

The reflects the glamour of america essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The novel 'The Great Gatsby' cannot be said to only reflect an image of American glamour, but of the entire American dream. It is a social commentary, an ironic satire, a dark prediction and a romantic drama, each factor combining to produce a book covering many themes, involving the individual and the whole. It presents views of America from both the inside and out, creating complex microcosms within itself, each reinforced through repetition from the first page to the last. In doing this Fitzgerald wrote a carefully structured novel, and rewrote and changed many chapters in order to expand the plot past a mere chronological order of events.

"It is worth bearing in mind the care that went into the revision of the work because it is deceptively easy to read the novel quickly in order to find out what has happened as we do in a detective story." - J. F. Wyatt* In the very first few pages the reader is introduced to the narrator of the book. Even this early on the idea self-improvement and wonderful opportunities is a key factor. Nick Carraway who is of a "prominent, well to do family" is restless in the West, and wishes to strive out to the East and be a 'bondsman'.

He has come back from the war, and discovered that "instead of being the warm centre of the world, the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe". To get in touch with the rest of the world he heads off to the city, in the East. The appeal of the East is not explained in so many words, but Nick makes an attempt to say why it must be big for some reason with "everybody I knew was in the bond business" as if to say, 'well it's where everyone else is going'. The 'Mid-Western' view of the East is further portrayed through comparisons Nick makes. "I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees" and on his new house in the East, "a

weather beaten cardboard bungalow". The theme of opportunity and attainable grandeur is again implied by his house with " My own house was an eyesore, but it was a small eyesore, and it had been overlooked, so I had a view of the water, a partial view of my neighbours lawn, and the consoling proximity of millionaires - all for eighty dollars a month.

. The mixing of wealthy persons and himself could surely only happen in ' a land of opportunity', a breaking down of the old barriers that held you back and enabling a fresh start with plenty of advantages. It would be a mistake however, to tie in the people of this place with the romantic imagery. Nick dictates his thoughts, and being at this stage a somewhat impartial observer, manages to see both sides of the world he has entered. Whilst admitting the obvious means the occupants of this place must have, he also describes his neighbours house for what it actually is " a factual imitation of some hotel de ville in Normandy". When he is driving to his first encounter with the people here, he is obviously impressed enough to mention how the " white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water".

These first descriptions lead to a lot of contrast as then we meet Tom Buchanan. The way Tom is portrayed is hardly flattering. The background Nick gives us on him makes him appear as if he is living the high life, the way he has never suffered for money, has magnificent status and can afford to bring " a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest". Yet Nicks personal insights sway our own opinions, " but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game", making Tom seem a sad character and living more in a

dream world than reality. " Indeed an important part of Fitzgerald's style is the juxtaposition of dreams with reality.

" - J. F. Wyatt*At Tom's first appearance, speech is not even required, just the presentation of his " Georgian colonial mansion", the sunlight glinting off the windows and a powerful figure standing on the porch with " his legs apart". This really does seem to fit in with the ' American image', a self-sufficient person, owning all that he can see (" the lawn started at the beach and ran down for a quarter of a mile"). At first appearances this is a testament to the power available for those willing to take it, indeed, it is only Nick's personal ability not to be impressed and remain impartial that enable the reader to see the other side to all of this.

Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body - he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage - a cruel body". It is Nick's last three words in that description which completely throw the imagery into a new light. Tom is a very effective character in communicating Fitzgerald's thoughts, but he is one of a few that makes up the core ' rich' characters in the novel. Tom and Daisy are an inseparable pair, although not altogether alike.

They are the antidote to Gatsby's dreaming, in all their actions they make nobody richer, just leave a trail of wreckage which is all the worse for its carelessness rather than intent. To understand this we need to delve into the

function of the characters. Daisy is an object. She can be regarded as such by the way she is isolated from human emotion and thought.

