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# Trapped and Bewildered: Dreams, Fantasies and Myths of Love, Money and Sexuality in *The Great Gatsby* of Scott. Fitzgerald.

Ms. Sonia Luthra

Dr J p Aggarwal

Phd SCHOLAR LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

*The main purpose of this research paper is to give a fresh interpretation of the mind and sensibility of the war heroes of the "Roaring Twenties" and the impact of the socio-political changes of the new age on Scott. Fitzgerald. He was the child of Jazz age the way William Wordsworth was the product of French Revolution. Wordsworth took up the ideals of French Revolution and Fitzgerald depicted the spirit of the 1920's in his short stories and novels. His personal life was full of challenges and contradictions that characterized the Jazz Age. Fitzgerald's marriage to Zelda Sayre proved a turning point in his life as he used her as a model for his women protagonists. Their marriage collapsed like the collapse of the American economy on Black Tuesday of 1929. In his life Fitzgerald was always fear ridden of poverty and failure. Fitzgerald wrote on the themes of moral decline of his American youth; on theme of human degradation and loss of faith in God. The emergence of existentialism; nihilism, and pervasive vogue of spiritual void deeply impacted the mind and sensibility of Fitzgerald. He was raised as a Catholic and he felt guilty since he wrote about the hedonistic pleasures enjoyed by the people after the World War. His father Edward Fitzgerald built no wholesale hardware business but went bankrupt in 1880's; worked as a salesman and died in penury giving no crutches to Fitzgerald. He broke with Catholicism and began his journey of life as a writer with disillusionment and despair. He wrote about the plight of the American people and the decline of the American Dream. Fitzgerald "has come to be associated with the concept of the American dream more so than any other writer of the twentieth century." (Pearson 638)*

**KEY WORDS:** Void, Nihilism, Hedonistic, Existentialism, American Dream, Catholicism

In this research paper the main focus is on the gradual decline of spiritual values and the emergence of the forces of nihilism and pessimism in the 1920s. The war heroes confronted a strange bewilderment and confusion after the end of the First World War. Scott. F. Fitzgerald discarded the traditional themes and took up the life of the war heroes in

his novels depicting the horrifying scenes of the carnage of war. The American youth was carried out by the nihilistic ideas propagated by Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883).

Fitzgerald published in 1925 *The Great Gatsby* to ridicule and debunk the ideals of the American Dream. The novel received encouraging and favorable reviews as the plot of

the novel depicted the spirit of the age and a passion for success of the hero. Gertrude Stein praised Fitzgerald providing her “genuine pleasure” through the plot of the novel. T.S. Eliot called the novel “charming,” “overpowering,” and “remarkable. Maxwell Perkins hailed *The Great Gatsby* as a “magnificent,” piece of art. The structural design of the novel is better than his previous novels since he wrote under the influence of Joseph Conrad. The critics hailed the creation of Nick Carraway who acted as the moral interpreter in the novel. The main conflict in the novel is the destructive role of the mercantile forces that wreck the life of Gatsby. Nick is the eye of the camera in the novel as he reports all events faithfully; acting as the central consciousness. Whatever happens in the novel is filtered through Nick’s perceptions. Nick remarks, “I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” (Bloom 6). Nick is a moral commentator narrating his perceptions about the actions, thoughts and ideas of Daisy, Tom and Jordan.

Gatsby is the son of “shiftless and unsuccessful farm people” in North Dakota. He rides on the wave of the American Dream and mints money to forge an identity in the aristocratic society. Once in his youth he loved a beautiful girl Daisy who is leading a married life. Gatsby had returned from the war and he had won only war medals. Gatsby meets Daisy for the first time when he is a common soldier. The critics observe that Daisy is “shallow” “foolish” and “unworthy” woman. She embodies conflicting values and expectations.

