

TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

ENGLISH B

EXTENDED ESSAY

Candidate Name: Selin Erdem

Candidate Number: D1129017

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Supervisor Name: Emine Efecioglu

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Research Question: To what extent the novel, The Great Gatsby by Scott F. Fitzgerald reflects the post-war socio-cultural differences of America with regard to decaying moral values and the concepts of new and old money?

Abstract:

This extended essay is a study of the extent to which the novel *The Great Gatsby* by Scott F. Fitzgerald reflects the post-war socio-cultural differences of America. The essay involves the exploration of this subject in terms of the decaying moral values and the concepts of new and old money, which are proper examples for the specified illustrations of the impacts of World War 1 on America in the novel. The research question mainly handled primarily with references from the novel itself however, I have used several secondary resources to support my ideas properly, which I have cited with a bibliography. The purpose of this study is to analyze in what ways and to what extent the author handled the post-war social sequences which are mentioned above and the reliability of the historical context took place in the novel with references to author's personal life.

The essay is composed of two sections, the titles *Decaying Moral Values (II.A)* and *Old Money vs. New Money (II.B)*. On the first section, the moral corruption, which is a major outcome of World War 1, is discussed in order to evaluate my research question broadly. The second section, *Old Money vs. New Money*, is about another essential outcome of The World War 1, which is consisted of economic issues and includes the detailed investigation of the clash between newly rich and born-rich. While I was analyzing these sections, I also make connections between them to achieve an accurate conclusion.

As a conclusion, it is approved that Scott F. Fitzgerald has reflected the post-war socio-cultural differences of America fluently thorough out the novel with regard to his personal experiences of that era.

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*“Only Gatsby, the man who gives
his name to this book, was
exempt from my reaction — Gatsby,
who represented everything for
which I have an unaffected scorn.”
(The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald 18)*

I.A Introduction:

The Great Gatsby by Scott F. Fitzgerald can be regarded as a great source and evidence for the impacts of World War 1 on the United States. The World War 1 was a global war, which was initiated in the central of the Europe but spread through the world just like a flame from 1914 to 1918. United States of America rather had chosen to stay neutral at first; however, several political, economical, social benefits and provocations forced them to become a part of the war and contributed a great economical boom, the roaring 20's. After suffering from such a horrendous war, Americans felt entitled to having fun and more focusing on things that would give them pleasure and comfort in order to forget the tragedies of the World War 1. Throughout the novel, Fitzgerald illustrates the evident post-war era of America throughout the clashes between social classes in early 20's with regard to West Egg and East Egg, which are located in Long Island, New York. The novel includes number of historical content caused essentially by the war including the presence of the American Dream, the Jazz Age ,the Great Depression in the 1920's and the most common trend of that era, "materialism".

F. Scott Fitzgerald or Gatsby?

Evident parallels can be drawn between the novel and F. Scott Fitzgerald's personal life especially through the protagonist Gatsby. Fitzgerald was born into an upper middle-class family in America. His interest in literature developed since he went to Princeton College, which he never had the chance to graduate because of his apathy to education and academic troubles. He rather had chosen to enlist in the US army and had attended the First World War. His military background led him to reflect the patterns of the war to his literal pieces including The Great Gatsby. He met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre, the girl who had influence on his life acutely, also his future wife, a rich girl with expensive tastes who adores luxury. Sayre refused to marry him, however she made up her rigid decision on marriage immediately after Fitzgerald

achieved a great success, literary sensation and enough money to impress her, for sure, with his novel, *This Side of Paradise*(1920). All of a sudden, the couple found themselves in a life with lavish parties and fame upset the affairs of them. This “wonderful nonsense” life-style and his obligation of earning money in order to please Sayre led, led Fitzgerald to be alcoholic and prevented his writing career. Besides, the couple’s tempestuous marriage, Fitzgerald’s everlasting alcoholism caused Zelda Sayre’s admittance to a sanatorium where she had been diagnosed with schizophrenia.

This brief summary of Fitzgerald’s personal life can be admitted as the factual explanation of his depiction of the “Jazz Age” and how he shaped his fiction in his writings. The affinity between the main ambition of both Fitzgerald’s and Gatsby’s lives is impractical to ignore from beginning to end of the novel. The most significant parallel between Gatsby and Fitzgerald based on their “great” desire for absolute success, money and love. While creating the fictional hero, Gatsby, it is certain that Fitzgerald integrated his memories, real life experiences, regrets and especially his dreams to him. In the novel, Zelda Sayre had been compared with Daisy Buchanan by the guilty pleasure of money and fame, the poverty of luxury of both. Furthermore, the main reason of both Gatsby’s and Fitzgerald’s downfalls was their obligation of impressing and deceiving Daisy and Zelda Sayre, which they both felt as it were unavoidable.

