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Boats Against the Current: The American Dream as Death Denial in F. Scott Fitzgerald's

*The Great Gatsby* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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English Honors Thesis

Professor Sarah Sherman

Spring 2012

Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* are both American men in pursuit of the American Dream – that is, to acquire wealth, success, and prestige. This quest for money drives modern-day America, but behind our perpetual urge to consume and possess lays a grim motive. It is human awareness of mortality and the subsequent desire to prove we are special and somehow resistant to death that fuels the longing for wealth and possessions. Belief in Christianity and the afterlife used to provide an answer to the fear of death, but now money and materialism have come to substitute for God. Even though we know everyone will eventually die, we strive to attain enough money and objects so that we might be the exception, or at the very least, our possessions will be passed on to our family and let our name live on after death. Gatsby and Willy demonstrate this tendency to deny personal mortality through conspicuous consumption, a version of the American Dream, and the inevitable death of these characters proves the futility of human beings' attempts to deny and defy death.

Every human being is aware of his or her own mortality. No matter who we are, where we live, or how we live our lives, we will all die eventually, and although we can take steps to maintain our health and thus increase our longevity, none of us can escape our inevitable demise. Humans seem to accept death as a sad but normal and unchanging aspect of life, and people go about their daily business without seeming to give much thought to their impending deaths. While people do not typically discuss their own death seriously in polite conversation, death is made trivial through various jokes and plays on words (“You scared me half to death” or “This job will be the death of me”). The knowledge of human mortality does not appear to impact day-to-day life.

However, present beneath every human being's conscious thoughts and behavior is an inherent, deep fear of death. According to Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death*, "The fear of death is natural and is present in everyone" and "it is the basic fear that influences all others, a fear from which no one is immune, no matter how disguised it may be" (15). This fear results from the instinct of self-preservation present in all living organisms, for knowledge of dangers in the world and fear of these dangers allows animals to take measures to protect themselves and thus live longer, reproduce, and protect the species from extinction. Humans, as creatures of heightened intelligence and self-awareness, would be paralyzed and destroyed by fear as a constant and conscious presence in our minds. Becker quotes Gregory Zilboorg as saying, "If this fear were as constantly conscious, we should be unable to function normally. It must be properly repressed to keep us living with any modicum of comfort" (17). As Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski put it in "Lethal Consumption: Death-Denying Materialism," "Human beings are... in constant danger of being incapacitated by overwhelming anxiety" (131).

In order to escape the devastating effects caused by awareness of death, humans form "cultural worldviews: commonly held beliefs about reality that serve to reduce the potentially overwhelming terror" (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 131). By creating certain ideals that give life meaning and that everyone buys into, humans find a way to make death seem less scary, and indeed, less real. Becker writes in *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, "Culture would reflect the particular style that a society adopts to deny despair, the particular ways it lies to itself about the nature of reality... If everybody lives roughly the same lies about the same things there is no one to call them liars" (148-149). The power of these cultural worldviews, which are, in essence, fictions, is in the group aspect, for if everyone else believes something, people find it easier to believe it themselves.

Religion provides one particular way for humans to deal with the awareness of death. In our society, Christianity solved the fear of death by giving people hope for the afterlife. Belief in God, Jesus, and the existence of heaven for believers lend meaning to a world which has the potential to be bleak, cruel, and full of anxiety. According to Becker, “[R]eligion alone gives hope, because it holds open the dimension of the unknown and the unknowable... and in doing so, it relieves the absurdity of earthly life, all the impossible limitations and frustrations of living matter” (*Denial* 203-204). Perhaps the most comforting aspect of Christianity is that it assures people that they are special and not simply animals destined for death. Rather, everyone has the potential to belong to the kingdom of God as long as he or she believes, and instead of having to fear death, Christians can look forward to eternal life after death in a beautiful paradise.

Now society has shifted, however, and has begun to look to another source for assurance of the unreality of death: the accumulation of money and possessions. Rather than looking forward to the afterlife as a way to combat fear of death, we attempt to fill our bank accounts with enough money and our houses with enough objects to somehow make us immortal. Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski state, “God isn’t dead after all,” as Nietzsche believed, but rather, “God has metamorphosized into money and materialism in contemporary society” (137). Just as belief in Christianity assures someone that he or she is “special and therefore more than just an animal fated to die and decay,” having a full bank account, a big house, and a nice car assert that the possessor is important, powerful, and permanent (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 137).

Money is power. According to Becker, “All power is in essence power to deny mortality” (*Escape* 81). It gives the possessor power over others, the power to possess anything and everything, and the resources to improve safety and health, and thus to prolong life. In this way,

money literally delays death by curing disease and injury. Money also denies death in a symbolic way, because ‘it can be accumulated and passed on, and so radiates its powers even after one’s death, giving one a semblance of immortality as he lives in the vicarious enjoyments of his heirs that his money continues to buy, or in the magnificence of the art works that he commissioned, or in the statues of himself and the majesty of his own mausoleum’ (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 137). Thus, even if a person’s body is dead, he or she will continue to be remembered and admired long after death.

The American Dream takes on a whole new meaning when considered alongside society’s urge to deny human mortality. Typically, people think of The American Dream as the drive to better oneself and take advantage of the social mobility and opportunities available in this country. However, the ideal of a self-made man who works hard to earn enough money for the right house, car, and accessories to keep his family satisfied is really just a culturally sanctioned way for us all to deny that we are just like any other living creatures in that we will someday die. Under the guise of the American Dream, “Modern man is denying his finitude” by getting the right job and making enough money, buying the right house in the right neighborhood, and driving the right car. Through the accumulation of these possessions, man seems to say, “I am not ephemeral, look what went into me, what represents me, what justifies me” (*Birth* 149-150). Money lends its possessor an air of power, importance, and permanence, so when we see someone in an expensive suit and a Rolex, driving his BMW to his beach house to use his yacht, “The hushed hope is that someone who can do this will not die,” that someone this important cannot possibly fall victim to something as mundane as death (*Birth* 150).

*The Great Gatsby* clearly demonstrates the underlying attempt at death denial present in the American Dream. Gatsby bases his entire existence on becoming the sort of man idealized by

the American Dream. He reinvents himself, creating a new identity and going to any lengths to earn money and get the right house and possessions. He does these things in order to win Daisy, but Daisy represents nothing more to him than the final acquisition to make his dream for himself realized. Getting Daisy will give him access to the kind of life he has always wanted, the life glorified by the idea of the American Dream, and despite all his wealth, he cannot truly be a part of this life until he has Daisy. Thus, Gatsby's life was based on gaining enough money and success to be considered more than just an ordinary person - in essence, someone whose success will make him immortal. His death at the end of the novel proves that although he dedicated his life to achieving this goal, it is futile to try to avoid or deny human mortality, because death catches up to us all.

