



Exploring the American Dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Novels: *The Great Gatsby, The Beautiful and Damned, and Winter Dreams*

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Introduction

The American Dream is a concept that has captivated writers for decades. Many authors have explored this theme in their novels, shedding light on both the promises and the pitfalls of the American Dream.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, an American writer, often portrayed the American Dream in his novels and short stories. He had mixed views on the subject. On one hand, Fitzgerald believed that the American Dream promised wealth, success, and happiness to everyone. However, he also recognised the darker side of the American Dream, where the pursuit of wealth and materialism could lead to corruption, disillusionment, and the loss of moral values. Fitzgerald's works, such as "The Great Gatsby," examine the complexities and contradictions of the American Dream, highlighting both its allure and its pitfalls. Fitzgerald criticised the idea that anyone could achieve prosperity and happiness through hard work and determination alone. He believed that the American Dream was often driven by greed, superficiality, and the pursuit of social status. Fitzgerald's characters, such as Jay Gatsby,



symbolise the tragic consequences of blindly chasing the American Dream without considering the moral and ethical implications. In Fitzgerald's eyes, the American Dream was a disillusioned illusion, a mirage that promised fulfilment but ultimately left individuals feeling empty and unfulfilled. His works explored the dark side of the Jazz Age and exposed the flaws and contradictions of the American Dream, highlighting the inherent inequality and corruption that often accompanied it.

John Steinbeck, another prominent American author, also had his own perspective on the American Dream. In his novel "The Grapes of Wrath," Steinbeck portrayed the American Dream as a deeply flawed concept. He believed that the dream of achieving prosperity and success was often an illusion, particularly for the working class and marginalised communities. Steinbeck's characters, such as the Joad family, faced immense hardships and injustices as they pursued their version of the American Dream during the Great Depression. Through their struggles, Steinbeck highlighted the systemic challenges and inequalities that hindered the realisation of the dream. Steinbeck's portrayal of the American Dream was often critical, emphasising the harsh realities of poverty, exploitation, and the dehumanising effects of capitalism. He challenged the notion that hard work and determination alone could guarantee success, highlighting the influence of external factors such as economic inequality and social injustice. While Steinbeck's views on the American Dream were critical, he also emphasised the importance of community, empathy, and solidarity in overcoming adversity. His works shed light on the need for social change and a more inclusive society, where the American Dream becomes accessible to all, regardless of their background or circumstances.



Arthur Miller, the renowned American playwright, had his own perspective on the American Dream. In his play *Death of a Salesman*, Miller explored the idea that the American Dream could be an elusive and destructive force. Miller portrayed the character of Willy Loman, a struggling salesman, as a symbol of the disillusionment and failure that can accompany the pursuit of the American Dream. Willy's relentless pursuit of success and material wealth ultimately leads to his downfall and a sense of emptiness. Miller's play critiques the notion that success is solely determined by financial prosperity and societal status. He highlights the importance of personal fulfilment, authenticity, and meaningful human connections as essential components of a fulfilling life. Miller's portrayal of the American Dream reflects a more nuanced understanding of success, suggesting that it should be measured not just by material wealth, but also by personal happiness, self-fulfilment, and integrity.

Overall, Miller's perspective on the American Dream challenges the idea that it is a universally attainable goal, emphasising the importance of personal values and individual identity in the pursuit of a meaningful life.

Ralph Ellison, the acclaimed African American writer, had his own unique perspective on the American Dream. In his novel *Invisible Man*, Ellison explored the complex realities and challenges faced by African Americans in their pursuit of the American Dream.

Fitzgerald presents the American Dream as a mirage in the book, one that at first seems to offer happiness, prosperity, and upward mobility but ultimately leaves one feeling empty and disappointed. Gloria and Anthony, who strived for both great social standing and financial success, epitomize the excess and extravagance of the Jazz Age. However, a loop of fruitless



endeavours, adultery, and self-destruction leaves their lives meaningless and morally bankrupt.

Fitzgerald's "The Beautiful and Damned" critique of the American Dream argues that pursuing material wealth and pleasure can corrupt people and undermine their sense of self and purpose. Reflecting the disillusionment and moral decay of the Jazz Age, the novella asks what success and pleasure truly mean in a materialistic world.

