



**YABANCI DİLLER YÜKSEKOKULU**  
School of Foreign Languages

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ATATÜRK ÜNİVERSİTESİ / ATATÜRK UNIVERSITY

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# MELIUS: JOURNAL OF NARRATIVE AND LANGUAGE STUDIES

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## MELIUS: JOURNAL OF NARRATIVE AND LANGUAGE STUDIES

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## **Melius: Journal of Narrative and Language Studies Dergisi Yayın İlkeleri**

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Atatürk Üniversitesi Melius: Journal of Narrative and Language Studies dergisi, bağımsız, tarafsız ve çift kör hakemlik ilkelerine uygun olarak yayınlanmış, bilimsel, açık erişimli, sadece çevrimiçi bir dergidir. Dergi, Atatürk Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu'nun resmi yayın organıdır ve yılda iki kez Haziran ve Aralık aylarında yayınlanmaktadır. Derginin yayın dili Türkçe, İngilizce ve Fransızca'dır; bu sayede farklı dil ve kültürlerden araştırmacılar arasında etkileşimi teşvik etmek amaçlanmıştır. Atatürk Üniversitesi Melius: Journal of Narrative and Language Studies dergisi, dil ve anlatı çalışmaları alanındaki araştırmaları desteklemeyi amaçlayan bir bilimsel dergidir. Dergi, bağımsızlık, tarafsızlık ve çift-kör hakemlik ilkelerine uygun bir şekilde yayınlanmakta olup bilimsel içeriği açık erişim prensibiyle tüm okuyuculara sunmaktadır.

Derginin ana amacı, dil ve anlatı konularında yeni bilgilerin üretilmesine katkıda bulunmaktır. Bu kapsamda dergide dilbilim, edebiyat, dil öğretimi, çeviribilim, kültürel çalışmalar ve diğer ilgili disiplinlerdeki araştırmaları içeren makalelere yer verilmektedir. Dergi, akademisyenler, dilbilimciler, edebiyatçılar ve diğer ilgili araştırmacılar için bir platform sağlamayı hedeflemektedir.

Dergi, makalelerin yayınlanmadan önce çift-kör hakem sürecinden geçtiği bir değerlendirme sürecine tabidir. Bu süreçte, makaleler bağımsız hakemler tarafından değerlendirilir ve hakem onayı alan makaleler editörlerin de görüşleriyle yayınlanır. Bu sayede, dergiye kabul edilen makalelerin akademik kalitesi ve bilimsel standartlarının yüksek düzeyde tutulması hedeflenmektedir.

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### **Aims and Scope**

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The main aim of Melius is to contribute to the production of new knowledge in the field of language and narrative studies. The journal encompasses various disciplines, including linguistics, literature, language teaching, translation studies, cultural studies, and related fields. It aims to provide a platform for academics, linguists, literary scholars, and other researchers.

The journal follows the principles of independence, impartiality, and double-blind peer review, ensuring the high quality and scientific standards of the published articles. The submitted articles undergo a rigorous evaluation process before publication, with independent reviewers assessing their suitability for publication. This process ensures the maintenance of academic quality and scientific standards for the accepted articles.

All expenses related to the journal are covered by Atatürk University. The submission and publication of articles are free of charge. Authors are not required to pay any fees at any stage of the evaluation and publication process. All articles should be submitted through the online article submission system available at <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/melius>. The formatting guidelines, technical information, and necessary forms can be found on the journal's website.

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## MELIUS: JOURNAL OF NARRATIVE AND LANGUAGE STUDIES

### Editors' Preface

Dear readers and colleagues,

In this second issue of *Melius*, we are pleased to present two research articles and a book review. With this issue, we aimed to span the spectrum of our journal. As a journal that was founded last year, we aim to be selective and thorough while selecting and publishing articles that are submitted to our journal. This process involves various scholars in the academy who are competent in their fields. In this issue, for instance, although we have worked with fourteen referees, we have published two articles and a book review, which showcases the diligent work of the scholars to whom we owe much because, without their insight, we as a journal cannot proceed. In this regard, we want to highlight the importance of referees in the academy.

With the feedback we continually receive from readers and reviewers, we try to maintain an academic journal that will contribute to narrative and language studies. We wish to make a valuable contribution to our fields with every issue. We dedicate ourselves to ethical publishing practices and stay compliant with academic standards. We expect from our readers and colleagues to give us feedback and encourage them to submit their original research articles or book reviews on language studies and literature.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Alper TULGAR** - Editor-in-Chief of *Melius: Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*

**Dr. Meryem ODABAŞI** - Editor of *Melius: Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*

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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

Sena ÜÇER<sup>1</sup>

**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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**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

**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)<sup>2</sup>, 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).

