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Dreams that Lived Fast and Died Young in the Roaring Twenties: Rethinking the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*

Kükreyen Yirmilerde Hızlı Yaşayan ve Genç Ölen Hayaller: *Muhteşem Gatsby* Üzerinden Amerikan Rüyasını Yeniden Düşünmek

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Abstract

Since the early nineteenth century, the American dream has been a significant theme of American literature. As an ideology, the American dream promises every U.S. citizen equality, freedom, and a prosperous life which is contingent upon their capability or accomplishment regardless of their ethnic background, religion, or social class. This study aims to reapproach the concept of the American dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* through the characterization, socioeconomic factors, and symbolism employed in the book and ascertain whether it is an attainable ideal or a flawed myth. Throughout the study, the literary analysis is conducted within the frame of the American ideology to understand the level of realization of the American dream. During the analysis, it was observed that the loss of moral values of the characters longing for the American dream was greater than their material gains or that they could never fully achieve this dream. Results show that the American dream is based on overly materialistic and consumeristic goals, and it is not an ideal to be actualized but rather a delusion that ensues from the dissatisfaction of greedy and superficial minds.

Keywords: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, the American dream, materialism, consumerism, corruption

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Öz

On dokuzuncu yüzyılın başlarından beri Amerikan rüyası Amerikan edebiyatının önemli bir teması olmuştur. Bir ideoloji olarak Amerikan rüyası, etnik kökenine, dinine veya sosyal sınıfına bakılmaksızın her ABD vatandaşına, yeteneklerine veya başarılarına bağlı olarak eşitlik, özgürlük ve refah seviyesi yüksek bir yaşam vaat eder. Bu çalışma, Amerikan rüyası kavramına F. Scott Fitzgerald'ın *Muhteşem Gatsby* adlı eserinde kullanılan karakterlerin analizi, sosyo-ekonomik faktörler ve sembolizm üzerinden yeniden yaklaşmayı ve bu kavramın ulaşılabilir bir ideal mi yoksa kusurlu bir mit mi olduğunu tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma boyunca Amerikan rüyasının gerçekleşme düzeyini anlamak amacıyla Amerikan ideolojisi çerçevesinde edebi analiz yapılmıştır. Analiz sırasında Amerikan rüyasının özlemine çeken karakterlerin manevi kayıplarının maddi kazançlarından fazla olduğu veya bu hayale tam anlamıyla hiç ulaşamadıkları gözlemlenmiştir. Sonuçlar, Amerikan rüyasının aşırı materyalist ve tüketimci hedeflere dayandığını, gerçekleştirilecek bir ideal değil de, açgözlü ve yüzeysel zihinlerin tatminsizliğinden kaynaklanan bir yanılsama olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Muhteşem Gatsby*, Amerikan rüyası, maddecilik, tüketim çılgınlığı, yozlaşma

Introduction

The quote that “the American dream, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement” (1931, p. 404) is said by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*, which was written in 1931. The American dream is a concept in which the dreamers pursue values concerning self-fulfilment, prosperity, and possibilities to achieve better living standards regardless of race, religion, and social or economic status. Encompassing the crucial aspects of human life, such as freedom, equality, democracy, and individual happiness, the American dream has been one of the significant sources in producing literature for the writers of the past and the present (From, 2012). One fine example of the literary canon of this theme is F. Scott Fitzgerald’s finest book, *The Great Gatsby* (2018)², where he writes about the mysterious and extravagant life of Jay Gatsby. This article aims to demonstrate the evidential incidents related to the artificially constructed world of hedonism in *The Great Gatsby* in light of the American dream. In the early 1900s, European immigrants were pouring into New York Harbor by ships. The dream that they were in took on a new significance when they arrived in the U.S. and saw the Statue of Liberty (Adams, 1931). America’s unlimited resources, vast geography, virgin territory and first-of-a-kind metropolises were offering different opportunities for everyone. For those who settled in America, the United States meant a country where they contend for a better life (Adams, 1931). The American Dream has perhaps become the trending topic with the concept of American Century and one of the most striking theories that spring to mind when speaking of America (Luce, 1994).

