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The American Dream in American Literature

Americký sen v americké literatuře

Bakalářská práce

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Cíl, metody, literatura, předpoklady:

Práce se zabývá národním étosem "amerického snu" v americké literatuře. V teoretické části s využitím příslušné sekundární literatury podá jeho charakteristiku a pojedná o jeho vzniku a jeho současném stavu. Praktická část se bude věnovat způsobům, jak se promítá do vybraných děl moderní americké literatury a jejich porovnáním.

ALBEE, Edward (1961): *The American Dream: and, The Zoo Story: Two Plays*. New York: New American Library, 1961.

CAPOTE, Truman (1958): *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. London: Penguin Books, 2011.

CULLEN, Jim: *The American Dream: a Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

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SAMUEL, Lawrence R.: *The American Dream: a Cultural History*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012.

MAILER, Norman (1965): *An American Dream*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2018.

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou závěrečnou práci Americký sen v americké literatuře vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího závěrečné práce samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

V Hradci Králové dne 2. 5. 2023

Lucie Jirsáková

Anotace

JIRSÁKOVÁ, Lucie. *Americký sen v americké literatuře*. Hradec Králové: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Hradec Králové, 2023. 42 s. Bakalářská práce.

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením amerického snu ve vybrané americké literatuře. V teoretické části se práce zaměřuje na charakteristiku tohoto národního fenoménu a obsahuje informace o jeho vzniku a historii v průběhu staletí. Dále je zde věnována pozornost souvislostem s nerovností určitých skupin lidí v dosažení amerického snu. Teoretická část je následně zakončena popisem jeho současné podoby ve společnosti, jeho ekonomických souvislostí a jeho vlivu a působení na kulturu. Praktická část práce se soustředí na vlastní analýzu étosu ve třech vybraných dílech americké literatury. Vybranými knihami pro tuto část jsou *Snídaně u Tiffanyho* Trumana Capoteho, *Americký sen* Edwarda Albeeho a *Americký sen* Normana Mailera. Interpretace literárních děl se zaměřuje převážně na způsoby zobrazení amerického snu hlavních hrdinů a na jejich porovnání.

Klíčová slova: americký sen, americká literatura, Edward Albee, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zaměřuje na americký sen v americké literatuře. Cílem této práce je představit a analyzovat jej ve vybraných literárních dílech z období 50. a 60. let 20. století, přičemž středem pozornosti jsou *Snídaně u Tiffanyho* Trumana Capoteho, *Americký sen* Edwarda Albeeho a *Americký sen* Normana Mailera.

Práce je rozdělena na teoretickou a praktickou část. Teoretická část práce začíná vysvětlením základních informací o myšlence amerického snu a zaměřuje se na jeho historii a problémy s ním související, jako jsou rasové a genderové nerovnosti. Soustředí se také na to, jak je americký sen chápán a zobrazován v současné době, aby bylo možné přesně porozumět vybraným literárním dílům pro jeho analýzu.

Knihy vybrané pro praktickou část jsou populární díla z období 1958-1965, která se zabývají stejným tématem amerického snu a reagují na sociokulturní náladu po druhé světové válce.

Analýza vybraných literárních děl si klade za cíl představit, jak je americký sen různými způsoby zobrazován v americké literatuře ve stejném časovém období, a ukazuje srovnání děl a jednotlivých amerických snů. Dále tato část stručně popisuje životopisy autorů. Vykládá důležité aspekty knih s důrazem na životy hlavních postav a na to, jak se v nich odráží Americký sen. Nejdůležitější body praktické části jsou následně popsány v závěru této práce.

Zatímco všechny knihy mají stejné téma, je vykresleno různými způsoby. Hlavními postavami všech tří literárních děl jsou zcela odlišné lidské bytosti s odlišnými životními okolnostmi a podmínkami. Ale touha po jejich vlastním osobním americkém snu je spojuje dohromady. Ve všech třech dílech zůstávají základní hodnoty amerického snu stejné – je zde hledání osobní svobody, individuálních práv a štěstí.

Snídaně u Tiffanyho zobrazuje úsek života mladé ženy, která uteče ze svého starého nenaplnujícího života do New Yorku, aby hledala svůj osobní americký sen. Mnoho z její minulosti zůstává neznámým, ale dozvídáme se o ní to, že je sirotek, a že se ve čtrnácti letech provdala, aby se postarala o manžela a jeho děti. Doc Golightly jí zajišťuje rodinné hodnoty, domov a lásku, ale ona jako mladá dospívající dívka ovlivněná obrázky v časopisech hledá různé smysly života ve velkém městě. Aby se užívala, baví muže a snaží se vyšplhat po společenském žebříčku. Něco jí ale v životě chybí, její životní styl ji nedělá šťastnou. K nikomu není ve svém okolí připoutaná a cítí se osamělá. Místo hledání hlubších pout s lidmi

kolem sebe a po několika životních událostech uteče z New Yorku. Holiday Golightly usilovala ve městě o americký sen, který ji nemohl v životě uspokojit.

Na začátku příběhu Mailerova díla *Americký sen* se zdá, že hlavní hrdina Stephen Rojack vede dokonalý život. Je to válečný hrdina, absolvent Harvardu, bývalý kongresman, autor knih, profesor a televizní osobnost. Ale je ženatý s bohatou dědičkou, která mu umožnila dosáhnout všech těchto úspěchů. Rojackův americký sen postrádá jeho osobní tvrdou práci, protože nebýt jeho manželství, nikdy by nedosáhl takových milníků a neměl by život, o kterém by mnozí snili. Z tohoto nepříjemného pocitu se nakonec osvobodí tím, že zabije svou ženu. Poté se snaží najít útěchu v jiné ženě jménem Cherry, do které je zamilovaný. Cherry je spouštěčem změny jeho hodnot, ale není řešením jeho problémů. Stejně jako v díle *Snídaně u Tiffanyho* se zdá, že hlavní hrdina vede úspěšný a naplňující životní styl, ale něco důležitého mu chybí a rozhodne se uniknout ze svého starého života.

Albeeho *Americký sen* se snaží ukázat, jak se po válce změnily hodnoty a standardy vlasti. Zaměřuje se na malou blízkou rodinu maminky, tatínka a babičky. Sdílejí byt a jejich velmi odlišné povahy vytvářejí specifickou dynamiku. Tato rodina má představovat průměrné členy tehdejší společnosti. Tatínek je pasivní a poslušný manžel, který poslouchá vše, co jeho žena říká. Maminka je materialistická osoba, která si tatínka vzala ne kvůli lásce, ale jen proto, že je dost bohatý na to, aby splnil její dětský americký sen o tom, že může žít z bohatství svého bohatého manžela a nemusí pracovat. Ale v jejich životě něco chybí. Společně řeší neplodnost, a tak se rozhodnou adoptovat chlapečka. Dítě jim však nepřináší radost a uspokojení, a tak ho nakonec zabijí a odhodí jako předmět pouze s materiální hodnotou. Náhlé objevení se mladého muže se jeví jako řešení nespokojenosti maminky a tatínka. Je totiž dvojčetem zavražděného chlapečka, který navenek vypadá dokonale, ale uvnitř je prázdný, jelikož už nemá nedokonalosti, které z něj dělají lidskou bytost. Stejně jako americký sen samotný se změnilo také hodnoty chlapce, tradiční význam a hodnoty byly vyměněny za materialismus a nadměrnou spotřebu.

