relationship with the American identity. It is not only how he contrasts east and west in his narrative, but also his role as a narrator. He is the narrator who has the function of the writer who is self-reflexive and self-referential and he declares that when he says that he is: "reading back over what I have written so far" (59). Nick's narration is carried out through his assessments of his experiences. He is an eye-witness and a participant at the same time. His dual role can be seen in the scene where he is dragged by Tom to meet Myrtle in the New York apartment. There Nick describes his annoyance, as well as his fascination. He wants to escape, but expresses a sense of wonder at the same time:

I wanted to get out and walk eastward the park through the soft twilight, but each time I tried to go I became entangled in some wild, strident argument which pulled me back, as if with ropes, into my chair. Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. It was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life (37-38).

In this statement Nick admits that he is a narrator and a character at the same time. He is "within and without, simultaneously". He narrates, but also participates in the narrative. He engages with the other characters and then comments on them reflexively. This technique has created a self-reflexive approach in telling the story of the American dream that has too long been taken for granted. And this process of doubting the dream by the narrator Nick becomes evident when he creates an imaginary account of Gatsby's final moments:

I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. (171-172).

Gatsby's disillusionment is known only to Nick, because, as a narrator, he is questioning the dream in Gatsby's place. Nick repeats "must have" many times, which only emphasizes Gatsby's disillusionment. Nick wonders whether Gatsby paid a high price for living for one dream and how it felt to lose the "old warm world" and whether he saw: "A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously

about" (172). Nick's thoughts show how fake the American dream actually is. He describes it as "material", and as a dream with no values. He confirms the dream is not "being real", but rather an illusion. He also states that Gatsby has lost his "old warm world" to this "new world" that offers a phony dream. Nick also pities Gatsby for following a "single dream", which shows that the American dream does not allow opportunities for choice and real individualism to create different and more personal dreams. Anything outside of that singular path is considered a failure. Tom is a good example of what a successful American should be and how society dictates an undemocratic single model for success.

Tom is depicted as "a national figure in a way"(6), which means he symbolizes the white, rich and physically fit American male. He is portrayed as the perfect prototype for the American. This means that men who do not possess the same physical qualities and social status as Tom are not qualified to be American. Working-class Americans, other racial minorities, and women become excluded with this statement. These categories are not regarded as suitable to share the status of national identity and success.

1.2 The Power of Wealth and Commodity: Winners and Losers of the Consumerist Dream

The roaring twenties was an era of change in the United States. For the first time more people were living in the cities than the country. National wealth increased and economic growth created a consumer society. It was an era of chain stores and brands. People also started to listen to the same music and use the same slang. It was an era of mass culture where the automobile became one of the most important commodities. There was a huge tendency towards materialism during the period, and the American dream started to depend more and more on material goods. Becoming rich was what most people dreamt about, just like Gatsby in the novel. But what the novel also shows is the difficulty of this dream for certain classes of people. People from lower classes like Wilson or Myrtle for example find it very difficult to achieve the American dream of wealth, and they die in the process. What I intend to study in this section, is the gap between the upper and lower classes and how realizable the dream is for them. I will explain how the American dream is actually only attainable for certain people who already live in certain conditions. People from the lower class suffer from poverty and cannot easily create chances for social mobility. This era of materialism only created richer rich, poorer or more miserable poor and inequality. I will demonstrate the huge economic and

social gap between these two groups that were seeking the American dream and how that made the dream for some unattainable.

It cannot be a coincidence that the name of Rockefeller is mentioned in the novel (28). He can be regarded as a strong symbol of wealth inequality and the hijacking of the American dream by powerful monopolies and corporations. The Darwinist philosophy symbolized by Rockefeller in the novel can be contrasted with another economic figure mentioned there: namely the progressive Henry Clay. His book *Economics* is found on Nick's bookshelf by Gatsby, who looks at it with "vacant eyes" (90). The fact that he is looking at it with vacant eyes creates the belief that the progressive theories of Clay are ignored and not looked at by society in general and the rich in particular. The contrast between two very different symbols mirrors the struggles of two different ideologies regarding American economics. Rockefeller took advantage of the free market capitalist system of the United States. He created his very powerful oil corporation by using monopolistic business tactics; like buying all his competitors or fixing prices by making secret deals. This made him control all aspect of oil production to become one of the world's richest men. This was called the survival of the fittest. According to Darwinist and laissez faire ideologies, this was the way of doing business. These monopolies were against any government regulations to help the weak which created an unequal distribution of wealth because labourers were not given decent wages. Clay on the other hand, was progressive and an advocate for protecting new and small industries in the country by setting tariffs. He also called for the creation of national bank to end the control of private entities and was for regulations that helped create an equal distribution of wealth. But it seems that the corporate spirit is gaining the lead in the novel. Businesses and companies seem to be everywhere. Gatsby declares he has been working with businesses like the "drug business" and the "oil business" (96). There is Nick's grandfather's "hardware business" (3). The transactions of Montana copper made Cody a millionaire (105). Names of famous automobile companies like Ford and Rolls Royce are also mentioned. The "National Biscuit Company" (120) and "Swastika holding company" (180) also appear in the background. This shows the important rise of corporate power in the United States at the expense of the lower classes. This means that while the rich are enjoying the American dream, the lower classes cannot attain it.

To arrive at this conclusion, it is important to dig into the lives of the rich and the poor in the novel and contrast them. The novel is full of images of wealth and extravagance, and it seems to dominate in the same way the rich dominate American society with their wealth.

Most of the rich characters already have rich families and backgrounds, which shows that already being rich or from an elite family is a crucial starting point for success. Nick's family is rich and he explains that: "my family has been prominent, well to do people . . . we're descended from the dukes of Buccleuch. He also tells us that it is his grandfather's brother that "started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries today" (3). Daisy comes from a rich family as well. She vanishes "into her rich house, into her rich full life" (159). Tom Buchanan's family is also wealthy: "His family were enormously wealthy-even in college, his freedom with money was a matter for reproach". He also "brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that" (6). It is clear that the rich characters in the novel already have the advantage of coming from rich and elite families, which makes success much easier much easier for them. The extravagant lifestyle of the rich can be seen in the houses they live in. Nick describes Gatsby's mansion that is close to his house: "The one on my right was a colossal affair by any standard; it was a factual imitation of some Hotel de ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side" (5) and with a "marble swimming pool" (6) Tom's East Egg home is also extravagant: "Their house was a cheerful red and white Georgian colonial mansion overlooking the bay. The lawn started at the beach and ran towards the front door for a quarter of a mile The front was broken by a line of French windows, glowing now with reflected gold a sunken Italian garden" (7). The house seems to have a life of its own; it has an existence independent from of the Buchanans. It is even exceeds them. The house, described through this sensual and poetic language, make commodities even more appealing. This setting is the setting of a story that "happens to one, not to the ninety-nine", because as Adam Smith said: "whenever there is great property, there is great inequality" (410).

It is not only the buildings that demonstrate a huge gap between the classes, but it is also their lifestyle. Gatsby hosts lavish parties. He has "eight servants and a gardener". He has a Rolls Royce. Lemons and oranges are delivered from a "fruiterer" every Monday (41). One a fortnight a "corps of caterers "comes to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. The parties have an orchestra and "floating rounds of cocktails" (42). Even the people attending these parties are among the most important in the city. Most of them are rich, powerful or famous. Among the attendees there are people from important families, "Gulick the state senator", "Newton Orchid, who controlled Films Par Excellence", "American capitalists" and many others (65-66). Gatsby acknowledges his lavish lifestyle:

"I lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe- Paris, Venice, Rome – collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big game" (69). He even has "a man in England who buys him clothes" (98). Even the dialogues between the rich are suffused by materialism. They define everything by wealth and possessions. Tom says he has "got a nice place here". When he wants to explain to whom his mansion belonged, he defines the owner as "the oil man" (8). Daisy tells Gatsby: "The pompadour, you never told me you had a pompadour – or a yacht" (99). Money also preserves the upper class's vitality. Gatsby becomes "overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (159).

On the other hand, there is another, less fortunate class in New York as Nick notices: "I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and I felt it in others—poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for solitary restaurant dinner – young clerks in the dusk wasting the most poignant moments of night and life" (61). Myrtle and Wilson also live in a poorer area called the Valley of Ashes, a place that is miserable and depressing: "This is the valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens". Unlike East Egg, the building there was "a small block of yellow bricks sitting on the edge of the waste land, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it, and contiguous to absolutely nothing. Tom exclaims: "terrible place isn't it" (28)? Even Wilson's garage's interior was "unprosperous and bare" and the only car visible was "the dust-covered wreck of a Ford". The absence of cars shows how little work Wilson actually gets as a mechanic, which means the lack of a decent income. When Tom asks him about business, Wilson "unconvincingly" (26) answers that he cannot complain, which means that he is struggling. But later, Wilson admits his struggles and declares that he needs "money pretty bad" (130). Even the people in the Valley of Ashes are described as "ash-gray men, who move dimly and already crumbling in the through the powdery air" (24). Wilson himself is portrayed as a "spiritless man, anaemic. And faintly handsome" (26). Tom also confirms that Wilson "doesn't know he's alive". Wilson seems miserable and lifeless and poverty seems to have taken a toll on him. Unlike what the American dream dictates, it seems that hard work is not enough for economic stability or upward mobility. The Finnish woman who does the housework in Nick's house is never given a more specific identity, and even after she spends all that time there, there are no conversations with her. She is treated as a person from a faceless crowd working in the background. This shows

how little power or influence the lower classes actually have. Even when characters from lower classes attain in some way the world of the higher classes, they are unable to adjust to the real prestige and behavior needed to be part of that class. And while the rich are getting richer the poor do not attain upward mobility, a fact the Jazz song "Ain't We Got Fun?" confirms in then novel: "One thing's for sure and nothing's surer. The rich get richer and the poor get—children. In the meantime, In between time" (102).

Myrtle has understood that she cannot attain upward mobility in a decent way, so she uses her affair with wealthy Tom to make that shift easier. This means that she is trading herself as a sexual commodity to Tom as an exchange for higher status and money. What Myrtle does reminds us of Adam Smith's declaration in his book *The Wealth of Nations*: "Every man lives by exchanging" (30). The way she commodifies herself is also important. If one considers commodity as being something useful that can be turned to commercial or other advantage, we conclude that a commodity is a value, not in terms of its use value, but in terms of exchange value. This means that it is not important what a commodity can be used for, but what it can be traded for. A commodity can be either traded for exchange value or traded for a social status its ownership confers, and this is called sign-exchange value. Carl Marx also emphasizes on the centrality of commodities in a capitalist society in his book *Capital*: "Capital is money, capital is commodities"(33). This means that commodities can be turned into money, and this is what Myrtle is exactly doing by exchanging sexual services for the money and status she gets from Tom. Tom Buchanan markets his socioeconomic status by choosing lower- class women in terms of the commodified view of social interactions, because that makes it easier to get more women. But Tom commodifies his relationship with Daisy as well. He exchanges his money and power for Daisy's youth and beauty. He seems to have "purchased" her with a \$350,000 string of pearls. This shows that capitalism is based on the notion of "you are what you own". This philosophy creates human values and relationships that depend on material possessions. As Karl Marx puts it: "Money degrades all the gods of man and converts them into commodities" (34).

Myrtle also tries hard to assimilate with the elite, but she lacks the sophisticated character of the class. Myrtle makes too hard efforts to furnish her apartment with fancy furniture, but still has copies of cheap and distasteful magazines like "Town Tattle", " scandal magazines of Broadway" and a scandalous novel *Simon called Peter* that is about an affair (31). Not only does her choice of reading show how much she strives to be rich and among the people in the gossip magazines, but it also shows how little her taste for reading matches the sphere

she wants to join. She makes efforts as well in changing her character to match the class. After wearing the cream chiffon dress, "her personality has also undergone a change". Her "intense vitality" was "covered into impressive hauteur" (33). Myrtle is also a good example of consumerism. She goes shopping a lot and lists what she is going to buy. She declares: "I'm going to make a list of all the things I've got to get. A massage and a wave, and a collar for the dog, and one of those cute little ash- trays where you touch a spring, and a wreath with a black silk bow for mother's grave" (39). The things she wishes to buy would not have been attainable had she stayed in her lower--class spheres. She is now getting them, not because of hard work, but because of her affair, which shows that getting ahead in the right way is not possible with the rich and powerful controlling society. Actually, family background and wealth is what makes the American dream attainable. That is even more important if one wants to join the elite. If these two conditions were not met, it means one has failed at the American dream. These criteria are what determine class issues. Gatsby in his poorer days "had deliberately given Daisy the sense of security; he let her believe he was a person from much the same strata as herself – that he was fully able to take care of her. As a matter of fact, he had no such facilities- he had no comfortable family standing behind him" (158).

Poverty has actually become a reason for shame, because it implies failure. Gatsby avoids talking about his family that is actually neither wealthy nor elite. "His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people. His imagination has never accepted them as his parents at all" (104). Gatsby's father confesses they were "broke" (182) when Gatsby run away from home because of their poverty. Also the fact that his family is "shiftless" shows how difficult it is for the farmers and common people or labourers to attain social mobility in America. Poverty can also be an obstacle to the way of love. This becomes clear when Gatsby admits that Daisy married Tom, because Gatsby was "poor" at the time (138). Poverty and too many aspirations for wealth have also cost Myrtle her life. She dies running after Tom, her source of wealth. She is also killed by the car, a symbol of wealth and consumerism. Wilson's and Myrtle's dreams cannot survive the system, because the rich "were careless people". The sad truth is that the only way for the Wilsons to survive is by letting Tom Buchanan exploit them. This means that the less fortunate must let the capitalist system exploit them in order to survive. George, for example, lets Tom humiliate him in the hope of getting a good price on Tom's car. Myrtle is having an affair with Tom and also accepts his humiliating behaviour, in the hope she could leave the Valley of Ashes for

good by marrying him. Tragically, their way out of this capitalist dumping ground was in a coffin. On the other hand, the rich get away with their faults, they "smashed up things and creatures" and then "retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness". Wilson and Myrtle end up dead because they are the victims of the rich who "let other people clean up the mess they had made" (190). This end is a concrete image of Marx's statement about capital: "Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more labor it sucks."(416). Andreas Huyssen confirms Marx's claims and Fitzgerald's preoccupation with the subject: "The nightmare of being devoured by mass culture through co-optation, commodification, and the wrong kind of success is the constant fear of the modernist artist" (qtd. in Pumphrey 118-119).

1.3 Race, Class and the White Man's Dream: Silenced Blacks, Rejected Immigrants.

Race and racism is an important subject in *The Great Gatsby*. The main characters are all white, and it is not the presence of minorities but the lack of it that is relevant here. In the time the novel is set, race, immigrants and nativism are important issues. Immigrants and African Americans moved in large numbers to New York City, and the white man started to feel threatened by men from other backgrounds competing for the American dream. This led to the white man shunning other minorities and trying to keep the dream exclusively for themselves. In this section, I will explore the exclusionary ideology the white race is projecting on immigrants and African Americans. White American society wants to keep their American success and dreams for themselves. And this uneven power struggle between races makes it difficult for minorities to survive and create success stories like their white counterparts.

The white race is regarded as the default race in the novel. This can be determined by the way other races are labelled all the time. Many characters are defined through their racial background, and sometimes only that. The housekeeper in Nick's house is defined as "the Finn" or the "Finnish woman". The African American man who witnessed the accident is only defined as "the Negro". The other man who witnesses the accident is also referred to as "the Greek". There is also "the Jew" (73), the "Italian child" (27) and the "lips of south-eastern Europe" (72). All characters who are not white American are defined not by name or personality but by race or nationality. The white characters are the only characters that are not defined by race. They are not described as "the white man" or "the white woman",

which makes the white race and mainly white American race the default race in the novel. Any person who is not white or American is othered, even if that character has already started a new life in America and is part of society. Tom confirms that the white race should stay dominant and that other races should be kept at bay:

“Civilization’s going to pieces,” broke out Tom violently. “I’ve gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read ‘The Rise of the Colored Empires’ by this man Goddard?” . . . “Well, it’s a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be — will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved . . .” “Well, these books are all scientific,” insisted Tom, glancing at her impatiently. “This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things. . . . This idea is that we’re Nordics” (14).

