

## **The Materialism and the Pursuit of Existence in Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald's Social Criticism "The Great Gatsby"**

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**Abstract:** In Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald's novel "The Great Gatsby", the pursuit of materialism and existence constitutes the core theme, and it is also an important part of the author's profound social criticism of American society in the 1920s. In the novel, materialistic culture becomes the dominant force of society through the emphasis on luxury, vanity and social status. Materialism leads to excessive pursuit of external success, ignoring internal happiness and moral values. At the same time, the pursuit of existence is reflected in the role of Jay Gatsby, who represents those individuals who are constantly striving to realize the American dream. However, the novel also reflects the illusion of the American dream and the unsatisfied pursuit of existence. Even if a person has wealth and social status, he may still feel empty and dissatisfied. Through the role's lifestyle, behavior and conflict, the author reveals the conflict between materialism and the pursuit of existence, and how this conflict affects the moral and cultural values of society. Through the description of social parties, famous cars, jewels and immoral behaviors, the novel emphasizes the problems of hypocrisy, social class division and moral degeneration. Through the story of Jay Gatsby, the author reminds people to examine their own pursuits and values, and cherish their inner happiness and real interpersonal relationships. "The Great Gatsby" is a profound work of social criticism. By discussing the conflict between materialism and the pursuit of existence, it reflects the culture and values of American society in the 1920s. This theme reminds people to reflect on the balance between external success and internal satisfaction, as well as the understanding of true happiness.

**Keywords:** Materialism; "The Great Gatsby"; Fitzgerald; Pursuit; Existence; Social Criticism

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

"The Great Gatsby" is one of the representative works of Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, a great American literary master, and is famous for its profound social criticism and pursuit of human existence. This paper aims to explore the relationship between materialism and the pursuit of existence embodied in this novel, and how to present the social and cultural defects through the experience of the protagonist Jay Gatsby. In the 20th century America, the prosperous economy and the growing middle class society gave birth to a materialistic era, which was called the "Great

Prosperity" era. Material pursuit has become the core of people's lives, money is sacred, and the pursuit of social status and wealth has almost become a fanaticism (Yang, 2014). "The Great Gatsby" vividly describes the materialistic culture of New York in the 1920s with its luxurious dinners, expensive cars and jewels, and people's luxurious lifestyle (Cao, 2014; Tai, 2002). However, behind this prosperity, Fitzgerald deeply discusses the hypocrisy and fragility of materialism through the story of the protagonist Jay Gatsby. Jay Gatsby is a mysterious and rich figure. He uses luxurious parties, limousines and gorgeous manors to cover up his inner emptiness. His whole existence is to pursue a phantom, a dream that can never be realized, that is, to reunite with his beloved Daisy Buchanan. Jay Gatsby's story shows the desire in the materialistic culture, but it also shows the emptiness and hypocrisy of this desire (Su, 1996). Through the interweaving of materialism and the pursuit of existence, this paper will discuss how "The Great Gatsby" reflects the values of American society in the 1920s, and how Fitzgerald deeply criticizes the pursuit, hypocrisy and the exploration of human heart through the characters and plots in the novel. This novel is not only a social critical work, but also a literary masterpiece to explore human nature, desire and pursuit, which inspires people to reflect on their own way of life and the meaning of existence.

## 2. FITZGERALD AND THE NOVEL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Fitzgerald and his Masterpiece "The Great Gatsby"

Fitzgerald stands as one of the most revered novelists in American literary history, renowned for his incisive literary works and his deep understanding of the cultural and social nuances of 20th-century America. His magnum opus, "The Great Gatsby," is celebrated as a quintessential American classic, offering a vivid portrayal of the 1920s American society and Fitzgerald's own critical perspective on materialism and the American Dream. Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1896, Fitzgerald was raised in a middle-class family. His education at prestigious institutions like Princeton University and Harvard University was interrupted by World War I, during which he enlisted in the army. Post-war, Fitzgerald embarked on his literary career, initially making a living by writing short stories and novels. His short stories, often featured in prominent magazines, helped him gain recognition in the literary circles. However, it was the publication of "The Great Gatsby" in 1925 that catapulted Fitzgerald to the forefront of American literature. The novel is renowned for its eloquent prose and