Francis Scott Fitzgerald is one of the great writers of his era who illustrates the Jazz Age of American lives, also known as the Roaring Twenties, in his masterpiece *The Great Gatsby*, shedding light upon its shortcomings and pitfalls along with enchantments and delights (Hernández García, 2014). This article deals with the characterization of Jay Gatsby, including his journey of self-reinvention and personal evolution. It also points out the complex relationship between Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan as reflected through the critical lenses of the narrator. In Fitzgerald’s novel, the narrator is also a character of the story, who appears as an ambitious young man moving to Long Island to achieve his American dream. Nick Carraway’s honest and sensitive personality and narration create a meaningful recognition of how things were in the 1920s in New York (Tredell, 2011).

² The following references about *The Great Gatsby*, 2018 will only include page numbers.

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This article also highlights the importance of socioeconomic factors as regards the recognition of the class distinctions of the characters. The achievement of the American dream depends on two central constituents: the acquisition of financial prosperity and increasing social status. Although Gatsby achieves the former of the above, he fails to come to the same social level as the people of old money (Fälth, 2013). Social status appears to be as significant as economic welfare since it is the main reason affecting Daisy's decision to choose Tom over Gatsby. Furthermore, Myrtle Wilson is involved in an affair with Tom Buchanan to climb the social ladder through his status.

Another aspect dealt with in this article is the symbolic meaning of literary elements used throughout the book several times. The symbols "are drawn from the human body, from the supernatural, from nature and from technology, and include eyes, noses, breasts, breath, ghosts, automobiles, trains, ships, telephones, ashes, heat, water, flowers, the sun, the moon and eggs" (Tredell, 2011, p.23). Related symbols examined in this paper include the green light, which appears as a symbol of hope for Gatsby to achieve his American dream; the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which signifies the God or loss of religion in the post-war era in the U.S; the Valley of Ashes, serving as the representation of the inequality between the social classes, and automobiles as symbols of wealth and class distinction. Through these symbols, the atmosphere of an industrial era is illustrated to improve the understanding of the American dream (Tredell, 2011).

The American Dream Reflected through Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan

The 1920s was a decade marked by massive consumerism and sheer economic, social, and political change in U.S. history that eventually affected the values of American life unlike any other decade in history. Uncovering the truth behind this affluent lifestyle in the 1920s, Fitzgerald portrays the outcomes of materialism and social corruption through characters such as Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan in his novel (Tredell, 2011). The main character, Gatsby, formerly James Gatz, appears as a man in his thirties, raised in rural North Dakota by an unwealthy family, who later makes a fortune and gains status in a very short period. However, he attains his achievement by engaging in organized crime, especially bootlegging. Gatsby has always been ambitious in his pursuit of richness, and the motivation behind his acquisition of immense wealth is his unlimited love for Daisy, whom he meets as a young military officer in Louisville. From that moment on, he devotes his life to winning Daisy's

love since she represents all that Gatsby does not have and all he desires to achieve. In other words, she signifies his American dream (Lučić, 2014).

The secret of Gatsby's success in becoming such a wealthy young man in a record time remains unknown till the end of the story. Although Gatsby does not appear until the third chapter, he becomes a household name throughout New York. In the book, Gatsby first appears as the aloof, mysterious host of the extravagantly opulent parties thrown in the Long Island village of West Egg. Fitzgerald impels the reader to seek the very nature of this enigmatic figure through the wild rumors circulating in the city. Despite the intense speculation about his success, no one knows anything about his background. However, the reader's first impression of Gatsby is reconstructed by the lovesick, gullible man, who appears later in the story, and the writer achieves his predetermined goal. Fitzgerald delays most of the information about Gatsby in that he aims to indicate an essential matter in Gatsby's personality, which is his theatrical approach to life (Hernández García, 2014). As Gatsby's achievements testify to his ruthless ambition, he transforms his dreams into reality as if he has a supernatural power that gives the character the quality of *greatness* as the title suggests. Gatsby remakes himself starting in poverty and raising the level of famously rich without considering the consequences of his illegal pursuits (Hodo, 2017).

Gatsby's journey starts with the reinvention of himself by changing his name from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby. He intentionally cuts the ties with his family as if he never belonged to a world that limits his aspirations, setting borders between him and his American dream. Fitzgerald uncovers the disillusionment that ensued from the materialistic values of the Americans, who seem to be obsessed with advancement to upper-level positions, and thus gain it through corrupted methods. He reflects this through the character Jay Gatsby, a realistically drawn character despite his unrealistic motives driven by illusions in a world of mindless consumerism, greediness, and hypocrisy (Åkesson, 2017).

