



## THE REPRESENTATION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S "THE GREAT GATSBY"

*Laylo Khaydarova*

*Bukhara state university, Foreign languages  
faculty*

**Annotation:** *F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is widely regarded as one of the most significant critiques of the American Dream in 20th-century literature. Set against the backdrop of the Jazz Age, the novel explores themes of hope, ambition, social stratification, and moral decay. Fitzgerald delves into the lives of characters who pursue their dreams only to find them unattainable, distorted by materialism and the rigid structures of social class.*

*The purpose of this article is to analyze how Fitzgerald portrays the American Dream as both a driving force and a destructive ideal. This analysis will explore the novel's symbolism, characters, and broader cultural implications, emphasizing its enduring relevance in contemporary discussions about success, wealth, and identity.*

**Key words:** *symbolism, the green light, materialism, social norms, elusiveness, social inequality*

### Introduction

The 1920s, known as the Jazz Age, was a time of significant economic growth and cultural change in America. Following World War I, the nation entered a period of prosperity marked by technological advancements, urbanization, and a shift toward consumer culture. Wealth and material success became central to the American ethos, often at the expense of traditional values.

Fitzgerald's personal experiences as part of the "Lost Generation" informed his critical view of this era. Having witnessed the moral decay and superficiality of the upper class, he used *The Great Gatsby* to expose the dark underbelly of the American Dream. The novel's setting in West Egg and East Egg serves as a microcosm of the societal divisions and contradictions of the 1920s.

### Methology.

#### The Green Light: Symbolism of Hope and Desire

The green light at the end of Daisy's dock is one of the most significant symbols in *The Great Gatsby*. It represents Gatsby's dreams and aspirations, particularly his desire to reunite with Daisy. The light's distance from Gatsby symbolizes the unavailability of his dream, mirroring the broader illusion of the American Dream itself.

Fitzgerald uses this symbol to highlight the tension between hope and reality. Despite his immense wealth and determination, Gatsby is unable to bridge the gap between his idealized vision of Daisy and the reality of who she is. The green light thus becomes a poignant reminder of the futility of pursuing dreams rooted in illusion.



### **Social Class and the Elusiveness of the Dream**

Fitzgerald presents social class as a major barrier to the fulfillment of the American Dream. Gatsby, despite his immense wealth, is never accepted by the old-money elite represented by Tom and Daisy Buchanan. His wealth, obtained through dubious means, lacks the pedigree and respectability associated with the Buchanans' inherited fortune.

This distinction between "new money" and "old money" underscores the rigidity of social hierarchies in America, challenging the idea that hard work and determination alone can lead to success. Through Gatsby's tragic fate, Fitzgerald suggests that the American Dream is an illusion, perpetuated by a society that values privilege and status over merit.

### **Moral Decay and Materialism**

The Jazz Age, with its emphasis on excess and indulgence, serves as the backdrop for the moral decline depicted in the novel. Characters like Tom and Daisy embody the recklessness and self-interest of the upper class, while Gatsby's wealth is rooted in illegal activities such as bootlegging.

Fitzgerald critiques the materialism of the 1920s by showing how the pursuit of wealth often leads to moral corruption. Gatsby's mansion, filled with extravagant parties and opulence, symbolizes the emptiness of his success. Despite his wealth, Gatsby is ultimately left unfulfilled, suggesting that materialism cannot provide true happiness or meaning.

### **Comparative Analysis: The Great Gatsby and the American Dream Today**

Fitzgerald's critique of the American Dream remains relevant in contemporary society. In the modern era, the dream of achieving success through hard work is still celebrated, but it is often overshadowed by growing economic inequality and societal pressures.

For example, the housing market crisis of 2008 revealed the fragility of the American Dream for many individuals. Much like Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy, modern Americans often chase dreams that are shaped by consumer culture and unrealistic expectations. Fitzgerald's novel serves as a timeless reminder of the dangers of conflating material success with personal fulfillment.

Moreover, the idea of social mobility, a cornerstone of the American Dream, remains contested. Just as Gatsby was unable to transcend the barriers of social class, many individuals today face systemic inequalities that limit their opportunities for upward mobility. This parallel highlights the enduring relevance of Fitzgerald's critique.

### **Results and Discussion.**

#### **The Illusion of the American Dream**

The analysis of *The Great Gatsby* reveals that Fitzgerald critiques the American Dream by portraying it as an illusion rather than an attainable reality. Jay Gatsby, the novel's central character, embodies the quintessential self-made man who strives for wealth and social status, believing it will grant him happiness and love. However, his relentless pursuit of wealth and Daisy Buchanan ultimately leads to his downfall. This suggests that the American Dream, particularly in its materialistic form, is inherently flawed and unattainable.

The novel further exposes the class divisions that undermine the core tenets of the American Dream. The social stratification between East Egg, West Egg, and the Valley of Ashes highlights the inescapability of social hierarchies. Despite Gatsby's accumulation of wealth, he remains an outsider to the old-money aristocracy, demonstrating that social mobility is limited. This challenges the ideal that success is purely based on hard work and merit, as entrenched social structures dictate access to privilege.



### The Decay of Morality and Values

Fitzgerald presents a world where moral decay and hedonism overshadow genuine aspirations. The characters, particularly Tom and Daisy Buchanan, epitomize the moral corruption of the wealthy elite. Their careless and selfish nature suggests that wealth does not equate to virtue or fulfillment. Gatsby's moral ambiguity also adds complexity to the critique, as his means of acquiring wealth are questionable, further illustrating the ethical compromises required to achieve success.

The novel's setting, particularly the Valley of Ashes, symbolizes the consequences of unbridled capitalism and social inequality. It serves as a stark contrast to the extravagance of West Egg and East Egg, emphasizing the disparity between the elite and the working class. This portrayal reflects the broader social critique of 1920s America, where economic prosperity benefited only a select few while leaving others in poverty and disillusionment.

### Further Research and Theoretical Considerations

Further research could expand on the American Dream's evolution in contemporary literature. While *The Great Gatsby* offers a 1920s perspective, an analysis of how modern narratives portray the dream could provide insight into its ongoing relevance and transformation. Additionally, comparative studies between Fitzgerald's work and other American literary texts—such as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*—could deepen our understanding of the shifting representations of success, failure, and societal expectations. Theoretical frameworks such as Marxist criticism could further elucidate the socio-economic critique in *The Great Gatsby*. Examining the text through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital would provide a nuanced understanding of how wealth and class function in the novel. Moreover, feminist and postcolonial perspectives could uncover additional dimensions of gender and race in the pursuit of the American Dream.

### Conclusion

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a powerful exploration of the American Dream and its inherent contradictions. Through the use of symbolism, character development, and historical context, Fitzgerald reveals how the dream's promise of success and happiness is ultimately unattainable for many. The novel critiques the materialism, social inequality, and moral decay that often accompany the pursuit of wealth and status. By examining the failures of the American Dream in the 1920s, Fitzgerald provides a timeless commentary on human ambition and the challenges of achieving fulfillment in a society driven by materialism. His work invites readers to question their own values and aspirations, making it a profound and enduring piece of American literature.

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