incisive social commentary. Set against the backdrop of New York in the roaring twenties, it unfolds the complex dynamics between the enigmatic millionaire Jay Gatsby and his neighbors, Tom and Daisy Buchanan, with the story being narrated by the protagonist, Nick Carraway. The novel delves into themes of materialism, social stratification, desire, love, and the intricacies of human nature. It is particularly famous for its nuanced discussion of the American Dream, a central tenet of American ideology that promises prosperity and success to those who work hard and persevere. Through his characters and their plights, Fitzgerald exposes the dichotomy between materialism and the quest for happiness, as well as the hypocrisy and moral decay that pervaded the society of the time. "The Great Gatsby" serves not only as a reflection of the cultural ethos of 1920s America but also as a profound critique of the social order and a deep contemplation on the essence of human existence. Despite not achieving widespread commercial success during his lifetime, Fitzgerald's works underwent a renaissance after his death, earning him a place of reverence in the annals of American literature. His oeuvre has not only inspired generations of writers but also provided invaluable historical insights into American society during the 20th century. Fitzgerald's legacy endures in the halls of American literature, a testament to his enduring influence and the timeless relevance of his critique of a society driven by materialism and the elusive pursuit of existence. His works continue to resonate, offering readers a window into the complexities of human nature and the perennial quest for meaning in a world often dominated by the superficial allure of wealth and status.

## 2.2 The Writing Background and Social Situation of the Novel

The creation background of the novel is set in the 1920s, which is called "the Great Prosperity" or "the Explosive 20s". After World War I, the United States experienced economic prosperity and cultural changes, which was regarded as the starting point of modern American culture (Churchwell, 2014). Fitzgerald is a writer living in this era. He served as a military officer during the First World War and experienced the war and post-war social changes. These experiences influenced his literary creation, especially his concern about social changes and moral concepts. The United States experienced rapid economic growth in the 1920s, which was driven by industrialization, technological innovation and market prosperity. During this period, American society's pursuit of material wealth and luxurious lifestyle reached its peak. People began to be interested in wealth, social status and indulgence, and this fanatical pursuit was regarded as part

of the "American Dream". American society in the 1920s was also characterized by entertainment and social activities, including jazz, movies, dances and fashion. These elements are vividly depicted in the novel, such as Jay Gatsby's grand party and social activities of characters, which reflect the social culture of the times. In the novel, prohibition period becomes an important background element (Cheng, 2009; Song & Li, 2018). Prohibition came into effect in 1920, prohibiting the production, sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, but it also led to the rise of illegal brewing and underground nightclubs. This provides opportunities and conflicts for some characters in the novel. In the novel, the problems of social class and moral concept are discussed, especially the pursuit of social status by the protagonist Jay Gatsby and the love of Daisy Buchanan, and the complex relationship between them. The novel deeply criticizes materialism, moral degeneration and hypocrisy. The writing background and social situation of the novel "The Great Gatsby" reflect the unique characteristics of American society in the 1920s, as well as reflections on materialism and the American dream. The prosperity, cultural change and social unrest of this era have provided rich materials for the story and theme of the novel, making it a profound and enlightening literary masterpiece.

### 3. THE RISE OF MATERIALISM

The 1920s was an era of the rise of materialism in American society, which was called the "Great Prosperity" or "the Explosive 20s". After World War I, the United States experienced tremendous economic growth. Industrialization, scientific and technological innovation and productivity improvement have promoted the prosperity of the country and created a lot of wealth. During this period, the consumption culture of American society flourished. People began to pay more attention to shopping, luxury goods and enjoying life, which prompted the rise of large-scale commodity production and advertising industry (Cheng, 2017). American society in the 1920s emphasized the importance of social status, and people were eager to enter the upper class and gain recognition. Social status is usually directly related to wealth. Emerging wealthy elites emerge, and they quickly emerge in social circles, but they often lack the social status and traditional background of the old aristocrats. Popular fashion, clothing and cosmetics have become important elements in society. Women's fashion style has become more avant-garde, reflecting liberation and new social freedom.

