

On Symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*

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ABSTRACT

The Great Gatsby employs a distinct style and language to reveal the moral emptiness and hypocrisy hidden beneath the halo of the Jazz Age, as well as to profoundly explore the spiritual essence of the broken American dream through the lens of broken dreams of love and money, which had a significant impact on American society at the time. He is a highly symbolic figure representing the United States in the 1920s, particularly the broken American ideal of unparalleled wealth and material abundance. In addition to its utilitarian relevance, *The Great Gatsby* has significant artistic value, with symbolism playing a key role throughout the work. Then this paper introduces Fitzgerald's biography, the novel's period background, and the discussion of symbolism, and then this paper specifically analyzes the symbols used in *The Great Gatsby* and their significance in conveying the theme of the novel. Finally, the paper draws a conclusion, reflecting on the problems of the American dream, and at the same time, linking with the modernization process of China, from which a warning can be obtained.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby*; Jazz Age; Symbolism; The American Dream.

Contribution/Originality: The originality of this thesis lies in three dimensions: First, an integrated analytical framework of three categories of symbols—color, geography, and objects—is developed, which systematically explains how symbolic techniques in *The Great Gatsby* express the social landscape of the "Jazz Age" and the thematic meaning of the disillusionment of the "American Dream." Second, the interpretation of symbolism extends from the literary text to the contemporary Chinese context, concerning how to balance material and spiritual development in the process of modernization with Chinese characteristics, thus enriching the present-day value of classical literary studies. Third, in light of a review of both domestic and international studies, this thesis elaborates on the multiple functions of symbols in the constitution of characters, elaboration of themes, and critique of society, thus achieving a fine localization of literary critical theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Great Gatsby is one of the masterpieces of American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald. Set in New York and Long Island in the 1920s, the novel depicts a "Jazz Age" full of dreams and dashed dreams, hopes and despair. During this period, American society experienced an economic boom after the First World War, but at the same time, the

social phenomena of moral degradation and materialism became increasingly serious. Jay Gatsby, the main character of the novel, epitomizes this era, and his life trajectory and tragic ending reflect the many contradictions and problems of society at that time. Since the novel came out, scholars have deeply interpreted it from different angles. Among them, symbolism, as an important method of literary criticism, provides a unique perspective for interpreting *The Great Gatsby*. Symbolism advocates revealing the author's deeper intentions and the thematic meaning of the work by analyzing the signs, metaphors, and symbols in the text.

The study of symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* has important academic value and practical significance. By deeply studying the symbolic elements of the novel, we can understand Fitzgerald's creative intention and literary style more comprehensively. The study of symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* helps us to have a deeper understanding of the historical background and cultural context of American society in the 1920s. Many symbolic elements in the novel are closely related to the social reality at that time, and by analyzing these elements, we can have a more intuitive understanding of the moral concepts, values, and cultural atmosphere of the society at that time. In today's society, the phenomena of materialism and utilitarianism still exist, and the problems of moral degradation and human alienation revealed in the novel have not disappeared completely. Therefore, by studying the symbolic elements of the novel, we can think more deeply about the nature and influence of these problems, to provide useful inspiration and reference for solving real problems.

The thesis will study it using textual analysis. First of all, it is necessary to make a careful reading of the text to identify and classify the various symbolic elements appearing in the novel. These elements may include characters, places, objects, events, colors, seasons, etc. For example, Gatsby's mansion, Daisy's green eyes, and the "valley of ashes" in the novel can be symbolic elements. The appearance and variation of these elements throughout the novel may imply a deeper intention on the part of the author. It is also important to consider how the use of symbolism in the novel relates to the historical and cultural context of the time. For example, American society in the 1920s was in a period of economic prosperity but moral decay, and this social context may have influenced Fitzgerald's characterization and plotting of the novel. By combining these symbolic elements with the historical and cultural context, the social value and historical significance of the novel can be more fully understood.

