

THE ARTISTIC DEPICTION OF THE "AMERICAN DREAM" CONCEPT IN 20TH- CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE (BASED ON F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S THE GREAT GATSBY)

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Abstract

This article explores the artistic depiction of the concept of the "American Dream" in 20th-century American literature, with a particular focus on F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. The study examines how Fitzgerald portrays the ideals of success, wealth, and social mobility, as well as the disillusionment associated with the American Dream. Through an analysis of characters, symbolism, and themes, the article highlights the novel's critique of the materialistic and morally decaying society of the Jazz Age.

Keywords: American Dream, F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 20th-century American literature, Jazz Age, social mobility, wealth, disillusionment, symbolism.

Introduction

The concept of the "American Dream" has been a fundamental theme in American literature, particularly in the 20th century. It embodies the belief that anyone, regardless of background, can achieve success through hard work and determination. However, many literary works have questioned the attainability and authenticity of this dream. *The Great Gatsby*, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925, serves as a poignant exploration of this theme, illustrating the disillusionment that often accompanies the relentless pursuit of wealth and status.

The exploration of the American Dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* has been widely studied and interpreted by numerous scholars, offering varying perspectives on its themes and meanings. Central to many analyses is the idea that Fitzgerald's novel serves as both a critique and a reflection of the American Dream, particularly in the context of 1920s America.

Fitzgerald's portrayal of the American Dream is often seen as a warning about its inherent contradictions. As Callahan (1996) points out, the novel's focus on the disillusionment of its protagonist, Jay Gatsby, reveals how the American Dream is a product of both hope and deception. Gatsby's dream of reuniting with Daisy and achieving social status through wealth ultimately leads to his downfall, highlighting the emptiness of the dream when pursued at any

145



cost. Callahan emphasizes that Gatsby's tragic end represents the failure of the dream in a society increasingly defined by materialism and social stratification.

One of the significant critiques in *The Great Gatsby* is the novel's commentary on social class and mobility. Lehan (1995) explores how Fitzgerald critiques the rigid class structures of the time, showing how characters like Gatsby, despite their wealth, remain outsiders to the old-moneyed elite represented by Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Lehan argues that Fitzgerald uses the contrast between East Egg and West Egg to expose the social immobility that characterizes American society, suggesting that even economic success does not guarantee acceptance or fulfillment in a deeply divided social system.

The moral decay of 1920s society is another theme that has received significant attention in literary criticism. According to Churchwell (2013), Fitzgerald critiques the Jazz Age's culture of excess, superficiality, and hedonism. Characters like Tom and Daisy Buchanan exemplify the careless attitudes of the wealthy, who are able to evade consequences due to their privilege. Churchwell notes that this moral decay serves as a key element in understanding the failure of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*, where the pursuit of wealth becomes synonymous with a loss of ethical responsibility and human connection.

Brucoli (2002) argues that *The Great Gatsby* is a novel built on the theme of illusion, with characters constantly striving for unattainable ideals. Gatsby's idealization of Daisy and his belief that he can recreate the past serve as metaphors for the illusions that fuel the American Dream. According to Brucoli, Fitzgerald shows how these illusions distort reality, making it impossible for Gatsby to achieve true happiness or success. This analysis suggests that the American Dream, when viewed through the lens of illusion and false hope, is ultimately doomed to failure.

In more recent critical interpretations, scholars like Bloom (2010) have emphasized the novel's lasting relevance in understanding the complexities of the American Dream. Bloom suggests that the novel's enduring appeal lies in its portrayal of a society that continues to grapple with the tensions between individual ambition and societal constraints. He argues that *The Great Gatsby* remains a powerful exploration of how the American Dream, as a cultural ideal, both inspires and destroys, reflecting the paradoxes at the heart of the American experience.

The 1920s, often referred to as the "Roaring Twenties," was a period of economic prosperity and social change in the United States. The aftermath of World War I led to a cultural shift, with individuals seeking wealth, pleasure, and material success. Fitzgerald's novel encapsulates the era's extravagance while simultaneously critiquing its underlying moral decay. Jay Gatsby, the novel's protagonist, epitomizes the American Dream. Born into poverty, he reinvents himself into a wealthy and mysterious figure, driven by his love for Daisy Buchanan. His lavish parties and opulent lifestyle symbolize the materialistic goals associated with the American Dream. However, Gatsby's story ultimately reveals the limitations and flaws of this ideal. Despite his wealth, he remains an outsider to the upper-class society and fails to win Daisy's love, emphasizing the unattainability of his dreams.

Fitzgerald illustrates how the American Dream has been corrupted by materialism. Characters like Tom and Daisy Buchanan represent the old aristocracy, where wealth is inherited rather



than earned. Gatsby, despite his financial success, is never fully accepted by this elite class, demonstrating the rigid social barriers that contradict the notion of equal opportunity.

