

THE RULE OF LOVE IN CRYSTALLIZING THE THEMES OF THE DEATH OF A SALES MAN AND GREAT GATSBY

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ABSTRACT: *This study delineates The Rule of Love in Crystallizing the Themes of the Death of a Sales Man and Great Gatsby. In both plays we see two marginalized families struggling to make it, to be accepted by the American mainstream, and to achieve the economic success that will, they believe, give them, the acceptance they long for. In both plays the families wish to be validated by the culture around them. In both plays, the dominant culture appears to stand in judgment of the two families who long to be regarded as worthy. These plays are rich for comparison as they examine the theme of what it means to succeed in America, in as much as the two plays treat similar figures, themes, and situations, set in approximately the same time in American history.*

KEYWORDS: Love, Dream and Wealth

INTRODUCTION

Death of a Salesman is a play written in 1949, by American playwright Arthur Miller. It was the recipient of the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Award for Best Play. The play premiered on Broadway in February 1949, running for 742 performances, and has been revived on Broadway four times, winning three Tony Awards for Best Revival. It is considered to be one of the greatest plays of the 20th century. Willy Loman returns home exhausted after a cancelled business trip. Worried over Willy's state of mind and recent car accident, his wife Linda suggests that he ask his boss Howard Wagner to allow him to work in his home city so he will not have to travel. Willy complains to Linda that their son, Biff, has yet to make good on his life. Despite Biff's promising showing as an athlete in high school, he flunked senior-year math and never went to college. Biff and his brother Happy, who is temporarily staying with Willy and Linda after Biff's unexpected return from the West, reminisce about their childhood together. They discuss their father's mental degeneration, which they have witnessed in the form of his constant indecisiveness and recurrent instances of talking to himself when he thinks he is alone. Willy walks in, angry that the two boys have never amounted to anything. In an effort to pacify their father, Biff and Happy tell their father that Biff plans to make a business proposition the next day. The next day, Willy goes to ask his boss, Howard, for a job in town while Biff goes to make a business proposition, but both fail. Willy gets angry and ends up getting fired when the boss tells him he needs a rest and can no longer represent the company. Biff waits hours to see a former employer who does not remember him and turns him down. Biff impulsively steals a fountain pen. Willy then goes to the office of his neighbor Charley, where he runs into Charley's son Bernard; Bernard tells him that Biff originally wanted to do well in summer school, but something happened in Boston when Biff went to visit his father that changed his mind. Happy, Biff, and Willy meet for dinner at a restaurant, but Willy refuses to hear bad news from Biff. Happy tries to get Biff to lie to their father. Biff tries to tell him what happened as Willy gets angry and slips into a flashback of what happened

in Boston the day Biff came to see him. Willy had been having an affair with a receptionist on one of his sales trips when Biff unexpectedly arrived at Willy's hotel room. A shocked Biff angrily confronted his father, calling him a liar and a fraud. From that moment, Biff's views of his father changed and set Biff adrift. Biff leaves the restaurant in frustration, followed by Happy and two girls that Happy has picked up. They leave a confused and upset Willy behind in the restaurant. When they later return home, their mother angrily confronts them for abandoning their father while Willy remains outside, talking to himself. Biff tries unsuccessfully to reconcile with Willy, but the discussion quickly escalates into another argument. Biff conveys plainly to his father that he is not meant for anything great, insisting that both of them are simply ordinary men meant to lead ordinary lives. The feud reaches an apparent climax with Biff hugging Willy and crying as he tries to get Willy to let go of the unrealistic expectations. Willy still clings to high expectations for him and cannot accept him for who he really is. He still cannot confront his son about his own moral lapses and indiscretions and weeps while he prepares to go to bed, exhausted. Willy, "astonished," says, "Biff - he likes me." Linda comforts him and tells him, "He loves you, Willy." Rather than listen to what Biff actually says, Willy appears to believe his son has forgiven him and thinks Biff will now pursue a career as a businessman. Willy kills himself, apparently intentionally by crashing his car so that Biff can use the life insurance money to start his business. The ambiguities at the funeral of mixed and unaddressed emotions persist. At the funeral Biff retains his belief that he does not want to become a businessman like his father. Happy, on the other hand, chooses to follow in his father's footsteps. The Great Gatsby is a 1925 novel written by American author F. Scott Fitzgerald that follows a cast of characters living in the fictional town of West Egg on prosperous Long Island in the summer of 1922. The story primarily concerns the young and mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby and his quixotic passion and obsession for the beautiful former debutante Daisy Buchanan. Considered to be Fitzgerald's magnum opus, *The Great Gatsby* explores themes of decadence, idealism, resistance to change, social upheaval, and excess, creating a portrait of the Jazz Age or the Roaring Twenties that has been described as a cautionary tale regarding the American. Fitzgerald inspired by the parties he had attended while visiting Long Island's north shore began planning the novel in 1923, desiring to produce, in his words, "something new something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned."^[1] Progress was slow, with Fitzgerald completing his first draft following a move to the French Riviera in 1924. His editor, Maxwell Perkins, felt the book was vague and persuaded the author to revise over the next winter. Fitzgerald was repeatedly ambivalent about the book's title and he considered a variety of alternatives, including titles that referenced the Roman character Trimalchio; the title he was last documented to have desired was *Under the Red, White, and Blue*. First published by Scribner's in April 1925, *The Great Gatsby* received mixed reviews and sold poorly; in its first year, the book sold only 20,000 copies. Fitzgerald died in 1940, he believes himself to be a failure and his work forgotten. However, the novel experienced a revival during World War II, and became a part of American high school curricula and numerous stage and film adaptations in the following decades. Today, *The Great Gatsby* is widely considered to be a literary classic and a contender for the title "Great American Novel". In 1998, the Modern Library editorial board voted it the 20th century's best American novel and second best English-language novel of the same time period.

