

The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece explores the decadence of the Jazz Age through the story of Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire pursuing the American Dream and his lost love, Daisy Buchanan.





F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Brief Biography

Early Life

Grew up in Minnesota, attended private schools with mediocre performance, and went to Princeton University.

Military and Love

Enlisted in the Army in 1917. Met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre in Alabama, who refused to marry him unless he could support her.

Literary Success

Published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920, becoming a literary star. Married Zelda one week later.

Later Years

Wrote *The Great Gatsby* in Paris in 1924. Despite now being considered his masterpiece, it sold poorly. Died of a heart attack on December 21, 1940.

Historical Context: The Roaring Twenties

Fitzgerald coined the term "Jazz Age" to refer to the period more commonly known as the Roaring Twenties. Fresh off World War I, Americans enjoyed an economic boom and renewed sense of possibility.

This era was marked by a complex mix of emotions that reflected the turbulence of the times. Jazz music itself, with its exuberant rhythms and tonalities, symbolized the energy of the period.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald stresses the darker side of the Roaring Twenties - its undercurrent of corruption and desperate, empty decadence beneath the glittering surface.

Plot Summary

Summer 1922

1

Nick Carraway moves to West Egg, Long Island. His neighbor is the mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby, who throws lavish parties hoping to attract Daisy Buchanan, Nick's cousin.

2

Gatsby's Past Revealed

Nick learns Gatsby and Daisy were in love before the war, but she married wealthy Tom Buchanan while Gatsby was away. Gatsby has built his fortune to win her back.

The Affair

3

Nick arranges a reunion between Gatsby and Daisy, who begin an affair. Meanwhile, Tom has his own mistress, Myrtle Wilson, in the industrial "Valley of Ashes."

4

Confrontation

Tom discovers the affair. During a tense confrontation, Daisy can't say she never loved Tom. Driving Gatsby's car, Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle.

Tragic Ending

5

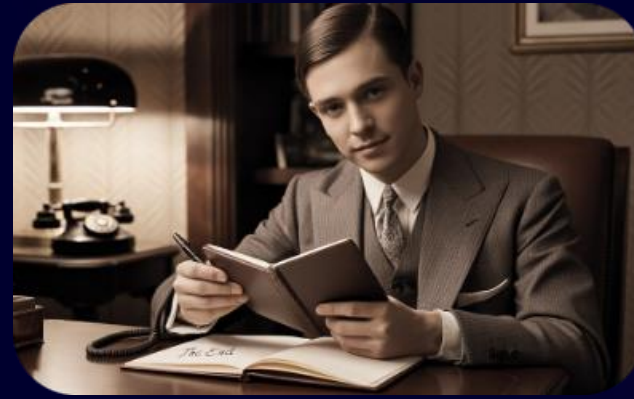
George Wilson, believing Gatsby killed his wife, shoots Gatsby and then himself. Only Nick, Gatsby's father, and one party guest attend the funeral.

Major Characters



Jay Gatsby

A self-made millionaire who reinvented himself (born James Gatz) to win back Daisy's love. His hopeful pursuit of the American Dream ends in tragedy.



Nick Carraway

The narrator and Gatsby's neighbor. A Yale graduate from the Midwest who becomes drawn into Gatsby's world while maintaining his moral perspective.



Daisy Buchanan

Nick's cousin and Gatsby's lost love. Beautiful but shallow, she chooses the security of wealth over true love, revealing the corruption of the American Dream.



Tom Buchanan

Daisy's wealthy, brutish husband. Represents old money's arrogance, racism, and hypocrisy beneath a veneer of sophistication.

Minor Characters

Jordan Baker

A professional golfer and Daisy's friend who briefly dates Nick. Beautiful but cynical, she represents the moral carelessness of the wealthy elite.

Myrtle Wilson

Tom's mistress who dreams of escaping her life in the Valley of Ashes. Her death drives the novel's tragic conclusion.

