

The Disillusionment of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Dreams and Ideals in *The Great Gatsby*

Fahimeh Keshmiri

English Department, Farhangian University, Isfahan, Iran

Abstract—In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the American economy ascended, bringing unprecedented levels of affluence to the nation. The chaos of World War I left America in a state of distress, and the generation that fought the war turned to profligate living to recompense. In this novel, Fitzgerald found this new lifestyle seductive and, like Gatsby, he had always idolized the very rich. In this era, unrestrained materialism set the tone of society, which ends to the collapse of all characters and society. This novel represents Fitzgerald's attempt to confront his conflicting feelings about the Jazz Age. Here we analyze major characters, symbols, themes and plot of this masterpiece as a tragedy, and a social novel. This creative work has been identified as one of the greatest novels of all time with Fitzgerald's incredible use of realism and symbolism. Moreover; there are some elements that make this work a modernistic and existential one. These key elements that made this work a success are obvious in the development of characters, plot, themes and setting throughout the novel. It is a highly symbolic meditation on 1920s America as a whole.

Index Terms—*The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, literary movements, twenty century, Jazz Age

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Great Gatsby* (1925), F. Scott Fitzgerald's sixth published book and his third novel, is, with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), one of two American books loved by both literary critics and a wide, general audience. Translated into more than thirty languages, it is a work of worldwide renown and, like *Huckleberry Finn*, provides those from other countries with an idea of America is and Americans with a sense of who they are. With its broad and deep appeal, its complexity and concision, its satire and lyricism, and its eloquence and gift for telling and suggestive detail, this novel is one of the most popular novels in the world.

The Great Gatsby is both romantic tragedy and a social novel. In real, it is a love story that results in the defeat of a union between the persons involved, in a social setting precisely and realistically observed. At the time Fitzgerald composed *the Great Gatsby*; American literature had a slight and distinguished history of social novels. There was, of course, much popular literature that idealized the lives of the rich and that depicted the struggles of persons to gain entrance to that milieu. But these novels made no new explorations into emotion or analysis. "Not until the works of William Dean Howells and Henry James did any American fiction approach social and romantic themes at the level of *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald's novel thus leads, with ironic appositeness, backwards to Howells and James, and in terms of genre especially to James, with his emphasis on wealth and its effect on romance. "None of the books often studied with *The Great Gatsby*, however, have its special tone, its capacity for wonder." (Lathbury, 2000) It is perhaps Edith Wharton who comes even closer than James to Fitzgerald's tone and foci. The sharpness with which wealthy society is satirized in Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) has some of the edge of Fitzgerald's novel. The relative poverty of Lily's inamorata, Lawrence Selden, touches on the theme of social disparity that figures in *The Great Gatsby*, but Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920) reminds a reader of the decent restraint of Nick; the book itself, like *The House of Mirth*, is less committed to idealism.

Of James's book the most natural to compare to *The Great Gatsby* is either *The American* (1877) or *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). The central figure of *The American*, Christopher Newman, has some of the naiveté associated with Jay Gatsby. Many elements of *The Great Gatsby* are present in this novel too, although in a different way. In *The Portrait of a Lady* and in his later fiction, James's central concern is the contrast of American with European culture. Yet, it is in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* that a real similarity with Fitzgerald's narrative technique is seen. Moreover, studies of Fitzgerald's style are rare, and there is room to extend some of the appreciations that have been written.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fitzgerald for all time felt a stable force from both his audience who asked him to write less truthfully and the critics who infrequently considered his work gravely and treated his works with convinced distrust. H.L. Menchen thought *The Great Gatsby* to be "no more than an overvalued anecdote," (Menchen, 1982) and Isabel Paterson defined it as "a book for the season only" (Paterson, 1984). *The Great Gatsby* failed to sell well. But between Fitzgerald's death and the publication of *The Crack-Up* in 1945, the standing of *The Great Gatsby* and Fitzgerald's work steadily increased; by 1945, Lionel Trilling could moderately say in his introduction to New Directions' reissue of *Gatsby* that "Fitzgerald is now beginning to take his place in our literary tradition" (Trilling, 1950). Thus, since the appearance of *The Crack-Up*

that same year, Fitzgerald has received the kind of considerate and insightful consideration from the critics that the work of the other famous writers of his time has.

