

In the Name of Allah



International Division

M.A. Thesis in English Language and Literature

**A critical Analysis of the
Althusserian and Marxist
Approaches to Fitzgerald's
*The Great Gatsby***

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Declaration

In The Name of God

Hereby, Fateme Jalal Kamali(909263), student of English Literature, Faculty of International Division, certify that this thesis results from my own research and whenever I have utilized other sources, I have clearly made reference to them. I also declare that the research and the title of my thesis are novel. I also promise not to publish the findings of this research and not to make it accessible to others without the permission of Shiraz University, which holds the copyright of this research.

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Abstract

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The Great Gatsby, one of the most prominent and widely read American novels, has been considered a noticeable accomplishment in Fitzgerald's literary life. This thesis explores the characters' obsession with wealth and property. This novel depicts the power of money, the role it plays in man's life and how it could change their ways of thinking and their decisions. It is a true picture of a materialistic modern society of America which categorizes people in clear-cut social divisions. Thus, the exploration of how money is the source of power, respect and value is the focal point of discussion. Deception, injustice, amorality and uncommitted relationships, and specifically marital infidelity, are the rotten fruits of the society of the novel that are the core issues of the modernity. Thus, the theoretical approach of Marxism and Althusser's material and class ideology are very suitable as the critical methodology of this research.

The Great Gatsby's main theme is materialism and the fundamental conflict of the novel is, indeed, the class struggle and the desperate mission of Jay Gatsby is to climb the social ladder. Louis Althusser's notion of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) can contribute to the readers' understanding of the world and characters of *The Great Gatsby*. Gramsci believed that the dominate class tries to impose on the member of the society its own values. This is what is happening in *The Great Gatsby* in which Gatsby and other characters who are from lower classes of society try to gain wealth as the indicator of success. Ultimately, this path leads the novel's characters to failure of their dreams.

Key words: money, success and failure, power, ideology, criticism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Content	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER I :	
1.1 .Introduction.....	۲
۱.۲ .Significance of the Study.....	7
۱. ۳ .Objective of the Study.....	8
1.4. Review of Literature.....	8
1.5. Methodology.....	9
CHAPTER II:	
2.1. Karl Marx’s Life and Philosophy.....	1۱
2.2. Friedrich Engels’ collaboration with karl Marx.....	12
2.3. Marx’s philosophy based on his early writings.....	1۳
2.4. Karl Marx’s Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.....	13
2.5. Economics.....	15
2.6. Marx’s Theory of Materialist History.....	1۶
2.7. Morality.....	17

2.8. Louis Pierre Althusser the theoretician of Post- Marxism.....	14
2.9. Althusser’s life and philosophy.....	14
2.10. Althusser and Gramsci.....	18
2.11. Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).....	18
2.12. Fitzgerald and Materialism.....	19
2.13. <i>The Great Gatsby</i> and Althusserian and Marxist Philosophies.....	20

CHAPTER III:

3.1. Scott Fitzgerald: Life and Literary Legacy.....	22
3.2. Fitzgerald’s literary Achievements.....	26
3.3. <i>The Great Gatsby</i> : Fitzgerald’s Major Criticism of a Capitalistic Economy.....	26

CHAPTER IV:

4.1. America: the Scene of Dominance of Money over Individual Ambitions.....	36
4.2. Critical views on the social implications of Materialism.....	38

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION.....

REFERENCES.....	50
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CHAPTER ONE

1.1. Introduction

The Great Gatsby is a modernist novel written by a well-known American novelist, F. Scott Fitzgerald, dealing with socio-political forces prevalent in 1920s. This novel explores the materialistic ideology of the twenties that was a significant element in shaping people's lives. Fitzgerald was born on 24 September, 1896 in a middle class family. In his youth after attending college and university, he decided to join the army. A crucial event at this stage of his life was his acquaintance and subsequent infatuation with a wealthy girl, Zelda who became the object of his pursuit in life. They eventually married, but Fitzgerald always felt that he was unable to satisfy her keen tendency in money and luxurious living. Thus, the marriage turned sour, resulting in mutual disappointment and self-destruction. However, When Fitzgerald became aware of his talent in writing, he started to earn his living with his pen and that settled his destiny. He gained wealth and fame through his brilliant novels and short stories. He, then, followed a promiscuous life style. Health problems and alcoholism weakened his ability to utilize his genius to write more fiction and finally caused his untimely death in 1940. When he passed away he was only forty four years old. Unfortunately, his short life did not allow him to continue his writing.

