

The Great Gatsby Literary Analysis Essay

F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" is a novel which defines the 1920's America, popularly called "the Jazz Age". It is a strong, symbolic, thought provoking look at America in the 1920's. It was an era of unprecedented affluence and material prosperity but marred by moral and ethical bankruptcy. Fitzgerald has painted the greed, cynicism, and the mind less pursuit of pleasure in this iconic novel.

"The Great Gatsby" is a commentary on the lives of Americans, especially those living in the East Coast. It is a masterful depiction of the clash between "old money" depicted through Tom and Daisy Buchanan and the crass and vulgar display of wealth by "new money" as typified by Jay Gatsby. The yawning gap between the two classes is depicted even in their location. The East Egg area, dotted with elegant mansions is home to old money, while the West Egg boasts of opulent, garish houses, peopled by the new rich. Dividing the two is the valley of ashes, representing the divide between the two moneyed classes, a chasm which cannot be bridged.

Fitzgerald's characters are what makes the novel a masterpiece of fiction, a mirror to the attitudes so prevalent in the society of the day. Jay Gatsby is the prototype of the 1920's self-made American, in whom we see the metamorphosis of an ordinary Mid-west lad into the sophisticated, legendary celebrity, who is the talk of New York society. Gatsby has an aura of power and mystery achieved through the technique of delayed character revelation which lends a theatrical quality to the man, much in keeping with his persona of one who lives life as if it were a dramatic event and who has created his own self "out of his own Platonic self-conception." But behind this veneer of flamboyance lurks a man so deeply in love with Daisy, that he resorts to criminal dealings to accumulate wealth, to impress Daisy. This love for her is so deep that he even takes upon himself the blame of the murder in order to protect her. Gatsby's loyalty to his lover is proof that in spite of his show of sophistication, he still retains the moral values of his humble upbringing.

Daisy Buchanan, the wife of Tom Buchanan, is the perfect blend of beauty, charm, grace and sophistication, but these are marred by her fickle, bored, sardonic demeanor. She is a woman in love with money, luxury and affluence. Although we see glimpses of her true love for Gatsby, it is not a sustained emotion. This attitude of hers is reinforced, when she allows Gatsby to take the blame

for killing Myrtle. Her selfishness is evidenced when she and her husband move to a faraway house in order to avoid Gatsby's funeral. Daisy is a perfect portrayal of the old money quality, where good taste and elegance are more important than the qualities of the heart.

Nick Caraway is the thread that binds the various characters in the novel. He is Gatsby's neighbor and Daisy's cousin, who helps Gatsby to meet Daisy and re-ignite his affair with her. Nick is the narrator of the novel and is perfectly cast in this role, because of his sober, reflective nature. The novel can be read as a personal memoir of Nick and his experiences in New York in the summer of 1922. All the characters confide in Nick since he is a good listener and can keep secrets, and he says of himself, "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (64). Although Nick is a secondary character, it is his personal observations and comments on the characters that shape our view of them. He is the fly on the wall, a part of the scene, but not actively involved in it. Nick's dialogues, which serve as interior monologues, especially in the I and IX chapter throw light on the American dream. and the subsequent disintegration of the dream.

"The Great Gatsby" retains a position of pre-eminence in American literature for its insights into the hankering after the great American dream and the ultimate futility of this pursuit. The novel examines the misplaced priorities of a generation of Americans but also shows the way to fulfillment through Nick who gives up the material pleasures of the city for a simple life in his native town.