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

## **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

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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**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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**Reflecting an Autistic Character and Her Isolation in Society in Carol Cujec and Peyton  
Goddard's *Real***

Carol Cujec ve Peyton Goddard'ın *Gerçek* İsimli Romanlarında Otistik Bir Karakterin ve  
Onun Toplumdaki Yalnızlığının Yansıtılması

Merve AYDIN<sup>1</sup> 

**Abstract**

No matter how advanced a society gets, social perceptions on people with disabilities have predominantly kept going on. Considering technological advancements and scientific improvements, the fact remains that the disabled continue to be regarded as different and are still unable to have equal rights in contemporary societies. Being a minority in society means being a distinct subgroup characterized by certain features that distinguish them from the dominant majority group, and the word 'minority' often illustrates prejudices in many fields. Inspired by Goddard's life, *Real* was written by Carol Cujec and Peyton Goddard. The novel portrays the experiences of Peyton who has struggled to show her existence as a human being and proves to the world that she is 'intelligent' although she is unable to speak due to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and despite the challenges she experiences while studying under unequal conditions. In the novel, Charity represents Peyton, and her narrative serves as an inspiration for the disabled. Through Charity, the novel delves into the value of overcoming challenges, working hard and not giving up for others who face similar challenges. Cujec narrates Peyton's life story for the purpose of making people aware that the disabled experience various troubles in their daily lives. It advocates the importance of empathy and acceptance in society, which makes the book essential in both youth and adult literature.

**Keywords:** *Real*, Carol Cujec, Peyton Goddard, autism, discrimination, youth literature

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## Öz

Bir toplum ne kadar gelişirse gelişsin engellilere yönelik bakış açısı büyük ölçüde aynı kalmaya devam etmektedir. Teknolojik gelişmeler ve bilimsel ilerlemeler göz önüne alındığında, engellilerin günümüz toplumunda hâlâ farklı görülmeye devam ettiği ve eşit haklara sahip olamadıkları gerçeği aynı kalmaktadır. Toplumda azınlık olmak, kendilerini baskın çoğunluk grubundan ayıran belirli özelliklerle karakterize edilen farklı bir alt grup olmak anlamına gelir ve bu sözcük çoğu zaman birçok alandaki önyargıları ifade eder. Goddard'ın hayatından esinlenen *Real*, Carol Cujec ve Peyton Goddard tarafından yazılmıştır. Roman, otizm nedeniyle konuşamamasına rağmen insan olarak varlığını gösterme çabası içinde olan ve eşit şartlara sahip olmadan gittiği okullarda 'zeki' olduğunu dünyaya ispatlayan Peyton'ın deneyimlerini okuyucuya aktarmaktadır. Romanda Charity, Peyton'ı temsil eder ve Charity'nin hikayesi engelli bireyler için bir ilham kaynağı olmaktadır. Roman, Charity aracılığıyla benzer zorluklarla karşılaşan bireyler için zorlukların üstesinden gelmenin, sıkı çalışmanın ve vazgeçmemenin değerini gösterir. Cujec, Peyton'ın hayat hikayesini engellilerin günlük hayatlarında yaşadıkları zorlukların farkında olmayan insanları bilinçlendirmek amacıyla yazar. Eser, empatinin ve toplumda kabulün önemini savunur, bu da romanı hem gençlik hem de yetişkin edebiyatında önemli kılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Gerçek*, Carol Cujec, Peyton Goddard, otizm, ayrımcılık, gençlik edebiyatı

## Introduction

The term “autism” originates from the Greek word “autos”, which is related to being “alone”, and it was first used by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1911 (Perkowski & Oksztulski, 2018, p. 43). According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5<sup>th</sup> ed.)*, there are three main deficits ranging from social-emotional reciprocity to nonverbal communicative behaviours and adjusting to social contexts (American Psychiatric Association & Association, 2013, p. 50). Autistic children may encounter specific challenges in many places making their lives hard. They can have problems with their peers and teachers because of their limited verbal skills, resulting in isolation from neurotypicals (Perkowski & Oksztulski, 2018, p. 48). These also affect their social interaction, causing their being “other” in society. Furthermore, they can have difficulty in taking roles in daily life because they feel safe only in their familiar environment; however, when their routines or safe environment change or when they encounter unexpected and unfamiliar situations, this leads them to have high stress and discomfort, which may result in tantrums. Families may prefer constraining their autistic children to specific areas, leading them to feel isolated and otherized in society because “despite the creation today of such an enormous capacity, which could help overcome disability, the way this capacity is misdirected means that many physically impaired people are still unnecessarily barred from full participation in society” (Baldwinson, 2019, p. 1). This oppression gradually changes the language employed in disability studies. There are new terms that are used such as “ableism” and “neurodiversity” (Manalili, 2021, p. 22).

