

“I disavow any essential connection between my life and what I write.” Is this a credible view for writers of literature you have studied?

Literature is a means by which authors can provide us insights of certain aspects of their world and life. Through the manner in which the author portrays the characters or setting, or the style and manner in which the literary work has been written, the piece of literature can allow us to have a deeper understanding of the author's thoughts. In The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, many of the themes, characters, language, and even the geographical setting parallel Fitzgerald's own life, and allow the readers to have a glimpse of certain aspects of his life. Through expounding on the similarities between The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald, this essay will attempt to show that the view that there are no essential connections between the novel and his life is not entirely credible.

The Great Gatsby was set in the 1920s, which also happens to be the time period in which Fitzgerald had been writing the novel. The 1920s had also been coined the 'Roaring Twenties', and was a time when the American Dream had slowly been distorted from being a set of ideals which encouraged hard work and determination in the pursuit of success, to an empty pursuit of material wealth, using any means necessary. The Roaring Twenties was a period of economic boom after a devastating period of war and fighting, and America was experiencing great economic success. As people became more affluent, materialism and rampant consumerism also became more prevalent in the American society at that time, which Fitzgerald was also a part of. The rampant materialism and consumerism during that time also gave rise to the social stratification between the rich and the poor, and the "old rich" and the nouveau riche. While these events and themes were prevalent in the society which Fitzgerald had been a part of, they had also been prominent in The Great Gatsby.

The social stratification which Fitzgerald had observed in the lives of others around him and perhaps had even faced himself has been reflected in the novel through the characters and the geographical setting of their houses. Tom and Daisy Buchanan represented the old rich – the ones who had inherited money which had been in their family for generations, and their house had been situated in the East Egg. The houses in the East Egg had been described as "white palaces" that "glittered along the water". The use of the word "white" suggests a sense of purity, which in turn reflects the idea that the money inherited by the old rich was untainted. By terming the houses of East Egg as palaces, Fitzgerald essentially brings across the idea that East Egg was more refined and less gaudy and superficial than the West Egg, while the word "glittered" suggests that they were like jewels and were something precious. On the other hand, the West Egg had been described as the "less fashionable of the two", which suggests that the houses in the West Egg had been less refined and more gaudy. Gatsby's mansion, which seems to be the one that dominates West Egg, was described as a "factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy". This

suggests that Gatsby had tried to imitate European refinement when flaunting his wealth, but was clearly not able to do so as his mansion was termed as faux and “superficial”.

Gatsby's extravagant and lavish lifestyle as well as the clear divide between the nouveau riche and those that had inherited money from their family is strikingly similar to Fitzgerald's experience. Having acquired some wealth from his writing after World War I, Fitzgerald began living a decadent and lavish lifestyle, while flaunting his wealth. Like Gatsby, he had thrown many extravagant parties, and attended many others thrown by other wealthy families. His house, which was located on Great Neck, Long Island, was luxurious, but when compared to some of the other more extravagant homes of the wealthy, old American families around, his house became seemingly less remarkable.

Besides their social classes, there are also similarities between Fitzgerald's and Gatsby's love life. During World War I, Fitzgerald had enlisted in the army and became a second lieutenant. He had been stationed at Camp Sheridan in Alabama, and while he was there, he had fallen in love with a rich and beautiful girl named Zelda Sayre. Although they had both loved each other, Zelda was rich and he was not, and although Zelda had finally agreed to marry Fitzgerald after a few years together, she delayed their wedding until he could prove that he would be able to support her restlessness, her overpowering desire for wealth, fun, and an extravagant and lavish lifestyle. Similarly, Gatsby had met Daisy Fay when he was at serving as a soldier. Like Fitzgerald, Gatsby was from an entirely different social class as Daisy, and there had been an “indiscernable barbed wire” between them – a social divide they knew they could not cross. Gatsby knew that “at any moment, the invisible cloak of his uniform might slip from his shoulders”, yet, “he let her believe that he was a person from the same strata as herself – that he was fully able to take care of her” so that he would be able to court her. Gatsby and Daisy's love story, one between a poor soldier and a rich girl, parallels that of Fitzgerald and Zelda, thus showing an essential link between Fitzgerald's life and his work of literature.