From the beginning of Gatsby's life, he longs to prove he is special and not simply ordinary, and seeks to create a life for himself beyond the mundane existence he is given. He describes his parents as "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people," and "his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all" (Fitzgerald 98). He sees his parents as the epitome of ordinary, destined to die with nothing remaining to show they had been special or made any sort of impact on the world. Even before he acquires his wealth, he sees himself as superior to his parents, and creates a fantasy that mediocre people are not actually related to him. His father recognizes his son's ambition and desire to distance himself from his parents and improve his station. Of a handwritten schedule in the back of Gatsby's childhood book he says, "Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that. He told me I et like a hog once, and I beat him for it" (Fitzgerald 173). Even in his youth, Gatsby wants to set himself apart from his parents, and thus he is "bound to get ahead." He has no problem criticizing his parents for

being ordinary and lacking manners, and in doing so, he distances himself from them so that he will not be tainted by their lack of distinction. Gatsby's father remarks, "He knew he had a big future in front of him" (Fitzgerald 172). Gatsby's urge to prove his specialness, and thus avoid death, is apparent to his father and drives his actions throughout his life.

In his essay "Gatsby and the Hole in Time," R.W. Stallman writes, "Gatsby incarnates the power of dream and illusion, the recurrent cycles of youth's capacity for wonder by which new worlds have been conquered since the beginning of civilization – the dream of a conquest of space-and-time, the illusions which reality deflates, the power of youth and faith in hope" (62). Gatsby creates his own identity and seeks wealth in order to sustain his dream so that reality, or death, will not deflate it. Fitzgerald writes, "Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God" (98). His identity is an illusion, created to assure himself he is not just like everyone else, but a "son of God," and surely a son of God cannot die. His dreams and fantasies "were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing" (Fitzgerald 99). He spends his younger years dreaming up the perfect identity for himself, "and to this conception he was faithful to the end" (Fitzgerald 98).

He actually abandons his old identity as James Gatz and becomes the Jay Gatsby he has dreamed up for himself when he sees Dan Cody's yacht for the first time. Nick muses, "I supposed he'd had the name ready for a long time, even then" because he has been so dissatisfied with his mundane life (Fitzgerald 98). For Gatsby, it is not Dan Cody himself that inspires him, but the yacht itself "that represented all the beauty and glamour in the world" (Fitzgerald 100). The object of the yacht stands for everything Gatsby desires, as it is the ultimate luxury possession. It allows the owner to sail wherever he desires in style, and it provides Gatsby with

an opportunity to leave his old life behind. Dan Cody also provides Gatsby with “a blue coat, six pairs of white duck trousers, and a yachting cap” (Fitzgerald 100). The new clothes allow Gatsby to transform completely into his new identity, because they give him the outward appearance to match the ambition and superiority he already feels inwardly. When he leaves Dan Cody, “the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man” (Fitzgerald 101). Gatsby’s acquisition of objects has created his new identity, and through the collection of possessions, he gets closer to the goal of denying his mortality.

Daisy represents just another aspect of the life Gatsby wants to live in an effort to avoid, delay, or fool death. He describes her as, “the first ‘nice’ girl he had ever known” (Fitzgerald 148). In “*The Great Gatsby: Fitzgerald’s Droit De Seigneur*,” Judith Fetterley writes, “The quotation marks around ‘nice’ indicate that the word is being used not as a reference to personality but as an index to social status and that Jay Gatsby’s interest in Daisy Fay lies in what she represents rather than in what she is” (103). Rather than desiring Daisy for her looks or her personality, she draws Gatsby in because he wants to be a part of the social class Daisy belongs to. He sees her as just another object to acquire in order to gain access to the kind of wealth and lifestyle that makes death seem impossible. According to Fetterley, “Daisy does not simply represent or incarnate that magical world Gatsby desires; she is herself the ultimate object in it” (104). Nick’s narrative continues, “He found her excitingly desirable. He went to her house... It amazed him – he had never been in such a beautiful house before” (Fitzgerald 148). Gatsby admits that he desired Daisy, but he then chooses to describe her house, rather than her appearance or her charm, an action which indicates that his desire is for her possessions and the social power she holds. According to Fetterley, “Gatsby thinks of Daisy in relation to the objects that surround her. Indeed, he cannot separate his vision of her from his vision of the house in

which she lives... She becomes identified in his mind with that house and that world, and they, in turn, represent for him a life of romantic possibility commensurate with his wild imaginings” (103-104). In order to get the life of wealth and power he desires, and through this life, deny death, he must make Daisy his.

Gatsby’s amazement at Daisy’s house stems from its “ripe mystery” (Fitzgerald 148). It is not only more spacious and elegant than the homes he is used to, but it seems to offer possibilities that ordinary middle-class homes do not. The house has “a hint of bedrooms upstairs more beautiful and cool than other bedrooms, of gay and radiant activities taking place through its corridors, and of romances that were not musty and laid away already in lavender, but fresh and breathing and redolent of this year’s shining motor-cars and of dances whose flowers were scarcely withered” (Fitzgerald 148-149). The house seems to offer opportunities that Gatsby would not otherwise have access to. More importantly, he thinks the house makes its occupants more youthful than the less-fortunate occupants of ordinary houses. He perceives that a potential romance with Daisy will not be “musty,” but “fresh and breathing,” an assumption that links his desire for Daisy with his desire for immortality. The image of flowers that are “scarcely withered” demonstrates Gatsby’s belief that the house, and thus Daisy and the wealth she possesses, indicates beauty and life, the opposite of death and decay. Daisy and the kind of people she associates with seem to be impervious to age and time, and if Gatsby spends time with Daisy, he feels he can develop this imperviousness, too.

Daisy becomes more desirable as Gatsby spends more time with her. He likes that other men have already desired and been with Daisy, because “it increased her value in his eyes” (Fitzgerald 149). Fetterly writes, “It is she for whom men compete, and possessing her is the clearest sign that one has made it into that magical world” (104). If others have sought after

Daisy, this must mean she is special and there is something of importance to be gained from her. Gatsby wants Daisy for symbolic reasons and for what she represents, so her value to others is important to him because he wants to absorb that value for himself. He “made the most of his time” and “took what he could get,” intending “to take what he could and go” (Fitzgerald 149). Gatsby thinks possessing Daisy for a short time will allow him permanent access to the life she represents. However, Daisy vanishes “into her rich house, into her rich, full life, leaving Gatsby – nothing” (Fitzgerald 149). Being with Daisy for a brief time does not give Gatsby access to the kind of life he desires; rather, it makes him feel further from this life but deepens his desire for it. Gatsby is “nothing,” and he must follow Daisy back into her “rich house” so that he can gain a “rich, full life” for himself. He says he “felt married to her,” suggesting that his dreams for greatness and power have become inextricably wed to Daisy, so that he cannot defy death without acquiring Daisy (Fitzgerald 149).