The story "The Beautiful and Damned" serves as a warning against chasing the American Dream only through materialistic endeavours and emphasises the importance of finding true fulfillment and meaning outside of the fleeting trappings of wealth and social prestige.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a novel explores the intricacies of love, social class, the American Dream, and the delusion of identity. The American Dream and its elusiveness are among the book's main themes. Gatsby is the perfect example of how hard effort and perseverance can lead to success because of his unwavering pursuit of wealth and prestige. Fitzgerald, however, presents the Dream as ultimately unfulfilling since Gatsby's wealth is unable to provide him with true happiness or acceptance in high society. Rather, it brings him to ruin and exposes the corruption and disillusionment that lie at the heart of the American Dream.

Fitzgerald looks at the tight social structure that ruled 1920s America, with wealth and ancestry determining a person's place in society. The "new money" of West Egg and the "old money" of East Egg are so different from one another that it emphasises the issue of social



class and how hard it is to grow beyond one's upbringing. Gatsby's repeated failures to fit in with the upper class highlight the obstacles posed by class differences.

Characters struggle with the conflict between appearance and reality throughout the entire book. In the end, Gatsby's attempts to hide his lowly beginnings and win Daisy back are in vain as he puts up a lavish front. The characters' lavish parties and flashy lifestyle serve as a disguise for underlying fears and emptiness, exposing the shallow nature of Jazz Age culture. Daisy's dock's green light eventually comes to represent Gatsby's unrealistic expectations and the ephemeral nature of his wants.

A lot of the characters in the book act out of love, or the appearance of love. Gatsby becomes oblivious to Daisy's shortcomings and the reality that the past cannot be changed due to his infatuation with her. Tom Buchanan's jealousy of Daisy and his extramarital romance with Myrtle Wilson both highlight the negative sides of love relationships. The interwoven themes of love, money, and social standing underscore the ways in which relationships are shaped by expectations and demands from without.

The Great Gatsby highlights the moral decay and corruption that exist under society's surface, set against the backdrop of the Roaring Twenties. The characters' excesses are driven by alcoholism, avarice, and carelessness. Gatsby's unlawful actions and affiliations to organised crime serve as an example of the darker side of the American Dream and the extent people would go to in order to fulfill their ambitions. Fitzgerald's criticism of the quest of wealth at any costs is reflected in his depiction of the period as one of moral bankruptcy.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* is rife with themes that explore the complexity of ambition, love, riches, and the destructive power of excess. Fitzgerald's



examination of these topics, which are set in the colourful but disillusioned backdrop of 1920s America, provides a moving commentary on the quest for happiness and the hollowness of the Jazz Age way of life. It revolves around a recurring subject of materialism and riches. The main couple in the book, Anthony and Gloria Patch, are obsessed with excess and luxury. They represent the aristocracy of the Jazz Age, whose social life is centered around parties, fancy drinks, and extravagant spending. Fitzgerald, however, exposes the hollowness of their way of life, showing money as a transient mirage that cannot provide contentment or happiness over the long term. The theme of materialism becomes a warning about the perils of excess and the meaninglessness of material pursuits as Anthony and Gloria waste their inheritance and go bankrupt.

The Beautiful and Damned also explores the issue of ambition and how it inevitably leads to disappointment. Anthony Patch aspires to be a writer and hopes to be recognized for his work. But his artistic ambitions are stifled by his lack of discipline and dependence on his family's wealth, which results in a life of sloth and self-indulgence. Gloria Patch, in a similar vein, longs for attention and social status but is caught in a vicious circle of superficiality and unhappiness. Fitzgerald criticizes the American Dream and the flimsy quest of prosperity at all costs through his depiction of the protagonists' crushed expectations and unfulfilled dreams.

Themes of love and relationships reoccur throughout *The Beautiful and Damned*, as people struggle with the intricacies of romantic relationships and the pursuit of emotional fulfillment. The intensity and turbulence that characterise Anthony and Gloria's marriage are moments of deep adoration interspersed with searing anger. Their relationship is



characterized by infidelity, jealousy, and disillusionment on both sides, which is a reflection of the destructive power of narcissism and selfishness. Fitzgerald examines love and relationships, showing how brittle human bonds are and how hard it is to establish true closeness in a world where desire and ambition rule the day.

