

## LACK OF MORALITY IN THE GREAT GATSBY NOVEL

### KURANGNYA MORALITAS DALAM NOVEL THE GREAT GATSBY

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#### Abstrak

Tujuan dari makalah ini adalah untuk menganalisis kurangnya moralitas dalam novel *The Great Gatsby* karya F. Scott Fitzgerald yang dilihat dari konteks sosial dan ekonomi, moral karakter utama, tema pengkhianatan dan kekecewaan, simbolisme moral, dan relevansi modern. Konteks sosial dan ekonomi menyoroti latar belakang Jazz Age dan American Dream serta dampak materialisme terhadap perilaku dan nilai-nilai masyarakat pada masa itu. Moral dari karakter utama: Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, dan Tom Buchanan digambarkan secara rinci tentang kurangnya moralitas mereka. Tema pengkhianatan dan kekecewaan yang menjadi topik umum dalam novel ini memaparkan hubungan antara karakter dan pengkhianatan moral, kekecewaan Gatsby terhadap idealisme cinta, dan reaksi masyarakat terhadap pelanggaran moral. Simbolisme moral mengkaji simbol mata Dr. T.J. Eckleburg sebagai representasi pengawasan moral dan warna serta elemen visual yang menggambarkan ketidakberdayaan moral. Terakhir, relevansi modern mencerminkan bagaimana tema moralitas dalam novel masih relevan di masa kini. Hasil analisis ini disajikan untuk memberikan wawasan baru tentang bagaimana Jazz Age dan gagasan American Dream memengaruhi aspek moralitas.

**Kata-Kata Kunci:** *The Great Gatsby*; Fitzgerald; Kurangnya moralitas; Jazz Age; American Dream

#### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the lack of morality in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as seen from the social and economic context, the morals of the main characters, the theme of betrayal and disappointment, moral symbolism, and modern relevance. The social and economic context highlights the background of the Jazz Age and the American Dream and the impact of materialism on the behavior and values of society at that time. The morals of

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the main characters: Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, and Tom Buchanan are described in detail about their lack of morality. The theme of betrayal and disillusionment which is a common topic in the novel exposes the relationships between characters and moral betrayal, Gatsby's disillusionment with the idealism of love, and society's reaction to moral offences. Moral symbolism examines the symbol of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg's eyes as a representation of moral surveillance and the colors and visual elements depicting moral helplessness. Finally, modern relevance provides an overview of how the themes of morality in the novel are still relevant to modern society. The results of this analysis are presented to provide new insights into how the Jazz Age and the idea of the American Dream affect aspects of morality.

**Keyword:** The Great Gatsby; Fitzgerald; Lack of morality; Jazz Age; American Dream

## 1. Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925, is a seminal work in American literature that captures the decadence and disillusionment of the Jazz Age. Set in the post-World War I era, the novel chronicles the life of Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire, and his obsessive pursuit of Daisy Buchanan, a symbol of his idealized past and unattainable future. Through its vivid characters and intricate narrative, the novel offers a scathing critique of the American Dream, materialism, and moral decay that characterized the 1920s.

At its core, *The Great Gatsby* explores the erosion of morality in a society dominated by wealth and status. The characters in the novel—Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, Tom Buchanan, and others—embody the moral dilemmas and betrayals that result from unchecked ambition and materialism. Gatsby's rise to wealth through illegal means and his unrelenting pursuit of Daisy reflect the corruption of the American Dream, transforming it from a vision of opportunity and self-betterment into a shallow quest for social validation. Meanwhile, Tom and Daisy's apathy and self-indulgence highlight the moral failures of the established upper class, whose privileges shield them from accountability.

This paper aims to examine the pervasive lack of morality in *The Great Gatsby*, focusing on the social and economic context of the Jazz Age, the moral failings of the main characters, themes of betrayal and disappointment, and the use of symbolism to critique societal values. By analyzing these elements, the study seeks to illuminate how Fitzgerald uses his characters and their actions to critique a society that prioritizes material success over ethical integrity. The exploration of this paper will argue that *The Great Gatsby* remains a timeless reflection of the dangers of moral compromise in pursuit of wealth and status, offering lessons that are as relevant today as they were nearly a century ago.