Her priority is social security and social stature. Gatsby is overwhelmed by her youth, her beauty, and her wealth. He lived in the false illusions that he would be lionized by all after the war and would easily marry his beloved Daisy. But his proposal was rejected since he had no money with him to buy all the amenities to Daisy. Gatsby was so much disillusioned that it became a passion for him to become rich. Gatsby was trapped in the money culture of America and gave his heart and mind to make garish money in life. Fitzgerald has depicted two types of people; rich and poor. The West Egg people are very rich but lack the refinement and elegance of the East Egg people to which Nick belongs. Gatsby belongs to West Egg society; he is affluent but morally corrupt; his mansion is a symbol of Gothic monstrosity.

Gatsby truly believes that “by his fiat the past can be recapitulated, the present reconstructed, the future guaranteed” (Gallo 39). Roger Lewis (1985) observes that Gatsby’s sense of the past “as something that he not only knows but also thinks he can control” (Lewis 47). Daisy is described as “Grail” Gatsby spends his garish money for a worthless Grail but Doris Stephens avers that his quest for the Grail is spiritual in nature; it is “quest for his peace with himself and God” (Stephens 56). William Fahey (1973) objects to calling Gatsby as a mythic character and “calls him as a circus character” (Fahey 81). Gatsby resorts to all that is artificial, corrupt and dehumanizing. Gatsby emerges as a mixture of materialism and idealism leading him to failure. Ironically, Gatsby tries his best to swim through the currents but history pulls him back. His cycle of

life of dream and nightmare begins. Nick believes that “Gatsby everything he scorns” At the age of seventeen Gatsby came in contact with Dan Cody who taught him all the evil ways to make fast money. Fitzgerald has explored the myth of Gatsby-Daisy relationship in a ritualistic manner in the novel. The majority of the critics such as Berman and Chase observe that Fitzgerald has depicted Daisy as a mythical Eve; a tempter characterizing her with beauty, glamour and grandeur. Gatsby is a strong, masculine and brave man. Gatsby first comes to see Daisy in her house. Gatsby is excited and stunned to see Daisy’s colossal house:

Her porch was bright with the bought luxury of star-shine; the wicker of the settee squeaked fashionably as she turned toward him.... and Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes” (*Gatsby* 179).

He tries to win beautiful and wealthy Daisy at that time. Gatsby is passionate to possess a wealthy and beautiful object but he belongs to a lower class. Gatsby is only “a penniless young man without a past” (*Gatsby* 178), with “no comfortable family standing behind him” (*Gatsby* 179). He naively “found her excitingly desirable” (*Gatsby* 177) and “felt married to her, that was all” (*Gatsby* 179). Above all, Gatsby “let her believe that he was a person from much the same strata as herself” (*Gatsby* 178). Gatsby is selfish and self-centered and like a neurotic he tries to make Daisy believe that he is worthy

of her. Daisy embodies all that Gatsby desires: beauty, purity and wealth. Fitzgerald uses a flood of images to depict the enchanting beauty of Daisy.. Daisy seems to be “gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (*Gatsby* 179), an immortal object of Gatsby’s imagination. Daisy is an enigmatic witch goddess whose life is determined the materialistic considerations of life. Gatsby loves her from the core of his heart and there is no ambiguity in his love for Daisy. But Daisy is not committed; she is worldly wise but Gatsby is a worldly fool. Gatsby writes a letter to Daisy expressing his sincerity and commitment to her love. Daisy is emotionally disturbed because she receives the letter of Gatsby just the night before her wedding. Gatsby appeals to her sincerely but Daisy is surprised by the million dollars pearl necklace gifted by Tom. Gatsby’s last fervent appeal goes waste as “She wouldn’t let go of the letter. She took it into the tub with her and squeezed it up into a wet ball” (*Gatsby* 91). Daisy is forced to take the ice-cold bath and the letter of Gatsby which she clutches has “crumbled like snow”. Daisy marries Tom. “Next day at five o’clock she married Tom Buchanan without so much as a shiver, and started off on a three months’ trip to the South Seas” (*Gatsby* 91). There is a lot of confusion about Daisy in the novel. She is an image of a fairy; she is an enchanted object for Gatsby:

Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy,

gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor (*Gatsby* 174).

