

The Greatness of Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*

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Abstract

The Great Gatsby is the masterpiece of Fitzgerald, the representative of “Jazz Age”. This paper studies the greatness of Gatsby from three aspects: Gatsby’s struggle against fate focusing on his love and career, Gatsby’s spirit of self-discipline and his spirit of self-sacrifice compared with Jesus Christ and other people. In a word, Gatsby is as great as the writer Fitzgerald thinks of.

Keywords

Greatness, Gatsby, Struggle, Self-Discipline, Self-Sacrifice

1. Introduction

The Great Gatsby is the masterpiece of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the famous American modern novelist and the representative of “Jazz Age”. This novel was “the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James” (Eliot, qtd. in Ousby, 1979: p. 218). “*The Great Gatsby* is very rich and complex. Our understanding of it can be deepened and enriched by looking at the historical period in which it is set” (Gross & Gross, 2008: p. xii).

The outstanding impression of this novel is the dream written by Fitzgerald. Gatsby’s greatness is the greatness of old American dream, for it has kindness and wealth. The death of the protagonist Jay Gatsby is a typical example which elaborates the disillusionment of American Dream.

Gatsby lives a poor life and comes across his true love Daisy. Yet they are doomed to separate because they belong to two social classes. But by struggle and hard work, Gatsby finally achieves great economic success. By entering the upper society, he realizes his wealth dream and life dream. His greatness lies in his struggle against fate, spirit of self-discipline and spirit of self-sacrifice.

2. Gatsby’s Struggle

2.1. Gatsby’s Struggle in Career

What people worship was the man who could pull himself up by his own bootlaces, just as Franklin did. Gatsby

was this kind of person who had the ability to approach success by working hard. Gatsby was born in a poor family at the bottom of the society, but he determined to become a rich people. Without struggle, it was his fate to continue the poor life and of course he would not get the chance to win back Daisy's love. Starting from scratch, he suffered a lot. Later with Mr. Dan Cody's help, Gatsby learnt much about business. He enriched his ability and began to bootleg wine and make great fortune overnight. Though he ran counter to the laws, he realized his fortune dream and promoted his social status. Having money as the backup force, he bought luxurious villa and held extravagant parties to attract Daisy and other prominent figures in that society. The other purpose of Gatsby's party was to display fully his fat pockets to the whole world. He thought that in this way he could be recognized and would become one member of the upper-class. It was not inexcusable to engender this kind of thought, because American society boasted equal opportunity. And there were many successful cases such as Franklin Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln, who started from the bottom, from the log cabin to the White House. In the "Jazz Age", it was great to realize one's dreams.

"American Dreams" were successful dreams which existed among young people. And dreams were considered as a kind of very valuable ability and talent by Americans. What's more, Americans were not merely dreamers and they were men of action instead. During that period of time, all were encouraged to make their dreams come true. Gatsby was also chasing the "American Dreams"—the typical Americans created a new concept which contained pride, hope and dreams in their minds. Gatsby was built of a successful man who fought against the fate to become one member of the rich people by personal struggle. He was firm, indomitable, brave and adamant. Although acquiring wealth by some illegal means, Gatsby was not an evildoer. As a matter of fact, he was forgivable for he was forced by the situation. To protect his pure dream and to get chance, his action could be understood. The keys to success were ideas and sufficient courage. Gatsby's struggle in career was the same as other Americans of that age. And that was the reason why Gatsby was accepted by people around him. The writer Fitzgerald was great because he knew the "Jazz Age" so well and could create such a figure who reflected that age lively.

2.2. Gatsby's Struggle in Love

According to Gatsby, becoming rich was the only way out for him. He recognized clearly that age and knew the fact that he lost Daisy because of his weak economic base. If he wanted to win back his love, he should acquire wealth as much as he could. Gatsby was great as he struggled against his fate in love.