“Though the Jazz Age continued, it became less and less of an affair of youth. The sequel was like a children's party taken over by the elders.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald

As I have investigated the personal life of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the resemblances of the protagonist, Gatsby and the author, Fitzgerald prove the reliability of the book regarding the post-war status of America. The scope of this study, therefore, will be the analysis of the reflections and patterns of the post-war socio-cultural differences of

America with regard to themes: decaying moral values, dreams and economical concepts.

II.A Decaying moral values:

Throughout the novel, the East Egg represents the old money and West Egg represents the new money. When it comes to the inevitable truth which every society includes without any exception, the working-class, Fitzgerald portrays an area which takes place between the New York City and West Egg, The Valley of Ashes, the representation of “no money” and absolute misery. In the novel, the gloomy portrayal and the motifs of desperation of the area are the proofs of the absolute poverty of the working-class, also the impossibility of the American Dream for the lowest class of the society.

“This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. “(Fitzgerald,39).

Fitzgerald uses the terms “valley” and “ashes” in the same phrase to name the area. The term “Valley” illustrates an image of green and undisturbed nature, however the term “ashes” associated with factories, spoiled working-class and even death. This contrasting naming of the area refers the desperation and suffering of those living in the Valley of Ashes. “The ashes” cloud the air, the houses even the people, imprisoned them into that awful hellhole. Moreover, the symbolism of “...men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air” explains the feebleness of the working-class whose lives are withering away because of their tough lives and the impossibility of reaching easy money just like the blinded wealthy that pass through the area and act like the working-class is invisible or already dead.

The Valley of Ashes symbolizes the moral decay, which is hidden by the fallacious glamour of the East Egg and the ornamentation of West Egg. It also suggests that underneath the flawless imagery of both lies the same disfigurement as in the valley. Conservatism and moderation were out and Americans became a pleasure-seeking nation during their prosperous 'Golden Era'. The American society's beliefs had become extremely ordinary and corrupted that overarching cynicism, greed for money and empty pursuit of pleasure spread among the public and replaced with the essential moral values once people had have. Another significance of the Valley of Ashes is people who live there reserve the only care of the real moral values without being decayed despite the remaining of the society.

Living was extremely effortless with easy money that the East Eggers disregarded the essence of the happiness. They have gained an egotistical manner, were blinded by the prosperity that made their feelings numb and lack of empathy on bruising people. Thus, this led the society to differentiate. In the novel, these immoral values of the East Egg are represented to the reader on Tom and Daisy Buchanan.

"They were careless people, Tom and Daisy- they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made." (Fitzgerald, 190)

Daisy is married to Tom, as he is a son of a wealthy and well-known family. They seem to be living a life with luxury but also with love. Nevertheless, when their life is examined genuinely, it is seen that their being is made full of materialism but nothing else. That illustrated the circumstance of East Egg after the victory times of America, which consisted of no care for love except the love for money and material luxury. To illustrate, the example is on the part of the novel when Daisy and Nick were having a small talk on the day Nick first arrived to the Buchanan's house. Daisy told Nick that her only wish for her daughter's happiness is her daughter to be 'beautiful

and fool'. "I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." The new generation had started to value prosperity erroneously thus the older generation's subservience and aspect in females vanished thoroughly. In the novel the character, Tom Buchanan is the major evidence how women lose their meaning for the society. The destructive nature of Tom Buchanan and his reckless manner without any consideration of the bruises he causes for others are the leading characteristics of him. As being a part of old money aristocracy, there was nothing that his endless money cannot afford including, women. He engaged in an affair with his mistress Myrtle from The Valley of Ashes who is disposable and meaningless for Tom such as his money and betrayed Daisy without any regret. Furthermore, Tom is able and has the power of beating women, both Daisy and especially Myrtle, without hesitation.

"Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand." (Fitzgerald, 53)

All over the novel, the decay of morality mainly seen on Daisy Buchanan as she had a fickle shallow heart with a bored sardonic personality that even when her love died she hadn't attended to the funeral, moving away with no address justifying she hadn't felt anything but caring about herself. This represents the hollowness of the upper class after the impacts of the World War 1 had started to be seen in the society, which led the moral values of the East Egg to decay. She had chosen the eternal fund, Tom who gave her only misery except the availability of spending money whenever she intend, instead of Gatsby, the lover of her who was able to gave her both endless happiness and money , just fewer than Tom can consume.

"And all the time something within her was crying for a decision. 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, 164)

The main reason of Nick's sudden decision of returning to West Egg from East Egg although he has the enough respectability and background to keep living in East Egg was his experiences with Gatsby. He recognized that he had become disillusioned due to the reckless life-style of East Coast society. Despite the fact that he left the West Egg just because he was willing to become richer and broader, he found the East Egg to be lacking in authenticity and morality. The betrayal of her cousin, Daisy to her so call lover Gatsby and her negligence towards emotions, even for Gatsby's murder brought Nick a melancholy and he returned to his roots, what he knows as noble.

“After Gatsby's death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eye's power of correction. So when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and the wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line I decided to come back home.” (Fitzgerald, 188)

After the World War 1, a minority in the society had lost their money and statues, stuck into the Valley of Ashes despite the majority that have utilized the perks of the economical boom. For instance, throughout the novel George Wilson who once had a fortune but now living in the Valley of Ashes is the only one to care and believe in the old real moral values. George was another example of an individual whose life was ruined by the greedy and corrupted society. His life was dull and miserable, consisted of a run-down auto shop, persuading the wealthy. He is the husband of Tom Buchanan's mistress, Myrtle, loves and admires her rather than Tom. Myrtle's betrayal on him with her love affair, yet her death grieved him from the depths and devastated him enough to commit suicide. Another dominant symbolism within the novel is the Doctor T.J Eckleburg's eyes. The eyes symbolize the loss of spiritual values in America also a religious association for George Wilson. He respects and scares from these eyes, which illustrates the God for him. The flux of the novel is lacking religious motifs and the presence of the God significantly and Wilson's character is the only who mentions him. The billboard of Doctor T.J Eckleburg's eyes was standing right next to his house, seemed like watching him and prevented him to cheat , lie despite the whole remaining of the society, literally.

“I spoke to her,” he muttered, after a long silence. “I told her she might fool me but she could not fool God. I took her to the window.”--With an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it----” and I said ‘God knows what you’ve been doing, everything you’ve been doing. You may fool me, but you can’t fool God!’” Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night.”(Fitzgerald, 174)

This quotation suggest that he strongly believes that none of the wealthy people is that powerful to trick God and will face the consequences of their sins although they never hesitate to betray him and use their to abuse him. In an era of instilling places and objects with meanings and changing ideals and values, this represents the God in the light of real social values is judging the American society as a moral wasteland.

During the post-war era, which Americans involved themselves in get-rich-quick schemes; the lowest class of the society was also in a search of money and reputation. In the novel, Myrtle Wilson is the evidence of this situation with her lost morality and desperate manner. Her desire for money and luxury forced her to involve a love affair with Tom Buchanan and betray her husband for prosperity. She acts like a snob throughout the novel in order to look fancy but it sounds her even more like herself, a rare, vulgar and a cheating woman without any morality.

“..and the despairing figure on the couch, bleeding fluently, and trying to spread a copy of the Town Tattle over the tapestry scenes of Versailles.” (Fitzgerald, 53)

Old Money vs. New Money:

In the novel, the terms “new money” and “old money” are used to define the region of the society that is new to wealth and those have had wealth from their families for a long time. Despite the fact, both of the regions are in the same class of wealth in society, they differ by their capabilities of handling their money and the capitals of their affluences.

Fitzgerald on the protagonist Gatsby represents the West Egg; the newly rich people, in other words “new money”. Gatsby is a young man who became rich due to his desires and ambitions. He has the impacts of the rise of crime in the society after the World War 1, as he obtained his whole wealth from bootlegging business. With the desire of luxury and the pleasure surpassed by more noble goals, the greed among Gatsby, also for the “new money” region, grows further so they lost their social graces and tastes. Gatsby drives a lavish Rolls-Royce, has a colossal mansion all by himself thus proves the effort of him on being flashy and impressive by his wealth explicitly by these facts. The common greed among the people is illustrated by the lavish parties, which Gatsby threw every week. For Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan is idealized perfection. Throughout the novel, the reader finds out that everything Gatsby did for money was actually to impress Daisy according to her luxury life style.

