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EXTENDED ESSAY

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Research Question: *How does the notion of the American Dream coincides with the main character Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel 'The Great Gatsby' regarding to the social structure and the progression in1920s?*

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ABSTRACT

F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of the writers that have the aim to reflect the decadence of the society in American literature with the affect of the astray structure of the 1920s, which is mostly known as the ‘Jazz Age’. The essentials of the ‘Jazz Age’ are depicted in Fitzgerald’s novel ‘The Great Gatsby’ in every aspect. The enchanting texture of the era is given in a solid interactive relation with the notion of the ‘American Dream’ in the novel. The main character Jay Gatsby is portrayed as a man who thoroughly meets the requirements of the ‘American Dream’ while perfectly mirroring the exaggerated luster of the 1920s.

The extended essay concerns about the progression and the alteration of the ‘American Dream’ in the novel ‘The Great Gatsby’ while analyzing the extreme resemblance between the evolution of the ‘American Dream’ and the evolution of the main character Gatsby with a dialectical approach. The first section of the essay, the introduction, targets to give background information about the ‘American Dream’ and the ‘Jazz Age’ and also targets to relate these notions to the novel. The following part is composed of the assessment of the character Gatsby to construe the birth, progress and the downfall of the ‘American Dream’ and to describe the interpretation of the ‘Jazz Age’ in the novel. Ultimately, the conclusion will justify the indistinguishability of Gatsby and the ‘American Dream’.

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I. INTRODUCTION

‘The American Dream’ is a notion that reflects an idealized form of lifestyle in many aspects. By putting forward the ‘The Epic of America’ Thomas Truslow Adams raised the thought of the ‘American Dream’. Truslow had clearly specified the very first and pure version of the idea, as stated in his own words: *“a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. (...) a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.”*(Adams, James 404) Truslow’s definition of the American dream was accepted as the basis of the notion. The American Dream focuses on prosperity for all men and women regardless of not only their social and cultural stations but also their ethnicity, religion and race. According to the idea, aforementioned prosperity can only be grasped through self-improvement and hard work. When the qualifications of the American Dream are taken into consideration, it would be noticed that ‘The Declaration of Independence’ corresponds to the American dream of every single perspective. The Declaration of Independence defends that every man has inviolable rights such as life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and it also emphasizes that women and men are free to endeavor, improve and finally achieve success. Hence, it can be said that the roots of the American Dream is actually based on The Declaration of Independence and it gained a specific name with Truslow’s definition. The American Dream targets the amelioration of the American nation as one and it expects to see amelioration -in means of social classes- as a result.

The American Dream can be illustrated as a flawless infinite loop. Each factor ignites the following factor, so that a continuously performing system can be formed. The factors -affecting each other- of the American Dream can be considered as ‘life and freedom of an individual’, ‘hard-work’, ‘success’ ‘prosperity’ and ‘upward social mobility’. A working and free individual will lead to success, therefore, prosperity and eventually upward social mobility. As a consequence, a strong development will be observed in every part of the society. Finally it will come back to the initial factor

and will go on in the same direction. This idea can guide the society into utopia in theory but putting this idea into practice is not as easy as it is thought. The reason for that, in one respect, it aims for overall perfection therefore, overall improvement. That's the point where the thought of the American Dream goes under the wrecking ball because; the effort of chasing perfection would be inconclusive.

The era between the years 1920-1929 have a great significance in terms of the bilateral development, positive and negative, of the American Dream, the era is known as 'The Jazz Age' or 'The Roaring Twenties'. In order to comprehend the progression of the American Dream throughout the years, 'Jazz Age' should be recognized. The major cities in the world had encountered with similar situations throughout these years. The positive and negative developments that happened during this era, in United States of America, have a great influence on the downfall of the American Dream. It is the dynamic era that witnessed rapidly changing and growing industry and culture.

