Caharacter Analysis Jay Gatsby And Willy Loman Essay, Research Paper

Scott Fitzgerald, author of The Great Gatsby, and Arthur Miller, author of Death of a

Salesman, both tell the stories of men in the costly pursuit of the American dream. As a result of

several conflicts, both external and internal, both characters experience an extinction of the one

thing that they have set their sights on…. The American Dream.

Jay Gatsby, a mysterious, young and very wealthy man, fatally chases an impossible

dream. Gatsby attempts to rekindle an old relationship and has confidence in repeating the past.

Gatsby claims that he is going to “fix everything just the way it was before” (Fitzgerald 117). In a

a conversation with Nick, Gatsby discusses how the past can be repeated and how he wants the

relationship that he once had with Daisy (Fitzgerald 116). Secondly, Gatsby attempts to

exemplify his wealth through fancy cars and stylish clothing. Gatsby shows his clothing to Daisy

and informs her that he has a “man in England” who buys his clothes every season (Fitzgerald

97). Illustrating his wealth, Gatsby drives a Rolls Royce that “was a rich cream color, bright with

nickel” (Fitzgerald 68). Although Gatsby’s foolish quest of the American dream exemplifies a

respectable aspiration, it ends in a tragic death that goes virtually unnoticed. A sharp contrast to

the parties , the funeral was sparingly attended and “nobody came” (Fitzgerald 182). Following

the death of Gatsby Daisy leaves town with Tom and “hadn’t sent a message or a flower”

(Fitzgerald 183).

An elderly salesman lost in false hopes and illusions, Willy Loman works for strict

commission and cannot bring home enough money to pay his bills. Willy foolishly pursues the

wrong dream and constantly lives in an unreal world blinded from reality. Despite his dream

Willy constantly attempts to live in an artificial world and claims “If old Wagner was alive I’d be

in charge of New York by now” (Miller 14). As a result, Willy often ignores his troubles and

denies any financial trouble when he says “business is bad, it’s murderous. But not for me of

course” (Miller 51). Another false segment of Willy’s dream includes the success of his two sons

Happy and Biff. Biff was a high school football star who never cared about academics and now

that he needs a job says “screw the business world” (Miller 61). Ironically, Willy suggests that

Biff go west an “be a carpenter, or a cowboy, enjoy yourself!”, an idea that perhaps Willy should

have pursued. Constantly advising his boys of the importance of being well liked, Willy fails to

stress academics as an important part of life (Miller 40). Furthermore, Willy dies an unexpected

death that reveals important causes of the failure to achieve the American dream. At the funeral

Linda cries “I made the last payment on the house today… and there’ll be nobody home” to say

that she misses Willy but in essence his death freed the Lomans from debt and the hopes and

expectations Willy placed on his family (Miller 139). Very few people attend Willy’s funeral but

they all agree that “he had the wrong dreams” and how “he was a happy man with a batch of

cement” (Miller 138).

Both Jay Gastby and Willy Loman fail to achieve the American dream. Both men share

the common dream to be happy and live a content life, but are unable to conquer their desire.

Gatsby’s dream of winning Daisy crumbles and he “didn’t believe it would come and perhaps he

no longer cared” (Fitzgerald 169). With the well being of his family in mind Willy eliminates any

chance of achieving his dream by taking his own life and allowing his family to collect the life

insurance money (Miller 136). A key external difference between the two characters lies in the

financial situations. Willy worked hard for the little money he earned, received no credit for his

hard work, and was even fired (Miller 97). Gatsby is a self made man who achieves financial

success through illegal acts, but fails to understand how wealth works in society (Fitzgerald 78).

Lastly, the dreams of the two men were truly unattainable and were perhaps the one true thing

that prevented happiness.

Ultimately, the chase of the American dream proved to be a costly, and even deadly

journey. Although the two characters were of opposite financial status and social rank, both men

lose their lives in the quest for their dreams. In reality the stories both convey a similar message:

that one must set achievable goals to be happy and that often times you have to be happy with

what you have and who you are.

Bibliography

none- Death of a Salesman

The Great Gatsby