George Wilson

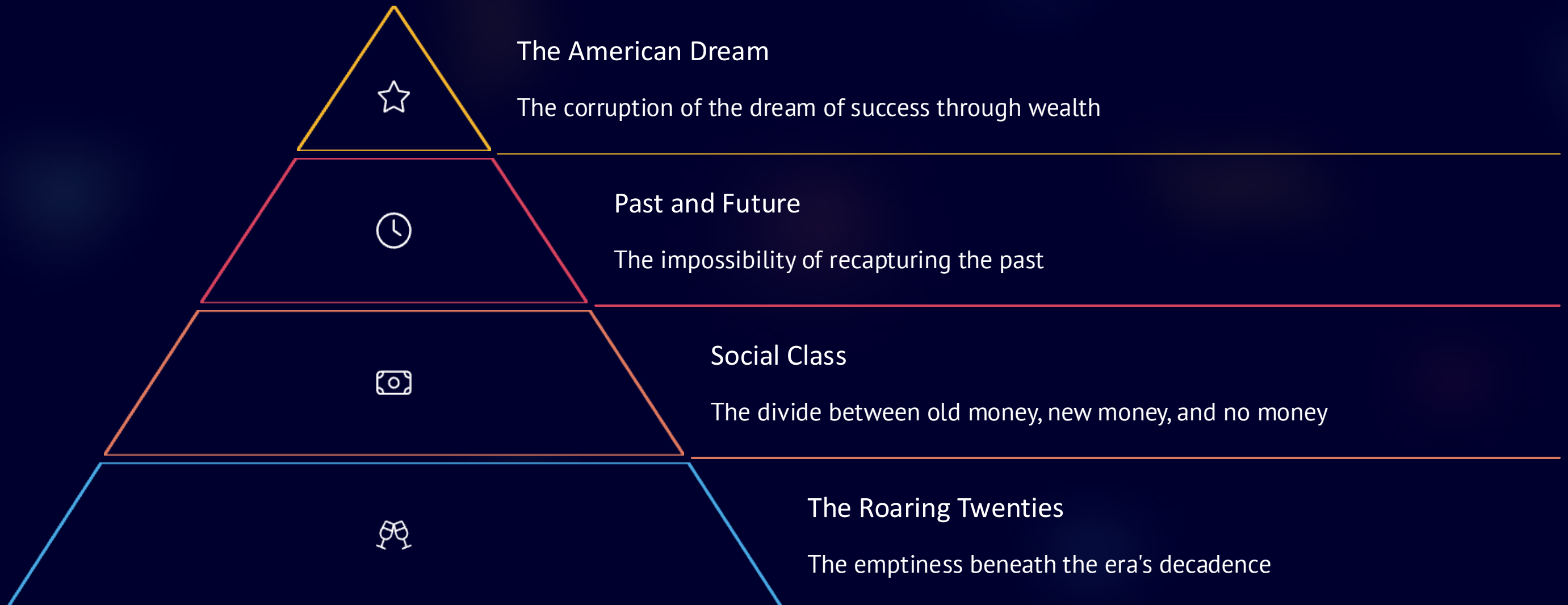
Myrtle's husband, a garage owner beaten down by life. His desperate act of revenge ends Gatsby's life.

Meyer Wolfsheim

Gatsby's shady business associate who fixed the 1919 World Series. Represents the criminal underbelly of the American Dream.



Key Themes



Fitzgerald uses these interconnected themes to critique 1920s American society. The novel shows how the pursuit of wealth corrupts the American Dream, turning it from a vision of building a meaningful life into an empty quest for riches and status.