Gatsby feels sexually repressed when Daisy rejects him and marries Tom Buchanan. He makes up his mind to live near Daisy and West Egg ultimately becomes an emotionally significant place for him. Gatsby's personal sense of grief and loss results from the desire to win Daisy. From Freudian perspective his failure leads to his regressive wish since "Daisy tumbled short of his dreams" (*Gatsby* 116). Gatsby creates a world of illusive fantasy and spends days and nights recollecting his memories of Daisy. Gatsby is not a rational human being; like a crazy and eccentric lover he worships Daisy's shadow, Daisy haunts Gatsby for the rest of life. Symbolically, Daisy's shadow is everything Gatsby values, but in reality her shadow brings down his downfall and leads to his tragic death at the end of the novel. For Gatsby Daisy appears like "a green light that burns all night" (*Gatsby* 112), which has lured him into reinventing his identity and trying to recapture the past.

Daisy leads a luxurious life; she enjoys wasting the sources at the time she falls in love with Gatsby. She marries Tom Buchanan because he can afford all the luxurious and consumption waste. Fitzgerald contrasts Daisy's "vicarious leisure" with Gatsby's poor social status. Daisy is rich and affluence; she belongs to the world of luxurious and comfortable consumption, but her world is also full of decadence and corruption. For Daisy social status is more important than futile romance of Gatsby. No wonder, "she vanished into her rich house, into her rich, full life, leaving Gatsby nothing" (*Gatsby* 179).

Gatsby is blinded by Daisy's beauty and wealth but he "had no real right to touch her hand" (*Gatsby* 178). Daisy rejects the marriage proposal of Gatsby simply because he has no financial heritage. Gatsby is so much mentally disturbed that her wealth becomes Gatsby's obsessions. He makes up his mind to gain "reputability" as a "gentleman of leisure". Evidently being penniless Gatsby could not keep Daisy at that time even though he loved her passionately. Nick is also impressed by the choice of Daisy. Daisy enjoys the aristocratic status by marrying Tom Buchanan. Gatsby's love affair with her teaches him a very bitter lesson of life. He suffers from inferiority complex because of financial insecurity and low social status. Gatsby realizes that being poor he could never "participate in the arrogant, inherited old wealth of Tom and Daisy Buchanan" (*Gatsby* 69). Gatsby is compelled to change the course of his life; now his main objective of life is to accumulate money which will help him enter Daisy's class. Gatsby assumes a false identity as in the early days of his romance with Daisy he lets Daisy "believe that he was a person from much the same strata as herself that he was fully able to take care of her" (*Gatsby* 178). A dream of money pollutes the sensibility of Gatsby and his dream of money destroys him. He gradually becomes "a tragicomic figure in a social comedy" (Chase 301). No wonder, Gatsby "does not know how to conform to the class to which Daisy belongs and to this class he seems ridiculous" (Chase 301). Gatsby lacks the art of living like an elite class and soon stands exposed; he is never fully accepted as a man of the higher class: "Jay Gatsby had broken up like glass against Tom's

hard malice” (*Gatsby* 177). Nick even characterizes Gatsby’s manners as having “sprung from the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower East Side of New York” (*Gatsby* 48) and “his parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people”. Gatsby couldn’t ignore the social realities. “the truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself” (*Gatsby* 118). With “his Platonic conception” Gatsby idealizes his world as well as his love. Gatsby wants to change his life through his garish money. Gatsby struggles to recapture an invented past with the new self-made identity of the present. He changes his name in hope of acquiring a new life. “Gatsby had no residual values to give his life direction except the values he created in inventing himself” (Lehan 31). Soon Daisy becomes his dream she becomes a cold, wealthy woman without any moral standards, leading to Gatsby’s disillusionment.