American society in the 1920s featured entertainment activities, including cinemas, jazz music, dances and fashionable nightclubs. These recreational activities provide social opportunities, but also reflect the materialistic culture (Dai, 2007). The 1920s witnessed the peak of the "American Dream", which is a universal belief that anyone has the opportunity to achieve success and wealth through hard work. In the 1920s, the American Dream was considered to be mainly associated with material success and wealth, and people began to associate success with wealth and luxury goods. In the early 1920s, the United States imposed a prohibition on the production, sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages. However, this has triggered a large-scale illegal brewing and the rise of underground nightclubs, providing a way for society to escape the law, and at the same time intensifying the materialistic culture. Generally speaking, the rise of materialism in American society in the 1920s reflected the social features at that time. Economic prosperity, consumerism, the importance of social status, fashion and entertainment, the American dream and the prohibition of alcohol have jointly promoted the rise of materialistic culture (Gao, 2011; Pan, 1991). The cultural characteristics of this period had a far-reaching impact on the later society and culture, and were also deeply discussed in novels, movies and literary works.

#### 4. MATERIALISM IN NOVELS

##### 4.1 The Presentation of Materialistic Culture in Novels

"The Great Gatsby" profoundly presents the discussion of American materialistic culture in the 1920s in various ways. Jay Gatsby, as the protagonist, became a symbol of materialistic culture with his grand party and luxurious manor in the novel. He holds large-scale parties every week and invites members of the upper class to participate. These parties include music, drinks, dances and fireworks, which highlights the luxury and enjoyment. Materialist culture is often associated with luxury goods such as luxury cars and jewelry (Tarner & Margaret, 2010). In the novel, Jay Gatsby owns an expensive car, which not only symbolizes his wealth, but also reflects his pursuit of social status. Daisy Buchanan also shows luxury with her jewelry and designer clothes. Materialist culture usually emphasizes the importance of appearance and social status. In the novel, people rush to Jay Gatsby's party, mainly to show their social status, not for real friendship or communication. Appearance and external image become very important, and people often hide their true feelings (Liu,

2015; Wang, 2016). Money plays an important role in the novel, and materialistic culture emphasizes economic success and the pursuit of wealth. Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby both acquired wealth through improper means, reflecting the power and power of money in American society in the 1920s. The hypocrisy and emptiness of materialistic culture are also revealed in the novel. Although many people pursue material success, they often find that wealth and material things cannot bring real happiness and satisfaction. Jay Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy Buchanan's love and Daisy Buchanan's infatuation with wealth and social status all show this emptiness. The novel "The Great Gatsby" vividly presents the materialistic culture in American society in the 1920s through the lifestyles, pursuits and conflicts of the protagonist and other characters. This culture advocates wealth, social status and enjoyment, but it also reveals its hypocrisy and interference with real happiness. These themes make the novel a profound reflection on the social values at that time, as well as a discussion of human desires and morality.

#### 4.2 The Influence of Materialism on Different Characters in Novels

The different characters in "The Great Gatsby" are deeply influenced by materialistic culture, which is deeply discussed in the novel. Jay Gatsby is one of the most prominent figures in the novel influenced by materialism. He is famous for his vanity and pursuit of wealth and social status. He devoted himself to creating a false appearance to attract Daisy Buchanan and show his obsession with her. Jay Gatsby's manor, party and car are all symbols of his materialism, but his inner loneliness and hypocrisy also show the emptiness of materialism. Daisy Buchanan is another key role influenced by materialism. She pursues social status and wealth, regardless of morality and true love. She married Tom Buchanan. Although she had an emotional relationship with Jay Gatsby, she finally chose Tom Buchanan, who was more stable and powerful materially. Daisy Buchanan sees herself and others through materialistic eyes, which prevents her from finding real satisfaction. Tom Buchanan is also influenced by materialism, and he represents the new noble class in his novels. His attitude is arrogant, selfish and heartless, and he regards wealth and social status as paramount. Tom Buchanan's control over Daisy Buchanan and his indifference to extramarital relations reflect his persistence in materialism. His cold behavior plays an important role in the novel. As the narrator of the novel, Nick Carraway is also influenced by materialistic culture. He was attracted by Jay Gatsby, but he doubted the emptiness of materialism in the development of the story. Nick Carraway is one of the few characters in

the novel who can see through the hypocrisy of materialism, and his views make readers understand the theme of the novel more clearly. Jordan Baker is another typical materialist pursuer in the novel. She is a professional golfer, representing the pursuit of career and wealth. Her calmness and selfishness reflect the characteristics of materialistic culture. The novel "The Great Gatsby" deeply discusses the influence of materialistic culture on individuals through the shaping of different characters (Lin, 2013). Materialism leads to hypocrisy, emptiness and moral decay. This theme runs through the whole novel and provides readers with a profound reflection on American society in the 1920s. The fate and decision-making of each character reflect the influence of materialistic culture in the novel, which provides complexity and depth for the theme of the novel.

