



## THE FALL OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN FITZGERALD'S 'THE GREAT GATSBY': AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

**Fawzia Abugela Salem Albawe, Dr. Apsara Stanley**

Plot.No.128, F,L1, Friends Colony, Gangotri Nagar, Naini, Allahabad, U.P India



**Fawzia Abugela Salem  
Albawe**



**Dr. APSARA STANLEY**

### ABSTRACT

Fitzgerald (1914) is one of the American "lost generation" writers. He came into prominence in the decade that followed World War I. Out of his disillusion of the war and the new materialistic civilization. Fitzgerald presented the American Dream in his novel *The Great Gatsby*. It shows how the achievement of that dream was impossible because of trends of materialism and commercialism that dominated the age.

This paper gives a general survey of American life, particularly in the early twentieth century regarding social, economic, intellectual and literary aspects. It shells light on the novelist's life, the literary midline in which he lived and contributed to his emergence as a novelist, and his major works. It also analyzes the novel *The Great Gatsby* and shows the elements of that dream and how they have been awakened by materialism.

**Key Words:** Economy, materialism, cynical, politics, sanctuary, practical, improvise

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### INTRODUCTION

The American civilization originally was an agricultural one, but it is changed to a great industrialization. The economic and political changes gave a chance to the native people to adopt their economy to new economic and technological ways. The new generation was dreaming of establishing a new land in which the individual, spiritual, moral

values and the material could be found. From the very beginning of new land was a Symbol for man's aspirations... American was a new Continent where there was neither tradition nor authority to make men confirm to any set rules. (1)

Religion greatly becomes weaker by the shock of Darwinism. "It was as though suddenly God had died, leaving man with neither divine protection

nor method of salvation”(2), as Ron.W.Horton points out. The capitalism increasingly affected the life in the United States. It includes all aspects of life and affected the American society. Therefore the American society was a subject to a complete decline during the twentieth century. As a result American people were influenced by the capitalism because it encouraged them to establish their hopes and wishes.

The influence of capitalism and materialism made people lose their traditional aspects of life. The younger generation regarded the older generation tradition to be responsible for the millions of people who had been killed during the war. They never respected their elders and behave in wild irresponsible ways. All people refused capitalism and materialism which replaced all traditions and moral values. The war and the cynical power of politics convinced them that moral and spiritual values were dead.

#### **The American Society**

Some people thought of American as “Sanctuary for persecuted sects, others as the solution of the unemployment problem in England”. (3) There was a disagreement between men’s theoretical thinking and their practical behavior:

The theoretical atmosphere in which he has Lived bears no relation to society, the practical atmosphere in which he has lived bears no relation to the ideals... Human nature itself exists on two irreconcilable planes, to plan of stark theory the plan of stark business. (4)

People rejected all traditional ideals which were found in old world. Bonalph Bourne had written in 1917: “The war... or American Promis! One must change... for the effect of the war will be to improvise American Promis”. (5)

The Americans believe they can achieve their dream. The American land was the land in which people could establish their hopes and wishes and to make an ideal world to live in peacefully and away from their traditions. The new materialism and commercialism helped people to get away from their traditions hoping to live in ideal world.

The human nature was influenced by the new industrial and economic changes. People hoped

to live a higher life than before. The law of the American decided that all people were born free and equal and anyone could do whatever he likes and hopes. The new generation considered the “jazz music” an interesting means to live in their ideal world. Because alcohol was illegal, it became attractive to young people as another means of breaking away from the social code of their elders.

Finally people refused capitalism, commercialism and materialism while the moral and spiritual values were dead. “Hemingway shows wandering alcohol in his ‘The Sun also Rises’, ‘They felt a stump as Jone Anderues aesthetic in Das passes’ ‘Three soldiers, as roatless”.(6)

In general the writers wrote about the influence of the war on the American society; they didn’t express their own experience but they described the experience of the whole society.

#### **Fitzgerald’s Life and Works**

Scott Fitzgerald was born on 24 September 1896, in St Paul, Minnen Polis, USA. He lived in a catholic family. His family was an upper-middle class. (7) His mother was from a successful Irish immigrant and her family made some amount of money which they paid for Fitzgerald's expensive education at Princeton. His father was from Maryland in the south of America, who had a little money with business. Fitzgerald's family wasn't rich but they lived a respectable life and they had to work to live. He succeeded in his writing of drama and novel. He wrote many plays and short stories such as May Day, Absolution and other novels. He also wrote many novels such as This Side of Paradise and Tender in the Night in addition to The Great Gatsby.

