
DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM
IN SCOTT FITZGERLAD'S
THE GREAT GARSBY

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I.1. ABSTRACT

Though the American Dream has been frequently studied, the decline of the American dream in the works of Scott Fitzgerald has never been explored in depth. This paper, therefore, is an in-depth study of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). It tries to explore Fitzgerald's attitude to the American Dream and his reflections on, and disapproval of the American dream and it seeks to show the reflection, and the decline of this dream in Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*

Through a critical analysis the paper reveals Fitzgerald's disbelief in, and disapproval of, the American Dream. Most of his novels depict the individual decline reflected in the moral decline of a society which has achieved superficial success, but has lost the commitment and purpose necessary to achieve a genuine American dream.

I.ii. PLOT SUMMARY OF *THE GREAT GATSBY*

There is no doubt that *The Great Gatsby* is Fitzgerald's most popular work due to its complexity yet ability to entertain. The novel is Fitzgerald's most complicated and sophisticated piece of writing and clearly offers readers the climax to the erosion of the American dream as seen through the eyes of Fitzgerald. He "draws a number of antithetical relations between the idealism and visionary self-aspirations of the mythic American West and the sham and vulgar materialism of the

civilized present symbolically signified by the modern wasteland of the urban industrial East" (Greasley 200).

Told through the eyes of one of Gatsby's neighbor, Nick, who is originally from Minnesota, readers get a glimpse into the lives of the residents who inhabit the East and West Eggs. Nick introduces readers to a world full of complexities, faded dreams and strict class boundaries as he continues to explain the connections between the various characters in the novel. It is revealed that the seemingly perfect, all American couple Tom and Daisy are not exactly what they appear to be. The mystery deepens when it is revealed that the driving force behind Gatsby's success is his undying passion for Daisy. The protagonist of the story, Jay Gatsby remains a mystery throughout the course of the novel due to the fact that no one exactly knows where he came from or exactly how he generated his wealth.

By introducing these conflicting characters and varying viewpoints of the same world, Fitzgerald immediately grasps readers' attention and drags them into the real and ideal worlds:

The reader is exposed to Daisy, Tom, Jordan Baker, and the Wilsons, is transported through the valley of ashes and into Myrtle's Manhattan apartment, and gets a fuller glimpse of Gatsby during the first party at his house. The chief results, aside from heightening one's interest in the mysterious Gatsby, are the various juxtapositions of beauty and squalor, peace and violence, vitality and decay—in short, the intensifying of the central contrast between the ideal and real (Brucoli 1985: 94).

Readers get exposed to the secret passion which Gatsby harbours for his long lost sweetheart Daisy and are presented with another conflict, between innocence and greed. Fitzgerald's portrayal of Gatsby's love for Daisy is an obvious reversion to the innocence of the American dream in its pursuit form, while his need for riches and extravagance indicates the newer and harder

reality of the dream. Fitzgerald continues to expose the new, and failed version of the dream by the further development of the Buchanan's, especially Tom who is revealed to be no more than a bully who does not let any one, especially women, stand in his way of what he thinks he is entitled to. Daisy's fickleness and her hot and the cold attitude with Gatsby's reveals that she is a fraud who is not a victim but rather a perfect match for the greedy and heartless Tom.

On the surface, it seems as if Daisy may be willing to abandon her sheltered and comfortable life in order to take a risk and return the love that Gatsby has harbored for her for so many years, unfortunately, this turns out to be nothing but an illusion. When it finally seems that Daisy will forsake, the restrictions that are placed on her, she falls back into the trap of doing exactly what society expects her to do and neglects the outsider. Daisy's refusal to admit her feelings for Gatsby and her placing the blame on Gatsby for the car crash that killed him, suggests that she is no more than a spoiled child and a symbol of the corrupted American Dream.

Nick realizes that he is not strong enough to handle the new version of the American dream as exposed by the Buchanan's and reverts to a simpler time in his life thus indicating that he wishes to recapture, the old innocent version of the American dream, "ultimately confronted by an historical, ideological and personal impasse. Caraway thus observes that he, no less than Gatsby and other transplanted Westerners in the novel possessed some deficiency that rendered him subtly inadaptable to Eastern life" (Greasley 200). Fitzgerald is attempting to convey that despite the lure of the new American dream it comes with a price. Gatsby paid for it by his death and if Nick does not escape, he too will pay for it in one form or another.

**I.iii. DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN
THE GREAT GATSBY**

Even for those who are not familiar with the works of Fitzgerald, it is painfully obvious that there is no escape from his most popular novel *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald conceived the idea of the novel in the spring of 1924 on Long Island (Brucoli and Smith, 2002: 21). While writing the book, he was convinced that it was better than any previous American novel ever written.

Although Fitzgerald claimed that this novel was pure imagination rather than a reflection of his experiences, upon inspection it becomes clear that Fitzgerald could not help bringing his personal experience into the equation. Like the scenes of grandeur that exist within the pages of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald himself was living a life of luxury at the time the novel was in progress. Like the world he wrote so convincingly about throughout the pages of the novel, he had the opportunity to live in for real, as Brucoli comments on this:

He was at the beginning of a decade in which he would be one of America's best-paid writers of fiction, but money kept vanishing as though at the command of an evil sorcerer. Renting a mansion on Long Island Sound could not have helped, of course, nor could driving into Manhattan for parties and hotels, or living next door to his friend Ring Lardner, a notorious alcoholic. Or a staff that included a live-in couple, a nurse for the baby, and a laundress (Brucoli, 1985:21)

It is clear, from the type of lifestyle, that Fitzgerald was leading at the time he wrote *The Great Gatsby* that he firmly believed that the American Dream revolved round the principles of excess and pleasure. As indicated in the above quotation, although Fitzgerald was making real money during his life time, it was not enough. The more he made the more he seemed to spend on things he would never have been considered before his new found wealth. His money kept on disappearing thus indicating that the new and materialistic version of the American

dream was nothing more than an illusion that would disappear as soon as the glitz and the lure eroded. During this particular time he was in a state of depression that somewhat impaired him from achieving the results that he desired. It can be argued that because of Fitzgerald's own ongoing personal battles, he subconsciously knew that the American dream that he had held so dearly onto all of these years was coming to an end.