## 5. THE PURSUIT OF EXISTENCE

### 5.1 The Pursuit of Existence in Novels

The pursuit of existence in "The Great Gatsby" is centered on the protagonist Jay Gatsby, which is one of the core themes of the novel. His pursuit is a profound reflection, which shows an eternal search for the American dream and human desire.

1. Jay Gatsby's pursuit, Daisy Buchanan: Jay Gatsby's main pursuit of existence is his love for Daisy Buchanan. He fell in love with Daisy Buchanan when he was young, but was separated by the war. Jay Gatsby pursues the opportunity to reunite with Daisy Buchanan by accumulating wealth and social status. This pursuit is not only the pursuit of love, but also the pursuit of one's inner fantasy and American dream. In the novel, Jay Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy Buchanan is expressed as the continuation of his firm love and dream for Daisy Buchanan. In one memory, Jay Gatsby described Daisy Buchanan's voice: "Her voice is golden, and her voice is tense, like the sound of summer wind." This quote emphasizes Jay Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy Buchanan and idealizes it as a precious existence.
2. The representative of the American dream: Jay Gatsby is also regarded as the representative of the American dream. His success and pursuit represent that individuals can realize their dreams through hard work and opportunities. However, Jay Gatsby's story also reveals the emptiness and hypocrisy of the American dream, because his success and wealth have not brought happiness. In the novel, Nick Carraway describes Jay Gatsby as "a romantic idealist and a man with great vanity", which reflects his persistence in the American dream and shows his pursuit of existence. However, this description also implies that his

pursuit is illusory, and the American dream is not always realized. 3. Inner loneliness and emptiness: Although Jay Gatsby is rich and successful in appearance, his heart is lonely and empty. His pursuit is not only to have Daisy Buchanan, but to fill his inner emptiness. The result of this pursuit is a kind of inner loneliness. In the novel, the loneliness and emptiness of Jay Gatsby are particularly obvious in his magnificent manor. Nick Carraway described the green light on the manor: "It looks very small, very far away, very hard, but it is desirable." This green light represents Jay Gatsby's inner pursuit and his unrelenting exploration of Daisy Buchanan. Jay Gatsby is a character full of existence in the novel "The Great Gatsby". Through his love for Daisy Buchanan and his persistence in the American dream, he represents an unrelenting search for happiness, satisfaction and life goals. However, the novel also shows the illusion and emptiness of this pursuit, emphasizing the inner loneliness of human beings under materialistic culture, which makes the novel a profound literary work.

### 5.2 Jay Gatsby's Dream and Obsession with Daisy Buchanan

In "The Great Gatsby", Jay Gatsby is a complex figure full of dreams and persistence in Daisy Buchanan. His dream and pursuit of Daisy Buchanan are the core of the novel, which shows a profound discussion of American dream and love. Jay Gatsby's dream is to pursue a better life and social status. When he was young, when he was far away from Daisy Buchanan, he decided to become rich to attract her attention again. His dream is manifested in his persistence in wealth, luxury and social status. In the novel, Nick Carraway describes Jay Gatsby's pursuit: "He pursues a fantasy, which is in front of him, like something he has never touched, experienced, and reached, right there." This quotation shows that Jay Gatsby's dream is about pursuing unknown and unrealized things, which inspires him to move forward. Jay Gatsby's obsession with Daisy Buchanan is one of the core plots of the novel. He loves Daisy Buchanan and even has a morbid crush on her. He pursues her love and regards her as the meaning of life and the motive force of existence. In the novel, Jay Gatsby's love shows his persistence in Daisy Buchanan. He often looks at the green light in the distance, which represents his dream and pursuit of Daisy Buchanan. This green light became his eternal yearning for Daisy Buchanan, although he knew that this yearning might never come true. Jay Gatsby's existence and pursuit represent a profound discussion of love and the American dream. His persistence shows people's unrelenting pursuit of perfect happiness and success, and also reflects the illusory and unattainable nature of these ideals. The text in the novel and the portrayal



of Jay Gatsby emphasize the complexity of the American dream and the persistence in love and wealth. Nick Carraway wrote at the end of the novel: "So we ran ahead, and constantly, the captain stood in the tide of history with his lazy hand leaning against the dark green world." This quotation highlights the pursuit of the American dream by Jay Gatsby and others, and the illusory nature of this pursuit. Jay Gatsby is a profound figure, and his dream and obsession with Daisy Buchanan represent a complicated discussion of American dream and love in the novel. His existence embodies the eternal pursuit of happiness and success, but also reveals the illusory and unattainable nature of these ideals. This theme makes the novel a profound literary work, reflecting the pursuit of perfection and the struggle for reality.

