

1920s america in the great gatsby english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Fitzgerald conveys a sense of illusion and disillusionment throughout 'The Great Gatsby' by the use of colour and the American Dream to portray the disillusioned post-war society of 1920s America. The symbolic nature of the 'America Dream' is used to bring together the characters which inhabit the world of 'The Great Gatsby'. 'Under the Red, White and Blue'[1], one of the possible titles for 'The Great Gatsby', symbolizes the colours of Gatsby, Daisy and American flag, it could have therefore been used to foretell the moral failures of a society obsessed with wealth and status witnessed in 'The Great Gatsby' through linking both Gatsby and Daisy to the most recognised symbol of America and American society in its history. The deliberation of illusion by Ishiguro in 'The Remains of the Day' is done through both memories and the past which Stevens lived in. Fitzgerald uses colour to portray illusion in 'The Great Gatsby'. For instance the colour white which is used to show innocence is also closely tied to Daisy Buchanan through her personality, voice and clothing. Evidence of this can be seen when Nick interprets Daisy Buchanan's voice as being of someone that lives "high in a white palace, the king's daughter, the golden girl"[2]. This presents the image of royalty to the reader through linking Daisy Buchanan to living in a palace, the description of the palace as being "white"[3] visualises Daisy as being protected, almost entrapped by the pure and innocent image which her husband Tom Buchanan has selected out for her, Daisy is effectively trapped by the colour white as it surrounds her and encompasses her life. Daisy's car before her marriage to Tom Buchanan is white; this signifies her loss of both virginity and purity after her marriage. Tom Buchanan wishes to preserve her purity by not having sex with her,

forcing him to acquire a mistress, namely Myrtle Wilson. Myrtle also plays the role of attempting to impersonate Daisy Buchanan, we become aware of this through the quote " Daisy Daisy Daisy- I'll say it all I want, Daisy Daisy Daisy!!!"[4]. Her wearing of an " elaborate afternoon dress of cream" signifies that Myrtle is un-pure - not white. Fitzgerald uses the literary technique of repetition to exude a sense of order, in the sense of hierarchy; Daisy Buchanan is the queen living in a white palace while Myrtle is merely a commoner chosen by Tom Buchanan to indulge his sexual desires. The effect this has on the reader is that of noticing Daisy as desired, people want to be her whilst blissfully unaware of her negative characteristics, notice her sardonic nature when it comes to living with the consequences of her actions, Daisy changes her mind on the night before her wedding and is then seemingly unable to choose between Gatsby and Tom Buchanan: " I did love him once," she says, " but I loved you too".[5]Tom was merely a convenience at a time when Gatsby was unavailable. Daisy Buchanan has both love and riches at her disposal, yet she is indecisive. This quote symbolizes Daisy's spoilt nature and characterizes her as a spoilt, much desired woman by showing her to be someone that does not trust her instincts and doubts herself. This connects to her femininity and low estimations of the female gender as shown by the quote " I hope she grows up to be a pretty little fool."[6]That's about the best a girl can hope for these days, to be a pretty little fool." Gatsby's rejection by Daisy Buchanan can be closely linked to that of Stevens' in the sense they are both after a woman they treasure, but wait too long to take action." The American dream is focused on the idea that anyone can become a success if they work long enough and hard

