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Allegory in *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby is a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald written because he wanted to write a novel about the Jazz Age while incorporating elements of his life. Told from the perspective of Nick Carraway, the novel follows Jay Gatsby and his obsessive pursuit of Daisy Buchanan, who he claims to love. Daisy is married to the self-centered billionaire, Tom Buchanan. The contrasting fates of Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan among other themes reveal that the book is an allegory of the self-destructive nature of the American Dream as it perpetuates inequality and classism.

To start, hope and yearning is a consistent theme in the book, particularly in Gatsby's character. To Gatsby, Daisy embodies a life of luxury and class that he desires. This is articulated on page 90: "He knew that when he... forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God." As a man born into poverty, having a relationship with a woman of Daisy's status represented wealth, upward mobility, and success. From the moment described in this excerpt of the text, Gatsby is forcing his grand and unrealistic dreams and desires onto Daisy. His obsession drives him to accumulate wealth by illegal means, however, like a beast he remains unfulfilled. This behavior is self-destructive because it causes Gatsby to lose himself. He continuously strived for what was unattainable because he was lost to the idea of his American Dream and because he connected his desires to something as fragile as a relationship, it all came crashing down in the end.

Additionally, Tom represents the arrogance that comes to those who are born privileged. From the beginning, Tom is depicted as rude. On page 10, Nick tells Tom about his career as a bondman. Tom responds dryly saying, "Never heard of them," From the beginning, the audience can see Tom's dismissive attitude

toward those he considers less than. Moreover, when Tom attends Gatsby's party, he is cynical and makes rude remarks. On page 88 Tom says, "Who is Gatsby anyhow?... Some big bootlegger?... A lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers..." Tom did not hesitate to question the validity of Gatsby's wealth. He was accusatory because of Gatsby's status of being nouveau rich. Because Tom comes from old money, he is prejudiced against those who fall under any social status below his, reinforcing the theme of classism. Tom's attitude is harshly critical, and this detail from the novel demonstrates that the select few who do make it to the top of the social hierarchy in American society are ultimately biased. This double-edged sword alludes to the idea of self-destruction because society will always be flawed without empathy and compassion for others regardless of status.

Furthermore, Gatsby's unfortunate death and Tom and Daisy's flee from the situation reflect the tragic reality of the American Dream. Jay Gatsby dies at the hands of George Wilson, who believes he is responsible for his wife's death, in chapter 8. According to page 132, the news surrounding Gatsby's death was "... grotesque, circumstantial, eager, and untrue." Gatsby is painted as a villain despite being murdered, serving as a veil for those responsible. In addition, page 133 says, " Daisy... and Tom had gone away early that afternoon, and taken baggage with them." The couple fled the situation despite being largely responsible for the bloodshed. This parallels those in higher society leveraging their privilege to protect themselves. This starkly contrasts Gatsby's downfall as he strove for success. The idea of the American dream is harmful as it favors a select few.

Some may argue that Gatsby reached the American Dream by accumulating his wealth. However, his treatment in high society says otherwise. Page 84 reads, "'You should come to dinner with me...' he [Gatsby] wanted to go and he didn't see that Mr. Sloane had determined he shouldn't." This excerpt shows that while Gatsby is treated cordially by higher society, he is still excluded by the old money elite, who view him to be suspicious because the source of his wealth is unknown. This further proves the message about the self-destructiveness of the American Dream, because it demonstrates that upward mobility is restricted by barriers upheld by the prejudices of the wealthy.

In conclusion, The Great Gatsby illustrates the self-destructive nature of the American Dream through the contrasting fates of Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan. Fitzgerald shows readers that the American Dream is an illusion as there is sabotage from those at the top and constant barriers for those trying to work themselves up. Even today, the novel remains true to society as people are constantly stuck on attaining ideal lives based on status while ultimately finding themselves lost to what are simply ideas. Like Gatsby, people are entranced by an unattainable, flickering green light in the distance.