

# An Analysis of Humanity and Reality in The Great Gatsby

Shengnan Ye

Zigang Middle School, Quzhou 324200, China.

---

**Abstract:** Fitzgerald is one of the most important American writers in the 20th century. The publication of *The Great Gatsby* shows his great talent in American literature. Eliot, a famous poet and literary critic, once said that it was the first step in the development of the art of the novel since the age of Henry James. Fitzgerald's masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, focuses on Jazz Age New York in the 20th century, depicting the people in the different classes of the society. Besides, love is an eternal theme in literature. And the reality and humanity shown in *The Great Gatsby* are also of great significance to today's society.

**Keywords:** *The Great Gatsby*; Fitzgerald; Human Nature; Reality

---

## 1. Introduction

Fitzgerald is a famous American novelist. After the first world war, he focused on the lost generation and he was a profound observer of that time, documenting the glitz of the jazz age with the care and insight. Fitzgerald's masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, focuses on the New York City, depicting the extravagance of the upper class and the hardship of the lower class. It is an indispensable part in American literature. The novel mainly describes how a young man named Gatsby struggled for life in the Jazz Age of the United States, which is an age filled with a large amount of material wealth and spiritual degradation. It shows the spiritual, cultural, economic and social development of the United States at that time. The story is told from Nick's first-person perspective, interspersed with the recollections and confessions of main characters. Among them, the love story between Gatsby and Daisy is the most impressed in the novel. The story of Gatsby and Daisy ends in tragedy, but the humanity and reality in it still have research significance and values.

*The Great Gatsby* tells the story of a young army officer, Jay Gatsby, who was born in an ordinary farming family in the midwest of the United States. When he was garrisoned in a big city in the south, he fell in love with Daisy, who was also born in the old aristocracy. While Gatsby was in Europe, Daisy married Tom Buchanan, who was in the same class with Daisy. Gatsby returns from the army, making a large fortune by an illegal bootlegging business in New York. He was determined to gain his lover back. At this time, Tom and Daisy had moved to a mansion on Long Island in New York City. And Gatsby buys a more luxurious villa across the bay. He often holds grand parties, waiting for the opportunity to attract Daisy and renew his old dream. When they met again, Daisy was deeply moved by Gatsby's loyal love and also his wealth. After that, when Tom discovered the affair between Daisy and Gatsby, he provoked a showdown in New York and publicly revealed that Gatsby had made a fortune from bootlegging. Not to be outdone, Gatsby confessed the five years of undying love with Daisy and asked her to go with him, but Daisy refused to break up with her coarse and unfaithful husband. Daisy was driving home from New York, and accidentally killed Tom's mistress, Mrs. Wilson. Gatsby was determined to take the blame for her. Tom lied to Wilson that Gatsby was the murder and instigated him to take revenge on Gatsby<sup>[1]</sup>.

## 2. The reality and humanity depicted in the novel

### 2.1 The compromise of love to reality

First of all, Daisy was also in love with Gatsby. This can be shown from the night before her wedding to Tom. She got drunk and cried again and again, she took out the pearl necklace which Tom gave her. She said that she wanted to change her mind and return the

necklace. So obviously, she had sincere and pure love for Gatsby. However, when she woke up the next day, she married Tom as normal as if nothing had happened. After their honeymoon, Daisy was infatuated with her husband[1]. And it reflects Daisy's surrender and adjustment to reality. For her, as an aristocrat since childhood, wealth and status are real things, and love is not worth mentioning compared with it<sup>[2]</sup>. In real life, most people, just like Daisy, do not have the courage to pay a high price and make a huge sacrifice for their ideal dream, so the reasonable choice for most people is based on the reality and the possibility that they can grasp. In addition, when Daisy was reunited with Gatsby for the second time, her joy was also sincere. However, at the end, when Tom revealed that Gatsby had become rich was because of illegal bootlegging, intentions and courage she may had, were all vanished<sup>[3]</sup>. Even though Daisy knew that everything Gatsby did was for her, she was not willing to take risks and weather the storm with him. Therefore, Gatsby is also the embodiment of the ideal love. For love, he takes all the risk and pursues it with his whole life. But the real world is cruel. And their love must compromise to the reality.