Fitzgerald examines the themes of time and mortality throughout the book as his characters come to terms with their transient existence and inevitable demise. Even though Anthony and Gloria are well aware of their own mortality, they waste time chasing fleeting pleasures and diversion. As they get older, they are compelled to face their own death and the effects of their decisions. The idea of time serves as a helpful reminder of the transience of youth and beauty as well as the value of savouring each moment while it lasts.

Morality and its ramifications are major themes in this book as characters debate the morality of their decisions and the effects of their acts. Due to Anthony and Gloria's careless actions, they suffer personal tragedy and financial loss, highlighting the moral decline and spiritual bankruptcy of the Jazz Age elite. Fitzgerald's examination of morality serves as a window into the larger cultural changes that America was experiencing in the 1920s as the excesses of the Roaring Twenties undermined conventional norms.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's moving short story "Winter Dreams" explores themes of love, ambition, social class, and chasing the American Dream. Fitzgerald's examination of these subjects, set against the backdrop of early 20th-century America, provides a rich picture of the human condition and the intricacies of desire and disillusionment. The unwavering pursuit of ambition and accomplishment is one of "Winter Dreams"' main themes. The main character, Dexter Green, has a strong ambition to rise in social standing and acquire fortune. He is



enthralled with the opulent world of the upper class and longs to join it from an early age. His drive drives him to put in endless effort and make sacrifices in order to achieve his objectives. But as Dexter rises in society and enjoys financial success, he finds that his achievements do not satisfy him as much as he would have liked. Fitzgerald's depiction of ambition emphasises both its capacity for transformation and its propensity to result in disappointment and emptiness.

Throughout "Winter Dreams," Dexter must negotiate the difficulties of romantic relationships and the need for emotional connection. Love and desire are recurrent themes. His life's course is determined by his obsession with Judy Jones, a captivating and attractive young lady. More than just a simple physical attraction, Dexter's desire for Judy is a metaphor for his need for approval and recognition from the upper class. Dexter struggles with his own contradictory wants and Judy's erratic behaviour, which makes their relationship difficult and disappointing at times. Fitzgerald's examination of desire and love highlights the intricacies of interpersonal bonds and the ways in which they may both satisfy and deceive us.

In "Winter Dreams," characters must negotiate the inflexible social structures of early 20th-century America. As a result, social class and identity are important themes. Dexter's ambition to rise beyond his lowly beginnings and recast himself as a person deserving of respect and adoration is the source of his fixation with the upper class. His deep-seated uneasiness about his identity and place in the world fuels his quest of wealth and status. Judy Jones, a wealthy elite member, also struggles to balance her own needs with society norms as a result of the demands placed upon her. Fitzgerald's examination of identity and



socioeconomic class sheds light on the ways that outside factors mold our sense of self and affect the decisions we make.

Fitzgerald draws a comparison between the unrealized American Dream and the harsh reality of life in "Winter Dreams." The harsh facts of life shatter Dexter's romanticized notion of success and pleasure when he learns that material wealth and social standing are no guarantees of contentment or happiness. Judy is similar in that her exterior display of elegance and beauty conceals a deeper insecurity and fragility. The idea of illusion versus reality draws attention to how fleeting human impulses are and how we can trick ourselves to achieve our goals.

Dexter struggles with the effects of his decisions and the transient nature of happiness in "Winter Dreams," where loss and regret are major themes. Dexter feels sorrow and remorse as he thinks back on his life and the people he has loved and lost. His realization that he has not found the fulfillment he had hoped for serves as a moving reminder of time passing and the certainty of loss. Fitzgerald explores regret and loss in a way that brings to light the frailty of human existence and the ways in which we come to terms with our decisions.

The American Dream is a concept that has captivated writers for decades. It represents the belief that anyone, regardless of their background, can achieve success, prosperity, and through handwork and determination. Many authors have explored this theme in their novels, shedding light on both the promises and the pitfalls of American Dream. The American Dream is a concept deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the United States. It represents the belief that anyone, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to achieve success, prosperity, and happiness through hard work, determination, and equal access to



