

**AMERICAN DREAM FOUND IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD' S
*THE GREAT GATSBY***

Zahrotul Muniroh, S.Pd., M.Pd.

Dosen Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris

FKIP Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo

Email: zahroraharjo@yahoo.co.id

ABSTRAK: Berbicara tentang Amerika tidak bisa terlepas dari mimpi tentang Amerika kebahagiaan menjadi tujuan akhirnya. Mimpi tentang Amerika telah memotivasi serta memancing para pendatang untuk mengadu nasib di sana sejak pertama kali daratan ini ditemukan. Amerika dianggap sebagai negeri dongeng karena orang-orang bebas bermimpi serta mewujudkan mimpi tersebut. Mimpi tentang Amerika juga telah menginspirasi para seniman dan penulis untuk menciptakan karya-karya mereka yang berupa lukisan, film, lagu, novel dan juga artifak. Karya F. Scott Fitzgerald yang berjudul *The Great Gatsby* merupakan contoh novel yang menceritakan perjuangan untuk mewujudkan mimpi tentang Amerika berikut akibat maupun hasil yang dicapai. *The Great Gatsby* ditulis oleh F. Scott Fitzgerald pada abad 20-an. Sesuai dengan teori yang menyatakan bahwa suatu karya sastra adalah merupakan refleksi atau cerminan dari masyarakat di mana karya sastra tersebut diciptakan. Novel ini juga melukiskan mimpi tentang Amerika pada abad 20-an. Penelitian ini diarahkan pada analisis tentang perjuangan untuk meraih mimpi tentang Amerika yang dilakukan oleh para tokoh dalam novel *The Great Gatsby*. Sebagian besar tokoh novel ini memfokuskan pencarian mereka pada kesuksesan materi. Hal ini menyebabkan mereka menjadi orang-orang yang mementingkan diri sendiri serta menafikan nurani karena mereka mengedepankan materialisme dan hedonisme. Dari penelitian ini didapat kesimpulan bahwa hanya orang-orang yang bisa bermimpi serta mampu menyeimbangkan kesuksesan materi dengan nilai-nilai spiritual yang akan berhasil mendapatkan kebahagiaan yang dijanjikan oleh mimpi tentang Amerika.

Kata kunci: mimpi tentang Amerika, perjuangan meraih kebahagiaan, kesuksesan materi, nilai-nilai spiritual

ABSTRACT: *Talking about America is inseparable from the American dream with happiness as its last goal. American dream has motivated and provoked people to come there since the very first time of its history. The United States becomes a kind of wonder-land where people can make their own dream and pursue it. American dream also has inspired many artists and writers to create their works such as paintings, films, songs and novels as well as artifacts. F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is an example of a novel of the pursuit of American dream. The Great Gatsby provides the efforts and struggles of its characters in the pursuit of happiness in their lives. They, too, have their own impacts and results of their dreams. The Great Gatsby was created by F. Scott Fitzgerald in the twenties. Thus, relating to the theory that literature is the reflection or mirror of the society where it is created, this*

novel also portrayed the American dream of the twenties. This research focuses on the analysis of the pursuit of the American dream of its characters. Most of its characters are the people who focused mainly on the material gain of the American dream. These conditions lead them to be people who were so selfish and heartless because they put materialism and hedonism as their beliefs and principles. From this research, it can be concluded that only a man who can dream wisely and balance the material gain with the spiritual values will succeed to reach happiness which is offered by the American dream.

Keywords: *American dream, the pursuit of happiness, material gain, spiritual values*

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is a new promise land. It is a place for those who pursue for a better life, good change and happiness. This idea becomes the main concepts of American dream.

This concept has emerged since the very first history of this New Land. Edmund S. Morgan in his book *The Puritan Dilemma* says that “European crowded in by their seeming lack of space and by a rigid special order, looked with longing across the ocean where space and opportunity abounded. Time and again, men critical of their own society hoped by migration to find the scope for working out their vision of a better order” (1958: ix).

