THE SHATTERING OF THE GREEN LIGHT: AN
EXPLORATION OF GATSEY'S DREAM

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)
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F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* can be viewed as a dramatic representation of the American Dream and a criticism of the American society and its dedication and exploitation of that great myth. The concept of the American Dream can be thought of as a product of the new frontier and the West. The new frontier represented a land of opportunity and plenty where men could strive to build a new life for themselves. These men could leave their past behind them as they journeyed to a new land untouched by civilization to achieve an ideal world born in their minds. Though it was essentially anti-Calvinistic, the dream represented a belief in the goodness of man as he struggled to fulfill his needs for achievement and provide a meaning to his existence. Self-satisfaction was probably the ultimate aim of this American myth.

Through time the American Dream has come to be equated with a dream of success. Success was dependent on the obtainment of money and the benefits derived from money. Material possessions and a life of luxuriant ease became the symbols of success. From these material possessions man thought that he could derive his spiritual satisfaction, rather than getting this satisfaction from a meaningful existence and hard work. The following statement supports this change in the conception of the American Dream:

The *American Dream* consisted of the belief (sometimes thought of as a promise) that people of talent in this land of opportunity and plenty could reasonably aspire to material success if they adhered to
a fairly well-defined set of behavioral rules—rules set forth in a relatively comprehensive form as long ago as the eighteenth century by Benjamin Franklin. In addition, Americans easily assumed that spiritual satisfaction would automatically accompany material success.¹

In *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby's dream is a representation of the American Dream. He is shown as a typical American striving for a dream of success. However, the struggle for attainment of this dream takes place in a corrupt society that had evolved from the land of beauty at the beginning of the New World:

Gatsby is linked to the 1920's world itself, but he is also historically associated with the "American dream," with the progress of American wealth and ambition from the very dawn of New World aspirations. In many ways, Gatsby is a marvel of symbolically compressed cultural history; of the original promise, seen in the "fresh green breast of the new world;" of the growth and decline of that promise as the history of American money-getting moved into the twentieth century; of the vulgarization and venality of the privilege conferred by wealth; but above all, of its association with a romantic view of time and the past.²

As suggested in the above statement, Gatsby becomes an image of "compressed cultural history." In Gatsby, we see the original promise of the Dutch sailors who discovered the new world and built their ideals and dreams on the beauty and richness of the land:

Gatsby is the spiritual descendant of these Dutch soldiers. Like them, he set out for gold and stumbled on a dream. But he journeys in the wrong direction in time as well as space. The transitory enchanted moment has come and gone for him and for
the others, making the romantic promise of the future an illusory reflection of the past.

His dream is representative of how the dreams of the Dutch sailors started changing and becoming exploited so as to incorporate money into them. The original dream of obtaining spiritual satisfaction is changing to include satisfaction from material possessions. Gatsby is representative of an American in the twentieth century trying to achieve a dream of success revolving around money:

Gatsby's dream might be described as the American dream of success. It is the dream of rising from rags to riches, of amassing a great fortune that will assure a life of luxuriant ease, power, and beauty in an ideal world untroubled by care and devoted to the enjoyment of everlasting pleasure with nothing to intervene between wish and fulfillment. It is a naive dream based on the fallacious assumption that material possessions are synonymous with happiness, harmony, and beauty. The dreamer overlooks or is unaware of the fact that the fullest kinds of pleasure come from the cultivation of sensibilities, the development of understanding, and the refinement of taste—accomplishments that have little to do with the acquisitive powers by which a fortune is amassed. Indeed, it is generally the case that the man who devotes all his energy to making money is deficient in those very qualities that make the life towards which he aspires desirable. The nouveaux riches, too newly rich to have had the leisure for self-cultivation, are frequently vulgar displayers of their new-won material possessions, lacking in culture, sophistication, and refinement.
Gatsby shows the effects of extravagant wealth; his personality has been distorted and perverted by the belief in the power of money.

*The Great Gatsby* is not simply a portrayal of the Jazz Age, but it is also a dramatic representation of the American Dream. It contrasts the original American Dream of the Dutch sailors and other early settlers with the American Dream of the twentieth century. Fitzgerald criticizes the society that has dedicated itself to the attainment of the exploited dream and states how this dream can never be attained, because it was born and buried in the past.
REFERENCE NOTES


Jay Gatsby, the main character in the book, becomes the vehicle through which Fitzgerald represents and comments on the American Dream. Gatsby is built into an American mythic hero:

Not only is he an embodiment of that conflict between illusion and reality at the heart of American life, he is an heroic personification of the American romantic hero, the true heir of the American Dream. He becomes a mirror to the ideal of what an average American wants to be. Gatsby is handsome, youthful, and wealthy—three qualities that Americans cherish. Like a dedicated American, he was a soldier in the war and he "tried very hard to die, but (he) seemed to bear an enchanted life." Instead, he came home with a medal for extraordinary valour. Nick describes Gatsby as follows:

He was balancing himself on the running board of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand (p. 64).

Gatsby seems to have energy bubbling through him that comes out in nervous motions. This quality makes the reader feel that Gatsby always takes advantage
of opportunities and that time is money to him. These characteristics, among others, form Gatsby into an American hero.

There is a mystery to Gatsby's background that adds to his mythic hero qualities. No one seems to know his actual background and lots of rumors are made to supply this information, only adding to his intrigue and uniqueness. At the first description of a party given by Gatsby, the rumors are many and varied. Some people think that he has once killed a man, while others feel that he was a German spy during the war. Another rumor implied that he killed a man who had found out that he was a nephew to Von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil. No one knew where he obtained the wealth needed to establish himself in West Egg among the nouveaux riches and to throw such extravagant parties. This mystery only added to his qualities and helped him earn the adjective of great before his name. He had abundant wealth, and although people didn't know where he obtained this wealth, it was greatly admired.

Another characteristic of Gatsby that caused him to be admired was that he was a self-made man. Gatsby "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself (p. 99)." When he was a boy, he wrote in the back cover of a book certain rules to follow for self-improvement. These even included practicing poise and reading books to improve his knowledge on current issues. These rules were to help him become the person he had dreams of being. They relate back to the concept in the American Dream that people can obtain material success by following certain behavioral rules. Gatsby built himself into a person who mirrored the images that people wanted themselves to have.