## 2. Methods

This research analyzes the lack of morality in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* using a qualitative approach. In their book entitled *Qualitative Research Methods*, Kusumastuti & Khoiron (2019:2) state that Creswell defines qualitative research as research to understand what is considered a matter of social or humanity by a number of people. They also state that qualitative phenomena are correlated with qualitative research. For example, "Motivation Research" is important research to find out the reasons for human behavior such as why people think or do particular things. The purpose of quantitative research is to find the motives that underlie human behavior and is considered very important. (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019:3).

In this study, researchers used observation techniques to collect data. Observation means a way to gain information by directly observing (Sarah & Nurholis, 2022). Direct observation carried out by researchers is through reading the novel *The Great Gatsby* and looking at every part that reflects the lack of morality in each character. The researcher used two data, which are primary and secondary. Primary data comes from the novel itself and contains characters, quotes, dialog, and narration. Meanwhile, secondary data is additional data that comes from outside sources such as dictionaries, journals, articles, and the internet.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Morals, in short, are the principles of good and bad human behavior. It can be seen in attitudes, actions, obligations, and others. Morals are very important because if there are no morals then humans will not be able to carry out the socialization process. Meanwhile, morality is a part of moral that relates to ethics and manners. Moral values in the novel *The Great Gatsby* can be considered as a central topic because each of the main characters has a lack of morality. The novel largely highlights the lack of morality such as dishonesty, disloyalty, materialism, lawlessness, and indifferences.

### 3.1 Social and Economy Context

Jazz Age is a term that refers to an important period in American history from the 1920s to the early 1930s, just after World War I. In this era, America underwent a major social and cultural transformation due to its rapidly growing economy. One important aspect of this era was the emergence and development of jazz music, which became an artistic symbol and liberation from old rules. Amidst the luxurious lifestyle that characterized this period, people put materialism at the center of their lives. In *The Great Gatsby*, morality is frequently disregarded in pursuit of personal ambition and pleasure, especially among the upper class.

According to Machcinski (2013), the 1920s were marked by significant social changes, where law and morality were often overlooked, especially with the introduction of Prohibition. Gatsby, as the central character, represents how criminality was used to achieve personal dreams in this context. His vast wealth, as revealed in the novel, was obtained through illegal businesses such as bootlegging. This reflects how society at the time often disregarded the law in pursuit of higher social status.

"Fitzgerald uses Gatsby's illegal activities not merely to critique him as a character but as a symbol of the broader moral decay of the Jazz Age. Gatsby's pursuit of wealth, regardless of the means, highlights the societal acceptance of crime as a stepping stone to the American Dream" (Machcinski, 2013, p. 45).

Additionally, the relationship between criminality and morality in this novel can be seen in society's indifference to the source of Gatsby's wealth. The guests attending his lavish parties didn't

care that his wealth came from illegal activities. This reflects a society more interested in outward appearances than moral integrity. As Machcinski points out, "Morality had been replaced by self-interest and love of luxury in this era" (Machcinski, 2013, p. 47).

In this context, *The Great Gatsby* becomes not just a criticism of individuals like Gatsby but also of a society that enables criminality to become a tool for achieving status and power. In addition, the materialism in *The Great Gatsby* also shows that the general public judges success based on wealth and luxury rather than hard work or honesty. The extravagant parties that Gatsby creates become places where people come to seek luxury, rather than value social relationships. The parties show that human relationships have become dependent on material rather than moral bonds. It shows how materialism has reduced social interactions and become transactions as people are judged by the wealth they have rather than their own identity.

One of the central themes in *The Great Gatsby* is the failure of the American Dream. Jay Gatsby, the main character, is portrayed as a representation of those who believe in the dream that hard work can bring success and happiness. However, reality shows that the American Dream pursued by Gatsby ends in destruction.

According to Hodo (2017), the American Dream in the 1920s had transformed into "a distorted concept, where success was no longer measured by effort and moral values, but by material wealth and social status" (Hodo, 2017, p. 300). Gatsby, despite successfully acquiring great wealth, cannot achieve the happiness he dreamed of, especially in his relationship with Daisy. This reflects that material success is not the answer to achieving true happiness.