opportunities The American Dream has its roots in the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as stated in the United States Declaration of Independence. It embodies the notion that individuals have the freedom to pursue their dreams and aspirations, and that their efforts will be rewarded with upward social mobility and a better quality of life. Throughout history, the American Dream has been a recurring theme in literature, particularly in novels. These literary works often explore the promises and challenges of the American Dream, shedding light on the complexities and realities of achieving success in a society that values individualism and personal achievement. One of the most iconic novels that examines the American Dream is "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Set in the 1920s, the novel portrays the pursuit of wealth and social status as a means to achieve the American Dream. However, it also reveals the emptiness and moral decay that can accompany the relentless pursuit of material success. Another notable work is "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller. The play tells the story of Willy Loman, a traveling salesman who is struggling to achieve the American Dream and provide for his family. It explores the disillusionment and desperation that can arise when one's dreams are shattered by the harsh realities of a competitive society. These novels, among many others, challenge the notion that the American Dream is easily attainable for all. They highlight the disparities and obstacles that exist, such as systemic inequalities based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status. They also question the impact of consumerism and the relentless pursuit of wealth on personal happiness and fulfillment. In recent years, the concept of the American Dream has been subject to much debate and criticism. Some argue that income inequality, limited social mobility, and the erosion of the middle class have made the American Dream more elusive for many. They



contend that systemic barriers and unequal access to opportunities hinder individuals from achieving their full potential. However, others maintain that the American Dream is still alive and well. They point to stories of individuals who have overcome adversity and achieved great success through hard work and determination. One important aspect to consider is the role of education in achieving the American Dream. Access to quality education is often seen as a pathway to upward mobility and economic success. However, disparities in educational opportunities, particularly in low-income communities, can hinder individuals from realizing their full potential. Furthermore, the American Dream is not solely focused on financial success. It encompasses the pursuit of personal fulfillment and happiness. For some, this may mean pursuing creative passions, contributing to society, or finding a sense of purpose beyond material wealth. It's also worth noting that the American Dream is not a static concept. It has evolved over time and can mean different things to different people. For some, it may involve owning a home, starting a family, or having a stable job. For others, it may be about making a positive impact on the world or living a life aligned with their values and beliefs. In recent years, discussions around the American Dream have expanded to include topics such as social justice, environmental sustainability, and the overall well-being of individuals and communities. Many believe that in order to fully achieve the American Dream, society must address systemic issues and create a more equitable and inclusive environment for all. Ultimately, the American Dream is a deeply personal and subjective concept. It reflects the aspirations, hopes, and dreams of individuals striving for a better future. While it may face challenges and criticisms, its enduring spirit continues to inspire and drive individuals to pursue their goals and create a better life for themselves and their



communities. Scott Fitzgerald's well-known novel "The Great Gatsby," published in 1925, examines the American Dream and how elusive it is. The story, which is set in the 1920s, revolves around the wealthy and mysterious Jay Gatsby and his pursuit of Daisy Buchanan, a former flame. Fitzgerald presents the American Dream in "The Great Gatsby" as a perverted ideal focused on wealth, social status, and the potential for self-reinvention. Personifying this desire, Gatsby amassed vast wealth through questionable means to regain Daisy's devotion. He lives in an opulent estate, presents costly parties, and presents himself as a symbol of money and success. However, as the story goes on, it becomes evident how unreal the American Dream is. Gatsby's wealth and social standing don't actually make him happy or fulfilled. Despite his best efforts, he is unable to win Daisy's love and bring her history to life. Tom Buchanan, Daisy, and Gatsby are only a few of the people entangled in a web of consumerism, shallowness, and morality.

Through "The Great Gatsby," Fitzgerald criticises the tainted ideals and vapid goals that frequently go along with the pursuit of the American Dream. He makes the case that the persistent chase of wealth and social prestige can lead to moral bankruptcy and emptiness, and that real happiness and fulfilment cannot be found in worldly possessions alone. In essence, "The Great Gatsby" is a cautionary story that shows the ugly side of the American Dream and implores readers to reassess their priorities and ideals. It makes us wonder if there are more significant parts of life that merit our attention and pursuit rather than the desire of money and social position as a means to happiness.

The short story "Winter's Dream" was written when Fitzgerald was considering turning the story into a novel. The Great Gatsby was not published until 1925, while The Fall was



published in 1922, and the similarities between the novel and the short story are intentional.

“Winter Dreams” became Fitzgerald's later short style that paralleled “The Great Gatsby” but also differed in two specific respects (“Winter Dreams” 217). Protagonists Jay Gatsby and Dexter Green are two men who want to capture the American dream not only for themselves but also for their happy women. In “The Great Gatsby” and “Winter Dreams” F. Fitzgerald's timeless themes are inspired by the characters of Jay Gatsby and Dexter Green, who pursue the American dream of wealth and social status in similar ways, trying to win women what they love, but with some different paths as well.