This statement confirms the fact that white Americans want to keep their country safe from immigrants and other races that "will have control of things". This shows that this is a power struggle for white American men like Tom. From Tom's point of view, newcomers from other races will undermine white American's control in society. Tom's statement about "Goddard" also clearly refers to both Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, two race theorists who were known for their racially discriminating ideology. *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* by Lothrop Stoddard argues that mass immigration into the United States is a threat to the pure white race. This was a common belief within the upper classes at the time and for people like Tom. Tom repeats the word "scientific" when he defends his nativist claims to make the exclusion of other minorities from the United States seem legitimate. Xenophobic anxiety can be found all over the text. Tom, for example states that, Gatsby "isn't quite white". Tom also insists that letting: "Mr. Nobody from nowhere" make love to his wife would be the first step to "intermarriage between black and white" (137). This shows that the narrative creates a binary opposition of black and white and pejorative associations for African Americans whose upward mobility is an illusion. White Americans actually regard all these minorities as a threat to the balance of the American way of life, to the American family, the American dream, American institutions and the purity of the white race: "Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and intermarriage between black and white" (137). Tom's statement shows that the so called American values and way of life are not ready to embrace newcomers from other backgrounds. Non-white and non- Americans are not welcome to share white Americans the quest for the American dream.

This white dominance is also emphasized by the numerous times the word "white" is mentioned in the novel. Daisy talks about her "white girlhood" (21). Jordan and Daisy were "both in white" (9). The "city was rising up across the river in white heaps" (72). The windows in Tom's house are "gleaming white" (8). Catherine's complexion is "powdered milky white" (31). This confirms how dominant the white race is over other races, and how much power and control it has on the rest of society. All races except the white are depicted negatively in the novel. They either are unflattering physically or morally. And apart from the "three modish negroes in the car" (72), no minority is given the credit of successful and decent life. This implies that racial minorities other than white Americans should not, and cannot be part of the American dream. While Tom, a white American, is described as man with "various physical accomplishments" and "one of most powerful ends that ever played football", the Italian child was described as "gray" and "scrawny" (27), the Finnish woman as "demoniac" (92), and a Jew as "small, flat-nosed" who had "tiny eyes" and "two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril" (73).

The minority characters are all living in some kind of misery or working in low-paid jobs, and if not, it is because they are taking part in treachery or fishy business. The Italian child, for example, lives in the Valley of Ashes, a depressing and poor area and works "setting torpedoes in a row along the railroad track" (27). The Finnish woman makes Nick's bed and cooks him breakfast (4). The south eastern Europeans on the bridge have "tragic eyes" and "a sombre holiday"(72). The Greek Michaelis like the Italian boy, also lives in the Valley of Ashes and "ran a coffee joint beside the ash heaps" (144). The Jew Wolfshiem is not poor, but is a prominent gangster and a figure in organized crime. Gatsby defines him as "a gambler" and the one who "fixed the world series" in 1919 (77). Fitzgerald not only makes this character ugly and dishonest, he also mocks Wolfshiem by giving him a phonological disorder. He cannot pronounce the letter "k", so he says "gonnegtion" (74) instead of connection, and "Oggsford" (182), instead of Oxford. The African Americans are also barely mentioned, which makes the black race the most silenced race in the novel. This racial exclusion of African Americans in the novel is no surprise from a nativist perspective. The nativists belief in the Nordic myth of national origins, that assigns the discovery of the new world to northern Europeans, systematically excludes the introduction of black slaves into the new world. Nativist history totally ignores the founding contributions of Africans in North America. This explains the limited appearance of African Americans in the novel. There are the three African Americans in the car on the bridge and

then there is the African American witness of the car that hit Myrtle. The "three modish Negroes" seem successful, well dressed and own a car, but still Nick laughs at them while they look at him "with haughty rivalry" (72). The word "rivalry" shows how much tension there actually is between the African American and the white American. African American success creates a sense of rivalry between the two groups, and it seems the white American male fears African Americans will compete with them for successful American dreams.

This is why the white American male uses all his power to silence and hide the identities of the African American voices in the novel. Also the way the African Americans' car is mirroring Gatsby's illustrates how the colour line separates between blacks and whites even when the two find common ground of identification between them. The "negro" witness is also only described as "pale" and "well dressed" (148). We do not know his name or background and he remains a mystery. But the "well dressed" African American witness may symbolize the African American race that is witnessing the death of the American dream and white society's betrayal in front of their eyes, a failure personified by Myrtle's death by a car, which is the American dream status symbol. Jazz is the only African American identity symbol that exists in the novel. It is played at parties, in the car and in the background. One might think that African Americans can at least take credit for their music in the novel, but after carefully looking into the songs, it is clear that even jazz has been put under control by whites in the novel. Songs like "Sheik of Araby" and "Ain't We Got Fun" were sung by white and not black singers at the time. "Beatle Street Blues" was also sung by a white woman Gilda Gray at the time of the novel. What is even more striking is the fact that the Jazz song "Three O'clock in the Morning" was not only sung by a white man, but also by a singer named Paul Whiteman. It seems there is an emphasis on the power white men have over African Americans, even in the domains that are usually under the control of African Americans. What makes Paul Whiteman important is the fact he was once called "the King of Jazz", which confirms that the white narrative is trying to steal the throne of jazz, a status African Americans have always legitimately claimed, from African Americans. By doing so, the white race also steals the only voice African Americans have in the novel and gives itself the legitimacy to speak on their behalf. Jazz has been the outlet to express African American struggles, dreams and aspirations. By shifting this voice of jazz to the white man, it silences the only voice for African American dreams in the novel.

1.4 Emancipated Women, Dependent Women: Any Dreamers?

The novel tells the story of women in the era of roaring twenties. It was also the era of the "New Woman" and the flapper. At this period women started to have more freedom, started to party more and get more jobs. Yet, when one examines the women characters in *The Great Gatsby*, we notice that these women are portrayed in a traditional, patriarchal manner. Few of them follow any dreams or careers, most of them are portrayed as materialistic, superficial and dishonest. They are also depicted as women who cannot handle freedom responsibly enough to thrive and make the right choices. They are physically and morally controlled or subjectified most of the time. Social and patriarchal barriers are what prevent them from thriving and making their own futures. They are victims of the traditional male gaze. *The Great Gatsby* is also accused by Judith Fetterley in her book *The Resisting Reader* of being hostile to these women: "Another American 'love story' centred on hostility to women and the concomitant strategy of the scapegoat . . . Not dead Gatsby but surviving Daisy is the object of the novel's hostility and its scapegoat (qtd. in Parkinson 67).

Women in the novel are not given enough individuality or personality. They are most of the time portrayed as superficial, gold -diggers or hedonists. Some of the characters women are not even given a name by Fitzgerald, which deprives them from a proper identity. From the beginning we encounter "the Finnish woman" who is always identified by her nationality, and not by name. In addition, she is compared to an old Dodge and a dog by Nick when he states: "I had a dog--at least I had him for a few days until he ran away- and an old Dodge and a Finnish woman who made my bed and cooked breakfast" (4). Here he is listing his possessions, the dog and the car, and then by adding the Finnish woman he makes her seem property as well. This strips her of her humanity and identity and turns her into a commodity under Nick's control. She is not appreciated as a woman with her own personality doing a job, but as a faceless woman from the crowd. Daisy's daughter as well is seldom given a proper identification. She is referred to as "the baby" (10) and not by name many times in the novel. Also, when the conversation about Tom's affair is brought up Myrtle is labelled as "some woman" (16) by Miss Baker, "my girl" (25) by Tom himself and "his girl" by Nick.

Not only are women stripped of their identity, but they are also controlled by men. This becomes clear when Tom refers to Myrtle as "my" girl, or when Baker states that he "got" a woman. Even the women at Gatsby's parties, not the men, "never knew each other's names" (42). The woman accompanying Mr. Sloane is also unidentified: "There were a party of three

on horseback-Tom and a man named Sloane and a pretty woman". She is only referred as "pretty" (108) as if that was the only thing that mattered. She is not given a name, nor an identity. She doesn't even engage in their conversation until she has "two highballs" (109). Women seem to be facing a process of de-identification in the novel, which makes it easier for men to control them, use their authority over them and objectify them. The Jazz song King of Araby, played in the car hints that women "belong" to men: "I'm the sheik of Araby. Your love belongs to me. At night when you sleep, into your tent I'll creep" (83). Sheiks are most of the time associated with harems and pictured as macho men treating women as sexual objects. The sheik also states that he will "creep" to his lover's tent when she is sleeping, which implies that he is not waiting for her acceptance or consent for his visit that seems to be for sexual aims. Daisy for example is treated as a trophy and not as a woman with character and individuality. It "excited" Gatsby "that too many men have already loved Daisy-- It increased her value her value in his eyes" (158), which shows how much value Daisy has in meeting Gatsby's competitive needs. Being ahead of other competitors and not Daisy's personality is what makes her valuable to Gatsby.

While talking about Miss Baker, Tom makes it clear that women have limits they should not go beyond: "They oughtn't to let her run around the country this way". When Daisy inquires: "Who oughtn't to?" Tom answers: "Her family" (20). Tom confirms this patriarchal philosophy again when he confesses that: "I may be old-fashioned in my ideas, but women run around too much these days to suit me. They meet all kinds of crazy fish" (110). This shows that even in the era of the so-called "New woman" of the roaring twenties, successful and independent women like Miss Baker are expected to be under the patriarchal control of the family. Tom also undermines Daisy's ideas and suggestions. When she suggests going to town, Tom finds it a bad idea and wonders: "Women get these notions in their heads" (127). Tom doubts Daisy's ability of responsible reflection again when he tells Gatsby that: "The trouble is that sometimes she gets these foolish ideas and doesn't know what she's doing" (139). This shows how much Tom belittles Daisy and considers women unable to think coherently. Not only are women controlled by men, but they are also badly treated. And because women have no power in their patriarchal and manly world, they have to endure their husband's extra-marital affairs and physical abuse. Tom cheats on his wife Daisy with Myrtle, and Myrtle is being physically abused by Tom. At the apartment, he, "after making a short deft movement", "broke her nose with an open hand. Then there were bloody towels upon the bathroom floor and women's voices scolding, and high over the confusion a long broken wail

of pain" (39). Myrtle's husband also noticed that "his wife had come from the city her face bruised and her nose swollen" (167).

Most women in the novel are only portrayed physically or superficially. No woman is been described according to her professional abilities, capabilities or character. Myrtle is described by Nick as a woman "in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her flesh sensuously as some women can. Her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue crepe de chine . . . She wet her lips . . . and spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse voice" (27). Even Catherine is defined by her beauty, not personality, when Myrtle presents her to Nick and declares that: "She's said to be very beautiful by people" (30). And even though Catherine is one of the most independent women in the novel, the masculine gaze limits her description to physical attributes: "Catherine was a slender, worldly girl of about thirty" her complexion was "powdered milky white". "Her eyebrows had been plucked and then drawn on again at a more rakish angle" (31). And while Mr. McKee was defined by his profession, "a photographer", his wife was described physically as "languid, handsome and horrible"(32).

Women in the novel are also portrayed as gold-diggers or only being interested in material things. They are also depicted as women who get their materialistic goals achieved through rich men, and not through their own work or effort. Myrtle is a woman who has an affair with Tom because of his wealth. She admits that she regrets marrying Wilson after she discovered that he was poor: "The only crazy I was when I married him. I knew right away I made a mistake. He borrowed somebody's best suit to get married in, and never told me about it" (37). She is at many times associated with money and shopping throughout the novel. Her main aim is material privileges and she seems only interested in shopping and gathering objects. For instance, when arriving at 158th Street, Myrtle "gathered up her dog and her other purchases and went haughtily in". She has also "changed her costume some time before and was now attired in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream colored chiffon" (32). Myrtle's love for things becomes more evident when Nick enters the apartment (used for the affair) filled with a collection of fancy furniture too large for the place: "The living room was crowded to the doors with a set of tapestried furniture entirely too large for it, so that to move about was to stumble continually over scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles" (30). Cody is also threatened by gold-diggers when "women tried to separate him from his money" (107). Gatsby also confirms to Tom that Daisy was looking for financial stability in a man and did not marry Gatsby because of his poverty: "She only married you because I was poor" (139) Women's superficiality is still evident in many instances. Myrtle's laughter is "artificial" (38),

and also Daisy's voice has "a clear artificial note" (91), even her "world" was "artificial" as well. Daisy's world was "redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery" (160) Jordan and Lucille discuss a dress that is, as Lucille declares: "Two hundred and sixty five dollars"(46).

Women are also most of time partying hard and self-objectifying themselves numerous times in the novel. At Gatsby's party, "girls were putting their heads on men's shoulders, in a puppyish, convivial way, girls were swooning backward playfully into men's arms, even into groups, knowing that someone would arrest their falls" (53). Wives also fight with their husbands at the party and, in an immature manner, leave the place being "lifted, kicking into the night" (55). Women are also portrayed as heavy drinkers who cannot control their drinking. At Gatsby's party, a "girl" who was drunk "was trying unsuccessfully to slump against my shoulder. At this moment she sat up and opened her eyes 'wha?' A massive and lethargic woman . . . spoke in Miss Baedeker's defence: Oh, She's alright now. When she's had five or six cocktails she always starts screaming like that" (113). Jordan is also "hard to find" because "the uncertainty of her own movements between hotels and clubs and private houses" (164). Not even Catherine, who seemed the most mature and independent woman in the novel, is spared from this negative portrayal. When Catherine was located after Myrtle's accident, it seems that "she must have broken the rule against drinking that night, for when she arrived she was stupid with liquor and unable to understand that the ambulance has already gone" (166). Drunken women continue to appear even near the end of the novel in a description of West Egg where "lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress . . . but no one knows the woman's name and no one cares" (188). Not only is this woman drunk, she is also anonymous, not given a face, a name or identity. The dehumanization of women is an ongoing process in novel. It mirrors women's position during that period in the United States. The narrative throughout the novel presents women as eager to party and drink, and as irresponsible characters who cannot handle freedom; therefore they must be controlled and supervised by men.

Even the supposedly most independent and successful woman, Jordan Baker, is labelled as a cheat, implying that women cannot become successful in a decent and honest manner. She "was incurably dishonest" and avoided clever men because that made her "feel safer" (62). She is also suspected of cheating at her first big golf tournament. There was "a suggestion that she had moved her ball from a bad lie in the semi-final round" (61). But what is even more extraordinary, is Nick's declaration that "It made no difference" to him and that "Dishonesty

in women is a thing you never blame deeply" (62). Nick's statement implies that dishonesty is a natural trait in women, a thing that should be expected. Not only are women depicted as dishonest but also as "ignorant" and "hysterical" by Gatsby (105). Women are given very little credit in the novel. Instead they are depicted very negatively as shallow, superficial and unable to survive without men. Daisy confesses to Jordan the difficulty of being active and getting things done: "How you get anything done is beyond me" (12). The only thing women seem to strive for is men's attention. They have no professional and intellectual dreams or aspirations. The female character's only aim is to please men. Jordan says that Gatsby looked at Daisy "in a way every girl wants to be looked at some time", which shows how important it supposedly is for women to be admired by men. She also states that she herself had "few beaux" by the next year (79), which implies that it is important for women to collect admirers, as if a woman's self-worth is dependent on her male admirers. Collecting admirers is also portrayed as a game women play, when Jordan mentions that after soldier Gatsby left Louisville, Daisy "didn't play around with soldiers anymore, but with a few flat-footed, short sighted young men in town". Daisy was also "presumably engaged to a man from New Orleans" in February, but by June she "married Tom Buchanan of Chicago" (80). Having many admirers seems to be women's only path to self-validation. Women are also portrayed as financially and emotionally dependent on men. Daisy marries rich Tom, whom Jordan describes as "so mad about her husband. If he left the room for a minute she'd look around uneasily, and say: 'Where's Tom gone?'" (81). It looks like Daisy cannot survive without a man constantly present in her life. Myrtle wants a divorce from her poor husband and has an affair with Tom whom she becomes dependent on financially. Jordan is financially independent, but also finds validation from having "the few beaux" she talks about.

This process of dehumanization, objectification and rendering female characters into mere trophies has made all woman characters unable to thrive. Stripping them of their identity under the patriarchal control of society has killed all the desire, dreams and aspirations in women. Nick describes Daisy's and Jordan's "impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire" (13), which shows the lack of passion in their lives. They made only a "polite pleasant effort to entertain or to be entertained" (13). Daisy confesses her pessimism to Nick: "Well I've had a very bad time, Nick, and I'm pretty cynical about everything". She continues to explain that when her daughter was born, she wept and hoped she "was a fool--that the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (19). Daisy's statement sums up the gender situation in relation to the American dream. There is no place for aspiring women in the

society of the roaring twenties, only a place for beautiful women who are irresponsible and under the supervision of men. Being a beautiful "fool" is the best that a woman can hope for.

Chapter Two

Do They Have the Right to Dream?