Seeing Daisy again only deepens his desire for her and her wealth and status. Her porch shines “with the bought luxury of star-shine,” suggesting that wealth can buy anything, even the cooperation of celestial bodies (Fitzgerald 149). Her wicker settee “squeaked fashionably,” an image which demonstrates the intense appeal of Daisy’s possessions (Fitzgerald 150). A squeaky piece of furniture is not usually considered fashionable, but Gatsby sees all of Daisy’s possessions as able to give him the social prestige and importance he desires. When he kisses her on her porch, he becomes “overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (Fitzgerald 150). Here Gatsby explicitly states his belief that wealth can defeat death, for it preserves not only youth, but mystery. Money, according to Gatsby, keeps the possessor young and lends him or her an air of mystery, so that

others perceive the possessor of money as special and above ordinary people in a vague, unexplained way. His mention of “the freshness of many clothes” emphasizes the importance of having the right possessions in order to gain access to the magical world of the immortal wealthy, and clothing is particularly important because, just like the clothes Dan Cody bought Gatsby, they can transform the wearer from someone ordinary into someone who appears rich and powerful (Fitzgerald 150). The association of Daisy with clothes shows just how much Gatsby thought of her in terms of monetary value and possessions. Daisy gleams “like silver,” connecting with the previous mention of “the bought luxury of star-shine” and comparing Daisy to something valuable and beautiful, but also very solid and permanent (Fitzgerald 150). Silver cannot be easily destroyed, so Gatsby thinks that neither can Daisy, who resembles silver, nor can anyone who possesses such a valuable item. Daisy is “safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor,” a phrase which further suggests her imperviousness to death, for being both safe and proud suggest that she is immortal and can gloat that others will still have to die (Fitzgerald 150). The “struggles of the poor,” implies the inevitable hardships that ordinary people have to endure, one of which is mortality.

Losing Daisy spurs Gatsby to begin amassing wealth, in hopes of being more appealing to her to win her back and finally completely become the Gatsby he has created for himself. Perhaps most importantly, he buys a house – “a colossal affair by any standard” with a “tower...under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden” (Fitzgerald 5). Before Nick Carraway narrates his first encounter with Gatsby, he provides a detailed description of his house, showing that Gatsby has to some extent become identified by his house and other possessions, and seems to have become a part of the magical world of the rich that he longed to inhabit. The house appears luxurious to the point of

being over the top, and it is so large that Gatsby cannot possibly use it to its full potential. Rather than being functional, then, Gatsby's house symbolizes his importance and status, and stands as a message to others of his permanence and resistance to death and decay. The marble of the swimming pool suggests permanence, and thus resistance to death, while the ivy and the forty acres of lawn and garden suggest an effort to control nature and its natural processes, one of which is death. In every possible way, Gatsby's house stands as a testament to the immortality he desires.

His house does not stand alone, however, as Gatsby has also filled it with all the right objects to back up his claim of immortality. He has a beach equipped with "two motor-boats" and a newly-purchased hydroplane (Fitzgerald 47). He cannot possibly use two motor-boats at once, and a hydroplane is an object of pure luxury, so Gatsby clearly owns these objects in order to impress others and demonstrate his ability to avoid death. His house contains a library full of books that looks as though it has been "transported complete from some ruin overseas" (Fitzgerald 45). Gatsby does not actually read these books, because he "didn't cut the pages" (Fitzgerald 46). Rather, these books merely indicate Gatsby's wealth and perceived importance. In his bedroom, his bureau is "garnished with a toilet set of pure dull gold" (Fitzgerald 91). Even a functional, everyday item becomes something to be admired and desired.

His bedroom contains "two hulking patent cabinets which held his massed suits and dressing gowns and ties, and his shirts, piled like bricks in stacks a dozen high" (Fitzgerald 92). His collection of clothes takes up so much room that it is contained in not one, but two cabinets that are described not as large, but "hulking." The small wardrobe Dan Cody purchased for Gatsby has grown into a mass of clothes piled high, purchased by "a man in England" who "sends over a selection of things at the beginning of each season" (Fitzgerald 92). He does not

even select his own clothes, suggesting that he wears these clothes not because he likes them or thinks they suit him, but because he believes they make him seem important and significant in the eyes of others. He wears clothing in bright, flashy colors, such as his “gorgeous, pink rag of a suit” and his “silver shirt, and gold-colored tie” (Fitzgerald 154, 84). These clothes are the opposite of subtle, meant to bring attention to the wearer and his ability to buy expensive items. Gold and silver, the color of precious metals, symbolize the money Gatsby possesses, and thus his resistance to his mortality.

He owns a Rolls-Royce that is “a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns” (Fitzgerald 64). The color suggests luxury and wealth, as Fitzgerald describes it as a rich color and it evokes images of decadent, creamy dishes. Its “monstrous length” implies it is almost too big – this car is over-the-top, and it is much more than Gatsby needs to get him from place to place. The car, swollen with different types of boxes, contains opportunities for any kind of activity or event that Gatsby could desire: shopping expeditions, sumptuous meals, attempts to build or fix something simply for something to do. The Rolls-Royce becomes more than just a car, as it is “terraced,” a description usually reserved for a building. Its “labyrinth of wind-shields” further emphasizes the immensity and unnecessary luxurious qualities of the car. The sun becomes multiplied by the vast power of the car, for like Daisy’s ability to buy star shine, the windshields mirror not just one sun, but a dozen. Fitzgerald describes the car as having “fenders spread like wings” that “scattered light” (Fitzgerald 68). This description suggests the car seems to defy gravity, a feat not far from Gatsby’s goal of defying mortality, and the suggestion that the car “scattered light” demonstrates its great power in its ability to affect and change the sun and nature.

Gatsby's parties and gatherings serve as the ultimate way for him to display his wealth and prestige to others and thereby ensure that he will not die, or at least will be considered to be immortal. His house serves as a source of enjoyment and entertainment for other people who are seen "diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound" (Fitzgerald 39). Nick does not observe Gatsby doing these things, making it seem as though Gatsby's house and possessions are not for his own enjoyment, but to impress others and to make Gatsby an object of admiration. Gatsby's Rolls-Royce "became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city... while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains" (Fitzgerald 39). Gatsby's wealth provides for his guests' convenience and transportation, making Gatsby seem powerful and important because he is able to provide for the needs of others. "[M]en and girls came and went like moths" at Gatsby's house, an image that suggests Gatsby provides the light, that is, the entertainment and amenities, that attract his guests like moths. Gatsby even provides a home for one of his guests, for Nick narrates, "A man named Klipspringer was there so often and so long that he became known as 'the boarder' – I doubt if he had any other home" (Fitzgerald 63). The power and wealth Gatsby possesses is so great that he is able to permanently house one of his guests without even thinking twice about the expense or inconvenience.

