

Reflection essay on the great gasbby

[Art & Culture](#), [American Dream](#)



Abstract As the spokesman of the “ Jazz Age”, F. Scott Fitzgerald , referred to his own experience, wrote his masterpiece-The Great Gatsby. Through abundant symbols, Fitzgerald profoundly depicted the society of Jazz Age and successfully displayed the disillusionment of American Dream, which existed in the majority of American in 1920s. To describe the restlessness of the “ lost generation” in the “ roaring twenties”, the author created several typical tragic characters. This paper, based on some symbolic theories, focuses on how the author brought his attitude to the surface to reveal the theme.

And by analyzing the symbolic meanings of some leading characters, it further probes into the failure of American Dream. Key words Symbolism; characters; American Dream; disillusionment

1 Introduction

1. 1 Plot and characters review Jay Gatsby, formerly Jake Gatz, is a successful bootlegger with desire of being accepted in the highest social circles of Long Island. Once he has done this, Gatsby spares no effort to win back the love of his former girlfriend Daisy, now married to a boorish " old-money" millionaire, Tom Buchanan.

Gatsby's obsession with Daisy and his pursuit of this unworthy dream results in disillusionment and, ultimately, tragedy. Sideline observer Nick Carraway, recounts the whole story.

1. 2 The spokesman of the “ Jazz Age”

F. Scott Fitzgerald is widely regarded as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century. He was both a representative of his era and a severe critic of society. In his short life, Fitzgerald experiences overnight fame and wealth in 1920s but suffers a lot in 1930s, which shares much resemblance with American society.

Furthermore, with a lot of works describing the expectation and disillusionment of the American young generation, he gained irreplaceable position in the history of American literature and was often called the spokesman of “Jazz Age”. The Great Gatsby, for which he was known, is somewhat a reflection of his experience and his attitude towards the American Dream. The novel shows the anomie following the First World War. During the “roaring” 1920s, American society enjoyed unprecedented levels of prosperity as the economy soared.

At the same time, Prohibition, the ban on the sale and manufacture of alcohol as mandated by the 18th century, made many bootleggers millionaires and led to an increase in organized crime. Although Fitzgerald, like Nick Carraway in his novel, idolized the riches of the age, he was uncomfortable with the unlimited materialism and the lack of morality that went with it. The value of money was mostly exaggerated during that age. The connection of the “old money” and “new money” is presented in geographical symbols of the novel: East Egg is the place where the established aristocracy lived, and West Egg – “the self-made rich”.

Using his narrator--Nick, the author told about his views of American Dream - it was “originally about discovery, individualism, and the pursuit of happiness”. 2 Symbolism in characters In the Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald skillfully selected different people, such as Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, Tom Buchanan and Nick Carraway. This part will analyze the four main characters in detail and discuss their function in symbolism. 2. 1 Jay Gatsby Through the whole life of Gatsby we can see that he is the representative of the people who pursue the American dream.

At first when Gatsby falls in love with Daisy, he is frustrated for the huge gap between their social status and wealth. Gatsby is a poor immigrant of low status but Daisy comes from an old wealthy American family. They belong to two totally different worlds under that condition where people all pursue money and material content. So their love is actually desperate and not realistic. He falls into great agony because he lost Daisy and he thinks they didn't get married just because he is not rich enough.

In Gatsby's opinion, his dream of loving Daisy is ruined by the difference in their respective backgrounds, so he resorts to crime to make adequate money so as to impress Daisy and win her back. To some degree, he makes it. He gets the money he needs and then, through building up a large house and holding luxury parties and banquets, he successfully attracts Daisy's attention. Daisy comes back to him, dating with him again. Gatsby is so happy to see that they finally return to their old days. But in fact, this is all his illusion, as their love is based on material possessions. He has lived not for himself, but for his dream, for his vision of the good life inspired by the beauty of a lovely rich girl. " The green light situated at the end of East Egg dock and visible from Gatsby's West Egg lawn may be the best symbol of his unattainable dream. " He stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and far as I was from him I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. In the end when Gatsby dies for the sake of Daisy, she just leaves him behind and goes to Europe with her husband to spend their holiday. Gatsby's dream of a perfect Daisy and a happy life totally breaks up until now. The falling

down of Gatsby's dream represents the falling down of American Dream. Then why the dream fails in such a miserable way? First, Gatsby builds up an illusionary dream. He is fascinated with Daisy's grace and charm, but blinds her shortcomings. " He gives Daisy an idealistic perfection that she cannot possess in reality" .

Although later he comes to know that Daisy is not what she used to be and that she doesn't love him, he cannot stop dreaming and continues to recall the old days. Gatsby's dream is ruined by the unworthiness of its object, just as the American Dream in the 1920s is ruined by the unworthiness of its object—money and pleasure. Second, from the beginning he uses a wrong way to achieve his dream and this would inevitably lead to his dream's coming into failure at last. He has made his fortune through racketeering and conducting suspicious business, regardless of the moral principles.

The American dream of Gatsby corrupts as the unrestrained desire for money and pleasure surpasses those noble goals. More importantly, the sharp contrast between the ideal and the reality is due to result in the breakup of the dream. In some senses, Gatsby's dream originated from the past, and made him sincerely persist. But when he was addicted into the past, he made efforts to find various possibilities in the future. He makes the historical past transform to the future in the vain hope.

