

A Probe into the Dark Side of Human Nature Veiled in American Dream by Analyzing "The Great Gatsby"

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Abstract—The *Great Gatsby*, being published in 1925, was written by American author F. Scott Fitzgerald. The story follows a cast of characters living in the fictional town of West and East Egg on prosperous Long Island in the summer of 1922. This work laid the foundation for F. Scott Fitzgerald in the history of American modern literature. It shows people the voluptuous "Jazz Age" or the extravagant "roaring twenties" that has been described as a cautionary tale regarding the American Dream. The story, in the main, spotlights the young and mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby and his ostentatious passion and obsession for the beautiful former lover Daisy Buchanan, which presents people the limits and realities of America's ideals of social and class mobility; and the inevitably hopeless lower class aspirations to rise above the station of their birth. In this whole story, people can clearly feel that it would be a successful story about human nature and reality rather than about love. And people can observe the dark side of human nature hidden in the American Dream which has been inspiring generations of Americans. With regard to this thesis, it focuses on the analysis of the dark side of the human nature laid down in the three lead characters: Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan and Tom Buchanan.

Keywords—*The Great Gatsby*; American Dream; dark side

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1925, the novelette story, "The Great Gatsby" laid the foundation for F. Scott Fitzgerald in the history of American modern literature. This work shows us the voluptuous "Jazz Age" or the extravagant "roaring twenties" that has been described as a cautionary tale regarding the American Dream. The novel presents the process of Gatsby's pursuit of American Dream in a limited view of the narrator named Nick Caraway. It has been received kinds of comments mixed with praise and disparagement, since the book was published. Scholars both at home and abroad had been thoroughly studied and analyzed this masterpiece from writing skills to characteristics of protagonists.

II. BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT BACKGROUND

A. *The Author*

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (1896-1940) is unquestioningly referred to as a spokesman of the "Jazz Age" and the "Roaring Twenties" in American literature. His father was an unsuccessful businessman. In 1917, he dropped out of Princeton University to serve in World War I. However, the endgame of the war was getting closer. So he never got straight involved in the battlefield. When he was training in the army, he met the attractive mammoth girl, named Zelda Sayre, from a wealthy family. And the two fell in love with each other. But Zelda was not willing to marry him until Fitzgerald's first novel "This Side of Paradise" brought him fame and wealth. After becoming a literary sensation, Fitzgerald was deeply indulged in an extravagant, reckless lifestyle. Meanwhile, he had to try to earn much more money by writing to please his wife. Obviously, his experience was partially added into his works. A few years later, his wife was settled in a hospital due to her mental illness. In the meantime, Fitzgerald was plagued by economic dilemma and spent a number of years hooked on alcohol. He died of a heart attack in 1940 when he was only 44 years old.

B. *American Dream*

Broadly, it's about pursuit of democracy, rights, liberty, opportunity, and equality. Later, it became a creed that the dream could be attainable, and that everyone could succeed with hard work and determination.

The connotation of American Dream has been changing. At the outset of American Dream, it's much more about something spiritual than just material by a great deal. As for African Americans, American Dream means fairness, rights and freedom.

During the World War I, Americans accumulated a large sum of capital by arms trade. Americans faced their golden age with booming economy. People regarded American Dream as a dream only for fame and wealth.

C. *The Jazz Age*

It's the period from 1918 to 1929, after the World War I and before the Great Depression. The World War I made the American veterans deviate from the traditional values. People at that time belittled the traditional moral standards and soaked themselves in the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment while American stock market soared.

D. *The National Prohibition Act*

The National Prohibition Act, also known as "The Volstead Act", went into effect after the 18th amendment in 1920 and abolished in 1933. According to this law, no one shall manufacture, sell or transport intoxicating beverages containing more than 0.5% alcohol except as authorized by this act.

III. THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE VEILED IN AMERICAN DREAM

A. *Jay Gatsby: a Bootlegger Living in a Frail Dream*

In this book, the story is narrated by Nick Carraway in a limited point of view. The attitude of Nick Carraway towards Gatsby does not keep the same. At the beginning, Gatsby was so mysterious that he was interesting and charming. But when he went to the party that's held by Gatsby, he clearly felt that what under this kind of extravagant life style were vulgarity and spiritual emptiness. In the party, he saw the power of wealth. Wealth drove the self-made rich to disguise themselves and help the established aristocracy cynical and lavishly opulent.