Fitzgerald fell in love with a rich and attractive girl named Zelda Sayer. He couldn’t marry her as he was poor. But when his short story was lastly accepted for publication by popular magazine and he had got some money, he married Zelda but he couldn’t forget that one day Zelda had been unwilling to marry him when he was poor. They travelled to Paris. Lastly they came back to America where his daughter was born. (8)

In the Spring of 1924 Fitzgerald left for France looking for calmness from his work. He wrote The Great Gatsby. Fitzgerald lived in Volescure near St. Raphael but his marriage was harmed by Zelda’s

involvement with a French warrior. He revised *The Great Gatsby* in Rome during the Winter of 1924-1925 and published it in April. (9)

Fitzgerald felt that he must get what he hopes, and he married a beautiful and a wealthy girl.

Most of Fitzgerald's novels were about the age in which he lived and he wrote about the influence of alcohol on the human health and he wrote about "jazz" which could be heard in every place in the American society. Young people disliked their traditional values and therefore they rejected the old world.

The new world fell down and people discovered that the traditions were the best way to live a peaceful life. F.Scott Fitzgerald wrote his works in a creative way. All his works refer original personality. He used several images and symbols in his writings. His glamour, triumph, euphoria, the break heart, and the tragedy of his life were primitive, and all his works refer to his good career. The last novel which Fitzgerald had written is *The Last Tycoon* in 1939 but he could not finish it because he died and there was an editor who edited his last novel and collection of many essays and personal materials published as *The Crack-up* (1945).(10) He died because of heart attack in 1970 at the age of forty-four.

### **The Great Gatsby**

Fitzgerald used the first narrator to write this novel. He used Nick as a narrator and a first character to narrate this novel. Nick starts the novel from the end of the story because the period of time between the date of narration and the real time in which the events happened (the summer of 1922) gives Nick the chance to make his last judgment on the events at the beginning of the novel. Nick introduces Gatsby as the most important character in the novel. He describes Gatsby's character as great personality because he has a good reputation which makes all the people who are around him like him. Nick expresses his admiration of Gatsby's personality and his heightened sensitivity to all aspects of life. Nick mentions another character, whose name is Daisy Buchanan. She is Nick's cousin, Tom Buchanan's wife and Gatsby's old beloved. There is a meeting between Nick, Tom and other two women. Daisy is one of them and the other woman

is Jordan Baker, who is Daisy's guest. From Daisy's conversation with Nick, he discovers that the Buchanans' belong to a distinguished society.

Mr. Gatsby usually has parties in which there are many people, colored lights and Christmas trees. Gatsby invites Nick to the party. Nick sees Jordan Baker and tries to avoid her but he can't do that. One of the invited people mentions that Gatsby made all his wealth out of crime but all other people refuse that. Gatsby comes to Nick's house with his gorgeous car and invites Nick to go with him for lunch. It seems to Nick that Gatsby's personality is good and kind but Nick feels that he is tired and Nick has a good impression about Gatsby. Gatsby tells Nick that he is the only son of a rich family that lived in Mid-west and all of them died. He came to America and studied in Oxford and that was to be considered as a family tradition. Nick feels that Gatsby didn't tell the truth. Gatsby tells Nick that he lived in Paris and he was collecting jewels. Nick remembers that he has to invite Daisy to have a cup of tea with him and he asks Gatsby if that may trouble him. When Daisy comes, Gatsby's feeling renews at the moment of her coming and Gatsby doesn't know that Nick understands him.

One morning there are many people visiting Gatsby's house and saying that his real name is 'James Gatz', and was working with a man whose name was Dan Cody, he stayed with him for a long period of time. Dan Cody was a millionaire and he died and Gatsby inherited all his wealth. Gatsby tells Nick about his secrets and he speaks about his love for Daisy. Gatsby tells Nick that he did his best to change his life from low class to a higher one. Gatsby tells Nick that he loved Daisy very much but she left him because he was poor and married a rich man. When they meet again, Daisy doesn't show any emotion to him because she is married. Gatsby tells Nick about his past, he changed his name into Jay Gatsby before his meeting with Cody. He wants to tell the truth but he continues to talk about Daisy's love for him.

After Gatsby's physical death, Nick discovers the truth from Gatsby's father. Gatsby had a schedule when he was alive, he was a practical man and he considered the value of time. Gatsby is killed by George Wilson. Gatsby gives some facilities to

Nick as a narrator to make his job easy to do. The events which took place in early years of Gatsby's life and romance are known for Nick by other characters such as Jordan Baker, Wolfshiem, Mr. Gatz and Gatsby himself. Nick tells us about Gatsby's moral personality he dreams to live. Nick finds a conflict between Gatsby's ideal dream and the "full dust" of reality. Nick describes people whom he knows during his journey to East Egg such as Tom Buchanan and his wife; the Buchanans are a rich family which belongs to the American Revolution (1775-83). Tom is careful about racism: "...It is up to us who are the dominant race, to out or these other races will have control of things." (11)

Tom and Daisy had secret things which suggest impossible decline "...as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged" (p.14). Even their guest Jordan Baker is not innocent, she has a bad reputation. Tom doesn't agree with the independence of women and he disapproves of freedom of women when he talks about Jordan Baker's behaviour: 'They oughtn't to let her ran around the country this way'(p.15), he means her family should keep her under more control. All these circumstances help Nick to do his job completely.