Gatsby fell in love with Daisy when the army stationed in the South during the First World War. He was too poor to marry her at that time. Then Gatsby went to the war and they lived far apart. After his leaving, Daisy became heart-broken. But before long she gave up her promise of waiting for Gatsby. She received a pearl necklace and married Tom, and then they went to spend their honeymoon. And as a matter of fact, she forgot Gatsby and began to love another rich person. Even Jordan thought Daisy was rather happy again. While Gatsby kept to their promise. In order to enter the upper-class and win his love back, Gatsby struggled to become rich by bootlegging wine. When Gatsby saw Daisy five years later, he behaved like a child and remembered the exact time since their separation. That day must have left a profound impression on Gatsby because he still remembered the exact date. Gatsby held the confidence that Daisy only loved him and that Daisy's marriage was just a mistake. To attract Daisy, Gatsby held the luxurious parties and asked Daisy's cousin Nick to act as a go-between and make opportunities for them. Gatsby had been waiting for her since they departed and still kept hope in it. After the accident, Gatsby wanted to make sure Daisy's security and waited for her to give sign to him. And the last thing he did for Daisy was to be the scapegoat for her and her crazy action. He was loyal and steadfast to Daisy. For Gatsby, Daisy was the incarnation of his American Dream. During all his life, he sought for Daisy's love and her love was the motive power for his career and his own life. So whether he would realize his love dream and career dream or not was not that significant, and what would inspire people was his unconquerable will.

But actually Gatsby did not notice the truth that Daisy did not deserve his love, because she was not a real angel in her heart. She was fickle in love. Daisy talked with men in a low voice so that men would approach her, which was her commonly used trick to attract men. When Nick invited Daisy to have some tea in his home, whose real purpose was to create a meeting chance for Gatsby and Daisy, Daisy asked Nick whether he was sweet on her. And when Daisy saw Nick in Gatsby's party, she told Nick that she would be excited if Nick wanted to kiss her. She was willing to receive his love and she was waiting for his contact anytime. What's more, she was playing with some dissipated men. She was not as serious about love as Gatsby was. It was Daisy's ap-

parently pure and naïve characters that attracted Gatsby. In addition, Daisy was hypocritical and cold. Apparent enthusiasm concealed her inner coldness. She was so selfish and mammonish that she was even indifferent to her own daughter's situation. The contrast in love between them further foiled the greatness of Gatsby.

3. Gatsby's Self-Discipline

3.1. Gatsby's Schedule

When he was a boy, Gatsby made a schedule to regularize his behavior. Having a family background which was not good, Gatsby would never be satisfied with just a few success in his life. He definitely knew his dreams and that he should discipline himself in order to realize them. The contents of his schedule were as follows:

Rise from bed	6.00 A.M.
Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling	6.15-6.30 A.M.
Study electricity, etc	7.15-8.15 A.M.
Work	8.30-4.30 P.M.
Baseball and sports	4.30-5.00 P.M.
Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it	5.00-6.00 P.M.
Study needed inventions	7.00-9.00 P.M.

GENERAL RESOLVES

No wasting time at Shafter's or [a name, indecipherable]

No more smoking or chewing

Bath every other day

Read one improving book or magazine per week

Save \$5.00 [crossed out] \$3.00 per week

Be better to parents (Fitzgerald, 2003: pp. 231-232)

From his schedule, it was obvious to understand Gatsby's ambitions. He knew his humble class origin, so he never stopped to discipline himself. He made such a whole system of action plans which must be done and accomplished every day. Gatsby was great because he had the spirit of self-discipline. Even his father was proud of his own son and thought that he was bound to get ahead. His schedule was a typical case to reveal Gatsby's self-discipline.

The early bird catches the worm. Getting up early in the morning was not only his good habit, but also a reflection of his spirit of self-discipline. He was not lazy and lived a regular and healthy daily life. From this, it was likely to infer that he did not like some evening parties which always ended late in the evening or in the morning of the next day. Doing dumbbell exercises and wall-scaling showed that Gatsby cared for his physical body. The body played a fundamental part in human beings' activities. Dumbbell exercises would do good to health condition and development of his physical body and wall-scaling was a way to flee from his life. Studying electricity showed that he wanted to know some knowledge of electricity. Electricity was one branch of science, perhaps Gatsby wanted to be one of the famous scientists such as Einstein and Newton. If he had gift in electricity, he would succeed in the future as well. In addition, studying electricity could also add his general knowledge. New inventions belonged to the same kind of situation. He also played baseball and did sports for the sake of health. Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it could train his communicative ability and promoted his public impression, which prepared himself for bigger tasks ahead. He was the one who would take precautions. And what he did now was really good for his later life.

