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# Bakalářská práce

Univerzita Hradec Králové  
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# Ztracená generace a americký sen

Bakalářská práce

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# American Dream and The Lost Generation

Bachelor thesis

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Bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem amerického snu a hodnot ve vybraných dílech autorů Ztracené generace. Práce zkoumá konkrétně díla *Velký Gatsby* od Francise Scotta Fitzgeralda, *Fiesta* od Ernesta Hemingwaye a *O myších a lidech* od Johna Steinbecka. Na základě analýzy vybraných aspektů těchto děl práce provádí literární komparaci zaměřenou na fenomén amerického snu.

CARLSEN, G. Robert. *American literature: Themes and writers*. New York, Webster Division, McGraw-Hill, 1979.

FITZGERALD, Francis Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. London: Abacus, 1995.

HEMINGWAY, Ernest. *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Ch. Scribner, 1970.

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### **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci *Ztracená generace a americký sen* vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího závěrečné práce samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

V Hradci Králové dne 1. 5. 2024

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### **Poděkování**

Ráda bych poděkovala Mgr. Janu Sukovi, Ph.D., za vedení mé bakalářské práce, ochotu, podporu, lidský přístup a cenné rady.

## **Anotace**

TÁGLICHTOVÁ, Barbora. *Ztracená generace a americký sen*. Hradec Králové: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Hradec Králové, 2024. 66 s. Bakalářská práce.

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem amerického snu a hodnot ve vybraných dílech autorů Ztracené generace. Teoretická část práce se zaměřuje na definici amerického snu společně s historií tohoto fenoménu, a dále na charakteristiku Ztracené generace. Práce dále představuje životy a kariéru vybraných autorů patřící do této generace, a to Ernesta Hemingwaye, Francise Scotta Fitzgeralda a Johna Steinbecka. Praktická část práce zkoumá jejich literární díla, ve kterých se objevuje tematika amerického snu. Konkrétně se jedná o romány *Fiesta*, *Velký Gatsby* a *O myších a lidech*. Práce nejprve představuje díla společně se stručným dějem a autobiografickými prvky, a poté zkoumá, jak je americký sen v dílech vyobrazen na základě tří vybraných aspektů – ideálu osobního štěstí, materiálního bohatství, a rovnosti a příležitosti. Na základě této analýzy práce provádí literární komparaci zaměřenou na vyobrazení fenoménu amerického snu ve vybraných dílech.

Klíčová slova: americký sen, ztracená generace, Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck

### **Annotation**

TÁGLICHTOVÁ, Barbora. *American Dream and The Lost Generation*. Hradec Králové: Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, 2024. 66 pp. Bachelor Degree Thesis.

This bachelor thesis explores the theme and ideals of the American Dream in selected works by the authors of the Lost Generation. The theoretical part of the thesis focuses on the definition of the American Dream together with the history of this phenomenon, as well as the characteristics of the Lost Generation. The thesis also presents the lives and careers of selected authors belonging to this generation, namely Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, and John Steinbeck. The practical part of the thesis examines their literary works in which the theme of the American Dream appears. Specifically, the novels *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Of Mice and Men*. The thesis first introduces the works along with a brief plot summary and autobiographical elements, and then examines how the American Dream is portrayed in the works based on three selected aspects – the ideal of personal happiness, material prosperity, and equality and opportunity. Based on the analysis, the thesis conducts a literary comparison focusing on the depiction of the American Dream in selected works.

Keywords: American Dream, Lost Generation, Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck

## Rozšířený abstrakt

Autoři tzv. ztracené generace byli ovlivněni první světovou válkou a atmosférou, která po konfliktu ve společnosti následovala. Proto se v jejich literárních dílech často objevovala témata, která nějakým způsobem souvisela s poválečným obdobím. Tato doba byla poznamenána existenciálními problémy a výraznými společenskými změnami, čehož si byli vědomi i všichni tři vybraní autoři a využili tuto skutečnost jako kulisy svých děl. Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na vyobrazení amerického snu ve vybraných dílech autorů ztracené generace.

Teoretická část práce se nejprve věnuje tématu fenoménu amerického snu – definici, původu pojmu a zobrazením toho, jak se vnímání této myšlenky měnilo v průběhu dějin. Dále představuje charakteristiku ztracené generace a spojuje ji s historií první světové války a jejími následky. Vybranými autory pro tuto práci, kteří ve svých dílech pracovali s myšlenkou amerického snu, jsou Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald a John Steinbeck. Práce popisuje jejich osobní životy, počínaje rodinným zázemím, studiem, a literární kariérou.

Tito spisovatelé patřící ke ztracené generaci se ve svých dílech vyrovnávali s ideály amerického snu a ve svém vyprávění zkoumali překážky a nedostatky, které tento koncept provázely. Tato práce detailněji popisuje jedno vybrané literární dílo od každého z těchto autorů, a to právě to, které se fenoménem amerického snu zabývá. Vybranými díly jsou *Fiesta* od Hemingwaye, Fitzgeraldův *Velký Gatsby* a *O myších a lidech* od Steinbecka. Každá kapitola týkající se knihy poskytuje základní informace o díle, včetně jeho formy a stylu. Dále shrnuje děj a též zmiňuje autobiografické rysy spojené s dějem díla. Následuje praktická část, která poskytuje analýzu vyobrazení amerického snu v těchto dílech. Zobrazení tohoto fenoménu práce analyzuje prostřednictvím tří vybraných aspektů amerického snu – ideálu osobního štěstí, materiálního bohatství a rovnosti a příležitostí. Práce tyto aspekty zkoumá především skrz postavy děl spolu s prostředím, ve kterém se děj odehrává, a to za pomoci využití úryvků z děl. Závěrečná kapitola porovnává vyobrazení amerického snu v těchto dílech a závěr shrnuje hlavní rysy děl spojené s aspekty amerického snu.

Jak ukázala tato bakalářská práce, vybraní autoři, kteří patří mezi významné americké autory dvacátého století, mají mnoho společného. Na druhou stranu, každý z nich je uznáván pro vlastní osobitý literární styl a metody; Hemingway je známý pro jeho minimalistický styl psaní a používání tzv. metody ledovce, Fitzgerald pro využívání básnických prostředků a obraznost jazyka, a Steinbeck je uznáván za jeho schopnost sociálního citění. Autoři sdíleli

povědomí o změnách ve společnosti a existenciální tísní, která charakterizovala poválečné období. Každý z nich ve svých dílech kritizoval některé aspekty americké společnosti, ať už ve spojení s brutalitou války, excesy jazzového věku, nebo nespravedlností napříč sociálními třídami.

Jejich životní zkušenosti a těžká situace po válce ovlivnily jejich duševní stav a všichni tři autoři se potýkali s problémem jménem alkohol. Práce při analýze děl objevila spojitost s životy autorů, a to i co se týče této problematiky. Hemingwayovo celoživotní nadměrné užívání alkoholu se promítlo i do jeho románu *Fiesta*, ve kterém konzumace alkoholu hraje velkou roli, vzhledem k tomu, že setkávání se v barech je jedna z mála aktivit, byť krátkodobých, kterou postavy považují za smysluplnou. Fitzgerald, který si se svou ženou Zeldou potrpěli na luxusní životní styl a okázalé sešlosti, se také oddával nadměrnému pití. S touto závislostí měl vážné problémy, což dokazuje i fakt, že přišel o práci scenáristy a byl dokonce hospitalizován v nemocnici. Touha po zakázaném alkoholu se projevuje i v jeho románu *Velký Gatsby*, na rozdíl od Fitzgeralda však postava Gatsbyho alkoholu odolává. Steinbeck se podobným problémům nevyhнул. Kritika, které po celý život čelil, patřila společně s rozvedem ke zkušenostem, které ho k pití alkoholu přiměly. Steinbeck používal alkohol jako prostředek rozptýlení, což je i strategie postav v jeho díle *O myších a lidech*, ve kterém pracovníci z ranče obvykle utíkají do městských hospod, kde se odreagují a odvedou myšlenky od jejich každodenních problémů. Zkušenosti autorů s konzumací alkoholu dodaly jejich dílům větší hloubku, a to i s ohledem na zkoumané aspekty. Práce prostřednictvím analýzy zaznamenala vyobrazení vybraných aspektů amerického snu v každém z vybraných děl.

Hemingwayův román *Fiesta* vypráví o poválečném světě, ve kterém je americký sen pro postavy nedosažitelný, a to právě kvůli válečným zkušenostem. Román zobrazuje ideál osobního štěstí, aspekt amerického snu, na každé postavě. Jak ukázala analýza, postavy nedosahují dlouhodobé osobní spokojenosti především proto, že se soustředí pouze na krátkodobé štěstí a pomíjivé veselí, jako je flámování a alkohol. Co se týče druhého vybraného aspektu, podstata peněz pomáhá některým z postav, ale obecně jejich problém nespokojenosti neřeší. Hlavní hrdina využívá peníze ke koupi příležitostí, které vedou k určité spokojenosti, a to jak pro sebe, tak pro ostatní – nicméně pohled, který mají na své nikam nevedoucí životy, zůstává stejný. Aspekt rovnosti a příležitostí není tak výrazný jako v ostatních románech, jelikož atmosféra v poválečné společnosti byla pro všechny sociální vrstvy téměř stejná.

*Velký Gatsby* zkoumá excesy a morální úpadek jazzové éry. Sny postav jsou založeny především na osobním naplnění, a to za pomoci materiálního bohatství, což platí zejména pro hlavní postavu. Peníze a bohatství plní pro Gatsbyho důležitou roli jakožto prostředku k dosažení jeho osobního štěstí. V románu jsou však i postavy, jejichž snem je být bohatý – což je ve výsledku to, co by je dle jejich představ učinilo šťastnými. Ti chudší usilují o luxusní život, ale nakonec se stávají oběťmi manipulace, někteří dokonce zaplatí svými životy. To, co tento román odlišuje od ostatních, je skutečné vyličení materiálního blahobytu – v románu je vyloženě popsán luxus, extravagantní domy i majetek bohaté elity, jako například automobily. Analýza prokázala, že všechny tři vybrané aspekty jsou v románu přítomny, neboť dílo zobrazuje i rozdíly mezi společenskými třídami. Narativ díla je důkazem toho, jak zázemí jedince ovlivňuje jeho budoucnost a možné naplnění jeho vizí. Nakonec však všechny sny zůstaly nenaplněny, bez ohledu na to, zda postava oplývala bohatstvím, či nikoliv.

Steinbeckovo dílo *O myších a lidech* zachycuje život pracovníků působících na ranči v době Velké hospodářské krize. Nejvýraznějším aspektem amerického snu, který je v této novele zobrazen, je ideál rovnosti a příležitostí; jedná se o jediné dílo ze třech analyzovaných, který obsahuje problematiku rasismu a segregace. Analýza ukázala, že všechny vybrané aspekty jsou v díle přítomny, a hlavně jsou navzájem hluboce propojeny. Na rozdíl od ostatních dvou románů nestojí v tomto díle představa osobního štěstí hlavních postav na podstatě vztahu se ženou. Základem jejich snu je malá vlastní farma, která by jim přinesla jak nezávislost, tak pocit seberealizace. Jde o ideál materiálního blahobytu, ale děj díla zároveň ukazuje propojení s ideálem osobního štěstí, vzhledem k tomu, že postavy k jejich snu vzhlížejí jako k naději. Síla peněz je zdůrazněna v situaci, ve které George, jedna z hlavních postav, začne skutečně věřit jejich vizi až poté, kdy se dozví o existenci možných finančních prostředků potřebných k naplnění jejich touhy. Podobně jako v případě románu *Velký Gatsby* dochází i v tomto díle ke smrti postavy, která se pouze snaží splnit své sny. V případě Steinbeckova románu k ní však dochází v důsledku souhry nešťastných okolností.

Vybraná díla se liší, jak analýza ukázala, v prezentaci vybraných aspektů amerického snu, jelikož každé dílo je zasazeno do odlišného časové období a prostředí – zatímco *Fiesta* se zaměřuje na téměř bezprostřední následky první světové války, *Velký Gatsby* zkoumá výstřednosti a morální úpadek jazzového věku, a *O myších a lidech* popisuje život pracujících v době Velké hospodářské krize. Všechna díla mají jeden důležitý společný rys ve spojitosti analýzy této práce – prezentují ideály amerického snu jako nereálné. Americký sen byl autory vyobrazen jako nedosažitelný a diametrálně odlišný od reality, s níž se potýkalo mnoho jedinců.

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## Introduction

Authors of the Lost Generation were affected by World War I and the atmosphere that followed. Therefore, their literary works often included topics which were somehow related to the post-war period. That era was marked by existential issues and significant social changes, which all three authors were aware of and used the situations as the settings for their works. This thesis focuses on the depiction of the American Dream in selected works written by the authors of the Lost Generation.

The theoretical part of this thesis begins with the phenomenon of the American Dream – its definition, origin of the term, and how the perception of the idea changed throughout the history. The term became world-known and started to be widely used and discussed. The thesis also explores the characteristics of the Lost Generation and connects it to the history of World War I and its aftermath. The selected, most prominent authors of the Lost Generation who worked with the idea of the American Dream in their works, are Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, and John Steinbeck. The thesis describes their lives, beginning with their family background, studies, literary careers, and personal experiences.