## **2.2 The American dream of transcending class has been shattered in reality**

Gatsby's affection for Daisy is not just love. For Gatsby, Daisy has become the embodiment of transcending classes, realizing dreams and being recognized by the society. Daisy was an old aristocrat, while Gatsby was a nouveau riche at that time. Gatsby was born poor, but dreaming of making his way into the upper class by his own efforts or by other means. And Daisy represented everything that he wanted. The first time they met made him unforgettable. Daisy appeared in his life like a gentle breeze, carrying the fragrance of roses and sweet summer air, reflecting the money and status of the upper class society that he yearned for<sup>[4]</sup>. However, in the end, Daisy and her husband led to Gatsby's death, which showed the collapse of Gatsby's dream of transcending class. Gatsby and Tom respectively represent two major forces in American society: one is idealism which is far from reality, and the other is extremely selfish and selfish pragmatism. Fitzgerald uses the competition between Gatsby and Tom to express the conflict between spiritual idealism and materialistic realism<sup>[5]</sup>. Tom, as a pragmatist, is recognized and approved by the mainstream in the American society. His personality is hypocritical and selfish, while Gatsby, as an idealist, is naive and pure, pursuing ideal love and clinging to his dream tightly. The conflict between the two sides shows the true face of the so-called upper society. Therefore, Gatsby's dream was shattered, and the American dream, which he pursued for fair competition and to achieve wealth through personal efforts to change his social status, inevitably disillusioned under the background of the degeneration of American traditional beliefs at that time. It is the fundamental difference in values that causes Gatsby's tragedy. Although Gatsby realizes that Daisy's voice is full of money, he does not finally understand that they belong to different worlds and represent different values<sup>[5]</sup>.

## **2.3 The American social reality reflected in the novel**

In the novel, no matter how rich Gatsby is, when he tries to integrate into the upper class society that he has longed for, his humble birth turns him into a perfect material for the suspicion and rumors of the so-called celebrities in the upper class. This also meant that millions of people like Gatsby, who were born in poverty but wanted to change their status, were not accepted by the American society at that time. In addition, after Gatsby's death, Nick held a funeral for him, none of the former guests showed up. The desolate funeral and the bustling banquet in the past obviously constituted a sharp contrast, indicating that he was not recognized by the society at all. It also indicates the postwar generation's disillusionment with the American Dream, and the dream that everyone can succeed through efforts is a lie<sup>[5]</sup>. The essence of the upper society is full of selfishness and ugliness, and it seems impossible for millions of people like Gatsby to realize their American dream at that time.

## **2.4 The humanity shown in the novel**

Gatsby's disillusionment with love and his dream also shows the nature of love in real life. Pure love does not exist in marriage. In most cases, love is still hampered by money and status. When facing marriage, most people may take realistic factors into consideration and make rational choices just as Daisy does. Even if they love someone else, they will only keep it in their heart and compromise to the better living conditions in reality. So they will choose the one who is suitable in every aspect, rather than the one who they love but is not suitable for marrying. Because marriage is mixed with so many other things. Actually, love only accounts for a small part in marriage. In real life, when people choose who to marry, they should also think about future life which is mixed with many factors unrelated to love, such as status, fame and so on. Therefore, *The Great Gatsby* also shows the theme related to humanity and reality in the marriage, which is still of great significance to our society nowadays.

### 3. Summary

The love between Gatsby and Daisy, from the pure romance at the beginning to the sloppy ending, all shows the indifferent and selfish of the American society in the jazz age. But if Daisy had never passed through Gatsby's world, perhaps Gatsby would not have gotten the love that has lingered for many years<sup>[4]</sup>. If he hadn't had the green light as a beacon, he might have fallen into a corrupt life, mingled with other people rushing for money and extravagance. When he reached out to the light, he was greater than anyone else, at least he didn't lose himself in the darkness. Gatsby stayed true to his original dream. However, the prominent status, fame and wealth gap between Gatsby and Daisy is an insurmountable gap. Just like his dream of entering the upper class and gaining recognition from society, it was vulnerable at that time. And today, when we face reality and humanity, it is also worth thinking.

### References

- [1] Fitzgerald. *The Great Gatsby* [M]. Translated by Wu Ningkun. Beijing: China Aerospace Press, 2013:2-8.
- [2] Deng NG. The Collapse of the Ideal Dream -- The Great Gatsby and the American Dream. *Foreign literature studies*, no.3, pp112-114, 1997.
- [3] Na RH. The Great Gatsby and the Collapse of the American Dream. *Language Journal-Foreign Language Education and Teaching*, no.2, pp67-68, 2009.
- [4] Shi YB. A Brief analysis of the tragic development of love in *The Great Gatsby*. *Literary Review*, no.21, pp13-15, 2022.
- [5] Zhang RH. The Symbolic Significance of *The Great Gatsby*. *Foreign Literature Studies*, no.2, pp9-12, 1999.
- [6] Zhang LL. The Evolution and Collapse of the American Dream -- An Analysis of *The Great Gatsby*. *Studies in Foreign Literature*, no.2, pp107-109, 1998.
- [7] Diao KL. Gatsby's Tragedy and Fitzgerald's Proof -- On the Theme of *The Great Gatsby*. *Journal of Henan University (Social Science Edition)*, no.2, pp83-88, 1994.
- [8] Chen L. An Interpretation of *The Great Gatsby*. *Foreign Literature (Quarterly)*, no.2, pp 90-93, 2002.
- [9] Hu M. On the Symbolic Meaning of *The Great Gatsby*. *Journal of Southwest University of Science and Technology (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, no.2, pp51-53, 2006.
- [10] Zhang Q. A Perspective on the Values of Women in the Jazz Age from the Female Characters in *The Great Gatsby*. *Journal of Zhejiang Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, no.4, pp80-84, 2003.