Gatsby holds weekly parties requiring "five crates of oranges and lemons ... from a fruiterer in New York" (Fitzgerald 39). After the parties, "these same oranges and lemons left [Gatsby's] back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves," an image that shows Gatsby's urge to consume and his own permanence and immortality in comparison with others and the objects he consumes. Gatsby's parties include excessive amounts of luxurious, rich foods: "glistening hors d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams... salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys

bewitched to a dark gold” (Fitzgerald 40). Fitzgerald describes the hors d’oeuvre as “glistening,” a word that suggests precious metals or jewels and emphasizes Gatsby’s use of his parties as a way of showcasing his wealth. The turkeys are “bewitched to a dark gold,” a description that makes Gatsby’s wealth and power appear to be magical and compares them to wealth and money. The party includes an orchestra, “no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums” (Fitzgerald 40). Listing all the different types of instruments emphasizes the enormity of the orchestra, and by providing this quality of music for the party, Gatsby further suggests his wealth, power, and his subsequent resistance to death. Gatsby’s parties are so excessive and luxurious partly because “People were not invited – they went there” (Fitzgerald 41). He holds parties not to entertain and socialize with his friends, but rather, to show off to people he does not even know. At the parties, these people “conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park. Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all,” (Fitzgerald 41). Gatsby’s house and wealth serve as a means of entertainment for people who do not even have to meet him to enjoy his possessions. He intends for people to come to his parties and see how much he owns and how powerful he is, rather than to become acquainted with him as a person, for he desires to be known not personally, but for his incredible wealth.

These parties not only showcase Gatsby’s incredible wealth, but they are also meant as a way to lure Daisy to Gatsby. However rich Gatsby is, he cannot completely become a part of the life he desires until he has possession of Daisy. When he finally sees Daisy again, he eagerly shows her his house, asking “Do you like it?” and showing her in through the formal front entrance (Fitzgerald 90). Gatsby attempts to showcase his wealth when he takes “out a pile of

shirts and beg[ins] throwing them, one by one before [Daisy and Nick]" (Fitzgerald 92). By carelessly throwing around his expensive clothing, and displaying it in "a soft rich heap," he seeks to win Daisy's approval and assurance that he has reached the status that he has aspired to for so long. He shows her the entire house, and throughout the tour "he hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy... he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes" (Fitzgerald 91). After showing Daisy the house, Gatsby wants to show her "the grounds and the swimming-pool, and thee hydroplane and the mid-summer flowers," further demonstrating his desire to show off his wealth to her and through this act, gain her admiration (Fitzgerald 92). Daisy and the lifestyle she lives serve as a model for Gatsby's aspirations, so Daisy's approval and admiration is essential to the success of everything he has worked for. In order to truly be a part of the wealthy class and preserve his youth, Gatsby must have Daisy approve of the identity he has created and the possessions he has amassed.

Gatsby's desire to win Daisy's seal of approval continues when she attends one of his parties. The moment she arrives, he urges, "Look around... You must see the faces of many people you've heard about" (Fitzgerald 104). He continues, "Perhaps you know that lady," and proceeds to point out a famous movie actress (Fitzgerald 104). By pointing out the famous people who deign to attend his parties, Gatsby seeks recognition for the incredible wealth, and thus immortality, that he has amassed. However, Daisy is unimpressed by the party, and Gatsby remarks, "She didn't like it... She didn't have a good time" (Fitzgerald 109). After this party, "the lights in his house failed to go on one Saturday night – and, as obscurely as it had begun, his career as Trimalchio was over," causing Nick to remark, "the whole caravansary had fallen in like a card house at the disapproval in her eyes" (Fitzgerald 113-114). Gatsby sees Daisy as the epitome of wealth, power, and everything he desires to be a part of, so he immediately puts a

stop to the parties when she expresses disapproval, assuming that these over-the-top displays of wealth are not the proper way to assert one's specialness and immortality.

Daisy and Gatsby begin spending time together, and she seems to approve of his possessions and behavior once he ceases throwing the riotous parties, but she still eludes him because in order to gain total possession of her, and thus the way of life and resistance to death that she represents, Gatsby alone must have her. She must renounce her relationship with Tom for Gatsby's transformation to be complete. Gatsby says of Daisy, "Her voice is full of money," and Nick remarks, "that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl..." (Fitzgerald 120). According to Roger Lewis in "Money, Love, and Aspiration in *The Great Gatsby*," "What Gatsby, with surprising consciousness, states is that Daisy's charm is allied to the attraction of wealth; money and love hold similar attractions" (50). For Gatsby, desire for money substitutes for love, and money represents access to immortality, so it is essential that he gain exclusive access to "the king's daughter, the golden girl." He cannot share her, for the jingle and cymbals' song must be his alone in order to drown out any possibility of death and decay.

Gatsby's dream starts to crumble when attempts to fully realize his dream of attaining immortality by getting Daisy all for himself and ascertaining that she has never loved anyone else. He says to Tom, "Your wife doesn't love you... She's never loved you. She loves me" (Fitzgerald 130). Daisy, however, cannot deny her love for Tom, bursting out, "Oh, you want too much! ... I love you now- isn't that enough? ... I did love him once – but I loved you too" (Fitzgerald 132). Daisy's ambivalence, combined with Tom's assertion of the validity of their relationship, seems "to bite physically into Gatsby" (Fitzgerald 132). The denial that he is the only one to truly have access to Daisy's wealth erodes away at Gatsby's dream, beginning to

break down the impression of invincibility and resistance to death that his wealth and near possession of Daisy has given him. He does not abandon his goal, and “the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly, toward that lost voice across the room” (Fitzgerald 134). Nick describes Gatsby’s dream as not merely crushed, but dead, an adjective that demonstrates the impossibility of Gatsby’s longing for immortality, for just as his dream is dead, he will soon be too. He tries in vain to reach Daisy’s voice that contains the promise of money, but her refusal of him has made her unattainable. Just as he lost her five years ago, she is again lost to him, this time for good. He cannot simply accept this defeat, however, for his commitment to his impossible dream is so deep that he will not abandon it, even when it is clearly shown to be out of reach.