After the World War I, USA dominated the global economy and took the lead role. Rapid growth in economy provided prosperity for the American society. However, the prosperity mentioned here is far removed from the prosperity mentioned in the American Dream. The reason for that is prosperity was not gained by personal hard work.

The American culture and lifestyle, even from music to architecture, had shown a remarkable alteration during these years. These are the years in which the American popular culture has settled. Americans become acquainted with telephones, automobiles, motion picture, radio and electricity. Everyday luxuries and wealth had become important to the Americans. The focus of the society was mostly on superficial materialistic issues. The priorities of the society had altered.

Eventually, the Roaring Twenties had ended up with the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and led to the Great Depression that put the whole world in economical adversity.

The Great Gatsby is the ultimate portrait of the Roaring Twenties in every aspect. It reflects every detail of the cultural and economical dynamism of the era with the loosening social qualities and life-styles. F. Scott Fitzgerald's genius perspective has great contributions to the brilliant narration of the theme and 'the lost generation'. 'The lost generation' indicates the post-war generation, which is in a vacancy caused by the bewilderment of the World War I. Fitzgerald, in one of his articles 'Echoes of The Jazz Age', defines this generation as "'(...) *the wildest of all generations, the generation which had been adolescent during the confusion of the War, brusquely shouldered my contemporaries out of the way and danced into the limelight (...) the generation that corrupted its elders and eventually overreached itself less through lack of morals than through lack of taste.*" (Fitzgerald, Echoes of The Jazz Age) He effortlessly hid the message about this era and its people under the character's qualifications and the relations in the novel. Therefore, the importance of the use of the characters and major relations between them are the points that should be deeply analyzed in order to grasp the idea of Fitzgerald.

II. CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF GATSBY

In the exploration of the transformation of the American Dream from its original version to the altered version, the characters should take the leading roles. Comprehending the roles of these characters will reveal social and personal affects of the corruption of the American Dream and structure of the society without any exertion.

The main character of the novel, 'Jay Gatsby' should be the first name while analyzing the American Dream, regarding to the reflection of the notion in the novel. Gatsby is the most explicit character in terms of the interpretation of the American Dream in the novel. Comprehending Gatsby will let the reader fully understand the American Dream. The importance of this comprehension is supreme because the parallelism between Gatsby and the American Dream is impressively high.

a. Hope and Dream

Gatsby is a character that is coalesced with the terms ‘hope’ and ‘dream’. The hope that he raised, within his mind, to achieve his dreams is immense and eternal. The existence of this illimitable hope is the reason for him being faithfully engaged to his dreams. Self-raised hope has lead Gatsby to his eventual promises that he made to himself. ‘Hope’ is the essence of Gatsby that formed the basis of his character. Therefore, it cannot be segregated from him. His hope made Gatsby the person who can sacrifice his whole life for the sake of achieving his dreams. The verb ‘sacrifice’ can be perceived as a sharp expression. However, in the whole picture, Gatsby may be seen as a man who lives a flamboyant life filled with money, wealth and luxuries but in the reality, the depths of his character will guide us to the invisible side of him where he faces loneliness and suffers from superficiality of the shallow upper class.

The approach to the concept of ‘dream’ is a point that shouldn’t be skipped over within the frame of the assessment of this character. The portrayal of this concept should be observed under two major understandings. One is his personal, intimate side that emerges in his relationship with Daisy, and the other is about his position in the society. These understandings will make the comprehension stronger because author’s approach to this issue is in the same way. He created two dreams for ‘Gatsby’, which explains the interpretation of the American Dream profoundly. Therefore, the character will be resolved over these dreams.