All of these characteristics made Jay Gatsby the ideal American to pursue the dream. Jay Gatsby's dream of success is representative of the American Dream. The first part of Gatsby's dream of success was that of obtaining money. In the days before Gatsby went to war, he was in love with Daisy.
But Gatsby was poor and could not reach the social level needed to obtain Daisy. It didn't matter that Daisy and Gatsby loved each other; Gatsby didn't have money. So, he proceeded working to obtain money in order to win Daisy's love. He obtained his money through bootlegging and illegal means. He associated with business partners such as Wolfsheim. Wolfsheim was the man who fixed the World Series, and through associating with him, it can be questioned whether or not Gatsby was involved in fixing the World Series. The means of getting money was not as important to Gatsby as the money itself.

The second part of Gatsby's dream of success was obtaining a high social position. Money is not altogether a satisfactory means of success because to be successful a person must be accepted and approved by other people. The first step that Gatsby took toward a high social position was to buy a big house in West Egg. West Egg was one of a pair of formations of land representing enormous eggs. They were about twenty miles from New York City and were identical in contour. They were separated only by a bay. The difference in West and East Egg resulted from the people living there. West Egg was the less fashionable of the two eggs, where the newly rich people lived. They had obtained their money fast and more often than not, it can be assumed, in illegal ways. They did not know how to handle this wealth with sophistication and restraint. Across the bay was where "the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water (p. 5)." These people had inherited wealth. They were raised in wealthy families and did not know or care of the struggles performed by many people to have the same things. The difference between West Egg and East Egg is clear:

Gatsby is presented as the archetype and tragic hero of a whole social class: they are the West Egg people, whose wealth is fluid income that might cease overnight. They have worked furiously to rise
in the world, but for all the money they spend they will never live in East Egg among the possessors of solid fortunes; at most they can sit at the water's edge and look across the bay at the green light that shines and promises at the end of the Buchanan's dock.

Another material possession which Gatsby thought was necessary for a high social position was a large car. His car is described as:

A rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns. Sitting down behind many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory, we started to town (p. 64).

Not only is the reader impressed with the surface description, but the symbols of the colors used work subconsciously to achieve a desired effect. The rich cream is similar to yellow, which becomes representative of the color and glitter of gold. The green leather is a symbol of money, which is displayed so vividly in this beautiful car. When the windshields "mirror a dozen suns," the concept of the glitter of gold is further enhanced.

Gatsby's new-found wealth is also shown in his clothes. He had shirts "piled like bricks in stacks a dozen high (p. 93)." They were:

Shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel, which lost their folds as they fell and covered the table in many-colored disarray. While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher--shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue (p. 95).

He dresses in suits of white flannel with silver shirts and gold-colored ties, which are again the symbols of money and wealth. However, these, along with his pink suits, show the gaudiness displayed by the newly rich.
To obtain social approval in his position, Gatsby throws huge parties displaying the extent of his wealth. These parties are known by many people who attend for the great amounts of food and liquor available. Nick states that:

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York--every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves... At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another (p. 59).

Again, the color of yellow and gold shines through. Not only does Gatsby have a seemingly unendless supply of food and liquor, but he provides music also. It is not "just a five-piece affair," as described in the book, but "a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and conets and picolos, and low and high drums (p. 40)." These lavish affairs are not merely for his enjoyment; they are to obtain the approval of the society of which he wishes to be a part. He also hopes that Daisy will hear of these parties so he can see again the vision he has worked so hard to obtain.

The extent to which Gatsby furnishes his house is observed in a scene in the library where a drunk man with the name of "Owl-Eyes" discovers that Gatsby has real books with pages in his library. He thought that the books would be
cardboard without pages, merely as show. However, he realizes the thoroughness which Gatsby has undergone to achieve his dream. Gatsby fills his library with books, not for his reading pleasure, or because of his knowledge of them, but for show. "Owl-Eyes" has the natural keenness of vision to penetrate both Gatsby's persona and the common conception of what lies behind it and to recognize the thoroughness with which Gatsby has filled out his "Platonic conception of himself." He is the only character in the book with real vision, outside of Nick, the narrator. He has "natural vision being focused through thick glasses to reveal the genuine beneath the sham, the genuine in the sham."  

All of the material possessions which Gatsby displays and flaunts are means of obtaining a high social position and approval from other people. He counts on other people's perception of himself to form a self-image. All of these possessions are demonstrable proof to Daisy that he has finally reached her social level and is ready to receive her love.

This dream of obtaining Daisy is the third part of Gatsby's dream of success. Daisy has the three qualities that Americans value so much—youth, wealth, and beauty. She is described as "high in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl (p. 120)." This statement sums up Daisy's past and what she represents in the present to Gatsby. Her white palace is her white girlhood. This girlhood was built upon the wealth of her family. She had a beautiful house: "Her porch was bright with the bought luxury of star-shine (p. 149)." The world in which she lived was one built on the basis of wealth. Any luxury she wanted could be provided:

For Daisy was young and her artificial world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the sadness and suggestiveness of life in new tunes. All night the saxophones
wailed the hopeless comment of the Harlem Street Blues while a hundred pairs of golden and silver slippers shuffled the shining dust (p. 151). The gold and silver slippers which shuffled the shining dust show the wealth of Daisy's world. She becomes the golden girl as the line suggests. "Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor (p. 150)." Because of Daisy's inherited wealth, she is able to exemplify and preserve her wealth and make herself gleam like silver. However, Daisy only gleams and is not pure gold or silver because the wealth that has enhanced her surface beauty has prohibited her from obtaining the inner beauty of human compassion and sensitivity. She has never realized the struggles necessary by other people because she is protected in her world by a wall of money. Therefore, Daisy represents to Gatsby not only the love that he is trying to obtain through acquiring wealth and a social level equivalent to hers, but the wealth, youth, and beauty that all Americans want to obtain.

The dream of obtaining Daisy was originated in Gatsby's past. She has become a vision toward which he has striven and because of which he has built a new world for himself. He no longer sees her as a reality or as a human being; instead, she has become a grail to him. He sees Daisy as a product of his imagination and his past with her and does not have the power of discrimination to see the corruptness underneath the glitter.