Ve všech třech prezentovaných literárních dílech je zdůrazněn význam materialismu, který je často spojován s ideologií amerického snu, přičemž postava maminky v díle Edwarda Albeeho je nejpozoruhodnějším příkladem toho, jak důležitou roli hrají materialistické hodnoty v pochopení snu a toho, jak je často zobrazován. Peníze mají obrovský vliv a představují účelný prostředek v životech všech protagonistů.

Útěk ze Spojených států a hledání amerického snu jinde je společným tématem *Snídání u Tiffanyho* a Mailerova díla *Americký sen*, kde jsou oba hlavní hrdinové zklamáni životem v New Yorku a vývoj událostí je vede k hledání osobní svobody na jiném místě. S tlakem na dosažení amerického snu se vyrovnávají tak, že přehodnocují hodnoty, které původně zastávali, a po událostech, které jim změnily život, je mění na hodnoty, které jsou pro ně smysluplnější.

Pro všechna tři vybraná literární díla je typické hledání vysokého postavení ve společnosti a spokojenosti. V díle *Americký sen* se Stephen Rojack neožení se svou ženou Deborah proto, že ji miluje, ale proto, že mu nabízí způsob, jak vystoupat po společenském žebříčku a jak se stát úspěšným a vlivným mužem. Totéž platí pro maminku z *Amerického snu*, která si tatínka vezme ne kvůli svým citům k němu, ale protože je to bohatý a pasivní muž, který si nestojí za svým a nechá se ovládat. Využije ho, aby dosáhla svého dětského snu být bohatá a mít vysoké společenské postavení. Ve *Snídání u Tiffanyho* se sice Holly Golightly v New Yorku z finančních důvodů nevdá, ale stále využívá společnost mužů k tomu, aby získala přízeň, vydělala peníze a stala se společensky významnou osobou.

Annotation

JIRSÁKOVÁ, Lucie. *The American Dream in American Literature*. Hradec Králové: Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, 2023. 42 pp. Bachelor Degree Thesis.

This bachelor thesis deals with the portrayal of the American Dream in selected American literature. In the theoretical part, the thesis focuses on the characteristics of this national phenomenon and contains information about its origin and history over the centuries. Furthermore, attention is given to the connections with the inequality of certain groups in achieving the American Dream. The theoretical part is subsequently concluded with a description of its current form in society, its economic context and its influence and impact on culture. The practical part of the work focuses on the analysis of this ethos in three selected works of American literature. The selected books for this section are *Breakfast at Tiffany's* by Truman Capote, *The American Dream* by Edward Albee, and *An American Dream* by Norman Mailer. The interpretation of literary works focuses mainly on the ways of depicting the American Dream of the main characters and on their comparison.

Keywords: the American Dream, American literature, Edward Albee, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote

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Table of contents:

1. Introduction	1
2. Theoretical part	2
2.1. Overview of the American Dream	2
2.2 The History of the American Dream	4
2.2.1 17th century	4
2.2.2 18th century	5
2.2.3 19th century	7
2.2.4 20th century	9
2.2.4.1 The American Dream in the 1950s-1960s	10
2.3 The American Dream and Inequality	12
2.3.1 Racial Aspects of the American Dream	12
2.3.2 Relation of Gender to the American Dream	13
2.4 The Contemporary American Dream	15
3. Practical part	17
3.1 The Portrayal of the American Dream in Selected Literary Works	17
3.1.1 Breakfast at Tiffany's	17
3.1.2 An American Dream	20
3.1.3 The American Dream	23
4. Conclusion	26
5. Bibliography	29

1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the American Dream in American literature. The goal of this thesis is to present and analyse it in selected literary works from the 1950s and 1960s time period, with Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Edward Albee's *The American Dream*, and Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* being the centre of attention.

The thesis is divided into theoretical and practical parts. The theoretical part of the thesis begins with an explanation of the basic information about the idea of the American Dream and spotlights its history and issues related to it, such as race and gender-related inequalities. There is also a focus on how the American Dream is understood and portrayed in current times in order to accurately understand the selected literary works for its analysis.

The books chosen for the practical part, *An American Dream*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *The American Dream*, are popular works of the 1958-1965 period dealing with the same topic of the American Dream and reacting to the sociocultural mood after WWII.

The analysis of selected literary works aims to present how the American Dream is depicted in various ways in American literature in the same time period and shows a comparison of the works and individual American dreams. Furthermore, this part briefly describes the authors' biographies. It interprets important aspects of the books with an emphasis on the lives of the main characters and how the American Dream is reflected in them. The most important points of the practical part are described in the conclusion of this thesis.

2. Theoretical part

2.1. Overview of the American Dream

The American Dream is as old as the state itself and remains to be ever-present to this day. The influence of this phenomenon is undeniably incredible and has had a great impact on previous and current generations. Furthermore, throughout the whole history of the United States, the main features have remained the same despite all the cultural and political changes.

The American Dream represents a concept that can be defined in many different ways and often stands for distinct meanings in a person's life according to their life circumstances. Although the American Dream cannot be simply explained, it frequently exhibits the same traits and stems from the same place of origin – if one works hard enough, they can achieve anything they set their mind to regardless of their background. According to Samuel (2012):

“Rather than just a powerful philosophy or ideology, the American Dream is thoroughly woven into the fabric of everyday life. It plays a vital, active role in who we are, what we do, and why we do it. No other idea or mythology—even religion, I believe—has as much influence on our individual and collective lives, with the Dream one of the precious few things in this country that we all share. You name it—economics, politics, law, work, business, education—and the American Dream is there, the nation at some level a marketplace of competing interpretations and visions of what it means and should mean.” (p. 2)

The American Dream guarantees liberty and justice for everyone. It provides the freedom to make both significant and insignificant decisions that have an impact on one's life, as well as the opportunity to pursue bigger and better goals. It also gives one the ability to amass wealth, the chance to live a prosperous life, and the freedom to live according to one's values, even if those values are not shared or accepted by others. (Barone, 2023)

Although the collocation “American Dream” appeared only in the year 1931, it could be argued that the history of this idea traces back to when the nation was just beginning to be formed in the 17th century. Historian James Truslow Adams was the first one to use this term, however, he was not the first person to ponder and write about the idea of the American Dream. The American Dream has been considered since the Declaration of Independence and Constitution came into function and since then has been a theme for many great writers, such

as Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Ford, Walt Disney, and Barack Obama. (Samuel, 2012, pp. 3–4)

The American Dream is undoubtedly persistent. Despite all historical events and crises, it has managed to survive and shape itself according to situational, political, and personal needs, whilst the core of the American Dream has managed to stay the same due to its ambivalence of individual meanings (Samuel, 2012, p. 4). It could be stated that wealth and success are the core elements of the American Dream which provoke ambiguity as well. However, the American Dream has shifted to represent an ideal of individual concerns and self-preservation. (Samuel, 2012, pp. 9–10)

Homeownership has become one of the most prominent goals tied with the American Dream. Since the beginning of the colonization of America, there was this vision of anyone owning some land with a house and this ideal remains to be culturally the same after all these years. Moreover, American popular culture has always had components of the American Dream in itself as it continues to be a rewarding theme. (Samuel, 2012, pp. 6–9)

We can view the American Dream not only positively, but also as something completely negative. The American Dream is not perfect. It may represent a utopic, flawless life, nevertheless, this is not the reality. There is a big enough ambiguity that allows for uncertainty and mystery in each personal goal.