For it is clear that Fitzgerald wanted a luxurious life not only for himself but also for his beloved Zelda and was not afraid to work for it, "I really worked hard as hell last winter—but it was all trash and it nearly broke my heart and my iron constitution" (Petry 103).

The context in which Fitzgerald wrote this particular statement was in the form of a letter to an old friend. During this particular time, he was in a state of depression that somewhat impaired him from achieving the results that he desired. It can be argued that because of Fitzgerald's own ongoing personal battles, he subconsciously knew that the American Dream that he had held so dearly onto all of these years was coming to an end.

The type of lifestyle that he had held on to all of these years could no longer be maintained, since the strain was too much for any man to bear thus indicating that he himself was the living embodiment of the failure of the American dream:

In the background of both author's work as reminders of that moralistic and idealistic strain of Americans who populated a wilderness and created its Washingtons and Lincolns. But the society each saw around him was one in which that kind of American was hard pressed to withstand the amoral and materialistic drive for power that characterized American success. The tragic hero set forth in *Gatsby* is really the American failure, failing to hold to the course of power that wins success and failing, moreover, because of the strength of idealistic illusions (Brucoli, 1985: 96)

Almost like an omen indicating the end of an era, when *The Great Gatsby* was first published (1925), it was poorly received by the general public generating revenue of a mere \$7000 dollars for Fitzgerald in his lifetime. The two main reasons for its commercial failure were its weak title and the lack of any really important women characters as (Perkinson 17) points out.

Due to a variety of factors and a renewed interest in Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* somehow managed to rise to success in the late 50s not only in America but also in Britain. Instead of being a mere observation of a decade, perhaps one of the main reasons for its modern day appeal is its ability to transcend any preset boundaries and lets readers decided the message they would like to take away from it, Prigonzy argues that

The Great Gatsby published in 1925, seems to speak directly to its current audience about love and freedom. Yet the ideas that we bring to the story may not be the ideas that the story brings to us. The book was written before most of its readers were born. It inhabits a different world, with barriers between men and women, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, rich and poor, capital and labor, educated and half literate. It was a more defined and morally harder world then (Prigozy , 2002: 79)

Keeping the above analysis in mind, it is obvious that *The Great Gatsby* is not a light hearted love story but embraces the struggle of many seemingly glamorous individuals to fit the expectations of society. Although it was written at a particular time period in American history, not much has changed in terms of the message it represents and sends to readers.

The vision of the American Dream that *The Great Gatsby* represents is clearly multifaceted but focuses specifically on how the new dream requires the loss of morality and freedom. It is important to note that although Fitzgerald writes so passionately about the losses of life and failures, he also exposes readers to the

inner working of elite classes, social groups and organizations and the disappointments that they face once they realize that their dreams are nothing but illusions, "The Great Gatsby became a profound examination of not only the American dream but also an examination of the members of a certain social group or class who have been disappointed by their own expectations" (Stanly 16). It can be argued that the novel became such a success after Fitzgerald's death because of the time period that had elapsed between its publication and the time period in which people were finally able to see the connection between Fitzgerald's works and the economic failure due to loose morals and greed.

Fitzgerald started out writing relatively simple prose with straight forward characters, however, with each novel, his perspective started to expand as his characters became increasingly complex and multifaceted (Donaldson: 16). The character of Nick acts as the narrator and ultimately the observer of society and its restrictions and limitations, "Fitzgerald's sensitive recording of a specific and special world, as envisioned and judged by a particular and special intelligence, Nick Caraway, must have escaped many of his contemporaries" (Garrett 130) The character of Nick himself bears striking similarities to Amory in *This Side of Paradise* not only because of his well off background but also because of his seemingly aimless outlook on life and the future. The character of Nick can be an extension of the men who were so common in the lost generation, drifting from one location to another while feeling passionate about everything and nothing at once. Thus Gross describes him as follows:

Before he meets Gatsby , he is already detached and at loose ends. He turns thirty during the course of the novel. He is unmarried and no profession or specific ambition. He has come to the East with a rather lukewarm intention of going into the bond business, and has left behind a girl for whom

he has no stronger feelings than friendliness to whom he wishes to avoid commitment. Like Gatsby, he has gone through World War 1, a permanently disorientating experience for many men of his generation. In 1922, four years after the war, he still feels unsettled (Gross 3).

Nick is an accurate representation of the Lost Generation that Fitzgerald wrote so passionately about in so many of his previous novels. Although he comes from a decent background, he has no particular direction or aim that keeps him in one place for more time than is necessary. Perhaps it is his detachment from his settings and environment that makes him the perfect narrator. His vision has not been scarred by a personal agenda, as Pelzer points out:

Nick Caraway's first glimpse of Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker, for an instant, utterly fixes them as representative of their class. Similarly, Caraway's description of Gatsby's car is an evocation of the owner's psyche rather than a recitation of make and model....In the end, Fitzgerald's style--the rhythm of his sentences, the precision of his language, the intensity of his poetic phrase--is an elegant signature that defines his fiction as distinctly as his characters (Pelzer 33).