Before she married Tom, she got very drunk, and in a state wanted Tom's pearls giving back to him. She was clutching a letter from Gatsby, which made her want to throw away the marriage to Tom on the grounds of love and romance. This didn't last long though, and she came to her senses and "Next day at 5 o'clock she married Tom without so much as a shiver". She wanted Tom's security, his ability to provide for her for the rest of her life and the remoteness from the working class, to be "above the hot-struggles of the poor". She even treats her daughter as a plaything and throughout the novel there is no real affection or thought towards her.

Then she added irrelevantly: you ought to see the baby. "Given that her daughter is three years old, and is not referred to by name but "the baby", Daisy cannot be thought to be a prime example of motherhood. Daisy is at first introduction, lying on a couch with Jordan Baker. Jordan is another self-confident female, one able to command an atmosphere by her very body language. "She was a slender, small breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her shoulders backward". She is a sceptic, with a talent for sarcasm and an inherent selfishness.

"Suppose you meet someone just as careless as yourself?" "I hope I never will" she answered. Her personality therefore, is an interesting for Nick to become romantically involved with, as he regards himself as an honest person, however they do break apart at the end, both recognising their differences. That Nick has seen the 'inside' of these people is fundamental,

as they can be taken as the epitome of glamour in the book, in which case it is not necessarily something to be desired. In terms of 'The American Dream', I think that Gatsby had it. This is not revealed to us at the beginning of the novel, instead Gatsby is a mysterious figure, someone you caught glimpses of but were never fully revealed.

"I saw that I was not alone, a figure had emerged from the shadow of my neighbour's mansion....."

he stretched out his arms towards the dark water in a curious way, and, as far as I was away from him, I could have sworn he was trembling....

... when I looked once more again for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness" The revelations about Gatsby occur at intervals in the book, breaking up Nick's chronological narrative and providing snippets of information, keeping us interested.

J. F. Wyatt* says "Nick is taken to New York by the great man himself and on the journey he reveals tantalising fragments of his past." The next thing we are presented with to do with Gatsby is the speculation of various people at his parties. "Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once" "It's more that he was a German spy during the war" These comments have to be taken in the context of which they are said though. Nick himself whilst at the time half believing these stories about this mysterious man also analyses the situation, his thoughts being:- "It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world."

“ . Nick perhaps is all the more impressed that shallow gossip is centred upon someone seemingly far from shallow himself. Indeed, it would seem to Nick very glamorous to be able to throw such a large party to so many people and be very much the centre of attention without your own presence being required. Nick’ first description of the party is an interesting one as it starts off with him speaking as an observer, then halfway through he seems to become a participant.

In this there are two ways of telling the same story of the party. This could also be an indication of a greater meaning that he is trying to get across. The first thing he highlights isn’t the music or the dancing or the foppery, but the enormous preparation that goes into creating these parties. There is a mass of activity in the first page of chapter 2 showing hard work and manual labour by those that won’t be attending in the evening. He talks of the servants, the gardeners, the butler pressing a little button two hundred times in half an hour, the corps of caterers, several hundred feet of canvas, fairy lights, the pyramids of wasted and pulpless orange halves, a bar rail stocked with gins and cordials so varied that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another, and such a lot more ‘ splendour’.

Or maybe ‘ wastage’. As he says later in the book “ whilst the common American is happy, even eager to be a serf, he draws the line at peasantry”. It could all be a metaphor for how much it takes to make a dream, something paralleled in Gatsby’s life (his criminal activities), and Daisy and Tom’s lack of responsibility. Then Nick goes on to talk of the time of the party, when the people surround you and the music is playing.

I think he is almost able to be swept along here and enchanted but for the irony it would have, for someone aware and knowledgeable about the preparation required for these parties to be another eager participant, and so his perception is tinged with distaste. Nick also has a very dry sense of humour. Due to his possessing of both the ability to take part in and observe (which is prevalent throughout the book), he is aware of the things going on around him. He has a self-indulgent moment when he is describing the likes of people whom attend Gatsby's parties. At the beginning of chapter four, he begins listing the names of people there and what he most remembers them for. The way this list is presented is just a mockery of American high society.