Immortality slips farther out of Gatsby’s reach on the way home from New York, when Daisy runs down Myrtle in his car. Gatsby’s car, a symbol of prosperity, wealth, and everything he has worked to be a part of, becomes an instrument of violent death. This reversal is intensified by Daisy’s role in the accident, for Gatsby’s shining trophy who he thinks will gain him access to a prolonged life becomes associated with death and destruction. Everything Gatsby has aspired to tumbles down around him, for wealth and expensive possessions have not prevented him from being involved in this horrible and dangerous affair. He remains faithful to Daisy, but she has forsaken him in the aftermath of the accident, and he grows more and more distant from the immortality he craves. Nick states, “His house had never seemed so enormous to me as it did that night... There was an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere, and the rooms were musty, as though they hadn’t been aired for many days” (Fitzgerald 147-148). Far from the youthful vibrancy that Gatsby admired in Daisy’s house, his house seems huge, empty, and stuffy, promising not life and exciting activities, but boredom and death. Without Daisy, Gatsby’s

possessions and wealth mean nothing, for they alone cannot give him immortality, and neither can Daisy.

Nick says of Gatsby, “He was clutching at some last hope and I couldn’t bear to shake him free” (Fitzgerald 148). He later refers to Gatsby’s “incorruptible dream” after Gatsby remarks, “I suppose Daisy’ll call too” (Fitzgerald 154). Despite Daisy’s obvious dismissal of his commitment to her, Gatsby clings desperately to his dream of attaining her, because to abandon this dream would be to admit defeat and to give in to the inevitability of death. He goes out to the pool, having “left word with the butler that if any one phoned word was to be brought to him at the pool” (Fitzgerald 161). Earlier, he remarks that he has not used the pool all summer, but he chooses this day to lounge in the pool on an inflatable mattress, showing that he puts his entire day on hold while waiting for Daisy to contact him. This act of extreme leisure, which he participates in alone and isolated, represents Gatsby’s last attempt at attaining his now-destroyed dream. The last hours of his life are spent waiting for a call from Daisy which never comes.

Nick suggests, “Gatsby himself didn’t believe [the call] would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream” (Fitzgerald 161). Giving up on a relationship with Daisy meant giving up on immortality, so Gatsby accepts his imminent death because he has nothing left to live for. Everything he has strived for has been in vain, and the death he must now face is the “high price” he must pay for “living too long with a single dream.” Nick continues, “He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass” (Fitzgerald 161). The life and world he has imaged for himself have been demolished, and

he now sees how harsh and unforgiving reality really is. He is not immortal, as he has hoped for so long, but is in fact subject to the clutches of death as everyone else is.

Wilson act of shooting Gatsby and killing himself only serve to emphasize Gatsby's realization and abandonment of his dream. Gatsby's death comes as a result of his car causing Myrtle's death, suggesting the destructive, rather than life-giving, power of objects and materialism. Gatsby believes acquiring expensive objects and having Daisy all to himself will allow him to evade death, but he cannot completely acquire Daisy, and she instead uses one of his most prized possessions to cause not eternal life, but death. He places too much value in objects, viewing Daisy as an object and believing she and his other possessions will make him immortal, but his misplaced faith only leads to his downfall. Nick states kindly, "Gatsby turned out all right at the end," but this assessment is far too generous (Fitzgerald 2). His dreams were in vain, for instead of living on forever, literally or figuratively, he is immediately forgotten in death, as no one comes to his funeral. Owl-Eyes makes an assessment of Gatsby that is far more accurate, referring to him as "The poor son-of-a-bitch" (Fitzgerald 175). His excessive wealth and gorgeous mansion do nothing to set him apart from any other poor son-of-a-bitch whose lives inevitably come to an end.

His efforts to attain Daisy and gain immortality through her are no more successful, as she abandons him and he realizes too late that he has set his sights on the wrong goal. He views her as being, "High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl" who is "gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (Fitzgerald 120, 150). He considers her made out of precious metals, separate and protected from mortality and other earthly misfortunes, but this view of her turns out to be false. She is very human, a woman who gives birth to a child, cheats on her husband, kills another person, and allows Gatsby to take the blame

for her mistake. The last time Nick sees Daisy, he observes her eating “cold fried chicken” and ale while conspiring with Tom about how to get away with her crime (Fitzgerald 145). This view of her as an embodied, human person eating very earthly, hearty foods contrasts sharply with Nick’s first description of Daisy as wearing white and floating in the air. While she initially appears to be angelic and impervious to death, she proves to be just as human as anyone else, and Gatsby focuses all his energy and admiration on someone who does not deserve it.

In the end, Gatsby stays true to his “religion” of materialism and Daisy, but it destroys him. Throughout the entire novel, traditional religion is replaced worship of the god of materialism. Wilson remarks, ““God sees everything,”” but he mistakes the advertisement of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg for God, replacing traditional religion with materialism (Fitzgerald 160). Gatsby is “a son of God,” but this refers not to the Christian God, but the god of consumerism, of “a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty” (Fitzgerald 98). This substitution of the pursuit of wealth for Christian religion acts as a way to deal with the terror of mortality, but Gatsby’s fate seems to suggest the dangerous implications of this substitution. Nick remarks, “When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever,” a rejection of the false religion of materialism and a desire for a more meaningful approach to life (Fitzgerald 2). He mentions that “foul dust floated in the wake of [Gatsby’s] dreams,” suggesting that although Gatsby put all his energy and efforts into sustaining a dream of acquisition and everlasting life, his dreams failed, leaving only unhappy, uncomfortable memories for the few people who care to remember him (Fitzgerald 2). His statement that “Gatsby turned out all right in the end” suggests that Nick understands Gatsby’s unflinching commitment to a dream, even if this dream was foolish and impossible to achieve. Fitzgerald concludes that although acquisition and consumption appear to be a way of denying

mortality and reflect human beings' need to believe deeply in something, it can be a futile and potentially hazardous approach to life.

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* also demonstrates the attempt to deny human mortality through the accumulation of wealth and possessions. Willy Loman makes his living as a salesman, but he sells not merely stockings, but himself. He tries his hardest to get others to "buy" the image of himself as a successful, prosperous businessman, even though this is not truly who he is, but a false identity he has created for himself. He fails and cannot achieve the wealth and lifestyle he desires, but continues pretending he has attained it and keeps aiming desperately at his dream. He hopes his son, Biff, will achieve what Willy has failed to grasp, so that Willy can attain immortality by living on through the legacy of his son. However, Biff rejects the goal Willy spends his life aiming for, and thus Willy has no way of evading a mundane death besides committing suicide to get insurance money which Biff can use to achieve the success Willy wants for him. The scant attendance at his funeral, and the remarks of his family that his death was needless, demonstrates the futility of trying to gain immortality through money and objects.