The above statement is very important because it reminds the reader that what Nick is relating to the audience is not what he chooses to see but what is actually taking place in front of his eyes. His assessments of circumstances are not biases but rather an accurate reflection of what is happening to him in a particular time and place. Another reason why Fitzgerald chose Nick as a narrator and gave him mid-western background is because of his own sentimental feelings towards the particular region and how it shaped his vision of the American dream,

Fitzgerald's treatment of the Midwest is neither cynical, critical, nor antiprovincial. It is rather the point of departure in Fitzgerald's own self-fashioned quest for achievement and success. Thus, if not necessarily the stuff dreams are made of, still for Fitzgerald and so many of his

protagonists, the Midwest is ultimately the place where those dreams were imaginatively formed and shaped, if only to be played out elsewhere, most often to disillusioning and disappointing effect (Greasley: 200)

Fitzgerald clearly introduces readers to two very different versions of the American dream within the opening chapter of the novel which are divided not only socially but also geographically as West Egg and East Egg. Nick's description of the Eggs is crucially important on a variety of levels because it not only provides a physical description but also a social description of two completely different societies, and thus dreams. The two Eggs are described by Nick as

they are not perfect ovals—like the egg in the Columbus story, they are both crushed flat at the contact end—but their physical resemblance must be a source of perpetual confusion to the gulls that fly overhead. To the wingless a more arresting phenomenon is their dissimilarity in every particular except shape and size (*TGG* 4).

The gulls are representative of the outside observer who is not familiar with the social construction of the two societies. To the casual observer, the two Eggs are seemingly identical because they are a heaven to the rich and privileged of America, they are not different from each other. However, to the insider, such as Nick, the two Eggs could not be more opposite and thus have nothing in common than their physical exterior. The West Egg, where Nick resides is the new version of the American dream that is based on principles of new found wealth and is represented by the new money flash of Gatsby's mansion:

The one on my right was a colossal affair by any standard—it was a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden. It was Gatsby's mansion (*TGG* 4).

The fact that Nick describes Gatsby's mansion as a factual imitation of a hotel signifies that Gatsby himself is replicating

those born into privilege and wealth. He is no more than a generic representation of wealth rather than the real thing.

In stark contrast to the West Egg, there is the East Egg which is just over the bay but is an entirely different world. The people who inherit the houses of the East Egg represent the glamour and lure of old money thus symbolize the old ideals of the American dream and all of the privileges that come with money. Nick describes the houses in the East Egg as, “Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water” (*TGG* 5). Nick shows his outright admiration of the houses by using the words “palaces” and the word “glittered” suggests that that world of the old money rich is one that appears to be perfect and absolutely untouchable, at least from the outside. On the outside, one can assume that the West Egg is the new version of the American dream because of the different social classes of people who live there. In reality, both of the Eggs are homes to the people who have been failed and disillusioned by their dreams.

Nick does not reveal much information about the title character, Gatsby from the get go but rather starts his character descriptions with the inhabitants of the East Egg, mainly the Buchanans. Tom and Daisy are perhaps the textbook definition of the spoiled American dream. When children all across the globe watch films and read books, they are more than likely to encounter numerous Toms and Daisies, although the names might change and the hair color a shade or two darker or lighter, the fact remains, this couple that Fitzgerald so clearly describes through Nick is the classic embodiment of the all American couples. So Fitzgerald describe Tom as

her husband, among various physical accomplishments, had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven—a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that

everything afterward savors of anti-climax. His family were enormously wealthy—even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach—but now he'd left Chicago and come East in a fashion that rather took your breath away: for instance, he'd brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that (*TGG* 5).

Nick's initial description of Tom is equivalent to that of a god-like figure who is perfect in everyway. All aspects of Tom's background indicate that he is the embodiment of the classic American dream. His wealthy background, good looks, academic and athletic achievements put him on a pedestal. To Nick, it is hard to imagine how someone who is almost the same age as himself could be so wealthy and well accomplished. The American dream that Tom lives is equal to that of the innocent Amory as he went off to Princeton. His world is full of privilege and entitlement; there is nothing, absolutely nothing that he cannot have.

The first indication that Tom is not everything that he appears to be and that he and Daisy do not have the perfect, cookie cutter marriage appears in Chapter Two. The reality behind Tom's perfect exterior is no more than ugly, bully who uses those around him to give himself greater power and control. Although Tom has everything that a man can desire, he is not happy. Even though he has a beautiful wife and money, he needs to make himself feel superior by having an open affair with a married woman while mocking her husband at the same time.

Tom's desire to have it all extends to having an affair but then restoring to breaking his mistress's nose when she mentions his wife. Tom is so lost and utterly deprived of any sense of himself that he does not know what he wants.

The all American man has transformed himself into a brutish bully who is bored by his position and circumstances that

he strives to create drama in even the most mundane of situations. Gross supports this idea:

Tom Buchanan is almost a caricature of the American Dream. He is wealthy and physically powerful. He has played football excellently at an Ivy League school and has married a beautiful woman. But he is also stupid, brutal, and bored, mouthing ideas that he has stolen, and cannot even remember correctly from third-rate books (Gross 11).

The character of Tom is easy to pity because he does not realize how tragic he is. He has no idea how lost he has become or how his lack of humanity has transformed him into an utter monster who has no remorse for causing hatred and murder. Tom's mockery of others and his use of force to demonstrate his power indicate that his dreams have faded. He has become a victim of his own world. The glamorous life that everyone around him seems to envy is no more than a mere lie, an empty facade that has no real value or depth.