Gatsby's guilt, insofar as it exists, is a radical failure—a failure of the critical faculty that seems to be an inherent part of the American dream—to understand that Daisy is as fully immersed in the destructive element of the American world as Tom himself.
The Daisy towards which Gatsby has striven was a product of his imagination and hopes. After Gatsby has seen Daisy again after five years, Nick comments that:

There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, deckin it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart (p. 97).

Gatsby shows a basic fault of all humans—memories can be distorted and made more pleasurable to us with the passage of time. Gatsby's dream followed this course until he was only living and striving for a dream of an ideal created in his mind. Even his house in West Egg was directly across from Daisy's house in East Egg. There was a green light at the end of her dock which beckoned to him from across the bay. The green light becomes the symbol of everything Gatsby was striving for. The light symbolizes looking toward the future as he would gaze across the bay, stretching out his arms. Its green color is symbolic of money, which is what Gatsby will ultimately have to obtain to get Daisy's love. Therefore, the green light also becomes a symbol of corruption. It is across the bay and is remote and cannot be reached; however, it is always beckoning the people willing to believe in the powers of it: "The green light, the contemporary signal which peremptorily summons the traveler on his way, serves well as the symbol of man in hurried pursuit of a beckoning but ever-elusive dream." There is an irony involved in the green light because it beckons Gatsby to the East, whereas the lure of the American Dream was always represented by the West: "To Fitzgerald, however, the lure
of the East represents a profound displacement of the American dream, a turning back upon itself of the historic pilgrimage towards the frontier which had, in fact, created and sustained that dream."\(^6\) The importance of the green light is a result of the past:

Thus the American dream, whose superstitious valuation of the future began in the past, gives the green light through which alone the American returns to his traditional roots, paradoxically retreating into the pattern of history while endeavoring to exploit the possibilities of the future.\(^9\)

In the green light, Fitzgerald sums up the striving of Americans for their dreams, although this light is always beyond their grasp. It continues shining and beckoning and many people fall prey to it. The dream was created in the past, but the characters in this portrayal of the twentieth century are still struggling to obtain it, although it now incorporates corruption and deception.

Gatsby can be seen as a dramatic representation of Americans striving for the American Dream. He is developed as a mythic American hero through his self-made image. His dream of success, which involves obtaining money, a high social position, and Daisy, is representative of the American Dream of the twentieth century. The faults of this dream and the society striving for it are seen through Fitzgerald's description of the various characters.
REFERENCE NOTES


2 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 66. All subsequent references will come from this edition and the page numbers are listed throughout the paper for the reader's benefit.


5 Ibid., p. 75-76.

6 Bewley, p. 51.


9 Bewley, p. 48.
The society that Fitzgerald criticizes is divided into three worlds. The first world is that of the Wilson's, who were born poor. The second world is that of Tom and Daisy Buchanan, who have inherited wealth. The third world that Fitzgerald criticizes is that of Gatsby, who has struggled from being poor to being rich, representing the world of the nouveaux riches.

The poverty and desolation of the Wilson's are shown by the location of where they live. The Wilson's live about halfway between West Egg and New York City. The location is very important because West Egg represents the nouveaux riches, who have an income stemming from illegal means and lack the sophistication of people who have inherited wealth. New York City, which represented a large, striving city with great culture and great business in the new world, has now come to represent a city beyond judgment where the usual moral rules don't apply. One illustration among many occurs when Gatsby drives Nick to New York City and is caught for speeding by a policeman. The policeman lets Gatsby go after Gatsby flashes a white card to him. At Nick's inquiry, Gatsby states that: "I was able to do the commissioner a favor once, and he sends me a Christmas card every year." The Christmas card which releases Gatsby from the normal rules shows the corruption of New York City and the powers that wealth has upon people. It also suggests that materialism has crept into the Christmas holiday and has corrupted that symbol of new hope and love.

New York City also becomes the symbol of death. As Gatsby and Nick continue to drive toward the city, Nick comments that: "The city seen from the Queens-
boro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world (p. 69)." This brings the city back to its beginnings when it was free from corruption and held promises for all men. But now the city has become corrupted from the crime and the money brought into it. The first thing that Nick sees after making his previous comment is a hearse, symbolic of the death of the city. Gatsby and Nick are on their way to meeting Mr. Wolfsheim for lunch, the man who fixed the World Series. The luncheon is in a dark cellar and the entire scene represents the crime and illegal means of making a living.

New York City is also the location of Tom Buchanan's mistress' apartment. This cheap apartment shows how the values of Americans have dwindled. It is the scene of Tom's affair with Myrtle and it is also the scene of the confrontation of Gatsby and Tom. At this confrontation, the Buchanan's marriage is deteriorating, along with New York City and the values of Americans.

The place where the Wilsons live, which is between West Egg and New York City, is called the Valley of Ashes:

A fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghostly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight (p. 23). This is a desolate area of land, where the color of gray predominates and men just seem to be like ghosts. The gray and desolation of this land provide a great contrast to the "fresh, green breast of the new world" which the Dutch
The contrast shows the deterioration of America and its ideals. It serves as a replica of modern society:

At one point, Fitzgerald refers to the valley as "the waste land," suggesting that it stands as a symbol for the spiritual aridity of the civilization about which he writes—the kind of barren and waterless land that T.S. Eliot had conceived in his poem of that name.2

In this valley of ashes is a billboard advertising the services of an eye doctor:

But above the gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. Evidently some wild way of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground (p. 25).

Doctor T. J. Eckleburg becomes the symbol of God in the modern world. He is an all-seeing deity but he is faceless, blank, and indifferent.

After Myrtle's death, George Wilson recalls his reaction to her love affair:

"I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. I took her to the window"—with an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it—"and I said 'God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You
may fool me, but you can't fool God!' Standing behind him, Michaelis
saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J.
Eckleburg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the
Thus, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg become the indifferent eyes of God,
watching over the activities of this corrupted modern society.

