Great Gatsby’s Dreams Essay, Research Paper

Materialism and Idealism in The Great Gatsby

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald is a novel which deals with the quest for wealth and power in society, in order for Gatsby’s happiness to be fulfilled . The main character Jay Gatsby believes that if he achieves his financial goals that it would lead to his happiness and a better life. In his mind money equals happiness.

Jay Gatsby believes in a sort of an American dream, that money equals happiness. To him being successful, having lots of money and every material object imaginable will fulfill the entire American dream, and result in acquiring the woman he loves. The true American dream describes a way of living that is full of hope and faith for the future. It deals with the wishes and dreams of a person and it tends to be a story of rags to riches. The American dream relates to a desire for inner and material improvement.

The Great Gatsby describes the decay of a proper American dream and how the want for money and power is overtaking the spiritual and inner happiness. The materialism in the novel is of more importance to the characters than idealism. Gatsby feels that the only way to achieve idealism is through materialism, he said, “She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me.”1 He believes that Daisy would be his if he had money. The story deals with the pursuit of happiness, with money as the driving force. Gatsby feels that material wealth alone can bring the dream to life which ends up not being the case.

Gatsby thinks that money is the answer to all of his problems and obstacles which he encounters throughout his life. Since Gatsby thinks money can bring happiness, he buys the fanciest cars, the largest house, and the nicest clothes. Gatsby has the best of everything. He has everything except the one thing he actually wants, Daisy. He believes that he can buy Daisy’s love, with wealth. He believes this because if he can be rejected for being poor than he should be accepted for having excessive amounts.

Gatsby was never one that wanted to stay at the poor end of society, by looking at his past you can see that he was determined to get ahead in life. His father told Nick,

Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always

has some resolves like this or something.

Did you notice what he’s got about improving

his mind? He was always great for that.1

Gatsby’s want for a large amount of money was a huge part of the American dream. He thinks that once he is successful in achieving his financial goals, that it would lead to a better and happier life.

The novel is set during the 1920’s, which were rather corrupt years, on the account of morals and values. With the sale of alcohol prohibited in the united States, it leads to how Gatsby actually made his fortune. He made his money through the illegal sale of alcohol or “bootlegging”

He learned the business form Dan Cody when he moved east from western United States. As Gatsby became richer he moved on to the West Egg in New York, which was directly across the bay from Daisy’s home. Gatsby’s house was built just for the purpose of impressing Daisy with his material objects, which is a sign of how the corruption was affecting how he used money to achieve his ideal.

The things that Gatsby used to show his wealth to others, are all of the antiques and his library full of leather bound classics which were unopened. At one party Jordan and a man spoke about the books, “Absolutely real – have real pages and everything. I’d thought they’d be a nice durable cardboard.”2 The books and antiques are Gatsby’s way of showing off his wealth to others, but Gatsby does not even seem to care one way or another what objects he owns. In the novel Gatsby only really uses his bedroom and it is described as empty compared to the rest of the house, which his guest see.

Other symbols of great status in the 1920’s was the automobile. In the novel we are told that Gatsby has five cars. He gives a car to Nick and one kills Myrtle Wilson later in the book. Gatsby’s favorite yellow car was describes by Nick as,

. . . and there in its monstrous length with triumphant

hat boxes and supper boxes and tool boxes . . .

Sitting down behind many layers of glass in a sort of

leather conservatory way we started towards town.3

The cars which he believed could bring happiness from materialism, eventually ended up being destructive to his happiness. The automobile ended up being the object which kills Myrtle and indirectly leads to Gatsby’s murder.

Another way that Gatsby uses materialism to achieve idealism id through his appearance. When Gatsby meets with Daisy, he wears his best outfit.

. . . the front door opens nervously and Gatsby in a

white flannel suit, silver shirt and gold colored tie

hurried in.4

To Gatsby his clothes create a vision of power and happiness, that his money can buy.

Another object of Gatsby’s that corrupted the true American dream was his massive house. Gatsby tells Nick and Daisy, “My house looks well doesn’t it? See how the whole front of it catches the light.”5 he thinks that when Daisy see’s his home that she will choose him over her husband , Tom. This is why Gatsby arranged for the meeting with Daisy at Nick’s cottage, because she would see it easily from his place. When Daisy finally got he tour of the house from Gatsby he left nothing out. He pointed out all of the lavish possessions that he owned in hopes of wooing Daisy. When Daisy saw the piles of fine shirts she broke down in tears, “There such beautiful shirts, it makes me sad because I’ve never seen such – such beautiful shirts before.”6 She was crying because she realized that she loved Gatsby, and if she would have chosen Gatsby to marry she would have had the best of both worlds, instead of being in a marriage with a rich man she didn’t love.

The richest people in the world cannot have everything. Material objects can get many things for Jay Gatsby, (or the illusion of many things), such as friends. It could not however get the one thing he truly desired. Even though Gatsby’s wealth drew Daisy closer to him, it could not sustain the love and happiness that Gatsby always imagined that it would. Gatsby told Daisy to state that she never loved her husband, Tom Buchanan, and state her everlasting love for him. Following the demands she broke down and stated that Gatsby wanted too much and she questioned why he needed so much more. She did not deem in necessary to proclaim her love of Gatsby in the past and take back love that she had for other people. She thought that the love she gave him now should be enough. In the end Daisy’s truelove stayed with her “brutish” husband, Tom. Once Gatsby realized that she was not going to ever be with him forever, his dreams were destroyed. Now that he finally had what he thought that he needed to be with Daisy, and did not succeed, he had to question what he had left. He realized that all he was left with was material objects the never wanted for himself in the first place.

Gatsby’s belief that money equaled happiness in fact lead to his demise and fogged his reality. He believed that his hard work and money would lead automatically to his inner happiness. He never realized that money cannot recreate the past, no matter how hard you attempt to do so. He tried from a young age to succeed and accomplish his American dream with fancy things. He never took in to account that the dream deals with spiritual and personal happiness not just material objects.

The American dream is not achieved in this story because of the one missing link, happiness. The wealth of the world cannot buy love or happiness,

I’ll buy you a diamond ring my friend, If it makes you feel all right. I’ll get you anything my friend, If it makes you feel all right. ‘Cause I don’t care too much for money For money can’t buy me love.7

and Gatsby never realized this until it was too late. This book is a perfect example of what is needed to achieve the American dream, materialism and idealism.