Individuals with disabilities face discrimination in preference to those without physical impairments because of their social exclusion, and this leads to the common phenomenon known as “ableism”. According to Beth Haller, the word “ableism” refers to “dominant beliefs that ignore or stereotype disabled individuals negatively” (2010, p. 67). The ongoing existence of stereotypes for the disabled causes the construction of a dichotomous worldview that segregates individuals with impairments from those without, consequently fostering ableist ideologies (Dickey, 2023, p. 3). According to Lennard J. Davis, the concept of ableism “seeks to remove the blame of those most responsible for creating a disabling society” (1999, p. 37), and aside from the fact that ableism exists in a way that discriminates people with disabilities, it also attempts to place the credit for this discrimination on those with disabilities. We should acknowledge that people with disabilities are disabled because of the environment created. Devlin and Pothier state that disability is not a concern for health sciences, instead, it is a matter of power and politics, and it needs some empathy and understanding (2006, p. 2). These

arguments clearly present that disability rather than being limited to medical studies is a phenomenon socially constructed and maintained by those without any visible physical disabilities. Glennon, for instance, highlights that disabled people in the past faced severe discrimination and treated as less than humans: “[P]eople identified as disabled inherit a history of discrimination and negative connotations along with this label. In the past, they were excluded from schools, placed in institutions or hidden at home, and often viewed as subhumans who threatened society” (1995, p. 24). It is known that the practise of segregating children with impairments was widespread before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading them to be institutionalized to pursue their education in asylums, nursing homes, and private institutions. In other words, people without any disability have authority over the disabled, so power structures are fundamentally responsible for the establishment of power distribution and the identification of those who exercise authority over others (Manalili, 2021, p. 28). As a result, it is commonly observed that individuals in positions of authority cause ableist phenomenon prevalent in the mainstream culture. This distinction in roles highlights differences in society and makes normalization difficult, as well as the marginalization of the disabled in comparison to non-disabled ones. To Campbell, the problem regarding segregation is that it creates a sense of separation among the disabled, and then, it causes the disabled to behave according to this discriminative behaviour (2008, p. 152). In order to make the lives of the disabled comfortable and easier, they must be under the same conditions as non-disabled people as their separation makes it difficult for them to adapt to social life. Their segregation from society causes them to be otherized, which leads their lives to be limited and confined.

*Real* written by Carol Cujec and co-author Peyton Goddard is inspired by the real-life story of Peyton Goddard<sup>1</sup>(2020)<sup>2</sup>. The novel includes the rich world of ASD, and shows the reader how autistic people are treated unfairly in society and presents valuable insight into how stereotypes can be removed for the sake of equity and how ASD can be perceived as an identity rather than a deficiency. The story is about Charity who cannot speak and is on the autism spectrum disorder (ASD), hence she has difficulty in controlling her body effectively. She is highly sensitive to her surroundings such as bright lights, noises, and crowded areas. Her communicative skills are limited, which is a typical symptom of ASD. In various studies, characters with are highly hypersensitivity issues to external factors such as noises and lights are dealt with (Loftis, 2015; Schulz & Stevenson, 2018; Tulgar, 2022a, p. 1354). This