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg can also be viewed as the dead vision
of the American Dream. The sign becomes a "symbol of the indifference of a
society characterized by lack of vision. Here Daisy and her husband display
their indifference to human values in episodes involving sexual exploitation
and careless violence." This lack of vision held by society is a blindness
to the qualities of humans. People can't distinguish the real from the fake,
the vision from reality. This quality is shown by Jay Gatsby when he can-
not see the faults of Daisy and views her as a vision of his past. It is
here in this wasteland that Daisy and Tom show their lack of morals: Daisy
in the accident and Tom in his love affair. The Valley of Ashes where the
Wilsons live and the billboard of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are symbols of the
corruption and deterioration of modern values.

It is in this valley that the Wilsons live. George Wilson blends into
the grayness that distinguishes this valley: "He was a blond, spiritless
man, anaemic, and faintly handsome (p. 25)." George doesn't have much
personality and hardly enough energy to live:

Generally he was one of these worn-out men: when he wasn't
working, he sat on a chair in the doorway and stared at the people
and the cars that passed along the road. When any one spoke to him
he invariably laughed in an agreeable, colorless way. He was his
wife's man and not his own (p. 157).
George Wilson does not have energy or motivation, and perhaps it is the lack of these two qualities that have attributed to keeping him in his impoverished world. He does not seem to have much of a personality and seems to fade into the wall if he is not doing something. He does not have enough depth and strength in him to face up to the fact that Myrtle has had an affair: "He had discovered that Myrtle had some sort of life apart from him in another world, and the shock had made him physically sick (p. 124)." George Wilson represents a man who was born poor and will continue to remain in that class because of a lack of ambition, motivation, and perceptiveness.

His wife, Myrtle, tries to escape this world of ashes by having a love affair with Tom Buchanan, who is representative of a society of inherited wealth. This affair is Myrtle's only chance to rise from this world of poverty to a world of wealth. She met Tom on a train going to New York. When she decided to start an affair with him, she said, "All I kept thinking about, over and over, was 'You can't live forever; you can't live forever' (p. 56)." Her sense of values was so exploited that her reasoning and justification for this affair were to live only for the moment and not worry about any consequences of her actions. She has a lack of morals and no real sense of values because the institution of marriage and the commitments involved mean nothing to her.

Another bad characteristic that Myrtle has is jealousy. It is Myrtle's jealousy that is her death. One afternoon, Tom, Jordan, and Nick are driving in Gatsby's car to New York City and stop to get gas at the Wilson's garage. At this time, Tom learns that Mr. Wilson wants to take his wife West because he has learned that she has been having a love affair. As they are getting gas, Myrtle is looking down from the window of the room where George has locked her:

In one of the windows over the garage the curtains had moved aside a little, and Myrtle Wilson was peering down at the car. So engrossed
was she that she had no consciousness of being observed, and one
emotion after another crept into her face like objects into a slowly
developing picture. Her expression was curiously familiar—it was an
expression I had often seen on women's faces, but on Myrtle Wilson's
face it seemed purposeless and inexplicable until I realized that her
eyes, wide with jealous terror, were fixed not on Tom, but on Jordan
Baker, whom she took to be his wife (p. 125).

Myrtle sees Jordan Baker as Tom's wife and the person keeping her away from
Tom. When Gatsby and Daisy are driving home from New York City later that day
in Gatsby's car, Myrtle runs out to the car to try to talk to Tom, who she
assumes is driving the car. Daisy is at the wheel and is unfamiliar with the
car. She hits and kills Myrtle and drives on. So, the death of Myrtle is
linked directly to her jealousy over Jordan Baker, who she assumes to be Tom's
wife. Instead, she is ironically killed by his real wife, Daisy.

Myrtle, who is representative of a poor society, assumes an air of hauteur
in her New York apartment as she attempts to play the roles of the rich. As
previously mentioned, New York City is the place where the usual rules do not
hold. In her apartment, Myrtle tries to rise from her class by assuming the
airs of the rich. She says that she married George because she thought that
he was a gentleman but has discovered differently: "I thought he knew something
about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe (p. 35)." Myrtle somehow
feels that she is above George, when actually she isn't:

The only crazy I was was when I married him. I knew right away
I made a mistake. He borrowed somebody's best suit to get married
in, and never even told me about it, and the man came after it one day
when he was out. "Oh, is that your suit?" I said. "This is the
first I ever heard about it." But I gave it to him and then I lay
down and cried to beat the band all afternoon (p. 35).
Myrtle is embarrassed that George was so poor that he had to borrow a suit to get married in. She realizes the poverty that she will have to live with for the rest of her life and the class she represents. New York City and her apartment rented by the wealthy Tom Buchanan are the only places where she can shed her poverty and assume rich airs. She sheds her poverty as quickly as she sheds her dress:

Mrs. Wilson had changed her costume some time before, and was now attired in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream-colored chiffon, which gave out a continual rustle as she swept across the room. With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur (p. 51).

She uses this newly donned hauteur to snob her friends, the McKees. When Mrs. McKee comments that she likes Myrtle's dress, Myrtle rejects the compliment: "It's just a crazy old thing. I just slip it on sometimes when I don't care what I look like (p. 51)." She tells Mrs. McKee that "I'm going to give you this dress as soon as I'm through with it. I've got to get another one tomorrow (p. 57)." By assuming a haughty air, Myrtle tries to rise out of her class, but lacks the real means of doing it. Myrtle and George are symbolic of Americans born poor who struggle to rise from their world, but lack the personality, motivation, and means to achieve it. These people hold the concept of the twentieth-century American Dream by wanting to have material success that is beyond their reach.
REFERENCE NOTES

1. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 69. All subsequent references will come from this edition and the page numbers are listed throughout the paper for the reader's benefit.


THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED

OF THE EAST EGG

The second world that Fitzgerald criticizes is that of Tom and Daisy Buchanan, who represent inherited wealth. Tom Buchanan is a big man with immense physical strength:

He was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body.

