



AMERICA AS A PROMISED LAND: A STUDY OF FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY*

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Abstract

This study explores how *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald presents, promotes, and critiques the ideals of Americanness and the American Dream. The research particularly examines how the novel reflects themes of American exceptionalism, self-reinvention, material and spiritual development, pursuit of happiness, fair play, and egalitarianism. The study employs a qualitative research methodology and uses textual analysis as the primary research technique to interpret significant passages from the novel. The American Jeremiad serves as the theoretical framework, enabling the study to analyze the tension between America's founding ideals and its moral decline. The findings reveal that Fitzgerald simultaneously celebrates and criticizes American ideals. On one hand, *Gatsby* symbolizes hope, ambition, self-made success, and the belief in limitless opportunity, reflecting the myth of America as a promised land. On the other hand, the novel exposes the corruption of these ideals through materialism, class discrimination, moral decay, illusion, and social inequality. The study concludes that Fitzgerald portrays Americanness as both inspiring and contradictory: a vision rooted in dreams of freedom and progress, yet damaged by greed, superficiality, and the loss of spiritual and moral values. Thus, the novel functions as a modern American Jeremiad that mourns the decline of the original American Dream while still preserving faith in its possibility.

Keywords: *American Dream, American Jeremiad, Americanness, Exceptionalism.*

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1. Introduction

The idea of “Americanness” gradually came into existence through history, politics, religion, migration, and economic development. From the colonial period onward, America was imagined as a “new world” where people could escape poverty, religious persecution, and rigid class systems that existed in Europe. Early settlers, especially the Puritans, believed that America was a special land chosen by God where a new and better society could be built. Later, the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence, such as liberty, equality, individual freedom, and democracy, further shaped the concept of Americanness. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, industrial growth, westward expansion, and immigration strengthened this national identity. America increasingly presented itself as a land of opportunity where anyone, regardless of background, could achieve success through hard work. This belief later became connected with the idea of the “American Dream,” which promised social mobility, prosperity, and personal freedom (Bercovitch & Patell, 1994; Cullen, 2004).

The rise of Americanness deeply influenced different institutions, including politics, education, religion, media, and the economy. Politically, democracy and nationalism became central values that distinguished America from monarchies and colonial powers. Educational institutions promoted patriotic ideals and taught citizens to value freedom, self-reliance, and individual achievement. Economically, capitalism and consumer culture became symbols of national success, encouraging competition and personal ambition. Religious institutions also contributed by portraying America as a morally chosen nation with a special global mission (Bellah, 2017). The media, cinema, and popular culture further spread these ideas both within the country and internationally. However, Americanness was not always inclusive. Indigenous people, African Americans, immigrants, and other marginalized groups often faced discrimination and exclusion despite the national claims of equality and freedom. Therefore, the concept carried both promises of opportunity and contradictions related to race, class, and identity (Sirvent & Haiphong, 2019; Anderson, 2020).

American literature played a major role in shaping and spreading the idea of Americanness. Writers used literature to create a distinct national identity separate from European traditions. Early authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman celebrated individualism, democracy, nature, and freedom as uniquely American values. Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855) portrayed America as energetic, diverse, and full of possibilities for ordinary people. Similarly, Mark Twain presented the American spirit through regional experiences and common people, especially in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In the twentieth century, immigrant writers and African American authors also contributed to the discussion of Americanness by showing both the opportunities and inequalities of American society. Literature became a powerful medium

through which readers could imagine America as a place of hope, reinvention, and self-making, while also questioning the failures of that promise.

Several authors actively propagated the image of America as a promised land that offered endless opportunities to individuals seeking a better life. Writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, and Horatio Alger explored themes of ambition, success, and social mobility. In *The Great Gatsby*, (1925) Fitzgerald explores this dream through the character of Jay Gatsby, who rises from poverty to immense wealth in the hope of achieving happiness and social acceptance. Gatsby's luxurious lifestyle, grand parties, and self-made identity reflect the attraction of America as a land of limitless opportunity. However, Fitzgerald also critiques this ideal by showing that the American Dream is often shaped by materialism, class inequality, and illusion. Thus, this study explores how Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, (1925) propagates and promotes Americanness, making it a central theme in his work.

1.1. Significance of the study

This study is significant from a literary perspective because it examines how *The Great Gatsby* reflects and critiques the idea of Americanness through the image of America as a promised land. By exploring themes of hope, ambition, success, class mobility, and the American Dream, the research highlights how the novel presents America as a place of endless opportunities while simultaneously exposing the illusions and disappointments hidden beneath that promise. The study contributes to literary scholarship by showing how F. Scott Fitzgerald uses characters, symbols, and settings to portray the tension between dreams and reality in American society. It also deepens the understanding of how literature reflects cultural identity, national values, and social change during the Jazz Age. Furthermore, the research offers insight into the continuing relevance of the novel in discussions of materialism, identity, migration, and the pursuit of success, making it valuable for readers and scholars interested in American literature, culture, and ideology.