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<sup>2</sup> From now on, only page numbers will be given for the novel *Real* by Cujec & Goddard, 2020



hypersensitivity can be observed in the way Charity behaves as well, which is a typical syndrome of ASD. Charity, due to this hypersensitivity, has not found a way to communicate with people, and no one knows what she wants, or how she feels in a brutal environment with full of restrictions for the disabled since her childhood. Although she is a very clever girl, no one is aware of her sense of humour, and her enthusiasm to struggle with bad treatments and bad people on her own way every day. It is clear that seeing the world from a so-called disabled girl helps readers to understand the emotional pain that she experiences when she is ignored, rejected and looked down on due to her identity. No matter how difficult the life is for Charity, she does her best to find a way to communicate and announce the reality that she is an intelligent girl. The fact that her intelligence is overlooked by neurotypicals is criticized by the author through Charity's deliberate actions to prove that she is intelligent. Whenever people see her, they reconstruct more stereotypes about her identity because of her body's repetitive movements such as clapping, jumping or screaming stemming from unknown reasons to neurotypicals. Even though she wants to go to a public school, no school accepts her because of her diagnosis since neurotypical families do not want their children to have education with the disabled. In spite of the fact that Charity confronts bullying and bad treatments, she adapts to the new conditions and proves that she is more intelligent than her peers without disabilities in the classroom. Charity's life story helps people to foster empathy along with encouraging the disabled not to give up trying to get equity. Based on a true story, *Real* reminds that no one should be excluded from society due to neurodiversity, and it makes the reader to conclude that everyone deserves to be treated equally.

### **Disabled people's struggle to be seen and heard in a society which disables them**

The number of disabled people may change according to countries; however, the disabled constitute a numerical minority compared to people without disabilities, hence the numerical disparity serves as a distinguishing feature which causes discriminations and problems. Ableism, as defined by Thomas is, "a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being" (2007, p. 73). People with disabilities experience constant obstacles and feel social disadvantages such as bias, stereotyping, discrimination, mocking, or exclusion. They also often encounter social stigma, which distinguishes them as "other" in comparison to people without disabilities. When they experience othering, they undergo a process of dehumanization or devaluation based on a common characteristic they possess in conjunction with a marginalized or minority group (McCarrick, 2024, p. 16). They

also experience pressure due to their being minority in a socially marginalized group, and this feeling can cause some stress in their daily lives. Individuals with disabilities often face the challenge of being minority in places where people without disabilities feel comfortable. Charity would like to demonstrate the disparity between the personal experiences of autistic individuals and the manner in which they are viewed and classified by experts and society:

My whole life, I have lived with this brain/body disconnect. The thinkers- the people with fancy initials after their names-have examined, poked, analysed me a million times. After all the tests, I am labeled, like a strange species of toad they have discovered. Most people see me only as that label, not as a real person. (p. 8)

These labels make them susceptible to prejudice, and exploitation as triggering the ideas that they are inferior or insignificant. In the above quote, Charity is perceived as she has a lack of control mechanisms and ability to make decisions for herself. She tries hard to prove that she feels everything, and she presents the importance of approaching them as genuine individuals with unique experiences, emotions, and viewpoints. People hardly demonstrate empathy when she reacts differently in unexpected situations, but she has nothing to do as her body sometimes acts out of control:

If my brain moves like lightning, my body sometimes moves like it's been invaded by aliens. For no apparent reason, I might jump, flap my arms, clap my hands, shrug my shoulders, squish my lips out like a duck face. Sometimes I am in control of my body, sometimes I am not. Even I do not understand how my body works. And no one can imagine how scary that feels. (pp. 10-11)

This extract presents a profound and powerful description of people who possess neurological or sensory processing impairments due to autism spectrum condition. This metaphorical depiction implies a divergence between cognitive processes and bodily actions. Charity's gestures exhibit involuntary or seemingly disconnected actions, thereby creating an impression of diminished control. People feel when they touch, hear or smell, but other than seven senses, people know what happens when they are hungry, or when they feel full after meal (DuBois et al., 2016, p. 105). This sense is called 'interoception', and it helps people to interpret different reactions inside body; however, autistic people lack in. Charity gives a description of how she feels when she does not know what to do for this unknown bodily reactions, and she explains this "each dawning day, I live in terror of my unpredictable body that no one understands" (p. 7), and she also provides important knowledge for sensory or neurological variations. This illustrates the intricate challenges that they encounter in regulating themselves to the new environment. She tries to show that her body and her conscious are different, so it is not proper to judge them according to their physical behaviours. Simi Linton states that "a person's abilities or characteristics are determined by disability or that people with disabilities as a group

are inferior to non-disabled people” (1998, p. 9). Disabled people do not want to be seen different, but they only want to be treated equally. In the novel, Charity states that “some call me *special*. Is that supposed to make me feel good?” (2020, p. 8). This shows that children who have physical, developmental or other problems face bullying compared to their non-disabled ones, but not only children but also adults treat the disabled in a bad way and they do not respect them. Workplace studies have examined how particular groups of employees are ‘othered’ based on their appearance, behaviour, or other visible or social differences from the majority (Mik-Meyer, 2016, p. 1357). In other words, adults can be more brutal than children when they encounter a disabled person:

Adults are even worse than kids. They just shake their heads and whisper that disgusting R-word. They think that because I cannot talk, I do not understand what they say. They think I cannot see the such-a-tragedy look on their faces. (p. 11)

Charity feels desperate when someone calls her “retarded”, and the R-word stands for intellectual disability, so it has not been used as it is offensive and a form of hate speech for a long time. This kind of criticism damages their sense of confidence and decreases their motivation for education or prevents them from making friends in daily life. Many disabled children are considered that they do not have any brain control, so they can do whatever they want. In the novel, Charity experience many kinds of mistreatment due to her physical appearance and her inability to talk, and she states that “some people think if I do not show emotion that means I do not feel any” (p. 7). Bullying can take many forms such as making fun orally, touching or physical threats, hence they can cause loneliness, depression and helplessness as a result of the power imbalance among them. Charity in a public school is bullied by someone whose nickname is Sassygirl72, and in an Instagram post, she says, “No retards playing basketball” (p. 186), hence it is necessary to educate school children about disabled ones. These harassments create uncomfortable atmosphere and unsafe place for people with disabilities:

Sassygirl72 had posted pictures of me on the field trip-one with me drooling on the bus and one of me standing next to a photograph at the museum-the lunch-counter photograph- my lips pressed into a duck face. The captions read, “First-class embarrassment!!!” and “Is this the way we want Lincoln represented???” (pp. 196-197)

Sassygirl72 shares images captured on a school daytrip, and makes this without permission and posts it online. If someone posts some unwanted photographs of anyone without consent, this is categorized as cyberbullying or harassment. Many steps must be taken against cyberbullying as it can cause a lot of damage, especially for people with disabilities. In public schools, that kind of bullying can happen; however, disabled people who study in specialized or segregated schools experience more problems compared to disabled or non-disabled students who study in

public schools (Rose et al., 2012, p. 2). Insulting, ridiculing, or stigmatising language addressed at disabled people not only causes them discomfort but also deteriorates their self-confidence. Uneducated people tend to call the disabled with a language that discriminates or hurts, but it is important to avoid ableist language against the disabled. In another instance, Charity feels sorry: “in second grade, a boy screamed when he saw me reaching for his throat. I only wanted to feel the silver, shiny buttons on his coat. ‘Fishface tried to strangle me’! That was his nickname for me-Fishface” (2020, p. 11). In order to help the disabled, fulfil their developmental stage, it is crucial for the environment to adapt and accommodate their needs, rather than stigmatizing them as ‘different’ due to their disability. Most people, especially the disabled experience stigmatization “at least in some connections and in some phases of life” (Goffman, 1963, p. 138). Being stigmatized results in the disabled person’s certain positive attributions overlooked. This outcome is the direct result of constructed stereotypes and biases which are present in an ableist society which favours able-bodied perspectives (Tulgar, 2022b, p. 196). This especially affects disabled individuals and makes it difficult for them to adapt to society where they hardly ever feel equality. In the novel, Charity defines equality and says, “Define *equal*: Equal does not mean that everyone gets the same. It means each person gets what they need” (p. 79). In other words, society neglects to take the necessary measures to create an environment that everybody can benefit from. In the novel, coach George in the basketball team does not think Charity as a player and avoids considering her own talent due to her disability:

“Hey, Charity did a great job today. She’ll make a terrific team mascot.” “Mascot?” Dad took a step back. “Well, sure, Steve. I thought she could put on the hornet suit and do some funny moves on the court, make some silly faces like she’s doing now. It’ll crack everyone up.”  
*Translation: I am a joke*. (p. 94)

The presence of environmental obstacles, such as restricted opportunities for unrestricted social interaction, has a significant impact on the perceived quality of life. Physical disabilities confine the interaction socially, and in the novel, Charity expresses her desire to participate in a school excursion. However, Jergen, the school administrator, initially exhibits reluctance in granting her permission to participate in the trip. Charity’s behaviour is perceived as fluctuating, so it creates some concern regarding the possible hazards posed to both herself and others: “Celia and Ms. Beckett had to convince Jergen to let me go. Her unpredictable behaviour puts her and others at risk. What will happen if she acts out or runs away like she has done at school?” (p. 193). Jergen has worries over the potential occurrence of outbursts or escape during the forthcoming excursion. This particular situation illustrates an often-encountered obstacle

experienced by individuals who are diagnosed with autism. These people can encounter challenges in social interactions or in unfamiliar places, but collaboration between schools, educators, students, and parents is crucial in arranging effective solutions and adjustments that help the disabled adapt themselves to these occasions. In the novel, Charity has education in a specialized school where she experiences violence and bullying as she does not interact orally:

By third grade, I was considered too special for public school. That's when the Thinkers pressured my parents to see me to a private institution. Define institution: a place where people are separated from the world instead of included. Separate can never be equal. Borden Academy was not a real school. Schools are places for learning. Borden was a prison camp for disabled kids, complete with an escape-proof, eight-foot-high chain-link fence. (p. 33)

This segregated education does not have any benefit on children in Borden Academy as the instructors are unwillingly helpful and friendly as well as they use violence when they do not obey rules. Since they lack the power to inform people about continuing physical and psychological violence, they find no way to escape. Charity is also afraid of having a tantrum inside a closet where she spends time waiting for her teacher's mercy:

Forever. I have been locked in here forever. How many minutes until I would be released from this prison? Would it matter? My mind would never escape the prison of my broken body. It was a life sentence. (p. 41)

The children in Borden Academy have different disabilities and their parents are unaware of the violence happening there. Charity experiences many forms of harassment and violence and states that "kids who cannot talk are easy targets for bullies. At Borden, I learnt teachers can be bullies too" (p. 31). Not only does the instructor use violence against children, but she also steals money from the children whose families give them as pocket money: "She reached into my pocket, pulled out the three dollars, and stuffed them into her own pocket. I saw her do this to other kids too, and I knew I would not be eating sloppy joes today" (p. 31). Charity remembers her days at school where she experiences bad treatments and harsh punishments:

Miss Marcia patrolled the room like a prison guard, snapping at kids to "Knock it off!" or "Put a lid on it!" and threatening to banish them to the dreaded time-out closet. I lived in fear of it every moment. Each lockup chipped away at my already broken heart. (p. 37)

Such bad attitudes and behaviours reduce the self-confidence of the disabled towards outside world, and these difficulties may cause the disabled to avoid social interactions, which will make adjusting to new social environment more difficult. First of all, it is critical to use a language that is free of prejudice and limitations against the disabled if the aim is to increase their emotional motivation, and make easier their adaptation process easier. When children go to the same school with children without disabilities, they are forced to adapt themselves to the conditions which are designed for people without disabilities. Charity has a heavy emotional burden of feelings of frustration stemming from the treatment of people who approach her pity

or hatred as a consequence of their condition. She expresses a desire for equitable recognition and treatment, underscoring her capacity to comprehend and engage with the world equal for any human:

Acceptance. Complete acceptance from the first minute. So different from how most new people react to me. They get stiff. They back away-like maybe I am contagious-and usually talk about me as if I am not there. Or they talk to me as if I am three years old. (p. 84)

As stated in the above quotation, the worst barrier that prevents them from society is the immediate environment such as family, school or neighbourhood, which discourages the disabled from social life. All people are considered to have equal rights, but some families think that “having special-needs students in regular classrooms lowers standards and distracts other students” (p. 76). Charity’s family struggles to find a school which accepts her; however, many schools reject her since they have parental concerns regarding the integration of such children may have negative effects on children without disabilities. When they finally find a school, the school’s head called Jergen forces her to take an exam to prove that she is able to study. Having such an opportunity gives her strength, hence Charity finds the power to take the exam saying “I have a mission. I need to prove to Jergen that I can be included in real classes. That all kids can be included” (p. 131). She is about to dismantle the educational system and demonstrate that, with the right support and training, children of all backgrounds can participate in regular classroom settings. This is consistent with the tenets of inclusive education, which aim to create diverse and equitable learning environments. Charity takes 96 out of 100 and proves that she is “*INTELLIGENT*” (p. 117), and this is the word that she types on the keyboard. From now on, she wants to “prove that kids like me could contribute and did not have to sit on the side-lines and watch other kids have a real life” (p. 137). She gets upset by always hearing that she has no brain: “pity poisons bubbled up inside me. I wanted to cry, but instead my body jumped and clapped. I begged for words. *My ears work. My brain understands. Can't you see I am a REAL PERSON?*” (pp. 60-61). Charity and other disabled people only want to be seen as normal since they are fed up with being judged by their disabilities. Different or special treatments also hurt them. Charity explains this as “just because there is an error in someone’s genes does not mean that person is an error. Does it?” (p. 143). Having equal rights, receiving the same education and not being excluded from social life will help the disabled to challenge themselves to study and work outside home. They will not be seen “different”, and this will help them increase self-confidence and motivation.