2.2 The History of the American Dream

2.2.1 17th century

The beginning of the ideology of the American Dream can be traced back to the Pilgrims even though at that time nothing like this idea had been defined yet. Their dream was incredibly strong as it paved the way for future generations, although sometimes with undesirable consequences. Puritans wanted religious reform, they believed that circumstances and reality could change which formed the basis of the American Dream. This at first meant beginning a new life and building a new society in the 16th century. They wanted a better life for their children, and, also, they often were not afraid to go after an idea while throwing away their security. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 5–17)

On the strength of their spiritual convictions that it was preordained, the Puritans who escaped religious persecution in England went on to achieve self-made success throughout New England. They believed that there was a perpetual struggle between the forces of good and evil on Earth and that the only way to defeat evil was to be ambitious, put in a lot of effort, and constantly pursue achievement. The same goals that motivated the first Americans to create their nation from the bottom up now fuel the current American Dreams. (“The Colonial American Dream”, n.d.)

For Puritans, it was impossible to think about buying forgiveness of sins since destiny in their eyes could not be changed. Yet they believed that they could somehow change the world for the better. Unfortunately, their dream was halted by several factors and the diffusion of Puritans across larger areas was a major influence in this. In addition to this, it is important to note that the American Dream had a different meaning for them individually even if it was a shared idea. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 19, 25)

Antinomian crisis embodied a danger to Puritans’ plans. This ideology suggested that no one could have leverage over a person's conscience since nobody knew who would be redeemed. This movement sought a more personal approach to their devotion to religion. This was the American Dream of religious freedom even if to some it might have looked like an invitation to anarchy. One of the most vocal members was Anne Hutchinson whose views led her to a trial and banishment. These events had a great impact on Puritans in the following years. A New World's formation had previously been the aspiration. But at this point, it was now necessary to maintain and expand it. With the new-coming generation, it was clear that the set ideals were limited by the real conditions of the world and the founding epitomes were

abandoned. The urge for self-improvement had emerged which became the pillar of any American Dream. It was evident by the end of the 17th century that the original Puritan doctrine no longer prevailed anywhere. Both in New England and in Virginia the goal of the settlers was to get rich. But for Puritans, the want was also about making the place more holy and better. The Puritanic worldview's basic concepts of community and morality served as the foundation for some of the most significant changes in American lives. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 26–34)

2.2.2 18th century

The American Revolution with the Declaration of Independence as its product still shapes lives today. The opening of the document supports the American Dream and has an impact on everyday life. In advertisements, life, liberty, and as much digital delight as possible are all openly referenced all the time in relation to the Declaration of Independence. If the companies did not believe it would benefit their business, they would not employ such patriotic rhetoric. The definition of liberty is all too apparent: it is a celebration of the freedom to purchase whatsoever. The Founding Fathers' principles have since been trivialized and reduced to vague and empty slogans. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 37–41)

Freedom was the Founding Fathers' American Dream. The meaning of this to them was different in comparison to what it meant to Puritans. For a long time, they did not realise that freedom was their goal since in many aspects it was their reality. The fact is that the British Empire was unable to properly govern a huge mass of land that was so far away. In this sense, the colonists were one of the least controlled people in the world. Yet the colonies were more connected to London than to each other in regard to culture and economy. Britain supported this minimalistic approach as North America contributed greatly to their economy, it was a source of materials and a good opportunity for the market with finished products. This was until the middle of the 18th century when the policy became difficult to prolong with wars and the French being evicted completely. With this came a crushing debt for Britain and the need for the colonies to help lower the costs. This is the reason why there was an upsurge in taxes. The colonists were hostile and resistant to such decisions and eventually were in need of political independence. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 41–42)

There was a struggle to define why the taxes were unjustified in the colonies and it remained unclear even as the war was coming. The colonies were not represented in the British Parliament which added to the American resentment and uneasiness. They thought that there should be no change to the way things were up to that point. Until then freedom was not a

necessity that required being fought for, they just did not want to lose it. The Declaration of Independence was to grant the colonists separation from the British government and to be equal to other state powers. The document, however, includes several other wishful thoughts, and it generally did not bring up new ideas as it was connected to a previous Congress meeting. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 42–46)

The Founding Fathers thought that they had become slaves to Britain and that being taxed without their consent was slavery. They did not use the word “slavery” for the market with African Americans. If one would have a look at some other places in the world, the colonists were not doing so terribly under British rule. Reaching freedom was their dream and they were determined to fight for it even if, from the modern-day point of view, it meant something else to them. (Cullen, 2003, p. 47)

The American Revolution brought ideas about ending African American slavery. In 1775, the first antislavery society was born, and the first regions abolished it in the following years, others were slowly adopting similar strategies as well. The North was way ahead of the South by the year 1804. With the Declaration of Independence and dreaming of freedom, other people’s dreams came to light. This was the African American dream of ending actual slavery to stop being an object that could be bought and sold freely. The nation's aspirations were suppressed by narrow self-interest in power, fear of cotton farming technology advancements, and freight of uprisings. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 47–50)

The objective of the Founding Fathers was to establish a natural aristocracy, in which those who had shown competence and virtue were entitled to serve as representatives of the people. The republic itself also had to be talented and moral enough to recognise and focus on such representative individuals. So, they were willing to incorporate some democratic aspects such as elections for privileged men. When the Declaration came into existence it was written in mind with the fact that not everybody should be equal. Women, Native Americans, nor African American people were a part of this equality. The only ones who were to be equal were white males. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 51–53)

Yet the dream of the individual Founding Fathers was most likely different. Benjamin Franklin was a pioneer in the self-help movement. He received fewer than three years of formal education and learned practically everything by himself. Franklin contributed more than any other person to the establishment of the American Republic. He assisted in convincing Parliament to remove the unpopular Stamp Act taxes while serving as the United States

representative in London, allowing the United States an extra ten years to get ready for war with Britain. He served on the panel that selected Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence. Without the official partnership and military assistance, which he obtained from France, it seems probable that America would not have won the Revolutionary War. He engaged in the peace talks with Britain. At the age of 70, he decided to support the American Revolution instead of the British Empire. (Powell, 1997)

On an isolated plantation in the Virginia Piedmont, Thomas Jefferson spent his boyhood reading books and exploring the surrounding forests. Because of his father's success, Jefferson received a first-rate education. Written in 1774, his pamphlet *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* outlined the colonists' case for independence and shaped many of the concepts found in the Declaration of Independence, his most well-known piece. Jefferson was actively organizing resistance to British authority by 1774. Jefferson was then appointed to draft the Declaration of Independence. This document is a masterful statement of fundamental human rights and the clearest expression of American political ideology. (Onuf, 2018)

The Declaration of Independence came to be a far-reaching document with ambiguities and intentions that at that time could not be predicted nor understood completely. By highlighting the disparity between the treasured aspirations of the Declaration and the horrific realities of American life, the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s accomplished its most substantial progress. It was never clear for whom the pursuit of happiness and liberty was, and it might not be properly clear until today. The document continues to be the constitution of the American Dream. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 55–58)

2.2.3 19th century

The modest republic established by George Washington's generation grew into the largest democracy in the world in the 19th century. The right to vote was granted to all adult, white males. Politics became fiercely contested as the voting age progressed. A number of important political parties also emerged during this time and also went out of existence. In the meantime, the nascent nation grew from the Atlantic to the Pacific. But, for Americans, expansion turned out to be a mixed blessing. While many white settlers discovered new prospects in the West, their settlement wiped out other populations including Mexicans and Indian tribes. Moreover, territorial growth revitalized African American slavery and increased tensions between the North and the South. The majority of Americans had a positive outlook on the future thanks to democracy and territorial expansion. Many Americans supported social

reforms as a result of these factors, which were strengthened by widespread religious revivals. These changes included the establishment of public education systems, the improvement of prison, insane, and poor people's welfare, the abolition of slavery, and the achievement of equal rights for women. Several of these measures had a great deal of success. (“National Expansion and Reform, 1815 – 1880”, n.d.)