Writers belonging to the Lost Generation confronted the ideals of the American Dream in their literary works and their narration explored the obstacles and flaws surrounding the concept. The thesis describes each of those authors' one selected literary work which deals with the phenomenon. The selected works are *The Sun Also Rises* by Hemingway, *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald, and *Of Mice and Men* by Steinbeck. Although *Of Mice and Men* is a novella, this thesis refers to it as a novel or short novel to help with the comprehension of the analysis. Each chapter concerning the book provides background information on the work, including its form and writing style. This is followed by a plot summary and autobiographical features connected to the storyline. The practical part follows, providing the analysis on the portrayal of the American Dream in those works. The depiction of the belief is explored through three selected aspects of the American Dream – personal happiness, material prosperity, and equality and opportunity. It studies it mainly through the characters of the works along with the settings, with the help of the books' extracts. The final chapter compares the depictions of the American Dream in those works and the conclusion summarizes the main features of the works connected to the aspects of the American Dream.

# 1 The American Dream

## 1.1 Definition and the Origin of the Term American Dream

The American Dream, as the phrase implies, is a phenomenon ingrained in American culture and history, symbolizing the belief that every individual person on the soil of the United States of America has the opportunity for success and overall prosperity regardless of their background and social class (Adams, 1931, p. 404). Samuel defines it in a simple sentence “For me, it is a devout belief that tomorrow can and will be better than today” (p. 6), however, he also states that the concept does not have one strict definition; it means different things to different people depending on an individual’s life conditions – for some, it could mean financial stability, owning a house, or the ability to enjoy their freedom (2012, p. 1). The aspirations are diverse; however, they are all connected to the well-being of a hard-working person who pursues their dreams. It is part of everyday life which is shared among the American population in numerous fields, whether it is connected to business, education, or state administration including economics, politics, or law (Samuel, 2012, p. 2).

When it comes to the American nation, Cullen states that when a “social cement is loosening”, meaning when the nation starts to part ways, the American Dream is there to save the society from collapsing by being the glue (2003, p. 6). The Dream has proved its ambiguity in a connection that it always came back to life despite suffering numerous crises and showed the capability of being resilient (Samuel, 2012, p. 4). It is important to realize that there are rather many American Dreams, than believing in the existence of a single strictly defined Dream (Cullen, 2003, pp. 6–7).

The meaning not only depends on the point of view of an individual, but also on the period of time throughout history, which held a different value to the meaning in comparison to what the American Dream is viewed as nowadays and to what it will mean in the future. Sarah Churchwell stated her opinion on the perception of the American Dream in an interview which was based on her book *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream*. The interview itself was published in the *Smithsonian Magazine* in October 2018 (Diamond, 2018). She claims that the backstory of the American Dream is misunderstood, as the phrase meant the opposite of what it means today while changing its meaning for each generation (until it was used as an argument for consumerism during the Cold War). Her explanation is based

on the argument that the original idea was not focused on the wealth of an individual, but it was the nation's dream for democracy, equality, and justice.

The first person to use and define the term “the American Dream” was the historian James Truslow Adams who took a closer look at the development of the American Dream throughout history in his work *The Epic of America*, published in 1931 (Samuel, 2012, p. 3). He defined the phenomenon as

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement ... 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 to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (Adams, 1931, p. 404).

According to his definition, Adams did not put wealth and material richness as the characteristics of the American Dream, his belief was based on spiritual prosperity.

Initially, Adams intended to use the term as a title of his book but was talked out of it by his publisher who claimed that nobody would pay three dollars for a book about a dream (Cullen, 2003, p. 3). According to Cullen, Adams repeated the phrase over thirty times in *The Epic of America*, which had an enormous impact; he linked thoughts to a newly created expression which immediately became known and used worldwide (2003, p. 4). Even though Adams is considered to be the founder of the term, he was not in fact the first writer to work with the idea of the American Dream.

One of the first references to the American Dream as people nowadays understand it was part of an editorial in the *New York Post* in 1900 (Churchwell, 2018, p. 26). According to Churchwell, the main focus of the article is displaying the rich, the multimillionaires, as the ones who will never be content with a position of equality and therefore can be a threat to the American Dream. They are portrayed as a risk to the republic due to insisting on having special rules and privileges, and their desire to be seen and treated as an elite class, not an equal one (2018, p. 26). It sounds exactly the opposite of what people nowadays believe that the American Dream was and is – wealth and possession representing the most important tool which brings people happiness. However, in 1900, the author of the editorial believed that people would

emphasize the role of equality as a feature of the American Dream rather than wealth (Churchwell, 2018, p. 26).

Other people who included the idea in their works and speeches prior to Adams were for example Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, or even political figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, or Abraham Lincoln (Samuel, 2012, pp. 3-4).

## **1.2 History of the American Dream**

The idea is part of a tradition, national pride, and identity, whereas the term is contemporary. People understood the idea even before the term was coined to it (Cullen, 2003, p. 5).

According to Samuel, the origins of the idea date back to the seventeenth century before the nation was even formed (2012, p. 3). As Cullen argues, the Pilgrims may not have talked about the American Dream, but they did imagine a destiny for themselves, therefore the concept of the belief was already in use. When the first colonists arrived, they had a vision of better life conditions, emerging from the idea of freedom and independence. Their dream was a communitarian one – everything they did was done in order to secure happiness for every single member of their colony, for their children, future generations. That, for instance, was in no way in agreement with behaviour towards the ones outside their colony, even the consequences were mostly unintended (2003, pp. 5–13). A significant theme in the history of the American Dream is its attainment often occurred at the cost of minorities. As research from 2012 made by Tonya Flores shows that the cost of the Puritans' freedom was engraved in someone else's faith – tragically, Native Americans and African slaves became casualties of the pursuit of Puritans' ambitions and aspirations (Flores, 2012, pp. 60–63).

The basic essence of the American Dream was officially articulated in one of the most significant documents of the United States of America, the *Declaration of Independence* approved by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. Specifically, the opening clauses of the second paragraph are the ones that support the idea “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” (Cullen, 2003, p. 38). According to Cullen, nothing more

concrete than the last phrase can be used to define the essence of the American Dream (2003, p. 38).

In the nineteenth century, the concept of the American Dream shifted towards emphasizing individualism following America's independence from British rule, and self-realization became much more important (Cullen, 2003, p. 59). As Frederic I. Carpenter argues, the nation faced a new vision – one which was no longer tied to European traditions. The ideal democracy was to be realized in the new society of independent, free people (1955, p. 8).

The American Dream represents a vision of a society that values opportunity, freedom, and prosperity, offering individuals the chance to build better lives for themselves and their families through hard work. Some people believe in achieving it, some people do not. However, the concept itself started to be discussed not only in society, but also in literature. Writers belonging to the Lost Generation confronted those ideals and provided an analysis of the obstacles and flaws surrounding the American Dream.

## 2 The Lost Generation

The term Lost Generation describes a group of writers who gained recognition in the world of literature, especially in the 1920s. The generation was considered “lost” since the traditional ideals of the society of the time had become meaningless and no longer relevant in the postwar era (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024a). Many of those writers expressed disillusionment with traditional values, questioned the morality and purpose of prewar conventions. The majority of them entered the conflict prior to the United States’ 1917 entry (Ulmanová, 2011, pp. 186–188). Their personal emotions and life experiences, the frustration and doubt that soldiers felt after returning from a war that twisted everything, are the central themes of their works. According to Cowley, the most significant writers of the group are Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, E. E. Cummings, and others (1980, p. 7).

As Gray states, World War I changed the modern American culture. The United States’ economic position has changed in relation to the rest of the world after becoming involved in a global conflict. Rather than being the debtor, it has turned into a creditor nation, having made billion-dollar loans to Europe. Not only money was involved in such status, moral and cultural support was also presented. President Woodrow Wilson created Fourteen Points in 1918, emphasizing the necessity for a world of nonviolence, peace, and freedom. After Wilson’s ideas were rejected, it appeared that isolationism would be the new norm in American foreign policy. Even though the United States did tend to distance itself from political participation in worldwide conflicts, the isolation could not be complete. The country was already too entangled with the outside world, both economically and culturally (2004, p. 339).

One of the most visible indications of weakening cultural boundaries between the United States with the world, especially with Europe, was the expatriate movement, as Gray argues. There has never been a literary migration of writers spreading through Europe as the one after the end of World War I. The authors were quickly drawn into the literary movement along with European writers, looking for fresh approaches. That being said, it is clear that the urge to stand and work against former norms of belief was not only an issue for Americans. Despite still being American authors, they started participating in literary movements or tendencies that rejected the conventional historical and geographical categories, such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Symbolism, Modernism;

regardless of whether they stayed in Europe for a while, spent most of their lives there, or even stayed in the United States (2004, pp. 339–340).

As Ulmanová states, people were prepared for a very different world than the one they had to live in after the war. Not every person who was directly or indirectly affected by the horrors of the war was “able” to bounce back to their previous way of life. For many people, material values have suddenly become insignificant. World War I caused a lot of pain, and not only the physical one. People were surrounded by brutality, and their hopes in modern society turned into naivety. Many people’s lives were filled with darkness and a sense of hopelessness (2011, p. 188). No wonder – after all, Europe seemed to be a never-ending factory producing dead bodies. Not even the Black Death had left behind such a large number of corpses throughout the continent’s history (Cowley, 1980, p. 4). Due to the war, young people frequently did not get the chance to graduate, they never experienced their first romantic relationships, never led the normal life of an adolescent. They had to mature abnormally quickly as a result of participating in the war, which changed their mentality. This atmosphere was then represented in the writings of some writers influenced by that era. They are called the Lost Generation, however, as Cowley mentions, the World War I generation would be a more accurate name for the group (1980, p. 7).

In reaction to the experience of the war, as Cowley states, writers lost faith in many things. Some of them believed they could be part of the American Dream, but it all faded in 1919. Strikes were happening all over the country, putting businessmen in a moral dictatorship. Writers began to feel like an oppressed minority in their motherland and thought it would be best for them to leave the country as soon as possible. A widely used term for those young men coming back from war was “disillusioned”. In fact, it had a different meaning for English men and American men. After years of trench warfare, the loss of friends and comrades, and a peace deal that guaranteed more conflict, the English soldiers were allowed to grow weary and sceptical. The Americans are said to be more disaffiliated by the postwar era rather than disillusioned by the war itself. The whole wartime generation had to give up the dream of governing the world, and so they started focusing on a new illusion. It was based on the idea that people might succeed in their personal life by focusing just on themselves. Until the crash in Wall Street a decade later, young men’s top priorities were to make money on their own, become

famous, live life to the fullest and enjoy themselves, and, for a growing number of Americans, produce art (1980, pp. 13–16).

Gertrude Stein, an American author residing in Paris, is credited for creating the term Lost Generation. In fact, it was unintentionally coined to the already mentioned authors – Stein only overheard a car mechanic saying the phrase in reference to the younger generation. In a conversation with Ernest Hemingway, she used that phrase and labelled him. He was actually the one who popularized the term by using it in his work *The Sun Also Rises* (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024a).

According to Ulmanová, the phrase can be used in a broader approach to describe the general atmosphere in the society, rather than merely the literary group. People shared opinions and were looking for a fresh environment. After the war, there were two centres for them – Greenwich Village in New York, and Europe (2011, p. 188). Ulmanová then states that there was a subtle shift in the reasons behind this eastward migration throughout the second part of the 1920s. The earlier exiles craved independence, education, and culture which would carry them away from commercial American way of life which was focused on materialism. Those who came to Europe later felt the same desire, but it was not as strong. They were mainly disgusted by America rather than drawn to certain European ideals – to put it simply, they were running away rather than going somewhere. Particularly, a lot of people were coming to Paris, where the colony of the Americans was expanding and eventually collapsing. As it happens with larger groups of people, there was plenty of gossip, intrigues, and above all of that – boredom. Due to that, many Americans relocated to areas that had not yet been tarnished by their own people (2011, p. 190).

Despite the horrible details of what was happening on the battlefields, Cowley argues that some viewed the end of a war as a missed opportunity – they did not get the chance to fight, be part of battles, defend their army. They never found out whether they were brave. When they were part of the war, some felt embarrassed about not being wounded (1980, p. 13). Even these emotions were present in society. Young men trying to live heroic lives, ended up being desperate when the reality did not meet their expectations. Many of them would dedicate the following years to searching for a further stage on which they could recreate the dangers and recapture the bitterness of the war; and the most notable writer among those is Ernest Hemingway (Cowley, 1980, p. 13).



### 3 Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway was born and raised in 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois. According to Baym, he was arguably the most famous writer in the world at the time of his death. He grew up with five siblings who shared quite successful parents – their mother had a passion for culture, worked as a music teacher and directed a church choir; their father was a successful physician. The Hemingways owned a cottage in northern Michigan, where they spent their summers. Later on, Hemingway used this location as a setting for numerous of his stories. His first job was writing for the *Kansas City Star*, right after he finished high school (1995, p. 2062).