## **Conclusion**

*Real* written by Carol Cujec is based on a true-life story of the novel's co-author Peyton Goddard, and the narrative is about a girl called Charity with autism. Even though Charity would like to adapt herself to society, she confronts various challenges due to her condition. As her body sometimes is out of control, she has unpredictable physical movements. Although she lacks the ability to speak, she possesses exceptional memory and understanding of mathematics. Her parents want her to be accepted to a state school, but many parents reject the idea that children with disabilities should have the same education with children without disabilities. The head of the school where Charity takes an exam says if Charity successfully passes the acceptance exam, she will get admission to the school. Remarkably, she takes the highest score. It is clear that disabled people are forced to prove themselves to get an education in a state school as they are deprived of common rights. On the other hand, no matter what they do, disabled people are always ignored by society, and they do not have necessary improvements to make their life better. Thus, when they face challenges in their daily lives, they may experience increased level of tension and discomfort. Under these conditions, they do not want to believe in themselves, hence they prefer not to communicate with people, which triggers their isolation. Nevertheless, this isolation leads to biases and discriminatory attitudes in many different fields, thus to raise awareness to avoid these attitudes everyone should be educated on different types of discriminatory behaviours. The goal of the normalisation is to protect individuals from devaluation by improving their social standing and talents.

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### *Lessons* by Ian McEwan

Ian McEwan'ın *Lessons* Adlı Romanı

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#### Abstract

This review explores Ian McEwan's *Lessons* (2022) through an analysis of Roland Baines' life, which mirrors some aspects of McEwan's experiences. The novel probes into trauma, the complexities of parenting, and unexpected encounters, interweaving present situations with past reflections. It contemplates life's unforeseen turns and the wisdom they bring, showcasing McEwan's storytelling prowess and philosophical musings on human existence.

**Key Words:** Ian McEwan, *Lessons*, trauma, child abuse, parenting

#### Öz

Bu yazı, Ian McEwan'ın *Lessons* (2022) adlı romanının bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. İnceleme, McEwan'ın hayatının bazı yönlerini yansıtan Roland Baines'in hayat deneyimleri esas alınarak yazılmıştır. McEwan bu eserinde travma, ebeveynliğin karmaşıklığı ve beklenmedik karşılaşmaları irdelerken, şimdiki durumlarla geçmişin yansımalarını iç içe geçirmektedir. Hayatın beklenmedik dönemeçleri ve bunların getirdiği bilgelik üzerine düşündüren eserde, insan varoluşu üzerine felsefi düşüncelerin sergilendiği görülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ian McEwan, *Lessons*, travma, çocuk istismarı, ebeveynlik

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## Review

A prominent figure in British literature as novelist, story writer and screenwriter Ian McEwan is known for his distinctive literary style. He mainly focusses on the exploration of human psyche and skilfully portrays the dark and bright sides of human psychology using different and imaginary landscapes in his literary works. His creativity at delving into the realities between imagination and reality garners praise from both readers and critics.

His creativity at constructing gripping fictional landscapes and his aptness at focusing on every single detail is acclaimed by both readers and critics. He meticulously adeptly explores the complexities of human psychology dealing with its brighter and darker aspects and delves into the moral problems of humanity.

His latest novel, *Lessons* portrays the life of a man who is trapped between his past and present. In the novel, McEwan explores Roland Baines's psyche from his adolescence to adulthood. Set during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the story begins with presenting the relationship of 11-year-old Roland Baines with his music teacher, Miss Cornell, who is a 25-year old. Roland Baines as a teenager wants to explore his sexual life, but he is abused by his teacher, which will continuously affect his life in future. Basing the story in post-war era, the book questions the complexities of human psyche and also the missed opportunities of that generation who must endure the vagueness of the era. Although there are many changes in his life along with the changes in society, Roland remains passive, portraying societal passivity and missed opportunities in that era.