Furthermore, Islam (2014) emphasizes that the American Dream in this novel is a critique of capitalist values that prioritize materialism. Gatsby dedicates his entire life to acquiring wealth to gain social recognition and Daisy's love, but his methods do not align with moral principles.

"The American Dream in the context of this novel not only fails to bring happiness to Gatsby but also reveals how society has lost ethical values in pursuing ambition" (Islam, 2014, p. 29).

Gatsby becomes not only a symbol of the American Dream's failure but also a victim of the capitalist system that emphasizes materialism above all else. As Islam explains, the capitalist system in this novel facilitates wealth for a select few, like Gatsby, but ultimately fails to provide true meaning in life. This is evident in the following quote:

"Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 193).

The green light, a symbol of Gatsby's hopes and dreams, ultimately becomes a metaphor for an illusion that remains out of reach. Hodo (2017) asserts that this symbol reflects how capitalism creates unattainable dreams, forcing individuals to continue pursuing something that is ultimately empty. Gatsby also reflects the paradox of the American Dream: while he tries to achieve success through illegal means, the same capitalist system provides no place for people like him to be socially accepted. Daisy and Tom, born into wealthy families, remain part of the social elite, while Gatsby remains viewed as an outsider despite his wealth.

*The Great Gatsby* not only criticizes individual dreams but also highlights the systemic failure of a capitalist society that makes materialism the center of life.

## 3.2 The Main Characters and Their Morality

In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses his main characters to explore the moral dilemmas of the Jazz Age. Besides materialism, the three main characters: Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, and Tom Buchanan, present moral complexities influenced by ambition and social status.

### 3.2.1 Jay Gatsby

Jay Gatsby is a figure characterized by a strong desire to achieve wealth. Gatsby, who comes from a poor family, believes that wealth is the way to regain the love of Daisy Buchanan, a woman from a high social class. Apart from his ambition for material desires, he also has a desire to change his life and build a perfect self-image in society. He changes his identity by discarding his birth name, James Gatz, and lives a glamorous life filled with many parties and a fancy house.

James Gatz—that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career—when he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 104-105).

Gatsby's change of identity from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby is explained by Nick the narrator. James Gatz changed his name at the age of 17 as part of his quest to change his fate and build a new life of glamor and wealth. This happens when he meets Dan Cody, a millionaire who gives him an early glimpse into the lifestyle of the rich.

Although Gatsby presents himself as a wealthy and successful man, most of his wealth was acquired through the illegal act of smuggling alcohol. This shows that Gatsby does not uphold moral rules to achieve his goals. Fitzgerald indirectly criticizes the condition of society in the Prohibition era showing that the American Dream has been corrupted by the lack of morality to achieve success and wealth.

'I found out what your 'drug stores' were.' He turned to us and spoke rapidly. 'He and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drug stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That's one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him and I wasn't far wrong.' (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 143).

It was said by Tom Buchanan who revealed that Gatsby and Meyer Wolfsheim were involved in an illegal activity. They bought several drug stores and used the stores to sell alcohol illegally. This shows that most of Gatsby's wealth came from illegal business, not legitimate or honorable business.

### 3.2.2 Daisy Buchanan

Daisy Buchanan is another example of defective morality. Daisy has a secret relationship with Gatsby even though she is married to Tom, showing her unfaithfulness in marriage. However, her relationship with Gatsby does not constitute genuine love. When she is given a choice between Gatsby and Tom, Daisy prefers the social status, comfort, and security provided by Tom over a relationship with Gatsby.

'Oh, you want too much!' she cried to Gatsby. 'I love you now—isn't that enough? I can't help what's past.' She began to sob helplessly. 'I did love him once—but I loved you too.' (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 141-142).

At a pivotal moment in the novel, when Gatsby asks her to admit that she never loved Tom, Daisy is unable to do so. This illustrates Daisy's indecision and ambivalence in her feelings. She is caught in a conflict between love and social status, expressing her divided feelings between Tom and Gatsby.