2. Theory and Methods

This study adopts qualitative research methodology as it focuses on understanding meanings, experiences, and social realities rather than measuring numerical data. It relies on interpretive methods such as textual analysis and observations with subjective shades (Leedy and Ormond, 2010) to explore how the novelist constructs, negotiates or propagate the phenomenon of American ideals or Americanness. For the conceptual guidance, the study draws its inspiration from the concept of Americanness, which is rooted in the idea of immigrants and settlers who have come to the United States in search of a new life and a new identity. For the theoretical interpretation of the selected texts, the study utilizes the theory of the American Jeremiad proposed by Sacvan Bercovitch (1978). For the textual analysis, this study adopts Catherine Belsey's textual analysis technique (Griffin, 2005),

which critically examines, synthesizes, and interprets both the explicit and implicit meanings to create new meanings within the text(s).

3. Analysis of The Great Gatsby

This section analyses the selected text against the defined theoretical markers which are closely related to the concept of Americanness.

3.1. American Exceptionalism

Gatsby embodies the exceptionalist ideal of self-reinvention, rising from humble origins to immense wealth, a testament to America as a land of material opportunity. His dream of winning Daisy is both romantic and symbolic—a belief that the past can be remade through willpower, echoing the nation's faith in limitless progress. The Great Gatsby by Fitzgerald, at many places reflects theme of American exceptionalism. For example, this quote “*Whenever you feel like criticizing any one, he told me, ‘just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had’*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 3) reflects the theme of American exceptionalism by touching on privilege, moral responsibility, and a sense of national superiority shaped by personal advantage. Nick's father's advice shows and acknowledges unequal advantages—whether social, economic, or educational. In the context of American exceptionalism, this echoes the belief that Americans are born into a position of moral and cultural leadership. It reinforces the idea that those with “advantages” (like Nick’s family) are custodians of virtue and judgment, mirroring the nation's own myth of being uniquely blessed and destined for leadership. This connects to the Puritan roots of the American Jeremiad, where America is not just special but must live up to its exceptional destiny through moral behavior. The advice encourages restraint in judgment, which mirrors the American ideal of being fair-minded, tolerant, and morally superior—not in arrogance, but in responsibility.

American exceptionalism is the belief that America has a unique mission—to offer a model of freedom, democracy, and moral virtue—and that it holds a special place in history. Gatsby, as described here, “*Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction... it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 4) embodies a core ideal of this myth: the unwavering belief in self-renewal, reinvention, and the possibility of achieving one's dreams regardless of origins. Gatsby's extraordinary “gift of hope” is not just personal but mythic—it reflects the deeply American belief in boundless possibility and upward mobility. This readiness to pursue the impossible ideal links to the spirit of the American Dream—an almost sacred belief in self-made success and spiritual elevation through individual effort. He rises from nothing and believes in transformation, embodying the promise of the American Dream. Just like Americans, Gatsby believes he can reclaim the past and build a life of spiritual and material perfection. So, Gatsby

becomes a symbol of American exceptionalism, not because he succeeds, but because he dares to believe in something greater and persists in the belief.

These lines also embody the theme of American exceptionalism, as “*The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 105), the phrase “sprang from his Platonic conception of himself” portrays Gatsby as self-created, embodying the ideal that one can invent himself totally anew in America—a central tenet of American exceptionalism. Here Gatsby becomes a self-made figure, born not from reality but from idealism, echoing the myth of America as a place where individuals can reinvent themselves and transcend class. Gatsby doesn’t just have ambition; he believes in a perfected, idealized self that transcends his humble origins—mirroring the American myth that anyone can rise through will, vision, and effort, making America an opportunistic land. Furthermore, “He was a son of God” suggests that Gatsby is a chosen one, with a kind of divine mission, aligning with the Puritan idea of America as a “city upon a hill.” So, Gatsby mirrors America’s idealized self-image—a land of limitless reinvention, renewal, moral mission, and destiny.

In this context, Gatsby is a believer in America’s promise—his faith in self-creation and the Dream echoes the Puritan belief in being “chosen” and in pursuing a moral, ideal society. However, his dream is corrupted by materialism, illusion, and moral decay. The self he builds is hollow because it’s built on false foundations. Gatsby, as “a son of God,” should embody spiritual greatness, but instead, he perishes in a morally bankrupt society. The novel mourns the fall from the promise of American exceptionalism into the moral wasteland. Gatsby’s fate warns that without a moral core, the American Dream becomes a delusion. “*I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 62).

This line captures the spirit of urban America in the 1920s—fast-paced, energetic, and filled with movement, modernity, and human ambition. New York is portrayed as a place of vibrant dynamism with a “racy, adventurous feel” with technological advancement (machines flickering through the city) and individual freedom and opportunity (a place where the restless eye is constantly satisfied). In the context of American exceptionalism, this reflects the idea that America is unique among nations—especially in its ability to inspire, innovate, and offer limitless reinvention. The city becomes a microcosm of the American dream—a space where possibilities are endless and life is in constant motion. It affirms the national myth that America is not only different but better—defined by energy, ambition, and forward momentum. It’s a vision of modern America as the pinnacle of progress, a place unlike any other in the world.