*Lessons* intricately intertwines significant global occurrences such as the Cold War, Chernobyl, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic with the personal chronicle of Roland Baines, a character bearing a striking resemblance to Ian McEwan himself. This narrative meticulously echoes McEwan's familial dynamics, formative years, and educational background (Begley, 2022). Nonetheless, as Roland progresses toward adolescence, his narrative deviates from the author's own experiences. McEwan also makes clear that it is not his biography by stating that "I raided bits of my own life, which I've never done before: the family life, my lost brother, the boarding school. The piano teacher, though, is totally fictional, and the story of my brother was made to fit the narrative" (Ermelino, 2022). A pivotal and transformative incident alters Roland's life trajectory, exerting a profound influence on his subsequent decisions and encounters. This narrative intricacy invites readers to juxtapose Roland's journey with the factual events of the author's life.

The story begins with the dreaming of Roland, a new father looks back on significant past events, notably the troubling encounters when he was 14 with his piano instructor, Miss Miriam

Cornell, resulting in a manipulative relationship. Miriam, physically harms the boy by pinching his thigh, advancing her hand toward his groin, and striking his knee with a ruler, all of which are presented as instructional actions. And Roland aims to have a sexual encounter before everything vanishes because of a possible nuclear war. However, as life persists, “so does their intoxicating and destructive relationship” (Flaherty, October 24, 2022). Ian McEwan vividly illustrates the upheaval caused by this mistreatment in Roland's life, delving into the lasting effects of his early traumas.

The story then shifts to Roland's current challenges as a financially struggling Londoner, dealing with his wife's sudden departure and, at the same time, taking care of their baby. The portrayal of parenthood in the narrative presents both its complexities and touching instances of connection and development, adding depth and humour to the story. His wife Alissa has a strong commitment to writing, putting it ahead of family responsibilities she sees as obstacles to her creative pursuits. She considers their child an obstacle to her pursuit of creativity and removes this obstacle by leaving her 7-month-old baby with a note attached to the pillow. Her decision reflects the idea of artists being solely focused on their work and raises questions about what sacrifices are being made for one's passion and who gets to make those decisions. The story also looks back at key moments: Alissa's parents in World War I, Roland's unique upbringing in Libya due to his father's job after the war, and Roland and Alissa's first meetings in Germany. As Roland moves through time, from the 1990's to the 2000's, his failed relationships make him want to reconnect with Alissa and Miriam. He tends to revisit the past compulsively to cope with life's complexities.

He eventually reconnects with Miriam and Alissa. Miriam apologizes, and Roland takes charge by deciding not to pursue legal action, seeing her as a different person now. Alissa, with health issues and a heavy smoking habit, showcases a sorrowful conclusion. Roland observes that her commitment to writing has come at a great price to her, considering the family ties, especially her relationship with her son. Unexpected reunions bring both hope and pain. Roland also meets his long-lost brother, an unlikely but real-life moment between two older men. His friend Daphne returns, too, and Roland proposes to her, feeling empowered by making choices. But his hope fades fast when Daphne reveals she has terminal cancer. Roland copes with her illness and, after her death, scatters her ashes at the point where she has marked on the map. The story shifts from Daphne's life to Roland's memories, focusing on his perspective.

In the later part of the book, we see Roland become a grandfather and his granddaughter Stephanie enters the story, offering a new outlook. They bond over the beloved tale “The Owl and the Pussycat,” passed down through generations, a comfort during a COVID-19 lockdown.

Towards the end, Roland sees the importance of preserving stories without imparting a moral, sharing with Stephanie an imaginary book holding everyone's tales, including hers. This shows how a story can become both a beginning and an end. At the end of the novel, McEwan tells a story of his English teacher, Neil Clayton to make Roland realize that life is composed of various lessons which find us unexpectedly, and we later understand that they are not deliberate teachings but gifts for our lives.

In conclusion, Ian McEwan's *Lessons* mirrors McEwan's own life including the global events that have significant effects on the life of Roland Baines. Beginning with the abuse of his piano teacher, the story unfolds this trauma and its repetitions in Roland's adulthood when he is abandoned by his wife leaving their child behind. Roland's life fluctuates between optimism and grief while he is struggling with the sacrifices and complexities of parenthood and unexpected reunions. The narrative navigates through Roland's present and past experiences by focusing on the confusion and uncertainty of his life and his inner world. The novel ends with Roland's granddaughter, Stephanie, representing a new perspective to pass down the tales over generations. McEwan beautifully demonstrates his aptness at storytelling the unexpected lessons in life as gifts, instead of imposing them as moral teachings.

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