Thus far many articles have been printed on Fitzgerald and his work, especially on *The Great Gatsby* to reflect its survival. It appoints high approbation that such a short work should propose so much and have its effect remain intensely for such a long time. D. E. Dyson mentions: Thirty-six years after its appearance I would say with confidence, then, *Gatsby* has not only outlived its period and its author, but that it is one of the books that will endure.” (Dyson, 1990) John Henry Raleigh believes that “... at its highest level *The Great Gatsby* does not deal with local customs or even national and international legends but with the permanent realities of existence” (Raleigh, 1957). Noticing only chaos around him, Fitzgerald tried hard to set order on his cosmos.

Lionel Trilling considers *Gatsby* as a genuine representation of America. As such “Gatsby can stand for America as expediently as he can stand for himself.” (Trilling, 1950) “Paul Rosenfeld’s commentary follows the discussion closely: *The Great Gatsby* embodies a criticism of American experience not of manners, but of a basic historic attitude to life more radical than anything in James’s own assessment of the deficiencies of his country. The theme of *Gatsby* is the withering of the American dream. (Rosenfeld, 1976) In any case, Gatsby’s dream, whether he represents America, everyman, or an individual was doomed to failure and corruption because it demanded too much.” (Ghasemi & Tiur, 2012)

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The foremost novel of Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, is the main texts to be examined in this paper. The approach to this subject is eclectic, proceeding from social, historical, and biographical approaches. A deep reading of the related texts will assist the disclosure of Fitzgerald’s process of disillusionment of The American Dream.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fitzgerald and his family spent generally, all the last half of the 1920s in France and during these months he wrote *The Great Gatsby*. One of the book’s best qualities, which makes it classic and places it above the others, is the author’s inconceivable use of *Realism and symbolism*. Moreover, there are some elements that make this work a *Modernism and Existentialism* work. These key elements are obvious in the development of plot, setting, and characters all over the novel, which we will refer to afterward. In *The Great Gatsby*, as in each fiction, the plots rotate about the characters, which are the base of the novel. Fitzgerald employs *Realism* to create credible characters in both their history and connections to each other.

The protagonist rose from an impecunious childhood in rustic North Dakota to become spectacularly affluent. Though, he gained this arrogant ambition by taking part in prearranged offense. At his youth, Gatsby detested poverty and yearned for prosperity and superiority – he fell out of St. Olaf’s College after two weeks as he could not put up with the janitorial occupation with which he was paying his tuition. Although Gatsby constantly required being well-off, his major incentive in obtaining his luck was his adore for Daisy Buchanan. Like Scott and Zelda, they had fallen in love when Jay was a young officer in World War I with no funds or position.

Gatsby loved Daisy’s sensation of lavishness, grace, and attraction, and preferred to hide his backdrop to attract Daisy. Daisy forgot her promise to Gatsby and married Tom Buchanan after two years, whereas Gatsby tried to achieve an education. From that moment on, Gatsby was eager to win Daisy back, and his gaining of great wealth and his plentiful weekly parties are all means to that ending.

Fitzgerald holds up the illustration of all these information until rather tardy in the novel. At first, Fitzgerald portrays Gatsby as the aloof, inexplicable, standoffish host of the luxurious parties at his house. He is already a type of well-known personality and appears as the focus of a hurricane of rumor all over New York and before he is introduced to the reader. The novelist drives the story onward through the early chapters by covering Gatsby’s background. Consequently, the reader’s first, remote imitations of Gatsby strike fairly different note from that of the obsessed youngster who appears at the end of the fiction.

