

# Downfall of the american dream



Authors use symbolism in their written expressions in order to enhance the thematic interests of the novel. The use of symbolism allows the reader to interpret the story, which in turn, stimulates a more personal, imaginative, and meaningful experience. Scott F. Fitzgerald's, *The Great Gatsby*, became an instant classic because of the symbolism used to enhance the theme throughout the novel. Without this symbolism, the theme of the withering American Dream would have been less than adequate, and the book would have never attained the status and popularity among readers that it does today. The most prominent and influential symbols are the green light, Gatsby's shirts, and the Valley of Ashes.

When Gatsby is first seen, " he stretched out his arms toward...a single green light, minute and far way, that might have been the end of a dock."(Fitzgerald 26)The green light that he appears to be reaching for is the light on Daisy's dock. In Gatsby's early life he had a romantic relationship with Daisy. However, he went away to war and when he came back she was married to an extremely wealthy man, Tom Buchanan. Gatsby concluded in his own mind that in order to win Daisy's love, he too had to become wealthy. After he established himself financially, he bought a house directly across the water from Daisy and her green light. He associates Daisy with the green light, and it becomes a symbol of her throughout the novel. " The whole being of Gatsby exists only in relation to what the green light symbolizes."(Bewley 41) Gatsby becomes so infatuated with the green light that it is almost as if Daisy does not even exist. She becomes no more than a romantic dream within the green light on the dock. At last he realizes this when he and Daisy meet and, while staring at the green light, link arms. He

finally attains what he thought he wanted and the green light becomes no more than a green light. This false sense of reality brings Gatsby great melancholy when he realizes that Daisy is not as great as he thought she was. This is similar to the feelings immigrants were overcome by when they reached America. They had been told their whole lives that America was the land of opportunity and that the streets were paved with gold, but when they got there they realized it wasn't all that different from the homeland which they so eagerly deserted.

In order to impress Daisy, Gatsby devotes his entire life to becoming wealthy. He becomes so obsessed with material items and prides himself on attaining them. When he finally gets Daisy over to his house, he is so overwhelmed by her presence that he does not know what to do. He shows her his bedroom and becomes so excited that " he took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them one by one before us"(Fitzgerald 97). Daisy begins to cry and says they are the most beautiful shirts she has ever seen. This disgusting display of materialism just shows how the American Dream has changed from living a happy life with your family, to obtaining the most expensive and exotic items. The shirts symbolize Gatsby's wealth, which he so proudly attained. He was willing to earn his wealth by any means necessary and did so. He was involved in bootlegging and organized crime; he allowed himself to stoop so low that crime was just to impress a woman. Gatsby is so corrupted by his lust for wealth that he is blinded and therefore not capable of doing anything else.

The valley of ashes is a " fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where ashes take the forms of

houses and chimneys and rising”(Fitzgerald 27). Wilson the owner of a small garage in the valley of ashes is considered to be the proprietor of the vast wasteland. This wasteland is symbolic of “ the corruption of the American dream by materialism”. (Bloom 110) It is only too coincidental that Wilson the “ keeper” of the valley of ashes is the end of Gatsby’s dream, which symbolizes Gatsby’s dreams turning to ashes. It should also be pointed out that the reason Gatsby was tied to the murder was because of his eccentric automobile. If he had not tried so fervently to impress Daisy with his material belongings, he would never have been unjustly linked to the car. This is a catastrophic example of the American dream being tainted by greed.

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s use of symbolism carried the bulk of the theme throughout the novel. It allowed the withering of the American Dream to be brought to new levels. The green light, the shirts, and the Valley of Ashes are only the most prominent examples of such symbolism but there are subtle symbols throughout the novel. Fitzgerald brilliantly communicates what he wants the reader to achieve without giving away too much. The Great Gatsby is just one of many great examples of how symbolism can convey the meanings that could not be derived from words.