The seemingly perfect life of Tom has put so much pressure on him that he has become a hungry monster who constantly needs to prove him. He needs to exercise power and control over those around him in order to prove that he has it all. His station in life and society has taught him that he is entitled to anything that he desires thus he knows no limits or boundaries and is incapable of showing others any sort of compassion or sensitivity. In short, Prigozy rightly argues that

Tom has become a bloated image of the perfect all American male. His good looks and wealth provide a perfect cover for his lack of direction and meaning, Tom drifts, like each of the characters, some elusive moment of happiness--for him, it is the wistful search for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game. By the end of the novel, Tom comes to symbolize the impenetrable wall of old money class that Gatsby is barred (Prigozy, 2004: 27)

Perhaps, what makes Tom even more frightening is his lack of education and his misadjusted attitudes that come across

as wholly racist, "Tom, incidentally, is a man born into wealth and former football hero, whose sense of anti-climax since his days of sporting glory has tempted him to embrace racist ideas for explanation and excitement, to convince himself that he is not stale and past it" (Gray 437). Due to his class and social status, Tom is convinced that the old, white American classes need to be protected from outsiders. Much of Tom's cold attitude towards Gatsby comes not only from his jealousy over the relationship between Daisy and Gatsby but also from his feeling of being threatened by the new self made American man.

Gatsby threatens Tom's American dream because he is a bit of an outsider with no real connections to the world of old money. If men like Gatsby can become rich and powerful in their own right, to Tom, this indicates that his social position is no longer special and unique. If the poor can rise to the top then there is no longer a distinction between his world and their world. The only thing that makes Tom special and unique in any way is his money and his family name. It is obvious that Tom is a corrupted version of the American dream because he lives and acts in a manner which indicates that he has no morals. His lack of morals has made him into a hateful person who clings to previously set standards and barriers which are irrelevant. His only identity is defined by his color and status thus it is imperative that he does not lose the only thing that vainly separates him from the masses, therefore;

The idea is if we don't look out "the white race will be--will be utterly submerged," a statement whose characteristic use of the dash emphasizes the anxiety that underwrites American nativism in the 1920s, its sense that the process of Nordic "submersion" by an ever-expanding "colored empire" may already be underway. What the dash in Tom's statement represents is what, for him, would be unspeakable-miscegenation, a process through which "whiteness" and "color" become undifferentiated, through which "race" itself

and the white race in particular, becomes indeterminate. For Tom, it is Jay Gatsby in particular who represents a mode of racial indeterminacy or "vanishing" that threatens to violate not only the immediate community of East Egg but also the very concept of Americanism itself (Flanagan, "Fitzgerald's Radiant World," 2006).

To Tom, the success of Gatsby is the end of his American dream. The dream of living in a country where those born rich stay that way, while the poor stay poor, is the very essence of his dream. Tom's actions, his hate and his lack of direction have made him a prisoner of the glamorous world which he so desperately clings to, but the harsh reality is that it is the only world that he knows. Without the illusion of happiness, and the use of money to ward off boredom, Tom is a broken man who is envied by none. To Tom, the procreation of his dreams and his lies is essential to his existence and his survival.

Daisy's character is initially portrayed as a wilting flower that needs to be loved and taken care of. She is the ultimate goddess who has been the object of Gatsby's love, devotion and dreams but in the end, she is a disappointment. To Gatsby, Daisy is beautiful, intelligent and graceful and embodies all the qualities that are worthy of love and riches. In reality, Daisy is harsh, jaded and bitter. Throughout the novel Fitzgerald drops hints of Daisy's disillusionment such as the time when she wishes that her daughter would grow up to be a fool because according to her that is the best thing for a woman to be.

Like Gatsby, Daisy has been disappointed by her dreams but unlike Gatsby, she transforms her disappointment into bitterness and resentment. At the beginning of the novel it is clear that she never really wanted to marry Tom but did it out of some sort of social obligation, but she didn't say another word:

We gave her spirit of ammonia and put ice on her forehead and hooked her back into her dress, and half an hour later, when we walked out of the room, the

pearls were round her neck and the incident was over.
Next day at five o'clock she married Tom Buchanan
without so much as a shiver, and started off on a
three months' trip to the South Seas (*TGG* 61).

Initially, her whole marriage to Tom seems rather forced and necessary rather than being based on any sort of real love or passion. She is fully aware that her husband is unfaithful to her but does not make any efforts to confront him as long as she is safe and secure in the lap of luxury. In other words, her dreams have been replaced by harsh reality. She realizes that the world is not simple as she thought and the only constant thing is money.

When Gatsby comes back into her life, it appears as though Daisy has been reconnected with her dreams of a life, which includes both love and luxury. When Daisy realizes that she may have another chance to have the life that she always dreamed of, she does not hesitate and wait but decides to take action right away. She knows from experience that if she waits Gatsby's attentions may turn towards another, "some authentically radiant young girl who with one flash glance at Gatsby, one moment of magical encounter, would blot out those five years of unwavering devotion" (*TGG* 87).

At first it may seem that Daisy has finally been reformed and reverted to the ideals of her youth but as the story progresses it becomes clear that her dreams have been permanently replaced by practicality. After the car accident, she is happy to let Gatsby take the blame for the crash even though she was the one driving. In the end, it becomes clear that Daisy's love for Gatsby was a pathetic attempt at revenge against Tom rather than true devotion. She runs back to the Toms rich arms and does not look back. Daisy and Tom do not even attend Gatsby's funeral thus showing the reader the depth of their selfishness. In reality, she is neither certain nor sure of her true desires, (Flanagan, "Fitzgerald's Radiant World," 2006)

Fitzgerald cloaks his title character with an air of mystery and then introduces him in an extravagant, over the top party which he hosts. Every aspect of the party, including Gatsby's house is symbolic of the flash and the urge that screams new money. Everything about Gatsby's existence embodies his perception of the American Dream which is an ironic two-fold combination of the new dream of material wealth and the traditional and innocent dream of having the ability to reach any of one's goals through hard work and determination. Indications that both of his visions of the American dream are failing are present almost immediately. On a materialistic level Gatsby fails to recognize that despite his desire to buy riches, he cannot buy acceptance or class or family name since he is still "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (*TGG* 136). Therefore his attempts at impressing the old money class are thin and easy to deconstruct:

Gatsby's house may have indeed been a houseboat sailing up and down the Long Island Coast, as the rumors contend, Material without being real; it is both intangible and monstrously tangible as his dream. To Gatsby himself, it is never real, unless for the moment he wondrously discovers it while showing it to Daisy, who at once sees the house grotesque and dislocated from its place (Callahan 53).