1.1 Current Status of Domestic and International Studies on *The Great Gatsby*

Many foreign scholars have examined *The Great Gatsby* from multiple perspectives, particularly focusing on symbolism and historical context. Newman (2018) argues that the novel presents a version of the American Dream, emphasizing the necessity of hard work to attain the symbolic "green light" and a promising future. Similarly, Cain (2020) analyzes the American Dream within the context of the Jazz Age and compares its representation in the novel with its contemporary form, highlighting its evolving implications. From a theoretical perspective, Tyson (2014) provides a systematic

framework for interpreting literary texts through various critical theories, offering analytical tools that can be applied to *The Great Gatsby*. In addition, Haziri (2020) interprets Fitzgerald's use of color symbolism, suggesting that the author employs vivid and solid colors in a painterly manner to illuminate thematic meanings. From a broader theoretical standpoint, Todorov (1982) explains that symbolism functions as an indirect expressive device, conveying abstract concepts, emotions, and experiences through metaphor and suggestion, thereby enriching textual meaning and deepening readers' engagement.

In recent years, domestic scholarship has also increasingly focused on the symbolic dimensions of *The Great Gatsby*. Cheng (2014) systematically reviews the academic history of Fitzgerald studies, analyzing critical approaches and the evolution of scholarly interpretations in both Western and Chinese contexts. He and Hou (2022) argue that the novel, as a representative work of symbolism in modern Anglo-American literature, demonstrates the application of symbolism through elements such as color, characters, objects, and spatial settings, thus enhancing readers' understanding of the text. Expanding the scope of literary analysis, Zheng (2025) explores the construction of metaphor in dialogue, emphasizing how linguistic strategies reveal underlying social metaphors and ideological tensions. Pan (2023) examines the symbolic function of white imagery, noting its dual connotations of purity and emptiness, which reflect Fitzgerald's critique of the illusory and corrupt nature of high society and the American Dream. Furthermore, Cao and Wang (2018) analyze the collapse of the American Dream in the novel and argue that it provides important insights for contemporary society, particularly in maintaining a balance between material development and spiritual fulfillment.

1.2 Fitzgerald's Life and the Background of the Novel

Fitzgerald, full name Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on September 24, 1896, to a furniture dealer (Britannica, 2026). He auditioned to write plays as a young man and enrolled at Princeton University after graduating from high school. While in college, he formed his theater group and wrote for the university's literary journal; however, he dropped out of school for medical reasons. In 1917, he enlisted in the army, but for various reasons did not go overseas to fight in the war. After his discharge, Fitzgerald continued to write as an amateur and made his mark with the publication of a novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920, which brought him early fame (History.com Editors, 2025). The success of the novel led to his marriage, and the couple later traveled to Paris, where he met several American writers, including Ernest Hemingway. In 1925, another masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, established his place in modern American literary history and made him a spokesman for the "Jazz Age" of the 1920s. Fitzgerald was one of the representative writers of the "Lost Generation," and he died of a heart attack in Los Angeles on December 21, 1940, at the age of 44. Fitzgerald was not only good at writing long stories, but his short stories were also unique. His works vividly reflected the destruction of the "American Dream" in the 1920s and showed the spiritual outlook of the "wilderness era" of the American upper class during the Great Depression (Hua, X. 2022).

The American Dream, which many Americans cite as their national spirit, is a product of the combination of Protestant ethics and constitutionalism, and its core meaning is that anyone in the United States can have a better life as long as he or she is hardworking enough to persevere in the struggle (Gottschalk, P. 2024). The earliest personification of the American dream was Benjamin Franklin, a legendary figure from a poor background who could not even go to school as a child, but became a founding father of the United States through his struggles, and an accomplished politician, investor, diplomat, and so on. The American Dream had brought great hope to countless poor people, but in the United States in the 1920s, the definition of a “better life” was simply the knowledge of living in the upper class, having more money, and enjoying richer physical conditions.

In Fitzgerald’s writing, *Gatsby* is purely a contemporary embodiment of the American dream: he comes from a poor background but loves to study from a young age. As a teenager, Gatsby had written a Franklin-esque work schedule neatly on the title page of his worn-out western novels. Through years of struggle, Gatsby also managed to rise to the upper class by engaging in a variety of hooks that ran against the law. The “Jazz Age” was marked by both material prosperity and spiritual disorientation. Following World War I, the rapid expansion of the American economy brought about significant social and cultural transformations. Technological advancements and urbanization reshaped everyday life, while shifting social norms, particularly regarding gender roles, reflected a broader process of modernization (Prigozy, 2020). At the same time, this era was characterized by moral ambiguity and a crisis of values, which provided important historical and cultural context for Fitzgerald’s literary creation of *The Great Gatsby* (Donaldson, 2018).

