

Materialism And American Dream In F. Scott. Fitzgerald: The Great Gatsby



Literature

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ABSTRACT

The Great Gatsby reflects the mood of glamour and wild ecstasy of the times of the 1920s in the American society up to a level which apparently, will never be realized again. The hot pursuit of materialistic goals the prevailing obsession with amassing wealth through fair, foul means seems to have engulfed the perfect America. The Great Gatsby speaks of the emptiness that lies at the very heart of glamour and ostentation symbolizing the Jazz Age. The Jazz Age gets reflected in the parties that capture the mood of self-confidence and gaudiness but it remains an undeniable fact that deep down in this mood lie boredom, fear and unavoidable crack-up. The action of the novel takes place in some important and lavish parties given by the different characters in the novel. The novel explores the American dream as it exists at a time in which a spiritual part of it has been wiped out and the material part has become the only means recognized as a way to achieve it.

F. Scott. Fitzgerald is famous for his depictions of jazz Age. He lived a glamorous life of parties and money-spending. It is the pursuit of material wealth that corrupts man. Through his novel he puts across the idea that the American dream has been corrupted by the desire for materialism. The American dream has increasingly focused on material items as an indication of attaining success. The hot and mad pursuit of the materialistic goals, the prevailing obsession with amassing wealth through fair means or foul, seems to have engulfed the ideal America. The American society was enjoying hither-to-unknown levels of prosperity during the 1920s. The economic state of America in 1920s brought about a change in the lifestyle of the Americans. The American society turned from a production-oriented to a consumer-oriented society. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald demonstrates that how a dream can change a life of man whose main focus is on acquiring wealth, power and expensive things. In the words of Stephen Matterson, "The Great Gatsby is about the closing of American society, and about 20th century developments which contradict and destroy the old American dream"¹. Through their characters Fitzgerald brings to fore the inner conflict which results in their excessive lust for money.

In the novel, Nick Carraway, is shown to belong to a well-to-do family. He comes to New York with a view to increase material wealth but he has an unstable lust for money. He rents a house next to Gatsby's grand residence that has all the ostentations, who holds lavish parties. Nick meets to Jordan Baker, an attractive young golfer, with whom he begins a romantic relationship. Jordan Baker's plans are also depressingly impacted by the immoral qualities of wealth.

We get a number of hints from the novel that how Gatsby got the fabulous wealth. For the sake of this wealth he is lowered down himself to an abject position of having been a bootlegger, owner of drugs and even a murderer and yet he has no friend. The kind of society in which he lives is draws its rapidness for life in earning fabulous wealth. Nick realizes that Gatsby is involved in many secret business dealings and his aim is to achieve material wealth but he is good at heart. Nick now also learns that Gatsby is in love with Daisy and she is Nick's cousin. But Daisy who's intimacy with Gatsby does not end up in marriage because at that time Gatsby had a very little money and she married to Tom Buchanan. Tom won her over not with the depth and intensity of the passion of love but with a string of pearls. Tom and Daisy's marriage is a proof of the end of the American dream. Gatsby's weak judgment is in not realizing that Daisy represents both material success and the corruption that wealth can bring.

Gatsby's rich lifestyle and lavish parties are an attempt to impress Daisy that she will one day come back to him. Tom also poses himself to be averse to the class of people known as neo rich and this can be nothing else except pretence. Now Gatsby wants Nick to arrange a reunion between himself and Daisy. Nick invites Daisy at his house to have a tea without telling her that Gatsby will also there. Now they reestablish their connection and begin an affair. Apart from that there is Tom Bu-

chanan's involvement with Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the valley of ashes and a wife of local poor garage owner. The valley of ashes itself symbolizes the moral decay and waste that results from the pursuit of material wealth. Lionel Trilling discovers a similarity between "the valley of ashes marked by the atmosphere of barrenness and futility" in *The Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot². Thus the valley of ashes is presented as an effective symbol of the failure of the American civilization on physical intellectual and spiritual planes.

Now Tom comes to know the affair of Gatsby and Daisy. Though Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair, he is irritated by his wife's disloyalty. When Nick and Tom drive through the valley of ashes they come to know that Gatsby's car has struck and killed Myrtle, Tom's lover. At the time of accident Daisy was driving the car. At this crucial stage Gatsby protects her by letting people assume that at that time of the accident, he was driving the car. Tom tells Myrtle's husband that Gatsby was the driver of the car at the time of accident. He is convinced that Gatsby had been her lover. He tracks Gatsby to his mansion, shoots Gatsby and himself. Nick stages a small funeral for Gatsby. On his funeral there is no one expect Nick and his father. The countless people who attend his parties and in his car drink his alcohol are nowhere to be seen in his funeral, when the time comes to pay their respects for Gatsby. They only used him for his lavish openhandedness. Nick recognizes that although Gatsby has gone in deep depth in a world of materialism and dishonesty, yet he is a good man. Nick now ends up his relationship with Jordan and moves back to the Midwest to escape the disgust he feels for the people surrounding Gatsby's life and for the moral emptiness of the wealthy American lifestyle and the pursuit of American dream. He is deeply rooted in the ideals of Midwest and of his family. His American dream is based on his experiences of his warm home life and friendly faces. His dream is as same as to the original American dream, which was focused more around family than wealth and an unending quest for success.

The Great Gatsby is a kind of novel which brings into focus the image of American dream and materialism. Fitzgerald's novel is a misrepresentation of the traditional American dream as a result of the East. "The lure of the East represents a profound displacement of the American dream, a turning back upon itself of the historic pilgrimage towards the frontier which had, in fact, created and sustained that dream"³. His novel may appear to be just a superficial novel about the jazz and parties, which he experienced in the early twentieth century. *The Great Gatsby* shows the corrupt and disillusioning effects that materialism can have on members of American society. All the characters in the novel are one way or another, are trying to achieve a status of happiness in their lives following their own understanding of the dream and they have lost in touch with morality. They are suffering from the misery and waste created by their passion for material wealth. The Jazz Age is a description of American dream which included having an excess of money and material possessions, such as an expensive car and an extravagant house,

with no regard for how the wealth is obtained. Fitzgerald thus exposes the hollowness of the American rich who failed to illuminate their minds through their riches and who could not acquire a certain taste for living. They only tried to establish

their superiority through violence, hypocrisy and snobbery. He thoroughly records the influence of materialism and American dream on human psyche, for he himself has been a victim of money and material.

REFERENCE

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