

The great gatsby as a social commentary



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Great Gatsby as a Social Commentary After the First World War, American society enjoyed prosperity as the economy soared. At the same time, Prohibition created millionaires out of bootleggers. Consequently, materialism and superficiality immediately filled America. F. Scott Fitzgerald, a witness of people's spiritually empty lives, wrote "The Great Gatsby" which gave him literary importance even today to reflect this ill society. As one of the greatest Modernism work, "The Great Gatsby" successfully incorporated many representative characteristics during the Modernist Movement.

Many Modernists view the world as a spiritually empty place. Fitzgerald strongly connects his novel with this general idea during Modernism. "I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard" (45). Mr. Owl-eyes, a middle-aged guy who gets drunk in the party initially thinks that all books in Gatsby's library are fake because most people only put durable cardboards on their bookcases to pretend to be knowledgeable. From Mr. Owl-eyes' view, it is common to see fake books in libraries, and that Gatsby owns real books even seems to be surprised to him.

Without real books, people gain no knowledge, lack of moral education and only care about being rich and having fun. Fitzgerald's analogy between books and knowledge from Mr. Owl-eyes' eyes tells us the spiritual empty in people's minds. Fitzgerald illustrates abandoning the idea of God through Tom and Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. When talking with Gatsby, Tom says, "By God, I may be old-fashioned in my ideas, but women run around too much these days to suit me" (103). Having an affair with Myrtle, Tom even feels somewhat proud of his attraction to women, instead of a little bit shame.

Even though starting his words with “ By God”, his lack of morals and faith has abandoned the idea of God. The eyes on the billboard are a metaphor for God because they are all-seeing and omnipresent. As Nick says, “ They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose” (23), the eyes can see anything in the world, the physical and the mental. Nevertheless, “ That’s an advertisement” (160), Michaelis only sees the billboard as a literary advertisement and do not understand it is actually a symbol of God.

Even though Wilson repeats that “ God see everything” (160), Michaelis still cannot correct his idea and keeps being superficial by looking at it just as an advertisement. His ignorance has abandoned the idea of God. In addition, the Modern characteristic of searching for a new source of hope is supported by Fitzgerald in this novel. The first time Nick sets eyes on Gatsby, he does not approach him because Gatsby’s behavior of “ stretch[ing] out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way” (20) arouses Nick’s curiosity and interest.

As Nick glances seaward, he sees “ nothing except a single green light, minute and far way, that might have been the end of a dock”. At first, Nick does not know Gatsby very well and has no idea of his stories. As time goes on, Nick gradually becomes Gatsby’s best friend in West Egg. Until then, Nick realizes that the green light is a symbol of dream and hope for the future, which is to be with Daisy to Gatsby. Like what American dream tells us: work hard, then you can reach what you want, the green light leads Gatsby from war to New York in order to be with Daisy.

On the other hand, it is money that separates Gatsby and Daisy at first, and symbolically, American dollars are all green. Thus, the green light can also be interpreted as money. Stretching out arms toward the green light then means Gatsby has pursued for money so desperately to prove to Daisy that he owns enough money to provide everything for her. As part of the tragic ending, Gatsby is killed by Wilson because he is mistakenly believed to be Myrtle's lover. This is a result of his love for Daisy.

Giving such an ending to Gatsby, Fitzgerald seems to tell us that having hope is important, but putting all hopes on a person or money is disastrous. In terms of Nick, the sources of hope to him at the end of the novel are honesty, purity and hard work. When Nick first comes to the East, he wants to get a job and work hard to earn money. However, through a series of complicated events in the East, Nick experiences superficiality and dishonesty, and finally decides to go to the West and start a new life.

In this story, the West stands for nearly all good qualities which Nick seeks, or at least, wants to live in the environment with these good qualities. It is Nick's pursuit of an earnest life that opens the way to the West, where his sources of hope exist. The Romantic characteristics indicated in the novel "The Great Gatsby" created a way for Fitzgerald to speak out about his dissatisfaction of people's way of thinking in the 1920s. He strongly criticizes the spiritually empty minds and the abandoning of God's ideas; while the search of a new source of hope opened a window for him to continue with his own life.