In reference to theme of America as exceptional or promised land, this line “*Americans, while occasionally willing to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 95), presents the heart of American exceptionalism—the belief that the United States is uniquely destined to transcend Old World class systems and embody the ideals of liberty, mobility, and opportunity. Fitzgerald contrasts “serfs” and “peasantry” to convey how Americans may accept temporary servitude (like working under capitalism or conforming to social norms) as long as they believe they can eventually rise, own, and transcend. “Serfs” implies a willing submission to systems of labor or inequality *for a time*, but “peasantry”—being trapped in a static, inherited, lower-class status—is antithetical to the American identity. The American psyche rejects permanence in social inferiority.

In Gatsby’s world, this belief plays out in his refusal to remain James Gatz, the son of poor North Dakota farmers. Gatsby reinvents himself, acquires immense wealth, and builds a mansion to rival European aristocracy—a theatrical assertion of his belief in upward mobility and self-made destiny, hallmarks of American exceptionalism. Americans reject peasantry—they believe in freedom, equality, and upward mobility. This reflects the Puritan idea of a chosen nation, meant to be better than the old, class-ridden Europe. Yet the willingness to be “serfs,” though occasional, reflects how Americans do submit to corrupt systems, like economic exploitation, class anxiety, and empty materialism. Thus, the line subtly warns that the illusion of exceptionalism, when astray from genuine virtue or meaning, leads to tragedy.

Well, if that’s the idea you can count me out.... Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they’ll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white.’ Flushed with his impassioned gibberish he saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization (Fitzgerald, 1925, Pp, 138-39).

This passage also refers to a critical moment in *The Great Gatsby*, where Tom Buchanan expresses his fear and resentment toward what he perceives as the breakdown of traditional American values. He believes he represents civilization—white, patriarchal, and upper-class—and that this civilization is under threat from modern social changes such as interclass and interracial mixing. His alarm over “sneering at family life” and interracial marriage reflects a belief that American identity is tied to racial purity and traditional values—a belief historically used to justify exclusion and domination. He sees Gatsby, a self-made man of unclear background, as symbolic of moral decay and the erosion of the old elite’s cultural dominance. He relates moral decline with racial mixing, suggesting that when the established social order breaks down, so too does the nation’s exceptional identity. The idea of being “on the last barrier of civilization” suggests that Tom imagines himself as the last defender of American greatness. He presents racial mixing and moral

liberalism as threats to traditional family life and social hierarchy and the nation's survival. Here, Tom sees himself as a defender of old values, implicitly urging a return to the social and racial norms that once defined civilized and exceptional status in America.

3.2. Land of Material and Spiritual Development

The selected passage richly portrays the theme of material success. This quote by Nick Carraway, the narrator, highlights how American identity—especially in the early 20th century—was often rooted in economic foundations and business success. “*My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this middle-western city for three generations... the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother who came here in fifty-one... and started the wholesale hardware business...*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, Pp. 4-5), here, his family's social standing is tied not to aristocracy or inherited titles (as in Europe), but to the entrepreneurial efforts of an ancestor who took advantage of America's economic opportunities. The mention of “three generations” of prosperity reflects how American families built legacies through hard work, enterprise, and industry—especially during the post-industrial revolution period. The “middle-western city” underscores the idea that material development wasn't limited to the coasts. The Midwest, often seen as the “heartland” of America, became a symbol of solid, respectable, business-based growth, contrasting with the speculative wealth of other places. This passage shows how economic initiative and business ownership became a path to social respectability and identity. It affirms the notion that material success could be earned and passed down in the American context, forming the foundation of one's status in American society.

There is another passage that captures Nick Carraway's personal disillusionment with the traditional values of the American heartland and his attraction to the material opportunities of the East Coast, reflecting a broader cultural shift. “*Instead of being the warm center of the world the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—so I decided to go east and learn the bond business*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 5). The Middle West, once perceived by Nick as “the warm center of the world,” symbolizes wholesome, stable, and moral American roots—community, family, and honesty—and is now perceived as “the ragged edge of the universe”—outdated and disconnected from the modern American ideal. His decision to “go East and learn the bond business” underscores how the East has become the new center of ambition, wealth, and status—an emblem of America's transformation into a land driven by financial gain and material progress. This shift in geography parallels the redefinition of the American Dream. Where the dream once emphasized hard work, virtue, and self-reliance, it is now increasingly equated with quick wealth, social climbing, and economic speculation—as represented by the bond business. Nick's choice reflects the seductive pull of capitalist success, but as the novel unfolds, the East reveals itself to be morally hollow, corrupt, and spiritually bankrupt. Nick's earlier perception of the Midwest as “the warm center of the world” represents an idealized

version of America: wholesome, rooted, moral, and spiritually centered. This aligns with the first phase of the American Jeremiad—America as a “city on a hill,” a nation guided by virtue and a higher purpose. The passage then shifts to disillusionment: “the ragged edge of the universe” suggests that the Midwest has lost its vitality and significance. It reflects a personal and national fall from grace.

