



Analysis of a modern classic: *The Great Gatsby*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel "The Great Gatsby" with regard to the point of view, and the tone; it argues that the main thesis of the book is that wealth corrupts, and great wealth corrupts absolutely. A classic novel is a story that men and woman can relate to from any generation and location. A classic lets people have a deeper understanding of the world around them through universal topics and timeless themes. The Great Gatsby, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925 and set during 1922 displays all these characteristics through the involvement and ultimate corruption of the American Dream and the love story between Daisy and Gatsby.

The Great Gatsby would indeed create an aftermath of wonder – in ways that its initial audience could not have imagined. Almost 90 years later, *Gatsby* is regularly named one of the greatest novels ever written in English, and has annually sold millions of copies globally. This slim novel of fewer than 50,000 words, a story of secret visions and gaudy revels, of sudden violence and constant envy, shimmers with a magic that readers have long recognized. The Great Gatsby would indeed create an aftermath of wonder – in ways that its initial audience could not have imagined. Almost 90 years later, *Gatsby* is regularly named one of the greatest novels ever written in English, and has annually sold millions of copies globally. This slim novel of fewer than 50,000 words, a story of secret visions and gaudy revels, of sudden violence and constant envy, shimmers with a magic that readers have long recognized. The Great Gatsby is set in post WWI America and at the time, the American dream was for any hardworking person to be able to achieve success and happiness regardless of their background or social class. This was a time of great change and revolution with the roaring twenties and rising middle class.

Keywords: Great Gatsby, indeed create, generation

Introduction

Overview: The Great Gatsby

The novel's events are filtered through the consciousness of its narrator, Nick Caraway, a young Yale graduate, who is both a part of and separate from the world he describes. Upon moving to New York, he rents a house next door to the mansion of an eccentric millionaire (Jay Gatsby). Every Saturday, Gatsby throws a party at his mansion and all the great and the good of the young fashionable world come to marvel at his extravagance (as well as swap gossip stories about their host who--it is suggested--has a murky past).

Despite his high-living, Gatsby is dissatisfied and Nick finds out why. Long ago, Gatsby fell in love with a young girl, Daisy.

Although she has always loved Gatsby, she is currently married to Tom Buchanan. Gatsby asks Nick to help him meet Daisy once more, and Nick finally agrees--arranging tea for Daisy at his house.

The two ex-lovers meet and soon rekindle their affair. Soon, Tom begins to suspect and challenges the two of them--also revealing something that the reader had already begun to suspect: that Gatsby's fortune was made through illegal gambling and bootlegging.

Gatsby and Daisy drive back to New York. In the wake of the emotional confrontation, Daisy hits and kills a woman. Gatsby feels that his life would be nothing without Daisy, so he determines to take the blame.

George Wilson--who discovers that the car that killed his wife belongs to Gatsby--comes to Gatsby's house and shoots him. Nick arranges a funeral for his friend and then decides to leave New York--saddened by the fatal events and disgusted by the easy way lived their lives

American Dream gone wrong

"In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars."

Nick, the narrator, and one of the leading characters of the story, says this describing The Roaring Twenties, a time of excess and of moral and material degeneration. A time that led to a complete financial and social breakdown finally culminated with the Great Depression. The Great Gatsby is a stinging critique of how the American dream can go wrong and what happens when it does.

Encoded at the very centre of our national DNA is admiration for the self-made success story, the mythic figure who pursues and fulfills his dream — someone like Jay Gatsby, a "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" who rises from obscure poverty to immense wealth.

"It's the Great American Dream," says Jeff Nilsson, historian for the bimonthly *The Saturday Evening Post*. Between 1920 and 1937, the magazine published 68 of Fitzgerald's short stories, and has just issued a collection called *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby's Girls* featuring the

first eight stories in book form.

"It is the story that if you work hard enough, you can succeed."

Leading Fitzgerald scholar James L. W. West III agrees. He calls *The Great Gatsby* "a national scripture. It embodies the American spirit, the American will to reinvent oneself."

West says it is no coincidence that *The Great Gatsby* is probably the American novel most often taught in the rest of the world. "It is our novel, how we present ourselves. He captured and distilled the essence of the American spirit."

Yet *Gatsby* also explores the dream's destructive power. "Americans pay a great price for that dream," says Nilsson.

The Great Gatsby also captures money's power to corrupt, to let the rich escape from the consequences of their actions. Here's Fitzgerald's description of that original 1% couple: "They were careless people — Tom and Daisy — they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money ..."

Hypocrisy of the elite

By juxtaposing the sensibilities of the elite and the working class, Fitzgerald offers a stark contrast of how the selfishness, snobbery and indifference of one section control not just the lives but also the deaths of the other.

"They were careless people, Tom and Daisy — they smashed 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 had made."

The romance of the Roaring '20s

Fitzgerald was the poet laureate of what he named "The Jazz Age," the most raucous, gaudy era in U.S. history.

"The 1920s is the most fascinating era in American culture," says Nilsson. "Everything was changing so much." Youth in revolt didn't start at Woodstock; it began with Gertrude Stein's "Lost Generation."

It was flappers, cars, sex, movies, gangsters, celebrities, a stock market minting money, everything awash in illegal booze. The wildest parties and bad behavior among the rich and famous today have nothing on the you-only-live-once hedonism depicted in *The Great Gatsby*.

Crazy love

What makes *Gatsby* magical is his motivation. Although he's made his fortune as a bootlegger and gambler, greed doesn't drive him. Rather he's on a quest to reclaim Daisy. Still, *The Great Gatsby* isn't a romance about how a nice millionaire almost wins back the girl of his dreams. It's about a narcissistic obsession with the past. To *Gatsby*, Daisy isn't a married woman with a daughter. She's an object, something he lost and wants back. Which makes his actions — such as buying a mansion across the water from the Buchanans so he can stare at the green light at the end of their dock — well, kind of creepy and stalker-like?

Imperishable prose

Forget the critics, the theories, even the characters. For Fitzgerald's fans, it's the language. "Fitzgerald had a pitch-perfect ear," says West. "There's not one flabby sentence," says Nilsson.

For evocative beauty, what can ever beat the last line of *The Great Gatsby*, which is engraved on the Rockville, Md., grave the author and his wife Zelda share? "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

Theme

It makes connections with readers' hearts and imaginations. Despite his moral corruption of being a bootlegger and his false pretense of being someone he is not, Jay Gatsby inspires the reader's feelings and, in a "transcendent sense" he touches the imagination with his idealism and passionate love. Truly, he attains an almost mythological quality as he is compared to Trimalchio as he hosts parties and drives a car, whose windows catch a thousand suns and whose fenders "spread like wings," a description that recalls Icarus of Greek mythology. The novel is a product of its generation—with one of American literature's most powerful characters in the figure of Jay Gatsby, who is urbane and world-weary. *Gatsby* is really nothing more than a man desperate for love.

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