Willy encounters several different models of success and masculinity. The first model is that of an agrarian man who works with his hands to grow plants and build things. Willy fits most naturally into this model, as he demonstrates a great interest in gardening and improving the house, and Biff remarks, "There's more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made" (Miller 110). However, this model of success no longer has any status or recognition in society, so Willy gravitates towards a model that will win him more respect and admiration. Willy's brother Ben represents a different model of success, one of imperialism and capitalism that involves cheating and a Darwinian struggle to eat or be eaten. At the suggestion that "the jails are full of fearless characters," Ben responds, "And the stock exchange, friend!" (Miller 35).

According to this model of success, being liked by others is not as important as seizing wealth and power, and it is acceptable to do so in an unscrupulous way if necessary. This model of success holds some appeal for Willy, for it seems to elevate Ben and give him power over death in a few ways. For instance, his possession of diamond mines suggests something hard and permanent to protect the owner against the threat of death, and Ben's constant refrain of "by God, I was rich!" suggests immortality because the use of God's name implies an association of Ben with God, as through wealth, he becomes immortal and thus close to godlike status (Miller 33).

However, the model of success and masculinity that Willy chooses believes in is that of a salesman. He is prepared to go to Alaska with Ben, and thus attempt to gain success through the imperialistic model of brutally and forcefully seizing possession of wealth, but he changes his mind when he meets Dave Singleman. Willy says of this experience, "And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on his green velvet slippers - I'll never forget - and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want" (Miller 60-61). Singleman's lifestyle attracts Willy because he is "remembered and loved and helped by so many different people," and "when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral" (Miller 61).

Even Dave Singleman's name draws Willy in, as "single man" suggests how admired and set apart the salesman is from the rest of the mundane, average population. Based on this idea, Willy states, "[I]t's not what you do, Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face! ... [T]hat's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked!" (Miller 65-66). The idea of gaining something tangible like diamonds from

something as intangible as popularity intrigues Willy. He realizes that he can gain success and wealth through selling, but he also realizes this kind of lifestyle can allow him to evade death, not only through the possessions he will acquire, but by how admired and well-liked he will become. Even when he dies, he will be remembered and missed by everyone he makes an impression on, and this approach appeals to Willy much more than the brutal, unscrupulous model of success that Ben represents.

Willy embraces Dave Singleman's model of success, attempting to sell himself as well as his merchandise. He constructs an identity for himself, an image to present to others so that they might like and admire him. He aims to become well-liked and attract people to him to gain social success, a way of avoiding the mediocre death he fears, but this proves difficult to him because he is not Dave Singleman, but Willy Loman, or "low man." Not special but ordinary, he struggles to make an impression on people, and thus must invent a false image of himself as a successful, admired, and well-liked salesman. According to Chester E. Eisinger in his article "The Wrong Dreams," "Under the pressure to succeed in business, the appearance of things is always more important than the reality, and the truth about one's accomplishments is never impressive enough; it is, consequently, necessary to delude everyone, even oneself, so often that lying becomes the habitual mode of discourse and hypocrisy the accepted moral stance. Or so Willy thinks" (170). Throughout the play, Willy struggles valiantly to hold fast to this constructed identity and make it prove true in some way, but he fails to actually gain success and renown and can only pretend.

Because Willy fails to become well-liked and cannot sell much, he exaggerates his success to others in order to appear as he hopes to one day be. He tells his sons, "[I] met the Mayor... And then he had coffee with me," and, "I have friends. I can park my car in any street

in New England, and the cops protect it like their own” (Miller 18-19). By claiming to associate with the mayor, Willy puts himself at a near-equal status with this important figure, and by claiming to be above the law, he elevates himself to also seem to be above the laws of nature, such as death. Willy is similar to Gatsby in this claim, because Gatsby too has a run-in with a police officer but manages to avoid trouble because of his status and power, but unlike Gatsby, Willy’s elevation above the law is imagined rather than real. Willy later claims, “I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. ‘Willy Loman is here!’ That’s all they have to know, and I go right through” (Miller 21). Once again, Willy asserts that he is above the rules, as his name has such powerful influence that he is placed ahead of more average, mundane people. In addition to being above the law and business rules, Willy claims, “I was sellin’ thousands and thousands, but I had to come home” (Miller 22). Rather than specifying a specific number, Willy uses the phrase “thousands and thousands” to make his selling success seem to go endlessly on and on, emphasizing the amount of money he has made and still has the capacity to earn more of. Through Willy’s exaggerated praise of himself, he appears to be wealthy, powerful, and above human mortality.

Although Willy boasts about his alleged success, he actually proves to be a very mediocre and average man. When his wife inquires the exact amount he has sold, he responds, “I did five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston,” but when she begins to calculate his earnings, he adds, “Well, I didn’t figure it yet, but... Well, I – I did – about a hundred and eighty gross in Providence. Well, no – it came to – roughly two hundred gross on the whole trip” (Miller 22). He at first maintains his exaggerated amount, but by admitting the truth to Linda, he demonstrates that although he pretends to be a big-shot business-man, this is really only what he aspires to be. Soon after this statement, he adds, “I’ll knock ‘em dead next

week... people don't seem to take to me ... they just pass me by. I'm not noticed" (Miller 23). Although he initially continues his charade of financial accomplishment, he ends up admitting that he is not well-respected or admired, but merely overlooked. He attempts to gain immortality by merely acting as if he is so wealthy he is immune to death, while desperately attempting to actually gain this success but never quite succeeding.

Willy places faith in his sons, hoping to evade death through Biff's material and social success even if he cannot achieve it on his own. Just as Gatsby idealizes Daisy, Willy views Biff as a shining beacon who represents everything Willy longs for and hopes to achieve. He continually thinks back on Biff playing football in the Ebbets Field Game, musing that Biff was the tallest player on the team, wore gold, and looked "like a young god. Hercules...the sun all around him" (Miller 51). This memory of Biff makes him seem magical, beautiful, and more than human, and remembering Biff this way allows Willy to sustain hope that he can attain this immortality through his son's achievements. Biff's gold uniform suggests wealth and power, while the college representatives watching and the cheers of "Loman, Loman, Loman!" demonstrate the power Biff possesses because he is well-liked, admired, and sought-after. In his article "Arthur Miller," C.W.E. Bigsby writes, "His sons are his only chance to succeed by proxy, the only mark he has left on a world resistant to his charm and his human needs alike" (109). Willy's failure to become like Dave Singleman will not matter if Biff can achieve this kind of success, and when Willy remembers this momentous occasion, he sees Biff as able to accomplish anything he chooses.