The Forgotten Americans in *Death of a Salesman*

Death of a Salesman is Arthur Miller's most iconic play. It has become the legacy of the common man in America. The story about Willy Loman, the American anti-hero, and his failure to achieve the American dream made a great impression on the audience and critics. It is a play that demystifies the American ideals of success and sheds light on the anxieties of the common man in American society. Not only does the play experiment with the theme, but also with innovative dramatic techniques. Miller examines the values of post war America, a period in American history that was supposed to be prosperous for all. It was a new era and even with the cold war concerns, the American future appeared bright. But it was also a conservative era and people returned to traditional gender roles and traditional family life.

Even though everything seemed to go in the right direction and Americans were enjoying the dream, the reality was quite different. Actually, the economic boom did not benefit all categories of the population. Unskilled labourers were poorly paid, easily laid off and they found it difficult to save money. Willy's salesman job, Happy's sales clerk job and Biff's job on the farm all come under unskilled labour, so they did not benefit from the boom, or the dream. In this chapter, I will explore the other Americans living in the so called prosperous post war era. I will study how the have nots like Willy and his family struggle financially and how the American dream fails them and destroys a family for not having enough money. The other category that the dream has turned its back on, is African Americans, who live in a totally different America. While others live the dream, they are absent and left in the American nightmare. Women as well are pushed away by the American masculine ego and prevented from sharing the dream or participating in its making. In her essay "The American Dream Was Often Just a Fantasy", Lauren Enriquez confirms that: "For factory workers, women, and slaves the American dream remained just a dream. Despite the hard work exerted by these three groups, their efforts for improvement in status, regardless of their social class, race, and gender, often remained fruitless. Only white males, and their pernicious desire for a society of white male dominance, lived the American Dream" (120-125).

Before I study the details of these three groups, I need to characterize the American dream as a truly American phenomenon in the American national psyche. I need to demonstrate how dreaming in America has different characteristics and how it has produced its own distinctive version of a united national dream. Only after this identification, can we demystify its flaws within the American national realm and continue to explore how working-class Americans and women are left out of the process.

2.1 The Dream: A Truly National Phenomenon.

Thomas E. Porter in his book *Myth and Modern American Drama* declares that: "The most salient quality of Arthur Miller's tragedy of the common man *Death of a Salesman* is its Americanism" (127). Porter explains that this quality became evident after contrasting the reactions of American and English viewers. While the English understood Loman at face value and found "nothing to be said" (127) about him, the Americans viewed him as a "good man who represents the homely, decent, kindly virtues of the middle class society" (qtd. in, Porter 127). This shows how important it is to understand the American context of the play. While the English audience did not project the American circumstances and values onto this play, the Americans identified with him and saw him as a representative of American society. Without the American perspective, Willy would only be a man who has failed to cope with his environment. It is important to bear in mind that Willy represents the American type, and with that come the ideals and values that have shaped him. Willy is the embodiment of the success myth, success the American style. Success is a paramount component in the American national psyche, and that is what makes his failure in the play so dramatic. Henry Popkin understood the importance of the success component in his review "The Stage Encounter": "Success is a requirement Americans make of life. Because it seems magical, and inexplicable, as it is to Willy, It can be considered the due of every free citizen, even those with no notable or measurable talents. . . . The citizen may justly and perhaps even logically ask--if Edison, Goodrich, and Red Grange can make it, why not me, why not Willy Loman?" (qtd. in Porter 128). The component of American success not only makes the plot, but also relates to the popular mind of the audience.

In addition to the anti-hero plot, what makes Miller's play important is the way he tells the story. Miller uses expressionist techniques like the symbolic set design, montage, flashbacks, costume, music, stereotypical features and the changes in lighting, that allow movement between the past and present. This two dimensional technique of blending real

time and remembered time is what allows Miller to present the anxieties of success and failure in an expressionistic way. This expressionism is what allows the audience to grasp the images of Willy's inner self and emotional experience. Action, like in traditional drama, is not important anymore. It is this inner conflict in the character that gives a closer look to the character's struggles. Miller uses many devices. Music is one of them. He uses it to reveal Willy Loman's true personality. The music symbolizes Willy's nostalgia for the lost New England. Willy also talks about his past, but does not remember it accurately. Instead, the past returns and makes him, uprooted in the present. Miller has also blurred the boundaries between the past and the present for Willy. And by doing that, Miller has tried to create dramatic spotlight on the reasons that lead to Willy's suicide. Miller also demonstrates the psychic nature of Willy, by not dividing the act into separate scenes. Miller has only divided the play into two acts. By limiting the division of action into several acts, Miller controls the unity of time. This unity contributes to the credibility of the expressionist reality in the play because it captures the continuity of uninterrupted actions. *Death of a Salesman* has made both the past and the present coincide to create expressionist experiences that show Willy's real inner conflicts. This temporal shift between the past and present allows the clash between dream and reality to come to the surface. This happens by showing the contrast between the dreams in Willy's past and the harsh failures in the present. This technique also contraposes optimism and pessimism in the play. But temporality is not the only technique to show the shifts between dream and reality. The use of characters also fulfills this role by contrasting successful characters like Charley, Ben and Bernard to Willy, Biff and Happy. The anxieties of the American dream are also represented by the use of many American themes and symbols in the play. For example the American city and its modern capitalist dream are contrasted with the agrarian pioneer dream of the west. The image of the "hero" and its competitiveness is also another American symbol found in the play.

Starting with the city, it is impossible not to notice how many cities are mentioned throughout the play and how important the American city as a territory is for the capitalist world. Willy declares that he "Knocked 'em cold in Providence, slaughtered 'em in Boston" (22), he "did five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston" (23) and Charley states that he will "take some of your Portland money" (36). Willy goes "a little above Yonkers" (6) and gets back "from Florida". Willy also assures Linda that: "They don't need me in New York, I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England". This

shows how Willy's identity and professional life are so much related to the American city and American territory. Willy achieving the American dream is related to the American city and his work as a salesman depends on them: "Waterbury is a nice city. Big clock city, the famous Waterbury clock. Sold a nice bill there . . . and a couple of other towns in Mass, and on to Portland and Bangor and straight home!" (20). Neil Campbell in his book *American Cultural Studies* states that: "from whichever era of American life, the city has always been a focus for human desires and dreams, a place of possibility, success and threat. . . . It represents the world of urban capitalism as a beacon" (192-198). Theodore Dreiser in *Sister Carrie* also declares that "the city has cunning wiles that attract large forces with allure . . . the gleam of thousand lights . . . the persuasive light" (qtd. in Campbell 198). These statements parallel with Willy's: "I'll show you all the towns. America is full of beautiful towns and fine, outstanding people. And they know me boys, they know me up and down new England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, there'll be open sesame for all of us" (21). But the American city is starting to suffocate the family, as Biff admits: "I hate this city" (41). He adds: "they laughed at dad for years and you know why? Because we don't belong in this nuthouse of a city! We should be mixing cement on some open plain, or—or carpenters, a carpenter is allowed to whistle" (43).

This triggers the nostalgia about the American west with its symbolism of the successful, free and self-reliant pioneer. Biff continues dreaming about the west when he asks Happy: "Listen, why don't you come out West with me?" (15) and suggests: "Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles" (15). Even Ben, the symbol of the successful pioneer brother doubts New York: "So, this is Brooklyn, eh" (31)? and continues to tell Willy that "Opportunities are tremendous in Alaska" (31). Here we see a contrast between two different American dreams that are colliding in Loman family anxieties. The urban tragedy is longing for the pioneering past and pastoral country of the west. Not only Biff, but also Willy starts to give up the urban dream and longs for the pastoral west: "You wait, kid, before it's all over we're gonna get a little place out in the country, and I'll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens" (50). Ben encourages Willy to abandon the urban dream in the city: "Get out of these cities, they're full of talk and time payments and courts of law. Screw on your fists and you can fight for a fortune up there" (61). And because the city, as Campbell describes it, is regarded as "a place of hierarchy and status where alienation, superficiality and selfishness are the norm" (199), the west starts to become attractive to the Lomans' eyes. The importance of the western story is depicted in Larry

McMurtry's novel *Lonesome Dove*: "We live in the civilization they created, but within us the wilderness still lingers. What they dreamed, we live; and what they lived, we dream. That is why our western still holds us, however ineptly told" (qtd. in Campbell 143). Willy, Biff and Happy strive for a change in territory, and what I mean by territory is a cultural state of mind. Willy's downfall is not due to his personality, but to circumstances of his territory. New England has become a sales resistant place and a milieu he does not know well enough. He becomes alienated in his own milieu. This feeling of failure and alienation makes Willy look for comfort in the old version of the dream, the dream of the frontier and the west. Willy's commitment to both versions of the dream comes as a legacy of the American past. The economic circumstances that have shaped his fate and failure cannot be controlled by Willy himself and the whole situation is shaped by the American condition. The American myth has not equipped its dreamers to deal with the forces of crisis and economy. In the past Willy "was a happy man with a batch of cement" (101). What is left for Willy to do is to go through an interior struggle with his American dream. Charley reminds him that: "The only thing you got in this world is what you sell (70).

2.2 The Poor Dreamer: American Enough?

Death of a Salesman is about failure, the American style of failure. And what makes failing the American dream a little different and more dramatic compared to other dreams, is its relationship with money. Dreams can be various and very different, and attained by different achievements, but in America, and mainly in modern America, making dreams come true is correlated with making money. Self-worth and identity are related as well to money. Willy says to Biff: "don't undersell yourself, no less than fifteen thousand dollars" (48). The whole American identity is related to the dream that means being at least, middle-class, owning a house, a car, modern appliances and having a happy family. Not abiding by these economic expectations of American society threatens the American identity of the poor. Willy Lowman's struggle to stay in the lower middle class, his struggle to make money, pay bills, pay for the house, sell his products, own good quality appliances, make him doubt his manhood and his identity as a likable American. Biff and Happy struggle financially as well, and they struggle with their identities just like their father does. In this section, I will try to study how the American dream has failed the poor, and how they struggle to validate their identity and gain respect in a society that values wealth.

The play demonstrates a duality that represents the American society of the time; the lower middle class and the rich business-owning men. This creates an opposition between the salaryman and the corporation. The American dream of the capitalist era has actually created two types of Americans: those who achieved the American dream and created enough wealth or their own companies, and those who failed to get close to the dream and stayed dependent on a salary that is barely enough. Characters like Howard, Oliver, Ben, Charley and Bernard represent those richer Americans who have their own independent enterprise. They symbolize corporations that have money and power. These men have a different lifestyle compared to Willy and his sons. Oliver owns an expensive fountain pen. Charley is so rich he can give easily money to Willy every month. Howard has a maid and owns expensive gadgets like the voice recorder and a camera that costs "a hundred and a half" (55). Howard, with all the machines he is buying, is actually a good example of the consumer society the new economic system has created. Bernard socializes with people who own their own tennis court and Ben is supposedly to have gained a fortune from diamonds. On the other hand Willy and his sons suffer from financial problems. Willy has unpaid bills and a large mortgage. His machines are not expensive brands and get broken easily. He is obliged to borrow money from Charley. Biff also does not have a high paying job. He asks Happy for money to buy a tie. He has once been a shipping clerk in Oliver's company and Happy is a sales assistant waiting in vain to become a merchandise manager. Willy is a failed salesman. All three are professionally in relatively low paid jobs and find difficulty to attain social mobility. This shows how much the American dream is limited to a certain category of people, people much higher on the social and professional ladder.

Companies appear throughout the novel, and it seems that they have stolen the American dream for themselves. It is evident that corporations are a very powerful entity that has strong influence on the salarymen's lives. Oliver owns a company, Howard is the owner of the "Wagner Company" (8) that Willy works for. The General Electric Company, one of America's biggest corporations is mentioned. The "chevy" (11), or the Chevrolet, is also present, and is described as the "greatest car" (23). It represents the powerful and thriving automobile industry. Coca Cola, one of the biggest corporations in the world is also in the play. This emphasizes how corporations have gained a central and influential stage in the economic situation in the country. These corporations have a lot of power in influencing the life of the common man. Willy's salary depends on the company he works for, and he almost begs Howard to keep him on at work. Biff goes to Oliver, who has a company as

well to ask for money for his new job idea. Oliver's refusal shows how much the lower class is dependent on these powerful corporations to survive. Happy is also a hostage in the company he works in because he cannot get the raise he needs, and he cannot do anything about it. It is clear that the lives of Biff and his sons depend heavily on these companies financially and morally. Their lives are literally in the hands of corporations. Chester E. Eisinger, in his article "The Wrong Dreams" shows the harsh side of corporations and the ones who hold power in these corporations. He states that: "Howard gives us the dehumanized version of the dream, for he shows us the heartlessness of the business ethic" (98).

In addition to corporations, we can find a lot of vocabulary related to money, moneymaking and hints of the lack of it throughout the play. There is buying, selling, money, bills, and even the mind is what "counts" (7). The struggle of making money is the essence of the play. Willy says: "When the hell did I lose my temper? I asked him if he was making any money" (8). Willy continues to insist: "But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty five dollars a week!" (9). Happy's merchandise manager is a good example of the successful American, who works for the sake of wealth and material rewards. He has built a great estate on Long Island, but "he lived there about two months and sold it once it's finished" (14). Money is earned just for its sake and even Happy questions the essence of this kind of life: "I don't know what the hell I'm working for." And Biff confesses that: "We weren't brought up to grub for money. I don't know how to do it" (15). Biff and Happy wonder whether a dream that revolves on something different than moneymaking is possible in American society.

Linda is the one always realistically reminding the audience that Willy is not by any means rich: "Willy Loman never made a lot of money" (39). She also reminds him to fix his financial problems and pay their bills. She tells him that the refrigerator, washing-machine, vacuum cleaner and the carburator must be paid for. Linda mends her stockings, because they are "So expensive" (27). She wonders: "When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it's he's pay? How long can that go on? How long?" (40). Even Willy admits that: "If business don't pick up, I don't know what I'm gonna do!" (24)

Willy working hard and his conformity with society's rule do not seem to bring enough wealth as promised. Willy thinks and wonders about the others who have made it: "No, no,

some people— some people accomplish something" (8). The successful, rich people he is talking about can be seen in the characters of Charley, his son Bernard, in Ben, and in Howard. Willy constantly compares himself to them and finds it difficult to admit the difference in their success. Depression crushes Willy. His failure to attain the wealth leads him to suicide. Lowman was not the only salesman to be the victim of moneymaking. Miller himself admitted that: "I had known three suicides, two of them salesmen" (The Old Globe 12). Willy goes back in the play to the past, to the depression era, and this shows how the national and personal depressions intertwine, how one's financial status is a manifestation of American identity. Willy simply cannot compete with the American success ideology, an ideology that rejects failure and mainly failure with money and business. Orison Marsden in his book *Entering Business* emphasizes how high the expectations of the dream are: "The creator made man a success-machine . . . and failure is as abnormal to him as discord to harmony" (qtd. in Porter 131). Michael Harrington in his book *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* describes the poor and the unlucky in the material world in a way that reminds us of Willy: "Indeed, if there is any point in American society where one can see poverty as a culture, as a way of life, it is here . . . The other Americans feel differently than the rest of the nation . . . they are lonely and isolated, often rigid and hostile". He adds that "To be poor is not simply to be deprived of the material things of this world. It is to enter a fatal, futile universe, an America within America with a twisted spirit" (129). Harrington's claims confirm the isolation of the have nots within American society and the norms of the American dream. He goes further by relating the financial strain that Americans suffer from to mental illness, and again, this reminds us of Willy: "Stress factors that that might be related to an individual's mental health risk. . . . were poor health, work worries, money worries, a lack of neighbours and friends, marital worries and parental worries" (132).

Willy is also trying to own a house, a car and modern machines, like American society expects every dreamer to do. Willy works hard just to pay off a house that nobody will live in it after he owns it. Home ownership is a status symbol that distinguishes the middle class from the poor. That finally happens in the end and Linda tells Willy at his grave that she has finally made the last payment on the house, after his death.