A lot of readers impute Gatsby's tragic ending to the trend of the epoch and the selfish heroine — Daisy Buchanan. However, in the author's opinion, what destroyed his American dream is not the trend of the epoch nor Daisy. It's himself who demolished his dream.

The disillusion of Gatsby's American dream is inevitable, because this dream was constructed by a pile of lies and illegal deals. He was originally born of a poor peasant family in North Dakota, named James Gatz. The poverty he had endured in his early years made him desperate for wealth and sensitive to the social status. His life changed when he met Cody, a rich man. He spent much time in traveling around the world in Cody's yacht. There is no reason to reproach ones who pursue their dreams in a moral and legal way. However, Gatsby's dream began to deteriorate after he fell in love with Daisy. He hid his identity and claimed he was the son of sick but very wealthy couple in Midwest so that he could match for Daisy. He polished his American Dream by plenty of lies. Facts proved that lies are not tenable for a long time.

In The Declaration of Independence, there is such a sentence: "...all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that they are among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." But Gatsby regarded those rights without any limitation. Gatsby's personal values were warped so that he dealt with shady characters such as Wolfsheimer. After the 18th

amendment in 1920, The National Prohibition Act was put into effect. It stipulated no one shall manufacture, sell or transport intoxicating beverages containing more than 0.5% alcohol except as authorized by this act. In such a situation, Gatsby amassed his fortune from illegal deals. His so-called pharmacy was actually a place where illegally manufactured and sold intoxicating beverages. It was inadvisable to get his way, by hook or by crook.

His American Dream was doomed to be shattered also because of his blindness. He was too optimistic, naïve and stubborn to see clearly the reality and the nature of Daisy Buchanan. He firmly believed that Daisy always loved him and she would come back to him if he was rich enough. Such a limited view on the reality and human nature made him entirely indulge into his wishful thinking. This limitation of views largely differentiates Jay Gatsby from Tom Buchanan. His simple ideas and blind pursuit after wealth and Daisy made him become a convenient whipping boy for Daisy's crime at the cost of his life.

B. *Daisy Buchanan and Tom Buchanan: a Couple with Glamorous Appearance and Odious Soul*

The character, Daisy Buchanan is similar to author's wife, Zelda, for both of them are gorgeous and born in a wealthy family. Young and beautiful, Daisy met Gatsby who claimed that he was a rich man and fell in love with him. After Gatsby was dispatched to the battlefield, she chose to marry Tom Buchanan a man with a pretty face and a well-off background. Of course, her choice is reasonable and unblamable. But the things happened after she reunited with Gatsby reflected that she was undoubtedly a woman of superficiality, utilitarianism and ruthlessness.

First of all, her thought on marriage focused on money. She could marry a man whom she did not love but who must be rich. In other words, in her matrimony, wealth was much more important than affections. Is there anything wrong with pursuing wealth? It depends. There was something wrong with Gatsby's American Dream because of his illegal deals and deceitful maneuvers. And as for Daisy, she enjoyed the extravagant life through sharing others' fruits. She pinned her desire for money on her rich parents and wealthy husband. So Gatsby is a dream hunter, while Daisy is totally a pleasure seeker and enjoyment sharer.

What was concealed under her pretty appearance was an indifferent and empty heart. Deep down, she knew that her husband was so disloyal to her that he had lovers outside. The only way to make her feel fulfilled was the sufficient material comforts. Her sense of emptiness was uncontrolled until she reunited with Gatsby. In Gatsby's sumptuous house, she found another brilliant and new lifestyle. She knew that she was the only one for Gatsby but not for Tom Buchanan. So she secretly kept this unfair relationship with Gatsby. The largest motivation of this relationship was the wealth with regard to Daisy. This was the reason why Daisy held back when Tom Buchanan said that Gatsby's source of finance was illegal. She escaped from the punishment of the laws after she accidentally hit her husband's lover when she drove. She was so selfish and indifferent that she even did not told

anyone the truth: it's she who hit Myrtle Wilson and did not get to the funeral of Gatsby's.