## 6. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN MATERIALISM AND THE PURSUIT OF EXISTENCE

### 6.1 The Conflict Between Materialism and the Pursuit of Existence in Novels

In "The Great Gatsby", the conflict between materialism and the pursuit of existence is a core theme. The novel deeply discusses this conflict through the lifestyles, values and conflicts of different characters. In the novel, materialistic culture is characterized by luxury, vanity and excessive consumption. Jay Gatsby's grand parties, manors and jewels symbolize this luxury, and they represent social status and wealth. This materialistic culture leads to the pursuit of external social status, while ignoring internal happiness and satisfaction. In the novel, Jay Gatsby's grand parties are vividly depicted, which reflect the pursuit of materialism in social circles in the 1920s. Nick Carraway described Jay Gatsby's party: "Everyone wants to see it, participate in it and become a part of luxury." It highlights the power of materialistic culture and drives people to pursue social status and enjoyment. The pursuit of Jay Gatsby's existence is manifested in the unrelenting pursuit of Daisy Buchanan to fill the inner void. His persistence represents the inner pursuit of happiness and perfection, but it also shows the illusion of this pursuit, because Daisy Buchanan's love may not achieve his happiness. In the novel, Jay Gatsby often stares at the green light in the distance, which is a symbol of his eternal yearning for Daisy Buchanan. Nick Carraway described the green light: "The green light is flashing in the distance, and the green light brings the night. The light is far away and attenuated. What it represents-or something close to it-is far like

eternal, perfect, approaching but never out of reach." This emphasizes the illusory pursuit of existence and the endless pursuit of perfection. Materialist culture has impacted social values, leading to moral decay, hypocrisy and emptiness. In novels, people pursue material success at all costs, ignoring morality and real happiness (Dilworth, 2009; Rauh, 2017). In the novel, Jay Gatsby's lifestyle and characters' behaviors reflect the collapse of social values. Nick Carraway wrote at the end of the novel: "So we ran ahead, and constantly, the captain stood in the tide of history with his lazy hand leaning against the dark green world." This emphasizes the collapse of social values and the blind pursuit of materialism and existence. The novel "The Great Gatsby" deeply explores the values and moral concepts of American society in the 1920s by showing the conflict between materialism and the pursuit of existence. This theme makes the novel a profound reflection on materialistic culture and the American dream, as well as a discussion of human desires and morality.

## 6.2 Materialism Deprives Jay Gatsby and other Characters of True Happiness.

In *The Great Gatsby*, materialistic culture deprives Jay Gatsby and other characters of true happiness, which is an important theme of the novel. Materialist culture emphasizes external vanity and social status, but ignores inner happiness. Many characters feel frustrated in the pursuit of social status and vanity, because they find that this does not bring real satisfaction. In the novel, the marriage between Tom Buchanan and Daisy Buchanan shows this point. They are successful in social status and wealth, but their marriage is full of dissatisfaction and betrayal. Tom Buchanan's affair and Daisy Buchanan's dissatisfaction show that although they have material things, they can't get real happiness. Materialist culture deprives people of their pursuit of dreams. Jay Gatsby represented those who struggled to pursue the American dream, but in the end his dream was replaced by illusion and disappointment. Materialism makes people ignore their inner happiness and seek external success instead. In the novel, Jay Gatsby's persistent attachment to Daisy Buchanan represents her persistent attachment to her dream. However, when he finally reunited with Daisy Buchanan, he realized that she was not as perfect as he imagined. Nick Carraway wrote: "In the sun, Daisy Buchanan's voice is neither golden nor hard, but soft and charming, like the sound of a summer breeze blowing through a wheat field." This reflects Jay Gatsby's disappointment with his dream and the influence of materialistic culture. Materialist culture emphasizes external appearances, but ignores inner needs (Corrigan, 1973;