Before the United States entered the war in April 1917, Hemingway volunteered for the Red Cross and was later reassigned to the Italian front, where he served as an ambulance driver (Cowley, 1980, p. 48). Within the authors of the era, only Hemingway and the dramatist Robert E. Sherwood, who were both serving in foreign armies, suffered significant injuries, the other writers returned home unharmed (Cowley, 1980, p. 3). Driving an ambulance was not as dangerous as fighting in the front lines, which may have been insufficient for some young fearless men – Hemingway was one of those who took unnecessary risks in order to be closer to the battlefield, which is what ultimately led to his injuries and brought him closer to death (Cowley, 1980, p. 13). On the night of July 8, 1918, while Hemingway was running a mobile canteen dispensing chocolate and cigarettes to other Italian soldiers, an Austrian mortar shell struck him, knocking him unconscious (Putnam, 2006). According to Hoffman, Hemingway referred to the injuries from which he suffered as his own death – 237 pieces of the shell were extracted from only that one leg. None of those three Italian soldiers who occupied the dugout with him managed to survive (1955, p. 68). Hemingway did, however, attempt to rescue one wounded soldier and brought him to safety despite his own injuries, for which the Italian government awarded him the Silver Medal of Valor (Putnam, 2006). After the attack, as Putnam mentions, Hemingway spent six months in a hospital in Milan and following the end of the war, he returned to his hometown (2006).

It is hard to find any positive aspects of being hurt, on the verge of death, experiencing all the pain and suffering. However, Hemingway's life was profoundly changed by this experience and perhaps that is why he became so well-known. If he had

not been injured, he would not have gone to hospital in Milan and he would not have fallen in love with a nurse – the romance that is the basis for the most popular war novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. Given his bravery and curiosity, him being so close to the battlefield, his experiences are portrayed in such depth in his writings that the reader feels like being part of it as well. As Hoffman argues, Hemingway's experience and awareness of death changed his perspective on the world and separated him from his American past, which is also one of the characteristics of the characters in his short stories (1955, p. 68).

Not only did he write about the war times, but he also concentrated on the aftermath of what happened once a soldier returned home. He himself had a problem with the readjustment to coming back from war and became estranged from his family, mostly from his mother (Baym, 1995, p. 2062). The disability to reconnect with the ongoing world and what happens to a person's soul in war is a theme in his short story *Soldier's Home*. One of the most popular fictional characters featuring in Hemingway's writings is Nick Adams in *Big Two-Hearted River*, where the life experiences of the author again play a significant role. It narrates a story of Nick, a war veteran who is on a fishing trip – Hemingway himself was a fan of fishing (as was his father), and this passion is also illustrated in his Nobel Prize-winning novel *The Old Man and the Sea* (Putnam, 2006).

As far as postwar language is concerned, it is something that had to be changed in the eyes of the writers. To understand this, it is important to realize that the horrible acts of the war were displayed in such poetic words that it made it sound like everything rather than an awful battle (Cowley, 1980, p. 16). As Henry Louis Gates Jr., a Harvard Professor, stated "The way we write about war or even think about war was affected fundamentally by Hemingway". Hemingway is said to have created a new style of fiction, "in which meaning is established through dialogue, through action, and silences – a fiction in which nothing crucial – or at least very little – is stated explicitly" (Putnam, 2006). Hemingway, among other writers of the generation, wanted to write what really happened, wanted to tell the truth. As he wrote in *Death in the Afternoon* "... the greatest difficulty ... was to put down what really happened in action, what the actual things were which produced the emotions that you experienced" (Gray, 2004, pp. 444–445). The difference between him and other authors was a way of telling the truth. The majority

of writers were satisfied with describing the emotion as they experienced it or as their heroes did, with hopes that the reader would understand.

Hemingway, on the other hand, wanted his readers to feel the emotion directly, as if it was happening to them. According to Cowley, everything that evoked the emotion is stated and described, such as a person's five senses, without any accompanying comment on the emotion itself. To achieve his goal, he wanted to learn how to write and came to Paris in 1921 (1980, p. 62). The previously mentioned Gertrude Stein was a prominent figure in American literary Modernism who was together with Ezra Pound one of the people that helped Hemingway master his writing; Hemingway stated that he owed her gratitude for learning about the abstract relationship of words from her (Gray, 2004, pp. 432–445). Cowley states that Stein's inspiration can be seen in Hemingway's earlier published stories where he used prepositional phrases, present participles, and repetition of words. Hemingway used as few adjectives and adverbs as possible (that being advice from Ezra Pound) and refrained from using emotive language. He also used the iceberg method – the art of omission. In his own words, “If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them”, again giving the reader a chance to feel the action and emotion. Not everyone was a fan of this kind of writing; some thought it was enjoyable, while others found it harsh and insensitive (1980, pp. 50–66).

Hemingway was surrounded with a lot of friends, and not just with those who worked for newspapers or as writers. According to Cowley, he committed himself to sports like boxing and tennis, where he met a lot of people. He even received an opportunity to become a skiing instructor. Later on, he began to focus more on Spanish bullfights. That brought him to starting the novel *The Sun Also Rises*, right after coming to Valencia. He had worked on it in Madrid, San Sebastian, Hendaye, and Paris. The initial draft was completed in less than two months of work. A few years later, Hemingway admitted that he had no experience writing novels and he was completely exhausted from working too hard. Eventually, he had to rewrite the entire first draft, which according to him, taught him a lot. Nevertheless, it was a well-written piece. He employed new components in his writing, following the tendency of beginning a story with something simple working his way up to something complex. While his short stories

typically focused on the lives of no more than three characters, this novel explored complex relationships within a group of people. A final version was published on October 22, 1926. Despite the fact that it had not been an immediate best-seller, a Greenwich Village observer claimed that Hemingway became an inspiration for younger writers right away (1980, pp. 68–71). Cowley states that many writers, including those in the same age group as Hemingway (Fitzgerald and Faulkner) and Steinbeck (who was too young to fight in World War I) were influenced by him throughout his early career, and the influence lasted long after. Hemingway's style was adopted by other young authors who wrote about their experiences during World War II (1980, p. 227).

According to Putnam, Hemingway went back to Spain as a correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance when the Spanish Civil War broke out. He was a propagandist for the republican cause and was criticized for being against Francisco Franco and the Nationalists. Despite his support of the Republican ideas, he has been credited for capturing the terrors of the war that occurred on both sides which he displayed in his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Putnam, 2006).

Given the history and consequences of Hemingway's writing, it was anticipated that he would write another war novel, this time, after World War II (Cowley, 1980, p. 216). The novel *Across the River and Into the Trees* did not meet the high expectations and did not gain the same favourable recognition as his earlier novels about World War I and the Spanish Civil War did (Putnam, 2006). Cowley argues that even though he had personally collected material from the war as a correspondent, there were numerous barriers to the writing that the world was unaware of – both mental and physical. Hemingway himself was responsible for both of these obstacles (1980, p. 216). His physical state might not have suffered as much if he had not taken such risks. As Cowley mentions, concussions, scalp wounds, headaches and problems with cognitive functions were all the issues with which Hemingway had to deal with, among pressure coming from the public. Though he had already experienced several near-death experiences, his vitality drove him further into danger, which might have seemed like he was destined to experience adrenaline activities resulting in accidents. He sustained internal injuries in an airplane crash in 1954 in East Africa from which he never recovered. Hemingway, aware of his problems, cut on his alcohol consumption

and created a strategy for coming back to writing – he wanted to start simple, progress to complex stories (as was his habit even in his writings) and finish with a novel (1980, pp. 216–217).

It was not just his writings that made Hemingway famous; it was also his persona and method of presenting himself. According to Cowley, he idealized himself in public and in private – he tried his hardest to excel in all spheres of life, whether it was literary or sport field, was a great leader and generous towards other people. However, there were also downsides in his qualities. His competitiveness would sometimes change into tough rivalry. He suffered from depression, rage attacks, hypochondria, fears of death (1980, pp. 227–228). Hemingway had witnessed several wars, unfortunately, he was unable to win the battle with himself and his mental health. He committed suicide in 1961 (Putnam, 2006). After his death, several works of his were published posthumously, such as for example *A Moveable Feast* (1964), *Island in the Stream* (1970) or *The Garden of Eden* (1986) (Hallengren, 2001).

Hemingway's works, thanks to his varied experiences and passions, deal with many different topics that it is easy to find its readers among broad spectrum of society. Some books deal with the war, loss, disillusionment, heroism. Some stories include the portrayal of love, romance, emotions, nature; some conclude both. This, in addition to his writing skills, illustrates his complexity as a writer.

### **3.1 *The Sun Also Rises***

*The Sun Also Rises* (1926) is one of Ernest Hemingway's most famous novels. The story follows a group of disillusioned expatriates living in Europe in the aftermath of World War I (Gray, 2004, p. 445). Hemingway's straightforward and minimalist writing style is employed in the novel. The iceberg theory is used as well; the narration does not provide every detail of characters to a reader, one must read carefully to understand the hints given by the author. The novel is divided into three books which are subdivided into nineteen chapters in total. It is narrated in the first person by the protagonist.

The protagonist is Jake Barnes, an American journalist and a war veteran who served as an ambulance driver during World War I and suffered a physical injury that made him impotent. In the beginning of the story, Jake's ordinary life in Paris is described

along with the introduction of his friends – beginning with a writer Robert Cohn with his romantic interest Frances Clyne. Jake is in love with an Englishwoman Lady Brett Ashley, but due to his physical condition, they cannot have a romantic relationship even though a mutual affection is present. The narrative continues with Jake going on a fishing trip in Spain together with his friend Bill Gorton. The story follows Jake and his friends as they travel to Spain to attend the festival of San Fermín in Pamplona. They stay at a hotel and immerse themselves in the festivities – food, alcohol, and bullfights. The group’s dynamic becomes increasingly strained as personal conflicts escalate, mainly coming from the jealous tension around Lady Brett Ashley. When the festival comes to an end, the group splits. Jake and Brett find themselves at the same spot as they were at the beginning of the story – unable to be together.

Even though *The Sun Also Rises* is a work of fiction, it draws on Hemingway’s personal experiences and emotions, reflecting the author’s life and the cultural context of the post-war era. Like the protagonist, Hemingway served as an ambulance driver during the war and experienced firsthand physical and psychological wounds. Hemingway was deeply affected by the sense of disillusionment and aimlessness that characterized the era after World War I. Most of the characters have been affected by the war in some way, either directly as veterans or indirectly through its aftermath – they serve as the representation of the Lost Generation. Hemingway was also part of the expatriate community of American artists residing in Paris in the 1920s, which is one of the settings in the novel. One of his most visited and favourite European countries was Spain, which serves as the main location for the narrative. Furthermore, Hemingway had a passion for fishing and bullfighting and his own experiences and knowledge of these hobbies served well for the authenticity in the novel where these activities are essential.

### **3.1.1 Depiction of the American Dream in *The Sun Also Rises***

#### **3.1.1.1 Ideal of personal happiness**

The American Dream has many forms, but they are all connected to the well-being of a hard-working person who pursues their dreams (Samuel, 2012, p. 2). One of those dreams and visions is the idea of personal happiness. A person acts in every way possible to ensure their own satisfaction and joy. The novel reflects the disillusionment and aimlessness of the Lost Generation portrayed in the characters of the story.

It highlights the gap between the idealized American Dream and the harsh realities of post-war life. None of the characters fully embodies the ideals of the American Dream, but they are all searching for meaning and identity in a world that seems devoid of purpose. In an attempt to fill the emptiness left by the war, they seek pleasure, adventure, and romantic relationships – but ultimately, they find themselves unfulfilled and frustrated. That represents the broader theme of the American Dream as a quest for happiness, prosperity, and self-fulfilment.

The characters experience empty relationships and missed opportunities for connection as they struggle to communicate, eventually ending in isolation and loneliness. They spend time together, interact with each other, but fail in forming a real connection and lasting relationship. Each of them is constantly trying to seek for something providing happiness and aim in their seemingly meaningless lives. When they find it, it is only in short-term entertainment such as heavy alcohol consumption. Other activities include dancing, promiscuity, and bullfighting. Nothing helps to change their lives into those that could be lived and enjoyed, as Cohn states

I can't stand it to think my life is going so fast and I'm not really living it. ... Don't you ever get the feeling that all your life is going by and you're not taking advantage of it? Do you realize you've lived nearly half the time you have to live already? (pp. 10–11).

Jake's response shows his admiration of bullfighting as well as agreeing to the idea of not fully enjoying his life “Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bull-fighters” (p. 10).

Jake Barnes, emotionally and physically wounded from the war, experiences feelings of estrangement, impotence, and existential uncertainty. His injury and the senselessness of the post-war era prevent him from achieving his ambitions of finding purpose, connection, and love. Jake experiences moments where he thinks about the life in general and about the idea of meaningless of life “Perhaps as you went along you did learn something. I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it” (p. 148). His personal unfulfillment comes from the disability to have a romantic relationship with Brett due to the injury. He is left to witness how everyone else except him is involved with Brett and knows that nothing can be done about it. However, he does not let that destroy his life completely. This journey for self-realization starts when he goes on the fishing trip to Burguete and later to the fiesta

at Pamplona. He is aware that living in self-pity atmosphere is not changing anything and tries to live in the moment and enjoy at least some activities in life, such as fishing and bullfighting. Even though relationship with Brett is not possible, Jake travels from San Sebastian to Madrid to save her and calmly listens to her speech about her affair and relationship with different men, which shows his courage, undeniable love, and devotion. At the end of the novel, Brett says “we could have had such a damned good time together”, fortunately Jake does not let it bring him into the previous sadness and disillusionment, and replies “Yes ... Isn’t it pretty to think so?” (p. 247). Jake maintains friendship with Bill throughout the book which is ultimately the only genuine connection portrayed in the novel. Bill Gorton is the only character who is portrayed as a happy man “He was very cheerful and said the States were wonderful. New York was wonderful ... Bill was very happy” (p. 70.). They are able to maintain truthful conversations that make them vulnerable, including sharing their feelings and emotions and willingness to help “What’s the matter? Feel low? ... How do you feel? ... Get over your damn depression” (pp. 222–223).

