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## **Symbolism in the Great Gatsby**

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قال تعالى

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

(اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ  
الْأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ)

صدق الله العظيم

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## **Dedication**

To those who were the light that illuminated my path and the heartbeat that gave me strength:

To my dear parents, my pillars in life—without their prayers and love, I would not have reached this achievement.

To my esteemed professors in the English Department, who have given me so much of their knowledge and support.

To my colleagues and friends, companions on this journey through sweet and difficult moments.

And to myself, in appreciation of every moment of effort, patience, and sleepless nights, and every dream I held onto until it became a reality.

This accomplishment is the fruit of love, perseverance, and sincere support.

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## Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) intricately weaves symbolism into its narrative, transforming objects, colors, and settings into vessels of deeper thematic meaning. The novel's exploration of the American Dream, social stratification, and moral decay is amplified through recurring symbols that reflect the aspirations and disillusionments of its characters.

The green light at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock epitomizes Gatsby's unattainable desires and the broader illusion of the American Dream. This beacon, often shrouded in mist or darkness, represents the elusive nature of aspirations rooted in materialism and nostalgia. The light's flickering presence underscores the fragility of Gatsby's vision, as his pursuit of Daisy becomes synonymous with chasing an idealized past. The color green, associated with money and envy, further ties this symbol to the corrupting influence of wealth, a theme central to Fitzgerald's critique of the Jazz Age (Bloom, 2004, p. 45).

The eyes of T.J. Eckleburg, looming over the Valley of Ashes, function as a moral specter in the novel. These faded billboard advertisements, described as "blue and gigantic" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 26), evoke a sense of divine judgment, yet their commercial origin strips them of spiritual authority. The Valley of Ashes itself, a desolate industrial wasteland, symbolizes the moral and social decay resulting from unchecked capitalism. Characters like George Wilson, who inhabits this bleak landscape, embody the dehumanizing effects of poverty, contrasting sharply with the opulence of East and West Egg (Churchwell, 2014, p. 112).

## **Chapter One**

### **1.1 Overview of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Life**

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota, to parents with contrasting backgrounds and influences. His father, Edward Fitzgerald, had Southern roots and worked as a wicker furniture salesman, reflecting the family's modest economic standing. His mother, Mollie McQuillan, was from a wealthy Irish-Catholic family, providing Fitzgerald with exposure to wealth and social aspirations that would later shape his literary themes (Brucoli, 2002, p. 5). From a young age, Fitzgerald exhibited talent for writing, initially honing his craft at the Newman School in New Jersey. He then attended Princeton University, where he dedicated himself to developing his skills as a writer, though he left before graduating to pursue a literary career full-time (Turnbull, 1994, p. 15).

In 1920, Fitzgerald achieved early success with his debut novel, *This Side of Paradise*, which quickly brought him fame and financial stability. This success allowed him to marry Zelda Sayre, who had been a longstanding romantic interest. Embracing the role of the Jazz Age chronicler, Fitzgerald captured the decade's exuberant spirit, glamour, and moral complexities in his works. His personal life, however, mirrored the volatility of the era; he and Zelda lived a life of both extravagance and instability, driven by a thirst for adventure and a desire to enjoy their newfound success. Fitzgerald's works from this period, such as *The Beautiful and Damned* and his various short stories, reflect both the enchantment and the inner turmoil that marked his own life (Mizener, 1965, p. 77).

As the 1920s turned into the 1930s, Fitzgerald's life became more challenging. Zelda suffered from mental illness, requiring costly treatments

that strained their finances, even as Fitzgerald's popularity waned. During this period, he completed *Tender Is the Night*, a novel heavily influenced by Zelda's struggles and his own reflections on love, youth, and decline. Although the book initially received mixed reviews, it is now considered one of his most significant works (Brucoli, 2002, p. 121). Fitzgerald passed away in 1940, convinced that he had failed as a writer, yet his legacy would later be cemented as one of America's great literary voices, with *The Great Gatsby* now celebrated as a defining exploration of the American Dream (Turnbull, 1994, p. 212).