The influences of Darwinism and laissez faire philosophies can be seen in the way Willy handles his financial problems. Darwinism means that the government should not interfere and that the fittest will adapt to circumstances and succeed, while others stay in shiftless

poverty because it is their fault and not the system's. This reminds us of Willy and his belief that character is enough to succeed. Willy has a good character, but still cannot gain wealth, which proves that economic struggles relate to many circumstances other than the individual's character. Regardless, Willy blames himself. He never blames the system, circumstances or the economic situation for its inequalities. Americans hardly blame anything else for their failures other than themselves. Miller confirms this: "It has often been said that what kept the United States from revolution in the depth of the Great Depression was the readiness of Americans to blame themselves rather than the system for their downfall" (*Timebends* 113). This mentality of the survival of the fittest also reminds us of Ben, who enters the jungles, and gets rich. He never explains how he got the diamonds, but he says never to play fair: "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of jungle that way" (35). This contradicts the American ideals of hard work and hints that there are other, shady ways of making money. Instead of the hard work that Willy believes in, ruthlessness, competitiveness and survival of the fittest seems to be the key to the American dream. The poor cannot make it by being fair, but could make it by accepting the rules of the jungle. Willy's hard work is exploited by the firm that gives him low pay and eventually lays him off. This shows how the unskilled American worker, regardless how hard he works, becomes a disposable worker that can be replaced by anyone. He gets no credit (moral and financial), no rights and mainly he does not get rich. Willy then admits his desperation: about his financial situation: "Ben, nothing's working out, I don't know what to do" (60).

Biff represents the character that doubts and tries to ignore the American ethos of moneymaking as an end in life, an attitude Jon Dietrick confirms in his article "Natural Value and the Logic of Naturalism in *Death of a Salesman*": "Biff would reject Willy's money-centred mentality . . . thus demonstrating his own ability to think of himself as other than commodity" (33). He tries to find an alternative dream and questions the validity of the rigid expectations of society and the importance of money:

BIFF: I tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is. I don't know

— what I'm supposed to want.

HAPPY: What do you mean?

BIFF: Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly manner of existence. To get on

that subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still — that's how you build a future (13).

In this passage Biff questions the values of the American ethos of moneymaking. He admits that he has already tried to follow the path of the American dream and worked in jobs regarded as suitable and valid socially, because they involve buying, selling and making money. He has been a "shipping clerk", a "salesman", has worked in different businesses, and still, he cannot grasp the reason all these jobs are so valued. He has not gained economically nor personally from his previous jobs. These kinds of careers also go against his personal aspirations. They are not what he dreams about or wants. His dreams are not about making money and participating in the capitalist process of gaining markets, selling and buying. He feels alienated in this system that expects you to make a future in this way, and no other alternative way. Biff actually desires to stay outdoors and fulfil different dreams, because for him, unlike what the American dream dictates, it is not money that satisfies him. Then Biff sums it up: "Screw the Business world!" (43).

2.3 The White Man's Dream: Manhood Anxieties and the Fear of Failure.

With the start of the twentieth century, the self-made American man started to face new challenges to his manly existence. The white American male has always embraced the values of life, liberty and property, and being a man meant being responsible for keeping these values. The white American male has been used to being the sole person responsible for the household and being the breadwinner in the family. Being a man meant being responsible, useful, independent and able to meet the needs of his family. Michael Kimmel in his book *Manhood in America* emphasizes this definition by stating that: "heroism was defined by a man's usefulness and service, his recognition of responsibilities" (20), and that what precisely defined a self-made man was his: "success in the market, individual achievement, mobility, wealth" (23). The white man found himself alone in such position, with no competition. Women were not emancipated to do the same, African Americans were slaves and immigrants were not that many. But things changed after the Civil War and with the beginning of the twentieth century the white man found himself surrounded with

competitors for success stories. The increase of the industrial output, factories and big corporations made the society more urban and cities more populated. Mass production meant that most labourers were not responsible for their own salaries in an autonomous way, but become instead part of the crowds controlled by factories and companies. Many American men found themselves turning from autonomous self-made men into men who could not control their fates and salaries anymore as Samuel Eliot describes in the *Journal of Social Sciences*: "to put a man upon wages is to put him in the position of dependent" and that the more dependent he is "the less of a man he becomes" (qtd. in Kimmel 21). What made the situation even more difficult for white men was the new competition from higher number of immigrants, freed slaves, and partly emancipated women who also started joining the workforce. Even the frontier as an escape from failures was not possible anymore, because the western frontier was losing its position to the powerful bankers' city. A man who tamed the wild became underrated while the wealthy banker and businessman became the new American ideal.

Willy Loman and his sons, Biff and Happy, are a very good example of the struggles the white American man faces. Achieving the American dream is not easy for them, and keeping up with society's expectations for success is making it even harder. They are seeking to prove their manhood in a society that has created a unique definition for white manhood. The white man's struggle to prove his manhood is related to undermining his competitors for the American dream, women, African Americans and immigrants. And because *Death of a Salesman* is a totally white play, I will only study the struggles of Willy and his sons in relation to their power struggle with women. I will also explore the importance of validating manhood, failures of manhood and the techniques used by the characters to escape their failures, which are escaping into frontier nostalgia and controlling women. I will study the pressures the American dream creates on the American man.

The fragility of Willy's dream is already hinted in the first page by describing a "fragile seeming home" where a "dream" is rising "out of reality" (5). It is this alienation from reality that is making Willy continue his quest to validate his manhood with his unrealistic expectations embedded in denial. Willy is living with the pressure of being obliged to achieve and prove his manhood to his family and society. But this takes a toll in him. His "exhaustion is apparent", and when he goes to the kitchen, he lets his "burden down" (5). He confesses that he is "tired to death" and that "he could not make it" (6). He also admits that he "could not drive anymore" (6) and that he is "going off the road" (7). Willy is

finding it difficult to do what is expected from him to do, which is making money. Making money is a central issue in the play. When Willy discusses Biff's accomplishments, he wonders whether he was "making any money" (8) which demonstrates that all three, Willy, Biff and Happy, are expected to make good money and good business to be regarded successful men. Willy also realizes that: "selling was the greatest career a man could want" (58).

With the realization that achieving the American dream is not that easy after all, and after feeling threatened by the competition from other groups, the white man, like Willy, has started to blame others for his own failure. Willy states that there are: "more people! That's what ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening" (10)! His statement shows how the white man has always wanted to keep the American dream for himself alone. Competition is making white man's masculinity feel vulnerable. By "more people" we may understand Willy is referring to immigrants and African Americans that have populated New York at the time. In addition to women, these two groups have created a new climate for the American dream, a climate of competition that the white man has fought against. Willy is also trying to find other excuses for his failure by stating that: "Certain men don't get started till later in life. Like Thomas Edison, I think. Or B. F. Goodrich. One of them was deaf" (10). His denial has made him compare himself with great American figures, and live in an unrealistic American dream. His comparison with Edison and Goodrich also shows how important achieving the American dream is for preserving ones identity and its interchangeability with the national identity. It is clear that responsibility for failure is not taken. When Biff fails math, Willy also blames his teacher and not his son's capabilities. It seems that the white American man finds it hard to admit his own failures.

The failures Willy and his sons are facing have created self-confidence problems and a troubled relationship with manhood. Willy is worried about others' gaze upon him. He feels people "laugh at" him and that he is "not noticed". Biff confirms that his father is a failure in the business world: "They laughed at dad for years, and you know why? Because we don't belong in this nuthouse of a city!" (43). Willy compares himself to "other men", who "do it easier". He compares himself to Charley and Ben, a comparison that only triggers more self-conscious feelings in Willy. He thinks about Charley who others "respect" (25), while he is struggling to gain the respect he is striving for from family and society. This makes him self-conscious both morally and physically. He finds himself "fat", "foolish to

look at" and that he is not "dressing to advantage" (25). Even his son Biff hints his father's lack of manhood: "He's got no character" (39), and Happy confirms that: "he's no hot-shot selling man" (47). This shows how much his professional crisis has created a manhood crisis in him. His manhood crisis is amplified after contrasting Willy's and Ben's confidence. Ben: "is a solid man, in his sixties, with a moustache and authoritarian air. He is utterly certain of his destiny, and there is an aura of far places about him" (31). Willy admires Ben's success and manhood: "What a man! There was a man worth talking to" (37). This spirit of competitiveness can be found throughout the play. It conveys the context of Darwinism and the survival of the fittest not only in the play, but within American society as well. The scene showing Biff and Ben fight portrays this. There are many hints that the men are in a jungle where they must compete to be the best. Ben comes out rich and successful from the jungle. And while trying to impress his role model Ben, Willy states that in Brooklyn "we hunt too" (35). And by hunting, Willy tries to use the manliest task possible to incorporate himself within the sphere of the jungle, so he can compete with other manly men already in that sphere.

The other role Willy has failed in, is his role as a father. That is the second reason for his achievement and manhood problems. A successful American man is a man who is a successful breadwinner and a successful father. Having successful children is also important for an American man. But Willy has failed as a father. His sons do not respect him. Biff calls him a "phony", "fake" and "liar" (88). Willy has cared about the boys, but only from the competitive aspect. He wants Biff to be a successful athlete, the best athlete, and return as a "captain"(63) and a "quarterback" of the team, but ignores the more important aspects of a being a father. He does not spend enough time with his sons because of his work and he fails to be interested in handling Biff's stealing problem. He only cares about the superficial traits of his sons, like being handsome and well liked. He also fails to listen to his sons. At the restaurant, Biff tries to tell his father the truth but Willy is not listening. Biff asks: "are you listening to me?" (80). And when Willy understands that Biff's failure at school is due to his discovery of the affair he had with a woman, he feels responsible and guilty for Biff failure. This realization in addition to his professional incompetence triggers a feeling of not being man enough. Eventually this leads him to escape again, this time by committing suicide.

Biff is also portrayed as failing to find a decent job that pays well, and he finds refuge from failure in a farm in the west. Biff is living the old frontier dream that is not a valid proof of

manhood any longer. It is not the accepted mode of masculine success anymore and his father Willy emphasizes that: "How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farm hand?" (8). Because he has chosen that path and not submitted to expectations, he is labelled as "lost". His father Willy decides to "get him a job selling", then "he would be big in no time" (9). This confirms the clash between the new definition of the American dream that means gaining money in the city and the old version of taming the wild as a pioneer in the west. This new definition of the American dream has limited masculine success to a single version that excludes other versions for success. And because of Biff's choice, he has "succeeded less" and his dreams are viewed as "stronger and less acceptable". In his article *The Jungle is Dark and Full of Diamonds: Natural Value and the Logic of Naturalism in Death of a salesman*, Jon Dietrick also states that "this discourse clearly finds voice in Biff's tangled relationship between country and city. . . where it is never clear which life . . . he considers wasted" (30). The fact that the path he has followed is not validated by family or society is making Biff very self-conscious, and his father attacks him for that: "Go back to the west! Be a carpenter, a cowboy, enjoy yourself! (44). Willy's statement shows that society has created a certain definition for a successful American dream, which is gaining money. The statement also shows that other means of self-realization, even the ones that make a man happy are not counted as success stories. Enjoying being a cowboy or a carpenter is socially a failure. Willy also warns Biff before going to meet Oliver: "Tell him you were in the business in the west. Not farm work". Willy's warning shows again that Biff's dream of working on a farm is not the American dream, but rather a destiny to be ashamed about. Happy also notices Biff's confusion about his path and his hesitations, and asks him: "What happened Biff? Where's the old humor, the old confidence"? Biff explains that his father's mockery has been bothering him: "Why does dad mock me all the time Everything I say there's a twist of mockery on his face". Biff is caught between the pressure of pleasing his father and what society dictates as success. He voices his confusion with the definition of the American dream: "It's a measly manner of existence . . . To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying . . . when you all really desire is to be outdoors. . . And still-that's how you build a future" (13). Biff realizes that according to society's definition of a man, he is not one: "I'm like a boy, I'm not married, I'm not in business". This emphasizes that business and making money has become the definition of masculinity in the American society. Having a business and a family is what defines the American dream, but Biff confesses to his mother that he does not "fit in Business" (43). Biff has fled the city and gone to the western states to follow his dreams of

freedom from society's expectations. He even encourages unhappy Happy to "come out west with me" (15) to raise cattle and use "our muscles" (15). Biff is looking for the traditional manly duties to validate his manhood: "men built like we are should be working out in the open" (15). Happy goes further to suggest they would be "The Loman Brothers" in the west, suggesting a label that feels more like a company's name, as if he is looking for legitimacy for their western adventure.

The frontier has always been regarded as the nostalgic place for manly success. Willy is portrayed many times dreaming about Alaska and the west, and contemplating Ben's success there. Sometimes he dreams about joining his father and Ben who left for other frontiers. He dreams about the west every time he realizes he is failing his city dream: "Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time! Ben! That man was a genius, that man was a success incarnate! What a mistake! He begged me to go" (28). He imagines Ben talking to him and saying that: "Opportunity is tremendous in Alaska" (31). This shows that the west has become a mechanism of escape from reality and its failure, and the struggle between the city's definition of manhood and the frontier's definition is very dominant in the play. And while Willy criticizes Biff for choosing farm life, he also contemplates that option: "before it's all over we're gonna get a little place out in the country, and I'll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens . . . I'd built a little guest house" (51). Willy not only nostalgically escapes to the idea of the frontier success every once in a while, but he also ignores the reality of him not being a successful salesman. The west is not the only geographical mobility for Willy, other cities are as well. He thinks he is "vital in New England" (7) and cities like Boston and Providence. This shows that he is compensating social mobility that should be happening in New York, and that he has failed to achieve, by geographical mobility.

In addition the west, another mode of fleeing failure is revalidating one's self by either controlling women in a patriarchal way to regain authority or by using them sexually to regain confidence. Willy treats Linda in a patriarchal way. He orders her about, interrupts her when she is talking and tries to control her. By doing that he wants to prove he is the man of the house. He asks "the woman" as well as Linda to "shut up!" several times. Biff also reminds Linda that Willy has: "always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you" (39). Willy also starts an affair with the "woman" to regain some of his confidence. Chester E. Eisinger in his article "Focus on Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*" confirms that: "When he fails to measure up to the model which he believes

society to have constructed and which he accepts-the American businessman as rugged, independent and successful, then he seeks comfort in his sordid little sin" (101).

Happy is also a good example of this. He treats women as sexual trophies to compensate for his stagnant career. Even though he is somehow nearer to the American dream than Biff, and though he has an apartment, car and dates a lot of women, he admits that "I don't know what the hell I'm working for. . . . But then, it's still what I always wanted . . . and still, goddamit, I'm lonely" (15). He is "lost" but in a "different way" than Biff. He has "never allowed to turn his face towards defeat" and "is thus more confused" (11). He also feels unhappy in his job because he does not get to be a merchandise manager, which means he cannot progress in his career. So, to validate his manhood, Happy finds refuge in sexual encounters: "Sexuality is a visible color on him, or a scent that many women have discovered" (11). Happy presents his status as a womanizer when he declares that "About five hundred women would like to know what was said in this room". It is a status Biff also confirms when he reminds Happy how "bashful" he was with "girls", and Happy corrects him: "Oh, I still am, Biff" (12). Happy compares dating beautiful women to "bowling or something" and that he keeps "knockin' them over and over and it does not mean anything" (16). It is clear Happy is using women as a game and a proof of his competitiveness, a thing he cannot prove at work. And he admits it: "I just have an over developed sense of competition or something" (16).

Sticking to this one dream is what destroys Willy. Regardless of his failures, he is delusional and dreams that "sometime I'll have my own business" (20), because then he would be an independent man and a real man like Ben who declares that he has: "many enterprises" (33). He dreams to be even "bigger than uncle Charley" (20), which shows how much manhood is about competitiveness and comparisons with other men. In the American dream it is not enough to be good; one must be the best, nothing less. But reality strikes Willy hard. He is dependent on the company and on his salary. This has taken independence away from him. His professional performance even puts him at risk of losing the salary and in the end he gets fired. Linda describes the humiliation Willy endures very well: "He works for a company thirty six years this March, opens up unheard of territories to their trademark, and now in his old age they take his salary away" (40). What also undermines his manhood is him being called repeatedly "kid" by the much younger Howard in a

humiliating way (57). As if it was not enough being a salary man, and mainly a dependent salary man, which undermines one's manhood. Willy is feeling humiliated by Howard's and the firm's attitude towards him: "I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away--a man is not a piece of fruit! Willy is feeling humiliated by being dependent all the time of Howard and Charley to make ends meet. The pressures of the American dream crush and kill him eventually. In his essay "What's the Secret? Willy Loman as Desiring Machine", Granger Babcock explains that many critics do not agree that Willy is a victim of the American dream, but instead remains passive in face of his fate: "Willy's problem then according to these critics, is that he accepts his fate; he does not possess the vision . . . capacity . . . to fight against the cultural forces" (28). Miller does not agree. He defends Willy by stating that the law of success is to blame: "it is a law which says a failure in society and in business has no right to live" (qtd. in Murphy 162). The American dream is not only about the salary as Charley confirms: "No man only needs a little salary" (101). It is about being the best. Willy died because there is only one dream allowed for the white American man, a fact Happy confirms: "It's the only dream you can have—to come out number-one man" (102).