Throughout the play, Willy comments on the potential to succeed and prosper that he believes both of his sons, but particularly Biff, possess. He tells Biff and Happy, "I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises," (Miller 21). The mention of the Greek god of

beauty and desire suggests how good-looking and appealing the boys are, and Willy feels glad of this because being attractive makes it easier to be well-liked and admired. Comparing the boys to gods in general suggests their potential to become immortal if they continue the way they are headed. Years later, he says of Biff, “He could be big in no time. My God! Remember how they used to follow him around in high school? When he smiled at one of them their faces lit up” (Miller 6). Looking back on Biff’s popularity throughout high school, Willy has no doubt that he can achieve this level of success again, but this time in the business world. The phrase “My God!” not only serves as an exclamation, for Willy also implies that to him, Biff acts as a god-figure because of his potential for success and thus potential to defy death. Willy further expresses confidence in his son’s potential when he states, “Lick the world! You guys together could absolutely lick the civilized world” (Miller 47). His statement demonstrates his belief that his boys have the potential to not only become successful, but to be more successful than the entire “civilized world.” His repetition of the phrase further emphasizes his confidence in Biff and Happy. Just as Gatsby views Daisy as an essential piece of the dream he longs to attain, Willy’s sons represent Willy’s attainment of immortality and serve as his substitute for God and religion.

Willy misplaces his faith and hope, however, because neither Happy nor Biff lives up to their father’s expectations. Happy says his life is “what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women” (Miller 12). However, he has an average job, is not wildly successful or wealthy, and does not feel satisfied with himself. He makes enough money to support himself, but he is neither successful nor well-liked enough to gain the kind of recognition and renown after death that Willy admires so much. Willy dismisses Happy’s achievements, for when Happy offers to support his father financially, Willy replies, “You’ll retire me for life on seventy

goddamn dollars a week?” (Miller 28). Through this statement, Willy minimizes everything Happy has worked for, for although Happy has dedicated his life to the pursuit of the same goals Willy values, he has not done well enough to be remembered after death. Willy’s use of the expletive “goddamn” suggests that Happy’s achievements are not enough to reach godlike status.

Although Willy favors Biff as having more potential to achieve success and immortality, he has even less success than Happy at reaching these goals. He initially admires his father’s apparent business success and strives to live by this idea by excelling in football and valuing his own popularity. However, he becomes disillusioned with this way of life when he discovers his father’s affair, saying to Willy, “You fake! You phony little fake!” (Miller 95). This statement refers not only to the falseness of Willy’s marriage, but to Willy’s practice of exaggerating his own success and desperately seeking to be well-liked. Later, Biff says of his own career, “I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind of another. And it’s a measly manner of existence” (Miller 10). He also says, “I don’t know what the future is. I don’t know – what I’m supposed to want” (Miller 10). While Happy at least embraces Willy’s idea of success, even though he does not succeed at it, Biff cannot even tolerate this kind of lifestyle. Rather than looking to the future that these kinds of jobs could provide for him, Biff refers to the process of working oneself up to be well-liked as “a measly manner of existence.”

Willy exaggerates the success of both of his sons, and while Happy goes along with this, Biff ultimately refuses to pretend. He says, “I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been. We’ve been talking in a dream for fifteen years” (Miller 81). “I don’t know who said it first, but I was never a salesman for Bill Oliver . . . Let’s hold on to the facts tonight, Pop. We’re not going to get anywhere bullin’ around. I was a shipping clerk” (Miller 83). Rather than

exaggerating his own success, and believing that if others buy into the lie, it will eventually become real, Biff refuses to buy into the false identity his father wants him to adopt. While Willy assumes Biff wants to spite him by denying his potential, Biff states, “I’m a bum... I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody!” (Miller 102, 105). Biff denies that he is the godlike person Willy believes he is, saying, “Why am I trying to become what I don’t want to be? What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there” (Miller 105). He continues, “I’m a dime a dozen...I’m not bringing home any prizes any more... I’m nothing! ... There’s no spite in it any more. I’m just what I am, that’s all” (Miller 106). Biff attempts to shatter Willy’s idealization of him as godlike and full of potential by stating that, rather than being able to deny death and being admired and remembered, he is just an average man. He no longer will attempt to gain business success because he does not enjoy this kind of life, and he will never succeed at it. Through honesty, Biff believes he can tear down his father’s deluded view of him.

However, Willy cannot give up his faith in Biff. He reaches an all time low in his own business success, for after working thirty-six years, his salary is taken away, and he is “on straight commission, like a beginner, an unknown!” (Miller 41). Rather than finally living up to the inflated image he has created for himself, his success is declining as he becomes less recognized and well-liked. When he approaches his boss to demand the recognition he deserves, his boss tells him, “I don’t want you to represent us... I think you need a good long rest, Willy” (Miller 63). Willy has been dismissed, and everything he has worked for his entire life has been obliterated. He goes to his friend Charley for help, saying, “I’m strapped, I’m strapped. I don’t know what to do. I was just fired” (Miller 75). He has put so much into his job for so long that he

feels lost without it, but when Charley offers him a job he refuses it. He cannot give up on his idea of achieving success, wealth, and immortality through being a well-liked salesman.

Faced with his own failure, Willy places all his faith in Biff, hoping to be remembered and gain immortality through Biff's success. Although Biff is not godlike and perfect, as Willy imagines him to be, but admits that he is "nothing," Willy cannot give up hope that Biff will be successful and admired. Just as Gatsby remains loyal to Daisy, although she proves to be quite human and flawed, Willy continues to believe in Biff. He says of Biff, "A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!" (Miller 51). Linda says to Happy and Biff, "He put his whole life into you" (Miller 43). He has put so much into his sons, particularly Biff, and has failed in his own attempt at financial and social success, he does not know how to move forward without these goals. Thus, even when Biff says, "I'm nothing... Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?" Willy can only remark, "Biff – he likes me! ... That boy – that boy is going to be magnificent!" (Miller 106). He cannot accept the fact that Biff is never going to be magnificent, so he continues to believe that with the right opportunity and resources, Biff will make something of himself, and make Willy successful by proxy.

Willy decides that the only way to be regarded and remembered as someone important and valuable is to give Biff enough money to make a start in the business world. As he has no other way of getting any money, and "A man can't go out the way he came in... a man has got to add up to something," Willy decides he is "worth more dead than alive" (Miller 99, 76). He decides to kill himself to get the insurance money for Biff, musing, "Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?" (Miller 108). Even though Biff tells Willy that he cannot, and will not, succeed in the business world, Willy still sacrifices himself

for Biff, dying for him because he cannot give up on his dream and sees no other way of attaining it. Right before he dies, Willy begins reminiscing about Biff's football game, because, although he remarks that this was "the greatest day of [Biff's] life," it was the greatest day of Willy's life, too. Willy must regain the glory he and Biff enjoyed years ago, and the only way to regain this immortality is by committing suicide for the insurance money.