The strength of Tom's body comes through as brutality in several incidents. For example, at one point Daisy realizes her little finger is black and blue and that Tom has done it to her. The major example of his misused strength is in the New York apartment. Myrtle is repeating Daisy's name over and over and Tom slaps her with his open hand and breaks her nose. Tom shows power and intolerance in this scene: "In the description of Tom we are left physically face to face with a scion of those ruthless generations who raised up the great American fortunes, and who now live in uneasy arrogant leisure on their brutal acquisitions." Tom is indeed living in "uneasy arrogant leisure" because he isn't really happy doing what he is doing. He is "one of those men who reach
such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savor of anticlimax (p. 6)." Nick feels "that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game (p. 6)." Tom's life is built on force and his acquisitions and he does not really know what he should strive for now. He has never known the struggles of the poor:

Surrounded from childhood by the artificial security of wealth, accustomed to owning rather than wanting, they lack anxiety or illusion, frustration or fulfillment. Inevitably, then, Fitzgerald saw his romantic dream threaded by a double irony. Those who possess the necessary means lack the will, motive, or capacity to pursue a dream. Those with heightened sensitivity to the promises of life have it because they are disinherited, forever banned from the white palace where "the king's daughter, the golden girl" awaits "safe and proud above the struggles of the poor."^3

Tom lacks the motivation and energy needed to pursue a dream or to make anything out of his life, mainly because he is already involved in living the great American Dream.

Tom also has a lack of morals: "Tom and Daisy Buchanan represent the world of sophistication which had heretofore, by the sheer brightness of its glamour, blinded Fitzgerald to its frequent lack of a sense of those 'fundamental decencies.'"^4 His lack of morals is shown in his love affairs. His love affair with Myrtle Wilson is the prime example that has been commented on earlier. The odd part about this love affair is that Daisy knows about it. However, there are more love affairs involved. Jordan comments that: "A week after I left Santa Barbara Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night, and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers, too, because her arm was broken—she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa
Barbara Hotel (p. 78)." It is obvious that Tom moves from one love affair to another while expecting Daisy to remain faithful to him.

Tom also shows a lack of morals in directing George Wilson to Gatsby after Myrtle is killed. Tom knows that Gatsby did not kill Myrtle, but tells George the true fact that Gatsby owned the car to direct George away from Daisy. He tells Nick that:

(George) came to the door while we were getting ready to leave, and when I sent down word that we weren't in he tried to force his way upstairs. He was crazy enough to kill me if I hadn't told him who owned the car. His hand was on a revolver in his pocket every minute he was in the house . . . What if I did tell him? That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's, but he was a tough one (p. 180).

Tom takes out his revenge on Gatsby because Gatsby loved his wife and was a threat to their marriage. Nick sees Tom as he really is:

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. 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 (p. 180, 181).

Nick feels that the money that Tom and Daisy have grown up with has protected them and given them advantages over the normal person. But by always having this money, they have become insensitive to the problems and feelings of a common person. They use people and walk on them if it serves their purpose. If it does serve their purpose, then the act is justified in their minds.

Tom also shows a lack of intelligence. Despite his money and the quality of education it could have brought him, he still lacks perception. This lack
of intelligence is shown in his knowledge of the latest books. He fears that the minorities will eventually "submerge" the white race and will attempt to control the world: "Something was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart (p. 21)." When Tom finds out that he can't be recognized any longer by his physical abilities, he tries to become intellectual, but fails.

Daisy, his wife, is another character that Fitzgerald criticizes as a member of the society of inherited wealth. Like Tom, Daisy also has a lack of morals. She has an affair with Gatsby to parallel her husband's affair with Myrtle. However, Daisy doesn't have this affair only for her love for Gatsby. She does it as a sort of nostalgia for the past. The past was five years ago when Daisy loved Gatsby, but he was not on her social level. She also does it for spite because Tom continually seems to be having a string of affairs. The third reason why Daisy has an affair with Gatsby stems from boredom since she really has nothing to fill her life.

She also shows a lack of morals in Myrtle's death. When she was driving Gatsby's car back from New York City, she hits Myrtle and kills her, but doesn't even stop. She shrugs off her responsibility of stopping and doesn't accept the consequences of her actions by letting her husband put the blame on Gatsby, whom she supposedly loves.

After Gatsby is killed by George Wilson, Daisy shows her lack of human compassion. Tom and Daisy leave East Egg without even leaving behind a return address. They never call or come to his funeral. Their consciences are not bothered by the fact that they directed George to Gatsby and his resulting death.

Another criticism of Daisy that Fitzgerald makes is that she married for money, not love. Daisy represents beauty and is like some sort of lovely flower, which has to be won by the richest or strongest male. Gatsby and Daisy
were in love five years ago, but he was not on her social level and didn't have
the money needed to marry her. She becomes engaged to Tom Buchanan while Gatsby
is away in the army. Tom has the wealth needed to sweep Daisy off her feet:

In June she married Tom Buchanan of Chicago, with more pomp and
circumstance than Louisville ever knew before. He came down with a
hundred people in four private cars, and hired a whole floor of the
Muhlbach Hotel, and the day before the wedding he gave her a string
of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars (p. 77).

Daisy's love is a love that can be bought and Tom can pay the price. Jordan
Baker is the only witness to Daisy's true feelings. She tells Nick:

I was a bridesmaid. I came into her room half an hour before
the bridal dinner, and found her lying on her bed as lovely as the
June night in her flowered dress--and as drunk as a monkey. She
had a bottle of Sauterne in one hand and a letter in the other (p. 77).
The letter was from Gatsby and Daisy had realized what she was planning to do.
She lets her true feelings come out since she is so drunk and she pulls the
string of pearls out of a waste-basket where she has thrown them and gives them
to Jordan, saying: "Take 'em down-stairs and give 'em back to whoever they
belong to. Tell 'em Daisy's change' her mine. Say: Daisy's change' her
mine (p. 77)!" This is the only time in the book that Daisy has a true grip on her feelings and that is because she is drunk. She doesn't want to go
through with the wedding because she realizes that she doesn't really love Tom.

It is interesting to note that Daisy's wealth shows through even when she is
drunk. She tells Jordan to say that Daisy has changed her "mine" not mind.
She regards everything as a possession and her wishes have always been fulfilled.

However, Jordan and her mother's maid put her in a cold bath, trying to sober
her up:
She wouldn't let go of the letter. She took it into the tub with her and squeezed it up into a wet ball, and only let me leave it in the soap-dish when she saw that it was coming to pieces like snow. 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 month's trip to the South Seas (p. 77, 78).

Daisy continued to cling to her true feelings while she was drunk just as she clung to Gatsby's letter until it dissolved like snow. As she sobered up, she realized what she must do rather than what she should do. She knew she must marry someone with money, so that is what she did, "without so much as a shiver."