Lady Brett Ashley is the ideal portrayal of a pleasure and freedom, she is independent and adventurous, but also emotionally detached. Despite her pursuit of love and happiness, she remains unsatisfied. Her love towards Jake is present, however, she would have to give up sexual intercourse, which turns up to be impossible due to her nature in being promiscuous. She experiences several pointless affairs when engaged to marry Mike Campbell. Her selfishness is shown mainly in the relationship towards Jake and Mike as she constantly seeks for reassurance of Jake’s love yet her feelings towards him will never lead anywhere, and expects Mike to wait for her even though she leads herself into one affair after another. Instead of committing to finding real love, Brett keeps on partying and distracting herself from the harsh emotionless reality, while the men fight over her possession. Even though it looks like she might be satisfied with the attention she gets, she does not express ultimate happiness throughout the novel “Oh, darling, I’ve been so miserable” (p. 24), she says to Jake after their drinking session in a bar in Paris. Another proof of her displeased mood is when they dance together later in Paris “I’m so miserable ... I just feel terribly” (p. 64). She lost her real love to the horrors of World War I and she is unable to find true happiness in anybody else, which might serve as an explanation for her disillusionment.



Every character aspires to be happy and satisfied but is unable to achieve so due to the war experiences. Jake's desire for love is rejected, and other characters' emotional suffering prevents them from finding personal fulfilment and joy. Instead, they are left to keep searching for meaning of their lives through distracting activities.

### **3.1.1.2 Ideal of material prosperity**

The novel depicts the emptiness around financial wealth rather than pursuit of material prosperity. The story revolves around a group of expatriates who enjoy glamorous lifestyle in Europe during the 1920s. The pursuit of financial stability and prosperity is one of common aspects of the American Dream and the novel portrays it in the behaviour of characters. Some are depicted as independent individuals with stable income who can live their lives however they want, while others are displayed as hopeless human beings who will never be able to control their expenses.

The novel shows money as a way of generosity and dominance in the portrayal of Jake Barnes. He often pays for the others when it comes to partying, heavy drinking, and merry-making. Jake never thinks twice when a larger amount of money is to be paid. He uses the power of money to enjoy at least something of his life – he cannot have a relationship due to his impotence, however, he is aware that money can buy him opportunities

I paid my way into enough things that I liked, so that I had a good time. Either you paid by learning about them, or by experience, or by taking chances, or by money. Enjoying living was learning to get your money's worth and knowing when you had it. You could get your money's worth. The world was a good place to buy in (p. 148).

Jake even prays for having some money in a cathedral. He starts his prayer with the thought about his friends, but eventually ends it with a bit of selfishness, including a material one

I ... prayed for everybody I thought of, Brett and Mike and Bill and Robert Cohn and myself, and all the bull-fighters ... then I prayed for myself again ... I wondered if there was anything else I might pray for, and I thought I would like to have some money, so I prayed that I would make a lot of money ... (p. 97).

What distinguishes him from the others from the group is that he actually works as a journalist and earns his own money which he saves to spend as he pleases. Other

characters such as Brett, Mike, and Robert, spend money as well, but it usually comes from their family or inheritance.

Tipping is also mentioned several times throughout the novel and it shows the knowledge Jake has about the power of money which could secure even new friendships “The waiter seemed a little offended ... so I overtipped him. That made him happy” (p. 233), “Next morning I tipped every one a little too much at the hotel to make more friends” (p. 233). Jake also uses the idea of money to describe the French, who are said to be friendly only if a person pays them “No one makes things complicated by becoming your friend for any obscure reason. If you want people to like you you have only to spend a little money” (p. 233), “I did not tip the porter more than I should because I did not think I would ever see him again. I only wanted a few good French friends ...” (p. 233).

Hemingway uses the idea of money as a way to describe the other characters as well; Robert Cohn is introduced as “a member ... of one of the richest Jewish families in New York” (p. 4); Mike Campbell talks about how he went “gradually and then suddenly” (p. 136) bankrupt and is usually the one who cannot contribute to paying for drinks of his friends, even though he participates in betting games in which the payer is decided; and Brett is described as the one who “never has any money” (p. 230) with her and the other men pay for her drinks, taxis and accommodation.

Money seems to be the only meaningful value in the post-war world, serving as a sign of the society’s obsession and lack of morality that comes from the idea of wealth, money, and luxury (Reynolds, 1988, p. 83). Even though Jack Barnes has a lot of money, it does not bring him happiness that would last at least a few moments in his life. It does create an opportunity for him to travel, make shallow friendships, and create an atmosphere full of dancing, drinking and entertainment. Nevertheless, the continual waste of finances does not bring him any deeper connection neither with himself nor with anyone else. The other characters, who are not able to achieve financial stability, stay lost in their lives, too. They all know what money serves for and what it can bring, but eventually, the uncertainty and disillusionment is same for every one of them.

### 3.1.1.3 Ideal of equality and opportunity

The American Dream is based on the equality and opportunity for every individual, no matter their background (Adams, 1931, p. 404). However, the characters of *The Sun Also Rises* are not portrayed as equal ones as far as their background or social status is concerned.

The expatriates find themselves in France and Spain, spending time together, despite coming from different social backgrounds. Lady Brett Ashley comes from a wealthy family, but desires something more than money. Robert Cohn is portrayed as an ambitious writer from a wealthy family who desires recognition in his literary career. His pursuit of the American Dream is characterized by ambition and a desire for validation. As previously stated, every character has a different approach towards money and different opportunities. However, Jake Barnes, even though he has to work for money, is the one that buys opportunities for the other expatriates. When they do not have enough money to pay for something, Jake pays. If he wants to show dominance, he pays as well. Even for the wealthy ones.

War is something that connects the characters. When Count Mippipopolous talks about experiencing seven wars, Brett's reaction confirms that the war topic, yet painful, is an important feature which should be shared among their group "I told you he was one of us" (p. 60). Jake approves of him when he sees his war wounds. Robert Cohn has never served in a combat and therefore, along with his characteristics, does not hold an equal position in the group. He is also the only one who is not an expatriate by choice but because lady Frances urged them to go on a journey to Europe.

The characters are fundamentally in the same situation, despite the fact that they do not share the same financial situation or privileged family history. Essentially, they are all caught in a never-ending cycle of disillusionment because of the war experience and the aftermath of the war resonating in the society, which prevents them from living regular, enjoyable lives. Regardless of their financial situation, their dreams remain unfulfilled. The perspective in equality and opportunity would be different if the war had not affected their lives. Hence, it may be concluded that the war made the American Dream impossible to achieve at all.

## 4 Francis Scott Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born in 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota. As Dickstein mentions, Scott's father was an unsuccessful salesman (after being an unsuccessful furniture manufacturer) and everything the family owned in financial terms was a modest fortune that Fitzgerald's mother had inherited. Scott received support for his passion for writing from his father, even though he hoped an army officer would be the career of his (2010, p. 10). However, his mother did not share this vision. She intended Scott to restore the family's reputation by making up for his father's failure and building on the prosperity of his ancestors – prosperous Maryland landowners, lawyers, or politicians (Dickstein, 2010, p. 10). The Fitzgeralds had to think twice before they would spend their money and they went through several financial challenges (Cowley, 1980, p. 20). Despite his not so wealthy background, Fitzgerald became a world-known short-story writer and a novelist, famous for his portrayal of the Jazz Age as well as for his private life with his wife Zelda (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024b).

In need of discipline, as Bruccoli states, Scott was sent to the Newman boarding school in Hackensack, New Jersey. His academic performance was weak, and he quickly became very unpopular. On the positive side, Fitzgerald met Father Cyril Sigourney Webster Fay there who introduced him to well-known literary figures such as Henry Adams (1981, p. 32–37). In 1913, Fitzgerald convinced the Princeton University admissions committee to accept him despite his poor entrance exam performance; he said that denying him right on his birthday would be heartless (Bruccoli, 1981, p. 43). According to Dickstein, Scott dreamed of becoming a football star at college, but he did not get his part on the university team. On the other hand, he started writing for the college magazine, the *Princeton Tiger*. Furthermore, he wrote for musical productions of the Triangle Club, where he became friends with later successful figures – critic Edmund Wilson and poet John Peale Bishop. He dropped out of school and returned again, but eventually, he never graduated (2010, pp. 10–11).

Fitzgerald was a witness to several significant developments throughout his life. He was born into an old era full of horses, railroads, and gaslight; and grew up into a period of electricity and cars (Reynolds, 2001, p. 7). According to a biography written by an American professor and literary critic Arthur Mizener, Scott had

a remarkable ability to vividly imagine and persuasively depict things (1951, p. 4). In connection with him being a spoiled child, as Mizener states, Scott had a hard time growing up. He had to learn that other children are individuals with their own lives too, not just people who are parts of his life who he could use as props to his own liking. On the other hand, his imagination is reflected in his writings and that is one of the factors that helped him shine in the world of writers (1951, pp. 4–5).

As Dickstein states, Scott joined the army in October 1917 as a second lieutenant. To his disappointment, the war had ended right before he was to go to Europe. Like other young men at that time, he wanted to experience war for various reasons. During that time, he met Zelda Sayre with whom he shared a life vision – they both wanted prosperity, fame, and success. Zelda accepted the marriage to Scott even though her parents disapproved, but under the circumstance that he would move to New York where she desired to live and imagined a successful life there for both of them, mainly coming from Scott's work. He started working for an advertising agency in February 1919 and sold his first short story that same year (2010, pp. 11–12). After realizing he is not made for writing adverts for street cars, he left New York (Brucoli, 1981, p. 6). He started publishing stories in the *Saturday Evening Post*, which was the highest-paying magazine at that time (Dickstein, 2010, p. 12). His first novel which is autobiographical, *This Side of Paradise*, was published in 1920 and became highly successful in the United States, making Fitzgerald a celebrity almost overnight (Brucoli, 1981, p. 119). Together with their unique personalities, the newly married couple quickly rose to fame and enjoyed their luxurious lifestyle (Dickstein, 2010, p. 13).

The problem with them, as Dickstein argues, was that Zelda was used to having her own fame, but suddenly, she was a novelist's wife. People's attention was mostly focused on Scott's achievements. This all resulted in the jealousy of Zelda, who tried to compete with her successful husband – she wanted to become a ballerina and a novelist. Their way of life had a negative impact on Scott's work, as he was constantly in debt and kept borrowing money from his publisher and agent. During his lifetime, Fitzgerald published 146 short stories, of which around two thirds were produced mainly in order to pay his bills (2010, p. 13). He claimed that he did it to have time for writing a novel; he would earn enough money to temporarily stabilize his finances and then be able to continuously work on the novel – unfortunately, this plan did not work (Brucoli, 1981,

p. 143). At the time of the 1930s, both Zelda and Scott lived unhappily and dealt with personal problems; he enjoyed drinking alcohol a little too much (as many writers of the twentieth century did) and Zelda had several mental breakdowns, from which she never fully recovered. This part of Fitzgeralds' lives is reflected in his last novel *Tender Is the Night* finished in 1934 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024b). As a competition to his work, Zelda wrote an autobiographical novel *Save Me the Waltz* which was published the same year (Dickstein, 2010, p. 13).

Fitzgerald's early success after publishing his first novel *This Side of Paradise* was suppressed with his next novel *The Beautiful and Damned* published in 1922, as it was not received well and did not live up to the lofty expectations (Dickstein, 2010, p. 13). He also published a collection of short stories *The Tales of the Jazz Age* the same year and another one called *All the Sad Young Men* in 1926 (Brucoli, 1981, p. 6). He wanted to prove the world that he is a good playwright too – unfortunately, his satirical play from 1923, *The Vegetable*, did not succeed either (Dickstein, 2010, p. 14). During the next two years, he worked on his most famous novel, *The Great Gatsby*. After the war, he lived in Long Island where he gathered essential inspiration for the book (Brucoli, 1981, p. 6).

*The Great Gatsby* is set in 1922 during the Jazz Age and the booming economy, fast development of technology, extensive urbanization, consumerism, and lust for the prohibited alcohol (Dembická, 1999, p. 11). The novel portrays the life experiences of that era, offering the closest criticism of the American Dream that the literature affords, presenting both the beauty and the drawbacks of those times (Bewley, 1954, p. 223). The book received the best reviews of all Fitzgerald's publications. One of those, written by Gilbert Seldes, appeared in *The Dial* in August 1925

There has never been any question of the talents of F. Scott Fitzgerald; there has been, justifiably until the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, a grave question as to what he was going to do with his gifts. The question has been answered in one of the finest of contemporary novels. Fitzgerald has more than matured; he has mastered his talents and gone soaring in a beautiful flight, leaving behind him everything dubious and tricky in his earlier work, and leaving even farther behind all the men of his own generation and most of his elders ... The book is even more interesting, superficially, than his others;

it has an intense life, it must be read, the first time, breathlessly; it is vivid and glittering and entertaining (Bryer, 1978, p. 239).

