

## American Dream As Utopian Fantasy: A Study Of Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*

S. Rupapriya<sup>1</sup>, Dr. J. Arul Anand<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University. [18pgenglish013@gmail.com](mailto:18pgenglish013@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, Professor & Head, Department of English, Annamalai University.

### Abstract

The history of American Dream glorifies an endless opportunities to the people of America which includes rights, liberty, being successful and equality that have to be possessed through hard work and dedication. This can create a better or ideal society, which can also be termed as Utopia. Through Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes* this American Dream turns into a mere fantasy. The carnival owned by Mr. Dark and Cooger prevails the townspeople and satisfies their wish which is a trap to get them into the pit, from where people loses their own nature and their loved ones particularly for whom they wanted to change themselves. Anyhow Will and his father Charles Halloway save the townspeople and Jim, Will's best friend by defeating the Sinister Carnival. This articles aims to explore the American Dream as Utopian Fantasy where at last through the character of Charles Halloway who ignores the fact that he is old and accept to be old rather changing into youth, he works hard and dedicates himself to save his son Will and the townspeople. Here the article also provides a great vision that American Dream is alive when the people accepts and fulfilled with their own properties.

**Keywords:** American Dream, hard work, dedication, fantasy, Sinister Carnival.

Most of the works of fiction from America written during the twentieth and twenty first century are about the impact of American Dream on the lives of Americans. In the early part of the twentieth century, people in America were driven by a rare passion for success and happiness in life. They thought that by their very birth as Americans they were bound to succeed in life. America seemed to be a land of plenty and prosperity. It was often visualized as a paradise on the Earth. If you were born in America you were born to taste success in life. People thought that a dream life was almost assumed for all who breathed in America. This American Dream about success was the real motivating force behind the lives of Americans. However, this dream proved to be a mere fantasy. People slowly realized that life without hard work can never be that easy and successful. However high pitched and ideal a dream may be, in the absence of proper plan and hard work will simply turn out to be utopian fantasy. This idea has been frequently made used by American writers in their works. Bradbury is one among the crowd.

Ray Douglas Bradbury (1920-2012) was one of the dominating figures in American writings. He was the author of more than three dozen books, which includes his classics *Fahrenheit 451*, *Dandelion Wine*, *The Martian Chronicle*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and many more. He also got numerous awards in his lifetime like Inkpot Award, Pulitzer Prize in Special Citation etc. Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Illinois which later became Green Town, Illinois and served as a setting for his numerous novels and short stories. He states that "Old is Utopia and new is Rubbish." Bradbury focused upon themes like Fantasy, Horror, Loss of Innocence and his concepts reside along with American Dream.

*Something Wicked This Way Comes* was published in the year 1962. This particular fantasy revolves around two energetic pre adolescent boys and the carnival that arrived too early in the month of Halloween, it earned Bradbury a huge success and collected a large number of young audience. This book was adopted as a film by Walt Disney production. The title of this novel was taken from William Shakespeare's drama *Macbeth* that appears in act four scene one. One of the witches chants, "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes." The title represents the arrival of something maybe harmful to the village; symbolically it represents the arrival of the evil carnival to the village. This article aims to associate the American Dream as Utopian Fantasy with the reference to the novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes*.

The entire novel sets in the village Green Town, Illinois in the month of October, not a good or bad month because it's a month where schools are already in open and this month is also called as the Halloween month where it is believed that the people who died will return back to the Earth. The novel tells the story of Will, Jim two friends who are going to celebrate their fourteenth birthday and the arrival of the carnival to the town. The novel explores the theme of loss of innocence, a fight between good and evil, love between father and son, time, age and accepting fact as it is. American dream revolves around achieving success which may come through hard work but the carnival inherited by Dark and Cooger spoils the mindset of the people in the village and makes them to believe that anyone can achieve their dream even without hard work. When people followed the tricks of the evil masters and they also achieved their dream within some days they learn it is just utopian fantasy.

There are two versions of the American dream. The historical American dream is the promise of a land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all. This dream needs no challenge, only fulfillment. But since the Civil War, and particularly since 1900, the American dream has become distorted to the dream of business success . . . The original premise of our dream of success . . . was that enterprise, courage, and hard work were the keys to success. (Clurman 132)

One fine night Will and Jim hear the music which fades soon. Both the boys run to the library where Charles, Will's father is introduced as a man with white hair who always isolates him inside the library who is also with an inferiority complex because of the age difference between him and his son. In the beginning of the novel Charles does not accept himself as a father of a twelve year old little boy. But anyway he loves his son Will more than anything in this world. Acceptance and fulfillment is one of the main aspects in this novel. The carnival preys on the people showing their desire through mirror maze. It operates during the day time to attract people and tempt them to come in night to change their fate. People also don't accept being old or unsuccessful they are unsatisfied with their goal in life which became bait for Mr. Dark. They want to succeed in life without working hard and also be happy with what they don't deserve to have. This may be seen nothing but a mere Utopian Fantasy an unrealistic and superficial goal of their lives which goes wrong and after attaining success through this unethical tricks people suffers a lot. They become inferior to themselves and the people for whom they wanted to change. Here Miss Foley is shown as a good example, once she was logging for her youth and finally gains it. All of a sudden a young mature woman transforms into a little girl. Her wish becomes successful but even now she is not happy. When a human gets everything he/she wished for, they cannot be happy and fulfilled in return they will aim for another thing or much better wishes will strive their heart. Thus by accepting and getting fulfilled with whatever they have will can make them happy.