2.4 Men Dream, Women Support.

Without doubt, *Death of Salesman* is not just a white play, but also a male-oriented one. It is full of male symbolism and masculinity. This masculinity is contrasted with the play's rather submissive women. All the women's roles in the play are trivialized in one way or another and limited to the care of the home and support of men. Carol Loranger in her essay "Meaningful Work and Self-Determination" describes how difficult it is for women to separate themselves from the domestic sphere:

"Once outside the domestic sphere, women often lacked opportunity to pursue the sort of valued work that might result in financial success; even for those who might break free and succeed by virtue of their hard work, the right of self-determination in their personal lives was not a guaranteed outcome, as families and social communities exerted a continuing pressure to make them conform to their culturally determined roles." (qtd. in Newlin 38)

This does not come as a surprise, because America of the forties was a rather conservative society. The post war period marked a new era and new hope for the future. Marriage rates soared, and the timing was ideal to start a family. Because people wanted more stability and normality after the war, gender roles became traditional again and the women who worked in the factories returned to domestic roles after the war. The feminism America witnessed in

the twenties disappeared and the American middle class favoured women that took care of their husbands, homes, and children. Those were the roles expected of them. Campbell explains that perfect middle-class women were described as those who: "do not want careers, higher education. Political rights—the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for. . . . all they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children" (225-226). This was the age of the *Baby and Child Care Manual* of the very popular Dr. Spock, who advised women to: "Stay at home and only to leave home . . . for a trip to the beauty parlor, to see a movie, to buy a new hat or dress, or visit a good friend (qtd. in Campbell 226). So childcare and the household were paramount in women's lives. A man's role on the other hand was defined as having: "a good business suit, ambition, paying one's bills on time, enough knowledge of baseball to hand out tips at the barbershop"(qtd. in Campbell 226). Women were not expected to aspire to anything more than taking care of their home. So women dreaming to achieve something else were not within the norms of society. Ambition was only meant for men. Men dreamt of success and heroism. And to help men achieve this heroism, they started to re-invoke women's domestic ideology. They fed their own masculinity and ego by dominating women. And for masculinity to assert itself men had to: "rediscover the art of dominating as a lion dominates the lioness—without force usually, without harshness usually, without faltering always"(qtd. in Campbell 227). This state of mind in postwar America shows the level of masculinization of society. Men's success was paralleled by the narrowing of women's spheres. Women felt split between what society expected them and obliged them to do and between their personal aspirations. They could not unite both spheres in the same woman, which became a dilemma for aspiring women.

This post-war antifeminist ideology is very strong in *Death of a Salesman*. One can understand the term "tragedy of common man" as sexually specific. Women are overlooked in the play and all major conflicts are between males. Conflicts like the ones between Willy and Ben, Willy, Biff and Happy, Willy and his father are all between men. Even the home, the so-called women's sphere, is dominated by men. This is clear whenever Willy talks with Linda; he disrespects her, interrupts her and makes his statements seem more important than hers. He does not listen:

Linda: He was just saying-

Willy: I heard what he said! (44)

And interrupts her:

Linda: Oliver always thought the highest of him-

Willy: Will you let me talk?

Biff: Don't yell at her, Pop, will ya?

Willy[angrily]: I was talking, wasn't I?

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

Willy: What're you, takin' over this house?

Linda: Willy-

Willy [turning to her]: Don't take his side all the time, goddammit!

Biff:[furiously]: Stop yelling at her! (46-47).

In this scene, it is clear that Willy is seeing himself as the one controlling the "house" when he says to Biff: "What're you, taking over the house?" Willy is clearly applying the post-war script by trying to dominate Linda and the house to assert his masculinity. His manhood is related to the submissiveness and belittlement of Linda. She is not respected in her own sphere, not listened to or allowed to equally participate in the conversations between the men in her family. Biff confirms Willy's behaviour with Linda: "He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you" (39). Even though Linda is the perfect housewife, mother and wife, she is not given enough credit for her efforts. She manages the bills, is gifted mathematically, takes care of the whole household by herself and is supportive to her husband. What shows even more disrespect for Linda is the fact that Willy cheats on her, even after all her efforts at being the perfect American housewife. Linda seems only to be associated with chores in the house; she keeps appearing with the laundry, she prepares food and pays the bills. Willy does not let her go beyond those chores, not even when it comes to her own sons. Willy prevents Linda from raising them with him. For example when Linda tries to express her concern about Biff's stealing and bad behaviour, Willy ignores her and sees no problem in that, on the contrary, he compliments Biff for being fearless. Willy also declares that his boys sprung from his "stock" undermining any role Linda has had in their birth and upbringing. When Linda asks Willy to be realistic about his success and commissions and calculates the real financial situation he ignores her again. Admitting she is right would undermine his manhood and success. As we see here again, trivializing women feeds the masculine ego. Linda is never appreciated enough. She is not even invited to the all-male celebration dinner her sons and husband are going to.

The whole mother role is also trivialized in the play, and credit is most of the time given unfairly to the fathers. Linda is not the only mother not getting credit; Ben's and Willy's mother is ignored as well. Ben describes his father, who left the family when they were young, as "very great" and a "great inventor" (34), while the mother is described as a "fine specimen of a lady" and an "old girl" (32). Even though the mother raised both boys alone and without any support, Ben left his mother at seventeen and did not contact her again. He did not even know about her death. Even Willy's memories of being in his mother's lap were associated with listening to some kind of music coming from a man "with a big beard" (34). Willy wants his sons to meet his father, because he wants them: "To know the kind of stock they spring from" (34). The trivialization of the mother figure intensifies when Willy has a yearning for his pioneer father with whom he wanted to settle in the north after all the years his mother took care of him and while she was still alive. Maternity cannot compete with the strong patriarchal community in the play. Even Ben's wife who gave him seven sons is barely mentioned.

Women are also objectified throughout the play and referred to as a game that is feeding men's competitive character. This is clear when Happy announces that he always wanted "plenty of women" and that he gets girls "anytime I want," but that "it gets like bowling or something, I just keep knocking them over and it does not mean anything" (15-16). Women are not only associated with play, but also as being mere supporters of men and their achievements. Biff is described as having a crowd of girls "behind him" in his games. Linda does her best to support her husband and encourage him with his work. Women also boost the men sexually. Linda tells Willy he is "the handsomest man in the world", while "the woman" boosts Willy's self-confidence physically through their affair. In his essay "Shame, Guilt, Empathy, and the Search for identity in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*", Fred Ribkoff confirms that Willy: "is driven by feelings of inadequacy and failure to seek himself outside of himself in the eyes of others. . . . The woman" makes him feel that he is an important salesman and a powerful man" (186). Even the beautiful women in the restaurant are there to boost Biff's and Happy's sexual confidence.

Even the women who seem to have careers within the business world are portrayed as cheap, hinting that decent women cannot be a part of the professional world. All working women are given the trivial tasks of secretaries and keeping records and nothing more important than that. They are also portrayed as prostitutes when Willy sleeps with the woman to be able to see the buyers, and Biff tries to date the receptionist to get an

appointment with her boss. Even when Willy meets Jenny, Charley's hard-working and decent secretary he says to her: "How 're ya? Workin'? Or still honest?" (65). This implies that when she is working she is not honest, and can be interpreted as a hint of prostitution. When Jenny asks him how he has been he, answers: "Not much anymore, Jenny. Ha, ha!" (65) His answer can also be interpreted as a sexual innuendo. Sexual connotations and exploitation can be found throughout the play. Women are portrayed as sexual objects. When Happy and Biff recall the past they remember the women with terms like "about five hundred women", "first time", "big Betsy something". Happy's conquests with women have developed from a "pig" to "gorgeous creatures" that he gets "anytime I want" (15-16). Degrading and animalistic adjectives are used to portray women, who are limited to the role of men's sexual satisfaction and being a trophy for men's competitive games. Happy enjoys making the fiancées of his colleagues his collectibles after "ruining" them. And by sleeping with these girls, he compensates for his low status in the business world. Happy even tells Biff he will give him Miss Forsythe, assuming she does not have any choice in the matter herself, and then asks her in a way that hints at prostitution: "You don't happen to sell, do you?" and even when she answers "no" he says to Biff that "she is on call" (74). Stanley calls Letta and Miss Forsythe "chippies" and Happy confirms that "there is not a good woman in a thousand" (74).

In addition to the professional and business world, women are overlooked as well in all references to the pioneer past, the frontier and the American west. The west has always been the big symbol of the American dream and fulfilling oneself. But even this symbol of the dream is controlled by masculine power, eliminating women from being a part of it. The play refers to nature, the west and the pastoral on many occasions as the perfect setting to demonstrate male freedom and self-reliance: "Biff enjoys his life on the farm: "Men built like we are should be working out in the open" (15). Ben goes into the jungle, ends up rich, Willy plants seeds, and Willy's Father as well goes to Alaska looking for his dreams. All the associations of nature with the dream are limited to men. There are no hints of a feminine pioneer's prospects whatsoever, which confirms the idea that dreams are only meant for men. On the contrary, Linda only wonders: "Why must everybody conquer the world?" (61).

In the final scene of Linda at the grave, she does not cry. She wonders why she cannot cry and tells her husband they are now "free", because the house has finally been paid for. But this scene can also represent the freedom of Linda from her husband's masculine ego and

oppression. She does not have him as a burden anymore. This shows that the American dream cannot acknowledge a balanced male-female relationship of equality. Linda gets her freedom only after the loss of her husband and Willy prefers death and destruction rather than admitting his wife is right and letting her create a role of her own the way she wants. Willy's life shows that men's success requires women to subordinate themselves and hide their talents. Linda has been taken for granted and not given enough credit for her role in the family, household and finances. She has also been the biggest support for her family's failed dreams. Kay Stanton confirms this in her essay "Women and the American Dream of *Death of a Salesman*":

The Loman men are less that they hold themselves to be, but Linda is more than she is credited to be. She is indeed the foundation that has allowed the Loman men to build themselves up, if only in dreams, and she is the support that enables them to continue despite their failures. Linda is the one element holding the facade of the family together. Yet even Miller, her creator, seems not to have fully understood her character (129)

This statement confirms how underrated women are despite all their effort for the family. This shows that women's roles are overlooked and their participation is not valued in a traditional patriarchal society. Linda shows patience, supportive behaviour, understanding and even better financial management skills than Willy. But throughout the play she is undermined while the male characters are portrayed as central and influential. It is the male patriarchal power that silences Linda's talents and personality. This power also limits her spheres of influence and condemns her to a domestic role she is obliged to live within.

Chapter Three

The Pursuit of Happiness and the Aspiring African American in *Invisible Man*

Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* tells the story of the African American experience and the complexities of the American dream in the post-war United States. Ellison explores with great talent the different layers in the relationship of the African American with his identity, country and dreams. The protagonist of the novel, an invisible man, takes a journey full of failed experiences and disappointments that eventually transform him from his state of humility and naivety to a state of self-awareness about his identity. The narrator, who is the protagonist at the same time, comes to terms with the rules of the American dream. He discovers through his failures that the white power structure is a major force in controlling African American lives and dreams. By using the special narrative technique of making the narrator also the protagonist, Ellison demystifies the complex circumstances that make the American dream unattainable for black Americans. The process of self-awareness that Ellison uses in the novel highlights how the protagonist, though a free American man, realises that issues of race and class are condemning his dream.

The events take place in the 1940s, an important period in American history. At that time black Americans had to endure segregation in everyday life, and the separation between black and white lives continued. Blacks were not a part of the community, but a community within a community. They lived in separate neighbourhoods, like Harlem, that became an important territory and symbol for African Americans. In many southern states, they still could not marry white women, vote or even live in buildings meant for whites. They were underpaid as well and faced many economic obstacles. White America controlled their lives and exploited them, because "they could be kept in place" (Harrington 27). Conditions were harsh, and achieving dreams was even more difficult, because of the absence of equal opportunities. In this chapter, I am going to explore the difficulties black Americans face in order to follow the American dream. What makes *Invisible Man* a suitable choice is the fact Ellison studies the reasons behind the failure of the African American pursuit of the dream. I will explore why the African American personified by the protagonist fails to achieve any of his plans even after doing everything according to instructions and even though he has become a free man. I want to present the reasons African Americans are not equally given

the chances their white counterparts are. Racism by the white majority creates borders that the African American finds hard to overcome. The class struggle between the African American farmer and the educated African American also creates tension within the African American community itself. I will study why an African American as a citizen in a free society and in his country faces so many obstacles. I will study their identity crisis and how it relates to the American dream. I will also explain how the class structure between black and white and between black and black creates obstacles in the way of upward mobility. I will also explore how the female characters, black and white, have also been silenced in this patriarchal white world.

3.1 Black Identity in America: Between Invisibility and Self-Realisation

For us to comprehend the nature of the invisible man's quest to realize his dreams, we must realize the importance of identity in his story. The status of identity in his life is a complex relationship between being African American and being American in a white society after slavery. The invisible man finds it hard to define his own status and to understand its relationship to achieving his goals. He follows a journey of self-realization and discovery from within and through the interaction with whites and blacks around him. I will study the process and the complexities that form the narrator's identity in particular and black Americans in general. The relationship between blacks and the United States has always been controversial. And according to Charles Banner-Haley, what makes the concept of race so unique to African Americans is the fact that their race has always been tied to slavery. But what is making this socially constructed identity troublesome, are the white values that control it. Even after the demise of slavery, racism continued to exist in society as a system. Ideologically speaking, racism was in all spheres. The definition of black Americans was defined and controlled by whites, who imposed that same definition on the black American himself. Banner-Haley explains that this made it difficult for black Americans to identify and understand themselves (12-20).

The invisible man in the novel realizes his invisibility and acknowledges that it is: "a matter of construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality" (3). By his statement, he declares that the inner eyes of the white community do not see black Americans as equals, which renders them invisible. What reinforces this identity crisis within the black American community is also their own negative perception of themselves, and their acceptance of white superiority. The invisible man, in

his naive beginnings falls into this trap and urges the black community in his speech to be humble in the white society. He is eager to please the white elite by his oration. He even takes part in the humiliating battle royal meant as entertainment for the white elite. But still, he accepts the humiliation and cannot imagine being outside the values of the white community. He pursues his self-worth through those same white values to the extent he feels guilty about going outside that hierarchy: "I felt a guilt that in some way I was doing something that was really against the wishes of the white folks" (17). He also confirms this hierarchy, when he declares that: "Men like us, did not look at men like Mr. Norton in that manner" (90). By saying this about Mr. Norton, who is a wealthy white man and one of the college trustees, he confirms white superiority, but also the separation between the two communities. The negative perception blacks have about themselves is not only moral, but also physical. When Trueblood, the poor African American from the ghetto who commits incest with his daughter, describes his daughter and compares her to her mother, he states that she is: "only better lookin'. You know, we gittin' to be a better looking' race of people" (54). This statement shows that the black American's perception of his own body and physicality lacks self-confidence, because he believes the labels white society has been imposing on him. Trueblood has fallen into the trap of believing that the black race has not been beautiful enough. The scene of the invisible man passing by a window decorated by whitening ointments shows how white power advertises for the idea of ugly blackness, by through discourse like: "You too can be truly beautiful" and "win greater happiness with whiter complexion" (262). White domination of black identity ideologically and symbolically in the novel, is very strong.

The scene of the oration by the invisible man in front of the white wealthy men shows how submissive to white rules the protagonist is, and how his own identity is weak, and ridiculed by the white audience. The white men do not take his oration seriously, "but still they talked and still they laughed as though deaf with cotton in dirty ears" (30) and the "room was filled with uproar of laughter" (31). When he mentions "social equality" that he remembers was "debated in private," "sounds of displeasure filled the room" and the audience becomes hostile. The master of ceremonies asks him if he was sure he had not made a mistake by mentioning "equality" and reminds him that "you've got to know your place all the times ". The invisible man's submission to and acceptance of their reaction confirms how he contributes to his own feeling of inferiority by accepting to be in his "place at all times" and naively obeying the master of ceremonies' orders. He is here accepting the boundaries of

racist white authority and confirming them, as well as reinforcing the white hierarchy. He himself, as a black man, is a part of the system that is making him a second-class citizen. After his speech, he rejoices in the fact that he was praised and was given a prize by the white elite: "I felt an importance that I have never dreamed" (32). Throughout the novel, the invisible man encounters different forms of authority that impose various identities upon him, which he naively accepts. Valerie Smith in her article "The Meaning of Narration in *Invisible Man*", confirms this process: "One might describe the story of Ellison's protagonist as the quest for an appropriate identity. Throughout his life, he encounters figures of authority—Norton, Bledsoe, the Brotherhood—who impose false names or unsuitable identities upon him." Smith adds that, "the act of naming is linked inextricably to issues of power and control" (191). Because he is living according to what others dictate, the protagonist of *Invisible Man* loses his freedom. He is always labelled by others, and given the way of doing things by others.