## **1.2 Historical Context of The Great Gatsby**

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925, is a vivid portrait of America in the Jazz Age, a period marked by both economic prosperity and social upheaval. The novel captures the optimism and wealth that defined the post-World War I era, along with the moral disillusionment that accompanied rapid change. Following the war, Americans experienced unprecedented economic growth, which led to an era of extravagance and consumerism (Brucoli, 2002, p. 104). The novel's setting reflects this newfound prosperity, as Gatsby's lavish parties, luxurious mansion, and lifestyle embody the excesses of the time (Fussell, 2009, p. 54).

The 1920s also witnessed the rise of Prohibition, a government-mandated ban on the manufacture, sale, and distribution of alcohol. Despite this restriction, the demand for alcohol soared, leading to the creation of a lucrative black market controlled by bootleggers and organized crime. Gatsby's wealth, implied to be derived from bootlegging, mirrors the economic opportunities and criminal undertakings of the period. This aspect of the novel highlights the corruption that Prohibition fostered and the moral ambiguity that characterized the decade (Turnbull, 1994, p. 198).



Another significant element of the 1920s was the changing role of women in society. The passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 granted women the right to vote, which was accompanied by a shift in social attitudes and cultural norms. Women were increasingly challenging traditional roles, embracing new fashions, and openly participating in public life. Fitzgerald's portrayal of characters like Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker reflects these evolving gender norms. Daisy's character embodies the complexities of these changes—she appears as both an object of desire and a symbol of privilege, yet her dependence on wealth and status ultimately restricts her autonomy (Mizener, 1965, p. 153). Through her character, Fitzgerald explores the limitations imposed on women despite their apparent freedom.

The *Great Gatsby* serves as a critique of the American Dream, a concept deeply rooted in the promise of prosperity and success through hard work. For Gatsby, the American Dream represents not just wealth but the hope of recapturing lost love and achieving personal fulfillment. However, Fitzgerald reveals the darker side of this ideal by illustrating how the pursuit of wealth and status can lead to corruption, emptiness, and ultimately, failure. Gatsby's tragic end underscores the disillusionment that many felt as the dream proved elusive, a sentiment echoed by critics and readers alike as the novel reflected the societal fractures of the era (Fussell, 2009, p. 78).

### 1.3 Plot Summary

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* follows the story of Jay Gatsby, a mysterious millionaire known for his lavish parties and relentless pursuit of the American Dream. Set in the summer of 1922, the novel is narrated by Nick Carraway, a young man who moves to Long Island's West Egg and becomes Gatsby's neighbor. Nick observes the extravagant lifestyle of Gatsby, whose wealth is both admired and questioned by the surrounding community (Brucoli, 2002, p. 145). From the start, Nick becomes fascinated by Gatsby's charm and mystique, recognizing in him an intense longing for something beyond wealth (Mizener, 1965, p. 112).

As Nick becomes acquainted with Gatsby, he learns that Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy Buchanan, Nick's cousin and a resident of the more fashionable East Egg. Daisy is married to Tom Buchanan, a wealthy and arrogant man whose life of privilege has left him callous and self-centered. Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle, it is revealed, is driven by his desire to win back Daisy, whom he had loved before going off to fight in World War I. Gatsby believes that by attaining wealth and status, he can rekindle their romance and fulfill his idealized version of happiness (Fussell, 2009, p. 213). Nick describes Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy as "extraordinary," noting that his "romantic readiness" defines Gatsby's character and motivation (Brucoli, 2002, p. 148).

The tension between Gatsby and Tom reaches a climax during a heated confrontation in a New York City hotel. Tom exposes Gatsby's wealth as being rooted in illegal activities, primarily bootlegging, which shatters Daisy's idealized view of Gatsby and leads her to retreat back to Tom. Devastated, Gatsby remains convinced that Daisy will ultimately leave Tom for him, even though her commitment wavers. This scene emphasizes

the novel's exploration of the fragility of Gatsby's dreams and the limitations of his idealism in a society driven by status and privilege (Mizener, 1965, p. 127).

The tragic end of the novel is foreshadowed by Gatsby's unwavering hope, which ultimately leads to his death. After the confrontation, Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress, while driving Gatsby's car. Tom, aware of Myrtle's death, manipulates events to cast suspicion on Gatsby. Myrtle's husband, George Wilson, is misled into believing Gatsby is responsible and ultimately kills him before taking his own life. Gatsby's death marks the end of Nick's romanticized view of wealth and idealism, leaving him disillusioned by the emptiness that characterized the lives of the wealthy East Egg residents (Turnbull, 1994, p. 248).