enough." [7] It is a quote taken from Scott Donaldson's critique of 'The Great Gatsby', the aspiration to achieve the 'American dream' was the sole contributor, outside WW2, to discard honest people whom tried to achieve the ideals of the dream through legitimate means. [8] The 'American Dream', and in turn illusion, is explored through characters, in particular George Wilson, Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan. In the cases of Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, these characters illustrate the failure American dream in the sense they have not worked legitimately to gain their social and economic standing within society. George Wilson is the sole legitimate pursuer of the dream through legitimate means, although his life is seen to crumble after the manslaughter of his wife Myrtle and is seen to die soon after. Notice Nick Carraway introducing Tom Buchanan as a "sportsman", Tom has no other characteristic or achievement to be called upon, and yet has a higher standing in society than George Wilson, someone who strives to achieve the dream in all its purity through legitimate means. The American dream is an illusion in itself [9], George Wilson - someone who is trying to achieve it is disillusioned, he represents the traditional values of the American dream [10], and his dream is to have a normal family, a good job and to live happily with his family. This becomes impossible as he is "so dumb he doesn't know he's alive", he does not realise that his wife has an intimate relationship with Tom Buchanan. The end of his dream approaches when he shoots Mr Gatsby and himself at the end of the novella, this shows how the American dream is nothing more than an illusion of happiness and prosperity as the only character that attempted to achieve the American dream through legitimate means dies. In the case of Stevens in 'The Remains of the Day',

the reader feels oddly alienated from him. This is due to Stevens' tendency to suppress his personal life and feelings. The characters in the novella represent Great Britain, Old Traditional Britain and Mr Farraday represents the new shifting appearance of the country. Stevens is characterized by the old regime, the old traditions and a value, he therefore dislikes changes to the country. We understand his 'American Dream' to be detached from Gatsby's although similar in one particular aspect, this being his quest to achieve the love of one particular woman (Ms Kenton). The past is explored within 'The Great Gatsby' through the symbolic representation of memory within the novella. "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!", a quote from Jay Gatsby himself puts his sanity into dispute by allowing the reader to believe that Gatsby understands that you can repeat the past and fundamentally re-create it. This makes the reader aware of his desperation to repeat his intimate past with Daisy Buchanan. The broken clock in Nick's house symbolizes that you cannot repeat the past through the symbolism of a broken time piece. Gatsby symbolizes the role memory and the past play in the characters' lives through his own desperation and urge to re-conquer the past. The themes of loss and regret in 'The Remains of the Day' characterize the past; most notably Stevens' loss of Ms Kenton and the time he spent trying to recapture their time in Darlington Hall. Stevens talks about Mrs Benn, using her name before her marriage, Ms Kenton. This signifies that he is unwilling to let go of the past, much like Gatsby, who is living in the past where his relationship with Daisy is still intact. Stevens' belief that any emotion would compromise his dignity led to the creation of distance between Ms Kenton and himself, which led to

her loving another man. In 'The Remains of the Day'; Stevens' loses Ms Kenton and spends the entirety of the novel trying to recapture their time in Darlington Hall, much like Jay Gatsby who pursues Daisy Buchanan. Stevens talks about Mrs Benn, using her name before her marriage, 'Ms Kenton'. This signifies that he is unwilling to let go of the past, much like Gatsby, who is living in the past where his relationship with Daisy is still intact. Stevens' wishes he had acted differently with regard to Ms Kenton and Lord Darlington. His belief that any emotion would compromise his dignity led to the creation of distance between Ms Kenton and himself, which led to her loving another man. In regards to the end of both novels, both speak of disillusionment and illusion through the theme of regret in the sense that their actions in the past were not sufficient. We become aware of this through Myrtle's statement saying "Well, I married him" in an ambiguous tone, Myrtle regrets marrying George; she "thought he was a gentleman", this quote implies gentleman was being rich, which we know to be wrong through common sense[11]. In conclusion, Fitzgerald conveys a sense of illusion and disillusionment through the use of characters to portray the disillusioned post-war society of 1920s America, the symbolic nature of his use of colours, the past and the characters in 'The Great Gatsby'. Ishiguro evokes disillusion in the different eras of 'The Remains of the Day' through the themes of loss and regret, Stevens' goes on a journey of self-learning that ultimately ends in failure, attempting to get Ms Kenton to come back to Darlington Hall. This mirrors Gatsby's inane efforts to retrieve the past between Daisy Buchanan and himself. The motif of alcohol, which is seen in both 'The Great Gatsby' and 'The Remains of the Day', is used to arouse

escapism in the characters, especially from the society which both Mr Gatsby and Stevens' feel so out of place in.