Black American identity as part of the American identity faces obstacles of assimilation. The protagonist finds it hard to relate to his own country. He feels he is an entity inside another larger entity, instead of being a part of it. He separates his hole, the dark underground hiding place where he hides, from the other spots in New York: "I doubt there is a brighter spot in New York than this hole of mine, and I do not exclude Broadway. Or the Empire State building on a photographer's dream night. But that is taking advantage of you. Those two spots are among the darkest of our whole civilization— pardon me, our whole culture" (6). The protagonist describes these iconic American spots, American culture, and civilization as "dark," because they take advantage of him. This also shows that he cannot relate to American culture. Norton calls black people "your people" a number of times (41) when he talks with the invisible man about destiny and Emerson, as if they were not part of the American people already. And when the protagonist insists to Emerson's son that: "I'll prove my identity", he answers: "Identity! My God! Who has any identity anymore anyway? It's not so perfectly simple" (187). He also adds that: "With us it's still Jim and Huck Finn" (188). Mr Emerson's statements explain that it is not that simple for the invisible man to have his own identity, because he is still caught in the black and white duality of Jim and Huckleberry Finn. The reason behind the duality that white America is embracing can be summed up with the slogan on the electric sign by the Liberty Paint plant that says: "KEEP AMERICA PURE". The way the protagonist describes this scene with "the flags" that were "flattering in the breeze" and how it felt like a "patriotic ceremony"

(196) makes the reader feel as if this obsession with purity and separation between the races in America is a national duty and a patriotic act. The white American's obsession with purity is intensified with the scenes from the paint plant, where the aim was to create the best, purest paint ever for the government. The protagonist wonders if that white paint was of "better quality" or a "special mix" (201). The fact that the paint was used for government institutions enforces the link between white superiority and authority. The relationship between white superiority and national identity is also re-enforced by Kimbro, the white man the narrator works for in Liberty Paint, with his statement about the paint : " That's it, it's as white as George Washington's Sunday-go-to meetin' wig and as sound as the almighty dollar!" (202). Here, the pure white paint is paralleled with national symbols like George Washington and the dollar. This symbolizes how national identity and economic power are both controlled by the white man, who excludes the black American from being part of this identity, because, as the protagonist remembers: "If you're white, you're right"(218). And concerning the black identity, the only thing left for them is "black emptiness" that cannot compete with the "bath of whiteness" (230).

The existence of the black and white or dark and light binary oppositions can be found almost in every page of the novel, which emphasizes the separation between the black identity and white identity in the United States. It mirrors the separation and segregation based on colour in American society. Ellison uses white and black colours persistently. He talks about "white folks", "black folks", "Lily-white men", "white person", "rich white man", "white hand", "white fellow", "white vapor", "unbroken blackness", "black anger", "white bread", "black pigeons" and hundreds of other phrases.

Norton's discourse also shows how stereotypes about blacks are imposed on them to separate them from white America, for example when he comments on the fact that Matty Lou, Trueblood's pregnant daughter, does not have a husband: "Oh, I see. But that should not be so strange. I understand that your people—Never mind! Is that all?" (49)? Here Norton reinforces the stereotype of blacks being sexual beasts that have no values. This sexual beast label that is given as a component of black identity is reinforced when in Trueblood's dream, Mr. Broadnax discovers him having sex. He simply states: "They just nigguhs, leave them do it" (58). The black sexual beast label continues throughout the novel when the unnamed woman states that the invisible man makes her "afraid" in a "primitive" way (413) and when Sybil asks him to rape her towards the end. The fact that Trueblood has been treated well by whites after his deed also shows how much the sexual beast label

has been normalized by white society, and how much black Americans are expected to fit into this label.

The invisible man tries to separate his identity from this imposed label stating: "But Sybil, you can see I am not like that" (518). He also expresses his anxiety about how his identity is defined: "But what does she think you are? A domesticated rapist, obviously, an expert on the woman question. Maybe that's what you are" (521). The invisible man starts to have many existential questions about his identity within the white world around him: "Where did my body end and the crystal and white world begin" (238)? The doctor's written questions to him continue the process of the protagonist's existential journey. When he is asked about his name, identity, his mother and where he was born, he finds big difficulties in answering the questions: "I was failing, I tried again, plunging into the blackness of my mind . . . I found nothing but pain. . . . Who am I? I asked myself . . . Maybe I was just this blackness and bewilderment and pain" (239-240). Then he acknowledges that when: "I discover who I am, I'll be free" (243). The protagonist goes through a journey of self-discovery. He has always been defined by others, and given orders about what to do by others. He is given a new name by the brotherhood, called "nigger" by other blacks and called "boy". He is asked to forget his past by the brotherhood, expected to be something important to the race by Mary, expected to use humility to go forward, to lie and tell whites what they want to hear and asked to become a new T. Booker Washington. He is even defined by Ras as "You African. African!" This last statement shows how African Americans, after feeling excluded from the national American identity, have resorted to re-creating their African roots as a new identity. Ras insists that the invisible man is from: "down south! You from Trinidad! You from Barbados! Jamaica, South Africa" (371). But the invisible man, in his quest for identity realises that the identity Ras is suggesting is not the answer, and that resorting to Black Nationalism would only reinforce the binary opposition of black and white. Harlem is also regraded as black American territory, the place they can create and find their own identity in. Ras confirms that Harlem is: "The black mahn's territory" (374). This again re-enforces the separation between black and white spheres within the same city and same country. Harlem is a city within a city. Ellison himself portrays it in his essay "Harlem Is Nowhere" as: "a ruin. . . . overcrowded and exploited politically and economically, Harlem is the scene and symbol of the Negro's perpetual alienation in the land of his birth" (242-243). But Harlem is also the embodiment of cultural experimentation, because black American's quest for identity has forced them to

re-create themselves. Morris Dickstein in his article "Ralph Ellison, Race and American culture" confirms that: "oppression and dislocation" in the black community has created the need to "experiment and develop a new language . . . they had to improvise" (130).

This need to tell their own story and to improvise is what made blues and jazz an important component in black American life and culture. Music became a way of recreating and asserting themselves. Jazz was also a refuge in times of crisis and sadness: "What did I do, to be so black and blue" (12)? It was also a way to tell an individual story and identity without any masks, like when the poor bluesman sings about sexual catharsis with his ugly woman and testifies to his love for her: "She's got feet like a monkey. . . . But when she starts loving me, I holler whoooo God-dog! Cause I loves my baby" (173). Blues and jazz as an oral tradition becomes a way to assert the black American identity and give it an essence: "I ends up singing the blues . . . and while I'm singing them blues, I makes up my mind that I ain't nobody but myself" (66).

This importance of developing a new language is also exemplified when Ellison relates the act of reaching identity to his narrative act when he contemplates in his hole that:

It was as though I'd learned suddenly to look around corners; Images of past humiliations flickered through my head and I saw that they were more than separate experiences. They were me; they defined me. I was my experiences and my experiences were me, and no blind men, no matter how powerful they became, even if they conquered the world, could take that, or change a single itch, taunt, laugh, cry, scar, ache, rage or pain of it (497).

The protagonist suggests that with his narrative he can show the meaning of his life. He discovers, in an Emersonian way the importance of self-reliance and individual experiences in shaping his own independent identity. By the process of narrative and his role as also a narrator, he regains authority of this identity. And by contrasting his way of opening the narrative, in which he highlights his naive persona, to this passage full of self-awareness, he creates a biography that follows his journey from ignorance to wisdom. His experiences, through his narrative, become the process of liberation. And this double consciousness of being both narrator and protagonist becomes the weapon against white authority, because nothing is more powerful than telling your own story yourself. It is one's own experiences that should determine identity and not the false identities others are trying to impose. These experiences make the invisible man realize by the end, that the past was important, that all his stories were important, and by telling them and accepting them as they are his identity becomes finally alive. He also admits that: "After years of trying to adopt the opinions of others, I finally rebelled" (575). The invisible man realises that it is him, and nobody else

who has to define his own identity, and he eventually distances himself from society to write his own story. Valerie Smith in her article "The Meaning of Narration in *Invisible Man*" confirms that: "He leaves the reader with the conviction that the double consciousness of being both narrator and participant in his own story empowers him" (209). By the end the protagonist does not let other authorities define his identity. His narrative has a cyclical structure that makes him remove, one a time, one figure of authority. With his narrative, he leaves behind Bledsoe, Norton, the college, the Brotherhood and all social structures that have tried to control him. By retreating to his hole to write about himself, he starts the process of independence, because the last part of his narrative will depend on his voice and only his. He has full authority of himself. By doing this he convinces the reader that his double consciousness empowers him, while his earlier duplicity did not. But the fact that the narrator knows when to stop his narrative makes him seem more sophisticated than the protagonist. This also reinforces the boundaries between the invisible man as a narrator, and as a protagonist. At least the Invisible man, unlike Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* and Willy Loman in *The Death of a Salesman*, comes to terms with his real identity. While Gatsby embraces the false identity he creates, and while Willy Loman cannot due to his weak identity accept and embrace his true self, the invisible man, on the other hand, becomes visible when he accepts himself without shame. He tells his own story that can be summed up in his statement: "I yam what I yam" (266).

3.2 The Class Obstacle: The Rich White, the Refined Black and the African American Farmer.

In addition to the identity crisis the black American is living in American society, he faces a class struggle that becomes an obstacle to upward mobility. It is not only the black- white duality that limits the black American dream, but it is also the class structure that has an influence on the different paths one can follow. In *Invisible Man*, we notice the presence of three categories: The rich white man, the refined black man, and the poor field African American. For the field African American hand, it is difficult to shift from his social level to become the refined black man or the urban black man. And for the refined black man, it is hard to have the life of the rich white man in an equal way. Upward mobility transcends the black—white definition and becomes dependent on the class struggle as well. The class struggle is not only between the black and white communities, but also within the black community itself.

The African American field hand is the poor black American who works in the fields and lives in the countryside. He is portrayed as uneducated, unmannered and stupid. He is the victim of both, black and white ridicule. And because most field hands are the descendants of slaves, they occupy the southern spheres of the United States. The conditions these rural African Americans live in are portrayed in the protagonist's and Norton's visit to the countryside: "We were passing a collection of shacks and log cabins now, bleached white and warped by the weather". Their houses only consist of "two square rooms" (46). The invisible man also describes Trueblood, a rural African American who is a good singer. Trueblood used to participate in the chapel with the quartet before his act of incest. But what he, and the quartet sang, was called by the officials "their primitive spirituals" (47). The fact that Ellison chooses Trueblood as the suitable character for the act of incest only re-enforces this label of the rural black primitivism. The narrator continues to belittle Trueblood and the peasant, when he explains that: "We were embarrassed by the earthly harmonies they sang", and because Trueblood made "animal sounds" while singing. The narrator confirms that the peasants were hated by both the whites, and the more refined blacks. He admits that: "all of us at the college hated the black belt people, the peasants, during those days"! (47). And when Norton asks him if Matty Lou and her mother Kate would know something about the history of the place, the narrator doubts that, because "they don't seem very bright". He also adds that the people living in that area are "too ignorant" (48). When Trueblood tells his story of incest and rephrases Kate's reaction, the narrator does not give her credit for the vocabulary she uses and suspects that "she musta learned them words from the preacher" (67). The rural African American represents shame for the other, more educated African Americans. Bledsoe for instance is furious when he knows that the invisible man took Norton on a drive to the slum: "Did you think a white man had to come a thousand miles—all the way from New York and Boston and Philadelphia just for you to show him a slum?" (138). He adds furiously: "Didn't you know you were endangering the school?" (139). It is clear, that the educated class of black Americans regard the rural black class as harmful to their prestige. And because the narrator has shown Norton the black rural reality, he is thrown out of college and accused of bringing shame upon the whole race: "College for Negros! Boy, what do you know about ruining an institution. . . . Instead of uplifting the race you have torn it down" (140). The educated blacks want absolutely to distance themselves from their rural counterparts, and mainly in front of whites to avoid shame. They do not want to acknowledge the existence of a "vulgar" rural identity within their own community.

The double segregation, by both blacks and whites, makes it difficult for the rural class to improve their status within the community. The college for blacks, as mentioned before, hated these peasants, and instead of serving and helping them to improve their status, it sustained their alienation. This alienation is also reinforced by whites as well. Norton, the supposedly northern symbol of black freedom and reconstruction, finishes Trueblood's story by giving him the hundred dollar bill and leaving after listening to his story, as if he was listening to some kind of thrilling entertainment. Norton does not express any concern about the victim what so ever. The white land-owning southerners take part as well in re-enforcing the peasant alienation by celebrating Trueblood's act of incest and normalizing it. John S. Wright in his article "The Conscious Hero and the Rights of Man" confirms the role whites have by declaring that: "Trueblood's perverse mishap confirms the power of the southerners to re-enslave him, it confirms the impotence, conversely, of northern liberalism to free him" (236). He also adds that: "Jim Trueblood, in the rhetoric [Booker T.] Washington so assiduously cultivated, is the novel's primary embodiment of that man farthest down for whom the buckets of racial uplift are to be lowered" (236). It is Trueblood who is ridiculed in this African American college when he wants to learn about crops. This attitude excludes the peasant African Americans from their right to upward mobility and chances for a better status, learning and new horizons. Everything related to these farm hands becomes a source of shame for the race. Everything they do becomes a symbol of backwardness. The narrator hesitates to eat the yams at first, because it is a southern tradition. He changes his mind about eating pork chops for the same reason and regrets naively that he called the secretary in New York "maa'm". He tries to avoid any act that may link him to the rural class. Eventually, though, the narrator starts questioning these constructed, class-related manners and finds nothing really shameful about them. The obsession of the educated blacks with uplifting the race has made them turn eating something one enjoys (like yams) into a humiliating act: "What a group of people we were, I thought. Why, you could cause us the greatest humiliation simply by confronting us with something we liked" (264). All these behaviours and attitudes create a strong class division that makes genuine uplifting hard. The insults the yellow woman yells to the narrator shows how "field niggers" are constantly attacked and not given a chance: "We keep our place clean and respectable and we don't want you field niggers coming up from the south and ruining things" (328).

While the rural African Americans struggle for racial and socioeconomic reasons, the educated black class struggles because it oscillates between a peasant class it wants to avoid and a white class it strives for but can never be part of. Even with all their efforts, there remains a clear social, racial and economic division that limits the equality of opportunities. The white style of life just seems out of the black league. The white have privileges, while the African Americans don't. When the narrator travels to New York, the bus he uses has separate seats for the "colored." The process of getting an appointment is slower for the blacks. The "basement" he lives in, is in a building that is "rented strictly to whites" (6). It is clear that "being born a Negro will continue to be the most profound disability that in the United States imposes upon a citizen" (Harrington 76). The whites were are most of the time portrayed as rich: "All of the town's big shots were there in their tuxedos, wolfing down the buffet food, drinking beer and whisky and smoking black cigars" (17). The narrator declares: "oh, oh, oh those millionaires" (37), while he waits for Norton whom he sees: "studying a wafer-thin watch", and notices that "his shirt was soft silk . . . his manner was aristocratic, his movements dapper and suave" (38). The narrator is also astonished by the white men's offices when he goes to hand out the letters and declares, perplexed: "These folks are the kings of the earth" (181). The difference between the white and black can also be seen in the photograph: "of men and women in wagons drawn by mule teams and oxen, dressed in black, dusty clothing, people who seemed almost without individuality, a black mob seemed to be waiting, looking with blank faces, and among them the inevitable collection of white men and women in smiles, clear of features, striking elegant and confident" (39). This photograph portrays very well how different the white and black worlds are. It is a world divided between black and white, the poor and rich, the happy and the unhappy, the confident and the invisible and the beautiful and ugly. And to achieve real mobility, black Americans had to overcome all those obstacles, while white Americans had the power and the ability of doing anything they wanted, as the prostitute from the Golden Day declares: "They want to have the whole world" (88).