The green light representing his ideal future, which also indicates the whole American ones, is unattainable. The American Dream destroys not only because of the profound social and historical reasons, but also being deeply concerned with the self-destructive characters of Gatsby. When Gatsby's simple and naive characters are confronted with the cold society and moral

decay of America, there will be no place for Gatsby to escape but die. In the end, the author wrote, " Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us.

It eluded us then, but that's no matter - tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther ... And one fine morning - So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" . Gatsby goes back ceaselessly into the past because the future is far too cruel to imagine. This is the tragedy of Gatsby: he himself lives in the past and is making a beautiful but illusionary dream of the future, so do the Americans. 2. 2 Daisy Buchanan Throughout the book, Daisy is described almost in a fairytale tone.

She is the princess in the castle, the wonderful girl that every man dreams of possessing. She is beautiful and rich and innocent and pure in her whiteness. " She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster ..." . But that whiteness is mixed with the yellow of gold and the unavoidable corruption that money brings. Just as Gatsby once comments after their reunion, " her voice is full of money. " . Her love for Gatsby is conditioned by his wealth. When she saw Gatsby's fabulous pile of shirts, she could not help crying: " I've never seen such --- such beautiful shirts before. . For Daisy, her love associated closely with stable and extravagant life. Daisy proves her real nature when she chooses Tom over Gatsby, then allows Gatsby to take the blame for killing Myrtle Wilson even though she herself was driving the car. Finally, rather than attend Gatsby's funeral, Daisy and Tom move away, leaving no forwarding address. Daisy lived in " a material world without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing like air. " Actually, Daisy stands for

youth, gold and status, which many young Americans regard as their dreams.

Yet, the dream has already become a nightmare, as it generates those money-oriented and power-persuing minds. As a social satire, Daisy is also a reflection on moral decadence in modern American society. It is concerned with the corruption of values and the decline of spiritual life. Since the Industry Revolution, Americans have fallen in , not only the way of life through which they seeking for more luxurious enjoyment, but also wealth and status at the expense of moral decay. As a consequence, American Dream has totally failed to bring any kind of fulfillment, either spiritual or material. . 3 Tom Buchanan Tom Buchnan, the dude from Yale, is a liar, a hypocrite, and a bully. Being born into a wealthy family has made him a spoiled man. He hasn't really worked his entire life and instead, spends his days in indulgence and ease. All Tom's feelings and actions are self-directed. He has a shameless affair with Myrtle because it satisfies his needs. He flaunts their relationship in public for he is a careless man who isn't bothered by the sufferings he causes. This also attributes to he and Daisy's escape in a situation where they would have to face.

Tom is the typical character of his class. His social attitudes are laced with racism and sexism, and he never ever considers trying to live up to the moral standard he supposed to. Tom is " a scion of the great robber barons of the Gilded Age who seize the land, gutted the forests, laid the railroads, and turned the cities into vast urban fortresses for the purpose of protecting their own moneyed interests" . He represents descendants of those early

pioneers, frontiersman and later settlers who attempted to transform the Virgin Land into a New World Garden.

These later empire-builders of the post-Civil War period, who were eager to replace crops with machines, set aside morality as easily and quickly as they attempted to buy up civilization. 2. 4 Nick Caraway Although Nick is not the hero in the novel, his importance as the narrator and a functional character makes him almost as much a central figure as Gatsby. He is Gatsby's neighbor, Daisy's cousin once removed, Tom's classmate in college and the sweetie of Daisy's close friend, Jordan.

He is a tie, who connects many contradictions and conflicts among characters, and a key figure in the complicated relation net. Nick uses his curious eyes to view Gatsby's actions and holds sympathy to suppose Gatsby's thoughts. As a witness who "has strong flexibility and broad and various information", he can observe Gatsby's actions standing far from him and take a neutral and calm view to value the story. Using "I" as witness to narrative the story, Fitzgerald let readers feel things directly while hid himself behind the case.

Nick resembles Fitzgerald in such aspects as age, family background, education record, literary interest, military experience and seeks of fortune. "If Gatsby represents one part of Fitzgerald's personality, the flashy celebrity who pursued and praised wealth in order to impress the woman he loved, then Nick represents another part: the quiet, reflective Midwesterner adrift in the lurid East". So this may fully explain why Nick senses, understands and sympathizes Gatsby. The similarities between Nick and Fitzgerald make Nick voice more than the author.

As a moral symbol he is the embodiment of a hope for moral and spiritual growth. Functioning as Fitzgerald's speaker in making his ultimate value judgements, Nick realizes that the fast-paced, fun-driven lifestyle of New York is grotesque and damaging; an ideal based on materialism rather than a fulfilment of American Dream. Knowing the truth of the East, Nick quickly goes back without any hesitation. At the end, Nick is the only person escaping from the illusory American Dream and unfolds this tragic story to us all.

3 Conclusion

In the *Great Gatsby*, by using symbolic images, F. Scott Fitzgerald reveals the contradiction and inner conflict of the characters as well as displays his intelligence and excellent writing skill. The entire story is about the effect brought by the roaring age of reshaping people's value, causing the deterioration of morality and running after money even one undeserved. Gatsby deadly accumulated great wealth in illegal way to get Daisy' love, but he didn't recognize people's ugly inward—greedy of money and mean of kindness, and finally he died with everything lost.

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