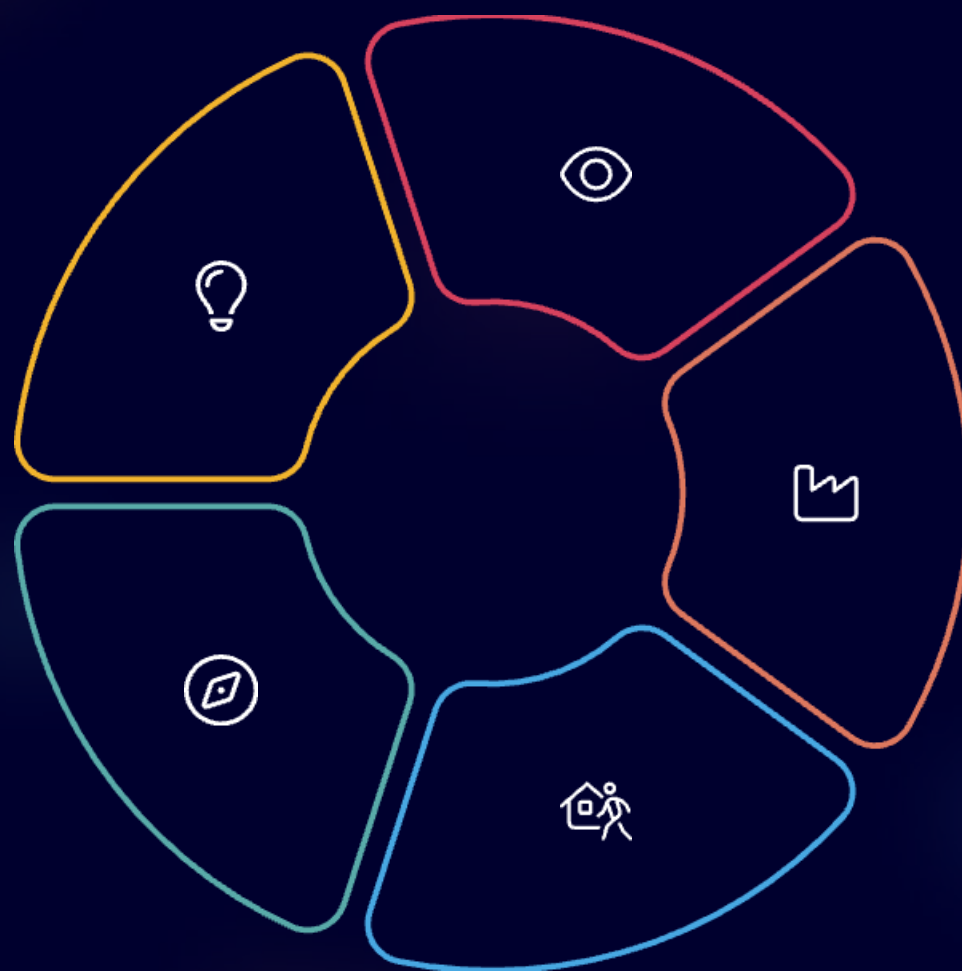
Symbols and Motifs

The Green Light

At the end of Daisy's dock, it represents Gatsby's hopes and dreams, the gap between past and present, and the promise of the future.

East and West

The contrast between the corrupting East and the more traditional values of the Midwest.



The Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg

The billboard overlooking the Valley of Ashes symbolizes the absent God watching over a moral wasteland.

The Valley of Ashes

An industrial wasteland representing the moral and social decay beneath the glittering surface of wealth.

Gatsby's Mansion

Symbolizes Gatsby's love for Daisy and the emptiness of material excess without genuine connection.

Chapter Analysis

1

Chapters 1-3: Introduction

Establishes the setting, characters, and Gatsby's mysterious presence. Nick observes the wealth and emptiness of East and West Egg society.

2

Chapters 4-6: Revelations

Gatsby's past with Daisy is revealed. Their reunion begins hopefully but shows signs of strain as past and present collide.

3

Chapters 7-9: Tragedy

The confrontation between Gatsby and Tom leads to Myrtle's death, Gatsby's murder, and Nick's disillusionment with the East.

The novel's structure moves from mystery to revelation to tragedy, mirroring the rise and fall of the American Dream. Gatsby's pursuit of wealth to win Daisy ultimately leads to his destruction, revealing the emptiness of materialistic values.

Enduring Relevance



Wealth Inequality

The novel's portrayal of economic disparity between social classes remains a pressing contemporary issue.



American Dream

Gatsby's pursuit of success and its ultimate emptiness continues to resonate in modern American society.



Social Status

The tension between old and new money reflects ongoing struggles with class identity and belonging.



Moral Decay

The ethical bankruptcy beneath material excess mirrors contemporary concerns about societal values.

Nearly a century after its publication, *The Great Gatsby* remains strikingly relevant. Its critique of wealth without purpose, status without substance, and dreams corrupted by materialism resonates in today's society.

Fitzgerald's final image - of boats beating against the current, "borne back ceaselessly into the past" - captures the universal human struggle between nostalgia and progress, between idealism and reality.