Similarly, in this quote, “*I bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities... like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 6), Nick Carraway, the narrator, describes his early enthusiasm for financial success by buying books on banking and investment. He compares them to “new money from the mint,” suggesting a sense of freshness, possibility, and the allure of immediate wealth. The reference to Midas, Morgan, and Maecenas invokes historical and mythical icons of wealth and patronage. These names combine material wealth (Midas, Morgan) and spiritual or artistic patronage (Maecenas), creating a complex image of American aspiration. This passage critically presents America as a land of material development, especially during the 1920s—an era of economic boom, consumerism, and the rise of Wall Street. The books represent the promise of financial self-education and upward mobility, aligning with the idea that anyone, regardless of background, can rise to wealth through knowledge and effort. Nick’s hope to master the “shining secrets” of finance mirrors the new capitalist religion of money, where economic knowledge becomes sacred and success becomes a moral measure. In the larger context of the novel, this passage illustrates how the American Dream—originally about self-betterment and moral growth—has been corrupted. What once was a dream of individual dignity and spiritual progress has been reduced to a scramble for wealth and status.

I’ve got a man in England who buys me clothes. He sends over a selection of things at the beginning of each season, spring and fall”. “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 (Fitzgerald, 1925, Pp. 99-100).

This quote from *The Great Gatsby* “I’ve got a man in England who buys me clothes” exemplifies Gatsby’s wealth and his attempt to impress Daisy through material display. Clothes from England, a symbol of elite taste and transatlantic prestige, represent his effort to remake himself and attain social acceptance. This aligns with the material development side of the American dream. Meanwhile, reducing distance enlightens the spiritual side. The green light symbolizes hope, an idealized future, a near-mystical vision of love and success. Gatsby believes he can recreate the past and attain a perfect union of love and success—a deeply American belief in reinvention. Gatsby’s journey mirrors the trajectory of the American Jeremiad: the dream of spiritual and material fulfillment.

He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 103).

The quote "*He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion*" shows Gatsby's imaginative effort to build a dream—not just of wealth, but of love, belonging, and identity. His "creative passion" highlights the spiritual intensity once associated with the American Dream. He doesn't passively pursue wealth; he actively constructs a possibility and redemption. Gatsby embodies the early Puritan ideal of America as a place to build something spiritually meaningful. The phrase "decking it out with every bright feather" suggests that Gatsby's dream has become largely ornamental, decorated with "feathers" of wealth and status. On the other hand, this powerful imagery also suggests a gradual shift from hope to illusion and consumerism, reflecting American Jeremiad's warning. While "ghostly heart" suggests death and loss, which means Gatsby's dream has ultimately become a memory, making him a victim of this dream. His dream, like America's, has become corrupted by materialism and illusion. Thus, this line epitomizes the tragedy of the American Dream. Gatsby's imaginative pursuit of happiness, while admirable, becomes a cautionary tale. Through his ghostly longing, Fitzgerald critiques a society that idolizes material success while neglecting moral and spiritual grounding—the very concern at the heart of the American jeremiad.

He was employed in a vague personal capacity—while he remained with Cody he was in turn steward, mate, skip per, secretary, and even jailor, for Dan Cody sober knew what lavish doings Dan Cody drunk might soon be about and he provided for such contingencies by reposing more and more trust in Gatsby. The arrangement lasted five years during which the boat went three times around the continent (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 107).

This passage explains Gatsby's role and identity as fluid and undefined. His identity as "*steward, mate, skip per, secretary, and even jailor,*" suggests his ambition without any proper structure while his loyalty and adaptability reflect the ideal of the self-made man, a central myth of American identity. On the other hand, Cody represents material success. The boat's wandering hints at purposeless luxury and could be a metaphor for the aimlessness of wealth without spiritual direction. This reflects the Jeremiadic message that America, a promised and spiritual land is gradually being wasted with excessive focus on materialism. Through the American Jeremiad lens, this passage shows Gatsby as an emblem of the American Dream's promise and distortion. He gains experience, exposure, and ambition through Cody — the material side of America. The passage, thus critiques the American life — material development without spiritual maturity—preserving a glimpse of hope in Gatsby's moral loyalty and yearning for something greater.

He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning fork that had been struck upon a star (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 119).

Gatsby is about to kiss Daisy, but at the very moment, he pauses because something important strikes his mind. He understands that this kiss will unite his idealistic dreams, his “unutterable visions,” with the reality of Daisy’s physical presence, her “perishable breath.” He knows if once he binds his transcendent dream to something earthly and mortal, it will be limited and diminished. Prior to this moment, his dream had been pure, limitless, and godlike, not bound by any limitations of this superficial real life. “Romp like the mind of God” hints at the freedom and creative power of Gatsby’s imagination. He knows that after the kiss that imaginative and spiritual striving will be over. “So, he waited” shows his delay to that perfect moment of unfulfilled potential of spiritual maturity. His contradictory situation shows his collision between his spiritual idealism (dream) and materialism and mortality (reality).

This quote from the novel “*The lawn and drive had been crowded with the faces of those who guessed at his corruption—and he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream, as he waved them goodbye*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 165) reflects the declining phase of Gatsby’s party that is crowded with the people who suspect the worst of him. The “faces” of the crowd may represent the society at large that has become superficial, judgmental, and blind to deeper values. It shows how the public generally has turned the dream of self-made success into suspicion. Similarly, Gatsby represents the American Dream, once a spiritual and moral aspiration, now tainted by materialism and cynicism. The phrase “concealing his incorruptible dream” represents the ideal state of Gatsby’s dream, not merely for Daisy but also for her pure and spiritual longing for a transcendent vision of self-creation and fulfillment. The phrase echoes the Jeremiad’s idea that beneath apparent outward decline, the original moral vision may still be alive, though hidden.