The love that Gatsby has for Daisy and his aspiration to reach out to her are colossal. Gatsby was stuck on the past, on the time when he shared an innocent love with Daisy. Although Gatsby leave for the War, Daisy’s affection on him has never come to an end. Once the War broke in their relation Gatsby has learned the devastating fact that Daisy has married to Tom Buchanan, a wealthy, powerful man - unfaithful to his wife- ‘*who reached such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one*’(Fitzgerald, 7) Even if Daisy was married to another man Gatsby’s immortal commitment to his beloved has never been interrupted, not even once. Gatsby bought the enormously refulgent mansion in the West Egg, which is right across the mansion of the Buchanan’s in the East Egg. His yearning for the resurrection of their love is

settled in the heart of his being. The green light that is on the dock in front of the mansion of the Buchanan's symbolizes Gatsby's hope and his craving for the grasp of the past. " (...) – he stretched his arms towards the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been at the end of a dock" (Fitzgerald, 20) Gatsby cannot let go of the past because he is attached blindly to the idea of owning Daisy. "(...) now attempts not merely to recapture of the past in his imagination but to make it repeat it self in actuality." (F. Scott Fitzgerald: Critical Assessments Volume I, 88) His inaccessible urge for this dream turns into a monomania and he becomes obsessed about this infatuation. " "I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured. "You can't repeat the past." □ "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" □ He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. □ "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see." " (Fitzgerald, 90) His obsession and the hope that has blossomed inside of him induces him to deny the absolute truth of the reality that has been set which is 'it is certainly impossible to revive the future as it was before'.

Gatsby shaped his whole life and built it all over again over the illustration of Daisy's nobility. This is the point where the two dreams of Gatsby integrate. His dream to retake the time and finally get back to Daisy's heart collides with his dream to become wealthy. He renounces his original roots (he came from a poor family which settled in the North Dakota) and he ruminates and reconstructs a brand new life according to his platonic idea of an exquisite, noble man. James Gatz from North Dakota transforms into a mysterious Jay Gatsby, man of the legends who is the glamorous, imperceptible, favorite high-society of his time. There are rumors about the unknown history of the splendid Gatsby who frequently holds ostentatious parties in his gigantic mansion where he 'keeps it always full of interesting people, night and day' (Fitzgerald, 74) to artificially prevent his loneliness. People whispered that he killed a man once or he was a German spy. He was always uncertain to the outer world because he created a background that he kept confidential. He discarded his past without any hesitation only because there is a certain profile and status created by

the society that he has to reach in order to achieve his dreams. This status is similar to what American Dream required: perfection.

b. Nick Carraway

The narrator of the novel, Nick Carraway, who is a distant cousin of Daisy, is privileged in Gatsby's eyes. When it comes to Nick, Gatsby's transparency emerges. Therefore the reader distinguishes Gatsby from Nick's point of view. Nick is the decisive observer that exhibits a general, God-like sight. *"I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life."* (Fitzgerald, 31) Nick is the only connection between Gatsby and Daisy, hence, Gatsby took out his superficial, faked mask and stood up as who he really is only in front of Nick purified from his adaptational personality. Nick is the only person that witnessed the piecemeal reach, chase of Gatsby, including his vulnerabilities, juvenility and his most intimate depths, broadly, his reality.

III. DELUSION

The flamboyant lifestyle that Gatsby has embraced in exchange for fading his background and investing in his future is what overshadows his reality. The root of his embrace is based on the chaotic delusion that he devoted himself blindfolded. In the very first beginning he believed his own creation of perfection, which is the image of Daisy that has grown gigantically in his mind until he constituted an untouchable quintessence out of her. He did create an emancipation that took him out his innate environment however his pursuit of *'the most's* is also what made his chase of elegance delusional. *'He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty.'* (Fitzgerald, 80) While he is reaching for the best, the perfect it is impossible not to face with a catastrophic disillusion. In this case, Gatsby's eternal hope and even his commitment will not make him reach the peak. As a consequence, his hope and his dreams are made of deception. Only the deception itself is not delusional.