Fitzgerald is known to have portrayed two personalities; on the one hand, a sentimental young man full of emotions, inclined to be spontaneous, and on the other hand, a man who is upset with his excess of passion that makes him to lavish his money. These two characteristics of him make his works complex, prominent and conspicuous. It is said that he really had no interest in money itself. Actually, it was the power of wealthy people having the potential to do everything and to gain respect with ease that mostly preoccupied his mind. In Fitzgerald's viewpoint monetary security was the best means to make his dreams come true. It can be concluded that the widespread ideology of the time fashioned both his life and his literary work.

A major social force which exerted a great influence on the lives of people of that era was the unrequited love for money and romance resulting from the distinguished gap predominant in social classes. Fitzgerald, like his protagonist, Gatsby, was in love with "extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness" (*Great Gatsby* 3). Similar to the fictitious Jay Gatsby, love for Fitzgerald, was another name for Resurrection. All his dreams of ideal life were intertwined with the love of his life, Zelda. He was always accompanied by emotional bursts and extremes.

The Great Gatsby, one of the most prominent and widely read novels, has been the subject of literary critics' praise and attention since its publication in 1925. This novel is considered a noticeable accomplishment in Fitzgerald's literary life. His deepest experiences are reflected throughout this novel. It is believed that this narrative tells the story of the writer himself. Similar to Fitzgerald, Gatsby is an emotional young man full of dreams who seeks money and pleasure in his life. *The Great Gatsby* is celebrated as one of the best novels of the 20 century. Fitzgerald's familiarity with Conrad's works had a profound impact on his first person narrative techniques. The use of first person narrator helps Fitzgerald to separate his two personalities. The way of narrating is colloquial and common, even simple, but mostly noble. The only friend of Gatsby in a world where friendship is rare is Nick. He is the first person narrator who observes everything and talks honestly.

Fitzgerald exclusively wrote for himself and about what had happened to him. He had an interest in the fulfillment of his dreams. He was very ambitious and was confident that trying hard could give him access to everything that he wanted. In his view all people were actors and all places were scenes ready for human drama, but he believed that these actors must be real, so that readers couldn't recognize them from the real scene. The relation between Fitzgerald's personal life and his works is

very important. He was aware that time would pass quickly and every second had a huge impact on him. John Keats was his favorite poet. He was a romantic writer and like Romantics, Fitzgerald paid attention to the place and time of feelings, also something that must be understood and comprehended.

This study has three parts. The first part revolves around the role of money in the corrupted community of modern America as described in *The Great Gatsby*. This is a novel that reflects the characters' obsession with wealth and property. It depicts the power of money, the role it plays in man's life and how it could change his way of thinking and his decisions. The novel is a true picture of a materialistic modern society of America which categorizes people in clear-cut social divisions. The second part investigates how in this modern society money is the force that determines the social standing of people. It explains how money is the source of power, respect and value. The narrative reflects the money-dominated community of the twenties in which the Machiavellian ideology is so common and raging that illegal activities as a short-cut to money making is acceptable and normal. The impact and implications of this kind of ideology are best delineated in the novel that is the focus of the third part of this study. Deception, injustice, amorality and uncommitted relationships, and specifically marital infidelity, are the

rotten fruits of the society of the novel that are the core issues of the modernity.

There is a drastic class distinction in the American society of the time. The different between social classes is demonstrated in two places in the novel. One of them is the West Eggers who are the newly rich and lack the culture and high lifestyle of the first class of the society. They are a group who has made their opportunities to build their social relationships. They do not have any aristocratic social background, but they are newly rich. The other group is East Eggers who are stylish because they are old rich. They are known as being up to date, refined in their manners, and possess a high class prestige. They have the family background to go with their wealth. Gatsby belongs to the first group of newcomers who are not polished in their behavior. Although he has money, he is not tasteful and stylish. People like Jay Gatsby are boastful, showy, with no social prestige. In the view of East Eggers, they are outsiders. Daisy and her husband belong to the second group whose background emblemizes their old wealth. Though they are wealthy and fashionable, they are without any feeling towards others even their own children. They are used to money's power to comfort themselves. They are full of infidelity; each of them has an illicit affair just for entertainment.