Gatsby’s stable pursue for Daisy confirms that he has an amazing aptitude to alter his dreams into reality; first he appears to the reader as he wishes to come into view of the world. This aptitude for self-invention makes Gatsby a *great man*. His dream about Daisy collapses, enlightening the unworthiness of the aspiration, much in the way Fitzgerald sees the *American Dream* breakdown in the 1920s, as immoral pursuit of wealth influences America’s leading sanguinity and individualism deeply.

Gatsby portrays Fitzgerald’s looking for his destiny in the world for in his romantic mode he stands for a deeper depression in the culture, what forces young men to believe that rich men can capture the girls of their dreams simply. Gatsby’s dream girl is Daisy.

If Gatsby symbolizes one part of Fitzgerald’s personality, the pretentious individuality who pursues and overvalued wealth to astonish his dream girl, then the narrator of the story, Nick Carraway represents the other part: the considerate Midwesterner adrift in the garish East. Nick functions as Fitzgerald’s voice, as in his comprehensive deliberation on time and the *American Dream*, and is the ideal option to narrate the novel. He is one of the best personifications of *double vision* in Fitzgerald’s work, as both participates in the action of the novel and comments on it. Moreover, he

verified a mixed reaction to life on the East Coast. Nick was both interested in the luxurious lifestyle of New York and he found that way of life critical. Nick's romantic affair with Jordan Baker mirrors this internal conflict throughout the story.

After observing the disillusionment of Gatsby's vision and the awful scene of Gatsby's funeral, Nick found the pleasurable life of revels on the East Coast, a wrap for the ethical emptiness that the Valley of Ashes symbolized. Achieving the maturity in his vision, he came back to Minnesota, seeking a tranquil life prearranged by more traditional moral values.

To some extent, based on Fitzgerald's wife Zelda, Daisy is a good-looking young woman from Louisville. She represented the ideals that Gatsby desired for as a child in North Dakota and what had first engrossed him to her, but in truth, Daisy fell far short of Gatsby's ideals. She is beautiful, but irresolute, opinionated, and sarcastic. She is characterized by Nick as a careless individual who destroyed things and then recoiled behind herriches. Daisy is the symbol of immoral values of the aristocratic East Egg set.

It should be taken into consideration that, in this novel Tom Buchanon's character was the same as some personalities in author's real life. Tom was akin to Ginevra's father, Charles King –Ginevra was Fitzgerald's first love – Both of them had a string of horses, and the same background in affluence. Tom was additionally, modeled after rich William Mitchell, who possessed horses. But, Tommy Hitchcock a prosperous Great Neck polo player was the other parallel character for Tom.

The last character of the novel to be discussed is Jordan Baker, in reality, one of Ginevra's best friends Edith Cummings. She is the deepest character in this novel. She is an attractive person, who is named for two well-known cars of that time and thus a commodity herself. She is plainly part of the corrupt East. So it is obvious that Fitzgerald mirrored his life in people, their speech and places in his works.

The fundamental and often universal ideas explored in this literary work as the most important **themes** are discussed here. The surroundings and the resulting pattern of winning and losing Zelda was the most significant of his life and had the most impressive effect on this story. A continual altercation between the desire and the loss is obvious in this novel.

At that time, Fitzgerald was a soldier, who never saw a combat, but since Gatsby's experiences are real, the novel can be considered as an instance of wish fulfillment of its creator. Fitzgerald, like Gatsby, had experienced the breakdown in his life. Ginevra was never his, and Zelda, too. Moreover, Fitzgerald remunerated for these deficiencies by portraying them.

Family background is also reflected in the base of *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald's father admired genteel ways; he had the feelings of aristocracy and no wealth. As the author's mother was an ambitious person for her son, Fitzgerald's disdain for her attitude toward money lasted all his life.