The United States became a global industrial power in the decades that followed the Civil War. Several new industries also appeared, while older ones expanded. Railroads significantly increased in size, integrating even rural areas of the nation into a market economy. American society was altered by industrial progress. It created a thriving middle class and a new class of rich industrialists. Millions of recently arrived immigrants and much more migrants from rural areas made up the workforce that enabled industrialization. The diversity of American society increased more than ever. But the era's economic success was not experienced by everyone. A lot of workers were frequently unemployed for at least a portion of the year, and when they worked, their earnings were generally low. Many workers supported and joined labour unions as a result of this predicament. In the meantime, farmers also experienced difficulties due to rising technological production and competition, which resulted in lower prices for agricultural products. Several young people moved to the city in pursuit of better career possibilities as a result of difficult circumstances on the farms. (“Rise of Industrial America, 1876-1900”, n.d.)

In the 19th century, hard work became not just an instrument for fighting realities but also allowed for creating own fate itself. This now was the base for anyone to move upwards (Cullen, 2003, pp. 59–60). The slave trade contributed to this as well. The first half of the 19th century was the most suitable time for moving upward with political parties being one of the most effective means of achieving it. (Cullen, 2003, pp. 69–72)

With the end of British domination came a sense of freedom which resulted in an increased feeling of self-interest and individualism. This becomes the defining theme of the American Dream in the 19th century. The American Frontier era began around 1840 and it brought the intention of investigating and obtaining the West of former colonies. Such events required individualism instead of a community-centred mindset which was typical for the earlier colonies. As a result of this movement, Native Americans were forcibly driven out of their homes, and subsequently, there was a gold rush in California that brought its own version of the American Dream. Furthermore, immigration, Civil War, and rapid industrialization

completely transformed both the culture and economy. As Americans strove to acquire the resources of their hard-won nation, competitiveness replaced cooperation and the concept of a self-made man gained new relevance. (“The American Dream in the Nineteenth Century”, n.d.)

2.2.4 20th century

The start of the war in Europe in 1914 shocked the American population. It had immediate and significant political and economic ramifications. With weaponry purchases from the Western Allies, the moderately depressed U.S. industry was thriving once again by 1915. By outlining the Allies' war objectives and stressing that the war was being fought against their dictatorial government rather than the German people, President Wilson made a significant contribution to the war's early completion. His renowned *Fourteen Points*, which were presented to the Senate in January 1918 as the foundation for a just peace, included the abandonment of hidden international agreements, the guarantee of freedom of the seas, the elimination of trade barriers between nations, the reduction of national armaments, and the adjustment of colonial claims while taking into account the interests of the affected populations. Additional clauses aimed to protect European nations' autonomy and unhindered economic growth. High hopes that were rapidly deflated as the post war economy returned to normal followed the war's early economic boom. As a result, the growing expense of living, excessive hours, and insensitive management alienated the worker force. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, however, was the event that caused the most public uproar and anxiety in the United States. Americans' morale was poor, and many started to worry that, just as a small group had taken control of Russia, so could a similar organisation gain control of the United States. A dramatic shift in American policy occurred during the 1920s with the restriction of foreign immigration. Early in the 20th century, immigration reached its height after surging in the late 19th century. For instance, more than 13 million individuals arrived in the United States between 1900 and 1915, primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe. Many of these immigrants were either Jewish or Catholic, which concerned many older Anglo-Saxon and Protestant Americans who made up the majority of the population. Some people disliked the newcomers because they strove for low-paying jobs, while others did so because they upheld Old World traditions, frequently resided in urban ethnic neighbourhoods, and appeared to resist assimilating into the bigger American culture. As an increasingly urban, secular society clashed with more ancient rural traditions in the 1920s, some Americans expressed their dissatisfaction with the nature of modern life by placing particular importance on family and religion. (“An Outline of American History”, 1994)

The stock market crash in October 1929 and the ensuing global economic crisis quickly put an end to the prevailing affluence of the 1920s. People's employment, finances, and even their houses and farms were at risk due to the crisis. Around a quarter of the US labour force was unemployed at the height of the Great Depression. These were challenging circumstances for many Americans. The first two terms of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration, known as the New Deal, were marked by hope and optimism. The 1930s' economic problems had a global reach and impact. In many places of the world, political instability was a result of economic instability. The United States attempted to stay out of the war when it officially broke out in both Europe and Asia. (“Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945”, n.d.)

In the 20th century, never before had the reach of global influence and attention been greater. The idea of the American Dream has taken on more guises, impacted more people, and sparked more opposition than ever before. The arrival of the modern age brought cynicism which started to challenge idealism. Americans in this century had similar aspirations to their ancestors, including those for freedom, purpose, and fortune. It's difficult to evaluate whether or not 20th-century Americans succeeded in fulfilling their dreams more or less than earlier generations. (“The American Dream in the Twentieth Century”, n.d.)

2.2.4.1 The American Dream in the 1950s-1960s

In the years immediately following World War II, the United States dominated international politics. The country felt confident in completing its objective at home and abroad after winning such an important battle and leaving its country unharmed by the effects of war. American leaders wanted to protect the democratic system they had fought so hard to defend and spread the wealth as broadly as they could. The United States saw extraordinary economic prosperity over the decade and a half after World War II while the Cold War developed. The post war years saw the United States solidify its position as the richest nation in the world. At this point, there was an increasing number of Americans identifying themselves as middle class. The size of America's leading corporations increased after 1945. The 1890s and the 1920s saw an earlier wave of mergers, while the 1950s saw another round. Leading the way were new conglomerates, or businesses with assets across several industries. As industrial America developed, workers saw changes in their own lives. Fewer employees created goods, while more offered services. In an effort to locate inexpensive accommodation for the bigger families created by the post-war baby boom, Americans made a significant relocation out of inner cities and into brand-new suburbs. (“An Outline of American History”, 1994)

Television also had a significant influence on social and economic trends. It was created in the 1930s but did not become extensively sold until after World War II. In 1960, at least one set was held by three-quarters of all families. The typical household watched television for four to five hours a day in the middle of the decade. People of all ages were exposed to more sophisticated marketing for goods that were supposedly essential for living a decent life. American culture experienced a feeling of uniformity in the 1950s. Young and elderly alike tended to conform to society's standards rather than forging their own paths. Traditional roles were maintained after World War II, despite the fact that both men and women had been driven into new employment patterns. Men aspired to provide for their families, but women considered their place to be at home, even when they worked. The homogenising trend was aided by television since it gave both young and old people a common experience that reflected societal norms. (“An Outline of American History”, 1994)

Those who had been largely excluded from the full meaning of the American Dream, both before and after the war, were not blind to the image and reality of overall economic success, and the upward mobility it gave for many white Americans. As a result, throughout the post war era, American women, Black Americans, and Hispanic Americans grew more adamant in their pursuit of the complete freedoms and civil rights provided by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. (“The Post War United States, 1945-1968”, n.d.)