In his general resolution, he knew clearly that smoking and chewing were bad for his health, so he requested himself not to get into bad habits. And cherishing time, bathing, reading, saving money and showing consideration for parents were good habits. Accumulation was a good way to success. Forming good habits lied in persistence, in never giving up.

The book called *Hopalong Cassidy* was Gatsby's favorite book, and it was about the story of opening up virgin soil by cowboys. This was his favorite book, so he might be attracted by the enterprising spirit, maybe he wanted to open up wasteland if he had gotten that chance. And his schedule was put into that book. It was easy for him to see this schedule every day which would remind him of his strong ambitions. When Nick saw this schedule, he thought that Gatsby was brought back to life again as both his future and his dreams were fresh and promising.

3.2. Gatsby's Simple Life and His Unsophisticated Morality

Gatsby still lived a simple life after becoming rich. His bedroom was the simplest room in the mansion. He only put the gold toilet set for Daisy in his room. He didn't decorate his room resplendently and magnificently. In his heart, wealth was not so momentous as true love and unsophisticated morality. He did not drink. Compared with those guests who were drunk in his parties, he was sober and self-disciplinary. So he made a decent impression on others. Nick would always see that Gatsby was watching his guests calmly himself. His spirit of self-discipline could be seen from his keeping mind awake and abstinence of wine. What's more, he ignored other women. Mr. Wolfsheim said Gatsby was careful about women. Gatsby would not have affairs with friends' wives, as what Tom had done. Gatsby did not indulge himself in love. He knew the significance of self-discipline and decency.

Nick thought that there was something magnificent in Gatsby. Gatsby was a man with eternal hope and romantic color. He had hope and romantic feelings that Nick had never seen before and would never find in the future from other people. Gatsby's unique imagination was visualized in Nick's words, "It has often been observed that Gatsby is in the line of heroes of romance" (Bloom, 1986: p. 30). Gatsby was idealized with his romantic nature.

Gatsby attached importance to the ties of relationship. He valued friendship much. Mr. Wolfsheim thought that Gatsby deserved the trust as one of family members. Nick thought Gatsby's smile was rare and unsophisticated, which contained no hypocrisy and money. When Gatsby smiled, he gave irresistible preferences to others. Therefore, he could give others sense of security and he possessed the ability to let others trust him. Sometimes he lied but he made Nick understand and trust him. After the car accident, Gatsby rejected Nick's suggestion of fleeing immediately, which showing his morality and courage of shouldering the responsibility. Gatsby was not as selfish as Tom who distorted the facts and chose others to offset errors.

Gatsby had a so-called "corrupt but pure nature", which meant that the thought core of Gatsby was still pure. As there was a pure dream at the bottom of his heart, his life purpose was just to realize his dream. He kept the kind nature from beginning to end. After achieving success and fame, he still kept pure nature like the lotus coming out of silt but not being dyed. He was wealthy but he was not mercenary. On the contrary, he was very generous. He revealed everything to his true friend Nick and his love Daisy. Even for the life-death matter, he could throw himself into the task of undertaking Daisy's whole responsibility, without telling others the truth except Nick. He had the Humanitarian spirit, which was also a result of his spirit of self-discipline.

And he is not lost in that generation. Unlike Mrs. Wilson who wants to change her life by a rich person rather than herself, she is lost in "Jazz Age". Gatsby refrains himself from temptations of that age and keeps his unsophisticated morality consciously. Essentially he is a hermit of that society. Living at that time, he is great because he disciplines him to keep a simple life and his unsophisticated morality.

4. Gatsby's Self-Sacrifice

4.1. Similarities between the Death of Jesus Christ and of Gatsby

By comparing Jesus Christ and Gatsby, it is easy to find some similarities. Jesus Christ is the son of God. Gatsby changes his name and treats himself as the son of the God. In addition, both of them are innocent and become the scapegoats for others, but they hold the view that their death is great. Therefore, both of them could sacrifice themselves when they are needed. Gatsby is great because he has the same spirit of self-sacrifice as Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, Jesus Christ was innocent, but he died for others. Jesus Christ's self-sacrifice could be seen from some stories. Jesus gave his bread as his body to others for the purpose of remembering him. "But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table" (Wei & Li, 1998: p. 117). "It naturally reminds us of Christ and his last dinner. Gatsby also extends feasts to his guests and provides good wine. The devouring guests in his dinner drink wine (symbolic of Gatsby's blood), but no one pays tribute. He is deserted by his guests and betrayed by them" (Guo, 2004: p. 11).