Gatsby is lost in his world of illusions. Daisy needs something permanent rather than a romantic moment. Gatsby could not give Daisy “a sense of security” (*Gatsby* 178) because his life does not depend on materialism but rather on romanticism and idealism. When Daisy rejects him Gatsby has no other alternative but to weave the romantic illusions wishing they could be together again. While Tom and Daisy were on their wedding trip, Gatsby made “a miserable but irresistible journey to Louisville on the last of his army pay” (*Gatsby* 183). He could not resist the hidden desire to recapture their past romantic moments. Illusions are false and deceptive but they give a unique pleasure and peace to him. He continues the “irresistible journey” and refuses to accept reality. His

thinking “that if he had searched harder, he might have found her that he was leaving her behind” (*Gatsby* 183). This illusion motivates him to search for Daisy for the rest of his life. Gatsby is trapped in his money culture as he insists that “everything of value can be bought” (Callahan 21). Gatsby has built a wealthy life to nurture his idealism and romanticism; yet he is still regarded as socially inferior to Tom and Daisy. The turning point in Gatsby’s life comes with the loss of Daisy; now he transfers his disillusionments from the past to the present. In her book *Self-Analysis* (1942), Horney outlined her theory of neurosis, describing different types of neurotic behavior of the neurotic patients. Horney observes that the neurotic needs for power, prestige, and affection lead to neurosis. Horney further adds in her book *Inner Conflicts* (1945) thus:

While he can succeed this way in creating a kind of artificial equilibrium, new conflicts are constantly generated and further remedies are continually required to blot them out. Every step in this struggle for unity makes the neurotic more hostile, more helpless, more fearful, more alienated from himself (Horney 19)

Gatsby is lost in his elusive endless dream and goes on hoping against hopes. He knows that Daisy is lost forever as she is married to Tom but he deliberately ignores the stark reality and derives pleasures in weaving false illusions about Daisy. His deceptive memories eventually deflate his self making him a neurotic lover. Gatsby loses his rational

thinking and psychic fantasy, trauma grip his consciousness. His chronic problem adversely affects Gatsby's capacity of thinking resulting into his ongoing personality disorder. Lehan observes that "Gatsby's love for Daisy is a pure impulse in a corrupt world" (Lehan 113). Gatsby's painful life begins with the physical loss of Daisy who for him is "the first nice girl he had ever known" (*Gatsby* 177). The life has no charm for him when she is lost and his perception of life and world changes with the separation of Daisy. Gatsby becomes morose and sullen and starts believing that there is only one powerful in this universe and that is power of money. No wonder, after his separation from Daisy he wholeheartedly devotes to earn money. For so many months he remains restless as he couldn't believe "a nice girl" like Daisy would betray an army officer who fought for the nation. His faith in nationalism; war medals and army honor vanish as he is confronted by the reality of a money-driven world. Men like Tom Buchanan are the real winners and he is a loser. Since he is a soldier he cannot accept the defeat from Tom and recreates a world of romance and wonder to escape from the stark realities of the corrupt world of Daisy. His mythical journey begins with the loss of Daisy as he emerges a new man after the separation from Daisy.

The mythical journey of Gatsby begins at the outset of the plot of the novel leading him to paranoia and neurosis. He suffers traumatic experiences. Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, "trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flash-backs, nightmares, and other