Gatsby's physical appearance is a manifestation of the absurd and burlesque, as in his pink suit that not only conveys his love and hopes for winning Daisy but also gives an ironic impression of his estrangement among the people of old money. Once a member of the lower class and later *nouveau riche*, he becomes an object of ridicule among his workers and thus loses the sense of belonging in any social strata. Fitzgerald draws attention to the alienation of Gatsby both through his odd style choices and the language used by him (Tredell, 2011). While advancing the social ladder swiftly, Gatsby cannot help but lapse into the local vernacular in that he constantly uses the phrase 'old sport' as a particular form of address, as

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implanted in his subconscious mind: “Why not let her alone, old sport?” remarked Gatsby. — “That’s a great expression of yours, isn’t it?” said Tom sharply. “What is?” “All this ‘old sport’ business. Where’d you pick that up?” (p. 127).

Gatsby’s story has an evidential value in that it indicates that anyone from the lower class trying to reach the zenith of success through criminal activity is doomed to failure. His inability to give up on his love for Daisy brings his downfall as he becomes a disadvantaged dreamer among his coldhearted and capitalist opponents. Fitzgerald castigates the American society consisting of hypocrites and gold diggers whose actions are entirely a matter of cynical expediency. Gatsby’s representation mirrors the characteristics of an age where social and sentimental values were contaminated and blurry.

Another integral character is Daisy Buchanan, who appears as a stereotypical upper-class American woman, a metaphor for Gatsby’s American Dream. Daisy is a perfect representative of the aristocratic East Egg. Through Daisy’s shallow personality and mundane existence, the writer criticizes the capitalist society for being alluring on the surface but rotten underneath (Smiljanić, 2011). She pretends to be a very sophisticated person, the epitome of elegance and dignity, but in reality, she leads a frivolous and unproductive life where she “smashes up things and creatures and then retreats into [her] money, and let other people clean up the mess [she] has made” (p. 179). Daisy shows her true colors when she allows Gatsby to take the blame for killing George Wilson’s wife in a car accident she caused. In addition, she does not even attend Gatsby’s funeral and flees with Tom shortly after Gatsby’s death, cutting off her relationship with everyone else she leaves behind. After this incident, the inevitable sense of disappointment leaves scars and blights in Nick’s heart, urging him to find at least a few people who can attend Gatsby’s funeral. The fact that none of the people who longed to participate in Gatsby’s extravagant parties attend his funeral signifies the high-level corruption within American society. The representation of Daisy creates the typical image of the elite that fosters the principle of hierarchy. Similar to most rich and married women, she becomes a mere puppet led by her egoistic and idle husband, Tom Buchanan. Daisy’s dependence on Tom and her fear of losing his support denotes her inability to compete in a society where men are dominant in position (Saunders, 2018). In a world where everything is merely fictitious, she shows no sign of sincerity but sheds crocodile tears over the loss of trivial matters: “For Daisy was young, and her artificial world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the rhythm of the year,

summing up the sadness and suggestiveness of life in new tunes” (p. 151). As indicated by the narrator in this quotation, everything about Daisy reflects her depthless nature in a way that manifests her inability and unwillingness to connect with others on an emotional level.

Notwithstanding her superficially drawn character, Daisy is aware that if a girl desires to live a prosperous life, she should adopt a vivacious personality to develop perfunctory relationships with people throughout her life. When Nick asks about her daughter Pammy, she recounts how she felt when she was born: “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. 20). This statement suggests another example of how Daisy uses emotional detachment as a coping strategy to avoid social criticism in that she wishes Pammy to be as superficial as her so that her daughter will not have to deal with the consequences of her actions no matter how corrupt they will be. Although Daisy’s financial stability is ensured through her marriage to Tom, she shows signs of dissatisfaction and uneasiness due to the lack of self-actualization. Her shallow nature and indifferent personality prevent her from expressing an emotional attachment towards Gatsby. Her inability to meet Gatsby’s emotional expectations grows out of self-doubt and alienation that ensues from sentimental detachment. Despite her unhappiness, she does not end her marriage as her affluent life and status are at stake. Through Daisy, Fitzgerald portrays the false allure of material accumulation, highlighting the emptiness inside Daisy that is never fulfilled despite living in a magnificent mansion with polo ponies and luxury cars.