In the novel, Fitzgerald represents the social values and morality of the society by the East Egg. The East Egg itself is the established aristocracy in the means of the people who already had a social background and wealth before World War 1. In other words before the country made a huge fortune enough for everyone to become rich, there were families with old wealth and high reputation in the country ahead. After the income of the new money, aristocrats were separated from the newly rich people by their social statues after the great victory of America. In the novel, the Buchanans represented the East Egg. The Buchanans, who were rich and highly reputed before the World War 1, live in a life of West Eggers in New York. Before World War 1, the East Eggers had already been used to do everything with their

money. They pleased themselves and lived in a great comfort and luxury. Life was so easy for them that even their relationships were based on money as they got everything they wanted. For the East Eggers, the meaning of happiness was defined by living with a fortune and reputation. Daisy Buchanan is the most critical character in the novel to comprehend the clash between the East Egg and the West Egg in the means of the old money and the new money especially with her love affair with Gatsby. She was so in love with money that it finally put her in the situation of lacking in heart and finally becoming selfish and fickle. With the power of the money, the East Eggers like Daisy Buchanan worried about only themselves and led them to live a fake and empty life with no real humanistic values but to feel happy, as they do not know the real meaning of happiness. At finally yet importantly, the East Eggers were the materialists in those times of 1920s, who had lost their emotions to the other ones. In addition, Tom Buchanan's rude and reckless manner towards everyone especially to newly rich or the region with no money proves that the East Eggers are hasty bullies who adjusted to money's power. Prosperity eases their minds that they never anguish about or empathize with the people they have bruised.

“His (Tom’s) speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts.” (Fitzgerald, 24)

The clash between old money and new money is the main outcome of the social reality of the American Dream, which is widespread along the country. It is decent to say that the American Dream is the most significant historical circumstance that took place in the novel. The American Dream was initially originated from the needs and desires of discovery, individualism and pursuit of happiness. Throughout the novel, the

clash between the East Egg and the West Egg thus the clash between the old and new money, is told by the narrator Nick Carraway, whom the reader witness the failure of an American Dream because of the decayed social values. Due to the great income to the country, there were plenty of unprecedented prosperity and material excess, an era of clashes between social classes and moral decay started. Hence, the original American Dream of people had disintegrations, which finally led the society to believe only in materialism. Even though the American Dream was an implicit assurance given to all citizens, which affirmed that any individual could achieve prosperity regardless of social class, F. Scott Fitzgerald critically claimed that it was only an illusion which was impossible to come true. The role of Daisy Buchanan as a East Egger is the major representation of the invalidity of the American Dream. The passionate dreams of Gatsby have arisen by his assurance on his money and Daisy's indefinable fixation on prosperity. This fixation led Gatsby to believe that he could win Daisy's love back. Gatsby has a dream of recreating the past when the dreams had real value by being happy with Daisy. Throughout the novel, he tries to reach the green light, which symbolizes his hopes and dreams. The green light can also be related with the color of the money, green, thus the American Dream. At the end of the novel, his dreams and hopes are ruined by Daisy's pleasure for money and selfishness, which indicates the clash between their moral values and social statuses. The clash between the East Egg and the West Egg, as Daisy and Gatsby, prevented them to get together.

“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that is no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. And then one fine morning—so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.” (Fitzgerald, 192)

As a conclusion, the old money knows how to handle with their money but the new money spent their money jauntily and in a spoiled method. On the other hand,

people such as Gatsby still carries a big heart, real feelings and a sparkle of empathy despite the old money region's egoism, crudity and destructive manner that born from their familiarity to wealth which is much more important for those decayed era.

CONCLUSION:

While investigating the research question: To what extent the novel, *The Great Gatsby* by Scott F. Fitzgerald reflects the post-war socio-cultural differences of America with regard to decaying moral values and the concepts of new and old money? it has become obvious that Scott F. Fitzgerald has reflected the post-war socio-cultural sequences fluently throughout the novel. In this study, two central aspects, decaying moral values and the concepts of new and old money have been discussed. The reliability and the accuracy of the novel's historical context are based on Fitzgerald's experiences that he had dwelled during the post-war era of America as I mentioned previously on my essay's introduction. The similarities between the protagonist Gatsby and the author Fitzgerald prove the factuality of the common clashes of the society during that era.

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