Daisy, who is part of the elite class, faces a dilemma between the comfort of a stable life with Tom Buchanan and the true love she feels for Gatsby. Although she may love Gatsby, in the end she chooses to be with Tom because Tom provides her with wealth, social stability and protection that Gatsby cannot provide because he comes from a poor family and his wealth was acquired through illegitimate ways. Her moral decisions are heavily influenced by her desire to maintain the security of the upper class.

I called up Daisy half an hour after we found him, called her instinctively and without hesitation. But she and Tom had gone away early that afternoon, and taken baggage with them. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 175).

Her decision is further reinforced when Daisy and Tom leave town without telling anyone when Gatsby dies. Daisy's actions clearly illustrate that she is not truly committed to Gatsby. In this case, Daisy represents an individual who is afraid of losing her social status to pursue her true love.

### 3.2.3 Tom Buchanan

Tom Buchanan, a wealthy and influential man, portrays racism and misogyny in the story. Tom reveals that the white race is threatened by other races. He even cites a book he read, 'The Rise of the Colored Empires' by Goddard to reinforce his view.

'Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved.' (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 16).

His beliefs reflected concerns about social changes occurring in the 1920s, such as urbanization, immigration, and changing gender and racial roles. Although Tom is portrayed as educated and powerful, his views show that he believes in ideas that are absurd and have no scientific basis. In this sense, Fitzgerald criticizes the ignorance that hides behind social privileges.

Despite his racist views, Tom also reflects misogyny, which is an action or behavior that denigrates or disrespects women. Tom shows his disloyalty towards Daisy by having an affair with Myrtle Wilson. Also, during an argument, Tom physically abused Myrtle because she spoke loudly to him.

Making a short deft movement Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 37).

Tom's action of breaking Myrtle's nose just because she mentioned Daisy's name is an example of misogyny. His reaction indicates that he is a person who dominates and controls women. He does not consider women as individuals, but as objects that he can control.

Furthermore, Tom's social status is a factor in his abuse of power to protect his position. After Myrtle is killed by Daisy in an accident, Tom easily manipulates the situation by making Gatsby a scapegoat. Tom told George Wilson—Myrtle's husband—that it was Gatsby who actually killed Myrtle.

'I told him the truth,' he said. 'He came to the door while we were getting ready to leave and when I sent down word that we weren't in he tried to force his way upstairs. He was crazy enough to kill me if I hadn't told him who owned the car. His hand was on a revolver in his pocket every minute he was in the house—' He broke off defiantly. 'What if I did tell him? That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's but he was a tough one. He ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car.' (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 190-191).

From the dialog that Tom said to Nick, Tom shows that he not only uses his status to manipulate others, but also avoids responsibility and consequences for his actions. This has an impact on George who eventually, without any consideration, kills Gatsby. Tom's abuse of power leads to the destruction of other people's lives yet he remains untouched.

### **3.3 Theme of Betrayal and Disappointment**

Moral betrayal is at the core of character interactions in *The Great Gatsby*. Through relationships filled with manipulation, infidelity, and ambition, Fitzgerald explores how these betrayals reflect declining moral values in Jazz Age society.

#### **3.3.1 The Relationship Between Character and Moral Betrayal**

In *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the relationship between character and moral betrayal is a central theme that unfolds through various character's actions.

##### **3.3.1.1 Jay Gatsby: Betrayal of Identity and Dreams**

Gatsby exemplifies betrayal of his own identity. By changing his name from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby, he creates a new persona entirely dedicated to winning Daisy's love and achieving the American Dream. However, as revealed by Jeanpierre (2013), Gatsby's effort to create his ideal identity is a form of betrayal against his true self.

"Gatsby's quest for an idealized version of love with Daisy leads him to betray who he truly is, as he sacrifices his authentic self for a fabricated persona" (Jeanpierre, 2013, p. 93).

Although Gatsby remains faithful to his dream of true love, this betrayal becomes the weakness that ultimately destroys him. His attempt to revive the past with Daisy only results in disappointment, as Daisy lacks the capacity to fulfill Gatsby's idealistic expectations.