“*This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat...*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 26) this vivid description of the valley of ashes in *The Great Gatsby* is deeply symbolic. It evokes a bleak moral landscape in stark contrast to the idealized vision of America as a land of opportunity, virtue, and spiritual growth. Originally, the American Dream was founded on spiritual ideals—a belief in hard work, honesty, and moral progress leading to both individual and collective uplift. However, Fitzgerald’s “valley of ashes” presents a grotesque reversal of that dream: instead of fertile soil producing wheat (a biblical symbol of life, nourishment, and abundance), we see a land where ashes grow like wheat—a place where moral and spiritual decay have replaced growth and prosperity.

This setting, located between the wealthy West Egg and the commercial hub of New York, represents the human cost of industrial capitalism and hedonistic materialism. A system that has traded moral substance for surface wealth has left the people inhabiting this space—including George Wilson—spiritually withered and socially abandoned. Thus, this line paints America not as a land of spiritual elevation but as one where moral death masquerades as progress and where hope has been buried under the ashes of greed. The American Jeremiad is a rhetorical tradition that mourns the nation's moral backsliding while calling for a return to its founding spiritual mission. Fitzgerald's valley of ashes, however, illustrates a nation so far fallen from its spiritual calling that it no longer recognizes the need for redemption.

The line "*It took me just three years to earn the money that bought it*" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 96), reflects a central tension in *The Great Gatsby*—the dual nature of America as both a land of material success and spiritual aspiration. On the surface, Gatsby's declaration is a triumph of material achievement. In just three years, he amassed the wealth needed to purchase a grand mansion—symbolic of the American promise that anyone, regardless of background, can achieve prosperity through hard work and ambition. This line exemplifies the rags-to-riches narrative deeply rooted in American cultural identity. It positions America as a place where rapid social mobility and economic success are possible—even if, as in Gatsby's case, the methods are morally ambiguous. His house, opulent and extravagant, is a physical monument to his success, mirroring the materialistic aspect of the American Dream. Gatsby's economic achievement is a means to recreate the past and fulfill an emotional and romantic ideal. Thus, America becomes a place where the material can be transformed into the spiritual, where wealth is used to construct a dream that transcends mere possession.

Gatsby's achievement is emblematic of the American Dream: rapid success, mobility, and prosperity through personal effort. However, Gatsby's wealth stems from shady dealings. The source of his money is morally ambiguous, suggesting that the means have been corrupted. Fitzgerald implicitly calls for a reevaluation of American ideals—to renew the soul of the dream, not just its material face. This aligns with the final movement of the American Jeremiad: the necessity to redeem the original vision by acknowledging failure and striving for moral renewal.

There is another line that critically explains the ideals of the American Dream, especially the myth of the self-made man. "*I can tell you right now,*' she answered. *'He owned some drug stores, a lot of drug stores. He built them up himself'*" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 116). This statement is Daisy's explanation to Tom about Gatsby's wealth. She claims Gatsby built his fortune by owning and developing a chain of drugstores—on the surface, a symbol of entrepreneurial success and legitimate business. This line encapsulates one of the central promises of America that through individual effort, initiative, and ambition,

anyone—regardless of social background—can achieve economic success. “He built them up himself” reflects the ideal of self-reliance, a foundational American virtue. This belief in merit-based advancement is a pillar of American exceptionalism, particularly the idea that America offers a unique environment for upward mobility through material achievement. The line, thus, supports the ideal of America as a land of material development—where men like Gatsby can build themselves from the ground up. The line praises Gatsby’s material development, which reflects one part of the American Dream: that one can rise through hard work and personal effort. However, within the Jeremiad framework, this praise is hollow because Gatsby’s wealth exposes the moral shortcuts behind success. Thus, the line becomes a modern Jeremiad lament that America has fulfilled its promise of material abundance, but in doing so, it has forsaken its moral and spiritual ideals.

“*He had a big future before him, you know... If he’d of lived he’d of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He’d of helped build up the country*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 179), Spoken by Gatsby’s father, Mr. Gatz, this line mourns the death of his son by placing Gatsby in the tradition of great American self-made men—specifically James J. Hill, the railroad magnate who symbolized progress, industry, and national development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. To Mr. Gatz, Gatsby’s rise from poverty to wealth—regardless of the means—is a symbol of the American ideal. He views Gatsby not as a bootlegger or a dreamer chasing illusions, but as someone who could have contributed to the growth of the nation, just like the industrialists who helped shape modern America. Gatsby is imagined as someone who would have “*built up the country,*” tying his personal success to national economic progress. By invoking James J. Hill, a real railroad tycoon, Fitzgerald connects Gatsby to the industrial expansion and capitalist success that defined America’s growth. Gatsby does achieve material success, but his spiritual development is stunted—his inner life revolves around an illusion. Gatsby, in Mr. Gatz’s eyes, embodied America’s promise. But Fitzgerald uses this to expose the disconnection between the ideal and the real—between the vision of America as a place of national progress and the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of its modern pursuit.