Daisy’s remark regarding being sophisticated indicates her desire to achieve self-fulfilment and intellectual satisfaction. Her uneasiness, veiled by the post war hysteria, proves that money cannot be the only source of bliss. Her negligence in assuming responsibility and ambivalent attitude in life prevent her from accomplishing the fundamental principle of life: self-actualization. Nick expresses his opinions about her charm emanating from her ecstatic and enchanting voice at their first meeting:

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. — there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget. (p. 12)

As shown in this quotation, Daisy’s seductive nature bears a striking resemblance to the function of money. Although Gatsby attributes angelic qualities to Daisy in his imagination, she fails to fulfill his expectations and causes the failure of his dream. People akin to Tom and Daisy, who possess the inherited wealth of established upper-class families, cannot satisfy their endless desire for material possessions despite all the wealth they have. In the 1920s,

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even though money could satiate the appetite for consumption, it fell short of nourishing the souls. With the help of his genuine observation, Fitzgerald criticizes the financial hysteria that emerged in the post war era (Hodo, 2017). Moreover, he indicates that money is no substitute for true happiness, and it only serves as a tool to satisfy the corporeal desires of the body. Through Daisy, the writer demonstrates that without intellectual and spiritual contentment, being financially secure and leading a prosperous life loses its charm. In reality, Daisy is not a celestial being nor “the king’s daughter, the golden girl...” (p. 120). She is not only lively and charming but also fickle, arrogant, cynical, and superficial in essence. Daisy is the living embodiment of class consciousness and the corruption that wealth causes. When Gatsby’s delusion of Daisy is shattered, all his efforts to win her prove futile and his dream comes out unworthy. Daisy’s impotent nature, preventing her from connecting with Gatsby, leads to Gatsby’s failure, which signifies the decline of the American Dream. Gatsby believes that he can change his past until he realizes all his attempts are nothing but the mere objectives of his delusion (Tredell, 2011). Although Gatsby and Daisy seem to have similar lifestyles for being upper-class citizens, they belong to different worlds. Therefore, they cannot build a future together.

Socioeconomic Factors and the Corruption Caused by Social Stratification

The 1920s was a period that hosted many revolutions in the U.S. Members of the lower and middle classes were seeking opportunities to be a member of the upper class, and the upper class consisted of two groups: those who came from *old money* and those who were *nouveau riche*, i.e., newly rich. The former refers to the inherited wealth of upper-class people, and the latter indicates people who gained their wealth through effort, rising from poverty (Bradbury & Triest, 2016). People who come from old money were considered courteous and wise, and they were the ones with better judgment in society, while the *nouveau riche* usually chose to follow illegal methods to become rich and attain high status in a short period (Vanneman & Cannon, 1987). Despite their position in society, people of new money are degraded by the ones from old money, and they would always feel the condescending gaze of the upper class upon them. Profligate spending of money showed Gatsby as a spendthrift in the eyes of people akin to Tom Buchanan. As mentioned earlier, Tom Buchanan thinks that Gatsby, similar to most newly rich people, extended his wealth and elevated his status by bootlegging. It shows what people of old money think of the newly rich: they did not belong to the world of aristocrats, and if Jay Gatsby, a member of old money,

could become wealthy, there could be no legitimate explanation behind their wealth (Fälth, 2013).

Growing up with almost no financial assurance, Jay Gatsby creates a new identity and seizes a place in high society. Since he does not come from a wealthy and respectable family, he is known as a newly well-off gentleman with a secret background. In other words, unlike Tom Buchanan, he was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Yet, he wants to be accepted and known as a respected member of this mesmerizing world. To achieve this, he alters his identity to gain respectability. In the novel, Jay meets Daisy, and they fall in love. This information remains unknown until Jay and Daisy meet years later. Towards the end of the book, even though Daisy promises to wait for Gatsby, she does not. Later, Gatsby realizes that even if he wants to be with her, Daisy belongs to a different world. Since his passion for wealth is as important as his desire to win Daisy's heart, he gets the spark of motivation over her. On the other hand, Gatsby's romantic standpoint regarding life makes him vulnerable and prevents him from realizing the consequences of his actions. Money, as Gatsby idealizes, is not the only means to receive respect within the social realm. There is a solid and unbreakable bond between Tom and Daisy Buchanan that money can neither break nor establish. Gatsby's great fortune is not enough for him to get the same position as Tom and Daisy, who come from similar educational backgrounds and family structures.