## **1.4 Themes of The Great Gatsby**

One of the central themes of *The Great Gatsby* is the distorted pursuit of the American Dream. Jay Gatsby, the enigmatic millionaire, dedicates his life to recreating the past and winning back his lost love, Daisy Buchanan. He believes that by accumulating wealth and throwing lavish parties, he can recapture the idealized version of their relationship. This pursuit, however, is based on an illusion, a romanticized vision of the past that can never be truly replicated. Gatsby's relentless pursuit of this dream ultimately leads to his downfall, highlighting the inherent flaws and corrupting influence of a dream solely focused on material gain and the recapture of an irrecoverable past. (Brucoli, 2002, p. 78).

The theme of class and social stratification is intricately woven into the narrative. The stark contrast between the "old money" of the Buchanans and the "new money" of Gatsby underscores the deep-seated social divisions of the era. Daisy and Tom Buchanan, born into wealth and

privilege, occupy a world of careless ease and moral laxity. They are protected by their social standing, shielded from the consequences of their actions. Gatsby, on the other hand, despite his immense wealth, remains an outsider, forever barred from entering their exclusive circle. This social divide is further emphasized by the geographical separation of West Egg, representing new money, and East Egg, the bastion of old money. This separation symbolizes the insurmountable barrier that exists between the two social classes, highlighting the inherent inequalities and prejudices that permeate society. The novel illustrates how social class dictates not only one's place in society but also one's moral compass. (Trilling, 1945, p. 247). The past, with its alluring promise of lost happiness, is another powerful theme explored in the novel. Gatsby's relentless attempts to recreate his past with Daisy drive much of the narrative. He clings to the memory of their youthful romance, believing that he can erase the intervening years and recapture their former bliss. His mansion, his parties, and his entire persona are carefully constructed to impress Daisy and win her back. However, the past, as Fitzgerald suggests, is an illusion, a romanticized memory that can never be fully realized. Gatsby's failure to grasp this fundamental truth leads to his tragic demise. (Bloom, 2010, p. 55).

The moral decay underlying the glittering facade of the Roaring Twenties is another crucial theme. The characters in *The Great Gatsby*, particularly those belonging to the wealthy elite, exhibit a profound lack of moral responsibility. Tom Buchanan, with his blatant infidelity and casual cruelty, embodies this moral bankruptcy. Daisy, though seemingly more innocent, is ultimately complicit in this moral decay, choosing to retreat into the safety of her wealth rather than face the consequences of her actions. Even Nick Carraway, the narrator, initially drawn to the allure of this world, becomes disillusioned by the moral emptiness he witnesses. (Brucoli, 2002, p. 112).

The symbolism of the green light across the bay from Gatsby's mansion plays a significant role in reinforcing the themes of the novel. The green light, representing Gatsby's longing for Daisy and his idealized past, becomes a symbol of his unattainable dream. It embodies his yearning for a future that is forever out of reach. As he stretches his hand towards it, he is reaching for an illusion, a phantom of the past that can never be grasped. (Trilling, 1945, p. 251).

The Great Gatsby explores the complex interplay of the American Dream, social class, the allure of the past, and moral decay. Through the tragic story of Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald offers a powerful critique of the societal values of the Roaring Twenties, revealing the dark side of the pursuit of wealth and the illusion of the past. The novel's enduring appeal lies in its exploration of these timeless themes, which continue to resonate with readers today, reminding us of the dangers of chasing unattainable dreams and the importance of confronting the realities of the present. (Bloom, 2010, p. 78).

## Chapter Two

### 2.1 Character Analysis: Gatsby, Daisy, Tom

Jay Gatsby's relentless pursuit of Daisy defines his character. He dedicates his life to recreating the past, believing that by amassing wealth and throwing lavish parties, he can recapture the five years he lost with her. This yearning for an idealized past blinds him to the reality of Daisy's present circumstances and her true nature. Gatsby's persona is largely a fabrication, a carefully constructed image designed to impress Daisy. He reinvents himself, changing his name from James Gatz and accumulating a fortune through questionable means, all in the hope of winning her back. This relentless pursuit, however, is not simply about romantic love; it is also about achieving a specific vision of the American Dream, one where wealth equates to happiness and the past can be rewritten. (Bruccoli, 2002, p. 87).