Mr. Gatz’s statement affirms America’s founding ideal that anyone, regardless of origin, can rise through talent and ambition to become a great man and contribute to national progress. It mirrors the Puritan ideal of a city upon a hill, presenting America as a moral and industrious example to the world. He links Gatsby to James J. Hill, a builder of infrastructure and wealth, framing Gatsby as someone who could have advanced both personal success and national good. But Fitzgerald uses this affirmation ironically. The reader knows Gatsby’s rise was through illicit means, not virtuous labor. His greatness was not in nation-building but in chasing a personal illusion. This irony enacts the lamentation phase of the jeremiad suggesting that America has strayed from its original

promise. The culture now rewards appearance over substance, materialism over morality, and fantasy over purpose. Gatsby's downfall represents the nation's spiritual failure—a society where dreams are hollow and ambition is corrupted.

3.3. Pursuit of happiness, Fair play and Egalitarianism

Americans are repeatedly told—through frontier lore, rags to riches tales, and even the Declaration's language of "pursuit of happiness"—that one can always start fresh. "*I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer*" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 6). On a surface level the taken sentence merely records a seasonal mood swing, but it also plugs Nick into two core American myths. "Familiar conviction"—the phrase signals that the feeling is culturally ingrained, not idiosyncratic. Summer has been presented as the apex of possibility. In agrarian logic, spring is planting, and summer is flourishing. Nick's optimism arrives just when New York's social scene is about to "flower," mirroring national narratives that locate opportunity at the peak of growth and abundance. The feeling that "life was beginning over again" encourages characters to treat the past as irrelevant. That mindset allows Gatsby to believe he can literally rewrite time with Daisy, a delusion the novel slowly dismantles. By the novel's end, the "familiar conviction" feels naïve. The season that promised fair play instead exposes systemic unfairness, culminating in Gatsby's death and the Buchanans' effortless escape from accountability.

I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before,' he said, nodding determinedly. 'She'll see.' He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 118).

Gatsby's declaration, "*I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before,*" reveals his fixation on reclaiming past happiness—a romanticized version of life with Daisy. This illustrates a *distorted* pursuit of happiness: rather than looking forward, Gatsby looks backward. He imagines that happiness is in recreating an idealized moment in time. Instead of achieving the dream through moral effort and progress, Gatsby seeks it through material excess. Gatsby's entire life is built on the idea of reinventing himself to attain success—but not through entirely honest means. His shady business dealings contradict the American ideal of fair play. His belief that he can "fix everything" and "recover" Daisy, as if she is a reward he deserves for his efforts, further subverts the idea of fair competition and mutual agency. Gatsby represents a deeply Jeremiadic figure—his dream mirrors the original American promise, but his downfall exemplifies the tragic consequences of a nation straying from its ideals. His obsessive desire to win Daisy, a symbol of that old-world class, reveals the deep inequalities and rigid social structures that undermine the egalitarian ideal. The passage reveals Gatsby's internalized sense of inadequacy. He's not just pursuing Daisy but "some idea of himself" that he believes was once pure or worthy.

The line, “*And I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 20), spoken by Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*, is a deeply ironic and critical reflection on gender inequality and social injustice in early 20th-century America. Egalitarianism promotes equality of all people, particularly in terms of social, political, and economic rights. Daisy’s statement, however, underscores the absence of gender equality. Her hope that her daughter becomes a “fool” is not a sincere wish but rather a bitter commentary on a society that offers women no real autonomy, value, or power beyond their beauty and submission. Daisy implicitly recognizes the structural constraints placed on women. Intelligence or awareness in a woman, in such a patriarchal world, leads only to disillusionment and suffering. Therefore, she believes ignorance—being a “fool”—is a kind of protective shield in a world where women are denied equal footing. From the perspective of the American jeremiad, Daisy’s dialogue can be interpreted as a modern secular jeremiad, mourning the moral decay and hypocrisy of the American Dream. The dream that promises equal opportunity but enforces rigid gender roles and class divisions. The ideal of a just and fair America is exposed as hollow.

There was dancing now on the canvas in the garden, old men pushing young girls backward in eternal grace less circles, superior couples holding each other tortuously, fashionably and keeping in the corners—and a great number of single girls dancing individualistically or relieving the orchestra for a moment of the burden of the banjo or the traps (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 51).

The selected lines depict a vibrant scene from *Gatsby*’s party where a diverse group of people—old men, young girls, superior couples, and single women—are dancing together, freely occupying the same social space. This moment temporarily embodies the ideal of egalitarianism and fair play in America, where distinctions of age, class, and gender seem to dissolve under the shared spirit of festivity. The intermingling of “old men” and “young girls,” “superior couples,” and “single girls” suggests a breakdown of rigid boundaries, evoking an ideal America where everyone is entitled to joy, self-expression, and presence. Even the phrase “*dancing individualistically*” points to personal freedom—a key feature of egalitarian ideology in America. *Gatsby*’s parties, in this sense, reflect a microcosm of American democratic ideals, where status and background are superficially irrelevant and access to pleasure and entertainment appears universal. In the American jeremiad perspective, this moment of dancing represents the “promise” stage, a vision of an egalitarian society where people, regardless of class or age, come together in joy.

