

# The eulogy of a dream

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



The central theme of *The Great Gatsby* is the decay of the American Dream. Through his incisive analysis and condemnation of 1920s high society, Fitzgerald (in the person of the novel's narrator, Nick Carraway) argues that the American Dream no longer signifies the noble pursuit of progress; instead, it has become grossly materialistic and corrupt. Fitzgerald's novel is structured as an allegory (a story that conceals another story): the terrible death of Jay Gatsby is, by extension, the death of the American Dream. For Fitzgerald, the true American Dream is characterized by a spirit of perseverance and hope; through these, one can succeed against all odds. This ideal is embodied by the young Gatsby (then James Gatz): he meticulously plans the path by which he will become a great man in his "Hopalong Cassidy" journal and then follows it, to the letter. When Mr Gatz shows the tattered book to Nick, he declares, "' Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that'." The journal exemplifies the continual struggle for self-improvement that once represented the American ideal. In comparing the young James Gatz to the young Benjamin Franklin, Fitzgerald suggests that the American Dream does survive despite the decay of modern society there will always be those guided by an indomitable hope. Modern society, however, has no place for such dreamers: Gatsby's passionate desire to win Daisy's love ultimately remains unrealized, and in fact leads to his destruction. Gatsby is first seen late at night, " standing with his hands in his pockets"; Nick says, only half in jest, that he is " out to determine what share [is] his of our local heavens." Nick watches Gatsby's movements and comments: " He stretched out his

arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and as far as I was from him I could swear 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 the dock.” Gatsby’s dedication to an ethereal ideal elevates him above his shallow, vulgar contemporaries. His longing for Daisy is like that celebrated by the medieval ideal of courtly love, in which a knight worshipped his lady without any hope of being loved in return; his every action was only for her, and he strove to lead a noble life in the hopes of becoming worthy of her. Daisy is Gatsby’s ideal: we first see him reaching toward the green light that marks her house in East Egg; in the final days of his life, he waits unwearyingly outside Daisy’s house for hours despite the fact that she has already decided to abandon him. Though Gatsby exemplifies the purest elements of the old dream, he cannot help but fail in his pursuit of it, since the woman he loves is a corrupt product of modern society. For Fitzgerald, the American obsession with wealth, power, and privilege is the chief cause of the decay of dreaming. Gatsby earns his money through illegal practices; his ostentatious parties, garish mansion, and lavish clothing are all attempts to win the attention of the cruel and shallow Daisy, who cares only for money. He ceases to throw his parties once he believes that he and Daisy will be reunited. Daisy and Tom Buchanan are the most detestable exemplars of the modern order: they live without hope and without regret, because all they care for is the preservation of their own power and privilege. Daisy is never heard from again after Gatsby’s death, as she wants only to forget him and their relationship. Nick confronts Tom about his responsibility for Gatsby’s death. Tom lies to George Wilson, telling

him that Gatsby was driving the car that struck Myrtle, though Daisy was the driver; he lets George believe that Gatsby was having an affair with Myrtle, when in fact it was Tom himself. Tom scoffs at Nick: ““ I told him [George] the truth... What if I did tell him? That fellow [Gatsby] had it coming to him’.” Tom admits that he is responsible for Gatsby’s murder and Wilson’s suicide, but does not feel guilty; he has never known guilt or shame, since his position as a member of the established elite protects him from punishment. Through Nick, Fitzgerald condemns all of “ high society”：“ I couldn’t forgive him or like him but I saw what he had done was, to him, entirely justified... They were careless people, Tom and Daisy- 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, and let other people clean up the mess they had made... ” Nick realizes that Tom and Daisy represent a class that has attained success at the cost of their own dehumanization. They are a kind of social void a wholly negative force that is capable of spreading only destruction. Toward the end of the novel, Fitzgerald creates a sense of utter hopelessness and despair through the introduction of Tom and Daisy’s child, the murder of Gatsby, and Wilson’s suicide. The first hint of the impending tragedy can be found in the person of the Buchanans’ daughter, whom Daisy nauseatingly refers to as “ Bles-sed pre-cious.” When the girl is brought into the Buchanans’ salon, Nick observes Gatsby’s obvious discomfort: “ Gatsby and I in turn leaned down and took the small reluctant hand. Afterwards he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don’t think he had ever really believed in its existence before.” Daisy then calls her child an “ absolute little dream,” crushing all hopes

Gatsby has of truly returning to the past he shares with her. The gross materialism that has taken the place of the American Dream is revealed shortly thereafter, when Nick and Gatsby attempt to discern why Daisy's voice is so seductive. Gatsby blurts out, "' Her voice is full of money'"; Nick has a sudden epiphany, which alters his view of society as a whole:" That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money- that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl..." At this point, all of Daisy is stripped of all her charm and beauty; nothing remains but the coarse lure of wealth. The ideal that Gatsby has been so inexhaustibly pursuing is not love it is money, soulless money, that has been given a deceptively pretty human face. When Gatsby dies, any chance the American Dream has of surviving in the dehumanized modern world dies with him. Nick later conjectures that Gatsby, at the moment of his death, " 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." The hopes and dreams which have strengthened Gatsby and guided him are shattered as he lies bleeding in the pool; he must take leave of a world which no longer has a place for men like him. George Wilson who symbolizes the common man struggling to eke out his own meager success on the modern world's harsh terms commits suicide. The deaths of Gatsby and Wilson, both striving toward different versions of the original American dream, mirror the death of that dream itself. At the end of the novel, Nick returns to the Midwest with this disturbing knowledge: the American people must struggle to keep from

losing its humanity: " So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." The dream is now utterly lost and can never be resurrected at least not in its original, its purest form. Through the story of a doomed romance, Fitzgerald heralds the tragic decline of American values. Gatsby and the other characters of the novel act as mere vessels for the author's true story: the American Dream, once a pure and mighty ideal, has been degraded and buried by the dehumanizing lust for money. Nick Carraway is an outsider to his own story: he is an honest man, an observer who bears witness to the calamity. *The Great Gatsby* is not, in the final analysis, a eulogy for a man named Jay Gatsby; instead, it serves as a eulogy for the idea of America itself.