2.3 The American Dream and Inequality

The concept that the realities of the American Dream have not necessarily come true in the lives of many current Americans and those who aspire to become Americans is conveyed by calling it a "dream". It is at least as ancient as the concept itself that reality falls short of the American Dream. Many Americans' ability to realise their dreams has been hampered by a variety of injustices and difficulties, including the expansion of settlers into Native American territory, slavery, the initial restriction on voting rights placed on white male landowners, and a lengthy number of other issues. (Barone, 2023)

2.3.1 Racial Aspects of the American Dream

In the 1970s, the culture accepted African American influence with black and mixed-race sensations appearing in the mainstream. During this time, the American Dream had transcended racial boundaries. This was nevertheless seen as something menacing to the culture and the American Dream itself. Up until then, the American Dream was meant to be only white. (Samuel, 2012, p. 176)

Historically, limitations unique to the African American minority position, such as racial prejudice and poverty, have kept them from benefiting from the promises of the American Dream. There are many aspects and barriers which diminish the chances of achieving the American Dream. Discrimination has been prevalent and remains common in their lives even today. This in turn has a huge impact on life satisfaction, making it lower for African Americans. Wages are about one-fifth lower than those of white people, and to add to this, more African Americans live in poverty. This all ties to structural racism. Nevertheless, this has not stopped them from believing in what the dreams bear. Although it is necessary to mention that scepticism about the ability to achieve the American Dream has been on the horizon. (Armstrong et al., pp. 228–231)

About a hundred years ago, African Americans were dispersed everywhere across the country. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, racism against African Americans peaked. Blacks were discriminated against; they were told where they could live and what they could do. With this wave also came the ideology of suburbia. With cars appearing on the streets, people were now able to cross bigger distances more quickly. This resulted in a huge deal of segregation which caused the demonization of African Americans by white people. (Loewen, 2011, pp. 61–67)

Children of immigrants who were from white countries (Ireland, Russia) learned white English whilst the English of African Americans developed into a language with specific attributes. African Americans had fewer opportunities for good education or health care. The segregation caused many blacks not to believe they could achieve the American Dream the usual white way, so they turned to crimes or tried to win the lottery. (Loewen, 2011, pp. 68–69)

The election of Barack Obama was a huge step toward more racial integration. It did not solve all problems with racism, however. America tries to formally perceive itself as an integrated country, but at the same time, elections and reality show the opposite. (Loewen, 2011, pp. 71–73)

2.3.2 Relation of Gender to the American Dream

Although the American Dream's definition suggests that it is achievable for anyone who works hard enough, in regard to gender, there seem to be uneven chances. Since the United States always has been and remains to be a patriarchal society, women, in general, have had more difficulties with achieving it.

Nowadays women often choose college graduate programmes which lead to lower-paid job positions. Science is often a more male-dominated field, girls often depart from science subjects and take less interest in it early in their high school years. (Hanson & White, 2011, pp. 78–79)

In terms of wage and salary, in the second half of the 20th century, the imbalance has gotten better but in recent years the gap is getting smaller and is decreasing slower. Job positions that are usually associated with women hold lower wages in comparison to typically male jobs. A woman typically needs an extra degree to obtain the same salary as a man. (Hanson & White, 2011, pp. 79–80)

Men's median hourly earnings peaked in the 1970s at around \$27 to \$28/h, fell to below \$23/h by the mid-1990s, increased again during the late 1990s boom, declined during the Great Recession, and increased somewhat since. Amidst these fluctuations, the median has remained constant since the mid-1990s between \$22 and \$25/h in 2018. Women have historically earned less than males on average. Their earnings were about \$17 per hour in the 1970s. Early in the 1980s, they started to climb throughout the remainder of the decade, flattened, and then started to rise once more in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Since then, they have largely remained flat. Women's incomes at the top of the distribution, just like men's, grew steadily further distant

from those at the bottom and even the median. Women at the bottom, in contrast to males, did not see a net decline. In comparison to men, women's progression has slowed, and in certain cases, it has come to a complete stop. (England et al., 2020)

The group who is the least likely to achieve the American Dream are poor women of colour which affects their children as well. Men often do not realise that not everybody has the same opportunities when trying to achieve the American Dream whereas women usually do. If we have a look at a comparison of America and other countries, one could then argue that more frequently the United States residents agree that individual hard work is the most important component when trying to get successful. In other countries, citizens acknowledge that class, gender, and race play a major part in this process as well. (Hanson & White, 2011, p. 81)

There is still a common perception that women should handle most home duties. American married mothers devote roughly twice as much time to childcare and housekeeping than married fathers do. Despite having a far higher likelihood of working now than they did in previous decades, American women—including those with small children—spend more time on childcare than did mothers in the 1960s. In the United States, couples still idealise and favour families with a male provider and a female housewife. The concept that a family conforms into that template is threatened by the acceptance of women as primary wage earners. When wives make more money than husbands, couples frequently minimise the significance of the woman's employment while elevating the husband's career as more prestigious. Furthermore, the division of domestic chores is unfairly distributed among breadwinning wives. Women tend to do more housework as their financial dependency on their spouses grows. Yet, men tend to perform less housework the more economically reliant they are on their spouses. Due to significant changes in women's lives—like how they've pushed their way into historically male-dominated fields—the United States is moving closer to gender equality. Nonetheless, men's lifestyles have changed less significantly than women's during the previous few decades. While men now spend somewhat more time helping out around the house, other parts of their lives, such as the necessity to work and support their families, have essentially remained unchanged throughout the years. (Rao, 2019)

2.4 The Contemporary American Dream

Once George W. Bush became the president of the US, his role in shaping the American Dream in his own way became important. The late 1990s were economically prosperous, owning a home was a major sign of that. In the following years, more and more people were able to reach such an achievement. At the same time, the gap between classes widened and with that came an increase in class polarity and reduced economic mobility. Until the 1970s, Americans who did not have much in terms of wealth were able to eventually become members of the middle class. Since then, this process has declined. (Samuel, 2012, pp. 168–169)

In 2005, the American Dream from an economic perspective was suffering. Nearly 20% of Americans had negative net worth or no net worth at all. Even though it was hard to believe for some Americans, the United States were on the same page with income mobility as countries in Europe, the possibility was no longer better. (Samuel, 2012, p. 170) The American Dream was a highly valuable and beneficial illusion that played its part in relation to the health of the whole country.