李娟娟 & 杨雯, 2012). This leads to the inner loneliness and emptiness of the characters, even though they look happy on the outside. In the novel, the marriage between Daisy Buchanan and Tom Buchanan is described as hypocritical and empty. Nick Carraway observed: "They are superficial people, and they are abandoned in places where there is no pain, no sadness and no happiness." This shows that under the materialistic culture, people's hearts are ignored, which leads to emptiness and dissatisfaction. The novel "The Great Gatsby" deeply explores how materialism deprives the characters of their true happiness. Materialism leads to vanity, lost dreams, inner loneliness and emptiness (Harrison, 2000). This theme makes the novel a profound reflection on American society in the 1920s, as well as a discussion of human desires and morality. It reminds us that true happiness depends not only on material things, but also on inner satisfaction and real interpersonal relationships.

## 7. THE EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL CRITICISM

### 7.1 By Criticizing Materialism, the Novel Exposes the Defects and Hypocrisy of the Society at that Time

"The Great Gatsby" reveals the defects and hypocrisy of American society in the 1920s by criticizing materialism. Characters in novels often hide behind hypocritical social masks, pursuing material success and social status, while ignoring their true feelings and moral values (Khan). This hypocrisy is the product of materialistic culture. In novels, characters often attend Jay Gatsby's parties, in which people dress up as different characters and hide their true identities. This phenomenon reflects social hypocrisy and excessive attention to appearance. Nick Carraway wrote: "It was a complete devil's feast." This exposes the hypocrisy of social parties and the influence of materialistic culture on people's behavior. Wealth and luxury goods are described as empty and false in the novel, and they can't bring real happiness to the characters. Materialist culture makes people pursue meaningless wealth and ignore their inner needs. In the novel, Jay Gatsby's manor and lifestyle are a waste of wealth, but his wealth has not brought him happiness. Nick Carraway wrote: "How rich he is, but how empty he is. This is not luxury, but hypocrisy." This highlights the falsity of wealth and the nature that it cannot satisfy the inner desire. Materialist culture leads to moral degeneration, and characters often sacrifice moral principles in pursuit of material success. This reflects the moral hypocrisy of society. In the novel, Tom Buchanan's extramarital relationship and abuse of Daisy

Buchanan are serious deviations from morality. This reflects how materialistic culture leads to moral decay. Nick Carraway wrote: "He doesn't care who Daisy Buchanan goes with or how he lives. He won't have a problem for anyone. He is hypocritical and corrupt." This exposes Tom Buchanan's hypocrisy and moral decay, and the promotion of materialistic culture to this phenomenon. By criticizing materialism, *The Great Gatsby* reveals the hypocrisy, moral degeneration and emptiness of American society in the 1920s. It emphasizes the negative influence of materialistic culture on individuals and society and the threat to real happiness. This theme makes the novel a profound reflection on social culture and reminds people to cherish their intrinsic values and moral principles (Yu, 2020).

## 7.2 Fitzgerald Uses Novels to Reflect Social Problems

Fitzgerald reveals the materialism and vanity of American society in the 1920s through the characters in the novel, especially Jay Gatsby and Buchanan. He exposed people's desire for external success and social status through extravagant parties, famous cars, jewels and wasteful lifestyles, while ignoring inner morality and real happiness. This vanity leads to a false life and loss of inner values. In the novel, Jay Gatsby is a symbol of the American dream (Li & Kang, 2023). He represents an individual who can realize his dream through hard work and opportunity. However, Fitzgerald reveals the illusion of the American dream through Jay Gatsby's story. Even if a person has wealth and social status, he may still feel empty and dissatisfied, because there is a gap between dream and reality. In the novel, the relationship between characters of different social classes reflects the class differentiation of American society in the 1920s. Fitzgerald describes the differences between social circles in the east and the west, and the relationship between Jay Gatsby and Buchanan's family, showing the problems of social class and inequality. This inequality leads to jealousy, conflict and contradiction, which reflects the tension within society. In the novel, Fitzgerald shows the character's moral decay and hypocrisy. Tom Buchanan's extramarital relationship, Jay Gatsby's fake identity and the immoral behavior of other characters all exposed the hypocrisy and hypocrisy of American society in the 1920s. This hypocrisy has a negative impact on social values and led to moral degradation. Fitzgerald successfully reflected the multiple problems of American society in the 1920s through "*The Great Gatsby*", including materialism, the illusion of the American dream, social class inequality and moral hypocrisy. His works profoundly reflect the culture and values of that era, reminding people to

examine the defects of society and think about the importance of internal values and moral principles. This makes him one of the writers with far-reaching influence in American literature.

