
Analysis of the Theme of Good Life in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Wolf Of Wall Street*

From celebrity lives to multi-billion dollar companies, today's society stresses the idea that having wealth is the essential to living a good life. Although this can be true to an extent, living a wealthy lifestyle can act as a facade for an unhappy life. This idea is suggested throughout the novels of *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Wolf of Wall Street* by Jordan Belfort. Both novels make use of characters, setting, and symbols to convey the idea that a seemingly good life from wealth, is just a semblance for the reality of an unhappy life.

The main characters found in both novels are given materialistic attitudes, however find themselves dissatisfied with their living conditions. Gatsby is known for living in "a colossal affair" where it is "always full of interesting people, night and day." However, it is revealed that Gatsby "bought [the] house so that Daisy would be just across the bay," and hoped for her to "wander into one of his parties..." Although Gatsby has bought many luxuries for his life, he is still not happy living a life without Daisy. This highlights the fact that material things that wealth can buy won't provide satisfaction in your life. Similarly, the protagonist of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Jordan Belfort, was insatiable and wasted large sums of money in attempts to achieve a happy life. Jordan enjoyed "the hookers...the drugs...the midnight rides through Central Park with strippers...the gym bags full of cash" throughout the early parts of the book, however he still finds difficulty and unhappiness in the relationship he has with his wife. During a fight with his wife, Jordan claims he, "had never raised a hand to her," but then "placed the sole of [his] sneaker firmly on her stomach, and with one mighty thrust [he] kicked o ut." This highlights that wealth and material things won't make every aspect of your life happy, and in fact can cause problems. Jordan's wife became upset and tired with the way Jordan spent his money and wanted to leave him.

In addition to characters and their conflicts, both novels use setting to convey the idea that certain cities are known as a place to get rich, however the wealth and lifestyles there push individuals to move away. This can be seen with New York City in *The Great Gatsby*. After WWI, there is an economic boom, and everyone moves east in a pursuit of money. Nick decides to move to New York to "learn the bond business," claiming "everybody [he] knew was in the bond business." Despite Nick's goals in the beginning he eventually leaves New York, and The East all together. Nick was disgusted by the lifestyle the upper class lived in New York. He witnessed first hand the account of Gatsby and how many like him are in reality living a meaningless unhappy life. Likewise, *The Wolf of Wall Street* is also set in New York City. Again, this shows how New York is a setting that acts as a hope for eager individuals looking to make cash. Jordan's brokerage drew in kids from "the middle-class suburbs of Queens and Long Island and then quickly spread to all five boroughs of New York City." Almost everyone, even kids, are in New York believing it is the ideal location to make a living. This idea is later contradicted when Jordan is advised to "keep a low profile for a while. Maybe take an extended vacation or something." This is because he is having legal problems in New York, which came about because of his greed and his wealth. This suggests rather than being a place money and a life can be made, New York is a place where the money you make causes problems in your life.

Lastly, symbols found throughout both these novels, highlight the deadly attraction of a wealthy lifestyle and the resulting consequences of them. In *The Great Gatsby*, the car is a symbol of new civilization of the 1920's, however it later becomes what kills another character. Gatsby's car is describe as having, "triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns." His car is far more ostentatious than others and reflects his wealth. Later in the story, Gatsby's car is the same one that kills Myrtle. Since Gatsby's car reflects his wealth, this incident can be interpreted that living an extremely wealthy lifestyle can be deadly and kill you. Correspondingly, the symbol of drugs in *The Wolf of Wall Street* act as a reflection of the risks of a wealthy lifestyle. Throughout the novel many wealthy characters use drugs casually, even recommending "the use of drugs, especially cocaine, because that'll make you dial faster." Jordan even admits "[his] drug of choice was Quaaludes, but [he] did a lot of cocaine too." Drugs symbolize the wealth of individuals who have become successful, since they are rich enough to afford them and don't worry about getting in trouble. However, like *The Great Gatsby*, this symbol reflects the risks of living a wealthy and ostentatious lifestyle. Naturally, drugs deteriorate your body over time and can be very deadly when used excessively. This is seen when Jordan almost kills himself from taking expired pills. He suddenly falls down and "[his] brain would no longer send clear signals to [his] musculoskeletal system," "had no control of [his] body," and eventually "had officially lost the power of speech."

Although having some wealth can help you lead a good life, ultimately wealth is not the only factor to a happy life and inevitably can not emulate or replace the happiness that is found in a good relationship. This idea is conveyed in both *The Great Gatsby* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* through the characters, setting, and symbols. In fact, both these novels use these factors to suggest that an excess in wealth creates more problems in your life than they solve. What is striking is the setting is the same for both novels, and it is viewed as a place to achieve "The American Dream," but both dreams in each novel end unsatisfactory.