Of course, not everyone agreed that it is the best novel. However, a lot of critics agreed that it is somehow special, such as Conrad Aiken wrote in the *New Criterion* in October 1926

Mr. Fitzgerald has written a highly coloured and brilliant little novel which, by grace of one cardinal virtue, quite escapes the company of most contemporary American fiction – it has excellence of form. It is not great, it is not large, it is not strikingly subtle; but it is well imagined and shaped, it moves swiftly and neatly, its scene is admirably seized and admirably matched with the theme, and its hard bright tone is entirely original (Bryer, 1978, p. 243).

American expatriates were introduced to Fitzgerald when he came to Paris; one of them was Ernest Hemingway, with whom he met in 1925 and became friends (Dickstein, 2010, p. 14). The meeting, however, was not exactly the portrayal of a flawless friendship. As Bruccoli states, Fitzgerald located Hemingway and they met at a bar, which was not probably the best idea. Later in *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway described Scott as a “fool and a hopeless drunk”. He disliked Zelda and claimed that she intentionally interferes with Scott’s work by supporting his drinking problem because of her jealousy (1981, pp. 227–228). Fitzgerald also met with Gertrude Stein when he was in Paris in 1925. Stein claimed that Fitzgerald was “the only one of the younger writers who wrote naturally in sentences”. She was also impressed by *This Side of Paradise* and believed that Fitzgerald would be read a long time after his contemporaries, who would be forgotten (Stein, 1960, p. 218). According to Bruccoli, Fitzgerald’s writing style is characterized by its flowing rhythms, lyrical language, vivid imagery, attention to detail, and clarity. Thanks to his flexibility, he could choose whether to be playful, poetic, or profound; and it always conveyed the right emotions (1981, p. 123).

Between the years 1935 – 37, Scott wrote stories that no one wanted to publish, and his drinking got out of control in a way that he was hospitalized, as Dickstein mentions. In 1937, he was offered a job as a screenwriter (which he lost due to his drinking two years later) and met Sheilah Graham, a gossip columnist, who fell in love with him as much as he did with her (2010, p. 15).

His last attempt to fulfil the promises of American life in a book character is in his unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon* which was published posthumously in 1941. Again autobiographical, the narrative centres on the life of a film producer (Dickstein, 2010, pp. 15–16). Fitzgerald died of a heart attack at the age of 44 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024b). During that time, both *The Times* and *New York Herald Tribune* identified Fitzgerald as a failed writer. As Bruccoli argues, perhaps no one believed that he would be adored later on (1981, p. 7).

Fitzgerald is one of the most celebrated writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose moving and descriptive style of writing had a lasting impact on American literature. His works are still praised today – for their intriguing characters and timeless themes. His legacy as a writer remains as significant and influential today as it was during his lifetime.

#### **4.1 *The Great Gatsby***

Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* was published in 1925 and has been regarded as the prototypical representation of the American Dream (Cullen, 2003, p. 180). The narrative revolves around portraying the beauty and the drawbacks of the Jazz Age, the extravagant lifestyles of characters, and the social and moral decline of the era (Bewley, 1954, p. 223). Fitzgerald's use of symbolism and vivid imagery define the writing style used in the novel. It is divided into nine short chapters which provide a clear progression of events. The novel is narrated in the first person.

The story begins with Nick Carraway, the narrator, moving to West Egg on Long Island in the summer of 1922. He becomes neighbours with Jay Gatsby, a mysterious man who throws extravagant parties but remains elusive. Nick attends one of Gatsby's parties where he encounters many wealthy and influential guests and finds out that Gatsby is in love with Nick's cousin, Daisy Buchanan. Gatsby is anxiously determined to get Daisy back – they were romantically involved before Gatsby went to war, despite the fact that she is already married to Tom Buchanan. With Nick's help, they begin an affair, which becomes increasingly risky. Tom confronts Gatsby about his intentions and that confrontation at the Plaza Hotel leads to a tragedy. While driving Gatsby's car, Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress. Gatsby takes the blame for the hit-and-run accident to protect Daisy, but it ends tragically. He is shot and killed by Myrtle's husband George Wilson, who believes Gatsby is the one responsible for the death of his



wife. Following these events, Nick decides to leave Long Island because he is fed up with the moral decline and emptiness of the privileged, wealthy elite.

Given that Fitzgerald lived during the period that serves as the novel's setting, *The Great Gatsby* can be seen as a representation of his own experiences. Fitzgerald shared Jay Gatsby's fascination with the extravagance of the Jazz Age, as well as his desire to climb the social ladder and gain acceptance among the elite of their era. Also, Fitzgerald's marriage to Zelda Sayre and Gatsby's love for Daisy Buchanan are comparable. Both men had strong romantic feelings for women who embodied certain standards of elegance and social position. Nevertheless, there were many challenges and disillusionment in their relationships. Fitzgerald enlisted in the military, but much to his disappointment, the war had ended just before he was due to leave for Europe. Despite the mysterious depiction of Gatsby's past, he served overseas in World War I. Another portrayal of Fitzgerald's life is connected to Gatsby's lavish parties which both he and Zelda adored and were well-known for. On the other hand, Fitzgerald did not portray Gatsby as his copy when it comes to drinking alcohol. Unlike him, Gatsby did not drink. Nick Carraway, the narrator of the novel, can be seen as a semi-autobiographical character. Similar to Nick, Fitzgerald had a Midwestern background, moved to New York City, and became entangled in the Jazz Age wealthy elite. They both believed in the idea of achieving happiness, success, and social acceptance through ambition and hard work. Ultimately, they both experienced disillusionment and tragedy in their lives.

#### **4.1.1 Depiction of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby***

##### **4.1.1.1 Ideal of personal happiness**

In the case of *The Great Gatsby*, happiness and fulfilment are the vision of the main character, Jay Gatsby. His desire is clear – gain a person's attention, love, and devotion. Only then he will be satisfied. His true goal is to win back the love of Daisy Buchanan, a woman from a wealthy and established family, no matter the consequences. Gatsby wants to win Daisy back by impressing her with his wealth and lavish lifestyle. He throws extravagant parties in the hopes that she will attend and goes to great lengths to create the illusion of a successful and sophisticated life. All of that is done only in order to experience personal joy and satisfaction.

In an attempt to create a stir in society and secure the necessary validation from the upper-class community of Long Island, his parties are attended by both the working class and the elite, which eventually means a house full of people every single time. But rather than forming real connections with them, Gatsby uses them as a means to an end as a way to gain Daisy's acceptance and finally get closer to her. He sees her as a prize, as he says, "Her voice is full of money" (p. 119), she is his dream and Gatsby thinks that a rich and successful woman is exactly what he needs to be happy

His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and for ever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God ... Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete (p. 111).

Moreover, he tries to please people with his hospitality, meanwhile, they are gossiping about his possible mysterious life and sinful acts. Guests of his parties do not hesitate to create the worst image possible of him: "He's a bootlegger ... One time he killed a man who had found out that he was nephew to Von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil" (p. 61). This serves as a reminder of Gatsby's loneliness. Even though Gatsby knows a lot of people, he does not aspire to form real connections with them. He tries to accomplish winning Daisy's love while being shamelessly used by other people just for his wealth.

Gatsby's ultimate goal is to persuade Daisy that he is the right man for her with whom she has already been in love years ago, and that she should leave her husband for him. It becomes clear that earning her affection is not enough for Gatsby once Daisy shows her love towards him. He expects Daisy to confess to her husband Tom that she is in love with Gatsby and that she has never loved her husband in the first place. Instead, Daisy does not fully commit to either of them. Despite that, Gatsby nonetheless accepts responsibility for the hit-and-run caused by Daisy. In fact, Gatsby's pursuit of this dream ultimately leads to its destruction and his tragic death. His need for personal happiness embodied in the idea of possession of another human was pursued blindly without caring about the consequences, which is why it turned out into a nightmare rather than a dream. He devoted his life to regaining women's affection but was eventually unable to fully achieve that and consequently lost his life. This point of view serves as a metaphor for the corruption and unattainability of the ideals of the American Dream.

Fitzgerald's use of symbolism was implemented in the portrayal of Gatsby's goal, his American Dream, referring to it as the green light (Dickstein, 2010, p. 246)

... he stretched out his arms towards the dark water ... Involuntarily I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished... (p. 23).

The green light is again mentioned at the end of the novel, suggesting that Gatsby tried so hard to achieve his goal while he was actually just blindly following the illusion

... I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him ... Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us (pp. 179–180).

#### **4.1.1.2 Ideal of material prosperity**

The novel portrays the corruption of the American Dream by showing how the characters' pursuit of wealth and status ultimately leads to their inevitable downfall. Again, the character of Jay Gatsby embodies this idea. Gatsby is a self-made man who has amassed a great fortune through illegal means, not through honest work. His parties capture the opulent lifestyle of the Roaring Twenties, a time when people prioritized outward appearances and material gain over genuine human connection. This shows how the pursuit of the American Dream, which promises success, can be shallow and ultimately unfulfilling.

Jay Gatsby needs to be wealthy so that he can show Daisy that he is worthy of her attention, even though the wealth he accumulated is not a product of an honest work. When they were in a relationship before Gatsby went to war, money and his social position became an obstacle in their possible future. That is also what Gatsby tells Daisy's husband Tom Buchanan when trying to explain that she is not in a relationship with him in the name of love and that their marriage was only issued due to his wealth "She never loved you, do you hear? ... She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved anyone except me!" (p. 130). Therefore, the ideal of material prosperity becomes

an important feature connected to his character. Extravagant parties and lavish lifestyle however did not bring the ultimate satisfaction, Gatsby's dream remained unfulfilled and his life was lost, no matter wealthy or poor.

Tom Buchanan is the other person that holds power due to money and prosperity in the novel, however, he is the representation of old money as he was born into wealth. Myrtle Wilson aspires to be part of the elite society and becomes Tom's mistress so that she is closer to the desired luxurious lifestyle. She even admitted that marrying poor George Wilson was a mistake "The only crazy I was 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 even told me about it" (p. 36). On the other hand, Tom has control over her along with her husband as well as over Daisy. His power leads to moral bankruptcy and manipulation, often containing physical violence and brutality. Tom was a means to better life for Myrtle, whereas she was an object he could control. He confesses to Nick he told George that Gatsby is the one responsible for his wife's death "I told him the truth ... He was crazy enough to kill me if I hadn't told him who owned the car ... What if I did tell him? ... He ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car" (p. 177).

Major symbol and a connection between the 1920s and the American Dream in the novel is the depiction of automobiles. When the new technology gained popularity as a means of transportation, it also shaped the beliefs and attitudes of the nation (Dickstein, 2010, p. 105). The car in the novel presents the fortune and luxury of the wealthy society but ultimately serves as the death weapon that leads to the failure of Gatsby's American Dream as well as to his own life and the lives of the Wilsons.

Lavish parties, crowds of people, wealth, expensive things. Every opulent aspect is bought with money which is thought to provide pleasure and endless satisfaction to the fortunate person. However, Gatsby is an exact example of the opposite effect. Money does not buy him happiness, he does not get to win Daisy's love back and he, despite knowing a lot of people, is left alone. People make gossips about him, and the ultimate evidence of his loneliness is shown at the end of the novel when Gatsby's funeral takes place. The only people who show up to pay tribute is his dad and Nick Carraway

A little before three the Lutheran minister arrived from Flushing, and I began to look involuntarily out the windows for other cars. So did Gatsby's father. And as the time passed and the servants came in and stood waiting in the hall, his eyes began to blink anxiously, and he spoke of the rain in a worried, uncertain way. The minister glanced several times at his watch, so I took him aside and asked him to wait for half an hour. But it wasn't any use. Nobody came (pp. 172–173).

Nick Carraway can also be seen as a character connected to the ideals of the American Dream. He is depicted as an honest and ambitious young man from the Midwest who moves to the prosperous and promising New York. Immediately, he is drawn into the world of the wealthy elite. In the beginning, Nick has a sense of idealism and a belief in the American Dream as well as in the higher society, but as he becomes more involved with Gatsby and the other affluent characters in the novel, he comes to see the corruption and moral emptiness that lies beneath their glamorous exterior. He witnesses the destructive effects of Gatsby's obsession with Daisy and the way it leads to his downfall. He is also able to understand how the wealthy characters manipulate and exploit others for their own gain. By the end of the novel, Nick's disillusionment with the American Dream is complete, and he chooses to distance himself from the decadent world of the wealthy and return to the simpler, more honest values of his home.

#### **4.1.1.3 Ideal of equality and opportunity**

The American Dream can be defined as the belief that every individual may pursue their goals, regardless of whether they are financial, social, or political. What is important to highlight is that everyone can accomplish such goals no matter their history or origins (Pearson, 1970, p. 638). In *The Great Gatsby*, several characters prove that this belief is rather a myth.

