The Representative Of American Dream In Literature

Many times people grow up with the pressure to fulfill the American Dream and be successful no matter who they are. The American Dream is often measured by achievements such as a nice house and a good job, not happiness. This idea can be seen in the similarities of the characters Tom Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie and Biff Lowman in Death of a Salesman. The struggles that Tom and Biff face reveal that one may choose to follow their own dreams and be happy even if it does not fulfill the traditional American Dream.

At the beginning of the plays, both Tom and Biff show dislike towards their current lives as they struggle to satisfy the American Dream. Tom, who works for a shoe factory to support his mom and sister, tells his mother “You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? Do you think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You think I want to spend fifty- five years down there in that - Celotex interior! with - fluorescent - tubes! Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains,” (Williams 1165). Tom’s negative attitude and word choice when describing his job show that he is unhappy with what he is doing with his life. He is only doing it to support his family because as the man of the house he feels obligated to fulfill responsibilities like paying for the rent and groceries. Although Biff is not stuck in a job that he does not want to be in like Tom, he knows that to please his family he needs to find an office job. Biff thinks of a 9 to 5 job as something people do “to suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off”. The last thing Biff wants is a steady job because he knows that it will not make him happy in life, he would rather have a job outdoors. To most people, the American Dream is having a steady job to support their own livelihood, but to Tom and Biff, they would rather follow their own dreams even though it might not make them as successful as others.

Tom and Biff both try to escape their unhappy lives in some way. Tom writes, goes out drinking, and goes to the movies as “compensation for lives that passed like mine, without any change or adventure,” (Williams 1173). Tom’s static mundane life provides no excitement for him so he tries to find it elsewhere. Going to the movies is his way of finding adventure and happiness in a life that he hates. Tom desperately wants adventure in his life but feels obligated to support his family. Going to the movies is a way for Tom to escape for a while without disappointing his family. Biff gets his adventure by going to different farms throughout the year and working, a life that he actually enjoys, but because he has multiple different jobs in the year he feels as though “[He’s] not gettin’ anywhere!... [He’s] thirty-four years old, [he] oughta be makin’ [his] future'. Biff came home because he feels like a failure because he does not have traditional success and he wants to make his family proud of him. Both Tom and Biff have parts of their life that give them some joy but, most of the time they feel unhappy and like a failure. They both feel obligated to make their families proud and they think the only way is through the traditional American Dream. The constant burden to follow the American Dream costs them their happiness.

Tom and Biff both want to follow a different kind of American Dream besides the traditional big family, nice house, and a good-paying steady job. Tom’s dream is to travel and have an adventure. Biff’s dream is to enjoy life outdoors even if it is n0t well paid. At the end of both plays, they both break societal norms and do what they want. Tom leaves his mother and sister

behind and “didn't go to the moon, [he] went much further”. Tom finally got his adventure and traveled and lived in many different places. Although he felt a little guilty for leaving his sister behind he felt more happiness in exploring the world. Biff decides to not live the same life his father did, he even tells his father “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”. Biff finally accepts that he is not built for a life in business and decides to leave in the morning for the life he wants to live. These are alternate versions of the American Dream, focused more on happiness rather than success. Tom and Biff both chose to ignore the pressures of the Traditional American Dream and follow their own dreams in order to be happy.

The characters Tom and Biff from The Glass Menagerie and Death of a Salesman both have a similar problem: they feel unhappy in the traditional American Dream. Their struggle to break off from societal norms and follow their own path shows that sometimes people will choose happiness in their own dreams rather than follow the traditional American Dream.