Gatsby's delusion is an era's delusion too. The catastrophic physical and mental affect of the World War I created a state of vast emptiness for the post-war generation. This state caused the generation to be in a great disorder and in a great absence of morals. With this era United States had encountered with many deviations, the idea that took part during the inception of the elevation of the USA, the American Dream demonstrated an extensive deviation like many other astray values. F. Scott Fitzgerald built a '*story behind a story*' (F. Scott Fitzgerald: Critical Assessments Volume I, 90) with integrating the American Dream and Gatsby himself.

IV. CORRELATION BETWEEN AMERICAN DREAM AND GATSBY

When we try to establish a connection between the characteristics of Gatsby and the fundamentals of the American Dream, we can create the following two perspectives. First is the 'impossibility' and the other is the 'perfection'. The contradiction between these facts may come to a conclusion of a paradox in which the battle between the impossibility and the perfection will never come to an end. They are not each other's results or reasons although they put each other into a never-ending circuit. Therefore, the core of the main character and basis of the American Dream is built upon the paradox in which the genesis, development and the fall of the notion and Gatsby as a character will demonstrate a great resemblance. The roots of this parallel origin, growth and collapse in both cases - the American Dream and Gatsby's dreams - will come to the exact same point.

a. Dialectical Logic

The pathway of this trinity – origin, growth and collapse – can be observed and evaluated with a dialectical logic. Dialectic defends the persistency of dynamism and alteration. According to the dialectical logic, any propounded thesis will create its antithesis and the contraction between these incompatibilities will lead to the synthesis phase in which a blended new idea will born out of the two contradicting ideas. 'Origin of the American Dream and Gatsby's dream', 'their development', 'their collapse and their alteration' is equal to thesis, antithesis and synthesis in dialectic logic respectively.

i. Origin

The origins of the American Dream and Gatsby's dream spring from the same roots. Both of the ideas rose upon an idealized grounding. For Gatsby it is recapturing the love that he is longing for by reliving the past, for the American Dream it is providing the utopia for the American society, which promises the overall amelioration of the nation. Both of these ideas are put forward as perfected theses that both reach for the excellence. The formation of the contrast of these ideas is the inevitable result of chasing perfection.

Impossibility of the chased ideas is the counterpart, in other words the antithesis of the envisioned perfection that is the initial thesis for both. The impossibility has formed during the development of these imaginary designs. The impossibility in question puts forward a nearly unrealistic bill which causes each idea to fall into conflict within themselves. The backbones of the ideas are to be evaluated as insubstantial.

This situation can be proven by the representation of Gatsby in the novel. In the beginning of the novel, Gatsby has never been put on the eye of the reader pellucidly; he has always been drawn behind a smoke screen that created his mystery. As if he was the unknown, unreachable ideal character with every authentically perfected qualities. In combination with these facts, Gatsby's delayed apparition in the book is also another element that reflects the insubstantiality of the character. Gatsby is a design of F. Scott Fitzgerald. He created Gatsby blurry and never fully defined him on purpose, in order to mirror the American Dream over Gatsby and to constitute the resemblance between them ideally. Besides, the narrator Nick Carraway beholds the disguised reality of Gatsby in the following parts of the book after he met with Gatsby. The design of Gatsby's idealized character was made up of the exaggeration that arose out of the obscurity. His perfectness could only be recognized in his dreams. *'So my first impression, that he was a person of some undefined consequence, had gradually faded and he had become simply the proprietor of an elaborate roadhouse next door.'* (Fitzgerald, 53) The parallel situation had occurred in the history as it was observed in Gatsby's case. With the post war era the society has lost its track on the foundations of the American Dream and it has driven itself

into the beginning of a chaotic end just like Gatsby did by approaching to a flawless vision that leads him to his apocalyptic end step by step with his monomaniacal state of mind which dragged him down from the edge of his 'meretricious' delusion.