Daisy Buchanan is a complex and often contradictory figure. She is presented as the epitome of feminine allure, with a captivating voice and a seemingly delicate demeanor. However, beneath this façade lies a deep-seated unhappiness and a moral ambiguity. Daisy is acutely aware of the limitations placed upon women in her social circle, and she seems to navigate these constraints with a mixture of cynicism and resignation. She chooses the security and social standing offered by her marriage to Tom, despite his infidelity, rather than risk the uncertainty of a relationship with Gatsby. The choice reflects her pragmatism and her understanding of the societal constraints that bind her. She is a product of her environment, a world where wealth and social status reign supreme, and she is ultimately unwilling to sacrifice these comforts for the uncertain promise of love. Her famous line, "That's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool," reveals her awareness of the limited options available to women

in her time and her own strategic embrace of a superficial existence. (Mizener, 1965, p. 142).

Tom Buchanan stands in stark contrast to Gatsby. He is born into wealth and privilege, possessing a sense of entitlement and arrogance that pervades his every action. Tom is a man of immense physical strength and a domineering personality. He is openly unfaithful to Daisy, engaging in extramarital affairs with little regard for her feelings or the social consequences. His casual cruelty and blatant disregard for the feelings of others reveal a moral emptiness at the core of his character. He represents the established elite, secure in their position and indifferent to the suffering they inflict on others. His confrontation with Gatsby reveals not just jealousy but a fear of losing his social dominance. (Trilling, 1945, p. 78).

## **2.2 Symbolism and Imagery**

The green light at the end of Daisy's dock, visible from Gatsby's mansion across the bay. This seemingly simple image becomes a powerful representation of Gatsby's yearning for the past and his unwavering hope for a future with Daisy. The green light symbolizes the unattainable nature of his dream, a dream built on an idealized memory of a lost love. Gatsby's relentless pursuit of Daisy is, in essence, a pursuit of this elusive green light, a pursuit of a past that can never be fully reclaimed (Brucoli, 2002, p. 87).

The valley of ashes, a desolate wasteland situated between West Egg and New York City, stands in stark contrast to the opulent mansions of the wealthy. This desolate landscape, covered in industrial byproducts, symbolizes the moral and social decay hidden beneath the glittering surface of the Roaring Twenties. It represents the forgotten and exploited underclass, the human cost of the relentless pursuit of wealth and pleasure.

The billboard featuring the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, overlooking the valley of ashes, becomes a symbol of a lost or absent God, a silent witness to the moral decay of society (Trilling, 1945, p. 24).

Another recurring image is that of weather, which Fitzgerald uses to reflect the emotional climate of the characters and the narrative. For instance, the oppressive heat during the confrontation between Gatsby and Tom in the Plaza Hotel mirrors the rising tension and the impending explosion of conflict. The heavy rain during Gatsby's reunion with Daisy at Nick's house symbolizes the awkwardness and uncertainty of their rekindled relationship, washing away the past but also creating a sense of unease. The changing weather patterns throughout the novel thus serve as a subtle yet effective way to underscore the shifting emotional landscape of the story (Stern, 1951, p. 112).

The color symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* is equally significant. Gold and yellow, often associated with wealth and status, are used to depict the superficiality and corruption that often accompany great riches. Gatsby's lavish parties, filled with "yellow cocktail music," are a prime example of this. The excessive display of wealth is ultimately hollow, masking a deeper emptiness and moral decay. In contrast, white, often associated with purity and innocence, is used to describe Daisy, but this association is ironic. Daisy's seemingly innocent exterior hides a shallowness and moral ambiguity that contribute to Gatsby's downfall. The contrast between these colors highlights the deceptive nature of appearances in the novel (Brucoli, 2002, p. 92).

The rich tapestry of symbolism and imagery in *The Great Gatsby* elevates the novel beyond a simple story of love and loss. Through carefully crafted symbols like the green light, the valley of ashes, and the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, and through vivid imagery of weather, colors, and



automobiles, Fitzgerald creates a powerful and enduring commentary on the American Dream, the corrupting influence of wealth, and the enduring power of the past. These literary devices work together to create a deeply resonant and unforgettable reading experience, continuing to captivate readers decades after the novel's initial publication. They offer a profound insight into the complexities of human nature and the enduring search for meaning and fulfillment in a rapidly changing world (Stern, 1951, p. 115).