The darker side of the carnival represents the darker side of American dream. Most of the events in the novel take place in the night that is in the dark. Even the carousel in the carnival operates in the night which is in repair condition for all day. Carousel becomes as a reflection of evil intention behind those evil events. The repaired carousel repairs the lives of people according to mirror maze which detects the damage and provides maturity or youth according to the wish made by the people, the magical carousel can go forward or backward a year or many more years. Even the antagonist of the novel is named as Mr. Dark who supports the viciousness of his goal. Desires of the characters to assume their dreams itself reveals as an unethical action. Every character has different dreams and appraisals which seem to be a fantasy. Mr. Dark also focuses on people with such Utopian Fantasy. When the boys arrived to the carnival to discover the damaged carousel they were caught by Mr. Dark and Cooger, who explains them about the carnival. Mr. Dark speaks only to Jim, avoiding Will. He knows well that he can't spoil the mind of Will which will be easy in the case of Jim. From this it is detected that people with wrong assumption of American Dream are fragile and that anyone can trap them into consequence.

The red-lettered sign said: OUT OF ORDER! KEEP OFF!

Out of order, said the man. Can't you read?

Pandemonium Theater Company....

He handed the card to Jim. It now read:

Our speciality: to examine, oil, polish, and repair

Death-Watch Beetles. (64-66)

The portrayal of good and evil explains the readers more about the plot. The struggle made by Will and Charles to overcome the evil created by Mr. Dark and his shadow show deliberately shows the reader's that in any cost evil will be defeated. When the carnival arrived for the first time through the advertisement Charles feels the evil. Here evil also represents that American Dream can't assure the path of success. The thing that can assure success is nothing but hard work which can be firmly achieved through good deeds. Not only evil which is around the world shown in the novel but also the evil that the characters hold in their heart is focused by the author. Jim peeps near the window and stare at a young couple who makes love, people in the village give more importance to the women who is in the poster and many more.

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep!

The Wrong shall fail,

The Right prevail,

With peace on earth, good will to men!'

Cooger & Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show—(23-24)

The weapon used by Mr. Dark and Charles makes a fantasy but plays a vital role throughout the novel. Carnival is itself a kind of weapon which is destroyed by human nature and power of human beings is explicated. At first in the advertisement Dark uses the painting of the most beautiful girl in the world just to attract the people. His use of a blind Dust Witch, Illustrated man, Mr. Electro, Mirror Maze to seize the eyes of the town's people. Whoever gets the ticket

for the show faintly becomes as a slave of Mr. Dark. Charles as a human, possess only goodness takes the weapon of laugh. He destroys the witch by laughing aloud and crushes Dark by his love. Mirror Maze is also destroyed by a huge laugh by Charles. Thus only true love can crush a man into pieces and nothing else can do anything rather being defeated by the so called true goodness or love.

The loss of innocence is one of the criteria of American dream. Both Will and Jim are going to celebrate their fourteenth birthday that is they are going to step into their teenage, where

The childish innocence changes into adolescent innocence. It is clear that Will is two minutes elder than Jim he is physically older but mentally Will proves to be a child and Jim don't have that much innocence. Jim is attracted by adulthood and wants to ride the carousel where Will does not believe. Even seeing the most beautiful woman in the advertisement Jim gets attracted and wants to see the carnival the next day and now he is busy in watching a couple through the window where Will has no interest to watch.

People in America always believe in individualism, even in this novel every character plays an individual role. In terms of individualism some in the novel isolates themselves from their own community. American Dream involves in chasing the desires of an individual on their success, happiness and fulfillment. Charles decides to isolates himself because of his age difference between him and his son Will. The desire of an individual makes huge consequence and makes them to get isolated from the society. The carnival makes promises to the people like success, youth etc., which is a reverse idea of American dream were they don't want to work hard rather they can enjoy life which implies as utopian fantasy. But in turn they isolate themselves from their own normal lives and from the people for whom they want to be changed or got in to the trap of the evil master. After being witnessed they need to go back to their own normal life which goes in vain, and stays as a mouse in the trap that can't do anything but to sit quietly.