This situation is depicted clearly in so many novels as well as films about this land. Many European were attracted with many promises that were offered by this new land. Even in a cartoon film entitled *An American Tale*, some mice from Europe were attracted by the promise that there would be no cat in America so they could live happily and peacefully. With the ship full of people sailing to the new world, they immigrated to America (*An American Tale*, A Movie).

In a more serious film, *Far and Away*, the major characters; Shannon Christie and Joseph Donely also became the admirer of the new land. They sailed from Ireland to America with the dream of having their own land so that they could manage their own life by having their own houses, horses, and farms to earn money (*Far and Away*, A Movie).

This new land offered dreams for everyone who wanted to pursue happiness; being free, being successful, being powerful and of course being wealthy. This dream then is well-known as an American dream.

American dream with happiness as its goal has been the ideal for everyone in America and has inspired many artists as well as writers to create their works like paintings, films, songs, and novels and also artifacts such as Brooklyn Bridge. This cultural symbol is a concrete example of American dream. The enormous and fabulous bridge that stretches over the river from Manhattan to Brooklyn is the American dream that has come true and real.

Many American novels are also inspired are also inspired by American dream. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is an example of the novel that depicts the pursuit of happiness of its major as well as its minor characters.

The Great Gatsby is usually considered as Fitzgerald's finest novel (Piper, 1970: 127). Through this novel, with the twenties as the setting of time, and Long Island, New York, mostly as the setting of place, the readers can learn that modernization and prosperity in America had achieved its remarkable level at this age.

America in the twenties was swarmed by new belief belief; hedonism and materialism. Hedonism is a belief that pleasure is the chief good. Hedonists idolize pleasure and material comfort to its utmost. This kind of belief is contra-productive. It may result the interaction among members of a society simply for material benefit (Leuchtenburg, 1986: 188). The attitudes which regard too much pleasure may create people who are selfish and insensitive of others' sufferings and pains like what is reflected in the characters of *The Great Gatsby*.

Tom Buchanan, Daisy Fay, and the guests of Gatsby's parties are the examples of the hedonists. They were people who just think of themselves and took no care of others. This condition is reflected in Gatsby's funeral. Daisy Fay, a woman for whom Gatsby had dedicated all his life, didn't come or even call. On the other hand, she escaped from the problem she had created and sacrificed Gatsby's life for her safety. Same as Daisy Fay, the regular guests of Gatsby's parties every week-end and his friends didn't come either in Gatsby's funeral. Even one of them showed his insensitivity by paying more attention to his worthless shoes he had as if it was more important than the issue of Gatsby's death. He also preferred to attend a picnic to come to Gatsby's funeral (Fitzgerald, 1925: 138).

The values that are brought by hedonism also enable to provoke the burgeon of materialism which will be a jeopardy and dangerous to the values of humanity. For the sake of material comfort as their first priorities, they will do anything. Material comfort which they praise as their new God may neglect other values such as humanity. They no longer care of social and spiritual codes and sanctions which actually can control one's bad and corrupt behaviors. It can create selfish and heartless people who are insensitive to the sufferings of others like what are portrayed by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*.

Besides hedonism, materialism also emerged in America in the twenties. Materialism is the tendency of people to place wealth as everything and wealth is the chief end of a man (Leuchtenburg, 1986: 188). The implication is that the people competitively try to be rich as quick as possible. The ambition to be materially rich sweeps out religious and moral values written in Holy Books. People are no longer taking care of hereafter life with its reward and punishment. Freda Kirchway wrote about American in the twenties, "Never in recent generations have human beings so floundered about outside of ropes of social and religious sanctions." (Leuchtenberg, 1986: 158).

The lost morality and get rich-quickism which became new man's ideology in the twenties seemed to cause the chaos. Cheating, stealing, violence, crime and corruption spread over all levels of lives as the result of people's "less interest in hereafter than in salvation on earth" (1986: 188). It was marked by the spread of illicit business which sometimes appeared disguising as legitimate practices such as racketeering which Morris (1951: 10).