1.3 Symbolism and Its Function in Literature

i The Origins of Symbolism

Symbolism is a term derived from the Greek word Symbol, which in Greek originally meant “a wooden board (or a pottery) divided into two halves, the host and the guest each holding one of them, and when they met again, put them together as a piece, as a token of friendship”. After several evolutions, its meaning has become “a form as a customary representation of a concept”, that is, extended to any idea or thing on behalf of any symbol or object that can express a certain idea, and a thing is called a “symbol” (Xiao, T. 2023). It is different from the metaphor that people usually use, it involves the essence of things, and its meaning is much deeper than the metaphor.

The artistic movement known as symbolism first appeared at the close of the 19th century in Britain and other Western nations. Symbolism emerged as a novel approach to creativity during the height of Romanticism. To a certain degree, symbolism was employed by many Romantic writers; there were more clues than answers and more intricacy than free play. Numerous Symbolist works had previously been published by Symbolism's founder, Baudelaire, as well as well-known Symbolists like Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Weiland. “Symbolism” refers to a form of theory centered on symbols. It

is not a technique of minutiae, but a way of thinking as a whole. According to the symbolist poet Adren Remacle, "Symbolism is the search for the unknown through the known, the search for the unearthly through the earthly." (Li, G. 2022)

ii **An Overview of Symbolism**

There are usually two kinds of symbols in literature: one is the implication with universal meaning, while the second one is more favored by the creators of literature, that is, the symbols are hidden in the specific linguistic context of the work to express the author's underlying intention. "When we read, we get the impression that certain specific characters and things in a novel transcend themselves or hide a larger meaning" (Barnet, S., Berman, M., & Burto, W. 2000).

Symbols can take many forms, such as objects, persons, places, or events, representing meanings beyond themselves. According to cultural conventions and social customs, selecting familiar symbols can effectively convey shared meanings within a society (Mirzayeva, 2024). For example, red symbolizes joy, the magpie represents good luck, the crow suggests misfortune, the dove signifies peace, and mandarin ducks symbolize love. For example, red symbolizes joy, the magpie symbolizes good luck, the crow symbolizes bad luck, the dove symbolizes peace, mandarin ducks symbolize love, and so on.

In literature, symbolism serves several important functions. First, it adds depth and complexity to a narrative by allowing readers to interpret symbolic meanings in diverse ways (Oson, 2024). Symbolism can also create a mood or atmosphere that complements the themes and ideas in a story. For example, if a story is about death and rebirth, the use of flowers or springtime might create a sense of hope and renewal.

In conclusion, symbolism is a powerful literary device that allows writers to communicate complex ideas and emotions through simple symbols.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, using symbolism theory as the analytical framework and textual analysis as the primary method. Taking *The Great Gatsby* as the research object, the study focuses on the interpretation of symbolic elements in the novel, including colors, objects, characters, and settings.

Through close reading of the text, this paper examines how Fitzgerald employs symbolism to construct and convey the theme of the American Dream. In particular, it explores how symbolic representations reveal the process from the rise to the decline of the American Dream, and analyzes the underlying reasons for the ultimate disillusionment of this seemingly "magnificent feast."

The analysis is conducted by identifying key symbolic images in the text and interpreting their thematic significance in relation to the social and cultural context of the Jazz Age, thereby uncovering the deeper meanings embedded in the narrative.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Color Symbols and the Their Implications

The Great Gatsby has less than 49,000 words in the original text, but it reads as long because the novel is very dense. Color symbolism is a crucial element in *The Great Gatsby*. In addition, different colors may inspire strong feelings in readers and help them create emotional resonance, which adds to the story's overall fascination and helps readers better connect with the characters. In addition, different colors can, to some extent, reflect the inner lives and personalities of the novel's characters. The following are examples of several common colors in *The Great Gatsby* and a detailed analysis of their symbolism in literature.

i Green

Green represents vitality and hope. The most representative thing in the novel is the green light, which symbolizes the dream that Gatsby has been pursuing all his life. The author's ingenious arrangement of the green light appears three times, the first time in the first chapter of the novel:

“Involuntarily I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock.”

When the green light first appears, we see Gatsby reaching out to the green light with both hands, trembling slightly, almost worshipping it in a way. He gazed across the river at the ever-flickering green light, and inwardly he was thrilled, a thrill that came from the fond hope that his love was close at hand and that he seemed to be able to hold Daisy at once. Gatsby sees Daisy as everything to him, and the green light at the end of Daisy's dock is seen by Gatsby as hope.