This quote from the novel, “*I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that... I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 62) reflects Nick’s inner longing for emotional fulfillment, romantic adventure, and personal connection—all as essential

elements of the American ideal of happiness. The ability to imagine entering someone's life suggests that in America, happiness is a personal right, and everyone is free to pursue dreams and relationships regardless of social background. He envisions a world where social class, gender expectations, or reputation do not prevent personal choice, and where human connection is unbound by rigid rules. The setting—Fifth Avenue, a public space—symbolizes a shared national space where all people, rich or poor, pass and blend together. His fantasy of mingling freely with strangers reflects the American belief in social fluidity and equal opportunity for intimacy, reinvention, and connection. In Nick's vision, everyone is potentially accessible, which embodies the egalitarian dream. Nick's idealistic vision of free, romantic possibility reflects the original American promise: a land where anyone can pursue happiness freely and equally. But this fantasy also has a dark, escapist undertone—he imagines entering lives secretly, “and no one would ever know or disapprove,” which hints at a moral erosion, a retreat into fantasy rather than real relationships. Thus, the line reflects a jeremiadic tension where America promises freedom, happiness, and equality, but modern life has turned that promise into lonely illusions, surface-level fantasies, and emotional detachment.

In the same way, this line, “*He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American*” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 69), captures Gatsby's physical restlessness, a symbolic expression of his emotional and existential longing—his constant striving for something more. The phrase “*resourcefulness of movement*” reflects Gatsby's resilient spirit, ingenuity, and tireless dedication to his ideal life, the embodiment of his dream. Fitzgerald calls this resourcefulness “*peculiarly American*,” alluding to a national ethos: the belief that through ambition, effort, and charisma, one can rise above their station and pursue a better life. Gatsby's self-made persona, reinvented through sheer will, reflects this myth of upward mobility and individual freedom. The American Dream ideal promises that everyone competes on equal footing—that success comes from talent, hard work, and integrity. Yet Gatsby's “resourcefulness” implies he had to bend or break rules to achieve visibility and status in a world closed off to outsiders like him. Hence, his pursuit of happiness is not grounded in fairness but rather in strategic performance within a society where fair play is a fiction for those born without power.

Gatsby embodies the original promise of America—a man of modest background using ingenuity and drive to build a better future. But Gatsby's means of achieving happiness—bootlegging, social lying, illusion—reflect a moral and societal failure. The society around him rewards wealth and appearance, not virtue or honesty. Gatsby's “*peculiarly American*” resourcefulness reflects a national spirit of ambition and striving—but also highlights the corruption of that spirit in a society where fair play no longer exists and happiness is chased through illusion.

As we crossed Blackwell's Island a limousine passed us, driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish Negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 74).

This brief scene is symbolically rich and captures a momentary inversion of social hierarchy. A limousine (a symbol of wealth and status) occupied by three well-dressed African Americans "modish Negroes" and driven by a white chauffeur is a clear reversal of expected racial roles in a deeply segregated society. In this context, it suggests a glimpse of egalitarianism and the American ideal that anyone, regardless of race or origin, can rise to prosperity. The "haughty rivalry" in the glances exchanged implies assertiveness and pride, qualities historically denied or suppressed in Black individuals under white-dominated society. Their demeanor suggests an emerging sense of equality or even superiority in that moment—a challenge to the racial order. This moment can be read as a flash of the American Dream in action, offering a glimpse that in America status might be achieved regardless of background. Yet, it is undermined by the racial language "bucks" and the mocking tone, suggesting that such upward mobility, particularly for Black Americans, is still viewed with skepticism, if not ridicule.

This line "*He had waited five years and bought a mansion where he dispensed star light to casual moths so that he could 'come over' some afternoon to a stranger's garden*" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 85) taken from the Great Gatsby captures Gatsby's idealized pursuit

of happiness, rooted in his dream of reuniting with Daisy. His actions embody the American Dream—the belief that with enough determination and wealth, one can achieve personal fulfillment and happiness. The phrase "waited five years" reflects Gatsby's long, patient hope and emotional investment in a dream. While "Bought a mansion" represents

material success, it was acquired not for luxury but to win back love. His lavish parties were not genuine social events but bait, hoping Daisy would appear. The "moths" are symbolic of people drawn to the glitter, unaware of his deeper purpose. The simplicity of his desire "to come over" juxtaposed against his massive effort shows that his happiness is not rooted in wealth itself, but in emotional and spiritual fulfillment. This line resonates with the jeremiadic structure that Gatsby's dream has noble roots—a pure, emotional goal (love, belonging, happiness)—but he pursues it through materialism and illusion, echoing America's moral decline; the dream of happiness is corrupted into a dream of wealth. The fact that Gatsby becomes estranged from his dream—needing to ask a stranger (Nick) to arrange a meeting—emphasizes how far removed he is from authentic human connection.