The Great Gatsby is reminiscent of the American milieu that is filled with materialism. It can reveal the nature of American society and its people and their beliefs. It is important to note how society compels man to do right or wrong. The ideologies shown by Fitzgerald are his way of criticism in social forces which have an important value system in the world. In *the Great Gatsby*, Gatsby, the hero, is an ordinary man becoming extraordinarily well-off through illegal activities. He does not want money for himself, but to attract the attention of the woman with whom he is in love.

The narrative focuses on one of the 20 century's bitter truths that love and money are inseparable as if love is the soul and money is the body of a love affair. Gatsby is in bondage to strong love. He is enchanted by the money-loving Daisy's voice as Gatsby explains is "full of money". That is why, in the novel words that are related to money and wealth are dominant. Gatsby thinks that it is his duty to rescue his lover, Daisy, from her obligatory marriage with her bully, rich, aimless, and powerful husband, Tom. The Buchanans' wealth is the sign of the family's endless power. There is marital infidelity in the novel. Everyone wants to cheat on somebody else, especially on his or her spouse. It is not a very important issue for them, and no one pays attention to it because, it is the

age of amorality. The most important theme of *The Great Gatsby* is corruption and decadence.

Gatsby is great as title is *The Great Gatsby*. The greatness of Gatsby is for his great ambition and power of creation which he lavishes on huge parties to which everyone comes without any invitation. He is living with his dreams; although dreams are very vital for him, Gatsby is aware of the decadence of his dream, but never stops trying. Some of the characters in the novel are involved in the web of politico-social forces. Gatsby, the hero, however, has a great dream in his mind. He lives with his dream, but the changing values of his time corrupt his great dream. Gatsby views Daisy with a kind of imaginary completeness that it is completely wrong about her. In fact, Daisy is only interested in ease and materiality. She is an indifferent, careless woman who represents the amorality of the rich. When needed, she retreats behind her money without care to others. The tone of the society is materialistic and it lacks morality. Daisy determines her true essence by choosing Tom instead of Gatsby.

The label of “American Dream” was coined by historian James Truslow Adams in his book, *Epic of America*:

But there has been also the *American dream* that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller of every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. It is a difficult for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but 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. (214-215)

1.2. Significance of the Study

One of the most acclaimed writers of the twentieth century is Fitzgerald whose works have to be more carefully analyzed and considered. This research argues that there is a touch of Gatsby in each of the American people of the time, i.e., 1920's people that are implicated in the modern twentieth century. Having dreams about something is more enjoyable, instead of attempts at reaching to that dream. Sometimes, achievement is as much defeat as a victory. As in this novel, the goal becomes meaningless when it is fulfilled. Reality is sometimes so shallow and ugly. The reality of the pleasure of today is the waste of tomorrow.

The most significant issue to be discussed in this research is the investigation of the notion of the American dream of materialistic accomplishment. This study would shed light on the effect of capitalism on lower classes of the society and how money oppresses and corrupts people. Therefore, this study attempts to be both an illuminating and a new contribution to the study of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

1.3. Objective of the Study

The main aim of this study is to reveal the theme of money, social class gap, materialistic viewpoint, and materialistic love with which all characters of this novel are entangled, reflecting the actuality of the American society in 1920s.

As realistic novels reflect the reality of the society, the analytical study of the novel is revelatory of social-political discourse of the time, leading to a better understanding of the twentieth century's puzzle which still has its effects on the 21st century people's lives.

1.4. Review of Literature

Bloom (1985) investigates Gatsby's idealist illusions concerning the opportunity to revisit his past and can contribute to the researcher's study of the sociology of the time. Fahey (1973), likewise, criticizes the applicability of the notion of the American Dream to the reality of the American society.

Mitchell Breit wieser (2000) relates Fitzgerald's work to "The term 'Jazz Age'" which "imputes to 1920s jazz what Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar call 'expressive causality'". Hook (2002) delineates Fitzgerald's development of the art of fiction. Shain (1961) demonstrates the extent of Fitzgerald's literary career and the fundamental role of *The Great Gatsby* in this development.

Brucoli (2000) provides a literary reference to *The Great Gatsby* which can be useful to the present study. Curnutt (2004) focuses on the historical context of *The Great Gatsby*. Mizener (1951) analyzes Fitzgerald's works from a biographical point of view. Prigozy (2002) presents a thorough survey of Fitzgerald's work which greatly contributes to this research.

1.5. Methodology

The analytical framework of this study is the critical survey of the