## **2.3 Setting and Atmosphere**

West Egg, where Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby reside, is portrayed as the “new money” district, inhabited by those who have recently acquired their wealth. This setting is characterized by its ostentatious displays of affluence, exemplified by Gatsby's extravagant mansion and his lavish parties. The atmosphere of West Egg is one of restless energy, fueled by the pursuit of pleasure and the desire to impress. The constant flow of guests, the loud music, and the extravagant displays of wealth create an atmosphere of frenetic activity, masking a deeper sense of emptiness and superficiality (Brucoli, 2002, p. 112).

East Egg, across the bay, represents the “old money” elite, the established aristocracy who have inherited their fortunes. This setting is characterized by its more refined and understated elegance, exemplified by the Buchanan's Georgian mansion. The atmosphere of East Egg is one of established power and social privilege, a world where wealth is taken for granted and social status is paramount. The residents of East Egg, like Tom and Daisy Buchanan, possess a sense of entitlement and detachment from the consequences of their actions, contributing to a sense of moral decay beneath the polished surface (Trilling, 1945, p. 38).

In stark contrast to the opulence of both West and East Egg is the valley of ashes, a desolate industrial wasteland situated between West Egg and New York City. This setting is a powerful symbol of the social and moral decay hidden beneath the glittering façade of the Roaring Twenties. The valley of ashes is described as a “fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens,” a bleak landscape choked by industrial byproducts. The atmosphere here is one of despair and hopelessness, a stark reminder of the human cost of industrial progress and the relentless pursuit of wealth. The ever-present dust and grime create a sense of suffocation and decay, mirroring the moral decay of the characters and the era (Stern, 1951, p. 95).

New York City, with its bustling streets and vibrant nightlife, provides another important setting in the novel. It represents the center of social and economic activity, a place where fortunes are made and lost. The city’s atmosphere is one of excitement and possibility, but also of moral ambiguity and corruption. The intense heat of the city during the climactic confrontation between Gatsby and Tom in the Plaza Hotel amplifies the tension and foreshadows the tragic events that follow. The city, with its diverse population and fast-paced lifestyle, further contributes to the sense of social change and moral uncertainty that pervades the novel.

## 2.4 The Green Light and the American Dream

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* offers a poignant exploration of the Roaring Twenties, a period marked by economic prosperity, social upheaval, and the persistent pursuit of the American Dream. At the heart of this narrative lies the green light, a seemingly insignificant detail that evolves into a powerful symbol of longing, aspiration, and the ultimately elusive nature of this dream. This essay will delve into the multifaceted symbolism of the green light, examining its connection to Jay Gatsby's personal desires and its broader implications for the American Dream as a cultural ideal. It will also draw upon other literary works to illustrate how similar themes of yearning and disillusionment have been explored in relation to the pursuit of success and happiness. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 1).

The green light, emanating from Daisy Buchanan's dock across Long Island Sound, holds profound significance for Gatsby. It represents his unwavering desire to recapture the past and reunite with Daisy, the woman he has idealized and placed at the center of his aspirations. Gatsby's lavish parties, his carefully constructed persona, and his vast wealth are all orchestrated in an attempt to attract her attention and win her back. The green light, therefore, becomes a tangible representation of his yearning for a lost love and a past he believes he can reclaim. It embodies his longing for a specific moment in time when he felt complete and fulfilled. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 180). This yearning goes beyond a simple desire for Daisy; it represents a longing for an idealized past, untouched by the complexities of reality. (Brucoli, 2002, p. 78).

However, the green light also serves as a potent symbol of the illusory nature of the American Dream. Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy is predicated on a fundamental misconception: he believes that by recreating the past, he can achieve happiness in the present. He fails to acknowledge the passage

of time and the inevitable changes that occur within individuals. The green light, in this context, symbolizes the deceptive promise of the American Dream – the notion that material wealth and social status can guarantee happiness and fulfillment. This illusion is further amplified by the superficiality of the wealthy society that surrounds Gatsby, a world obsessed with appearances and devoid of genuine emotional connection. (Bloom, 2010, p. 45).