The first time he hears Gatsby's name was when Jordan mentions it at Tom's house: 'you must know Gatsby'. Nick heard some ideas about him before such as: "a distinguished man", "smiled understandingly", "Caisar's nephew" and many others.

He's bootlegger; said the young ladies, moving somewhere, between his cocktails and flowers. 'One time he killed a man who had found out that he was Nephew to Von Hindeu Bury second cousin of the devil. (p.49).

When Nick returns from his first visit to East Egg he saw Gatsby who was a neighbor.

I saw that I wasn't alone of fifty feet away a figure had emerged from the shadow of my neighbor's mansion and was standing with his hands in his buckets regarding the silver paper of the stars, something in his leisurely movements and the secure position of his

feet upon the low suggested that it was Mr. Gatsby him self comes out to determine what share was his of our local heavens (p.17).

When Gatsby invited Nick to one of his parties, he had the chance to discover Gatsby's personality "I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the guests who had actually been invited. People were not invited-they went there"(p.32).

Fitzgerald's aim of the futile parties is to explain the hedonism of the Jazz music, these parties are superficial and futile "Gatsby's mansion was a place in which all people could found"(pp.39,47). Nick struck by drunken men who don't consider the values of things. One of them says: "I never care what I do so I always have a good time..."(p.34). Nick meets Jordan by chance '...Jordan invited me to join her own party...' (p.35).

Nick as a narrator goes on to describe the influence of the drunkenness on one's mind. Nick got drunk twice in order to understand Gatsby's personality which no one could understand.

He smiled understandingly-much more than Understandingly...I understand you just far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to be... (p.38)

Nick is confused and his confusion is clear when he talks about Gatsby's experience. He is confused between the traditional habits and the audile rumors about Gatsby's personality and potential condition he has noted.

With an effort I managed to restrain my Incredulous laughter. The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they crocked no image except that of thousand 'character' leaking sawdust at every pore. as she pursued a tiger through the Bois de Bugbane. (p.53)

Then Jordan tells him about her meeting with Gatsby in his library. But what makes Nick to pay attention is the isolated Gatsby's personality from the world which he himself created.

So I thought you ought to know something about me. I don't want you to think I was just nobody ...

I usually find myself among strangers because I drift here and there trying to forget the sad things that happened to me... (p.54)

Gatsby was born in the Middle West. His legal name was James Gatz but he changed it into Jay Gatsby when he was seventeen years old. It is clear that Gatsby's family and his will to achieve social success, he has lived by his wishful imagination hoping to establish his principles. His ideal fancies and illusion increases till he becomes to use his dream in all aspects of life.

Each night he added to the patterns of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene with obvious embrace. For a while these reveries provided an outlet for the rock of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing. (pp.99.100)

He tries to fulfill his dream from the influence of his academic study, and innate skills lead him to the small Lutheran College of St. Olaf's in Southern Minnesota when Jordan sees Daisy sitting with alien, she doesn't know him. The man's name is Jay Gatsby. Nick notes that there is a secret between Daisy and Gatsby.

...for half a minute there wasn't a sound. Then from living room I heard a sort of chocking murmur and part of lough, followed Daisy's voice on order artificial note I certainly am awfully glad to see you again (p.70).

Nick says that Gatsby gave up all his wishes when he fell in love with Daisy "she became everything to him". Gatsby has a heroic quality of innocence which can't help but admires.

...I saw that expression of bewilderment had come back in to Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to the quality of him as to the quality of his present

happiness. Almost fire tears! even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams-not through her own fault... thrown him self into it with a creative passion adding to it all the time... (p.78).

Daisy got a good reputation "among the rich families". It was obvious that Daisy was not happy in her marriage with Tom, 'about six weeks she heard Jordan was talking about Gatsby who was 'her old lover'. (p.63)

Daisy's beauty is useless as "her voice is full of money" as Gatsby made it clear to Nick. Gatsby belongs to a lower social class than Daisy's. Therefore the commitment of his ideal fancy of the material beauty is wasting and ironic to attain the ideal aim. Instead of the increasing feeling of betrayal, Gatsby makes his dream on his love in a way in which was too difficult to understand Gatsby's heroic valiance.