In the 2000s, the American Dream started to take on different meanings and approaches. On one hand, some argue that being rich overall makes people less happy and brings social issues. On the other hand, some say that the American Dream has transformed into working a joyful job while being able to support your family. There can also be the perspective that Europe's own dream was far ahead of the American one, it provided social stability to their citizens in comparison to the United States. It could also be stated that work and consumerism have become the most prominent ideas of the American Dream which results in all kinds of social and individual troubles. (Samuel, 2012, pp. 172–175)

The American Dream in the early 2000s was the core of many TV shows, such as *American Idol* (2002). It was used in building multi-media platforms. Popular music, especially hip-hop focuses on the themes of the American Dream as well, for the most part on money. All this cultural exposure resulted in immigrants being interested in it despite non-ideal circumstances. (Samuel, 2012, p. 184)

The United States' most lucrative export, commercial entertainment filled the void created by the post-Cold War expenditure cuts. Whether it is a large screen in a movie theatre or a little one in a television or computer, people all around the world perceive the United States through some sort of screen. Moreover, what is shown on those devices has the ability to influence how other countries view the American Dream and what it represents. While

Americans are generally positive about their individual life, a recent poll conducted by *The Atlantic*, showed that the same optimism does not apply to the American Dream. A significant majority does appear to be losing trust in it, according to the poll. This is also unsettling because if these Americans do not make the required efforts to spread the idea to others, they may get jaded about it and lose faith in it. Adult men and women who were prepared to embark on a perilous journey of tough labour, self-sacrifice and hope for a brighter future were drawn to the original American Dream. From the look at American television pop culture, it seems like the new dream appeals to post-adolescents and adolescents who are concerned about maturing. This is not a real representation of American life, nor is it appealing to many of the people whom the country needs on its side. (Bayles, 2015)

Obama's candidature for the president of the United States was greatly helped by the fact that he was the embodiment of the American Dream. During this time, the ownership of the house changed its shape. It was now more complicated and difficult to obtain a mortgage loan and many Americans had no other choice than to rent. People kept seeing the American Dream as something more and more unachievable. In 2006, the top 10% continued to become even richer while digging deeper into the gap that was between them and the working class and the middle class. (Samuel, 2012, pp. 190–191)

If we have a look at dual-income homes where both partners work, there is a high ratio of hours worked to free time. Couples work a combined 100 hours or more each week. For many American families, having two incomes has become necessary in part due to wage stagnation and price inflation. At the same time, most Americans who truly have a choice between living on one income or two incomes prefer money. Families probably have no viable options at the lower end of the middle-class level. But at the median, it's obvious that middle-class families—the average ones—have a choice. This type of American citizen can still achieve the American Dream if they become modest in their possessions. (Schweyer et al., 2020)

The American Dream is also currently closely tied to consumerism. The rapid expansion of production and consumption generates consequences for the environment and society with uncontrollable results. Thus, capitalism relentlessly exhausts the very people and natural resources it depends on. Nevertheless, leaving American consumption is equivalent to abandoning American capitalism, and this effort would undoubtedly face enormous obstacles. (Ivanova, 2011)

3. Practical part

3.1 The Portrayal of the American Dream in Selected Literary Works

3.1.1 Breakfast at Tiffany's

Truman Capote, real name Truman Streckfus Persons, was an American novelist, short-story writer, and playwright (1924–1984). His early works progressed the Southern Gothic tradition, but he later developed a more journalistic style in the novel *In Cold Blood* (1965), which, along with *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958), remains to be his most well-known literary work. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is a generally well-known novella written by Truman Capote. In 1958, Esquire magazine originally published it. Later, it was compiled with other short stories as a book. (Kuiper, 2022) In his work, Capote displays a period of Holiday's life when she is a young woman who tries to achieve happiness through the means of the American Dream. However, Holly's pursuit of the American Dream does not lead her to happiness.

Holiday Golightly is a young independent woman who lives wildly in an apartment in New York on the Upper East Side. She embodies a notable example of the American Dream. If we have a look at her lifestyle choices it can be stated that she lives a dreamlike life. Her mailbox has her name with the note: *Miss Holiday Golightly, travelling*. She uses this to leave a different impression of herself to others because, in reality, she is often at home. She dreams of owning a piece of luxurious jewellery from Tiffany's which holds a symbolic meaning for the luxurious lifestyle that she would like to achieve. From the very beginning, it is clear that she tries to achieve her dreams completely by her own means. She does not have a supporting family nor a standard mundane job but offers her company to get finances, gifts, and good treatment not by being a prostitute but by portraying an "American geisha" (Inge, 1987). She is one of the girls who accompany important and influential men and who get their place reserved in the gossip columns. For example, she meets up weekly with a mobster in prison Sally Tomato. Although she delivers a code each time, she does not think about the possible consequences of her actions because to her it does not matter, she is determined to achieve what she sets her mind to, and she is not worried about taking advantage of people nor about doing something illegal. By performing these actions, she tries to climb the social ladder through hard work and determination.

We do not get to know much about the heroine's past, but her life story up to that point could be the definition of the American Dream. Holly, whose parents died of TB, comes from a lower-middle-class family. She got married at a very young age when she was fourteen years

old with the promise of taking care of her husband's children in Texas. She gets to meet Doc Golightly because she and her brother were stealing milk and eggs and got found by his oldest daughter. This man offers her family values, a home without work, and real love. She agrees to marry him because she had never been married before and later on when she is older considers it to be illegal. Holly sees the sweetness of his behaviour and likes him as a person in general. But she is ambitious and does not ponder that is all life is supposed to give her. Doc Golightly believes that she ran away due to looking at show-off pictures and reading about dreams and different ways of livelihoods in magazines. And when he finally finds her after years and talks to her, she realises that she has not changed that much although she has got older and is not a child anymore. At that point, she is still that young girl that looks at magazines and dreams of her own American Dream.

After escaping from her old life to New York, she becomes lonely and isolated. Furthermore, she is unattached to anything and anyone. However, she is not in pursuit of new deep relationships. Holly does not even name the cat because according to her it doesn't belong to her. Yet when she lets the cat go, she regrets her decision deeply. Also, Holly calls the narrator Fred because he reminds her of her brother. Once her brother dies, she stops calling him by this name and completely changes her habits. Her dream and life shudder heavily. She does not care about her appearance anymore; she hibernates and no longer entertains men with one exception of Sally Tomato. Yet she seems more content and happier than ever. She decorates her flat and stays inside. It could be argued that this event makes her realise that her old life and the values which she shared with her brother are gone. But at the same time, she is aware that her current lifestyle does not make her happy and that she craves something else. She decides to run away again this time from New York with José to Rio. She wants to get married to him and start a new life leaving everything behind. Whether this decision would actually make her feel fulfilled is unclear, but we do get to know at the end of the novel that she lives a similar life to the way she carried on in New York.

The American Dream is supposed to be a means of achieving happiness. Real life is not a dream, however. The American Dream is simply just a dream. While being very subjective, it is also just not palpable. Was Holly happy? She definitely tried to be happy in New York as much as she could by her own means. Nevertheless, she was most likely pursuing a goal that could not make her content, it did not bring her what she needed – a place to put down her roots while being surrounded by people with good intentions and understanding. Holly's life quite obviously resembles a common interpretation of ambitions that suggests that one lives a

successful life by paving their own path with their efforts and work. Yet the achievement of these ideals does not bring her happiness. She most likely repeats the cycle of escaping and living a similar life to the one we get to know in New York. Trying to start all over again in another country without creating meaningful relationships and a safe place to call home is most likely not the answer and approach that could make her content. Nevertheless, we do not get to know whether she eventually finds her own actual happiness or not.