The symbolism of the green light transcends Gatsby's personal ambitions and extends to the broader societal pursuit of the American Dream. This dream, often defined as the opportunity for upward mobility and success through hard work and determination, has long been a cornerstone of American identity. However, as Fitzgerald suggests, this dream can become distorted and corrupted, leading to disillusionment and despair. Gatsby's relentless pursuit of Daisy, fueled by his belief in the transformative power of wealth and status, ultimately culminates in tragedy. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 152).

The theme of the elusive nature of dreams and the potential for disillusionment resonates in other literary works. In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman's unwavering faith in the "American Dream" of achieving success through charisma and popularity leads to his downfall. (Miller, 1949, p. 139). Willy's inability to adapt to changing times and his adherence to outdated notions of success contribute to his tragic fate, demonstrating the perils of clinging to an idealized vision of the past. (Bigsby, 1999, p. 62). This echoes Gatsby's inability to relinquish his idealized past with Daisy, illustrating how such fixations can lead to tragedy. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 176).

Similarly, in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, the Younger family's dream of owning a home in a better neighborhood represents their

hope for a brighter future and escape from the constraints of poverty and racial discrimination. (Hansberry, 1959, p. 30). Their struggles and triumphs in pursuing this dream highlight the challenges faced by many in achieving the American Dream, particularly those from marginalized communities. (Nemiroff, 1994, p. 102). While their ending offers a glimmer of hope, it also acknowledges the persistent obstacles that stand in the way of true equality and opportunity. (Hansberry, 1959, p. 131).

The green light in *The Great Gatsby* stands as a powerful symbol of the allure and ultimate unattainability of the American Dream. It embodies Gatsby's personal yearning for a lost love and a bygone era, while also reflecting the broader societal pursuit of success and happiness. Through Gatsby's tragic story, Fitzgerald cautions against the dangers of pursuing a distorted vision of the American Dream, one that prioritizes material wealth and social status over genuine human connection and personal fulfillment. The green light, therefore, remains a poignant reminder of the complex and often contradictory nature of human aspirations and the enduring power of hope and illusion. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 182).

## Chapter Three

### 3.1 Analysis of Gatsby's Parties

Gatsby's parties are emblematic of the decadence and excess of the Roaring Twenties, serving as a backdrop to critique the erosion of the American Dream. Each weekend, Gatsby's mansion becomes a cacophony of jazz, laughter, and champagne, with guests arriving "like moths" to the allure of wealth (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 45).

The parties are meticulously staged to project an image of unattainable grandeur, yet they paradoxically highlight Gatsby's profound isolation. While crowds dance and drink, Gatsby often stands alone on his marble staircase, a spectral figure detached from the revelry he funds. This dissonance between public spectacle and private solitude reflects Fitzgerald's critique of the American Dream's corruption, where material success fails to fulfill emotional or spiritual needs. "Gatsby's gatherings are not celebrations but rituals of self-destruction, where his idealism collides with the vulgarity of reality" (Bloom, 2004, p. 89).

The extravagance of the parties also underscores Gatsby's desperation to attract Daisy Buchanan. His mansion, strategically positioned across the bay from her home, becomes a symbolic beacon meant to lure her into his world. The scale of his hospitality—catering to strangers, hiring entire orchestras, and importing fresh flowers—mirrors his obsession with recreating a romanticized past. However, the parties inadvertently expose the futility of his quest. Scholar "Gatsby's lavish displays of wealth are not acts of generosity but desperate bids for validation, each bottle of champagne a brick in the edifice of his self-made myth" (Brucoli, 20002, p. 112).

The guests, oblivious to his longing, treat his home as a playground, leaving behind debris and scandal. A car accident near the end of one party, in which a drunken driver crashes into a ditch, symbolizes the moral carelessness of the era. The driver's laughter—"as though the whole evening had been a trick" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 68)

### **3.2 The Mysterious Nature of Gatsby**

Gatsby fabricates a new identity as a Oxford-educated aristocrat, a transformation that hinges on lies and omissions. His insistence on his "Oxford days" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 72) and his evasive responses to questions about his past fuel speculation, creating a persona shrouded in contradiction. Gatsby's mansion, filled with imported luxuries, serves as a physical manifestation of his constructed identity, yet it also betrays his insecurity. The opulence is a facade, masking his fear of being exposed as an impostor. Critic Marius Bewley argues that "Gatsby's mystery is not incidental but existential, a reflection of the American obsession with self-creation and the fragility of identity in a class-driven society" (Bewley, 1954, p. 45).