Daisy shows the value that Americans placed on money and a high social position. Another fault is Daisy's insincerity. Nick realizes this as he listens to her voice. Daisy has a very unique voice: "It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again (p. 9)." It is very melodious and makes a person lean forward so as to catch every word:

There was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered "Listen," a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour (p. 9, 10).

Daisy's voice holds a promise in it that men want to pursue. But Nick realizes the insincerity of it all when he says:
The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me. I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face, as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged (p. 18). Daisy's words here have no value and show insincerity, but the melodious charm of her voice compels people to listen. She and Tom are members of a secret society, but it is an undesirable society because the people in it have no morals, sincerity, or human compassion. Gatsby defines the charm in Daisy's voice when he says that her voice is full of money. Nick says: "That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money--that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it (p. 120)." The voice that compelled men to listen to it was the symbol of money and wealth. It would always hold a charm for men and a promise, but there really wasn't any value in it, only insincerity. Money holds great promises and hopes, but it leads men into undesirable societies like the Buchanan's. They are undesirable because people lose basic important values in these societies and become corrupted and hollow.

Daisy also shows a lack of purpose in her life. The same day that everyone goes to New York City, Daisy exclaims: "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon? And the day after that, and the next thirty years (p. 118)?" She has no plan for her life or any goals to achieve. She just seems to float along and take what life can give her. Boredom is one of the reasons why she has an affair with Gatsby.
Daisy doesn't even accept raising her child as one of her responsibilities and a purpose to her life. She allows the care of her child to a nurse and only sees the little girl when it fits her needs.

The belittling of her responsibilities toward her child is another one of Fitzgerald's criticisms of this society. At the child's birth, Tom was not even there and Daisy didn't know where he was. When the child was born, all Daisy could say was that she hoped the girl would be a fool. She tells Nick:

Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where.

I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. "All right," I said, "I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool--that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool (p. 17)."

Daisy has a poor attitude toward her girl and places her under the care of a nurse. She treats her child like a doll, only seeing and playing with her when she wants to. She shows her off to Gatsby and Nick, calling her a "little dream." Daisy doesn't see the girl as a reality or a responsibility. When Daisy is through with the child, she sends her off and Daisy's world resumes itself once again.

Jordan Baker, who is living with the Buchanans for the "home influence", is another character of this society that Fitzgerald criticizes. Jordan is dishonest and lies about many things. Nick says:

When we were on a house-party together up in Warwick, she left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then lied about it--and suddenly I remembered the story about her that had eluded me that night at Daisy's. At her first big golf tournament there was a
row that nearly reached the newspapers—a suggestion that she had moved her ball from a bad lie in the semi-final round. The thing approached the proportions of a scandal—then died away. A caddy retracted his statement, and the only other witness admitted that he might have been mistaken. The incident and the name had remained together in my mind (p. 58).

Jordan's dishonesty varies from lying about a car left out in the rain to actually moving her golf ball in a tournament. Her dishonesty comes to be associated with her to the extent that both the name and the incident become connected in Nick's mind. Jordan also avoids certain relationships because of her dishonesty. Nick describes this avoidance as follows:

Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body (p. 58, 59).

It is possible that the reason that Jordan likes Nick is that she feels he will never put her at a disadvantage. Nick prides himself of being honest, and Jordan recognizes this trait. Since Nick is so honest, she will always hold the advantage because it is not beneath her to lie.

Jordan is also a gossip and is not ashamed to eavesdrop on someone. When Myrtle calls Tom at his home, Jordan unashamedly listens in to the conversation and then tells Nick all about it.
Tom and Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker are representatives of a world of inherited wealth. Every wish is fulfilled for them and they are living in a life of luxuriant ease. Their world is one toward which many people are striving. Fitzgerald criticizes this world and shows that the people who inhabit it have many faults and undesirable characteristics. People who strive for this world see the world of wealth as a vision because the real world of wealth holds people devoid of the fundamental decencies that everyone should have. However, this world still glitters for people who dedicate their life to achieving it.
REFERENCE NOTES

1 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 7. All subsequent references will come from this edition and the page numbers are listed throughout the paper for the reader's benefit.


THE HIGH BOUNCING LOVER IN SEARCH
OF THE GOLDEN GIRL

The world of Gatsby is the third society that Fitzgerald criticizes. Gatsby is representative of a person who is born poor and strives for the world of the rich. These people are the ones who dedicate their lives to the attainment of the American Dream. These people are forever looking forward only to be pushed back.

Gatsby is built into a mythic American hero by many people and is seen as having many desirable qualities. But in reality, Gatsby has many faults.

Gatsby is a very hollow person. He depends on other people's view of himself in order to build a self-concept. He has no self-image and is not an individual. Rather, he is a combination of characteristics that he feels a self-made man should have. He gives parties for the social prestige rather than for his own enjoyment. Nick discovers his lack of personality after knowing him: "I had talked to him perhaps a dozen times in the past month and found, to my disappointment, that he had little to say." Gatsby continually uses the expression "old sport" to show familiarity with people, but this only shows his inability to articulate:

It is characteristic of Gatsby that he has virtually no language of his own. His monotonously iterated expression, "old sport," which is redolent of the 1890s rather than of the 1920s is symbolic of his lack of words. Like his richer rival Tom Buchanan, he is a newcomer to the realm of ideas. He has many more books in his library than
he has read; most of them, in fact, are for show and the intellectual "Owl-eyes" discovers that their pages are uncut.2

Gatsby is a fraud—he has a fake name and fake wealth:

Just as the first half of the novel is devoted to the inflation of the myth of Gatsby to gigantic proportions to give apparent support to the "colossal vitality of his illusion," so the second half gradually deflates this myth through the revelation of the deepness of the roots of Gatsby's dream in the deprivations of his past.3

The Gatsby that Americans have admired and built into a hero is in reality a hollow person with little knowledge of himself or the world.