In France he got several promotions and badges of honour, so within the few months of America's actual participation in the war. (12) Gatsby stayed in Oxford because of the misunderstanding of Daisy's letter. Gatsby becomes a rich out of his tricky dealings with Wolfshiem who works in business "you wouldn't have to do any business with Wolfshiem...but I assured him was wrong" (p.67)

Wolfshiem's personality reflects the immorality of Jazz Age which led Gatsby to his dream to get money. He helped Gatsby to fulfill his success during 1919 and he told Nick one time about his business with Gatsby. With Wolfshiem's help Gatsby becomes wealthy and he bought his great mansion in Long Island. He does all these things in order to see Daisy at any time he wants. "If it wasn't for the mist we could see your house across the bay", said Gatsby. He also said: 'you always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock' (p.76).

Although he had many Lavish parties but he never enjoy himself "obscurely as it had begun, his career as Trimeslchio was over" (p.113) (13), but has a hope that Daisy will come to one of them. Nick plays an important role in Gatsby's experience because he makes a meeting between Daisy and Gatsby. "He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and

I think he reevaluated everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-bored eyes." (p.79).

Fitzgerald's use of clock as a symbol is to express the beauty of his past when he was in love with Daisy. Gatsby hopes his love will come back.

...His hands learned back so far that it rusted against the face of defunct mouthpiece clock and from this position his distraught eyes started down at Daisy, who was sitting frightened but graceful, on the edge of a stiff chair (p.70).

Gatsby and Daisy talk to each other about their past and their love. When Gatsby is with Daisy, his mansion seems more beautiful than before. Daisy shows Gatsby's dream for a short time and this makes another problem for Gatsby's establishment of this dream. The lovers are listening to a song.

'one thing's sure and nothing's surer. The rich get richer and the poor get-children.

In the meantime,

In between time, (p.78)

This song creates a romantic atmosphere for them, but Daisy's beauty was without value because her love was for her advantage. This creates a contrast between her wish to get money and Gatsby's real feeling. After the meeting Gatsby invites Tom and Daisy to one of his parties. After the party Gatsby asks Daisy to tell her husband (Tom) that she doesn't love him and he asks her to be free from him. "He wanted less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say :I never loved you... they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house-just as if it were five years ago".(p.89). Nick mentions that Tom saw Gatsby three times before the time in which he met him. Nick says that Tom hates Gatsby because his wife (Daisy) loves him. Nick says that Tom is Gatsby's competitor. Daisy puzzles whether to choose her husband Gatsby but her behavior shows her need for Gatsby. "Daisy puts her arms through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said"(p.76).When the rivalry between Gatsby and Tom about Daisy increases, Gatsby tells

Tom to leave Daisy alone to speak with her. The Buchanans represent the materialism in the novel; they don't win anything from the society although they are rich; "the berial of the raive American dream in a corrupt society". (14)

By Gatsby's speech about love he can win Daisy's heart and this reminds Daisy of the days they have spent together in Chicago. The problem is that Gatsby keeps faithful to his dream because he doesn't know its harm. Nick feels about the Gatsby's tragic experience before it happens. Gatsby likes his hopes and wishes. Many people refuse his behavior but he continues his way. At the same time he is a responsible of his choice till the end "when he waits for Daisy's telephone message". The story ends with Gatsby's physical and tragic death. Gatsby tells Nick about his life -- all the circumstances of his life. According to Sklar, the "end of season of life, the cycles had made their revolution and came back again to the point where the end meets the beginning"(16), the meaning of the "revolution" here is the natural elements which were around Gatsby's romance till his death, and the autumn is a signal in his old experience with Daisy because he leaves her in 1917 and comes back when he finds her married in autumn of 1922. Jordan Baker's hair is another signal which refers to the colour of autumn's leaf.

I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared, if that was true he must have lost the old warm, paid a high price for living too long with a signal dream. He must have looked upon at an unfamiliar sky... and shivered as he found what grotesque thing rose is ...A new world, material without being red, where pour ghosts. breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about (p.123).

In the end Gatsby discovers that there is a conflict between what he believes in and what is real. Fitzgerald's great religious and moral personality could not be found in society. "He was a son of God and he must be about His father's business, the service a vast regular and meticulous Beauty (p.33).

#### CONCLUSION

Fitzgerald reveals his generation's disappointment of the spectacle of American Dream and describes its physical and spiritual death. He uses memory to look back death's aesthetic vision of new world before its existence.

Nick shows the wasting of the American Dream which he describes. Nick describes his journey from the old world to the new one as a circle of the world to think about everything in that world and about the events which took place in the novel. However Fitzgerald had the experience which Gatsby had, both of them established their dreams and then they discovered the fall of their dreams. Fitzgerald comes back to the virtues of his forefathers because only that vision is possible to establish the American Dream.

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