The conditions of the twenties above are portrayed clearly in *The Great Gatsby*. The characters in this novel were the people of twenties and most of them were hedonists and materialists so that they mistakenly interpreted the American dream and happiness into material gain only. Some of the people were the people who were so heartless and selfish and sometimes sacrificed others in order to get what they wanted. The pursuit of happiness in this novel mostly relates to the material and secular gain; wealth and money. From all of the characters of this characters of this novel, only Nick Carraway, who realized the presence of God and implicitly believed in hereafter life. Thus, he wasn't trapped in the secular gain of the American dream.

The *Great Gatsby* provides the efforts of its characters in the pursuit of happiness in their lives. They had their own concepts and ways to reach their American dream. They, too, had their own impacts and results of their dream. Thus, this study is tended to trace out the struggles of Americans in the twenties portrayed in the characters of *The Great Gatsby* to pursue American dream.

The finding of this research is hoped to be a useful reference for the understanding of the American dream in American society.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study is based on a qualitative research using library research. The research is focusing on the bibliographical sources of the data.

The materials are taken from novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) as the primary source and some other references such as; autobiography, anthology, literature, history, criticism and also journal which are relevant and supporting the topic of the study as the secondary sources. The selected data are processed by applying a qualitative method because this method of research is aimed to comprehend the process of someone's or a group of individuals' thought toward their where they live. In the qualitative method, meaning is essential to interpret someone's or society's behavior (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982).

However, by applying the library research, this study can hand down the issues in terms of proposing and analyzing the various data through a descriptive analysis. It means that the study deals with the description of any data found out in the work in order to relate all data comprehensively in achieving the objectives.

ANALYSIS

Since the very first time of American history, it offered dreams for people who came there and this dream becomes a very famous term called American dream. The American dream is a cliché that in very much a part of the American cultural landscape. In essence, the American dream is a relief that if one works and keeps out of troubles; he will gain success in his life.

David F. Track in Henry Dan Piper's *F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby* said that the American dream consisted the belief (sometimes thought of as a

promise) that people of talent in this land opportunity and plenty could reasonably aspire for material success if they adhered to a fairly well-defined set of behavioral rules – rules set forth in a relatively comprehensive form (Track, 1970: 213).

Another opinion is stated by James Truslow Adams that American dream is the dream of land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to his/her ability and achievement (Adams, 214).

From their statements above, it is clear enough that the key words of the American dream are opportunity and success in which life, liberty and happiness become the last goal. Both opportunity and success in which life, liberty and happiness become the last goal. Both opportunity and success can be gained by all without looking at the status, gender or race like what is stated by Thomas Jefferson in the United States' Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with the certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Jefferson in Hollinger and Capper, 2001: 134). Avery Craven and Walter Johnsons in *A Documentary of the American People* argue that those statements might considered as the foundation of American dream (159).

Actually, all the immigrants who came to the New World had their own American dream. This kind of dream that they wanted to achieve consists of two types:

- **Spiritual / Religious gain**

This kind of dream consists of freedom to speak and the freedom to embrace or not to embrace any religion.

- **Material / Secular gain**

This type of dream consists of the freedom to make life better by having money, success and fame.

The first settlements used *the Ladder of Fortune* as their rules to reach American dream that consists of industry, temperance, prudence, integrity, economy, punctuality, courage and perseverance while morality and honesty become the soul

of their struggle to reach success, riches, contentment, conscience and the favor of God. (Albanese, 1992: 6 – 9).

In the modern day, Americans imitate a famous American moralist; Benjamin Franklin with his thirteen moral virtues which in some part is similar to the Ladder of Fortune, those virtues consist of temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity and humility (Franklin in Hollinger and Capper, 2001: 100).

The Ladder of Fortune and the thirteen moral values written by Benjamin Franklin tell implicitly that in the pursuit of happiness in American dream, one should consider spiritual and moral values in order to be successful. Otherwise, he will fail if he takes no care of those values like what is portrayed in *The Great Gatsby's* characters.