Despite, the grandeur and luxury that surrounds him, Nick notices that Gatsby appears to be wholly distant from the scene around him. He does not seem to drink or socialize very much with the other guests. It seems almost as if Gatsby is watching a film rather than living his true life. Instantly, it is obvious that Gatsby is more of a dreamer than a realist, although he strives to achieve material success.

The most interesting aspect of Gatsby is his ability to gain Nicks approval despite the narrators aversion to the lifestyle of Daisy and Tom, Nick finds it hard not to like Gatsby, "He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it,

that you may come across four or five times in life” (TGG 40). From the instant Nick meets Gatsby he feels an instant connection to him and a sense that despite the false lifestyle surrounding him, he is a good and honest man. This is important because it at once shows the differences between the two worlds of Tom and Daisy compared to that of Gatsby.

Although Gatsby is materialistic on the surface, internally, he is still pure because he has not lost sight of himself. His wealth is simply a cover for a bigger desire or dream; he does not fully immerse himself into his parties and the happenings around him because he knows that it is not what will make him truly happy. Gatsby’s outlook on wealth is entirely different from that of Tom and Daisy who have become prisoners of their own social standing and their own wealth. They are defined only by money and have no greater sense of themselves since they have never had to work or dream for anything greater in their lives. The title character Jay Gatsby is introduced to the readers as a fun loving, typical WASP. However, as the story develops Gatsby is revealed to be more than he appears to be. In Chapter Four, Gatsby’s character becomes both clearer and yet more confusing and indefinable. As Nick is further entangled into Gatsby’s world, he realizes that all assumptions that he made about him have gone out of the window. Handley comments on this:

Within Nick’s narrative energy, Gatsby’s Unwitting imbrications in the national idea Makes him, indeed, great as both sacrifice and ideal, as both fraud and fantasy made real He serves a culturally symbolic project of reconciling American idealism and greed (Handley180).

Gatsby himself does not reveal who he truly is; instead he continues to present conflicting images of himself to Nick. Gatsby, so desperate to fit into the world of old money, lies to Nick and tells him that he comes from a well off family from the

Midwest. At first glance this may seem believable but Gatsby shatters the illusion by mixing reality with lies.

Instead of presenting himself as a believable character, it seems as if Gatsby is almost playing with Nick and pushing his absurd lies to the limit just to see how much Nick will actually believe. One of the reasons that Gatsby may employ these tactics is because he is so convinced that money can buy everything, he no longer needs to tell people the truth.

Gatsby's stories are a humorous but sad reflection of the society he lives in, where people do not respect honesty as much as they respect material wealth and riches. At this point, Gatsby may also tell Nick these lies in order to find some sort of connection with his new friend. The reality is that Gatsby has no true sense of how he should portray himself since he does not come from old money, the only image he can present to others is the one that he believes that they will find acceptable.

Since he cannot reveal his humble roots to those that surround him, he must present himself as a believable illusion, unfortunately it becomes clear that Gatsby's dream of fitting into the world of old money is never going to become a full reality because he has no true sense of what that particular world is constructed of:

Gatsby has created himself, literally patched himself out of popular ideas and books about self improvement and success that he encountered during his difficult journey from youth to manhood. His attempt to link his background with Nicks-- he says that he is the son of wealthy parents from the Middle West, educated at Oxford as the family tradition (Prigozy, 1998: 27).

Upon closer inspection, Gatsby's desperate desire to fit into the world of old money is almost embarrassing because it is so contrived. Like Tom who has become an inflated version of the old money American Dream, Gatsby himself has also become an inflated version of the new money American Dream.

Everything about Gatsby's lifestyle and possessions indicate that he is trying to convey the message that he is living the all American Dream. Everything about Gatsby's lifestyle and possessions indicate that he is trying to convey the message that he is living the American dream. His house is too big and somewhat tacky, his cars are too flashy and his language which is filled with phrases like old sport is rather precontrived.

In order to ignore the essential emptiness of his materialistic existence, Gatsby surrounds himself with people he claims are interesting but in reality are just as self absorbed as he is. The dream that he worked so hard to achieve does not exist but he is so caught up in his own determination to notice. Although Gatsby has thrown himself fully into his dream, he constantly remains an outsider and an observer thus indicating that he can never really belong to the world he strives to be part of (Hensley 13). Fitzgerald reveals Gatsby's true background as the novel progresses and thus dramatically changes the entire dynamics of the novel. It is revealed that Gatsby quits college because he could not bring himself to work as a janitor in order to pay the tuition. From this, the reader catches a glimpse of the traditional American dream in which the ordinary person can achieve great success. Fitzgerald transformed a typical, rich character into a character that dreamed, struggled and fought for what he wanted.

Gatsby rejects the concept of class and race in equation to success. He changed his name from James Gatsby which has tones of Jewish ethnicity into Jay Gatsby which is a typical WASP name. Gatsby's ethnic origins remain a mystery throughout the novel; he is perceived to be a bit off-white. This perception is brought to reality after his death which is said to be holocaust-like (Will, "The Great Gatsby and the Obscene Word," 2005).