3.1.2 An American Dream

American writer and journalist Norman Kingsley Mailer (1923–1927) is most known for adopting a style of journalism known as "New Journalism," which mixes the subjective imagination of fiction with the more objective characteristics of journalism. The totalitarianism that Mailer thought to be ingrained in the centralized power structure of 20th- and 21st-century America was strongly critiqued in both his fiction and nonfiction. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023)

Mailer, who was born in Long Branch, New Jersey and raised in Brooklyn, initially planned to pursue aeronautical engineering during the time he was a student at Harvard. While he graduated from Harvard in 1943 with a degree in engineering, his professional aspirations changed due to his writing lessons there. He enlisted in the army in 1944 where his time in the Philippines served as the inspiration for his debut book, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948). At a fairly young age, Mailer became a literary sensation after the publication of this work. Throughout the course of his career, Mailer published nearly forty books in both fiction and nonfiction, covering a wide range of topics. In 1955, he helped establish the *Village Voice*, and his work there launched a successful career for him as a journalist and cultural critic. Many people believe that Mailer's creative production and fame peaked in the 1960s and 1970s. He took part in the 1967 march on the Pentagon, and he wrote about it in *The Armies of the Night* (1968), which won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. *The Executioner's Song* earned him another Pulitzer Prize. From the 1980s onward, Mailer concentrated more sharply on the novel and literary biography, although he kept up his sharp cultural commentary. His final book, *The Castle in the Forest* (2007), was a *New York Times* bestseller. He continued to write until his passing in 2007. (McKinley, 2021)

The centre character Stephen Rojack is similar to the author himself in many ways despite Mailer partially denying this idea. From his answer for the *New York Post*, it can be assumed that he created an idealised, mostly better version of himself in the novel and, therefore, there is a certain connection between the two. The story very much resembles his personal American Dream. In an interview with *New York Post* Mailer stated:

“The point is, I wanted a man who was very much of my generation and generally of my type. When one writes in the first person it’s agreeable to have a character who’s reasonably close to oneself, let’s say as Frederick Henry was close to Hemingway, though certainly not in any manner identical. But all

similarities granted, Rojack is still considerably different from me—he's more elegant, more witty, more heroic, his physical strength is considerable, and at the same time he's more corrupt than me.” (Lennon, 1988, pp. 101–102)

Stephen Rojack is a man many would dream to be. He studied at Harvard, is a war hero, former congressman, book author, professor at university, television personality and husband to a rich heiress. On the outside, it may seem like his life is without a flaw. But Rojack's American Dream lacks his own hard work. He disregards his marriage with his wife Deborah Kelly and uses her to achieve milestones he would not be able to achieve under different circumstances. Being with her does not bring him happiness or satisfaction, it just helps him become successful. Their marriage eventually slowly collapses, and they decide to separate. Their interactions become hateful, bitter, and full of spite. But he got what he needed from this marriage and through these means, he was able to achieve his dreams.

When Deborah moves to an apartment, Stephen visits her because he has debt. The visitation ends in an ugly fight and Deborah is choked to death by Rojack. He then makes the scene seem like she killed herself by committing suicide. In a way, he frees himself from her, he achieves freedom from his past. During this moment, another part of his American Dream begins which is comparably different.

Yet a certain emptiness looms over him, his personality stands on a void and there are signs of a lack of happiness. But women in his life are used to fill that void. First is his wife Deborah who provides him with opportunities to become a well-known successful man. The knowledge that he would not be able to achieve such things if it was not for her drives him insane and he murders her.

Ruta is in some ways like Stephen himself. They both try to take advantage of the rich Kelly family. Again, it is not a loving relationship between the two. Ruta to him is just another woman he can sleep with and use to reach his goal. She also tries to achieve her American Dream by taking advantage of someone else which in the end makes them quite similar. But another woman in Rojack's life appears:

“I caught no more than a glimpse of her, but she had one of those perfect American faces, a small-town girl's face with the sort of perfect clean features which find their way onto every advertisement and every billboard in the land. Yet there was something better about this girl, there was a silvery cunning in her features.” (Mailer, 2018, p. 53)

Into Rojack's life then comes woman named Cherry. Cherry's bringing up was not easy. She was raised by her half-brother and half-sister after her parents were killed in an accident. Her life dream is to become a singer. After almost marrying a Navy flier, she meets a rich older man whom she entertains, and he takes care of her living situation until she realises, he is tied to the Mafia and that his name is Barney Oswald Kelly. She gets passed to a king of narcotics in L.A. but manages to escape thanks to her singing dates in Vegas. She had the power to get people killed and at the same time get killed. Eventually, she leaves for New York where she meets other important men like Shago but also Stephen. Rojack becomes infatuated with her and sees her as the perfect woman that he could love and who offers him safety in a relationship, a beacon of hope. But Cherry is not perfect, he just likes her and the way she makes him feel in her presence. He still behaves selfishly, and the relationship is still more about his needs than hers. In the end, Cherry's a nudge for his change of life circumstances. After her death, he moves to Guatemala to start a completely new life.

If we have an overall look at the main protagonist's American Dream, it just as in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* does not lead to happiness. Whilst having a seemingly successful and fulfilling way of living there is something that causes emptiness in the lives of the characters. For Rojack, this might be the fact, that because of his wife, he becomes prosperous which fills the void in his heart but only for a while and not by his own doing. The meeting with Cherry changes his life perspective and he realises that his values might lie somewhere else and that he is missing some important aspects of a happy life like love, care, and safety. Just like Holiday Golightly, in the end, he runs away from the United States and the American Dream hoping to leave the old life behind and start a new better one.

3.1.3 The American Dream

Edward Franklin Albee (1928–2016) was an American playwright. He was adopted as a baby by Mr. and Mrs. Reed Albee of Larchmont, New York, who raised him in a wealthy household. Albee was introduced to theatre through family's company at a young age and grew to love the arts intensely, although his adoptive parents wanted him to follow a more traditional commercial or professional career. He left his family at age 20 and relocated to Greenwich Village in New York. Albee supplemented his little inheritance from his grandmother over the following ten years with a series of odd jobs. He finished *The Zoo Story*, his first significant piece, at the age of 30. In 1959, the play had its world premiere in Berlin, Germany, and the following year it opened Off-Broadway. With his dramas *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox*, Albee introduced absurdism to the American stage. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, his debut Broadway show, was a critical and commercial success and a Tony Award was given to the play. In 1967, he established the Edward F. Albee Foundation. With *Three Tall Women*, which was acclaimed by many reviewers as his best play in 30 years, Edward Albee made a remarkable comeback in 1994. Three Pulitzer Prizes for Drama, a Gold Medal in Drama from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1980), the Kennedy Center Honors (1996), and the National Medal of Arts (1996) were awarded to Albee. (“Edward Albee”, 2022)

The American Dream is a play which focuses on an immediate three-member family of Mommy, Daddy and Grandma who share an apartment. The names of the characters are very broad and impersonal which suggests this could be almost any American family's situation. Albee shows the American Dream from a different perspective and how the country's social standards changed after the war.

All three main characters have very different personalities and represent various personality types. Daddy is a typical docile husband who agrees with his wife in everything and is not interested in the relationship itself very much. He desired to be a senator all his life but changes his mind to wanting to be a governor because it is closer to his apartment. While he is very passive and compliant with his wife, he seems aware that his wife is using him for his financial value and is not with him because she loves him or cares for him in any way. He just provides her with her own little girl's dream of marrying a wealthy man and not having to work. Nevertheless, the typical idea of a husband at that time would be that he is mainly the father of children whose main responsibility should be bringing home money and being a deadbeat partner otherwise.