Analyzing the pursuit and the results of American dream in *The Great Gatsby* is inseparable from the condition of the 1920s; when the novel was created. After The Great War ended in 1918, young people in America wanted to enjoy themselves. They also wanted plenty of money. Clothes, music and ideas were all new and different. A law was passed at this time which said that people could not buy or sell alcohol. But many people broke this kind of law. A great number of people got rich very quickly. They often broke the laws to make the money. People enjoyed themselves at parties by dancing to the new jazz tunes (Bradbury, 1991: ix – xi).

The characters in *The Great Gatsby* were the people of twenties. At that time, American dream had its own kind and version, but of course the American dream still has its typical goal from time to time, i.e. wealth, success and fame.

Just like many Americans, almost every character in *The Great Gatsby* dreamt of being wealthy, successful and famous. Only Nick Carraway, the wise man who could learn his lessons at last and could see through the reality. Thus, he could manage his dream wisely and he didn't make too much desires and dreams. He was the only character who was safe and wasn't trapped in American dream.

The issues of American dream found in *The Great Gatsby* are:

- **Wealth**

Almost every character in this novel dreamt about being wealthy. Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan, Daisy Fay and Myrtle Wilson were the materialist and

placed money as their last goal. This condition had led them to do everything in the pursuit of their desires. For the sake of material comfort and “dignity” they were dreaming of, they justified the means. They did not care the legality of the way they took to achieve their goals; as long as it worked out well and gave them benefits, they would selfishly do it.

The main character here, Jay Gatsby held some illegal and illicit business to become the rich and powerful Great Gatsby to get his old woman who was very materialist back to his arms again (Fitzgerald, 1925: 74 and 110). He became a partner of Meyer Wolfsheimer who was a big criminal at that time. Together with him and his friends, Gatsby played his role in criminal world and became a very wealthy man who could earn his extravagant life with fabulous parties every week. He was successful to be an enormous wealthy man but at last he must pay it with the worthiest thing he possessed; his life.

Different from Gatsby who was born poor and got his wealth by doing some illegal business, Tom Buchanan inherited his enormously wealth from his ancestor. He was a multi-millionaire man who often used his wealth to get everything he wanted included married with the most beautiful girl in Louisville, Daisy Fay (Fitzgerald, 1925: 15 and 63). Using his wealth too, he got a mistress like Myrtle Wilson. In essence, the power that was given by his wealth had made Tom very arrogant and did everything he wanted. Sometimes he even sacrificed others to save his life and his wealth.

Similar to Tom, his wife; Daisy Fay was also very selfish and heartless to maintain her extravagant life. The only reason why she decided to marry Tom Buchanan was also because of the wealth this man possessed. She was very addicted with money so that Gatsby considered that her voice was full of money. She took everything that the wealth offered and didn't care if it would lead others to suffer (1925: 98 and 134).

Same as Gatsby, Myrtle Wilson was born as a poor girl. Unfortunately, she married a weak and poor man whose name is George Wilson. Being sick of poverty, she dreamt to be a rich woman and her dream seemed to be true when she met and became Tom's mistress. She betrayed her loyal husband who loved her very much to

get her dream; wealth. On the other hand, she lost everything she had including her life to pay for it (1925: 27 and 118).

- **Success**

Every character of this novel had this kind of dream. Even Nick Carraway himself dreamt to be a successful businessman and it was the reason why moved to the East to learn the bond business (1925: 22).

Jordan Baker, Tom Buchanan and Gatsby also dreamt of success in their own business. But they all used the wrong way to be successful or to keep the success on by breaking the laws and sacrificing others. Jordan Baker had her own dishonest way to be a successful golf-player. She made some kind of cheating in her big tournament to be the winner (1925: 49).

They were the examples of the moral failure in the twenties. They often cheated and did illegal things to get what they called “success”. This often harmed others and even themselves.

- **Fame**

Jay Gatsby, Jordan Baker, Tom Buchanan, and Daisy Fay also wanted to be famous, They did many things to be well-known. Daisy Fay foolishly used her charm, beauty, and wealth to get it. Other characters also took many scandals, i. e. Tom Buchanan and Gatsby did everything to make people have a sight toward them and remembered them all the time long. Gatsby used his wealth and lifestyles by holding elaborate parties every week with excellent guests.