The second appearance of the green light is in Chapter 5 of the novel when Gatsby is reunited with Daisy:

“Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one.”

Gatsby shows his mansion as an opportunity for Daisy to show that he has risen through the ranks, the wealth of ten thousand dollars, and when Gatsby's wealth, will be Daisy is impressed, shocked and feels that Daisy has been close at hand, no longer like the previous so “distant” and “fuzzy!” Gatsby thought that his hopes and dreams were about to be realized. He said to Daisy, “If it weren't for the fog at sea, we could see your house on the other side of the channel, and there is always a green light at the end of your pier, and the light is always on all night long”, and the green light at this time symbolizes that Gatsby is chasing after his dream, and his dream is about to come true. In Gatsby's mind, Daisy is perfect, and when they meet again, Daisy's actions make him realize that the goddess in his heart for many years is not a perfect fairy, and the green

light at this time loses its original significance, and the discrepancy between the dream and the reality makes Gatsby feel disappointed.

At the end of the novel, the green light appears again, “And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.”

After Gatsby’s death, Nick thought of the first time Gatsby saw the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock, a dream that Gatsby himself pursued for his entire life, never stopping. However, when he finally stood at the pinnacle of his life, he realized that the green light did not bring true happiness and satisfaction. This comparison and contrast makes people have deep doubts and reflections on Gatsby’s American dream. At that time in the United States, such a consumerist society, Gatsby’s pursuit of the spiritual level of the dream and the social trend of popularity is out of step with the society, and such a society can not be for Gatsby’s spiritual dream to provide the soil for the roots of the germination, detached from the social environment, Gatsby’s pursuit of the dream is destined to be empty.

ii Green

The color white mainly represents elegance and sanctity among the British and American countries. In *The Great Gatsby*, white has almost become Daisy’s representative color. When Nick visits Daisy in the first chapter of the novel, the scene he sees goes something like this: “The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up towards the frosted wedding-cake of the ceiling.” “The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house.” Throughout this white imagery, they are ethereal, free, pure, and romantic, from which one can imagine the material abundance and wealth of Daisy’s family. In Gatsby’s first encounter with Daisy, Daisy is young and beautiful in a white dress. For Gatsby, Daisy is the most beautiful, pure, and holy girl in the world.

The color white also represents emptiness and pallor; Daisy’s house is heavily filled with white, and in reality, Daisy and Tom are not happily married.[2] Gatsby purchased the mansion, and house decoration, and even his suit is white, from the novel’s description can be seen, that Gatsby is also emptiness and despondency – dancing skillfully only, and his sweetheart Daisy dances once, most of the time the sidelines of the cold eyes.

iii Yellow

The color yellow represents money and power, and the entire story spends a great deal of time depicting the luxurious life of the upper class, the yellow sports cars, the overflowing champagne When Gatsby is reunited with Daisy again, “Gatsby, in a white flannel suit, silver shirt and gold-colored tie, hurried in.” He wears the white color that Daisy represents that he can’t get out of his mind but still doesn’t forget to wear a gold tie to show his money and wealth. In the novel the yellow champagne is often consumed by the upper class and the white milk is fed to the dogs by Myrtle, the champagne is much more expensive than the milk and he becomes a symbol of the upper class and money.

iv Grey

Gray represents lifelessness and deadliness. “This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally, a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight.”

Although gray appears only once in this text, the tone of the whole passage is gray and extremely depressing. This is a poor area where the bottom class people live, and also contrasts with the open and white house of Daisy’s house in the previous paragraph, the gap between the rich and the people is reflected in this moment. In the gray world, the bottom workers need to pay a high price to realize their dreams. Even if they occasionally achieve success, they become depressed, dejected, miserable, and even commit suicide because of the difficulty in realizing their value, which in turn renders the disillusionment of the “American Dream”.

3.2 Geographical Symbols and Their Implications

East Egg represents the ancient aristocracy, who received a great lot of money and status from their forefathers, whereas West Egg represents the new class, who gained their riches through hard work. The physical locations of East Egg and West Egg reflect the characters' various identities, and their dwellings correlate to their social standing.

i East Egg

“Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanan.”