Maybe she really loved Gatsby, but she loved herself much more than anyone else. She also loved Tom Buchanan, but she more loved money. She has been pampered in a rich family, which made her take the ease and enjoyment for granted and ignore the moral standards.

When it comes to Tom Buchanan, People are going to remind of him as an arrogant and egocentric racist, as well as a sophisticated and cunning old money. In the novel, Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan were born in opposition. Different from Gatsby, Tom Buchanan was born in an upper-class family. In other words, he inherited a large fortune from his parents. So the family background of Tom Buchanan matched that of Daisy. There is a lot of resemblance between Tom Buchanan and Daisy Buchanan in disposition. Both of them were extremely selfish and cold-blooded, which caused a great gap between this two upper-class rich old money and Gatsby who started from scratch. To a certain extent, Tom Buchanan reflects the decadence of the upper class in many aspects.

Tom Buchanan was absolutely a racist and always thought that the nature of a person depends on race. When they had dinner, Tom Buchanan kept talking about a book named *The Rise of Colored Empires* in which the racism was highly advocated. Tom Buchanan's racist arguments were full of the pride in white supremacy and the contempt for the colored people. And he firmly believed that people of Germanic extraction were the much more dominant than any others.

The old money, represented by Tom Buchanan and Daisy Buchanan, had a good taste in life, but they were usually lacking in conscience and moral principles. They were so dependent on the power of money that they squandered their money on enjoyment to have fun so that their emptiness would be wiped temporarily and they never cared about others' feeling. Tom Buchanan was an outstanding example. He really was a playboy. He bought a house for his mistress so that they could have secret rendezvous, although he loved his wife Daisy Buchanan. The inherited assets and social status made he feel superior. He ignored his marital infidelity but could not put up with his wife's. He was also a man of violence. He hit his mistress Myrtle Wilson with great force just for Myrtle Wilson mentioned Daisy. Tom Buchanan was also arrogant. He despised Gatsby and taunted Gatsby about his taste as new money.

In this whole story, there is no doubt that Tom Buchanan is the final winner. Gatsby took the responsibility for the crime caused by Tom Buchanan's wife — Daisy Buchanan. And after being told that Gatsby drove the car and hit Myrtle Wilson, Mr. Wilson thought Gatsby was the one who had been keeping an affair with Myrtle Wilson. So Gatsby also shouldered the responsibility of Tom Buchanan's affair with Myrtle Wilson. And finally, Gatsby undertook the all at the cost of his life, while Tom Buchanan moved into another place to begin a new life with Daisy Buchanan and their daughter without attending Gatsby's funeral.

This rich couple had a distinct thing in common that was both of them despised the poor and curried favor with the traditionally wealthy. Tom Buchanan knew it very clearly. So when Gatsby claimed that Daisy had loved him not her husband in a hotel, Tom Buchanan reminded Daisy of Gatsby's illegal deals and implied that Gatsby could not offer her with a wealthy life for a long time. Tom knew Daisy was so utilitarian and materialist that she would never like to leave a man who had access to a stable financial source and a high social standing.

After the death of Gatsby, Tom Buchanan and Daisy Buchanan fled from this horrible mess without any sympathy for Gatsby and without any regrets or sense of guilt for the bad things they had done.

The indifference and hypocrisy of Tom Buchanan and Daisy Buchanan contrasted sharply with the loyalty towards love of Gatsby. That's why Nick Carraway thought that Buchanans and Gatsby was worth more than all of Banchanans and their friends.

IV. CONCLUSION

In a lot of stories in literature, there is real experience of authors' or others'. As for *The Great Gatsby*, it's a story about the American Dream of Gatsby's as well as Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald's; it's a story about the love between Daisy Buchanan and Jay Gatsby as well as between Zelda and the author himself. The reality can be clearly seen in the book. The reality is that there will never be simplicity in real life.

Gatsby, representing the people at the bottom of society, shows a course of dream disillusion. His experience tells that if you want to climb to the top in society, you need not only willpower but also profound insight into human nature and discipline. People can not just stick to their dreams and ignore the laws. People can not let the impulse totally dominate ourselves. People can not love ones just because of their appearance. The love that makes people stronger is the same that gets them foolish.

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