The novel contains representation of each social class. There are two fictional (yet important) parts of Long Island – East Egg and West Egg. These parts are not a portrayal of rich and poor, but rather an idea of people who have “old”, inherited, money and a social status such as the Buchanans on East Egg, and of those who have “new” money but are not as successful. West Egg represents the ones who got wealthy recently by mysterious, often illegal, means. That is where Jay Gatsby has his mansion. Self-earned money is not perceived that well on Long Island, but what makes the difference

is the way those people earn their money. When Daisy finds out how Gatsby acquired his wealth, she gets scared and their vision of being together disappears. She values her status more than anything and there is no way she would put it at stake – if her name would be associated with someone who is involved in illegal activities regarding money profit, that is exactly what would happen. The novel displays the social classes associated with old money, new money, as well as nearly no money. The lower-class neighbourhood is called the Valley of Ashes and characters that live there are George and Myrtle Wilson.

This working-class couple is another example of characters aiming at achieving their dream. George owns a shop and strives for success, while Myrtle wants to be part of a better social group and therefore maintains an affair with Tom Buchanan who is able to provide her with a taste of a luxurious lifestyle. However, their relationship roles are far from equal; Tom is the superior one, and Myrtle is still the dependent individual whose happiness depends on someone who is privileged. She is ambitious and wants more than what she was given, including her marriage with poor George. They do not have much money even though they work hard to live a prosperous life, as the American Dream promises. Instead of experiencing that, they end up dead. And the ones who behave incorrectly, dangerously, and recklessly, carry on living their prosperous lives.

That concerns the arrogance of Tom and Daisy Buchanan. They do not need the American Dream, because they were already born wealthy and can only experience their privileged lives. They act carelessly and do not think about the consequences of their actions, even when it concerns people surrounding them. They do not need to fight for a better life, only to maintain their social status and position. More importantly, they do not hesitate to brag about their wealth and use their social status to feel and act superior. That is also how Nick Carraway portrays them at the end of the novel

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made (p. 178).

The idea of the American Dream is based on equality among all social classes and backgrounds (Samuel, 2012, pp. 1–3). However, the novel serves as a proof that

income inequality and family background matters, and furthermore affects the approach that the person has later in life.

The characters mentioned above can be seen as a reflection of the ideals of the American Dream. Most prominently through Gatsby's character, Fitzgerald demonstrates that the American Dream is an illusion, that people who pursue it will never truly be satisfied and will always be reaching for something more even after fulfilling their previously set goals. The ones who were not born privileged eventually ended up dead and did not achieve the American Dream; the ones who lived surrounded by wealth and money did not live their lives with real aspirations or goals. It is a commentary on the emptiness of the American Dream and the disillusionment it can bring.

## 5 John Steinbeck

John Ernst Steinbeck was born in 1902 in Salinas, California. He had three sisters and since he was the boy in the family, his parents treated him differently, as Schultz & Li mention. As a result, he was perceived by some as a spoiled, lazy person. His mother Olivia was the one who introduced him to literature; she made sure their house was always filled with a variety of books and she encouraged Steinbeck to explore the language with a sense for imagination and spirituality (2005, p. 4). However, his childhood memories were not only positive. As Jay Parini mentions, Steinbeck's youth experiences from his home served as the basis for his daydreams and inspiration as well as for his nightmares (1995, p. 11). Olivia behaved like a schoolteacher and showed disappointment in early stages of her son's learning, particularly when he was reading aloud. His father's business failed, and even though the family later recovered from the financial problems, Steinbeck inherited the subsequent anxiety coming from the concern about finances. What had even more impact on him was the emotional withdrawal of his father who continued to live in the shadows of the house rather than be present with his family (Parini, 1995, pp. 27–29).

Steinbeck attended Stanford University, though he never graduated (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024c). The cause of that was anything but the usual. Steinbeck's reason was neither poor academic performance nor joining the army. According to Schultz & Li, Steinbeck established his own study program – he did not attend certain required courses for a degree in English because he did not find them useful. Instead, he repeatedly joined those courses which he found helpful and beneficial for his writing. Before becoming a well-known writer, Steinbeck supported himself during the time of his studies as a manual labourer; his jobs varied – he was a store clerk, mail truck driver, cotton picker or a ranch hand. He therefore developed a strong sympathy for the common labourer and those experiences helped him vividly portray the lives of workers in his stories (2005, pp. 4–5). However, his ambitious mother was very disappointed with his attitude towards the academic grounds that she either stopped speaking with him on a regular basis or conversely, started heated arguments (Parini, 1995, p. 45–48).

In 1925, he embarked on a ship cruise with the intention of beginning his writing career in New York, as Schultz & Li mention. Reaching the city with very little money,



he got in touch with his sister living in Brooklyn, whose husband found Steinbeck a job. He worked around fifteen hours a day on the construction of Madison Square Garden and there was not much time or strength left for his writing. Eventually, his uncle gained a position for him as a reporter for the *New York American*. Steinbeck, however, was not able to fulfil the requirements and was fired after a few months. After one more unsuccessful attempt, when he tried to sell his short stories to a promising publishing house known for working with undiscovered authors, he accepted that his writing desire would remain unfulfilled and returned back to California. There, he found a job as a caretaker for the Brigham family's summer estate in Lake Tahoe, which was exactly what his writing career needed. During this time, especially in winter when there was not much work around the house, he developed a routine of writing, finished the manuscript for his first novel and even began working on another (2005, pp. 5). Steinbeck, unlike in loud and crowded New York, worked there in a self-isolation in silence, and that is what suited his writing soul the most. Throughout his life he went alone to several places that provided him with the best strategy to create his greatest works, in a self-imposed exile, far away from that distracting society (Parini, 1995, pp. 84–85).

His first future wife, Carol Henning, worked in the advertising department of the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Schultz & Li, 2005, p. 5). She was a perfect match for Steinbeck in the meaning of opposite characters – he was shy and introverted (unless he drank alcohol or found himself surrounded with close friends) and she was outgoing and always filled the room with energy (Parini, 1995, p. 116). According to Schultz & Li, Steinbeck moved to San Francisco in 1928 so that he could be closer to Carol, and once again through the help of relatives, he started working as a warehouseman, which proved to be incompatible. He was not able to write properly or devote his time to Carol while being physically and mentally exhausted from the manual work. Even though his mother was the primary person who supported his literary ambitions, his father offered him their summer cottage in Pacific Grove along the Monterey coast, rent free with the addition of monthly pocket money, so that his son could concentrate entirely on his writing (2005, pp. 5–6). His frequent visits there whenever he was upset or in need of a break during the rest of his life indicated that this location was one of the most significant ones to him. One indication of this is that Monterey served as the setting for a number of Steinbeck's most well-known works (Parini, 1995, p. 29).

His first novel, *Cup of Gold*, was published in 1929 – ironically, by the same publishing company that previously declined Steinbeck’s collection of short stories in 1925 when he tried to succeed in New York (Schultz & Li, 2005, p. 6). As Gray mentions, three years later a collection of stories about a farming community, *The Pastures of Heaven*, was published. His third book published in 1933, a novel *To a God Unknown*, is once again about a farmer. However, Steinbeck gained the world’s attention no sooner than after publishing *Tortilla Flat* in 1935. A year later, his novel *In Dubious Battle* brought a political light to his work. By publishing *Of Mice and Men* in 1937, Steinbeck set his reputation as the author of literary works about the poor rural areas, evicted and broke farmers, and migratory workers (2004, p. 497). Though it does not contain the phrase directly, it was the first of the novels that is today regarded as a classic analysis of the American Dream, written during the period when the phrase was widely used in the country (Churchwell, 2018, p. 189). His most influential and popular novel, for which he received the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize is *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) in which the bitterness of the Great Depression, a worldwide economic downturn lasting during the years 1929 – 1937, is reflected along with a portrayal of sympathy for the condition of migratory farmworkers (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024c). The novel received great reviews, such as the one written by George Stevens in 1939 for the *Saturday Review*

*The Grapes of Wrath* is worth it, worth all the talk, all the anticipation, all the enthusiasm. Here is the epitome of everything Steinbeck has so far given us. It has the humor and earthiness of *Tortilla Flat*, the social consciousness of *In Dubious Battle*, the passionate concern for the homeless and uprooted which made *Of Mice and Men* memorable. These elements, together with a narrative that moves with excitement for its own sake, are not mixed but fused, to produce the unique quality of *The Grapes of Wrath* ... It is by no means perfect, but possibly its faults (one of which is egregious) are a measure of its worth, in that it triumphantly lives them down (McElrath et al., 1996, p. 157).

Steinbeck’s first wife Carol helped him master his works; according to Parini, she devoted numerous hours to retyping his manuscripts which required extensive editing. Steinbeck, like Fitzgerald, could neither spell nor punctuate. As Parini mentions, he failed to understand the distinction between a colon and a semi-colon throughout

his career, and he seldom ever bothered to use possessive apostrophe as well as commas when using more adjectives (1995, p. 129).

Unlike some other writers, Steinbeck resented the effects of the fame that came along with his writing success – he believed his personal life should remain private and separated from his work and its audience (Schultz & Li, 2005, pp. 6–7). What made him different from the other authors of his generation was his interest in science. As Parini argues, his creativity originated from a deep understanding of the physical world, and he paid close attention to even the smallest details of its functioning. He became friends with Ed Ricketts, and under his influence he spent a lot of time reading and discussing scientific subjects. He was certain that humans ought to adapt into the greater community of living things. Even though Steinbeck may not have been a professional ecologist, his works show a strong ecological sensibility and a dedication to raising awareness of environmental issues (1995, p. 5). Steinbeck went with Ricketts on a precisely documented scientific expedition to the Sea of Cortez, and their observations were subsequently compiled into the book of the same name (Parini, 1995, p. 292).

During World War II, Steinbeck wrote some pieces of government propaganda. One of them is for example *The Moon Is Down* (1942) which depicts the life of Norwegians under the Nazi regime (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024c). According to Schultz & Li, Steinbeck, as many other writers from this period, served as a war correspondent, particularly for the *Heral Tribune*. His reports came from London, North Africa, and Italy. Despite being officially forbidden from carrying a weapon as a journalist, he took part in multiple missions against the Nazis in Italy as an armed soldier. He came back to New York to his second wife Gwyn in October 1943, after five months spent on the battlefield. Minor physical injuries and more serious, the lasting psychological distress caused by witnessing the death from the immediate vicinity, changed him into a different person. He immediately started working on something completely different to shake those experiences off and wrote a comedic novel *Cannery Row* (2005, p. 10). When it comes to relationships, Steinbeck was not very lucky. His second marriage broke down as well, Gwyn won custody of their two children and kept Steinbeck's belongings he needed to continue in his writing – such as his personal correspondence and a typewriter; all of this resulted in sadness, depression

and it also increased his alcohol consumption (Schultz & Li, 2005, pp. 12–13). Luckily, he soon recovered and even fell in love again. His salvation had a name, Elaine Scott, soon Elaine Steinbeck. He started writing out his emotions he felt after the betrayal from the mother of his children, which resulted in publishing play-novelette *Burning Bright* in 1950 (Railsback & Mayer, 2006, p. 46).

With the aim to provide his sons with a realistic historical account of their ancestors' migration from New England to California and the origins of the family, he tried to recall his past precisely in the novel *East of Eden*, published in 1952. However, it ended up as a work of fiction, drawing inspiration from real-life events and locations (Parini, 1995, p. 12). As Railsback & Mayer argue, the success of the novel was enormous, leading to a film and television miniseries production. During this time, Steinbeck was looking for his voice in literature, trying to change the career of a novelist into one of a playwright, which proved to be unsuccessful. He therefore started to devote more of his time to journalism and travel. In 1962 *Travels with Charley* was published, depicting Steinbeck's 1960 road trip around the United States (2006, p. 47).

Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. Immediately after the Nobel Committee's choice became known to the public, criticism appeared, as Schultz & Li mention. Altogether, the opinions were based on the idea that Steinbeck had a mediocre talent and his works had been outdated. He himself answered a reporter's question negatively when asked whether he thought he deserved the prize. However, he was deeply hurt by the reviews coming from the literary elite and ultimately, never created another work of fiction after that (2005, p. 15). Throughout his life, as Parini mentions, Steinbeck received a lot of criticism and reacted badly to it, which often led to drinking alcohol and dark moods on the verge of depression. He also struggled with a negative attitude towards women, which is thought to have emerged from his relationship with his mother (1995, p. 25).

According to Schultz & Li, the Steinbecks were asked at the suggestion by President Kennedy to join a tour in Europe behind the Iron Curtain, as a part of a cultural exchange program. In 1963, during the exhausting journey that lasted two months, they visited the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and West Berlin. In honour to Kennedy's memory, they carried on with the tour after his assassination (2005, p. 15). Being quite close to President Lyndon Johnson,

as Parini argues, Steinbeck attempted to defend the Vietnam War to both others and himself, but it was visible from his letters and speeches that deep down he knew the war was wrong. The fact that his son John enlisted to the war and went to Vietnam may have caused Steinbeck to view the conflict through the eyes of an ordinary soldier trying to carry out his patriotic duty (1995, p. 557–560). According to Parini, he flew to Vietnam with Elaine and travelled around Southeast Asia. After their return, Steinbeck’s health worsened; he was experiencing breathing difficulties and had multiple mini strokes. He died peacefully of a heart disease in his home on December 20, 1968 (1995, pp. 571–578).

