

We might choose to read the blazing lights of Gatsby's house as an image of his blazing love for Daisy. Or we may see it as a form of display, using electricity as he uses his cars and clothes in the hope of attracting Daisy's attention and drawing her to him.

The American Dream

F. Scott Fitzgerald exploits the tensions that exist between two variant definitions of the American Dream. The first is an ideal version, which preserves the sense of wonder and limitless possibility at the heart of what America means. This America is an embodiment of human potential, free from any limits set by past experience. It is this aspect of Jay Gatsby that Nick Carraway admires unequivocally.

Another version of the American Dream has come to be predominant, however. This is a materialistic version in which the process of creating one's self is equated with getting rich. The acquisition of wealth allows certain material freedoms and possibilities that remain forever closed to the poor. It is the corrupt means by which Gatsby has achieved wealth and his vulgar exhibitions of affluence that provoke Nick's scorn.

Gatsby has recreated himself, shedding the past, abandoning his parents, just as America tried to jettison European history and Old-World values with its Declaration of Independence in 1776. Gatsby's desire was to create an ideal self, held together by hope and wonder. But this ideal is tainted by the criminal means he employed to attain his evident wealth. In terms of F. Scott Fitzgerald's symbolism, the New World's 'green breast', living and nourishing, has diminished to become the 'green light', at the end of the Buckanans' dock, the artificial marker of a rich man's property.

The tension here may be formulated in terms of material success and moral failure, which are clearly thematic issues of concern to F. Scott Fitzgerald. He presents an apparent

paradox in which success in material terms—the acquisition of the trappings of wealth—inescapable means failure in terms of the ideal.

Yet it is not just the rich who sacrifice their individuality and their freedom in order to acquire money and property. George Wilson is unequivocally a failure, in economic terms and as a husband to Myrtle. He has few possessions, but he is ensnared as a worker, a drudge within the economic system, with no room to manoeuvre. His dream, expressed to Tom, who is alarmed at the prospect, is to go West with his wife, and to begin life anew; but it is just a dream and one that will not realised.