One of the novel's most famous symbols is the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. For Gatsby, it represents hope, ambition, and the dream of reuniting with Daisy. However, the light remains distant and unattainable, symbolizing the illusionary nature of the American Dream. No matter how hard Gatsby tries, he cannot reclaim the past or achieve his ultimate goal.

Gatsby's tragic fate underscores the novel's central message: the American Dream is often an illusion that leads to disillusionment. While Gatsby embodies the idea of self-made success, his demise reveals the darker side of ambition and social inequality. His death, along with the moral emptiness of the upper class, suggests that the American Dream is inherently flawed and unattainable for many.

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* serves as a powerful critique of the American Dream, exposing its contradictions and limitations. Through vivid characterization, symbolism, and social commentary, the novel illustrates how the pursuit of material success often leads to moral and emotional emptiness. The novel remains relevant today as it continues to prompt discussions about wealth, social class, and the true meaning of success in modern society.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* provides a profound and often critical exploration of the American Dream, reflecting both its allure and its ultimate fragility. The novel portrays the American Dream as a pursuit of wealth, status, and happiness, yet it also highlights the corruption and moral decay that can accompany this quest. Through the character of Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald demonstrates how the idealized vision of success can become an illusion, shaped by nostalgia and unattainable desires.

One of the central themes in *The Great Gatsby* is the contrast between material wealth and true fulfillment. Gatsby accumulates immense wealth in an attempt to recreate the past and win back Daisy Buchanan. However, his dream is ultimately unattainable because it is built on an idealized and unrealistic perception of the past. Fitzgerald critiques the American Dream by illustrating how economic success does not necessarily lead to personal happiness or moral integrity. The novel suggests that the pursuit of wealth, particularly through questionable means, can lead to destruction rather than fulfillment.

Furthermore, *The Great Gatsby* highlights the social divisions within 1920s America, particularly the gap between the newly wealthy and the old aristocracy, as well as the struggles of the lower class. The contrast between East Egg and West Egg symbolizes these class distinctions, emphasizing the rigid social structures that prevent true upward mobility. While Gatsby represents the self-made man, his ultimate downfall reveals that wealth alone does not grant acceptance into elite society. This aspect of the novel underscores the limitations of the American Dream, suggesting that it is not equally accessible to all.

Another important aspect of Fitzgerald's critique is the moral decline of American society during the Jazz Age. The novel presents a world driven by excess, hedonism, and superficiality. Characters like Tom and Daisy Buchanan exemplify the carelessness of the wealthy, who use their privilege to escape the consequences of their actions. Gatsby's tragic fate serves as a warning about the dangers of blind ambition and the illusion of the American Dream.



In conclusion, *The Great Gatsby* presents a complex and multifaceted depiction of the American Dream, revealing its contradictions and shortcomings. Fitzgerald portrays the dream as both an inspiring ideal and an illusion that can lead to disillusionment and destruction. Through Gatsby's tragic pursuit of success and love, the novel ultimately questions whether the American Dream, as it is traditionally conceived, is truly attainable or merely an illusion shaped by materialism and social barriers.

The concept of the American Dream has been a central theme in American literature, reflecting the nation's ideals of success, freedom, and self-determination. This dream, often associated with the pursuit of wealth and happiness, has evolved over time, shaped by social, economic, and cultural changes. However, many literary works have explored the complexities and contradictions of this ideal, questioning whether it is truly attainable for all.

One of the most influential literary depictions of the American Dream is found in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Set during the Jazz Age, a period of economic prosperity and social transformation, the novel presents a critical examination of the dream's promises and failures. Through the character of Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald explores the pursuit of wealth, love, and status, ultimately revealing the illusions and moral corruption underlying the American Dream.

This paper analyzes how *The Great Gatsby* artistically portrays the American Dream, highlighting its allure, its limitations, and its eventual downfall. By examining themes such as materialism, social class divisions, and moral decay, the study aims to demonstrate how Fitzgerald's novel serves as both a celebration and a critique of this deeply ingrained cultural ideal.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* offers a powerful and critical examination of the American Dream, illustrating both its appeal and its inherent flaws. Through the character of Jay Gatsby, the novel reveals how the dream, while promising success and happiness, can also lead to disillusionment and destruction. Gatsby's relentless pursuit of wealth and love ultimately proves futile, emphasizing the dangers of clinging to an idealized past and mistaking material success for true fulfillment.

Furthermore, the novel highlights the deep social divisions and moral decay of 1920s America, showing how the American Dream is not equally accessible to all. The contrast between old money and new money, as well as the struggles of the lower class, underscores the limitations of social mobility. Fitzgerald's portrayal of excess, greed, and carelessness among the wealthy further critiques the moral emptiness that can accompany the pursuit of wealth.

In conclusion, *The Great Gatsby* serves as both a celebration and a critique of the American Dream. While it acknowledges the dream's inspiring potential, it ultimately questions whether it is truly attainable or merely an illusion shaped by materialism and social constraints. Fitzgerald's novel remains a timeless reflection on ambition, identity, and the consequences of chasing an unattainable ideal.



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