##### **3.3.1.2 Daisy Buchanan: Infidelity and Betrayal of Gatsby**

Daisy is a central figure in the moral betrayal that drives conflict in the novel. Although she engages in a secret relationship with Gatsby, Daisy ultimately chooses to stay with Tom for the social security and comfort offered by her husband.

"Daisy's decision to abandon Gatsby in favor of Tom highlights her moral failure, as she values material security over emotional integrity" (Mooduto, 2014, p. 45).

Daisy's infidelity to Tom, and ultimately to Gatsby, shows that her love isn't as ideal as Gatsby imagined. As expressed by Nithyaabhirami & Saraswathi (2024), Daisy represents the dilemma between following desire and submitting to patriarchal societal norms. Her involvement in the

accident that kills Myrtle and her decision to flee without facing consequences demonstrate her betrayal of moral responsibility.

### **3.3.1.3 Tom Buchanan: Betrayal Through Power and Infidelity**

Tom symbolizes moral betrayal through abuse of power. He not only betrays Daisy through his affair with Myrtle but also manipulates others to protect himself. As explained by Braam (2013), Tom uses his social status to avoid responsibility, such as when he makes George Wilson believe that Gatsby was responsible for Myrtle's death.

"Tom's manipulation of others to safeguard his own privilege underscores his moral corruption and selfishness" (Braam, 2013, p. 46).

Tom's betrayal of Myrtle is also evident in his treatment of women as objects, as seen in his violence toward Myrtle when she mentions Daisy's name.

### **3.3.1.4 Myrtle Wilson: Betrayal of George and Social Ambition**

Myrtle, in her attempt to escape her marriage to George, betrays her husband by having an affair with Tom. However, as revealed by Mooduto (2014), Myrtle's decision to pursue Tom reflects not only her desire for freedom but also her social ambition rooted in materialism.

"Myrtle sacrifices her loyalty to George in pursuit of a glamorous life with Tom, but this ultimately leads to her demise" (Mooduto, 2014, p. 48).

This betrayal reflects how social norms and class pressure influence moral actions, especially for women of that era.

### **3.3.1.5 Nick Carraway: Betrayal of Personal Moral Values**

Although Nick often portrays himself as moral, he isn't entirely free from moral betrayal. As an observer, Nick often allows injustice to occur without taking action. For example, while he criticizes Daisy and Tom's actions, he remains involved in their world without meaningful intervention.

"Nick's moral ambiguity reflects the societal complicity in allowing moral transgressions to persist unchecked" (Grande, 2015, p. 9).

### **3.3.2 Gatsby's Disillusionment with The Idealism of Love**

Jay Gatsby is the personification of the struggle to reshape identity in pursuit of dreams, particularly in his relationship with Daisy Buchanan. Born into poverty, Gatsby creates an entirely new persona—a wealthy and successful man—with the primary goal of winning back Daisy's love. This process reflects Gatsby's struggle to achieve purity in its ideal sense, although the reality is filled with moral compromises.

Gatsby's struggle is not just about acquiring wealth, but also about creating a perfect identity that meets society's expectations and, especially, Daisy's. In his analysis, Jeanpierre notes that Gatsby "strives to create an ideal version of himself that can meet the demands of a world full of materialism, even if it means erasing his past" (Jeanpierre, 2013, p. 89).

However, although Gatsby succeeds in building the wealth and status he dreamed of, his relationship with Daisy remains a source of conflict. Jeanpierre notes that Daisy, who represents purity and love in Gatsby's mind, is actually a very human and imperfect figure. This creates a gap



between Gatsby's idealism and reality. Daisy is unable to fulfill Gatsby's dreams because she herself is more concerned with the social and material stability offered by Tom Buchanan.

"Gatsby's struggle to maintain the purity of his dream often ends in betrayal, both by Daisy and by the reality of a world that cannot satisfy his desire for perfection" (Jeanpierre, 2013, p. 93).

Gatsby's inability to accept the reality that Daisy is a complex figure who doesn't match his ideal image shows how his pursuit of purity leads to destruction. In the end, Gatsby loses everything, including his life, because he cannot let go of the illusion of perfect identity and love.