Gatsby's idealized love for Daisy Buchanan is equally shrouded in ambiguity. His vision of her as the "golden girl" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 127) is less about Daisy herself than about the symbolic purity she represents—a relic of his past and a trophy of social ascent. Scholar Ross Posnock contends that "Gatsby's love is not romantic but narcissistic, a projection of his own aspirations onto an unattainable ideal" (Posnock, 1987, p. 78).

### 3.2 Rumors and Speculation

The rumors surrounding Gatsby reflect the novel's exploration of societal voyeurism and the destructive power of gossip. Guests at his parties trade wild theories about his origins, speculating that he is "a German spy during the war" or "the nephew of the devil" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 48). These baseless claims reveal the moral detachment of 1920s high society, where truth is subordinate to entertainment. Even Nick, the narrator, admits to spreading rumors, noting that "Gatsby's notoriety ... represented to me the peculiarities of his existence" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 54).

Scholar Richard Lehan argues that "the rumors function as a collective narrative, allowing characters to avoid confronting the moral vacuity of their own lives" (Lehan, 1990, p. 102). The parties become a forum for idle chatter, where Gatsby is commodified as a spectacle rather than recognized as a person.

The culture of speculation also mirrors the era's fascination with celebrity and scandal. In the 1920s, tabloid journalism thrived, and Gatsby's parties mirror this obsession with sensationalism. Guests treat his life as a tabloid headline, deriving excitement from fabricating lurid stories. Critic Ronald Berman notes that "the novel's gossip reflects the commodification of identity in modernity, where individuals become products of public imagination" (Berman, 1996, p. 63).



### **3.4 Nick's First Encounter with Gatsby**

Nick wanders alone, Gatsby approaches him, mistaking him for another guest, and strikes up a conversation about the “advantage of the weather” (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 53).

The exchange is brief and unremarkable to outsiders, yet it carries profound significance. Gatsby's smile, described as “one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance” disarms Nick, revealing a vulnerability beneath his polished facade. This moment of connection contrasts sharply with the superficiality of the party, hinting at Gatsby's loneliness and his longing for genuine human bonds, this encounter establishes the novel's central irony: Gatsby, surrounded by crowds, is fundamentally alone, and Nick, the outsider, becomes his only confidant (Miller, 1964, p. 89).

The interaction also foreshadows Nick's dual role as participant and observer. While he becomes entangled in Gatsby's world, he maintains a critical distance, noting the “foul dust” that trails Gatsby's dreams (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 6). Gatsby's accidental intimacy with Nick—his admission that he “came over here to ask you a favor” (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 83)—hints at their complex relationship. Critic Robert Roulston suggests that “Nick's moral ambivalence is encapsulated in this moment; he is both seduced by Gatsby's charm and repelled by his moral compromises” (Roulston, 1993, p. 45).

## Conclusion

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* stands as a piercing critique of the American Dream, exposing its fragility and the moral decay embedded within the glittering excess of the Jazz Age. Through its tragic protagonist, Jay Gatsby, and the novel's rich symbolism, Fitzgerald dismantles the myth that wealth and status can fulfill human longing or recapture an idealized past. The green light at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock—the novel's most enduring symbol—epitomizes this illusion. Gatsby's obsessive reach toward its flickering glow mirrors the futile pursuit of a dream rooted in nostalgia and materialism. The light, shrouded in mist and distance, represents not only Daisy's unattainable love but the broader corruption of the American Dream, which conflates emotional fulfillment with social ascent and consumerist excess.

The novel's setting amplifies this tension. The contrast between West Egg's "new money" extravagance and East Egg's "old money" elitism underscores the rigid class divisions that Gatsby's wealth cannot bridge. His lavish parties, filled with "yellow cocktail music" and strangers, symbolize the emptiness of his self-made identity. Despite his opulent mansion and tailored suits, Gatsby remains an outsider, his reinvention as "Oxford man" Jay Gatsby a fragile facade. The Valley of Ashes, a desolate wasteland between the Eggs and New York City, embodies the moral and social decay wrought by capitalism. Here, the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg—a faded billboard's gaze—loom like a godless judgment on characters like Tom Buchanan, whose brute entitlement, and Myrtle Wilson, whose desperate grasping for dignity ends in tragedy.

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