Instead of being bound by his perceived limitations Gatsby ignored them and was determined to take what was rightfully his, Daisy and a life of luxury. He threatens the distinct border between the privileged white upper class and the poor immigrant classes. He changed his manner of speaking and transformed it into old money language peppered with phrases such as old sport. Although, Gatsby dreamed of being a valid member of the white upper class, he did not fully convince everyone. His speech is contrived which Fitzgerald shows by the constant use of dashes after one of Gatsby's old money phrases and his ethnic origins are constantly a matter of speculation between the other characters.

The most striking difference between Tom and Gatsby is not only their personalities but also their perspectives on money. To Gatsby, money is everything because he never had it while growing up thus it becomes the main aspiration behind all of his hopes and dreams. Also, To Gatsby, the quest for money is endless because only money can buy love and happiness. To Tom, money is a non issue because he has never been without it. Tom does not have to think about buying anything thus does not see Daisy as any sort of prize but as his right. Although the desire for money puts Gatsby in an ambitious place and gives him the ability to treat those around him with more compassion, it also makes him prone to illusions and obsessions that focus too heavily on material possessions and desires. Brucoli convincingly argues that

Gatsby's on the other hand, is new money, money in the process of being acquired. This newness gives the money some sort of purpose and vitality: to win Daisy. But there is a danger for Gatsby in this redeeming purposefulness. When he buys a fantastic house, he thinks he is buying a dream, not simply purchasing a property. This makes Gatsby a more sympathetic man than Tom, but it is sympathy that he projects at the price of naiveté; he is completely innocent of the limitations of what

money can do, a man who we feel, would believe every word of an advertisement (Brucoli, 1985:51).

Gatsby did not want to be classified and bound by his ethnic origins and humble background but wanted to be on equal footing with the white Americans. He saw the world and dreamed of it not from the eyes of the privileged, "I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes--a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams" (*TGG* 173). The shocking revelation of Gatsby's background defines the very essence of the new American Dream, the opposite of the one that Daisy and Tom cling to. This American Dream is not based on entitlement but rather stems from the principles of hard work, determination and the ability to transform yourself into whomever and whatever you desire to be.

This version of the American Dream is the one that appears in countless modern day novels and films because of its widespread appeal and accessibility. The character of Gatsby managed to transform himself from nobody into one of the most talked about characters in New York.

Because the meaning of Gatsby's quest and his invention of a new identity to achieve his dream are at the core of the novel, a naturalistic approach would distract readers from those concerns. Thus Gatsby himself not only embodies the Horatio Alger myth of success but all of the stories of self made men which dotted the history of American expansion in the late 19th century. He, is on one hand, a variation of the log cabin boy who, after an early education at the feet of the genuine relic of the expansion, pioneer Dauchee Dan Cody rises to unparalleled wealth and power, and on the other, a modern-day racketeer moving easily between bootleggers and gangsters like Meyer Wolfshiem (Prigozy, 2004: 27).

Aside from dreaming of being a part of the rich, white upper class, Gatsby dreamed of marrying the love of his life

Daisy. The language that Fitzgerald uses to portray Gatsby's love for Daisy as grand and romantic. This version of the American dream is of a more innocent and fresh nature, one which is not driven by money but by emotion. Since for five years Gatsby has been pining for Daisy and the memory of her, to him, Daisy is not only a beautiful woman but she embodies the fantasy of the all American golden girl. Gatsby compares kissing Daisy for the first time to a God-like experience that could never be relived. Fitzgerald used this extreme language in order to portray the extent of Gatsby's ideal dream and his preoccupation with fantasy (Dillard 3).

But Gatsby's perception of the American Dream and the belief in the money is equivalent to the happiness formula that filled his life with lies and complications. After his realization that his dream or the all American dream of wealth does not live up to its expectations, he desires to revert back to the past and hold on to his memory of how he once loved so freely and openly as argued by (Brucoli, 1978; 49).

As details of his affair with Daisy are further revealed, it becomes painfully obvious that Gatsby is running on pure imagination and fantasy rather than reality. The extent of his intimacy with Daisy before he went off to war is a shared kiss rather than any sort of real sexual relation. Over the course of five years, Gatsby has taken the memory of the single kiss and transformed it into a vast array of possibly. Gatsby has spent so much of his time preoccupied with fantasy and the dream world. But unfortunately, Daisy bitterly disappoints Gatsby and robs him of all his dreams according to Verhoven:

Gatsby is above all, thr failure of the American dream. Gatsby's obsession with changing the past and returning to a time in which he and Daisy had loved each other and he had the feeling that anything was possible to him, is a powerful commentary on the hubris of the American

dream, of a New World, while Tom and Daisy Buchanan's, petty, sordid lives amid the tappings of wealth and affluence reflect on the individual level the tragic failure of America itself which has turned the fresh, green breast of the New World into an ash heap (Verhoeven 16).

However, when faced with reality, Gatsby is a bit distraught, "I'm very sad old sport, and Daisy wants us to run off together. She came over this afternoon with a suitcase all packed and ready in the car" (*TGG p.?*). Gatsby has spent so much of his time preoccupied with fantasy and the dream world that he is surprised when reality hits him and he is able to have what he always dreamed of. In other words, Gatsby is afraid that if he has Daisy and his wealth he has nothing more to dream about and struggle for.

Daisy's character is initially portrayed as a wilting flower that needs to be loved and taken care of. She is the ultimate goddess who has been the object of Gatsby's love, devotion and dreams but in the end, she is a disappointment. To Gatsby, Daisy is beautiful, intelligent and graceful and embodies all the qualities that are worthy of love and riches. In reality, Daisy is harsh, jaded and bitter. Throughout the novel Fitzgerald drops hints of Daisy's disillusionment such as the time when she wishes that her daughter would grow up to be a fool because according to her that is the best thing for a woman to be.