### **3.3.3 Society's Reaction to Moral Offences**

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald portrays the Jazz Age society as a community indifferent to moral transgressions, as long as luxury and social status are maintained. The society's reaction to the immoral actions of its characters demonstrates how materialism has replaced ethical values as the primary measure of social life. For example, the lavish parties held by Gatsby are filled with guests who come uninvited, simply to enjoy the glamorous atmosphere without caring about the host or how the wealth was acquired. This, as noted by Braam (2013), reflects a society that prioritizes personal enjoyment over moral responsibility. Ironically, when Gatsby dies, almost no one attends his funeral, showing that society only cares as long as they benefit from him.

Greater moral transgressions are also overlooked, especially by the upper social class. Tom and Daisy Buchanan are symbols of the elite who use their power to avoid responsibility for their actions. Daisy, who is involved in the fatal accident that killed Myrtle, runs away with Tom without telling anyone, leaving Gatsby to take the blame for her actions. Fitzgerald, through the narrator Nick Carraway, criticizes this indifference by calling them "careless people," who only care about their personal comfort. As expressed by Hodo (2017), their actions depict how society allows moral transgressions to occur without real consequences, as long as the perpetrators belong to the powerful social class.

The society's indifference to moral transgressions in this novel is Fitzgerald's critique of the distorted values in the Jazz Age. A society that prioritizes consumption and enjoyment over ethical responsibility is a portrait of a culture that has lost its moral direction. This apathy is not only relevant to the 1920s but remains a reflection for modern society, where ethical violations are often forgiven or forgotten for material or social gain. Obsession with wealth and fame in modern culture shows a similar pattern, making Fitzgerald's critique still relevant as a reminder that a society that loses its moral values will only result in emptiness and injustice.

### **3.4 Symbolism and Morality**

Symbolism is one of the key elements in *The Great Gatsby*, used by Fitzgerald to illustrate the morality of characters and society during the Jazz Age. Through symbols such as the green light, the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, certain colors, and the Valley of Ashes, Fitzgerald highlights how materialism, ambition, and obsession erode traditional moral values.

The green light at the end of Daisy's dock is a central symbol reflecting Gatsby's desire and dreams. According to Grande (2015), this light is not merely a representation of Gatsby's love for Daisy but also a symbol of human ambition to achieve the unattainable. Gatsby sees the green light as a symbol of the future he dreams of, filled with love, social status, and legitimacy that he has pursued throughout his life.

"Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 193).

However, the green light also reflects corrupted morality, as Gatsby's dreams are not based on reality but on the illusions he created himself. As explained by Grande (2015), the green light is a symbol of ambiguity, representing both hope and disappointment, showing that obsession with ideal dreams often sacrifices ethical values.

The symbol of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg's eyes on the billboard in the Valley of Ashes is often interpreted as the "eyes of God" watching over the world. However, this symbol also reflects the spiritual emptiness of that era. As noted by Grande (2015), this billboard illustrates how morality has become something passive, without the power to influence human behavior.

For George Wilson, these eyes become a symbol of divine judgment, but for other characters, this symbol holds no significant meaning, reflecting how society ignores the concept of moral oversight. Fitzgerald uses this symbol to criticize the moral apathy of society, which is more concerned with pursuing wealth than maintaining ethical integrity.

The Valley of Ashes, a wasteland located between West Egg and New York, is a symbol of destructive materialism. This area is filled with ashes that symbolize the destruction and remnants of life sacrificed for ambition and greed. Mooduto (2014) notes that this valley is a metaphor for the moral decay ignored by the elite society. This is where Tom and Myrtle's affair takes place, reinforcing the idea that this area is a place where morality has completely decayed.

"This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 26).

The Valley of Ashes also shows how the lower class, like George and Myrtle Wilson, fall victim to the moral transgressions committed by the upper class. Fitzgerald uses this symbol to criticize social inequality and its impact on morality.

Colors as Symbols of Morality Fitzgerald also uses color as symbolic elements to depict themes of morality. The green light reflects hope and illusion, while yellow or gold colors symbolize false wealth and destruction. For instance, Gatsby's yellow car, which is a symbol of his wealth, eventually causes Myrtle's death, indicating how wealth can bring about destruction.