Miller emphasizes the futility of Willy's death through the use of his car, rather than the rubber tube connected to the gas in the basement, as the instrument of Willy's death. Willy prizes his car as a symbol of a salesman's success and as the means for him to travel and thus make sales, and he states, "The dealer refused to believe there was eighty thousand miles on it," suggesting the power the car imparted to defy death and aging (Miller 8). When his children are young, Willy encourages them to "simonize" the car, instructing them to take good care of it to keep it looking nice and running well, hoping that through the maintenance of his car, he will preserve his image as a successful salesman, and teach his sons to do the same. By using his present-day car as a way of killing himself, Willy destroys the aesthetic value and the functionality of the car, making it worthless. While he may have intended to use this object of death-defying power to help him carry out his last action to acquire money for Biff, his death by car accident demonstrates the danger of putting too much importance and emphasis on obtaining immortality. Willy focuses all his energy on maintaining an appearance of material, business, and social success, and ends up killing himself with an object meant to maintain this image.

Willy's failure to obtain immortality through his suicide becomes more apparent at his funeral. Willy predicts, "that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates – [Biff] will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized – I am known," assuming his funeral will be

similar to the grand affair of Dave Singleman's funeral (Miller 100). However, Linda asks at the funeral, "Why didn't anybody come? ... [W]here are all the people he knew?" (110). It is almost as somber and forlorn as Gatsby's funeral, because just as all the people who allegedly admire Gatsby and regard him as immortal neglect to come, none of Willy's friends and admirers, real or imagined, come to his funeral except his family and Charley. And just as Daisy forsakes Gatsby by failing to attend his funeral, Biff does not live up to Willy's expectations because he does not praise Willy as a great man, but simply says, "He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong... He never knew who he was" (Miller 111).

Biff's failure to carry on Willy's dream, as Willy believes he will, further demonstrates the futility of Willy's actions. His sacrifice was in vain, for instead of gaining the insurance money for Biff to use to become magnificent, his death changes nothing. Biff will continue as he always has, and although Happy vows to carry on Willy's legacy to show "everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain," Happy has proved himself to be mediocre and probably will not follow through with this declaration (Miller 111). Furthermore, Willy did not view Happy as a god and a source of hope as he did Biff, so his dedication to Willy after his death means next to nothing. Charley seems to impart some dignity to Willy's death with his statement, "Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream," but he really just recognizes and normalizes the compulsion to sell oneself and gain immortality through the transaction (Miller 111). In this way, Charley fulfills the function that Nick fulfills in *The Great Gatsby*, for just as Nick suggests that Gatsby "turned out all right," Charley cautions that no one should blame Willy for his actions. Charley's statement does not address the crux of the problem, for even if a salesman has "got to dream," Willy should not have tried to be a salesman in the first place.

The dismal funeral scenes and apparent futility of each character's death paint a bleak and depressing picture of society and human nature, for if we all try to avoid death by acquiring wealth and objects, both Gatsby and Willy demonstrate that this practice does not accomplish immortality and can be destructive. However, both works offer a more hopeful and universal insight into humans' need to believe in something. Whether it is religion, love, or materialism, it is human nature to need to believe deeply in something, to strive for some long-pursued ideal or goal. *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* both speak to the human need to dream, and the value of remaining faithful to this dream even if it is never fulfilled. Gatsby and Willy both remain faithful to their dreams until the end, and are willing to sacrifice themselves in order to do so, and it is this dedication which redeems them.

Nick condemns Gatsby's confusion of materialism with something more meaningful like religion; he states, "Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (Fitzgerald 2). Gatsby's love for Daisy becomes tangled up in the "foul dust" of materialism which becomes a destructive force that consumes Gatsby's life, but his undying faithfulness to the ideal of Daisy represents the human need to believe in something. Even when Daisy proves imperfect and does not live up to Gatsby's ideal, he sacrifices himself for her in order to affirm his need to dream. He believes "in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us," a dream that affirms a human need even when unfulfilled, because it is the act of hoping and believing that we yearn for (Fitzgerald 180).

Willy too believes in this green light, because "for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life... He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine" (Miller 111). Willy's desire to be well-liked takes over his entire existence, but his continual faith in Biff,

despite Biff's failures and flaws, reflects his need to have faith in something. His sacrifice for Biff, like Gatsby's sacrifice for Daisy, proves that he never gives up on his dream, however misguided it is. Miller presents Willy in a slightly more ambivalent way than Fitzgerald presents Gatsby, for although Charley states that Willy should not be blamed, Biff asserts, "He had all the wrong dreams" (Miller 111). While Nick merely condemns the foul dust that floats in the wake of Gatsby's dreams, Biff criticizes the dreams themselves. Biff acts as a voice of criticism that is not present in *The Great Gatsby*, because he disagrees with Charley's idealized praise of Gatsby's dedication to a dream whereas Nick consistently views Gatsby in a positive way. Miller seems to offer a more hesitant statement about dreams than Fitzgerald, for the mixed reactions to Willy's death suggest that it is natural and even admirable to adhere strongly to a dream, but it can be harmful if we choose the wrong dream.

Nick and Charley both pinpoint the redeeming aspect of Gatsby's and Willy's lives, dismissing the ultimate failure of both men's dreams because the act of dreaming and remaining true to an ideal is more important than the actual fulfillment of the particular dream. Even if Gatsby placed his faith in materialism rather than actual love, and Willy "had the wrong dreams," their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their dreams reflects a universal human need. The conclusion *Death of a Salesman* is slightly darker than that of *The Great Gatsby*, as Biff's statements at the funeral suggest that following a dream too zealously can be negative if it gets in the way of happiness and survival. However, Charley's statement, "Nobody dast blame this man," rings true because nobody is exempt from the need to believe deeply in something (Miller 111). When Charley says, "A salesman is got to dream," this applies to every human being (Miller 111). This human need to dream has made these two texts classics because they showcase a basic yearning to which everyone can relate. Like Gatsby, we all believe in "the

orgastic future that year by year recedes before us” (Fitzgerald 180). Fitzgerald’s final sentences sum up human existence: “It eluded us then, but that’s no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. ... And one fine morning – So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (Fitzgerald 180). Even though our dreams are forever beyond our grasp, it is the pursuit of a dream that fulfills us. It is the pursuit of a dream that makes us human and that allows us to escape the overwhelming of our own human mortality.

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