Tom used the fashion he wore and his way of life; such as travelling all over interesting places in the world and held an enormous and unforgettable wedding party when he got married with Daisy (1925: 7).

Jordan Baker also cowardly made a cheat in her golf-tournament since she thought that by being the winner would make her more famous and well-known.

- **Education in college**

Most of young men and women of the twenties dreamt to get an education in a college to raise their prestige and social status. Gatsby himself was also sent to Oxford University after the war but he quit because he hadn't realized yet about the

importance of being educated. But then, he told everybody that he was educated in Oxford University since he knew that college's education could raise one's status (1925: 53 – 54).

Tom Buchanan and Nick Carraway were the examples of educated young men at that time. They educated in New Haven University and graduated before the war occurred (1925: 4).

- **Freedom and Liberty**

The era of twenties was the era of the United States. Everything in this era was change and new including lifestyle and the way of thinking. The young generation dreamt of being free to live on their way. Nick Carraway was dreaming of this too. He left Middle West and went to the East to learn the bond business actually because of his desire to be free from his family's interference and his past (1925: 55).

CONCLUSION

The New World that is called America is the land of opportunities and promises for every one. Since its discovery in 1492, this New World offers its richness and abundance for its explorers and settlers who came and settled down there.

On the other hand, this abundant land also provides some barriers and difficulties such as the wilderness and its severe climates. It becomes the characteristics of this land because the barriers and difficulties given by this land are meant to make everyone who comes to this continent struggles and works hard to gain what they want.

Every explorer and settler in this land has his own dream that is different one another. The dream that is offered by this land to attract many people going there and tries their fate in *the New Garden of Eden* later is well-known as American dream with happiness as its last goal.

Since the very first time of its history, American dream brings about some implicit rules relating to moral and religious values in pursuing it. Anyone who wants to succeed in the pursuit of happiness should consider these rules; otherwise, he will fail to reach the dream. The first settlements used ordinary religion consisting of norms and rules to lead them in pursuing their goals; success, riches, reputation,

conscience, good will to men, contentment and the favor of God. To reach these achievements, people should use *the Ladder of Fortune* consisting of industry, temperance, prudence, integrity, economy, punctuality, courage and perseverance. Besides those material rules, people should also consider moral values consisting of morality and honesty in order to be successful.

In the modern day, American dream still has its norms and rules. Benjamin Franklin, the best example of the self-made man in America, whose biography becomes the references for the young generation also emphasized that in the pursuit of happiness in the American dream, should also consider honesty as well as social and spiritual betterment, otherwise it will become chaotic and dangerous for humanity. Furthermore, he also writes thirteen moral virtues which in some parts are similar to *the Ladder of Fortune* in the past. Those thirteen moral virtues consists of temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility.

America is the land where achievement is more important than the social status. It is a place where everyone can make a dream and tries to make it come true. This land of dreams lets everyone who comes there to try to pursue his dream without looking at the race, caste, gender or skin-color.

Every decade and era has its own kind of American dream. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* which its setting is the twenties also has its own kind and characteristics of American dream. The twenties was the era of post-war generation and the era of the modernization that spread over the country. Everything changed into the new ones: music, lifestyle, hair-style, clothes and the way people thinking also changes. Along with the spread of modernization, the moral failure also occurred in this era.

American dreamers in the twenties with their illicit business were the best examples of how the gain of material comfort set aside religious and spiritual decline of the dreamers manifested itself in several dimensions such as cheating, stealing, violence, crimes and corruptions because money became the chief goal of life itself, not as the means to pursue the goal.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* provides the struggle of its characters to pursue happiness as the last goal of American dream. As the people of twenties, most

of the characters in *The Great Gatsby* also placed material gain such as money and wealth, success and fame as their last goal. They sometimes even took no care of moral and spiritual values in pursuing their dreams. The writer of this novel is such a kind of Fitzgerald's critics toward people and even himself who interpreted American dream into the material gains only so they dedicated their lives for reaching those. Thus, they failed to pursue happiness in their lives. The real American dream is the pursuit of happiness; the wealth, success and fame are only its devices to get the real happiness.

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