Daisy's derogatory attitude regarding West Egg, where Gatsby lives, explicitly indicates the difference between people as Gatsby and those belonging to the old money. Fitzgerald establishes a metaphor between the old money and new money through East Egg and West Egg. While people with old money (for example, Tom and Daisy Buchanan) live in East Egg, newly rich people (Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby) settle in West Egg. In this sense, Fitzgerald's settings arouse controversy concerning *nouveau riche* and the rich. Even though the rich accept them in their social circle occasionally, the members of the two sides do not live together. No matter what Gatsby does, he cannot change his past, and thus, he fails to achieve the status of established upper-class people. Nevertheless, his financial advantage provides Gatsby with the opportunity to connect to the long-term wealthy, even at a superficial level (Lindberg, 2014). He uses his money to *buy* himself new friends from high society. However, once the party is over, all these temporary friends will return to where they belong, leaving Gatsby and his extravagant mansion behind. An example of this situation occurs after Gatsby's death when Nick Carraway tries to contact Gatsby's friends to inform them about his death. He calls, but no one answers: "At first, I was surprised and confused;

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then, as he lays in his house and didn't move or breathe or speak, hour upon hour, it grew upon me that I was responsible, because no one else was interested" (p. 164). This statement demonstrates the loose relationships people establish with one another, especially when a nouveau-riche social climber is concerned. The idea of a relationship, in this case, is based on mutual benefits rather than loyalty or gratitude. The relationship between the rich and the poor portrayed through other characters also shows the significant socioeconomic gap between the groups. Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson exemplify this idea perfectly. Buying an apartment for his mistress in the city and spending money on her, Tom dominates and controls this extramarital affair. Tom's social superiority becomes tactile when he slaps Myrtle across the face due to her remark about Daisy. By doing so, he determines Myrtle's social status by degrading her position within the levels of social stratification. Myrtle is punished not only due to her remarks about Tom's wife but also because of daring to involve Daisy, an upper class, in her *cheap* argument (Lindberg, 2014).

Tom uses his money and power to *purchase* Daisy's social status, beauty, and youth. Similarly, Tom's social status serves as a tool to possess other women with whom he is involved in affairs, such as Myrtle. Without Tom's financing, Myrtle would have nothing but her ramshackle, old cottage in the valley of ashes. This creates an unbalanced, toxic relationship between them. Another example of Tom's social dominance appears when Mr. Wilson says he wishes to buy his old car if Tom sells it. Tom initially accepts his offer but breaks the deal later without considering how this would affect Wilson. He likes showing off his extravagant lifestyle and treats Wilson as his subordinate.

Fitzgerald demonstrates the effects of social stratification through his characters representing the old money, similarly Tom and Daisy Buchanan's self-centered personalities in the novel. After Gatsby's death, Nick feels devastated as he reveals his thoughts concerning the unbelievable negligence shown by Daisy and Tom: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy- they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean their mess" (p. 179). By portraying Tom and Daisy as negligent, manipulative souls through the lenses of Nick Carraway, Fitzgerald displays the cynical, ravaging nature of the upper-class people, as they are always busy competing to impress each other with their opulent lives while lacking the decency to correct their mistakes. They do not care about anyone but themselves, being apathetic about inappropriate manners. Despite their misbehaviors, Daisy

and Tom value themselves above any human being and continue to pursue their hedonistic lives fueled by the American dream (Lindberg, 2014).

Being the son of poor farmers, Jay Gatsby is the opposite representative of Tom Buchanan. They do not have much in common except for the opulent lifestyle. In consideration of the foregoing, every American, either from West Egg or East Egg, builds relationships only to preserve the status quo. In addition, the characters living in the Valley of Ashes as representatives of the lower class, similar to the Wilsons, pursue a life in alignment with their low socioeconomic position. When Tom takes Nick to Wilson's garage to introduce his mistress to him, what Nick witnesses is a somber, gloomy atmosphere, hosting a couple of forlorn figures, and a dusty old car. The contrast between the glamorous life of the rich and a row of ramshackle homes in an "unprosperous" (p. 26) industrial area represents the socioeconomically divided groups of lower and upper classes. The only mutual point they share is moral corruption, which displays the failure of the American dream. Through these metaphors, Fitzgerald, once again, impels the reader to question the reliability and credibility of the American dream.