John Steinbeck frequently tackled important social and political themes in his writings, such as injustice, poverty, and the struggles of the working class. He received a lot of criticism throughout his life; however, his works have had a profound impact on American literature and many of his books continue to be studied and celebrated.

### **5.1 *Of Mice and Men***

Steinbeck’s depiction of the dreams and suffering of migrant workers is in the form of the 1937 short novel, *Of Mice and Men*, and is nowadays regarded as a classic review of the American Dream (Churchwell, 2018, p. 189). It follows a story of two ranch workers who are struggling to make ends meet while dreaming about having their own land. Steinbeck’s writing style employed in the novel is focused on vivid depiction of settings, clear description, and use of repetition. The short novel is composed of six chapters, each of them starts with a description of particular setting. It is narrated in the third person and most of the text consists of the character’s dialogues.

The story starts with George Milton and Lennie Small who come to a ranch near Soledad in California during the Great Depression to look for a job. George is a small man who makes decisions and looks after Lennie, who is big and mentally handicapped. What is more challenging for the duo, as it brings a lot of trouble, is Lennie’s uncontrollable physical strength. Together with his passion of touching anything soft, these characteristics of Lenny cause a lot of damage including killing animals and human beings. They share a dream of owning a farm, living together in a little house surrounded by animals. As they get a job at the ranch, they meet other people who live or work there; Slim, a mule driver, Crooks, the Black stable-hand, Candy, an old worker, who helps clean around the ranch as he is missing a hand and cannot do more intense work, Curley,

an aggressive son of the ranch owner, and his wife. Conflicts on the ranch arise because of Curley's aggressive behaviour and attitude. Lennie tries to comfort Curley's wife during a talk, and he unintentionally murders her, which puts him in immediate danger. George knows Curley would not only hurt Lennie, but he would organize a lynch. George cannot let him do that and decides to save him from the upcoming cruelty – he shoots Lennie in the back of his head while talking about their dream farm.

John Steinbeck grew up in California where most of his works find their setting, including *Of Mice and Men*. The story is set specifically in Salinas Valley, where Steinbeck was born. Before becoming a well-known writer, Steinbeck among many jobs worked also as a cotton picker or a ranch hand. That is how he learned about the conditions surrounding farms and worker's lives. His experiences led him to have a deep empathy for the common labourer, which enabled him to realistically depict the workers' lives in his writings (Schultz & Li, 2005, pp. 4–5). As Parini mentions, Steinbeck worked on several ranches that were owned or rented by his father's old sugar company called Spreckles. He witnessed that each farm had both permanent staff and ranch-hands, who were only needed certain times a year (1995, p. 42–43). Even though *Of Mice and Men* is a work of fiction, Steinbeck used his own experience, as he suggested in an interview

I was a bindlestiff myself for quite a spell. I worked in the same country that the story is laid in. The characters are composites to a certain extent. Lennie was a real person ... I worked alongside him for many weeks. He didn't kill a girl. He killed a ranch foreman ... I saw him do it (Parini, 1995, p. 43)

Regardless of whether Steinbeck witnessed a ranch murder, he definitely had a lot of interaction with those who worked there (Parini 1995, p. 215). Therefore, his storytelling relies heavily on vivid description, and the novel itself offers a real insight into the lives of ranch workers during the Great Depression.

### **5.1.1 Depiction of the American Dream in *Of Mice and Men***

#### **5.1.1.1 Ideal of personal happiness**

The pursuit of personal happiness is presented in many characters of the novel, and the main figures, George and Lennie, are no exception. They have a dream of owning land, not just for the material ideal, but also in the name of a brighter future. They would

not have to work on someone else's property just to afford the cost of living, and additionally, they would gain their independence and freedom. George and Lennie hold onto their dream as a source of hope. During their conversations throughout the novel, they come back to their plan and repeat it several times, starting with a comparison to other workers

Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go inta town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to ... With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us (p. 15).

Lennie loves hearing about their future and is delighted when he persuades George to talk about it. High frequency of the repetition of the story is displayed on George's response, when he is asked to go over their plan "You got it by heart. You can do it yourself ... Why'n't you do it yourself? You know all of it" (p. 15). They seem to have created their future in their heads with every possible detail "... we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an a cow and some pigs and ... when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work" (pp. 15–16). The idea of living on their own and enjoying their freedom is shown in one of Lennie's interruptions to the storytelling, when he adds that they will "live off the fatta the lan'", meaning they will live well without the need to work very hard for it (Cambridge Dictionary).

They fantasize about their ranch very often and George adds something to the idea every time he talks about it. By doing that, he creates future tasks for Lennie, giving him even more situations to look forward to. The repetition serves as an example of their hope based on the vision that better days are yet to come. They work hard and overcome many obstacles during their life in order to save up some money so that they could, one day, live on their own little farm, and fulfil their American Dream of happiness that is based on independence and self-sufficiency. However, their fantasy fades away with the death of Lennie. Their friendship is the base of their dream, and while George saves Lennie from the inevitable cruelty by killing him, he ends up alone, as most of the migrant workers do. Ranch-hands go through hard times and often end up in town drinking alcohol so that they could relax and forget about the fact that they do not live happily, as George tells Lennie in the beginning of the novel "We don't have to sit in no bar room blowin'

in our jack jus' because we got no place else to go" (p. 15). These runaways from reality ultimately lead to spending money for which they worked very hard. However, George and Lennie needed to save money so that their dream could come true. When Lennie dies, Slim invites George to have a drink "Come on, George. Me and you'll go in an' get a drink" (p. 118). George lost his friend with whom he shared a cherished dream, and now is destined to a lonely life of a migrant worker who bury tears in alcohol (Andrýsková, 2016, p. 27).

Candy, an old one-handed man, is expecting to be fired from his job pretty soon, due to his physical handicap. He hears George reminding Lennie of their vision and immediately adores the idea of owning a piece of land with a house; as written, he "turned slowly over ... his eyes were wide open" (p. 62). At first, he asks where the place is and how much it costs. When he tells them about how much money he earns, he adds "I ain't much good but I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the garden some. How'd that be?" (p. 65). After their conversation they all start believing the dream is possibly coming true, and that exact dream was suddenly a vision of three people who are desperate to leave the ranch and live freely on their own.

Curley's wife, isolated and surrounded by men, symbolizes the pursuit of personal happiness as well. Her marriage does not bring her anything else than constant separation, she feels lonely and wants to be heard and validated. No matter how impossible that sounds, her desire gets her killed. Anyway, it happens due to a series of unfortunate circumstances. When she has a conversation with Lennie, she mentions how unhappy she is with her life "Seems like they ain't none of them cares how I gotta live. I tell you I ain't used to livin' like this. I coulda made somethin' of myself" (p. 96). She then continues with a monologue about how she was given an option of becoming an actor when she was fifteen but was unable to follow that career path. She regrets the missed opportunity "If I'd went, I wouldn't be livin' like this..." (p. 96). She talks more about another chance of becoming an actor and then confesses about her feelings towards Curley. The conversation continues and she moves closer to Lennie. She brags about her hair and makes Lennie to touch it, as he loves petting soft things. Unaware of his strength, she starts panicking and moves in a way that leads to Lennie breaking her neck. She wanted to be heard and have someone as a company, unfortunately, her pursuit of that dream ultimately ended with her death.



### 5.1.1.2 Ideal of material prosperity

*Of Mice and Men* explores the material aspect of the American Dream by showing the ideal on the characters who aim for a higher standard of living and the obstacles they encounter in their pursuit of material stability. In this novel, it is clearly connected to the pursuit of personal happiness, such as the dream of Lennie and George.

As written in the previous chapter, their dream is to be independent and self-sufficient. The thought of achieving their long-held desire that fills them with happiness and optimism every time they discuss it, is what motivates them to overcome daily challenges of a poor migrant worker. A material part of their dream is the possession of land. Owning a house means a way out of their miserable lives driven by financial instability; they dream of being self-sufficient without the need to work very hard for it. In their ideal world, they would gain the possibility of success thanks to maintaining a farm with a wide variety of animals, which would provide them with the ability to generate their own wealth and prosperity. Their dream is the exact opposite of their lives on farms.

They work very hard, save money, but eventually, they make someone else wealthy – the ranch owners. The American Dream is meant to represent the belief of an individual who seeks something beneficial for himself, not for others. The story depicts the unattainability of the belief in the life of a farm worker, in this novel specifically during the Great Depression, when labourers on ranches put in a great deal of effort, yet their work served to increase the prosperity of someone else. Every character in the novel has dreams, but Curley and his wife are the only ones who have real power and do not need to be afraid of their future very much. Curley is the son of the ranch owner and they do not have to work, because they pay workers to do the necessary. The problem is that they pay them poorly. Moreover, they have the ability to fire any worker and make their life even more unbearable. The ranch workers are aware that their fate does not depend exclusively on themselves – the owners can fire them due to any reason (as Candy anticipates given his disability), pay them less, or decide not to hire them at all if they do not want to or if the season does not require any more help. The owners are powerful, and they know it. Curley behaves arrogantly and that behaviour is only possible for him because he has a higher position over the others.

The power of money is displayed during the situation when Candy hears about the dream of George and Lennie. George tells Candy that the price for the place is six hundred dollars and Candy starts talking about his life savings which could be used for the payment if they include him in the plan “Tha’s three hunderd, and I got fifty more comin’ the end a the month ... S’pose I went in with you guys. Tha’s three hunderd an’ fifty bucks I’d put in” (p. 65). They start counting how much money they need and come up with a plan

... if me an’ Lennie work a month an’ don’t spen’ nothing, we’ll have a hunderd bucks. That’d be four fifty. I bet we could swing her for that. Then you an’ Lennie could go get her started an’ I’d get a job an make up the res’, an’ you could sell eggs an’ stuff like that (pp. 65–66).

Candy’s money makes the dream actually possible to achieve “They looked at one another, amazed. This thing they had never really believed in was coming true” (p. 66). Even though they talked about their dream and somehow believed in achieving it, the reality is that money is required to make this type of dream come true. They had very little chance of succeeding on their own as the farm workers’ low wages would not help them. Candy, and more significantly, his money, is the means to buy their American Dream. Even George started believing that the dream is within reach, as “his eyes were full of wonder” (p. 66).

Crooks serves as a reminder that the American Dream is not to be achieved, as he speaks from experience about owning a piece of land. He hears the group talking about their future farm and unenthusiastically tells them what proves to be right

You guys is just kiddin’ yourself. You’ll talk about it a hell of a lot, but you won’t get no land. You’ll be a swamper here till they take you out in a box. Hell, I seen too many guys ... Seems like ever’ guy got land in his head ... Jesus, I seen it happen too many times ... They never get none under their hand (p. 84).

Despite his skepticism, he offers to assist physically and finds himself drawn by their idea of owning a farm once he realizes that they actually do have money for it. Nevertheless, when Lennie dies, their dream vanishes and cannot be revived by no money. Candy tries to maintain the idea between him and George “You an’ me can get that little place, can’t we, George? You an’ me can go there an’ live nice, can’t we, George? Can’t we?” (p. 103).

There was no need for George to say anything, as the next lines suggest “Before George answered, Candy dropped his head and looked down at the hay. He knew” (p. 103). Eventually, they are left to live that miserable, lonely life on someone else’s farm.

The novel demonstrates the fragility of the American Dream. Although Lennie and George cherish their dream and work hard to achieve it, their hopes of owning a land and gaining prosperity as well as personal independence are not realized – instead, they are completely destroyed.

### **5.1.1.3 Ideal of equality and opportunity**

The American Dream of equality and opportunity is out of reach for many characters of the novel, whether it is based on economical background, social class, or race.

The novel depicts economic inequalities surrounding the life on a ranch. There are wealthy landowners who hold power and privilege over migrant workers, who are provided with low wages and moreover, with no job security. The owner has the power to terminate employees at any time, thus there is no guarantee that they will work and make at least some money. For instance, when bad weather occurs and fewer labourers are needed for those agricultural tasks, some workers may find their employment opportunities suddenly eliminated. If something happens to them and they physically hurt themselves as Candy did, no one ensures their job is secured. The owners’ prosperity is a result of his staff’s effort. The owner may spend his fortune on whatever he pleases, while the others work and have very little possibility of realizing their dreams. George and Lennie, as well as other working characters in the novel, depict the challenges of achieving the American Dream for those at the bottom of the social ladder. As the novel shows, the wealthy class and the working class do not have the same access to dreams and opportunities, and it therefore turns the American Dream into a myth.

The novel also portrays the challenges of achieving equality and opportunity in a society marked by discrimination. The Great Depression worsened the economic situation of black Americans, as they were the first ones to lose their jobs. The unemployment rate was high for every group of people, however, compared to white workers, the unemployment of African Americans was two to three times higher

(Hardman, 1999). Crooks, the African American stable hand, faces racism and segregation. He lives separated from the others on the farm and cannot enter the bunkhouse. Once, Lennie enters his room. Crooks wants him out, but Lennie does not know why. Crooks gives him the explanation based on the society of that era “Cause I’m black. They play cards in there, but I can’t play because I’m black. They say I stink. Well, I tell you, you all of you stink to me” (p. 75). His defence mechanism makes him act like he is a solitary guy who is better off without anyone else. He is poorly paid and cannot even think about achieving something greater. Moreover, he is threatened by Curley’s wife. She knows that she has power over him as a white person and as a wife of the son’s owner, and that she can easily ruin his life. When she enters his room, Crooks wants her out and tells her she cannot be there. Curley’s wife does not care and reminds him of his social position “Listen, Nigger ... You know what I can do to you if you open your trap? ... I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain’t even funny” (pp. 88–89). Crooks’ colour of skin denies him the opportunities of white people.