ii. Growth and Downfall

The developments of these ideas are unintentionally intertwined to their downfall and metamorphosis, which indicates the synthesis phase of the dialectical logic. Closure for Gatsby and the American Dream can be evaluated as the outcome of the paradox, which was mentioned before. This closure is also the corruption of the ideas and the beginning of their transformation. Gatsby's closure is the realization of his deception and the impossibility of his dreams. The moment that he lost his 'immortal' hope is the moment that his dreams are ruptured. The realization of his reality, that no matter how hard he tried it was never enough to break this incorruptible entity of life. Gatsby has instantly found out, to his disappointment that his life passed by while he was chasing his unattainable dream. "*(...) for all these amusements and fragile splendours there was an ultimate, and inward, price that would duly have to be paid.*" (Bradbury, Malcolm, 10) The Great Gatsby that can never be separated from his dreams, has turn into a desperate man with all of the meaningless money and the loneliness in his hand. He was now lost in his wilderness of disappointment '*I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. 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, 132) In the same way, the whole American society built a deception to hide their privation of morals. Their deception has lead them to the formation of the texture of their future. The American Dream has transformed itself into the arising American popular culture. The combat between the logic of the American Dream and the degraded values of the society in the 1920s are the main reasons for the synthesis to begin. Therefore, American popular culture has been born out of this transition phase.

Society's combat with the American dream is also valid in Gatsby's situation. Society mainly disowns them both. American Dream and Gatsby are revealed as the creations of the structure of the society. Gatsby's dream to become wealthy is a necessity of pattern of the society. The perception that is developed by the money-oriented society has accepted that to have material power is what is needed for the welfare. Gatsby was possessed by the idea to have the maximized power to have Daisy. His struggle to have her didn't bring him happiness but it did bring him a wasted lonely life. Those people that raided to his parties were no longer here for him, not even at his funeral. "*The minister glanced several times and looked at his watch, so I took him aside and ask him to wait for half an hour. But it wasn't any use. Nobody came.*" (Fitzgerald, 142) The stolidity of the society has caused people to forget about the inner and social values. The abstract of the American Dream that originated from the society was ignored when it should be adopted. The conflict between the society and the American Dream has aroused from the differentiations of the social classes. This discrimination was unambiguously reflected in the novel with the use of the contradiction between 'The West Egg' and 'The East Egg'. The abandonment of Gatsby and American Dream has been the tragic finale for the both of them. 'The East Egg' symbolizes the innately wealthy part of the society where people like Tom Buchanan and Daisy (who exemplify the callousness of the rich) live. On the other side, 'The West Egg' symbolizes the average or the part of the society, which gained the power of money by their own without the force of their families. This situation indicates that the innate conditions of an individual do determine the position of that individual in opposition to the precept of the American Dream: "*regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position*" (Adams, James 404)

V. NARRATION TECHNIQUES

F. Scott Fitzgerald used contrasts - such as the contradictions between elitism and shallowness, perfection and impossibility, society and Gatsby - and symbols - such as The West and The East Egg, the green light and the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg which represents the eyes of God that sees the depravation of the society - to narrate the pathway of decadence. Fitzgerald's commitment to the 'Jazz Age' made him base his narrations on the rueful situation of the society. "*The whole golden*

boom was in the air – its splendid generousities, its outrageous corruptions and the tortuous death struggle of the old America in prohibition. All the stories that came into my mind had the touch of disaster in them...’’ (Fitzgerald, Early Success) This is the reason for Gatsby’s closure to be ased as a corruption, in Fitzgerald’s words ‘disaster’.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Great Gatsby is the American Dream itself. The great story of Gatsby is actually the epitome of the decadence of the 1920s. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s design of the character aims to thoroughly picture the progress of the American Dream within the frame of reflecting the delusion of an era. Both the downfall of the American Dream and the finale of the Jazz Age that ended up with the Great Depression and drag the whole world to the edge of economical hardship, confirms the catastrophic repercussions of being captivated by a utopic idea. The destructive and irreversible consequences of degeneracy that are hidden behind the era’s charming glamour are brought to light by Fitzgerald with the portrayal of Gatsby which precisely coincides with the American Dream.

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