Like Gatsby, Daisy has been disappointed by her dreams but unlike Gatsby, she transforms her disappointment into bitterness and resentment. At the beginning of the novel it is clear that she never really wanted to marry Tom but did it out of some sort of social obligation, but she didn't say another word. "We gave her spirits of ammonia and put ice on her forehead and hooked her back into her dress, and half an hour later, when we walked out of the room, the pearls were around her neck and the

incident was over. Next day at five o'clock she married Tom Buchanan without so much as a shiver, and started off on a three months' trip to the South Seas" (*TGG* 61).

Initially, her whole marriage to Tom seems rather forced and necessary rather than being based on any sort of real love or passion. She is fully aware that her husband is unfaithful to her but does not make any efforts to confront him because as long as she is safe and secure in the lap of luxury. In other words, her dreams have been replaced by harsh reality. She realizes that the world is not simple as she thought and the only constant thing is money. When Gatsby comes back into her life, it appears as though Daisy has been reconnected with her dreams of a life, which includes both love and luxury.

When Daisy realizes that she may have another chance to have the life that she always dreamed of, she does not hesitate and wait but decides to take action right away. She knows from experience that if she waits Gatsby's attentions may turn towards another, "some authentically radiant young girl who with one fresh glance at Gatsby, one moment of magical encounter, would blot out those five years of unwavering devotion" (*TGG* 87).

At first, it may seem that Daisy has finally been reformed and reverted to the ideals of her youth but as the story progresses it becomes clear that her dreams have been permanently replaced by practicality. After the car accident, she is happy to let Gatsby take the blame for the crash even though she was the one driving. In the end, it becomes clear that Daisy's love for Gatsby was a pathetic attempt at revenge against Tom rather than true devotion. She runs back to the Toms rich arms and does not look back. Daisy and Tom do not even attend Gatsby's funeral thus showing the reader the depth of their selfishness.

Daisy's character is realistic whereas Gatsby's character is idealistic. Daisy sees the world for what it really is and is not afraid of going out and getting what she desires. She wants

revenge she gets it, she wants money she gets it but most importantly, she knows what she wants. On the other hand, Gatsby lives in a romantic world that has no solid grasp of reality. When faced with reality he is uncertain and unsure of his true desires (Flanagan, 2006).

In order to truly understand what went wrong with the American Dream in this little community made up of the so called rich, it is important to examine the circumstances that revolve around Gatsby's death and the various reactions of the different characters that are involved. For Tom and Daisy, the death of Gatsby is almost a relief, since now they can continue living their lives as they did before. However, they do not realize that they are corrupted and no longer moral. Thus, they have no problem with letting an innocent man die because of their own crimes and greed. The death of Gatsby confirms that once more decay has begun it can never be reversed. Although it is Wilson who actually kills Gatsby at the end of the story, the Buchanans are the ones who are morally responsible. "They are careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashes 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 made..." (*TGG* 186).

Gatsby destroyed with the tacit connivance of the very rich he has always admired, his dream shattered thanks to the quiet agency of the woman he wanted to dwell at its center, the story is almost over (Gray 438). Nick, on the other hand, reverts back to his narrative duties and describes the death as a loss of perception, "Gatsby's end coincides with a decline in perception. When they gaze at Gatsby's body, only Nick's description of the laden mattress on its accidental course with its accidental burden, suggests the presence of a body and only a thin, red circle in the water" (Hensley 41). To Nick, the death of Gatsby is not so much the death of a human being or his friend but rather the death of a

dream, "In the end, Nick does not seem to care so much about Gatsby as he does about the fact that, after Gatsby's death, the East was "haunted for me....distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction" (Handley 181). Gatsby's death ushers the death of the American dream in all of its forms. After Gatsby's death, Nick sees what Gatsby may have dreamed, since

his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in the vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. Gatsby believed in the green light, the organic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter ... borne back ceaselessly into the past (TGG 188).

In order to further demonstrate how the American dream has died, Fitzgerald reverts back to the use mixed imagery and uses colors to represent how the once innocent dream has been corrupted and died. For instance, the use of colors through out the novel and their meaning transform as the dream begins to die. At the beginning, the color white is meant to represent innocence and purity, "white appears to be the color of purity. When Nick first visits the Buckanans, he sees Jordan and Daisy wearing white dresses. The mansions of East Egg glitter in white. New York rises in white heaps and sugar lumps" (Shuman 532). As the story develops, it becomes clear that color white is a mere illusion for the evil that it covers. The white buildings of New York city are where Tom has his affairs, Daisy's white dress covers her greed and Tom's and Daisy's white mansion covers their evil plan to blame someone else for Gatsby's death.

Like the color white, the color green also takes on a new, corrupt meaning as the dream begins to die. Originally, the color green represents nature and peace. However, as time progresses, the color green turns into a representation of greed and corruption, "the light at the end of Daisy's dock is green. The first

time Nick sees Gatsby, he is reaching out to that object. To Gatsby, Daisy represents youth and the regeneration of springtime, but in the end her green light brings only death" (Parkinson 76). Fitzgerald, this time, clearly conveys that the innocent version of the American dream no longer exists. The white snow that once represented Nick's youth as well as the green tickets that he bought to go home for Christmas are now tainted, "the green breast of the New World flowered once for the Dutch sailors and filled them with wonder. However, Fitzgerald knows that this world no longer exists" (Shuman 535).

