

Sydney Wilson

Mrs. Brianne Matheney

Honors English II

8 December, 2016

### The American Dream

Morals are like an unwritten code of behavior. People expect other people to act a certain way and know not to do or say certain things. Morals are the star of corruption in F.Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Nick Carraway moves to New York and settles in a place called West Egg. He meets a wealthy man named Gatsby who throws lavish parties for many people. He soon finds out Gatsby is helplessly in love with Nick's rich, married cousin, Daisy. Gatsby tries with all his might for five whole years to earn back Daisy's love, but when Daisy chooses her husband Tom, Gatsby's dream is dead. Fitzgerald supports the theme of the withering of the American dream through the presentation of the Valley of Ashes, the dust that eats at Gatsby's dreams, and the moral decay of the upper class.

The Valley of Ashes is the place where factories dump ashes and other waste they do not need which the author describes : "This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens" (Fitzgerald 23). The Valley of Ashes shows the moral decay that the city and the upper class hide and Fitzgerald presents this with this oxymoron inside the quote: "grotesque gardens" (23). The people who live here lose their vitality and the life they have inside of them: "The ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight" (23). The people who live here lose their sense of excitement, and anyone can see that as this quote talks

about people as if they are animals. This setting shows how the pursuit of wealth leads to moral decay and traps these poor people in this environment.

The same dust that settles in the Valley of Ashes eats at Gatsby's dream: "it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (2). Gatsby is wrapped up in getting more money but ends up ruining his own morals in the process. Gatsby tries to impress Daisy with his wealth and possessions, and she comes to understand this: " 'They're such beautiful shirts,' [Daisy] sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. 'It makes me sad because I've never seen such beautiful shirts-such beautiful shirts' " (92). She sees that he has changed himself for her, but they have both changed so much that the past is just too far away. The morals he gained from his upbringing in the West have been compromised because of his focus on his dream: money.

The upper class think of themselves as untouchable, so they have no compassion for others and show no sense of the morals they should possess. They show this several times throughout the novel: "There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that [Tom and Daisy] were conspiring together" (145). This happens after Daisy kills Myrtle on the way home from New York, and their first thought is to cover their own tracks when a woman is dead and her husband is devastated. Daisy and Tom are used to having people clean up their messes: "I called up Daisy half an hour after we found [Gatsby], called her instinctively and without hesitation. But she and Tom had gone away early that afternoon, and taken baggage with them" (164). They took off and hoped the mess would go

away on its own. They do not care who has to go down for them which shows the lack of caring and compassion the upper class possesses.

In *The Great Gatsby*, there is a constant theme: the withering of the American dream that is shown through several ways throughout the book. It is shown through the Valley of Ashes where people are trapped by their pursuit of money. It's also characterized by the parasitic dust that eats at Gatsby's dream which is money once again causing people to stray from a good path. The last way it is presented is through the carelessness of the upper class which is the ultimate display of moral decay caused by money. Fitzgerald shows his audience how money can affect people in negative ways and cause them to forget the simple life lessons and morals they have learned.

## Works Cited

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995. Print.