The American Dream shows the influence of materialism on American culture and family life after the war. This is especially seen in Mommy's character. Both Daddy and Mommy represent the average members of society at the time. Mommy is the head of the family and is driven by the force of materialistic possession. She looks for the feeling of being superior in any given situation, she emasculates her husband and behaves poorly toward Grandma whom she would rather put away and live without in the apartment. She is controlling of people around her and especially of her husband. Her American Dream is based on the fact that Mommy grew up in a poor household. She got married to Daddy not because of love but because of his wealth. As a result, she can live off his finances and that is her dream come true since when she was a young girl. Furthermore, she also feels entitled to his money after his death. Mommy's lifestyle reflects this state of mind as well. Shopping is an important aspect of her life, and she uses material means to achieve a certain social status. This can be seen particularly in the scene where she causes a conflict with the cashier just because the leader of her social club argues with her about the colour of the hat she bought. In general, old values are discarded and replaced by new superficial ones. Original and traditional values like love, matrimony, respect, and family are replaced by materialistic values and the feeling of satisfaction.

There is, however, something that is missing in Mommy and Daddy's lives. A perfect American family also has children but for Mommy and Daddy, the process and achievement of this reality is not that simple. Daddy deals with infertility, so they decide they want to buy their own "bumble of joy" in the form of a baby boy. But the boy does not look like Mommy or Daddy. They gradually mutilate the baby because he is not acting according to their imagination of a well-behaved child. Eventually, they murder him because bringing him up does not give them joy and satisfaction and finally, they demand their money back for the imperfect kid. To both Mommy and Daddy, the child is just another disposable object which they can purchase and get rid of once it does not fulfil their needs completely and without a flaw. They were not afraid of hurting him and even killing him, they just wished for an exemplary American child who would satisfy their craving and once the boy was not able to do that, they just discarded him like an object which has only material value.

The only explicitly stated relation to the American Dream is the Young Man who is a good-looking, muscular, movie-starlike guy who obviously puts work into his looks. He is the American Dream – "Clean-cut, Midwest farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way. Good profile, straight nose, honest eyes, wonderful smile ..." (Albee, p. 107).

Yet he is incomplete – he looks good on the outside, but it is just a façade, the inside of him is desolate. There is a certain feeling of emptiness inside since the murder of his adopted boy twin caused by Mommy and Daddy. The idea of the American Dream sounds perfect as well, but often it is not achievable for many. He is a sudden solution to Mommy and Daddy’s dissatisfaction with being an incomplete family. Just like the Young Man, the American Dream exists to bring satisfaction, too. He comes searching for any job that would pay him money because to him money is something significant and powerful. Money should help people achieve happiness.

But the Young Man is not the same as his twin; he is the dissected version of his brother, and there is nothing original left. He no longer is a “bumble of joy” nor an imperfect kid who causes troubles and behaves childishly with his adoptive parents. This might suggest a means to accomplishing the American Dream – one should get rid of what makes a person human to succeed. The concept of the American Dream and its values changed just like the Young Man, the traditional meaning was replaced by overconsumption and materialism. The twins are the difference between the real American Dream and the perfect idyllic one. Without the imperfections and realities which make a person human, the Young Man becomes empty just like a shell.

4. Conclusion

This bachelor thesis aimed to define and analyse the American Dream from different perspectives and to show in selected literary works from a similar time period how the American Dream can be portrayed by individual writers. The thesis focused on the definition, history and inequality related to the American Dream. The literary works selected for purpose of the inspection were T. Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, N. Mailer's *American Dream*, and E. Albee's *The American Dream*. The goal of the analysis was to concentrate on the main character's personal American Dream and its circumstances.

While all the books have the same theme, it is portrayed in various ways. The main characters of all three literary works are completely different human beings with different life circumstances and conditions. But the want of their own personal American Dream binds them together. In all three works, the core values of the American Dream remain the same – there is the search for personal freedom, individual rights, and happiness.

Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* portrays a segment of the life of a young woman who escapes from her old unfulfilling life to New York to search for her own personal American Dream. A lot of her past remains to be unknown, but she is an orphan who married at the young age of fourteen to take care of a husband and his children. The man provides for her family values, home, and love. Being a young teenage girl influenced by pictures in magazines, she seeks out different meanings of life in a city. To make a living, she entertains men and tries to climb the social ladder. But there is something missing in her life, her lifestyle does not make her happy. She is unattached to anyone and feels lonely. Instead of searching for deeper bonds with people around her, and after several life-turning events, she escapes New York. She was in pursuit of an American Dream that could not make her content in life.

At the beginning of the story of Mailer's *An American Dream*, the main character Stephen Rojack seems to lead a perfect life. He is a war hero, Harvard graduate, former congressman, book author, professor, and television personality. But he is married to a rich heiress who allowed him to achieve all these accomplishments. Rojack's American Dream lacks his personal hard work because if it was not for his marriage, he would never achieve such milestones and would not have the life many would dream to have. He eventually frees himself from this uncomfortable feeling by killing his wife. He tries to find solace in a woman named Cherry with whom he is infatuated. Cherry is a push for a change in his values, but she is not the solution to his issues. Just like in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the main protagonist seems

to lead a successful and fulfilling lifestyle but there is something important missing and he decides to escape his old life.

Albee's *The American Dream* tries to show how the country's values and standards changed after the war. It focuses on a small immediate family of Mommy, Daddy and Grandma. They share an apartment, and their very different personalities create specific dynamics. They represent average members of society at that time. Daddy is a passive and obedient husband who listens to anything his wife says. Mommy is a materialistic person who married Daddy, not because of love but only because he is rich enough to fulfil her American Dream of being able to live off her wealthy husband and not having to work. But there is something missing in their lives. They deal with infertility, so they decide to adopt a baby boy. However, the child does not bring them joy and satisfaction, so they eventually kill him and discard him like an object with only material value. The Young Man appears as a solution to Mommy and Daddy's dissatisfaction. He is the twin of the murdered baby boy who looks perfect on the outside, but he is empty on the inside, he no longer has imperfections which make him a human. Just like the American Dream, the values of the boy changed, the traditional meaning was exchanged by materialism and overconsumption.

In all three presented literary works, there is an emphasis on the prominence of materialism which is often tied to the ideology of the American Dream with Mommy's character in Edward Albee's *The American Dream* being the most notable example of how materialistic values play an important role in the understanding of the dream and how it is often portrayed. Money has a huge influence and serves a big purpose in all protagonists' lives.

Escaping the United States and searching for the American Dream elsewhere is a mutual theme for *The Breakfast At Tiffany's* and *An American Dream* where both main characters become disappointed with their lives in New York and the course of events leads them to a search for personal freedom elsewhere. They deal with the pressure of achieving the American Dream by reconsidering the values they originally held and changing them into values which are more meaningful to them after the life-changing events.

In all three selected literary works, there is a search for a high position in social status and satisfaction. In *An American Dream*, Stephen Rojack does not get married to his wife Deborah because he loves her but because she offers him a way how to climb the social ladder and how to become a successful and influential man. The same goes for Mommy from *The American Dream* who marries Daddy, not because of her feelings for him but because he is a

wealthy and passive man who does not stand up for himself and lets himself be controlled. She uses him to achieve her childhood dream of being rich and having a high social status. In *Breakfast at Tiffany's* Holly Golightly does not get married for financial reasons but she still uses the company of men to receive favours, make money and become a socially important person.

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