It is not only the white wealth and privilege that creates the division between whites and educated blacks. There is also the issue of racial inequality. In the paint plant, young black men, college- educated, are hired because "that way they don't have to pay union wages" (197). This indicates that even educated black Americans were taken advantage of and did not have the same rights, wages and union memberships. The discussion between two doctors who hesitate about a peculiar operation to be performed on the invisible man also

sheds light on the moral inequality blacks are facing. They do not even get an equal examination from a doctor for an illness:" It is a mistake to assume that solutions—cures, that isth—at apply in, uh . . . primitive instances, are, uh . . . equally effective when more advanced conditions are in question. Suppose it was a New Englander with a Harvard background" (236)? The strength of the class division between the whites and blacks in the white psyche is re-enforced when one of the brothers asks the narrator to sing: "White man sleep in a feather bed, Nigger sleep on the flo' . . . ". Jack gets furious and calls it "racial chauvinism" (312).

Inequality is faced by the black man everywhere. The way in which Clifton, the young African American activist in the Brotherhood, dies is another good example. It triggers additional questions about equality and mainly with the authorities. The policeman who killed him: "would be Clifton's historian, his judge, his witness and his executioner" (439). Clifton has been killed, judged, silenced and witnessed by the same white authority. He does not get equal treatment, and has been judged as a second- class citizen. He is not given the right to defend himself and speak for himself. Black Americans are not even guaranteed justice and it seems that the white man is always ahead of them in all spheres. He is always one or more steps ahead. This is what is keeping "the Nigger-boy running" (33). Whatever he tries, however hard to works, he never achieves any dream. Upward mobility in an unequal society is a myth. Going up is not that easy as staying down, as he realizes in his hole: "Then I was in the dark and blundering around, feeling rough walls and the coal giving way beneath each step like treacherous sand. I tried to reach above me but found only space, unbroken and impenetrable. Then I tried to find the usual ladder that leads out of such holes, but there was none . . . and I realized that to light my way out I would have to burn every paper in my briefcase" (567). This statement about the protagonist's search for a ladder out of his hole can be seen as a symbolic image to his quest for upward mobility. He realizes that the world he wants to reach to from his "dark" existence is "impenetrable". He also notes that there is no "ladder" for upward mobility from the "dark" black American world. He explains that he has just been "blundering around", which implies his failed attempts to find a path towards a better status. When he in the end states that he "realizes" that the only "light" for a solution was to "burn every paper" he had. The papers he had symbolized all the past authorities and class structures that controlled him and his dreams. From Bledsoe's letter to the Brotherhood's paper he burns them to see the light. His process of realization starts here when he confesses he "realized" his way out was by burning them.

This reinforces, along with his awareness as a narrator, his liberation process from class codes and structures. As a narrator, he liberates his protagonist self when he realizes that his free identity emerges only when he burns and ignores what class structure has tried to impose on him.

3.3 Black American Dreams: White American Rules.

Richard Yarborough states in "The Quest for the American Dream in Three Afro-American Novels: *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, *The Street*, and *Invisible Man*" that "Afro- Americans felt that they would only have to follow the rules which white society prescribed in order to attain the American Dream" (33). The instructions seemed simple and easy to follow. In order for black Americans to achieve the American dream, they just had to follow what white Americans did or dictated. But the recipe was not as simple as it seemed, because it ignored the components of identity, class, race, equality and freedom of choice. Black Americans did not have the same background, starting point or even the same rights in society to be able to use white rules to achieve success. The narrator follows all the rules he is told, obeys orders and does everything society dictates him to do, but still he faces a series of disappointments and failures. He eventually realizes that he has followed the wrong path, a path that only led white Americans to success.

In his naive beginnings, the narrator believes that "humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress . . . I only believed that it worked" (17). He believed so hard in humility as means to success, that he humiliated himself multiple times. He used it in every difficult situation he encountered as a solution. When he was asked to fight in the battle royal, he wondered: "was not this a moment for humility, for non-resistance?" (25).

This method of progressing with humility makes the narrator depend on white orders and instruction to achieve anything. After his oration, and as a result of his submissiveness to the white elite, he gets a scholarship to an African American college. He also gets important papers from the white elite, papers that will "shape the destiny" of his people (32) and give him access to college. This demonstrates that his fate and destiny are related to white power. It is the white elite that "shapes" his future, and it is them who dictate the rules. The narrator admits he depends on whites for success, again, when he thinks he should flatter Norton: "it was advantageous to flatter rich white folks. Perhaps he'd give a large tip, or a suit, or a scholarship next year". Norton confirms to the amused narrator that his scholarship is "a great dream becomes reality" (38). He also tells him that he, as a white

contributor, is part of the "vision" of the college (39), and the "destiny" of black people (41). The narrator is only a follower in the paradigms of white power; he has no control over his own fate, the same way he follows "half consciously", "the white line as he drove" (46). The narrator's ultimate dream at the time was to be like Bledsoe, the African American collage president: "he was the example of everything I hoped to be: the influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race . . . a possessor of not one, but two Cadillacs, a good salary, and a soft, good looking and creamy complexioned wife" (101). The veteran in the Golden Day confronts the naive narrator and Norton with the truth. He insists that the narrator "fails to understand the simple facts of life," that he is a "walking zombie" and "a mechanical man" that is not following his own path, but is just "the perfect achievement" not of his own dreams, but of Norton's. The narrator is just the "mark on the scorecard of your achievement," he tells Norton, "a thing", and not "a man" (94-95). This confrontation does not make the narrator realise his naiveté yet; on the contrary, he still believes in humility as a solution to avoid being expelled: "I wanted to stop . . . Mr Norton, to beg his pardon for what he has seen, to plead and show him tears, unashamed tears like those of a child . . . far from being like any of the people we had seen, I hated them" (99). The narrator's humility is turning more and more into self-humiliation and self-alienation from his black African identity that is already troubled. But it does not help, and the narrator faces his first bitter disappointment by being expelled from college. He is confronted by Bledsoe, who tells him he does not understand how things are done. He insists that: "you don't know the difference between the ways things are, and the way they're supposed to be.". He explains that the rules are to lie to "white folks," "to pretend to please" them, even to "lick around" and "act the nigger" (142-143). He gives him the recipe for black success: "You let white folk worry about pride and dignity, You learn where you are and get yourself power, influence, contacts with powerful and influential people-then stay in the dark and use it" (145). The narrator realizes that the road to success is not the Horatio Alger recipe after all, but many sneaky tactics, losing one's dignity, being sycophantic, and then using that power from the dark to let the whites think they are still in power. But even though the narrator has faced a setback, he naively continues to have hope and believe that Bledsoe is sending him to important people that can offer him a job. The narrator follows Bledsoe's instructions, believing that he has "to submit to punishment" (147), and goes to New York trying to find a job. New York becomes the new destination for the narrator's dreams. It is a place that the vet calls "not a place" but "a dream" where he can even dance with a "white girl," which has always been the forbidden fantasy of black

men (152). He also warns him from the authority of the "white folks . . . the force that pulls your strings until you refuse to be pulled anymore. The big man who's never there, where you think he is" (154). The narrator feels optimism, is impressed by Harlem and the opportunities it hides and starts dreaming about serving his employer, saving money and returning in the fall "full of New York life" and being a "leading campus figure" (157). He even thinks going forward by pretending and using Bledsoe tactics is the way to success: "I would have one way of speaking in the North and another in the South. Give them what they wanted down south, that was the way. If Dr. Bledsoe could do it, so could I" (164). But then Emerson's son puts the narrator in touch with reality again and destroys the dreams he has been creating by showing him Bledsoe's letter. For the second time, the narrator faces disappointment due to his naive belief in the rules. Emerson warns him: "Ambition is a wonderful force, but sometimes it can be blinding" (184). This harsh reality shocks the narrator, who starts slowly to reconsider the rules. His job in the paint plant reinforces his anger towards reality and the forces that control him. He starts to feel anger against the system. When Brockway tries to assault him physically, he resists his authority this time: "You were trained to accept the foolishness of such old men . . . but this was too much" (225). His accident at the plant and his experience in the hospital make him more self-reflexive about his path and his dreams. He reaches the realisation that he should become free from humility, from the pretending and the imposed manners that control him. He starts his new life in the city trying to achieve visibility by achieving something and proving his worth. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. explains in his article "Ellison's Vision of Communitas" that: "The executive powers, ordain that being black he shall be "invisible", and thus his great central effort becomes that of wresting an acknowledgment, of achieving visibility" (112).

It is not only the white rules that impose the narrator's dreams upon him, but the dream is also strongly related to the collective dreams of the black race. When a black American is dreaming, the whole race is dreaming with him. The collective psyche of the black race imposes its expectations upon the individual dream. Mary Rambo tells the narrator: "It's you young folks what's going to make the changes . . . you got to lead and you got to fight and move us all a little higher." And when the narrator reflects on what he wants to do, she says: "I hope it is something that's a credit to the race". (255). It is not only Mary that expects certain dreams from the narrator, Jack, from the Brotherhood suggests he becomes the new T. Booker T. Washington and be a new leader for the race. Jack orders him: "you have the duty of working in their interests" (293). Even the sacrifice and manipulation of

the narrator by the Brotherhood is related to the bigger sacrifice of the whole black community in Harlem by the same Brotherhood. Again, both fates are interchangeable. Ellison depicts how the black American dream has created utopias that they think can save them and the race as well: "The lobby was a meeting place for . . . older advocates of racial progress with utopian schemes for building black business empires . . . old men of sixty or more still caught up in post-Civil War dreams of freedom . . . the younger crowd . . . still unaware that they dream" are about "abstract games" (256). Even shame is collective. The narrator and the school feel the whole race is shamed by Trueblood's incestuous deed. The shame of the old evicted couple is also "our shame" (181). Individual black success and failure is interchangeable with the collective failure and success in a very strong way.

In the beginning, the narrator embraces Jack's invitation and believes in the authenticity of the Brotherhood. He considers his new role his new dream: "They'd made me see the possibility of achieving something greater and more important than I've ever dreamed" (355). Again the narrator, though more mature this time, does not realise that the dream the brotherhood has created for him is nothing but an "instrument of the committee's authority" (363). The narrator then gets a letter that sums up how black success is dealt with: "If you get too big, they will cut you down. You are from the south, and you know, this is a white man's world" (383). This letter confirms how the white system always wants to keep black dreams at bay, in their place and under control. They must stay enslaved to white power. When brother Tarp gives the narrator the piece of steel that represents a souvenir from his long prison years, the narrator remembers that Bledsoe had one that resembles it on his desk, but without the traces that show "it has been stubbornly yielded" like the one Tarp has. This symbolises the unseen imprisonment people like Bledsoe are living by abdicating to white power in contrast to Tarp, who has had the courage to resist and say no and bravely take the consequences for it. The black American is not expected to go beyond the limits white power sets. The narrator is told that "he was not hired to think" (469). When he asks if he could express his ideas, he is told that ideas only come from the committee that will dictate them to him (470) and make the "decisions" for him (472). He is also given the order of telling people what to think. The narrator is also annoyed when he is undermined by the Brotherhood as a "smart beginner" who skipped "several grades" (470). The narrator is belittled and controlled by the Brotherhood; he has no freedom of choice to do things his way. He is all the time pulled down. It is not only him that has been asked to slow down, but also his fellow members and the black American community as a whole.

The black community is portrayed as being alienated from the American dream and American identity. The old black couple, for instance, is "living, but dead. Dead in living" (290). The narrator also wonders about the fate of those who are not part of the system, who are searching for a path, are "transitory," do not fit any "classification" and those who are distant from the centres of "historical decision.". He wonders how those who come from the south to the busy city manage, and what is the position of the black men who are "outside history" (439-440). He wonders: "do others see them, think about them" (441)? Even the people of Harlem express that, with Clifton's death, their hope "has been shot down" (444). "Black images of sorrow" conquer the streets.

The narrator starts a process of realization, mainly when he understands that the Brotherhood has betrayed him and the people. He acknowledges that he has been "asleep, dreaming" (454) and starts at last understanding his own experiences and failures: "knowing now who I was and where I was, and knowing too that I had no longer to run for or from the Jacks and the Emersons, and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine" (559). He also realizes that everybody has wanted to sacrifice him for their own good, and he wonders when will this sacrifice of the weak will stop: "They [the whites] have set themselves up to describe the world, what did they know of us except than we numbered so many, worked certain jobs" (507). He declares that all that the whites wanted from blacks is for them to be heard but not seen, and heard only in the chorus of "yessuh.". He regrets his naivety: "why have I not seen the possibilities. . . . my God what possibilities exist!" (509). He also realises that upward mobility is just a lie, a lie "they kept us dominated by" (510). He finally understands that he has always tried to go in "every one's way but my own" (573). Now the invisible man confidently realises: "I am nobody but myself, but first I had to discover I was an invisible man" (15).

3.4 Invisible Women: Silenced Voices, Objectified Bodies.

As we have seen in the previous sections, Ellison demystifies the binary oppositions of black American and white American relationships in the United States. He also brings up the issues of inequality and the complexities of race beyond the stereotypes of society. He digs deeply into the characters, their psyche and their roles. But in terms of gender, he has not developed the role of women characters in the novel as skilfully, be it intentionally or not. While he frequently parallels the race cause with the gender cause, and portrays them

both as a result of white patriarchal society, he does not give women characters a mature voice in the same way as the male characters. While he resists stereotyping within the racial sphere, he presents the women characters, black and white, according to the white male oppressive norms. Ellison oscillates between the binary oppositions of the prostitute or easy woman, and the angel-like mother figure.

In this section I will study how Ellison has given a very stereotypical identity to female characters, defining them either by race or sexuality (the whore- virgin duality). He has not explored their invisibility, or portrayed them as individuals, but only presented them as symbols of the female gender.

If we start with exotic dancer scene, it is clear that the nude blonde dancer, who is dancing for the white big shots in the audience, is the embodiment of the objectified female within the white male power structure. Even though white women are usually regarded as having higher status than black women, they are still regarded as possessions that can be controlled and objectified. Even the white woman is invisible, and a tool. The fact that the dancer does not have a name emphasizes her lack of individuality and enforces her invisibility. She, like many other characters in the novel, is described only physically. The dancer is "the magnificent blond", who is there "stark naked" with breasts that were "firm and round". Her hair was: "yellow like that of a circus kewpie doll", and "her face heavily powdered and rouged, as though to form an abstract mask, the eyes hollow and smeared a cool blue, the color of the baboon butt" (19). The invisible man's description of her makes her almost non-human. Mentioning the mask, heavy make-up and her "impersonal eyes" makes her invisibility even stronger. She is present as a tool for entertainment, and as a tool for the white elite to control the black men through her white skin. She is a white power tool, because black men are not allowed to take part in the sexual enjoyment of white women. This makes the invisible man feel "an irrational wave of guilt and fear" (19), because he knows he is disobeying the rules. He continues to describe her lustfully in sexual terms mentioning her "fine skin", "pink and erected buds of her nipples" and "soft thighs" (19). The dancer is also described as having a "small American flag tattooed upon her belly". This symbolizes the fact that both, America and white women are possessed by white males. The political and sexual mix here. The invisible man wants "to caress her and destroy her" (19) at the same time. It seems, with the American flag on her belly, that the white dancer symbolizes America in the same sense that the invisible man feels about his country as the place for his dreams and possibilities, as well as the place for inequality.

While the invisible man is aiming naïvely to please the white elite, the dancer is not aiming for recognition. She is just performing, aware of her invisibility and lack of individuality with a "detached expression on her face" and "disgust in her eyes," while a merchant's lips were "drooling" in the audience (20). Carolyn W. Sylvander's article "Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Female Stereotypes" criticizes this dehumanized role Ellison creates for his female characters: "The narrator of *Invisible Man* in fact loses what slight recognition he has of woman-as-human at the beginning of the novel as he becomes more closely allied with manhood, Brotherhood, and his own personhood ". She also insists on that stating that: "While Ellison uses the artist's skill to depict and explore and evaluate the humanity of Black men, to thereby confute the effects of stereotyping, he remains blind to the humanity of his women characters" (77).

While the narrator continues his journey of self-realization throughout the novel, he meets other white women in his path. And while his description of other white female characters seems to be less sexualized in comparison to the dancer, he still, almost in every encounter with a white woman, expresses lustful hints or moments with them. When the narrator meets Emma, the first white woman equal to him after he frees himself from social boundaries and starts accepting himself, he starts by giving her a mature description, he mentions that she is "smartly dressed" with a "handsome face" and having "a clip of blazing diamonds on her dress" (300). But when she expresses that the narrator should be blacker for the role of a black leader, Jack calls her "a damn fool" and the invisible man starts belittling her: "Who is she anyway" (303)? She is also portrayed as a submissive woman, who is just executing orders. Jack asks her for drinks, for funds, and all kinds of services in their meetings. In addition to the belittling, the narrator eventually goes back to his perception of the woman as a sexual object and describes his temptation while he dances with Emma: "She close, soft against me and the hot swift focusing on my desire . . . Emma holding me tight, her bound breasts pressing against me . . . her eyes, saying, "Ah, temptation", and my desperate grab for a sophisticated reply and managing only, "Oh, but there is always temptation" (512).