### 7.3 The Deeper Values Reflected in "The Great Gatsby"

In "The Great Gatsby," Fitzgerald crafts a narrative that extends beyond a mere depiction of the Jazz Age's excesses. He embeds within the story a rich tapestry of philosophical and ethical considerations that speak to the human condition and the search for meaning in life. Despite being eclipsed by the novel's opulent settings and decadent social scenes, these deeper values are integral to the work's timeless relevance and appeal. Fitzgerald's critique of materialism and consumerism is a central theme in "The Great Gatsby." He uses the character of Jay Gatsby to explore the emptiness that can result from an obsession with material wealth and the pursuit of love as a commodity. Gatsby's relentless drive to recreate the past and win Daisy's love through material means underscores the hollowness of such pursuits. His tragic end serves as a stark warning of the spiritual and moral void that can befall those who place material success above all else. In contrast to Gatsby, Nick Carraway, the novel's narrator, emerges as a character who upholds a sense of moral integrity. His critical yet empathetic perspective on the events and characters he encounters allows him to navigate the moral quagmire of the era. Nick's ability to maintain his moral compass, even as he is drawn into the world of the wealthy, underscores the importance of ethical principles in the face of societal pressures and temptations (Chen, 2021). "The Great Gatsby" also implicitly challenges the American Dream, questioning whether happiness can be derived from the accumulation of wealth and social status. Fitzgerald posits that the true essence of life's value lies beyond material possessions. He suggests that personal growth, authentic relationships, and spiritual fulfillment are the cornerstones of a meaningful existence. This message is particularly poignant in contemporary society, where the allure of consumerism and materialism continues to influence our values and aspirations. Another layer of deeper values in "The Great Gatsby" is the exploration of the relationship between illusion and reality. Gatsby's life is built on a grand illusion—the dream of Daisy—and his inability to distinguish between his idealized vision of her and the real person leads to his downfall. This theme encourages readers to consider the dangers of living in a fantasy world and the importance of confronting and accepting reality (Wang, 2023). The novel also delves into the complexities of social class and the illusion of

social mobility. Through characters like Tom and Daisy Buchanan, Fitzgerald exposes the entrenched nature of class divisions and the limitations they impose on individuals, regardless of their wealth. This critique extends to the broader societal structures that perpetuate inequality and the facade of meritocracy. In conclusion, "The Great Gatsby" is a rich exploration of the deeper values that underpin human existence. Through his characters and their struggles, Fitzgerald invites readers to reflect on the true meaning of success, the importance of ethical behavior, and the pursuit of authentic happiness. The novel's enduring legacy lies in its ability to provoke thought and stimulate dialogue on these fundamental human concerns, making it a timeless work that continues to resonate with readers across generations.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In Fitzgerald's novel "The Great Gatsby", materialism and the pursuit of existence constitute an important theme. Through the conflict between them, the author makes a profound social criticism. Fitzgerald deeply explores the tension between materialism and the pursuit of existence in American society in the 1920s through different characters and plots in the novel. He shows the luxury, vanity and excessive pursuit of external success of materialistic culture, and emphasizes that this pursuit ignores internal happiness and moral values. Materialist culture leads to social masks, hypocrisy, moral decay and social class inequality, all of which are important themes in the novel. Meanwhile, the novel also highlights the pursuit of existence, especially through the role of Jay Gatsby. Jay Gatsby is a complex figure, who represents those who pursue the American dream, but finally finds that the American dream is illusory and can't satisfy their inner desires. His persistent love for Daisy Buchanan and longing for the green light exposed the importance of the pursuit of existence to individuals and society, but also reflected the illusory and unattainable nature of this pursuit. Fitzgerald deeply reflected on the culture and values of American society in the 1920s through "The Great Gatsby". He emphasized the threat of materialistic culture to intrinsic value and the importance of the pursuit of existence for real happiness and satisfaction. This social criticism is presented in the novel with vivid stories and multidimensional characters, which makes it one of the important classics in American literature and reminds people to cherish their inner values and moral principles.

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