What happens to these people....

. " an automobile ran over his right hand" " his nose got shot off during the war"

. re ridiculous and funny escapades, but the main thing Nick communicates, is the lack of dignity and formality present. Considering these are social events and these people are doing their best to appear like cultured and glamorous socialites (like Daisy and Tom) then it is all a distasteful mockery. " This could be put down to Nick's application of Western standards into a situation that they do not really fit" 2* according to one critical work however in the West apparently " an evening was hurried from phase to phase towards its close, in a continually disappointed anticipation or else in sheer nervous dread of the moment itself.

This is the glamour in the book. It is present at Gatsby's parties. The drink, the young women, the young men, the food and the music, light and

<https://assignbuster.com/the-reflects-the-glamour-of-america-essay/>

dancing, but then the underside to it all. The slaving away of servants, the breakage's, the gardens and the caterers all working to provide for this 'gorging' of all that is good at Gatsby's parties. The glamour shown here I'm afraid, is not that attractive. " Also, Nick' role is becoming more and more crucial as a conscience rather than just an observer.

He has begun underpinning what he says by his choice of adjectives and imagery. " 2*Nick' narration and views of the parties, although unbeknown to us, have to be influenced in some part by Gatsby's motives in providing them. The way Gatsby is trying, and has been for some years, to encounter Daisy is an extraordinary perseverance. That this eventually pays off and that in Nick, Gatsby has found a way of meeting Daisy is a testament to the American idealism that a mans ability to achieve anything if he tries hard enough and for long enough is possible. Gatsby is a dreamer and a romantic.

He has fallen in love with Daisy and built up an entire world of expectations and scenarios. That he is naive enough to expect Daisy to leave Tom for him, and that he has achieved his wealth through criminal activities is not the most important part of this man. Nick sides with Gatsby due to his respect for the ideal of the man. He disapproves of his morals and belief that the end justifies the means and knows that Gatsby is wrong in a lot of things yet this does not detract from the mans greatness.

Nick recognises in Gatsby a wonderful trait that if it were present in everyone would make the world a better place. Gatsby has an innocence about him; a desperate plea to the world to treat him in the way he believes it should that appeals to Nick. " You're worth the whole damn lot of them put

together," says Nick to Gatsby. An interesting revelation about Gatsby comes after his death, when his father reveals how he was always after self-improvement. Nick is in a difficult position, but decides that Gatsby's accumulated wealth is able to make his father proud is a good thing, and there is no need for him to know how it was acquired.

The father calls Gatsby and American hero. That is very interesting as he is not, due to his involvement in crime, adultery and using of Nick. This means that at a first glance, Gatsby is a true example of the American dream. He is very wealthy and has made it all himself, is generous and flash. Gatsby's willingness to protect Daisy from anything, is also his downfall. His death is due to his placing of his trust in an imperfect character.

In Gatsby's mind, his sheltering of Daisy from responsibility of Myrtle's death can only be a good thing as he is helping the woman he loves. In reality, the world does not work like that and he is only setting himself up to reap the repercussions and tempt Daisy to revert to her secure husband and feel safe without him. " He put his hands in his coat pockets and turned back eagerly to his scrutiny of the house, as though my presence marred the sacredness of the vigil. So I walked away and left him standing there in the moonlight - watching over nothing. " If the glamour is to be Gatsby and his parties, then this novel could be thought to incorporate a social commentary on ' high-society', and ' glamour' and wealth.

If Tom and Daisy provide the glamour, then it is a deeply pessimistic book, as they are shallow characters, whose whole attitude is summed up by their running away in the end. Therefore; This novel is not a romantic reflection

into the glamour of any era. It is a story of the perversity of the world in that a dream however noble, can be warped and ruined by both the holder of the dream and those careless and responsible around them. The American Dream does exist, but if you are not careful, at what cost.