Another bad characteristic of Gatsby's personality is his compulsive optimism. He cannot see situations for what they are and continues to hold an optimism which is impractical. One optimism he has is in the goodness of Daisy. He cannot see Daisy for what she really is and he overlooks any flaws or faults that she has. Even after Daisy kills Myrtle in the automobile accident and doesn't stop, he fails to see her faults or condemn her in any way. Instead, he is concerned with her reactions and plans to say that he was driving the car. He also stands outside of Daisy's house and waits for a signal in the event that Tom gives her a bad time. If Gatsby sees this signal, he plans to help Daisy. Little does he know that Tom and Daisy are conspiring together in the kitchen:

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table, with a plate of cold fried chicken between them, and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table to her and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement. They weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale—and yet they
weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural
intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were
conspiring together (p. 146).

Gatsby is concerned about Daisy's feelings while she is conspiring with Tom on
leaving and how to get out of the mess created by her. Gatsby believes so
much in his vision of Daisy that he fails to see the faults in her and remains
optimistic of the outcome of their relationship.

He also has a compulsive optimism about the ability to repeat the past.
It has been five years since the time when he courted Daisy and he wants to go
back to that time and the feelings that they had for each other then. Gatsby
has obtained a high social level, which he lacked earlier, and he feels that
Daisy and he can continue their love affair now. He wants to erase those five
years just as if they hadn't happened:

He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom
and say: "I never loved you." After she had obliterated four years
with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures
to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to
go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it
were five years ago (p. 111).

Gatsby demands the impossible—he wants to forget the past and also obliterate
those years which had lapsed. He wants Daisy to disclaim any love she may
have felt for Tom and then he wants to marry her in Louisville where their
paths had separated. Gatsby forgets the changes that people can make in five
years. In those five years, Gatsby's dream lost its reality and he tries to
get this reality back so he can realize his hopes. But Gatsby sees how his
vision isn't quite fulfilled because he says to Nick:

"And she doesn't understand. She used to be able to understand.

We'd sit for hours—" He broke off and began to walk up and down a
desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers. "I wouldn't ask too much of her," (Nick) ventured. "You can't repeat the past." "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see." 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. . . (p. 112).

Gatsby begins to realize that Daisy may have changed some because he says that she doesn't understand him now. As he walks down a path, it is filled with fruit rinds and crushed flowers: "The American dream, stretched between a golden past and a golden future, is always betrayed by a desolate present--a moment of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers." The American dream is built upon the past while looking toward a promising future which makes the present meaningless. The present is only seen as a step to the future and is not enjoyed or fully benefited from. But Gatsby still has optimism that he can repeat the past, even though it is out of his grip at the moment. He wants to recover the reality that he had at that time in the past, because once he started working toward his dream, he lost touch with reality. All he has now are his optimism and hopes.

Gatsby also has an insecure grasp on his values. To obtain the money needed to win Daisy's love, Gatsby resorts to criminal means. He is a bootlegger and deals with the underground world and Wolfsheim. Gatsby wants to
obtain money and he doesn't care how he goes about it. However, he loses Daisy by gaining his wealth this way: "The structure of appearance erected to impress Daisy is founded on some kind of illegal traffic which only repels her, so that she is lost to Gatsby even before the accident of Myrtle's death." 5

Gatsby also shows his insecure grasp of values through his show of wealth. He equates cost with value and quality with quantity. His house, car, clothes, and parties are all for show and for status. He feels that these material things will win happiness and his goals. His success is equated with his possessions, rather than inner qualities which count the most.

Gatsby shows that he has the corrupted values of the twentieth century by placing such importance on money. He works so hard to obtain money when money actually has no value in itself. The value of money is the importance that humans place on it and the material possessions they say that it can buy. Americans have taken the stress off of obtaining inner beauty and placed importance on the false glitter of material items. This misdirected sense of values is criticized by Fitzgerald and its role in the society striving for a corrupted dream.

The attainment of material success is a criticism made of Gatsby. Gatsby's wealth is made by criminal means. It is a fluid income which could cease overnight. It can bring him material possessions, but it can't place him on the social level that the people with inherited wealth have obtained. In fact, the wealth needed to obtain Daisy actually drives her away because of its source: "Jay Gatsby loses his life even though he makes his millions because they are not the kind of safe, respectable money that echoes in Daisy's lovely voice." 6

Fitzgerald also criticizes Gatsby's vision of Daisy. The vision of Daisy is not based on reality. Gatsby is unable to see Daisy as she really is and
he overlooks her faults. Daisy is a vision based upon Gatsby's memory and the Daisy he left behind in his past. While he was away from her, he built her up in his mind and made her into an ideal to pursue. He dedicated his life to obtaining her. She is the embodiment of the glamour of wealth:

Note that the Fitzgerald hero is not attracted by the fortune in itself. He is not seeking money so much as position at the peak of the social hierarchy and the girl becomes the symbol of that position, the embodiment of its mysterious power. That is Daisy Buchanan's charm for the great Gatsby and it is the reason why he directs his whole life toward winning back her love.7

Fulfillment destroys the dream because a major part of the dream is working toward the final goal: "The instant that the illusion is wedded to an actuality of experience... the dream seems to split in two. Half of its energy goes on trying to believe that the girl is the realization of the magical glory, half goes on trying to express the right of that glory in the materials at hand."8

Fulfillment of the dream also destroys the magic of the final goal:

The story is a repetition of what the earlier books pointed toward: to win the king's daughter, the golden girl, who lives high in the white palace, was to win a fraud because her actualities are never equal to, and so are a betrayal of, the enormously imagined golden world she represents to the innocent, hungry seeker.9

Daisy holds promises, but as Gatsby obtains the goal, he sees that the golden moments he dreamed of are gilt, not gold:

In The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald made out of his life with Zelda and his dream a moral history of the growing and murderous disappointment attendant upon discovering that the gorgeousness of America exists not in her glittering actualities, past or present, East or
West, but in the fantastic sense of possibilities that drives the imagination of the archetypal American, the eternal pioneer in search of the golden moment dreamed in the past and to be recaptured in the imagined futures.10

But the futures which are imagined and the possibilities that they hold rarely become real. Therefore, Gatsby's dream is based on a vision and is left behind in the past where the vision was created: "The green light at the end of Buchanan's dock will draw us on forever--but we shall never possess our Daisy, for she is a vision that really doesn't exist."11 The vision of Daisy is a product of Gatsby's imagination, just as the visions of a new life were born in the minds of the early settlers.

