

## F. SCOTT. FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY*: THE DEATH OF THE AMERICAN DREAM AND MODERN TIMES

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### ABSTRACT

*F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is one of the most popular novels in American fiction. In the middle of the roaring 1920s, Fitzgerald wrote this novel to depict the dream of the people of his times through the story of Jay Gatsby. The mysterious death of Gatsby symbolizes the death of the American dream. The present paper studies the relevance of the Great Gatsby in the present times as people are still influenced by the hollow culture of the moneyed society and meet disillusionment in the end.*

**Keywords:** *Wealth, Dream, Disillusionment, Loss, Corruption, Hollow*

*The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald's finest work is certainly the book for which he is best known. A portrait of the Jazz Age in all its decadence and excess, *The Great Gatsby* captured the spirit of the Jazz age generation and earned itself a permanent place in American mythology. Self-made millionaire Jay Gatsby, embodies some of America's most abiding obsessions – money, ambition, greed and promise of new beginnings.

*The Great Gatsby* does not proclaim the nobility of spirit, it does not reveal how to solve the problems of life, it delivers no comforting message. It only beautifully describes the death of the American Dream.

It is a story of failure, it is a tale of the prolongation of the adolescent incapacity to distinguish between the dream and reality. Jay Gatsby is a young millionaire with a notorious past. Daisy is the girl whom Gatsby had met during the war and fell in love but as he had no money or position, Daisy had rejected him and married Tom Buchanan.

The novel tells the story of Gatsby's attempt to get Daisy back some four years later. All he wants to do is to repeat the past, to be reunited with the love of his life. Daisy is bored in her marriage, feels trapped in the cage and therefore, feels flattered by Gatsby's attention. Tom Buchanan, her husband, has a mistress, Myrtle who meets with an accident by Gatsby's car which Daisy was driving. Gatsby takes the blame and is consequently shot by Myrtle's desperate

husband, Wilson in Gatsby's mansion. Hardly anyone comes to attend Gatsby's funeral, including Daisy. Gatsby is buried with the same mystery with which he had appeared suddenly.

Nick Caraway, the narrator of the story, comments about the Buchanans':

“Careless people .... they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together.” (170)

He realizes that the bootlegger who followed his dream wholeheartedly was, “worth the whole damn bunch put together.” (146)

Gatsby's greatness lies in his capacity for illusion. He fails inevitably because of his inability to separate the ideal from the real. By crassly materialistic ends, he hopes to capture the ideal girl who in fact is not at all the golden girl of his dreams. Gatsby pays a high price for living too long with a single dream– the dream which is disastrous. He has money, name, fame and all the worldly pleasures. He throws parties but he himself is not a part of his own parties. He does all this to get Daisy's love. Daisy is merely a product of materialistic society.

Fitzgerald has exposed the hollow culture of the society of his times in which money is the only value. The corruption in the so-called rich strata of society is disgusting.

Gatsby embodies the desires, fears and painful experiences of Fitzgerald as well as many people of his times. Fitzgerald wrote:

“I know Gatsby better than I know my own child.”

Fitzgerald depicts the life of the high class society during the roaring twenties with its lust for money and frivolous pleasures of life and reveals the moral corruption that lies beneath the glitter and gaiety. He presents the original aspects of the American Dream along with its modern faces to show that the once impervious dream is lost forever. Gatsby's desire to win Daisy's love is his version of the old American Dream. The green light in which Gatsby believes is the symbol of the American Dream. Gatsby's death is symbolic of the death of the American Dream. Infact, Gatsby never recognizes the superficialness of the world of the very rich, where he searches for fulfillment. He fails to see that the Buchanans, representative of the class with its origins and ways of life nourished by wealth, are sordid and spiritually barren yet extremely powerful. Gatsby tries to chase the unreal dream and adapt himself in the manners of the materialistic society which is emotionally & morally barren. He makes fortune but remains lonely throughout the novel.

Gatsby's unflinching faith in the fulfillment of his dream is ultimately shattered. Gatsby fails to realize that the past he tried to escape from, especially the traditional values of Catholicism, represented by Nick and the advice of his father, could have saved him from himself and a society which offers nothing at all.

The dream that gave meaning to his life, has disappeared forever. His faith in the possibilities of life, that vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty, like his childhood faith in the God of catholicism, has been shattered when death finally strikes Gatsby, as he lies on the pneumatic mattress floating in his pool, he no longer possesses the old warm world or the desire to be born anew. In Nick's words:

“He must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. 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. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about ...” (153-154)

With the death of Gatsby, his incorruptible dream is over. He is doomed for having lived too long with a single, impossible dream defeated by social opposition, trampled down by a world of moral corruption and carelessness.

The death of Gatsby symbolizing the death of the American Dream, is the end of the story. *The Great Gatsby* is quite relevant in today's times, when people are still chasing the same dream which is bound to come to disillusionment.

## REFERENCES

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