Fitzgerald's prep-school experiences intensified his conflicts over social position. A poor boy among rich boys at St. Paul's Academy and then the Newman School, his ideal was being heroic. His literary ambitions found their way into *The Great Gatsby* as well. Like Nick Carraway who wrote a series of editorials for the Yale News, Fitzgerald wrote short stories and verses for the Newman literary magazine. He tried to be striking from his generation by any available means. Obviously, his feelings about money and class reflected in *The Great Gatsby* were repeated in his literary career.

Fitzgerald dealt with the theme of labor in his literary life, as a means of self actualization. The idealism of Gatsby at the core of the story could be considered as a true part of Fitzgerald's life, if the ideas surrounding aspiration in *The Great Gatsby* resolve to divergent attitudes about affluence and the possibility of realizing love in the meretricious.

Totally, *The Great Gatsby* is an extremely symbolic deliberation in 1920s America, particularly the dissolution of the **American dream** in an era of wealth. Gatsby is the personification of this dream. A disadvantaged farm boy is a prosperous man now. He has gained extraordinary wealth in a few years, but he is never really one of the privileged and his dream is just a frontage.

So, Fitzgerald introduces the 1920s as a period in which the social and ethical values are rotten. The inattentive jubilation that led to corrupt parties resulted in the corruption of the *American Dream* consequently. The major plotline of the story, the materialism, mirrors this appraisal.

One of the main topics explored in this novel is the **sociology of wealth**. The West Egg and its occupants imply the newly rich, while East Egg and its residents symbolize the old aristocracy. Fitzgerald embodies the newly rich as being offensive and in contrast, the old aristocracy acquires elegance and subtleness, characterizes by the Buchanan's stylish home and dresses.

The East Eggers as the old aristocracy show themselves thoughtless bullies who are never worry about throbbing others. The Buchanans demonstrate this stereotype when, they don't take part at Gatsby's funeral at the end of the novel. Conversely, Gatsby with new wealth has a faithful heart, what causes his death and the Buchanan's self-interest allows them to eliminate themselves from the tragedy bodily and psychologically.

Fitzgerald employs a variety of colors, objects, and signs as symbols to represent the corrupt ethical values of people and society in this novel. For example, the **Green Light** located at the ending of Daisy's East Egg wharf, symbolizes Gatsby's hope and dreams for the future. At the first chapter, he uses it in the dark as a guideline to direct him to his ambition. "As Gatsby's quest for Daisy is generally related to the *American Dream*, the green light symbolizes that ideal as well. In Chapter 9, Nick contrasts the green light to America, mounting out of the sea, must have looked to early settlers of the new state." (Sanders, 2007) In this chapter, *The Valley of Ashes* among West Egg and New York

City is a wide deserted land created by industrial ashes, symbolizes the moral and social corruption that is the consequence of the unrestrained quest of them for wealth. Furthermore, The Valley of Ashes portrays the troubles of the poor people like George Wilson, who live there and lose their vitality.

The Eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg are a pair of vanishing be spectacled eyes on an advertising billboard over the valley of ashes. May be they signify God gazing upon and criticizing American society as an ethical wasteland, although the novel never makes this point unambiguously. Instead, all through the novel, Fitzgerald recommends that symbols only have meaning because characters inspire them with meaning. The eyes also come to signify the crucial purposelessness of the world and the uncertainty of the mental process by which people devote meaning to objects.

The *parties on Great Neck* in Gatsby's house were a symbol of the twenties and were modeled after real parties held by Herbert Bayard Swope. There he met some of the sketchier people from New York, and bootleggers as rich Max Gerlach, whom Fitzgerald used as James Gatz.

The Great Gatsby is well famous for the use of entangled plots and sub-plots in it. Firstly, Fitzgerald used *Realism* to develop the plots by choosing the realistic ones. For instance, the main plot of the novel, *The American Dream* (Gatsby's dream of becoming wealthy to amaze his dream girl) is simply believable and is still a common dream of current time. Smaller plots, such as Tom Buchanan's affair with Myrtle, are realistic in our life too. In real, Fitzgerald's descriptive style of writing permits him to portray all plots of the story realistically.