Ultimately, *The Great Gatsby* is about the various failures of the American Dream in all of its forms. Gatsby embodies the newer version of the American dream which is based on principles of material wealth as well as the traditional and more romantic and ideal version of attainable goals. For instance, he represents the corrupt version because he adopts corrupt means achieving his dream but at the same time he is still representing the ideal one. More importantly, he was corrupt but he was killed while he tried to be ideal. However, to readers, Gatsby's endless quest for money and his beloved Daisy may come across as slightly exaggerated, yet, one cannot help but feel pity for him as he meets his death.

Since the dreams that Gatsby represented are not simply illusions but desires of a man who wants to purify and glorify the American dream through his attempts to purify Daisy and to bring her back into the innocent and the idealistic time of their love which metaphorically means to purify and clarify the corruption which occurs to the dream itself, the following conversation is enhancing this idea:

I [Nick] ventured, "You can't repeat the past." "Can't repeat the past?" [Gatsby] cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of the house, just out of reach

of his hand. "I'm [Gatsby] going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly.... He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was... (TGG 116).

But the result was Gatsby's death. It is clear that the dream that Gatsby once embraced represented great hope; "he was clutching at some last hope" (TGG 154), desire of an entire generation to recapture and restore the ideal American dream and this is what makes Gatsby great. His quest for Daisy is a search for the American dream's destiny. But the price was his life

He had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found ... a new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about (TGG 168).

Thus, when Gatsby died, he essentially took the dreams of an entire generation with him and hence signifying the death of the American dream itself. In stark contrast to the pity felt for Gatsby, readers feel disgust at Daisy and Tom who are the representatives of the corrupt version of the American dream. Money and class are their birthright and cannot be taken away from them, no matter how many innocent people get hurt along the way. In other words, they are ready to get rid of any threat which disturbs their materialistic world and kills any one if he tries to purify and clean their corruption.

In this novel Fitzgerald intently wants to prove that this age is the age of corrupt people and exploiters (like Daisy and Tom) and opportunists (like Meyer Wolfsheim). They are responsible for the death of the ideal American dream. Therefore it is very difficult to a man like Gatsby, in this materialistic and

corrupt age to purify, idealize and bring back the glorious time of the American dream. So, this novel is considered the climax of the decline of the dream. It witnesses the death of Gatsby as the death of the dream. Fitzgerald is very determined to clearly show the death of the American dream through direct elaboration of greed, wealth, and immorality as vital factors behind the death of the dream.

I. iv. CONCLUSION

Although, the American Dream started off innocently enough by sheltering the hungry and poor, it suddenly transformed into an uncontrollable monster. Since the American Dream of hope, hard work and perseverance in order to get ahead soon became all consuming. Before America knew it, its innocence, willingness to offer protection to all in need became a shameless display of competition, ill will and a desperate attempt at outdoing the competition at all things big and small. The dream suddenly transformed into the need for money and power rather than ideals.

Money became the distinguishing factor between the worthy and the unworthy. The ideal dream turned to be a corrupt and obsessive pursuit of wealth at all costs. Basically, those who possessed a certain amount of wealth were living the American Dream while those who were struggling were not living up to their potential. Most people in society failed to realize that money did not necessarily equate to success, since not everyone could possibly become a millionaire. Thus, one can conclude that the American dream eventually loses its innocent face and comes to adopt a materialist face, which has caused its decline.

Through his novels, Fitzgerald is able to accurately portray the decline and failure of the American dream in its various stages, from its more idealistic days all the way to its death. The reason why Fitzgerald was so profound in expressing the

development of the dream stems from his own life experiences and their reflection within the pages of his novels. He lived his life as a writer during the infamous Jazz Age and chronicled the impact of wealth and access on the lives of young Americans as well as the traditional version of the American dream.

The Great Gatsby is an interesting novel because it clearly outlines the dual nature of the American Dream as well as its ultimate death. Fitzgerald accurately pictures the double face of the American dream; the ideal (innocent) face as well as the material corrupt one, since the duality of the dream is well represented in the character of Gatsby himself Gatsby represents both the newer and the materialistic version of the American dream which promotes the pursuit of wealth and access at all costs. However, ironically, he represents the idealistic and more romantic version of the American dream that promotes the pursuit of dreams regardless of one's background.

Although it is clear that Gatsby himself promotes materialistic values, he also embodies the hope of possibilities of the reformation of corruption through the traditional and ideal pillars of the American dream. Through the death of Gatsby, Fitzgerald clearly demonstrated the ultimate death of the American dream, therefore, the novel was seen as the climax of the decline of the dream. One can conclude that, when Fitzgerald penned this novel, he himself was facing the backlash of the American dream. His novels and marriage were both off-track and seemed on their way to an ultimate end as reflected in *The Great Gatsby*.

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المستخلص

لقد كتبت الكثير من الدراسات عن "الحلم الأمريكي" إلا أن فشل وتدهور الحلم الأمريكي في روايات سكوت فتزجيرالد لم تكتب عنه دراسة معمقة لحد الآن. ولذلك يحاول هذا البحث دراسة رواية سكوت فتزجيرالد: **غاتسبي العظيم** () محاولة الكشف عن موقف فتزجيرالد من "الحلم الأمريكي" ووجهة نظره فيه وعدم إيمانه به. ويحاول البحث أن يبين كيفية تناول فتزجيرالد لهذا الحلم في رواية غاتسبي العظيم.

تبين الدراسة من خلال تحليل رواية **غاتسبي العظيم** عدم إيمان فتزجيرالد بالحلم الأمريكي وعدم قناعته به وان معظم رواياته تتناول الفشل والتدهور الفردي متمثلاً في التدهور الأخلاقي للمجتمع الذي قد حقق نجاحاً زائفاً ولكنه فقد الأيمان والدف الضروريان لتحقيق الحلم الأمريكي.