Another criticism of Gatsby's world concerns the extravagant parties that he is prone to give. His lavish show of wealth in the enormous amounts of food and alcohol available for the guests is representative of the importance placed on wealth. These parties were to initiate Gatsby into a high social level and offer proof to Daisy of his attainment of wealth. By pleasing people with his parties, he felt that he could please them with himself and become accepted. But Gatsby fails at this because he is always standing apart from his guests and very few of them know him. He also shows his wealth by presenting a lady with a new dress costing $265.00 after hers is torn on a chair. Gatsby does this so as to obtain social approval and be accepted into this class. All of these displays of his wealth help build up the concept of him being the "great" Gatsby. But his greatness is a result of his material success, which could disappear at any time and which was made by illegal means.

Fitzgerald also criticizes the people who attend these parties. People weren't invited--they just showed up: "They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door..."
Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all, came for the party with a simplicity of heart that was its own ticket of admission (p. 41)."

These people showed poor manners at the parties: "Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks (p. 41)."

They also had domestic quarrels at the parties, dragging their personal lives into public view. One man stayed so long that he became known as "the boarder" because he sponged off of Gatsby and eventually moved into his own room.

The irresponsibility of these people is shown by an automobile accident after one of the parties. Nick is witness to the accident on his way home:

In the ditch beside the road, right side up, but violently shorn of one wheel, rested a new coupe which had left Gatsby's drive not two minutes before. The sharp jut of a wall accounted for the detachment of the wheel, which was now getting considerable attention from half a dozen curious chauffeurs. However, as they had left their cars blocking the road, a harsh, discordant din from those in the rear had been audible for some time, and added to the already violent confusion of the scene (p. 54).

Involved in the accident, "Owl-Eyes" is amazed that the car is now in the ditch. He has no idea of how it happened. The man who was driving eventually gets out and wants to know if they ran out of gas. He didn't even notice at first that they had stopped and when he had realized that point, he didn't know that he was in a wreck. The drunkenness and irresponsibility of these party-goers are highly exemplified by this example.

The world of Gatsby which had appeared so "great" on first glance is not worth the adjective given to it. Gatsby, who serves as a mythic American hero, turns out to be hollow with a compulsive optimism and an insecure grasp of
values. His material success turns out to be achieved by criminal means and the Daisy that he is striving for turns out to be a vision and not a reality. The parties displaying his wealth are cheap affairs showing cheap and shallow relationships. The people who attend have poor manners, poor behavior, and a lack of responsibility. The people represented in this society have not achieved their dream but, unlike the Wilsons, they have the motivation and the means of attempting to fulfill their visions. The nouveaux riches can achieve a world similar, but not identical, to the world of the people of inherited wealth. These people pursue the American dream, but still cannot attain it.
REFERENCE NOTES

1. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 64. All subsequent references will come from this edition and the page numbers are listed throughout the paper for the reader's benefit.


9. Ibid., p. 165.

10. Ibid., p. 165.

11. Miller, p. 54.
THE SHATTERING OF THE GREEN LIGHT

The Great Gatsby can be viewed as a dramatic representation of the American Dream. The American Dream which it represents is a dream of the twentieth-century American society. This modern dream is a corrupted and exploited version of the original American Dream which was a product of the new frontier and the West. The original dream represented a belief in the goodness of man and had self-satisfaction as its ultimate aim. The dream existing in modern America is a dream of success revolving around money. Material possessions started becoming the symbols of success. Americans assumed that the obtainment of material success would bring them spiritual satisfaction.

Jay Gatsby is developed into a mythic American hero and becomes representative of Americans striving for the dream. He is a typical American and shows his dedication to his country by fighting in the war. He has a mysterious background which adds to his intrigue and uniqueness. He also is a self-made man who rises from "rags to riches" and obtains a fortune. All of these qualities serve to make him representative of Americans striving for the American Dream.

His dream of success is representative of the American Dream. His dream involves the obtainment of three things. The first is the obtainment of money, which he earns by criminal means. The second part of his dream is the obtainment of a high social position. In order to do this, he buys a large house in West Egg, a large car, many clothes, and throws extravagant parties. The first two acquisitions are prerequisites to the obtainment of the third part of his dream—Daisy's love. His dream is representative of the exploited American Dream in the twentieth century.
The Great Gatsby can also be viewed as a criticism of the American society which dedicates itself to the obtainment of this dream. Fitzgerald's major criticism of this society is its avid pursuit of material things. Daisy will only marry for money and not love. Gatsby directs his life to the acquisition of money regardless of the means. The Wilsons are continually striving to break away from their poverty. Material possessions are equated with happiness and spiritual satisfaction.

Society's love of escapism is shown in its love for parties. Gatsby's parties always attract great numbers of people as they try to escape from the rules and corruption of this wasteland.

Another criticism of this society, as it is revealed by Fitzgerald, is its emphasis on youth and beauty. All of the characters in the book are in their late twenties and early thirties. The ages of the characters imply that the future is in the hands of the youth because these young people are the ones striving for the green light and everything that it signifies.

Modern American society has an awe of the wealthy and the privileged. America originally prided itself on the equality of men that it stood for, but now it places special privileges on the people who have obtained wealth. An example of this comes when Gatsby is released from paying the fines of a speeding ticket by showing a Christmas card that he received from the commissioner. This also demonstrates the society's inability to understand the proper use of power.

This society has a lack of a moral code which is shown in all three worlds. The many love affairs, violent acts, dishonesty, and revenge are just some examples of a lack of fundamental decencies. There is only one incident which shows human compassion when Nick erases the obscenities written on Gatsby's steps after his death.
This society also has a destructive view of idealism shown in its pursuit of the green light. The society is characterized by a lack of vision and it cannot tell the real from the fake. Gatsby and Daisy are both created as ideals, while each has many faults and weaknesses. This view can be destructive because Gatsby has lost his life in the quest for attainment of Daisy, who he thought was an ideal but really is corrupt and immoral.

Through these symbols, themes, and characters, Fitzgerald presents a dramatic representation of the American Dream and a criticism of the American society which dedicates itself to the attainment of this dream. However, it is shown that this dream can never be obtained because it was born and buried with the new world: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."
BIBLIOGRAPHY