Symbols Signifying the Decline of the American Dream

Symbolism is used in literary works to provide a vivid picture associated with realistic events, usually to criticize and further explain the discussed issue. It enables the author to replace dull writing with artistic expression. Symbolism may include an object, person, or event, contributing to the visualization of complex situations. This section reveals the symbolic meanings of the primary objects and scenes from the novel, including the green light, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, the valley of ashes, and automobiles (Tredell, 2011). The colorful picture of the American dream in *The Great Gatsby* portrays the false allure caused by disillusionment, greediness, and the lack of moral values. *The Great Gatsby* is considered a successful illustration of the early twentieth century's ideological and social structures. It also symbolizes the beginning of a modern era in which the so-called liberation brings along racial discrimination, injustice, and inequality among individuals in the U.S. The symbols used in the book are usually associated with the moral and socioeconomic values that were lost in the first half of the twentieth century (Tredell, 2011).

While writing this novel, Fitzgerald employs objects and colors to enrich the artistic value of his work. One of these symbolic colors is green, as in the case of the green light. Green has both positive and negative connotations. Regarding the positive ones, it is the color of hope, which allegedly promises the auspicious days Gatsby aspires to spend with Daisy. It

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is the color of nature, rebirth, and a fresh beginning, as in Nick's decision to move to Long Island. As for negatives, it is the color of greed and jealousy, which appears in association with Wilson's murder. When it comes to the green light, in a broad sense, it is a symbol that designates the failure of the American Dream. As it is understood from earlier explanations, the American Dream is defined as an ideology of passionate individuals who try to reach what is unreachable, in that the green light appears to be a guide leading Gatsby gradually to what he dreamed of and eventually to his failure. In the beginning, when it appears as a mysterious sign, the reader does not know what it refers to, yet it gives the excitement of a foreshadowed incident. The narrator cannot be sure about where the light is coming from, and he describes it as follows: "Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock" (p. 24). The uncertainty and skepticism of this information emphasize the symbolic meaning of the object. The light is a physical object in the novel, but it also embodies a philosophical idea. As the story continues, the light reappears when Gatsby shows Daisy around his mansion. This time, the mystery of its presence diminishes to a certain extent, as if Gatsby has reached halfway through his dream:

"If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay," said Gatsby. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock." [...] Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy, it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. (p. 93)

As this statement demonstrates, the second encounter with the green light bears a "colossal significance" (p. 93), which sinks into oblivion as soon as Gatsby and Daisy come together. It would not be absurd to say that his dream is more attractive to Gatsby before he reaches it. By the time Gatsby realizes he cannot win Daisy's love, his American Dream diminishes and eventually dies. At the very end of the novel, the green light designates a great loss because it is now out of sight, as Nick states below:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning. So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (p. 180)

When Daisy comes to his estate, Gatsby gets hold of an idea that she is connected to him by the green light representing the memory of the old love, which only he tried to revive, and

when he cannot see it anymore, Gatsby becomes aware of all his futile attempts. He realizes that his enthusiasm for changing his past has vanished. Eventually, Gatsby loses Daisy and is shot to death by George Wilson. Tom and Daisy's corrupted world destroys Gatsby and persists as if nothing had happened. The green light lures Gatsby to his death since it symbolically denotes a woman whose voice is full of money. When Gatsby dies, Daisy leaves, and Nick no longer lives in Long Island, the green light disappears as well (Åkesson, 2017). Thus, it becomes nothing but a memory in Nick's mind, reminding him of Gatsby's tragic life story. In the beginning, the light contains a personal meaning that is essential to Gatsby only, but at the end of the novel, the symbolic meaning is extended to the collective. The narration shifts from a light that Gatsby believed in to a common symbol that motivates every American citizen (Tredell, 2011).