Then, as a punishment, the narrator is given by the Brotherhood the task of lecturing about the woman question instead of racial issues. This task being a punishment implies that gender emancipation and women's rights are not a priority, as are other social issues within society. On the contrary, it is portrayed as a secondary cause to fight for. Another thing to notice is that there are no women activists within the woman question, just an audience of

women. It is the narrator, a man, who lectures the women about their rights and their problems. They have no voice. It is only through the male voice, that their rights and problems are expressed. Women are invisible and silent even in the spheres they have to speak out for themselves in. This implies two issues: women are not smart enough to speak about their own rights, and that it is the strong male patriarchal society that is speaking for them, telling them what to do. The woman question in the novel is actually never answered. When the invisible man is asked in the Brotherhood party about the woman question by the "plain woman", she is not answered (311). The woman question is described by the narrator as "taboo" (408), and unlike his speeches about racial issues, the content of the woman question lectures is elided in the novel. It feels as if Ellison does not engage in that cause seriously. The narrator brags about his popularity within the female audience: "they'd simply thrill at the sight of me" (409), giving the impression that for the female audience, admiration towards the speaker is more important than the content of the lecture itself. The protagonist is given the power to be also the narrator for women. Their voice is under the power of the protagonist, who is also their narrator in their behalf. He acknowledges his duality when he states that: "I was a spokesman—why shouldn't I speak about women" (407)? The fact that women's rights are introduced by a male voice shows that the patriarchal society, here personified by the protagonist, controls the female voice. The male narrator decides to not release the lectures about the woman question, which shows how women's rights are being silenced by the dual function of the character.

Belittling the female gender is reinforced in the scenes where the narrator is with the unnamed woman from the audience. Instead of engaging in serious discussions about the woman question, the unnamed woman seems only to have sexual goals she wants to fulfil with the narrator. She starts by declaring that "Women should be absolutely as free as men" (414), but then, the only thing she seems to care about is getting the narrator to sleep with her, as if that was her only definition of freedom. She starts seducing the narrator, "gripping my biceps with her little hand", and again, as with the dancer, he wanted to "smash her" and to "stay with her" at the same time (415). In addition to being portrayed as a seductress, she is also cheating on her husband, which makes her seem even cheaper. She is portrayed as a sexual object, a woman of no values and as another invisible person who has no name, with no individual, developed character. When the invisible man leaves her place, he wonders why: "did they have to mix their women into everything? Between us and everything we wanted to change in the world they placed a woman: socially, politically,

economically. Why, goddamit, why did they insist upon confusing the class struggle with the ass struggle?" (418). Here the narrator presents the woman as an obstacle to the social, political and economic changes society is striving for, excluding her from being a vital part of it, relating her, again, with "the ass struggle". Avram Landy, in his essay "Marxism and the Woman Question" comments on this by saying that: "The crude complaint that the "ass struggle" replaced the "class struggle" was apparently common enough that the protagonist's own use of it is something of a cliché" (206). Ellison seems time after time to follow these clichés and de-humanize his female characters, a point Sylvander emphasizes: "Ralph Ellison's women characters are not, in his own analysis of stereotyping, fully human" (77).

Sybil is another white woman the invisible man encounters. She is also portrayed as a superficial, sex- thirsty woman, who hates politics and is not interested in the schemes her husband is interested in. She was "more interested in drinks" (516). The invisible man exploits her, because she is "lonely.". And while they spend time together, she starts seducing the invisible man: "come to mamma, beautiful" (517). Then she starts asking him to rape her, insisting that she needs it and reassuring him: "You can do it, I'll be easy for you, beautiful. Threaten to kill me if I don't give in" (518). As usual, she is also portrayed in sexual terms; she promises to be easy for him and even admits being a nymphomaniac. The invisible man secretly ridicules and manipulates her. He also laughs at her: "I laughed inwardly. She would soon be a biddy stout with a little double chin" (519). He also writes on her belly with her lipstick: "You have been raped" (522). And though he has not physically raped her, he has morally and symbolically by manipulating her, making her drunk, secretly mocking her and by sending her away when she is not useful to him anymore. All white women threading throughout the novel are portrayed as cheap and lustful. None of them has been explored beyond the physical surface, or given a possibility to be visible, have a voice or be totally human outside the objectifying spheres of stereotypes.

But this kind of stereotyping and objectifying is not limited to white women. The novel portrays black women as invisible characters as well. For black women, the situation is even worse, because they are facing double oppression:; oppression of race by being African American, and oppression of gender by being women. Erica Dunbar, in her book *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* explains that black women had no authority over their own and their families' lives. In the

1940s, black women were considered the lowest social order within the American community (9). Deborah Gray White also explains the situation of black women in her book *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*: "If she is rescued from the myth of the Negro, the myth of woman traps her. If she escapes the myth of woman, the myth of Negro still ensnares her. Since the myth of woman and the myth of the Negro are so similar, to extract her from one gives the appearance of freeing her from both" (28).

Matty Lou, Trueblood's daughter, is a good example of the African American woman who has no power, nor voice. She is raped by her father, who eventually impregnates her. Trueblood is not held accountable or punished for his deed. On the contrary, he does not take responsibility for his actions that are accepted by the white community. Here, Matty Lou is a victim of her father's authority, as well as the victim of the white authority, because it has not reacted to the crime. She is facing double silencing: racial and sexual. Matty Lou is not given any opportunity to speak in the novel; Trueblood is her only voice. Even Norton seems to be only interested in the act of rape, but not in the well-being of Matty Lou herself. Nobody cares or asks about her feelings or her condition. Kate, Trueblood's wife, strongly condemns her husband's deed and gets very angry about it, but she cannot leave him, because she is dependent on him and would not be able to survive alone. As Trueblood explains: "Even if Kate won't speak to me, she took the clothes I brought her from up in town" (67). This shows how difficult it is for black women who do not have the tools to survive independently and embrace their own individuality. Their voice is possessed by the male in the family. This becomes clear when Trueblood does not let Kate bring a midwife to terminate her daughter's pregnancy: "I don't want them fooling with my womenfolks" (67). Kate and her daughter are both in a weak position, they have no voice, they are invisible in the dominant patriarchal society. Matty Lou and Kate, body and soul, are the property of Trueblood. They are not individuals. Even in the Golden Day, most of the black prostitutes have no name. They are not portrayed as individuals, but stereotypically, as objects with the emphasis on their physicality: "Women in short, tight-fitting, stiffly starched gingham aprons" (74).

Mary Rambo, on the other hand, is portrayed as being totally the opposite. Unlike the negative portrayal of the other female characters, she is portrayed as a pure, angel-like mother figure. She is the saviour of the invisible man when he is on the verge of collapse. She is the symbol of hope and virtue. It is due to her help, that he is born again to the brotherhood identity. She nurses him, feeds him and is kind to him. But her portrayal being

positive does not mean it is not a stereotypical portrayal that is based on rigid binary oppositions and not on women as individuals. Mary can be read as the symbol of the Virgin Mary. She is the mother without sexuality. She is the only real support for the invisible man in the whole novel. Every time he feels he is in crisis, he thinks about going to her. She is his refuge and only friend: "Other than Mary I had no friends and desired none". He adds that she was "something more-a force, a stable force". He loved her for the "hope she kept alive" (258). Mary Rambo falls into the image of the super human black woman and fits into the plantation mammy stereotype. But she is just a means to an end. After the invisible man is reborn into the Brotherhood, he abandons her, not giving her the credit and recognition she deserves. She is limited to being a symbol.

It seems the female characters in *Invisible Man* are objectified the same way female characters in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Death of a Salesman* are. They are either sexualized and objectified, like Daisy and Myrtle in *The Great Gatsby* or the woman in *Death of a Salesman*, or given the nurturing supporting role of the angel mother figure like Linda. Escaping from this duality is not possible in any of these texts. The female characters are still to be given a voice. But there are critics, like Claudia Tate, who call for re-examining the female characters in *Invisible Man* beyond the notion of their absent individuality. Tate does not agree that Ellison has created simplistic female stereotypes in his novel. She states in her essay "Notes on the Invisible Women in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" that when examining these female characters we must: "start with the stereotypes, accept them as true, and then seek out the human truth which they hide" (163). On the other hand, Shelly Eversley explains in her article "Female Iconography in *Invisible Man*" that "While they are the most consistent and crucial symbols in *Invisible Man*", women are also "more than symbols" and that "Indeed they become sites of revelation that transcend the simple opposition between black and white to offer new complexity to the novel's organizing themes" (173). These statements do not exclude the fact that all the female characters are one-dimensional and occupy only peripheral roles in the novel. As Tate herself admits, the first response that comes to mind when discussing the women in the novel is: "What women" (163)?

Conclusion

The American dream has always prided itself on being a dream that is egalitarian and just. It is a philosophy that believes in the story of great success due to hard work, self-reliance and individualism. Many Americans think it is possible to go from rags to riches, and that the path of success is possible for "all" as the Declaration of Independence stated. But what the three texts I have analyzed demonstrate is how limited the American dream actually is. It is a formula made for only certain classes and races. It is a dream that embraces men instead of women, rich instead of poor and white instead of other races. In *The Great Gatsby*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Invisible Man* I have demonstrated the exclusionary spirit of the American dream. I have studied the lower classes, racial minorities and women in all the three primary texts and emphasized my claim. All three categories face struggles and obstacles that make it difficult to attain the American dream while the rich white man thrives.

The lower classes face a dead end in all three texts. American class dynamics take the poor hostage and prevents them from upward mobility. In *The Great Gatsby*, Wilson and Myrtle, a poor couple struggle to change their situation and earn more money. Wilson gives up to his existence as a low income mechanic. Myrtle on the other hand, instead of hard work and individualism, finds that the only way for socioeconomic uplift is by having an affair with rich Tom Buchanan. This problem of an immobile lower class is due capitalism and not a lack of effort. Capitalism has a big impact on the lives of the characters who struggle for financial stability. Because of capitalism and the rise of corporate power in society, labourers get fewer rights and lower wages. The man from the lower classes is overwhelmed by the consumerist system. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is a pertinent example. He spends all his life working for the same company but his wage only decreases. After all the devotion he has had to his job and the company, after all his hard work, he is laid off his job in a humiliating way. He also struggles to pay his bills and mortgage. He has a lot of financial problems, he borrows money from his friend Charlie and he struggles to make ends meet. The quest for the American dream has led many of these low income characters to their deaths instead of to their dreams. Myrtle dies running after Tom, her source of wealth and status. Wilson also kills himself in the process. Willy commits suicide because of his failure and to turn his death into insurance money for his family.

The texts show how capitalist forces lead the less fortunate to commodify themselves in order to access commodities. By killing himself for the insurance, Willy dehumanizes himself and turns himself into commodity. Myrtle also does that by having an affair with Tom. By doing that she commodifies herself as woman in exchange of money and status, which also dehumanizes her. On the other hand the lower classes in *Invisible Man* are even more challenged, because they are related to race. African Americans are portrayed as poorer and lower class than the whites in the novel. Contrasts between the rural African American Trueblood and the wealthy trustee Norton shows the big social and economic gap among the two races. In addition to that, a second gap between African Americans themselves shows how many differences there are between American citizens because of parameters of class and race. Rural African Americans are the poorest and the less likely to attain any success stories. Like Trueblood they are uneducated, poor and have the rural black manners which makes them shunned by fellow urban African Americans. And while the urban African Americans are educated, and better off than the rural African Americans, they still cannot attain the levels of success the white American can. While whites like Emerson and Norton are very wealthy and fancy, the protagonist, though educated struggles to find a job and a decent living.

In addition to the lower classes, racial minorities also suffer exclusion from the American dream. African Americans and immigrants are seen as a threat by the white majority that wants to keep the American dream for itself. White Americans perceive racial minorities as a threat instead of as fellow Americans in pursuit of happiness. In *The Great Gatsby*, all immigrants are portrayed negatively and degrading way. All the immigrants mentioned are in low paying jobs or crooks. The Finnish woman is a housemaid in Nick's house, the Greek man works in a café in the miserable Valley of Ashes, the Italian boy does manual labor at the railroad in the Valley of Ashes as well. The Jew Wolfsheim, is a gangster that gets rich by crooked ways. None of these immigrants are living the American dream or getting wealthy through hard work and perseverance. African Americans are almost silenced by white power. Other than quick mentions of "negro" in the novel, they are not given a voice or an identity. Even the "modish" African Americans in the car are portrayed in a scene of rivalry with Nick.

On the other hand, *Death of a Salesman* is a white play, with no racial minorities and African Americans at all. This emphasizes white power and whites' status in society as the default race. Therefore, I have studied how Willy and his sons demonstrate white male

anxieties in capitalist America, and how they fear losing their manhood and status in society if they do not achieve what is expected of the white American male. In *Invisible Man*, complex racial issues are treated by Ellison. Through the protagonist's journey towards self-awareness, the obstacles African Americans face in their path to upward mobility become clear. African Americans are not granted the same opportunities as whites. Though African Americans in the novel are free, segregation is still in place and part of the reason for their failures. The protagonist goes to an African American college. He travels in a bus with separate seats for African Americans. He gets appointments slower because of his race. The protagonist also tells us that some buildings are rented to whites only. African American Harlem is a black neighbourhood that is a separate entity within the white dominated city of New York. Power and justice also treat black Americans differently. Clifton is killed by the police without being given a chance to speak and defend himself. The white police take the role of his prosecutor and judge at the same time. African Americans are also controlled by how society dictates that they should behave and what is expected from them. Their identity is under society's control. Bledsoe, Norton, the brotherhood and other characters keep telling the protagonist what to do. African Americans are not given real freedom to create their own identities, let alone pursue the American dream.

Women are also silenced in the three texts. Patriarchal society tries to keep them under control by objectifying them into sexual characters devoid of any personal identity or by making them virgin-like, motherly figures, whose role is supporting men. Many women are not even identified, which dehumanizes and belittles them. For example in *The Great Gatsby*, the "Finnish woman", in addition to many others, is not given a name. She is not granted her individuality and personality. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's mistress is also depicted as "the woman", which also objectifies her. She is also limited to the role of boosting Willy's confidence. In *Invisible Man*, the nude, magnificent blond is also unidentified and referred to only as "the woman". This shows how women are stripped of their individuality under male rule. There are no real success stories for women in the three texts. They are either dependent on men for a living or supporting them to shine. Even the women who seem successful and outwardly happy end up being dishonest. In *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy and Myrtle are both depicted as materialistic women living on the wealth of their men. Daisy marries rich Tom instead of poor Gatsby to secure a comfortable life, while Myrtle has an affair with the same man for the same reasons. They use men to secure

their goals, instead of fulfilling them themselves. Jordan Baker who seems to be a successful golf player, ends up being a cheat in her game. This implies that women cannot succeed in honest manners. Patriarchal society undermines women in order to keep them under control from gaining free, independent lives.

Women are also portrayed as a source of support for men. They are given the position of mothering men until the men reach their dreams. In *Death of a Salesman*, Linda is a smart woman, but only exists to provide support for her failing husband Willy and her sons. Even when she seems to be the most bright and realistic character in the play she does not do more than encourage Willy and Biff or take care of the home. Mary in *Invisible Man* has the same role; she supports and helps the protagonist to come back on his feet. She takes care of him physically, morally and financially. She is there just for support and not to achieve anything herself. Some women also undergo a process of sexualisation in the texts, and are therefore pictured as un able to handle independence. Daisy, Myrtle, Sybil and the woman in red are all labelled sexually. And even the women working decently have been forced into this definition, like, for example, Howard's secretary, whom Willy mocks.

What also unites the three texts is that the pursuit of the dream happens in New York, the cradle of capitalist power. It is a city that attracts dreamers like Gatsby, Willy and the invisible man. But after the three characters suffer and fail, they discover the dangers of this city controlled by white capitalists. It is depicted as the new American frontier where only the tough succeed and where moral corruption thrives. This city can also become the place for disappointment for those who fail. Nick acknowledges the dangers of the city and longs for his native Midwest, Willy and his sons contemplate leaving the city and the invisible man's mother reminds him the city is "wicked". New York is the symbol of the American dream, but also a symbol of those controlling it: the white and rich.

What I have examined demonstrates that the American dream is not available for "all" and is not that easy to fulfil due to social, economic and racial factors. The American dream is an unrealistic aspiration for most of the dreamers. It is real only in the collective psyche of these Americans. Biff confirms the state of the dream when he tells Willy: "Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens" (97).

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