The setting of the novel makes structure and development of the plots realistic. The writer has used *Realism* unbelievably because he lived during the time of the novel and he could imitate his interpretation of the era in detail. At this time WWI had just finished and the world dominant power was America. So, it can be concluded that Fitzgerald left the Victorian era to create this *Modernist* masterpiece for American fiction.

All the characters in this novel are spokespersons of the *modern world*. So, the novel is the criticism of corrupt ethics in that social system. Fitzgerald's protagonist Jay Gatsby is the essential modernist hero: he doesn't accept his real life. His trust in his dream is weird, and isolates and obliterates him lastly. Tragically, Gatsby was unconscious of the corrupt and cruel world of wealth, what he desired to enter and will finally cause the disillusionment of his dreams.

Wright Morris believes, the intricacy of Fitzgerald's *existential-philosophic* vision of modernity is established in his optimistic-absurdist vision of modern experience, and it places him as the first American to formulate his own philosophy of the absurd which was created during the writer's tries to write something unlike the works of his generation and from his own early artistic activities and what presents a remedy for living in Jazz Age.

In fact, "it was through Fitzgerald's writing of *Gatsby* that he finds his vision." (Bryer, Petry, 1996) Fitzgerald's complex vision in *Gatsby*, both embody the cultural and philosophic dilemmas of his time and makes his work a unique masterpiece.

V. CONCLUSION

All through his twenty-year career, Fitzgerald used the same material as: the quest of riches and gladness by striving deprived boys; the romantic desires of youth; and the apprehensions of high class men and women. Moreover, he provided unforgettable characters like himself. His fame is for his *material* and *themes*. His essential characters commence processes of self evaluation, they evaluate others, or are evaluated by their creator. Most of female characters in his works are incompetent of used *double vision* sharing the hopes of the men who love them. One of the most well-known personifications of Fitzgerald method is Nick Carraway. He takes part as an insider and outsider viewer.

For Fitzgerald the *American Dream* was bound up with the America's history. His most reminiscent heroes own *the quality of the idea* and *willingness of the heart* described by Fitzgerald as characteristically American. Fitzgerald's idea about the influence of money on character was complex and his works reflect his hesitance of attitude. The main topics Fitzgerald deals with in all his works are: youth, attractiveness, affluence, and romantic keenness. The opposite subjects are: age, ugliness, poverty, and wasted potential. Such conflict and consequential tension is the material for all fiction.

Fitzgerald has given a special attention to *Symbolism* in his artistic works, particularly the use of color images into symbolic patterns, his stable drawing upon episodes from American history, and his constant apprehension with time and variability, or predictable change.

Fitzgerald's vision in *Gatsby* is a multipart combination of history, politics, religion, social issues, and philosophy, which symbolizes the civilizing and philosophic dilemmas of his era, and makes the author different from the others, but what is noteworthy about Fitzgerald is the reflection of European *Existentialisms* in his works and art. Like the existentialists, Fitzgerald realized the insufficiency of American democracy in a profitable culture and rejects the capitalistic values, individualities, and norms arranged by the greatly depressive American culture.

For Fitzgerald the personality and the creative life of the nation are at stake and they appear in all his early works, an emotion obvious in their representations of purposeless characters. Broadly, when he found America not a suitable place for the real growth of the individual spirit, expatriated himself to Europe.

Fitzgerald's art is considered, both as an existentialist critiques of his American moments, and as a response to existential dilemmas of Being American in his time. By doing so, Fitzgerald becomes the prophet of his unfaithful generation.

To conclude, the events leading to Gatsby's death signify that his collapse is a plain conquest of moral powers. His disillusionment is brought about by Daisy, who deserts him; by Tom; and by Wilson as an envoy of the ash-gray men who comes to Gatsby or to Fitzgerald himself, in his disillusionment, as an awful personification of the realities which have ruined his dream.

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Fahimeh Keshmiri is PHD in English Literature (2010-2013), graduated from National Academy of Science, Armenia.