East Egg is a place of wealth, an area located directly east of New York City, about twenty miles from the city, on an elongated and oddly shaped peninsula. The location of the East Egg area is a symbol in itself. It sits on the edge of the city, away from the

hustle and bustle of the city center, yet it maintains a strong connection to the city. The social environment of the East Egg area is also symbolic. East Egg area is a place of luxury and hedonism, a place where upper-class socialites gather. People here pursue money, power, and fame, enjoying a lavish lifestyle and endless revelry. At Gatsby's party, "And the Hornbeams and the Willie Voltaires, and a whole clan named Blackbuck, who always gathered in a corner and flipped up their noses like goats at whosoever came near." The behavior of the old nobles is to highlight their noble and prominent aristocratic status on the one hand, and on the other hand, to make the people around them different from them, so that it is difficult for the bystanders to get close to them.

ii Green

Combined with the history of the United States, it is not difficult to find, in the United States in the East and the West respectively represent two different social formations and development patterns, the east usually refers to the United States of America's old noblemen live in the region, the early industrial development of the rapid development of a large amount of wealth, while the western region, has a clear colonial brand, with the spirit of adventure.

"I lived at West Egg, the – well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them."

People living in the West Egg area were often the new aristocrats who gradually became prominent through their efforts and talents. They may not have the same social status and wealth accumulation as the East Egg people, but they have a more pragmatic and enterprising spirit. For example, Gatsby, the main character in the novel, is one of the representatives of the West Egg region and has achieved great success in the business world through his efforts and wisdom. West Egg also carries the dreams and pursuits of Gatsby, the main character of the novel. Gatsby desires to win the love and recognition of his beloved Daisy through his efforts and talents, and this pursuit is not only the desire for personal happiness but also the persistence and belief in the "American Dream".

3.3 Object Symbols and Their Implications

Symbolization of things is one of the important representative elements of the author's use of think ah levy hair, "*The Great Gatsby*" involves a large number of things depicted, for example, moths, cars, etc., to play an important symbolic significance of the things, with an extremely important role.

"There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In the blue gardens men and girls came and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. "

Moths love light, are phototropic, and are often attracted to light sources to the exclusion of other things. The author uses the metaphor of a moth here to convey Nick's disdain for the diners surrounding Gatsby, people who seek material pleasures and sensual stimulation but ignore the spiritual dimension. It is as if the moth is only

attracted to the source of light and ignores everything else around it. The imagery of the moth reappears in Chapter Four:

“The modesty of the demand shook me. He had waited five years and bought a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths – so that he could ‘come over’ some afternoon to a stranger’s garden” 11

The “casual moths” in chapter 4 echo the moths in chapter 3, and here again, the diners are compared to moths, suggesting that they are like wallflowers. The conversation between Nick and Owl-eyes about Gatsby’s funeral in chapter 9 reinforces the moth-like nature of the diners:

“ I couldn’t get to the house, ” he remarked.

“Neither could anybody else. ”

“Go on! ” He started. “ Why, my God! they used to go there by the hundreds. ”¹² The grand banquet and the wealth and aura behind it were like the brightest lights in the summer night, and countless men and women were like moths fluttering to the flame and had no resistance to the revelry in the summer night. However, wealth will dissipate, and life will also disappear, Gatsby’s accidental death is just like the sudden extinction of the lamp, the light dispersed, the temperature cooled, and the moths fluttering on the flame also dispersed, and even a small insect refused to stay in the footsteps again. None of the people who came to the party at Gatsby’s villa that summer ever showed up at his cold funeral.

3.4 The Realistic Significance for the Research on the Symbols

As a classic American novel, *The Great Gatsby*, with its profound symbolism, sheds light on American society in the 1920s, and at the same time provides us with an important perspective on today’s society. In the novel, the image of Gatsby, his dream, and the social background he is in have strong symbolism.