According to Mooduto (2014), the color yellow in the novel not only represents luxury but also the rotten morality beneath the glamorous surface. Gatsby, despite being wealthy, is still not fully accepted by the upper class due to his illegal sources of wealth, showing that material luxury cannot completely replace moral integrity.

Symbolism as Moral Critique The symbols in *The Great Gatsby* serve to criticize the morality of Jazz Age society. The green light, the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, the Valley of Ashes, and certain colors all depict how obsession with wealth and social status has replaced ethical values. This symbolism also reflects the spiritual emptiness that emerges when people focus too much on material ambition. As noted by Islam (2014), these symbols remain relevant today, serving as a reminder that without morality, modern society is also at risk of facing similar decay.

### 3.5 Modern Relevance

Although *The Great Gatsby* is set in the Jazz Age era of the 1920s, the themes of morality, materialism, and the failure of the American Dream remain relevant in the context of modern society. The novel reflects how society is constantly obsessed with wealth, social status, and self-image, often at the expense of deeper moral values.

In modern culture, phenomena such as extreme consumerism and "flexing culture" on social media reflect similar patterns to the materialism in the novel. Hodo (2017) notes that the transformation of the American Dream into an obsession with material wealth is one of the main issues depicted in the novel:

"The American Dream in the 1920s had transformed into 'a distorted concept, where success was no longer measured by effort and moral values, but by material wealth and social status'" (Hodo, 2017, p. 300).

Fitzgerald's critique of Jazz Age society can also be applied to today's society, where individuals are often judged by the wealth or social status they display, rather than character and moral integrity. Islam (2014) highlights that the failure of the American Dream in this novel reflects the impact of capitalism on ethical values:

"The American Dream in the context of this novel not only fails to bring happiness to Gatsby but also reveals how society has lost ethical values in pursuing ambition" (Islam, 2014, p. 29).

Furthermore, the obsession with social image in this novel has parallels with the use of social media in the modern era. Many individuals construct their identities based on the perceptions of others, similar to the way Gatsby creates a persona to attract Daisy. This suggests that the struggle for social recognition and the sacrifice of morality for the sake of self-image is not only a Jazz Age phenomenon, but also a challenge facing modern society.

In addition, the social inequality depicted in the novel through characters such as Tom and Daisy Buchanan remains a global issue today. Hodo (2017) and Islam (2014) agree that the capitalist system often creates inequalities that benefit a small portion of the population while victimizing other groups. Daisy and Tom, as symbols of the irresponsible upper class, illustrate how social elites are often spared the consequences of their actions, a dynamic that is still visible in contemporary society.

As such, *The Great Gatsby* remains relevant as a critique of modern society, reminding readers of the dangers of morality being compromised in favor of material and social ambition. Symbols such as green light, lavish parties, and the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg continue to speak to new generations about the risks of losing core values in pursuit of the illusion of success.

#### 4. Conclusion

*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald serves not only as a sharp critique of Jazz Age society but remains relevant as a social reflection in the modern era. The novel explores themes of materialism, morality, and failed dreams that continue to resonate in today's society.

The theme of the failed American Dream in this novel reflects how modern society often remains trapped in illusions of material success. Just as Gatsby pursued wealth to win Daisy's love, many individuals in the contemporary world are willing to sacrifice moral integrity to achieve social status or wealth. Phenomena such as extreme consumerism, "flexing" culture on social media, and obsession

with luxurious lifestyles are tangible evidence of how materialism continues to dominate modern society's values.

The Great Gatsby portrays capitalism that facilitates social inequality. The gap between the upper class represented by Tom and Daisy and Gatsby, who struggles for acceptance, reflects social and economic inequalities that remain global issues today. This disparity affects not only social relationships but also creates a moral crisis where success is often measured by possessions rather than character qualities.

The novel serves not only as a critique of the 1920s but also as a mirror for contemporary society. Amid obsessions with materialism and social image, The Great Gatsby reminds us that pursuing success without considering moral values will only lead to emptiness and destruction, both personally and socially.

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