There is another line that also deals with inner world of conflict. "*She wanted her life shaped now, immediately—and the decision must be made by some force—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—that was close at hand*" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 161). This line reveals Daisy's inner conflict and how she conceptualizes happiness—not as an

abstract ideal, but as something that must be immediate, tangible, and secure. Her pursuit of happiness is not based purely on emotional or spiritual fulfillment, but on what is practical, socially acceptable, and materially safe. “She wanted her life shaped now, immediately” reflects Daisy’s impatience and fear of uncertainty. She is pressured to define her future quickly, suggesting that happiness must be achieved quickly and without risk. This scene foreshadows her decision to choose Tom over Gatsby. “The decision must be made by some force—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality” shows that Daisy is torn between love (Gatsby), money and stability (Tom), and practicality (social expectations, family pressure, and the status quo). Her idea of happiness is shaped by all three, but in the end, money and practicality win, showing that the pursuit of happiness has been corrupted by materialism and societal pressure. She chooses what is easily accessible and secure—Tom Buchanan “that was close at hand.” Gatsby, despite representing a more romantic version of happiness, is a risk, a dream, not a certainty.

The American Jeremiad is a rhetorical tradition that blends lamentation and hope. It criticizes the moral and spiritual decline of America, warning that the nation has strayed from its founding ideals—particularly the promise of the American Dream, equality, and individual liberty—but always calls for renewal and return to those principles. Daisy’s need for “unquestionable practicality” and her inability to pursue love alone reflect a moral decline. The American promise of happiness based on love, merit, and freedom of choice has degenerated into choosing money and security. Her decision warns readers of how the pursuit of happiness has been distorted by social class, capitalism, and fear of instability—a key concern in the Jeremiad: that materialism is replacing virtue in American life.

“If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 172). The line from *The Great Gatsby* is a deeply poignant moment in the novel that carries rich thematic weight, particularly in relation to the pursuit of happiness and the American Jeremiad tradition. This line captures the emotional and existential cost of Gatsby’s obsessive pursuit of an idealized dream—a dream that is, at its core, the American Dream: self-made success, love, reinvention, and the promise that with enough effort, anything is possible. The phrase “lost the old warm world” suggests that the dream he has pursued has alienated him from reality, from authentic human experience, and from the present. While “paid a high price” signals the emotional, psychological, and ultimately fatal toll of pursuing a dream that is founded on illusion—Daisy was never his to reclaim, and the social world he aspired to join never truly accepted him. He has allowed his dream to consume his entire identity.

In the same context, the American Jeremiad laments the moral and spiritual decline of the nation and warns of its consequences. Gatsby believed in a personal version of the American Dream—a belief in reinvention, prosperity, love, and ultimate happiness. This mirrors the national myth of America as a land of new beginnings, a “city upon a hill.”

Just as the Jeremiad warns of punishment for abandoning foundational ideals, Gatsby's demise is portrayed as a moral and spiritual consequence of a society that elevates wealth, appearance, and status over truth and justice. Gatsby's dream is not destroyed merely by personal flaws but by the corruption of the American society he lives in. Gatsby's pursuit of happiness ends not in fulfillment, but in emptiness and loss. His death is not just his failure but America's—a failure to uphold its own promise of opportunity and reward based on merit and hope.

4. Conclusion

The critical analysis of the *The Great Gatsby*, leads to the conclusion that Fitzgerald both promotes and critiques the ideals of Americanness through Gatsby's rise, dream, and tragic downfall. On one hand, the novel celebrates core American ideals such as self-reinvention, ambition, upward mobility, and the pursuit of happiness. Gatsby's transformation from poor James Gatz into the wealthy Jay Gatsby reflects the exceptionalist belief that America is a land where anyone can remake himself and achieve greatness through determination and hope. His unwavering faith in the future, symbolized by the green light, mirrors the national myth of limitless possibility and progress. At the same time, Fitzgerald exposes how these ideals have become corrupted by materialism, class prejudice, greed, and moral decay. Gatsby's dream, though noble in spirit, is built upon illusion and dishonest wealth, while the society he longs to join remains shallow, careless, and exclusionary. Characters like Tom and Daisy Buchanan represent a morally bankrupt elite who preserve privilege while destroying others without consequence. Through the valley of ashes, failed relationships, and Gatsby's tragic death, Fitzgerald critiques an America that has abandoned its spiritual and moral foundations in favor of wealth and social status. Thus, the novel functions like an American Jeremiad: it mourns the decline of the original American Dream while simultaneously preserving hope in its lost ideals. Fitzgerald ultimately suggests that Americanness contains both extraordinary promise and deep contradiction—offering dreams of freedom and reinvention, yet often betraying them through inequality, materialism, and moral emptiness.

5. Limitations of the study

This study analyzed the selected text critically, but certain limitations must be acknowledged. One limitation of this study is that it focuses primarily on *The Great Gatsby* as a single literary text, which may limit broader generalizations about Americanness in all American literature. The study mainly relies on textual and thematic analysis, so interpretations may remain subjective and influenced by the researcher's perspective. Moreover, the research concentrates largely on themes of American exceptionalism, materialism, and the American Dream, while giving less attention to other important dimensions such as gender, race, and historical-economic contexts in greater depth. The

study is also limited to the socio-cultural setting of the 1920s America presented in the novel, which may not fully represent contemporary understandings of Americanness.

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