People wanted to crucify Jesus, but Pilate said he found "no fault in him" (Wang et al., 1992: p. 83). After Jesus was arrested, many followers were escaping with panic, and the blasphemy was given to Jesus, and Gatsby suffered this kind of thing as well. At last, he was looked down upon by his guests. Besides, their attitudes about death are almost the same, they do not fear death. They want to do something that is good to others. And many people criticized them after their death. Only a few people come to Gatsby's funeral, which is a contrast with so many guests in his great parties.

And both of them are killed by the people they have trusted most. Jesus is betrayed by Judas who is his follower. The cause of his crucifixion is Judas's betrayal for the sake of money. And Gatsby's death is resulted from Daisy who is not responsible in nature. Daisy is Gatsby's true love. For the purpose of winning back his love, Gatsby loses his life.

When Nick came to Gatsby's house, he connected Gatsby with the Dutch immigrants and American hundreds of years ago. Nick thought that Gatsby's American dreams did not disappear and his ideal and romantic spirit would go on as long as the universe existed. This kind of feeling could be seen as the resurrection of Gatsby's spirit. And it comes to light that Jesus is resurrected after his death.

4.2. Gatsby's Self-Sacrifice and Other People's Indifference

And by comparing Gatsby's self-sacrifice and other people's indifference, it is easy to find out Gatsby's greatness.

"*The Great Gatsby* thus tells another tale, a tale of the blindness of desire and of the rocklike indifference of the universe" (Piper, 1970: p. 155). Both Gatsby and Tom knew the assailant of that car accident was Daisy, but their actions were different. There was a big contrast here. Gatsby was trying to protect his lover from Tom's threat, while Tom was trying to revenge Gatsby and ran away with Daisy. As everyone knew, Daisy was loved by both Gatsby and Tom. But their loves for Daisy were in different levels. Gatsby loved Daisy with all his soul and heart so that he could think for her all the time without hesitation. When Nick asked Gatsby to escape from this mess, he refused and tried to shoulder Daisy's responsibility instead. When things were related to Daisy, Gatsby was willing to sacrifice himself. But Tom was not that kind of person. When Mr. Wilson asked Tom about the truth, he was so scary that he carried out his conspiracy. Mrs. Wilson was Tom's mistress, and he was sad for her death. Different from Gatsby's self-sacrifice, Tom was selfish in nature. Tom loved Mrs. Wilson, but he loved Daisy more. And he loved himself most. After Gatsby's death, Nick saw Tom was still wary and arrogant. When asked about Gatsby's death, he was not repentant in his heart. Nothing is more vital than himself.

Gatsby's spirit of self-sacrifice could be seen in the contrasts to other people's reflection. Miss Baker, a friend of Daisy, was also indifferent about the accident and Daisy and showed less worry than Gatsby. Mr. Wolfsheim was another counterexample. He was Gatsby's good friend before. Gatsby had told Nick that Mr. Wolfsheim was once loyal to his good friends. But he disappeared after Gatsby's death. He wanted to reduce trouble. Therefore, Mr. Wolfsheim's reflection added dismal atmosphere to Gatsby's death. But what did Daisy do on that night? When Gatsby thought about her security, she was brewing a plot with her husband for the one who loved her most. In Gatsby's funeral, she even did not appear. Daisy's ruthlessness serves as a foil to the greatness of Gatsby.

5. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is easy to say that Gatsby is great. Firstly he struggles against his fate in love and in career. Viewed from his struggle in love, Gatsby is infatuated with Daisy all the time. According to Gatsby's struggle in career, he makes great efforts to enter the upper-class from the bottom of the society. He struggles against fate to become rich. And he depends upon personal ability to realize his dreams. Secondly, he has the spirit of self-discipline. His spirit of self-discipline could be seen from his ambitious schedule, simple life and his unsophisticated morality. He lives a simple life and keeps his unsophisticated morality throughout his whole life. Last but not least, he has the spirit of self-sacrifice as Jesus Christ. Compared with other people, Gatsby is made to stand out from the crowd. To sum up, it is acceptable to say that Gatsby is great as he has these highlighted spirits.

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