Furthermore, both Fitzgerald and Gatsby had strived to work hard and gain wealth and success in order that they might be able to win over the girls' hearts. After Zelda Sayre had decided to break off her engagement with Fitzgerald until he could prove that he had the money and power to be able to support her, he had begun writing furiously and worked hard on his first novel, “This Side of Paradise” until it became a literary sensation and propelled him to fame and wealth. As for Gatsby, he knew that he was merely a “penniless young man” who was unable to wed Daisy because he was poor. This pushed him to engage in bootlegging in order to acquire wealth after the war, to embark on the empty pursuit of wealth and success in hopes of winning her over. Even after attaining wealth, he continued throwing extravagant parties, and inviting her over to his house, so that he might be able to flaunt his well and convince

her that he now possessed the wealth to support her desire for a lavish lifestyle. Although Fitzgerald eventually convinces Zelda that he is able to support her, while Gatsby does not succeed in winning Daisy over, this yet again shows the connection between the life of Fitzgerald and his novel.

In the novel, Fitzgerald also provides us with a glimpse of the female emancipation happening in the 1920s due to the Nineteenth Amendment. Since she was a child, Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda Sayre, showed a strong, rebellious attitude, and was often determined to go against the expectation society had of Victorian women – she wore her hair short, smoked and drank alcohol, and wore short skirts. She was one of the first flappers, and was the epitome of an emancipated woman in the 1920s. Fitzgerald demonstrates the qualities of his wife, and the emancipation of females in 1920s America in the lives of the female characters in the novel. Jordan Baker is contrast to the stereotype of women at that time, for she was independent, and was a “golf champion”. She has been portrayed as a modern emancipated woman as her slenderness, the way she holds herself and the tan gained from her sporting life are emphasised several times. The emancipation of women is also reflected in the many women at Gatsby's parties, as they were “highly indignant”, suggesting that the women had been going against the gender stereotype of that time since they had been openly drinking and getting themselves drunk in public. Furthermore, when Daisy Buchanan begs, “ Oh, let's have fun” as they set off for New York, she is expressing what all emancipated young women desire, which could have been parallel to what Fitzgerald had always observed about Zelda.

In the case of The Great Gatsby, the essential connections between Fitzgerald's life and what he has written is not only limited to similarities between certain characters and Fitzgerald, or events which have taken place in Fitzgerald's life being mentioned in the novel, but it includes Fitzgerald's attitudes towards certain issues.

Although Fitzgerald himself had embarked on a an empty pursuit of wealth and he had led a decadent lifestyle, he was able to look past the glamour of rampant materialism and consumerism which was prevalent in the Roaring Twenties, and delve into the moral decay and emptiness behind it. This is reflected through the narrator, Nick Carraway's observations and opinions of the other characters in the book. When Tom and Daisy Buchanan took off after Daisy had killed Myrtle Wilson and let Gatsby take the blame for it, Nick had showed us that the rich were “careless” and “smashed things up and creatures and then retreated back into their money or vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.”. This shows that the characters, in particular, the rich, had the ability to cause destruction in others' lives but were always able to get away without facing any sort of punishment because of their wealth. Furthermore, when detailing Myrtle Wilson's death, Fitzgerald writes “she [knelt] on the road, her thick blood mingling with the dust”. The act of kneeling is

often associated with prayer and penitence for sins, and by describing Myrtle Wilson as such at her death, Fitzgerald shows that there was a heavy price to pay for materialism, which people treated like a religion. Through the brutal end of characters such as Gatsby and Myrtle Wilson, he also cleverly yet subtly brings across his criticism of materialism and consumerism, and reflects his conflicting feelings towards American society at that time, thus showing a connection between his life and what he wrote.

In conclusion, Fitzgerald has provided us with a clear glimpse of his life and events which he had witnessed in the American society in the 1920s, as well as allowed us to have an insight on his attitudes and criticism of certain issues, through the themes, as well as description and plot in his novel, The Great Gatsby. Hence, with reference to F. Scott Fitzgerald, and The Great Gatsby, the view "I disavow any essential connection between my life and what I write" is not entirely credible, as there are many essential connections between Fitzgerald's life and the life of the characters throughout the novel.

References:

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