Another significant symbol is the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes have been one of the most striking human organs used in literature for centuries as they carry multiple connotations, one of which is the supreme power fixing a "persistent stare" on people (p. 26). As the symbolism calls to mind critical meanings, it is not difficult to realize what Doctor Eckleburg's eyes stand for in the novel. The physical ability to see belongs to human beings, but when it is elevated with the quality of omniscience, the eyes possess a god-like function. They remind us of God, who observes everything and everyone with his judging eyes. In *The Great Gatsby*, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are on an advertising billboard located over the Valley of Ashes and near George Wilson's dilapidated garage. In the 1920s, God is considered dead, and he has become an advertisement figure, an illusory description on an enormous placard. The eyes demonstrate the lack of spiritual values promoted by religion in the corrupted American world. Through these gigantic eyes, Fitzgerald draws attention to the iconic God of this new age, which is materialism. In that era, people placed the utmost value on material accumulation in money, and business became the new religion of America (Pearson, 1970). Therefore, by indicating this irrational indulgence of Americans, Fitzgerald criticizes their motives, seducing them into becoming the slaves of temporary pleasures. Moreover, these gigantic eyes describe the only firsthand account of life in a corrupt country, witnessing the incidents in the novel. For this reason, Doctor T.J. Eckleburg signifies God, who sees all, as Wilson states in the quotation below:

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 dissolving night. "God sees everything," repeated Wilson. "That's an advertisement," Michaelis assured him. (p. 160)

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This quotation indicates that George's sudden and striking realization helps him understand how God observes the corruption human beings caused on earth. The absence of religion is well-expressed also by Jordan Baker as she says: "There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy and the tired" (p. 80). This statement epitomizes the spirit of the early twentieth century, where the lower class often felt alienated by the excessive workload trying to achieve their American dream, and the upper class was busy showing off the extravagant material accumulation they possessed, which sent them into a spiral of spiritual lack and despair.

Where George Wilson and his wife, Myrtle Wilson, live is known as the Valley of Ashes. It is the depressing industrial area of Queens located between West Egg and Manhattan. This gloomy place symbolizes social and moral corruption created by the upper class and is described as an isolated area, "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" (p. 25). In this area, no plant grows, and the sun does not shine generously over the blue waters, as in East Egg. Covered with dark ashes and black clouds, the sunlight in this desolate industrial area is inaccessible to its local people, underlining the poor living conditions of the lower class. Fitzgerald establishes a metaphorical relationship between the aristocrats and the lower class as regards the symbolic meaning of the Valley of Ashes in that the upper class indulges in all sorts of pleasure while leaving the poor people nothing but dust. The word "dust" constantly appears in the novel, signifying how the spirit of corruption pervades the country, as in Nick's statement: "There was an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere" (p.147). Another example appears with Myrtle's death. She gets run over by Daisy, who takes no responsibility for her crime. Thus, the Valley of Ashes becomes a symbol of death where Myrtle Wilson's "thick, dark blood [mingles] with the dust" (p. 138).

The early decades of the twentieth century cover an era of economic, political, and social changes in America. As lifestyles and cultures changed after the World War I, a growing gap occurred between the rich and the poor. During that era, men prioritized business, whereas women became more social, attending various social activities. Big cities became the center of attraction, and industrial progression catalyzed mass production and consumption (From, 2012). Technology became a symbol of elite life, and people started to show off with their luxurious cars. Therefore, automobiles have a significant value in this novel. Automobiles are considered one of the most notable elements of socioeconomic status. Thus, they served as commodities, characterizing the upper-class members of society.

Automobiles were not only used as a means of transportation, but they also signified the class distinction. Fitzgerald highlights that cars define social position in metropolitan counties; therefore, he deals with automobiles, depicting their shapes, colors, and sizes, quite often in the novel. While doing so, he does not concentrate on the function or mechanism of the cars since what is significant about them seems to be their appearances rather than qualities, meaning he stresses aesthetics, not service. Each character has an automobile that defines them the best. Tom has a blue coupé, Gatsby has a cream-colored, dazzling car, whereas Wilson has “a dust-covered wreck of a Ford” (p. 26). The cars are also connected with the decline of the American dream as they are the symbols of wealth and materialism. Throughout the novel, the cars are always involved in different conflicts, leading the characters to their destruction. Daisy hits Myrtle with a car, Myrtle dies in a car accident, and both Wilson’s and Gatsby’s deaths are connected to that incident indirectly. The car wreck stands as a metaphor, representing not only the tragedy caused by excessive monetary acquisition but also indicating the loss of human life.