The relationship between father and son is one of the significant ideal of American dream. The son always takes his own father to be his role model. In this novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes* the characters Charles and Will are portrayed in an extraordinary manner by Ray Bradbury. The love both have for each other is quite different. Though Charles is 54 years old man he loves his son a lot. According to Charles a father should play baseball with his son but he feels that he is not capable of doing so and when he shares these things with Will's mother she too replies that it is not necessary because he is one of the greatest father and guiding force to Will, he takes care of him and thinks about him each and every minute. Will also loves his father a lot when he feels something strange about the carnival he always wants to keep his father out of the situation. Anyhow at the end of the novel Mr. Charles Halloway changes his attitude and comes out of his inferior complex to save his son. When the Dust Witch comes to the library to stop his heart Charles laughs a loud and destroys the Witch, he safeguards himself to save Will from Dark. He wins heart of the readers as a father. Jim father is not shown throughout the novel. When Jim is trapped by the Mirror Maze he sees himself as an adult man who appears his own father. Dark usually shows the person whom they miss or the life they wish to live. It is proven that Jim miss his father to the core and when the mirror maze reflect his father he wants to take the ride. At last Jim climbs the carousel and Will catches his hand within few minutes after the carousel operates. According to Utopian concept the relationship between parents and children should be supportive. Both father and mother have to spend equal time and love in order to grow up a fantastic child. Here Jim does not get that fatherly love but Charles as a grown up shows equal love and care towards Jim too, which helps Jim to overcome the effect of carnival. For Jim his fatherly love becomes Utopian fantasy where Charles and Will solve his tenderness as a father and saver like a normal American.

Jim Nightshade, out the back door of the maze, lost on the carnival grounds, running, stopped.

'What happened?' asked Jim, at last.

What didn't! cried Dad.

They laughed again, when suddenly Will grabbed Jim, held him tight and wept.

'Oh, dad, dad, you did it, you did it!'

'No, we did it together.' (232-258)

Charles Halloway, the factual hero of the novel is portrayed as the embodiment of American Dream who overcomes his inferior complex. He comes out healthy and becomes youth not because of the carnival but of his hardwork. Charles takes vital role in the novel and dedicates his time soulfully towards whatever he does as a husband, dad, librarian, who follows the traditional American values and gets his success. Charles can also be the representation of Utopian fantasy in the beginning stage he wants his youth where he can enjoy with his son but soon learns that only human body can get old but not the mind or heart. He truly comes out from the fantasy and fights with the evil carnival. Charles is shown as a man of words, he knows well about the carnival and what can affect the effect of the carnival that's why he use laughing as a weapon and succeeds the carnival. His spontaneous behavior is shown when he comes to the carnival after destroying the Dust Witch in the library. In the carnival Mr. Dark performs his shadow show and he ask for a

volunteer to a rifle game no one in the crowd wants to take risk, where charles stands all alone in the crowd to Dark's surprise. Like this Charles revolves as a true human with goodness surrounded by evil.

Mr. Dark nodded swiftly.

'Since there are no volunteers—' He scraped his illustrated wrist. The witch

Shuddered. 'We will cancel our last act and—'

'Here! A Volunteer!' The crowd turned.

Mr Dark recoiled, then asked: 'where?' 'Here.'

Far out at the edge of the crowd, a hand lifted, a path opened.

Mr Dark could see very clearly the man standing there, alone.

Charles Halloway, citizen, father, introspective husband, night-wandered and

Janitor of the town library. (214-215)

According to Ray Bradbury attaining the Utopian fantasy can be achieved when an individual follows the American Dream that is without disturbing the real world he can pursue his dream with hard work and dedication. Like Charles Halloway in the novel who accepts his age factor and changes his mind set, he is capable of doing achievement and he is the one who saves the town, his son Will and Will's friend from the evil carnival. Before achieving the Utopian fantasy a man must conquer his state of loneliness and non fulfillment in things what they are doing, according to American Dream they have to work hard and be focused towards what they work. Carnival is the real temptation that makes people to follow the unrealistic Utopian fantasy. The people get confused in between their desires and reality of life. Bradbury through his characters like Miss Foley, Jim paints the American Dream as Utopian fantasy who needs only happiness and fulfillment in life without any proper plan or handwork with dedication. Will is also one of the character who wants to be happy with what he has, he don't want anything that gives pleasure within a short period. Will follows his father to be happy. Mr. Dark, Cooger are shown as a sinful person who takes advantage of people's dream. Ray Bradbury concludes the novel by killing the evil and makes the good to win the race. Bradbury also proves that American Dream as Utopian fantasy by the tempting evil carnival. He also shows the path how to overcome the fear of being defeated. Only way is to work hard with dedication and being fulfilled with what they own.

#### Reference:

1. Bradbury, Ray. *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. United States: Simon and Schuster, 1962. Print.
2. Brenner, Johanna. *Utopian Families*. Socialist Register, vol. 36, no. 36, socialistregister.com, 2000. Page cited: Print. 142.
3. Clurman, Harold. *Willy Loman and the American Dream*. Reading on Arthur Miller. San Diego: Greenhavn Press, 1997. 132
4. Eller, Jonathan R. *Becoming Ray Bradbury*. United States: University of Illinois Press, 2011. Print.
5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something\\_Wicked\\_This\\_Way\\_Comes\\_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Something_Wicked_This_Way_Comes_(novel))
6. Touponce, William F. *Laughter and Freedom in Ray Bradbury's Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Children's Literature Association Quarterly, Vol. 13 no. 1, 1988, Print. 17-21.