In the novel, we can see that Americans in the “Jazz Age” understood the realization of their dreams only as having more material enjoyment and being in the upper class, which is undoubtedly wrong. Gatsby buys a villa and throws a big party to attract his love, Daisy. Compared with the lively dinner party, Gatsby, who is often on the sidelines, looks lonelier and emptier. A lot of money does not bring Gatsby happiness and joy; his efforts to be among the upper class are not to have material enjoyment but to find, because of poverty and lost love, which is the root cause of his tragedy, but also the reason why he deserves respect. At the same time, people in the upper class are not as decent as they appear to be. Tom is devious and cunning and will do anything to achieve his goal, using the most despicable means to frame Wilson’s death on Gatsby, and finally taking Daisy far away. Jordan takes unsavory tactics to win the golf tournament, doing whatever it takes to smooth over the storm through bribery, and ends up with no remorse whatsoever. Fitzgerald has completely negated the American dream through what happened to Gatsby and the selfishness and hypocrisy of the upper class. The symbolic significance of this story lies not only in the fact that it reveals the American society of that era but also in the fact that it provides us with a window to

understand today's society. In today's society, everyone is facing all kinds of pressure and challenges and pursuing their dreams. However, very often, we may get lost in the sea of material things and desires, forgetting our true selves. The story of *Gatsby* is a reminder for us to understand that true success does not lie in material abundance but in spiritual abundance. In conclusion, as a classic American novel, the symbolism of *The Great Gatsby* has multiple meanings in real life. It can not only help us deeply understand the culture, values, and morality of American society in the 1920s, reflect on the value orientation and life pursuit in real life, and improve our literary aesthetic ability, but also help us better understand the artistic charm and literary value of *The Great Gatsby*.

Today, China is in a critical period of realizing the great cause of rejuvenation, with rapid economic development, social stability, and prosperity. On the road to modernization, we must be even more vigilant to avoid getting lost in the sea of materialism and desire. "Chinese-style modernization is a modernization that harmonizes material and spiritual civilization." In his report to the 20th Party Congress, President Xi Jinping pointed out that material abundance and spiritual wealth are the fundamental requirements of socialist modernization. In promoting modernization, today's China not only emphasizes the liberation and development of social productive forces and the promotion of sustained and rapid economic growth but also considers spiritual civilization to be the proper subject of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The development of a single material civilization without the advancement of spiritual civilization is not true socialist modernization and does not meet the requirements of overall social progress.

The symbolism in the novel helps us reflect on the values and life pursuits in real life. *Gatsby's* tragic fate tells us that excessive pursuit of material wealth and illusory love often leads to the distortion and loss of human nature. Therefore, for the novel *The Great Gatsby*, we can not only understand the American society of that era but also gain a deep insight into today's society. We need to understand that true success does not lie in material abundance, but in spiritual abundance; we need to cherish our dreams and hopes, but we should not be overly persistent and expectant. Only in this way can we find our direction and realize our value in the complex society.

4. CONCLUSION

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald critiques American society in the 1920s through his characters, highlighting the corrupting influence of wealth and the indulgent behavior of the upper class. This literary work is one of the first to challenge the notion of the American Dream. Despite his material wealth, *Gatsby*, who rose from poverty to the upper class, fails to achieve his dream, and the grand banquet only serves to emphasize his despair. Having more money does not always translate into a better life, and material items do not provide contentment or satisfaction. The author completely rejects the idea of the American Dream through *Gatsby's* experiences.

The development of American society in the Jazz Age and its modernization as reflected in *The Great Gatsby*, serves as a good warning for the development of

modernization in China today. As early as in *On New Democracy*, Chairman Mao Zedong envisaged that the new China we were to build would have not only new politics and a new economy but also a new culture. That is to say, “We will not only transform a politically oppressed and economically exploited China into a politically free and economically prosperous China, but also transform a China ruled by the old culture, and therefore ignorant and backward, into a civilized and advanced China ruled by the new culture”. Our country is now in the period of pursuing the “Chinese Dream”, and the whole nation is making concerted efforts to promote the smooth realization of the “Chinese Dream”. In realizing the “Chinese Dream”, in addition to improving people’s material living standards, it is also important to improve people’s spiritual life. Harmonizing material and spiritual civilization, and achieving both material and spiritual abundance, is the noble pursuit of Chinese-style modernization, and Xi Jinping pointed out in his report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC that “material abundance and spiritual abundance are the fundamental requirements of socialist modernization”. This important assertion, which profoundly reveals the distinctive features of Chinese-style modernization, is a scientific application of Marxist materialistic dialectics. It guides people to reject the immoral behavior of irrational will, inspires them to develop a correct worldview, and outlook on life and values, improves their ideological and moral qualities, responds positively to and solves the difficulties encountered in their work and life, and makes their whole life meaningful so that they can live out a wonderful future, and contribute their strength to the realization of the “Chinese Dream” of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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