Nearly every one of the characters in *Of Mice and Men* is portrayed to have some kind of a dream. George and Lennie already have a dream of their own as the novel starts. Some of the characters realize their desires with the unintentional help of others throughout the novel, such as Candy, who wants to become part of George and Lennie’s dream of owning a farm. Another one is Crooks, at least for a while. He is sceptical of their dream but eventually finds himself attracted to it as well. There is also a character, Curley’s wife, who had a dream in the past, and talks about how it has been destroyed. Their dreams provide them with a feeling of hope in their miserable lives. Nevertheless, none of the dreams is fulfilled. The fate of those workers demonstrates that ordinary working people could not achieve their ambitions during the harsh times of the Great Depression.

## 6 Comparison of Selected Works and Their Depiction of the American Dream

*The Sun Also Rises*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Of Mice and Men* are literary works of the authors of the Lost Generation, selected for the analysis as they all examine the theme of the American Dream. This chapter provides the comparison of how the American Dream is portrayed in those works, based on the analysis of selected aspects.

First aspect is the ideal of personal happiness. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the pursuit of the American Dream in the name of personal happiness is portrayed on every character. As the setting is the post-war world, it follows the lives of characters who seek pleasure and adventure in an attempt to fill the emptiness left by the war. They are constantly looking for something that provides happiness, but it ends only in a short-term entertainment. Every character aspires to be satisfied but is unable to achieve so due to the war experiences. Jake Barnes sees his happiness in Lady Brett Ashley, but again due to the war tragedies, they are unable to have a relationship. However, Jake does not let that ruin his life completely and he starts to focus on enjoying at least some activities. Even though he does not accomplish his dream of being with a woman he loves, he tries to look for some meaning in life. That is the difference between him and Jay Gatsby, the protagonist of *The Great Gatsby*. Same as Jake, Gatsby's dream is a woman. However, Gatsby wants to win Daisy Buchanan by impressing her with his wealth. He goes to great lengths to win her over, and it quickly becomes a race for a prize and possession. Gatsby is unable to form a genuine connection with people as well, but unlike Jake, he does not connect with others because he is focused on one person only. In Jake's case, he is unable to do so because of the post-war atmosphere in society. Gatsby was blindly following his dream of regaining women's affection and he lost his life as a consequence. In contrast, the pursuit of personal happiness in *Of Mice and Men* does not stand on the idea of a relationship. The basis of the dream comes from owning a land, where the characters, farm workers, would gain their independence. Even though it is connected to the ideal of material prosperity, they visualize their dream so often that it becomes their hope and just thinking about it makes them excited. The only female character in the novel is Curley's wife, whose personal happiness relies on being heard and listened to. Due to a series of unfortunate circumstances, her dream gets her killed. Jake and Gatsby are unable to get their desired women, ranch workers are not capable

of getting their own farm. The novels show that as far as the personal happiness is concerned in a connection to the American Dream, the desires for satisfaction remain unfulfilled.

Next analysed aspect is the ideal of material prosperity. *The Sun Also Rises* depicts the emptiness around financial health rather than pursuit of material prosperity. Some characters are portrayed as financially stable while others are displayed as the opposite. The character of Jake Barnes uses money as a way of generosity and dominance. He cannot achieve his dream of being with a woman he loves, so he uses money as a way to compensate for this unfulfillment and at least enjoys some merry-making activities. Hemingway uses the idea of money as a way to describe the other characters as well, talking about how much money they have or whether it is inherited, or earned. Jake is portrayed as a wealthy man, but it does not bring him long-lasting happiness. The characters who are not as wealthy stay lost in their life as well. The uncertainty and disillusionment are eventually same for every one of them. However, money and material prosperity have more important role in *The Great Gatsby*. Jay Gatsby needs to be wealthy so that he can show Daisy that he is worthy of her attention. Another portrayal of the power of money is in the character of Tom Buchanan, who manipulates people with his wealth. What makes *The Great Gatsby* different from the other novels in the depiction of material prosperity is actually describing the luxury, extravagant houses, and possessions of the wealthy, such as automobiles. The novel portrays the corruption of the American Dream by showing how the characters' pursuit of wealth ultimately leads to their downfall – no matter if wealthy or poor, Gatsby's dream remains unfulfilled.

As stated previously, also *Of Mice and Men* explores the material aspect in connection to the aspect of personal happiness. The difference with this short novel is the reason of the pursuit of material prosperity, because it has more to do with material stability that would ensure better lives rather than being wealthy. Those farm workers feel the need to own a land because they live in a misery with low wages and no independence. They work hard for it but the only ones who benefit from their work are the owners of the farm. The power of money is displayed during the situation when Candy hears about the dream of George and Lennie and offers to provide the required money. Even though they believed in achieving it previously, the reality is that money

is necessary in order to fulfil the dream. Another confirmation of the money's influence is shown in the situation when it persuades the otherwise sceptical Crooks about the possibility of buying own land thanks to the actual possession of money. Each of the novels depicts the material prosperity in a different way. *The Sun Also Rises* shows that money is not important once a person's life is affected by war, but it shows that at least it buys opportunities so that the individual can try to enjoy some parts of life. *The Great Gatsby* depicts the material prosperity as means to achieving something greater, even though it is in fact a manipulation. In *Of Mice and Men*, the idea of owning a land signifies a hope of leaving a miserable life behind. However, in none of those novels does money ultimately assist in attaining the desired dreams.

The third and final analysed aspect is the one of equality and opportunity. The expatriates in *The Sun Also Rises* spend a lot of time together despite coming from different social backgrounds and having different approach towards money and opportunities. The characters are in the same meaningless life situation even though their backgrounds, such as privileged family history, differ. The novel is different than the other two in the portrayal of the ideal of equality and opportunity due to the setting. The perspective is different because it concerns the war experiences and the immediate post-war world, which is what ultimately makes the fulfilment of the American Dream impossible. On the other hand, *The Great Gatsby* contains representation of each social class and distinguishes it clearly – old rich, new rich, and the lower, working class. It shows how the society values each of those classes and how the poor ones want to belong, fairly desperately, to the wealthier ones. It depicts how belonging to specific social class changes person's behaviour and their approach to life, mostly presented on the relationship of the Wilsons with the Buchanans. The novel proves the emptiness of the American Dream, as the ones who were born privileged did not live with any real goals and the poor ones, even though hard-working, ended up dead. In the case of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the vision of equality and opportunity is out of reach for many characters of the novel. It is depicted on different financial backgrounds along with social classes and race of the characters. There are wealthy landowners who hold power over lives of their poorly paid employees. The working people on the farm show the challenges of achieving the American Dream as they are the ones at the bottom of the social ladder. It is the only novel of those three that presents an issue of racism and segregation. The novel, as well as *The Great Gatsby*, shows that the wealthy class

has a better access to easier life and opportunities than the working class has. That, again, turns the American Dream from a belief to a myth.

While *The Sun Also Rises* focuses on the aftermath of World War I, *The Great Gatsby* explores the excesses and moral decay of the Jazz Age and *Of Mice and Men* portrays the life of ranch workers during the Great Depression, they all share one feature – they depict the ideals of the American Dream as unattainable. The American Dream was presented by its writers as an ideal that is unachievable and diametrically opposed to the terrible reality faced by many individuals.



## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to define the American Dream and compare its depiction in selected literary works of the authors of the Lost Generation. The definition and history of the American Dream open the theoretical part of the thesis, followed by the origins and essence of the Lost Generation. The thesis then continued with the biographies of the selected authors and analyses of their works based on the depiction of three chosen aspects of the American Dream. The practical analyses are founded on the ideals of personal happiness, material prosperity, equality, and opportunity. The depiction of these aspects is compared in the last chapter.

The selected authors, Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, and John Steinbeck are major American authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are each recognized for distinctive literary styles and techniques; Hemingway is known for his economical prose and use of the iceberg theory, Fitzgerald for his lyrical language and vivid imagery, and Steinbeck is acclaimed for his social consciousness. All three authors belong to the Lost Generation; they shared an awareness of the profound changes in society and existential distress that characterized the post-war period. Each of them criticized aspects of American society in their works, whether it was Hemingway's portrayal of the brutality of war and the decline of traditional values, Fitzgerald's depiction of the excesses of the Jazz Age, or the injustices faced by the working class during the Great Depression reflected in the works written by Steinbeck.

Their life experiences and harsh situations following the aftermath of the war influenced their mental state, and all these three authors found themselves surrounded with alcohol. Despite his lifelong heavy drinking, Hemingway most likely realized he had a problem after the East African plane crash and made an effort to reduce his consumption. In his *The Sun Also Rises*, the alcohol consumption and drinking sessions play a significant role in the narrative. Fitzgerald, who was fond of an opulent lifestyle and lavish gatherings with his wife Zelda, also indulged in excessive drinking. He had a serious drinking problem, as proved by the fact that he lost his job as a screenwriter and was even admitted to the hospital. The lust for the prohibited alcohol is displayed in *The Great Gatsby*, however, Gatsby does not drink. Fitzgerald may have realized he had an issue with this kind of addiction and developed a character that handled it better. This problem did not affect Steinbeck any differently. The criticism Steinbeck faced

throughout his life, and the divorce with his wife Gwyn, were among his personal experiences that contributed to his drinking and depressions. He used alcohol as a distraction, a strategy that is also depicted in the lives of the ranch workers in *Of Mice and Men*, who typically end up in town sipping alcohol to unwind and take their minds away from the struggles they face. They all exploited their alcohol experiences to give their works greater depth. Though in various ways, they all explored the concept of the American Dream.

First introduced author in this thesis is Ernest Hemingway. His personal life is described as well as his literary career. His novel *The Sun Also Rises* is introduced and analysed based on the depiction of the selected aspects of the American Dream. The same structure continues with Francis Scott Fitzgerald and his novel *The Great Gatsby*, and with John Steinbeck and his work *Of Mice and Men*. These books selected for the practical part deal with similar topics concerning the period after World War I and depict the American Dream in different settings and relations.

Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* focuses on the post-war world and the American Dream is unattainable due to the war experiences and the atmosphere in the society. The novel depicts the American Dream's aspect of personal happiness on every character. As the analysis showed, the characters do not achieve long-lasting personal satisfaction, mainly because they are focused only on the short-term happiness and fleeting merry-making activities, such as partying and drinking. As far as the second aspect is concerned, the essence of money only helps some of them but does not solve the problem of disillusionment. The main character buys opportunities for himself and for the others as well, however, nothing changes in the way they view their meaningless lives. The aspect of equality and opportunity is not as strong as in the other novels, because the atmosphere in the post-war society was almost the same for every social class. The characters' lives are directly affected by the war experiences, and therefore they cannot fulfil their dreams.

*The Great Gatsby* explores the excesses and moral decay of the Jazz Age, and the dreams of the characters are mainly based on personal fulfilment with the help of material prosperity, prominently in the case of the main character, Gatsby. Money is important feature for him as it serves as means to achieving his personal happiness, but there are also characters whose dream is to be wealthy, and consequently

that is what would make them happy. The failure of achieving their American Dream is based on the consequences they encounter. The not so wealthy ones aspire to live luxurious lives, but they end up being manipulated, and even killed. What distinguishes this novel from the others is the actual portrayal of material prosperity – the luxury, extravagant houses, and possessions of the wealthy elite, such as automobiles, are described. The analysis proved that all three selected aspects are present in the novel as it also depicts the difference between social classes. It displays how the individual's background influences the person's future and possible achievement of their visions; but no matter if wealthy or poor, all the dreams remain unfulfilled.

Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* portrays the life of ranch workers during the Great Depression and the most prominent aspect of the American Dream portrayed in the short novel is the ideal of equality and opportunity; it is the only novel of those three that presents an issue of racism and segregation. The analysis showed that every aspect is present, but more importantly, they are deeply connected with each other. In contrast to the other two novels, the main characters' idea of personal happiness does not stand on the essence of a relationship. The basis of their dream is owning a land, which would bring them independence and a sense of self-realization. It is an ideal of material prosperity, but the narrative also demonstrate how, since the characters look to that vision as a source of hope, realizing their desire to own something leads to the fulfilment of their personal happiness. The power of money is highlighted in a situation when George, one of the main characters, begins to genuinely believe in their vision after finding out there is an option of actually being able to afford it. Similar to *The Great Gatsby*, there is a death of a character who tries to satisfy their wishes. However, in the case of Steinbeck's novel, it happens due to a series of unfortunate circumstances.

World War I and its aftermath affected all these selected writers belonging to the Lost Generation, which is reflected in some of their literary works. The selected novels, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Of Mice and Men*, differ in presenting the chosen aspects of the American Dream as their setting is not the same, however, they all share one feature – they depict the ideals of the American Dream as unrealistic. The American Dream portrayed in the novels was presented by its writers as an ideal that is opposed to the harsh reality faced by many individuals and is therefore unattainable.

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