The similarities between Jay and Dexter are obvious as you read each story. Both were from the Midwest, and although Dexter's family had some money, they were similar in that they did not start out as rich, upper-class men from wealthy families. They create their wealth, their wealth, and the relationships that come with it, through their own work and decisions, entirely at their own discretion. Both achieved their American Dream goals at a young age and were able to become part of the upper class they saw from afar. Their desire to keep the money and the benefits it brings is surprising, they want to win the girl they want and the girl will only be there for them when they have money and status.

Conclusion

Examining F. Scott Fitzgerald's books, especially “The Great Gatsby,” “The Beautiful and Damned,” and “Winter Dreams,” to examine the American Dream exposes a nuanced web of hopes, disappointments, and social criticisms. Fitzgerald's depiction of the American Dream captures both its appeal and its final hollowness, with characters pursuing wealth, prestige,



and love only to discover that they are caught up in a vicious cycle of consumerism and moral decline.

Perhaps Fitzgerald's most famous examination of the American Dream is found in *The Great Gatsby*. The story, which is set in the affluent Roaring Twenties, centers on Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire who represents the desire for wealth and social standing in an effort to win back Daisy Buchanan, the love of his life. Fitzgerald captures the appeal of the American Dream—the conviction that anybody can succeed and find happiness through hard work and perseverance—via Gatsby's expensive parties and way of life. But the sparkling exterior hides a brutal reality. Gatsby compromises his morality and commits crimes as a result of his unrelenting quest of wealth and status. Even with all of his riches and extravagance, he is still unhappy since he can't get Daisy to love him, the one thing he really wants. Fitzgerald makes the argument that pursuing the American Dream exclusively for monetary gain and social acceptance eventually results in disaster and disillusionment.

Fitzgerald examines the destructive repercussions of the American Dream on Anthony Patch and his wife Gloria in "*The Beautiful and Damned*," in a similar manner. The story, which is set against the backdrop of the Jazz Age, follows the couple as they pursue wealth and pleasure at the expense of decadence and moral degradation. Gloria revels in the accoutrements of riches and social standing, while Anthony, an aspiring writer, wastes his fortune on a carefree lifestyle. Fitzgerald reveals the futility of their goals as their marriage implodes and their hopes wane. Anthony and Gloria are caught in a vicious cycle of indulgence and disillusionment, driven by ennui and discontent despite their wealth and



status. Their narrative serves as a warning, highlighting the perils of chasing the American Dream without considering its moral and ethical ramifications.

Fitzgerald addresses these topics in "Winter Dreams," a short novella that is frequently cited as a preface to "The Great Gatsby," via the persona of Dexter Green. Similar to Gatsby, Dexter is a self-made guy who overcomes adversity to attain financial success. His unwavering quest for Judy Jones, a representation of beauty and fortune, pushes him to succeed more in order to gain her love. But just like Gatsby, Dexter eventually experiences disappointment and heartache as a result of his pursuit of the American Dream. He is not able to find contentment or satisfaction in his relationship with Judy, despite his accomplishments. Fitzgerald makes the argument that chasing the American Dream at the price of moral principles and integrity can only result in disillusionment and hopelessness.

The books of F. Scott Fitzgerald provide a powerful critique of the American Dream by highlighting its flaws and the dangers of materialism and social aspiration. Fitzgerald exposes the hollowness of a fantasy that promises prosperity and happiness but actually brings emptiness and sadness via characters like Jay Gatsby, Anthony Patch, and Dexter Green. Fitzgerald concludes by reminding us that the pursuit of meaningful relationships and moral integrity, rather than money or prestige, is what leads to true fulfillment.

The dark side of the American Dream, as well as the dangers of materialism and social aspiration, are poignantly shown in F. Scott Fitzgerald's works. Fitzgerald exposes the fallacy of a fantasy that offers riches and happiness but really brings only emptiness and sadness through characters like Jay Gatsby, Anthony Patch, and Dexter Green. Fitzgerald concludes



by reminding us that genuine fulfillment comes from pursuing meaningful relationships and moral integrity rather than pursuing wealth or prestige.

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