Conclusion

This study presents the concept of the American dream, illuminating the motives and aspirations regarding its achievement in the light of the characters, socioeconomic factors, and the symbolism employed in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby*. The American Dream has been an intriguing concept in literature since the early nineteenth century. This ideology is used quite often by famous writers to illustrate the unique attraction of the American lifestyle, which has become a meaningful milestone in American history over time. In this mesmerizing world, every citizen of the United States is presented with the generous vision and ideals of the dream. What emerged from the literary analysis of the book was that in the 1920s, although the American dream was economically achievable for most lower-class citizens, it failed to elevate the social position of a lower class to the upper class, for class distinctions are determined before birth and inherited through lineage.

Being known as the author of a quintessentially American novel, Francis Scott Fitzgerald amply encapsulates the glamors of the Jazz Age and reflects its enticements and delights alongside the failures. As an American writer of the Roaring Twenties, Fitzgerald reveals the corruptness of social strata and ideals of his time in eloquence in *The Great Gatsby*. His illuminating insights into the socioeconomic factors and abandoned moral values provide a comprehensive perception of that controversial age. The novel is acknowledged as a

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tragic love story with brilliantly employed symbolism with references to American philosophy, socioeconomic factors, and moral aspects of the 1920s.

The main character of the book, James Gatsby, represents a lower-class born American who strives to become an upper-class elite leading a prosperous life. Although Gatsby's reinvention of himself and illegal actions provide him with the longed-for wealth, his wealth fails to recreate the past (Paul, 2014). Despite the parties he hosted in his majestically decorated mansion and his generosity towards his upper-class guests, he is not accepted by those of old money. Gatsby cannot fully achieve social acceptability and contentment because he grows up in poverty and makes his fortune through selling illegal alcohol. Similarly, Daisy chooses Tom Buchanan over him because she knows that Gatsby lacks the high-class respectability of East Egg people. As a representative of the upper-class woman, she appears to be a superficially drawn character on account of her choices and personality traits. The social class dynamics between the old money and the nouveau riche and among the upper class and the lower class are determined by the financial principles alongside the ancestral heritage. No matter how magnetic its appeal is, many problems underlie the idea of the American dream, such as the economic plight of the lower class and the moral corruption that ensues from the materialism of the upper classes. In the 1920s, even though money could satiate people's thirst for consumption, it was failing to nourish their souls. Extramarital affairs were prevailing in that era, as illustrated in Tom Buchanan's relationship with Myrtle Wilson. The post-war hysteria caused the emergence of money-worshippers and gold diggers like Myrtle Wilson. Myrtle's greediness eventually brings her to death because she solely relies on the financial support of Tom Buchanan. What she cannot see is the impossibility of fitting in with the upper class. Her greediness prevents her from seeing the hardworking and decent character of her husband. The high-level corruption caused by material accumulation and social stratification culminates in the death of two characters in the book.

The literary elements chosen to convey the messages throughout the book may evoke multiple meanings, and these components function as symbols, such as colors, objects, or characters. In *The Great Gatsby*, among the significant symbols are the green light, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, and the Valley of Ashes and automobiles. Green, as a color, has positive implications like hope, financial prosperity, and fresh beginnings and negative ones like greed and jealousy. The green light is a symbol that designates Gatsby's hope of achieving the American dream and winning Daisy's love. Another significant symbol is the

eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, placed on a vast advertising billboard. The eyes are one of the most commonly used symbols in literature since they carry multiple meanings, one of which is the supreme power fixing a judging stare on people. In the book, the eyes remind George Wilson of God, who watches everyone to deliver criticism. The third symbol discussed in this paper is the industrial area where George and Myrtle live, also known as the Valley of Ashes. It is a depressing manufacturing area located between West Egg and Manhattan. This dark place signifies social and moral corruption created by the upper class and is depicted as an isolated area filled with industrial dust and ashes. Finally, the automobiles serve as the symbols of social class in the book. In the 1920s, big cities became the center of industrial advancement, and technological innovations encouraged continuous production and consumption. Automobiles became the most notable symbols of socioeconomic status, signifying the affluence of higher classes. In *The Great Gatsby*, the cars owned by each character reflect the personality of that character along with the social classes they belong to.

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