repetitive phenomena" (Caruth 91). Nick meets him for the first time and found him lonely and depressed: "he was content to be alone he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way" (*Gatsby* 26). Loss of Daisy was a big shock to him as he lost all charm in life and in the activities of the world. He had no source of entertainment as he would spend days and nights thinking and dreaming of Daisy. When he goes along the streets in Louisville, "he stretched out his hand desperately as if to snatch only a wisp of air, to save a fragment of the spot that she had made lovely for him" (*Gatsby* 183). Gatsby is unaware of what is actually happening to him in the real world. The image of "the dark water" symbolizes rebirth and wishing for another life. This dark water also acts as a dark mirror of his dark mind. Fitzgerald has depicted Gatsby as a mythical hero as Maurice Bewley opines: "Gatsby is a mythic character...he has no private life, no measuring or significance that depends on the fulfillment of his merely private destiny" (Bewley 131). Gatsby is projected as Everyman performing his role as a mythic character of the Roaring Twenties. Henry Dan Piper also supports the arguments of Bewley affirming that Gatsby "achieves is that of the myth that creates and sustains him" (Piper 121). Ross Posnock is of the opinion that Gatsby embodies in his personality "multiple mythical dimensions" (Posnock 211) and he emerges as a myth himself at the end of the novel. Thomas Cornellier contends that Gatsby is a great mythical character of Fitzgerald embodying "escape and fulfillment." (Cornellier 15). Stephen Matterson (1990) observes that Gatsby is a symbol of "freedom, self-reliance and

individualism” (Matterson 5). R.W.B. Lewis in his book *The American Adam* (1955) traces the history of Nobel Savage of America who is a pioneer; a frontier and the mythical hero imbibing in him the superhuman traits of individuality; passionate love for freedom; dogged determination to fight with the external forces of nature. Gatsby has all the traits of a Noble Savage of America. Nick leaves goes to the East digging out gentility, snobbery hypocrisy; he enters into the new world in the East to “the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes (*Gatsby* 137). Nick alludes to the Dutch sailors who came to America in a particular historical context. The Dutch sailors like Ulysses traveled to find a new land. Their journey is historical and adventurous like the journey of Gatsby. He joins the Great War like Ulysses and he has strong will to overcome his fate. Like Ulysses he leaves home to make more money since Daisy rejects him preferring Tom Buchanan who belongs to high class and has plenty money in his bank. Gatsby’s heart is broken and like Ulysses he determines to pursue his own life based on his own ideals. Unlike Ulysses Gatsby neither learns about himself nor about the world that surround him. Nevertheless like Ulysses, Gatsby has an “enormous capacity for wonder” (*Gatsby* 182). The mythical hero is always a personification of the human consciousness and thus transcends the limits of human actions. Rose Adrienne Gallo observes that Gatsby is under any pressure and has the potential to cross all barriers of life. Gatsby truly believes that “by his fiat the past can be recapitulated, the present reconstructed, the future guaranteed” (Gallo 39). Roger Lewis (1985) observes that Gatsby’s

sense of the past “as something that he not only knows but also thinks he can control” (Lewis 47). Daisy is described as “Grail” Gatsby spends his garish money for a worthless Grail but Doris Stephens avers that his quest for the Grail is spiritual in nature; it is “quest for his peace with himself and God” (Stephens 56). William Fahey (1973) objects to calling Gatsby as a mythic character and “calls him as a circus character” (Fahey 81). Gatsby resorts to all that is artificial, corrupt and dehumanizing. Gatsby emerges as a mixture of materialism and idealism leading him to failure. The major cause of the downfall of Gatsby is the dualistic nature of his materialism. His three major illegal ventures land him to difficulties as he stands exposed by Tom and Daisy abandons him forever.

To conclude Gatsby is a neurotic suffering from the psychological ailments. His passion for Daisy is the outcome of his sexual repression leading him to the deflation of self. His passion for garish money completely dehumanizes him. His tragic end at the end of the novel doesn’t evoke any pity for him as we experience in the great tragedies of Shakespeare. He is a case study of neurosis, paranoia and schizophrenia trapped in the illusions and false money culture of America. Gatsby is trapped in his materialistic culture and romantic idealism. He forms his own independent image of himself but his dualism and contradictions ruin his life. The forces are so powerful that he is eventually crushed by the evil forces. John Chambers (1989) has commented that Gatsby, in spite of his death and destruction is “a man of tremendous

potential who directs his energies towards an idea of happiness” (Chambers 100).

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