DISCUSSION

Set on the prosperous Long Island of 1922, *The Great Gatsby* provides a critical social history of America during the Roaring Twenties within its narrative. That era, known for unprecedented economic prosperity, the evolution of jazz music, flapper culture, and bootlegging and other criminal activity, is plausibly depicted in Fitzgerald's novel. Fitzgerald uses these societal developments of the 1920s to build Gatsby's stories from simple details like automobiles to broader themes like Fitzgerald's discreet allusions to the organized crime culture which was the source of Gatsby's fortune.^[2] Fitzgerald educates his readers about the garish society of the Roaring Twenties by placing a timeless, relatable plotline within the historical context of the era.^[3] Fitzgerald's visits to Long Island's north shore and his experience attending parties at mansions inspired *The Great Gatsby's* setting. Today, there are a number of theories as to which mansion was the inspiration for the book. One possibility is Land's End, a notable Gold Coast Mansion where Fitzgerald may have attended a party.^[4] Many of the events in Fitzgerald's early life are reflected throughout *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald was a young man from Minnesota, and like Nick, he was educated at an Ivy League school, Princeton (in Nick's case, Yale.) Fitzgerald is also similar to Jay Gatsby, as he fell in love while stationed in the military and fell into a life of decadence trying to prove himself to the girl he loves. Fitzgerald became a second lieutenant, and was stationed at Camp Sheridan, in Montgomery, Alabama. There he met and fell in love with a wild seventeen-year-old beauty named Zelda Sayre. Zelda finally agreed to marry him, but her preference for wealth, fun, and leisure led her to delay their wedding until he could prove a success.^[5] Like Nick in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald found this new lifestyle seductive and exciting, and, like Gatsby, he had always idolized the very rich. In many ways, *The Great Gatsby* represents Fitzgerald's attempt to confront his conflicting feelings about the Jazz Age. Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald was driven by his love for a woman who symbolized everything he wanted, even as she led him toward everything he despised. In her book *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem and the Invention of 'The Great Gatsby'* (2013), Sarah Church well speculates that parts of the ending of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald were based on the Hall-Mills Case.^[6] Based on her forensic search for clues, she asserts that the two victims in the Hall-Mills murder case inspired the characters who were murdered in *The Great Gatsby*.^[7] The main events of the novel take place in the summer of 1922. Nick Carr away, a Yale graduate and World War I veteran from the Midwest – who serves as the novel's narrator – takes a job in New York as a bond salesman. He rents a small house on Long Island, in the (fictional) village of West Egg, next door to the lavish mansion of Jay Gatsby, a mysterious millionaire who holds extravagant parties but does not participate in them. Nick drives around the bay to East Egg for dinner at the home of his cousin, Daisy Fay Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, a college acquaintance of Nick's. They introduce Nick to Jordan Baker, an attractive, cynical young golfer with whom Nick begins a romantic relationship. She reveals to Nick that Tom has a mistress, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the "valley of ashes":^[8] an industrial dumping ground between West Egg and New York City. Not long after this revelation, Nick travels to New York City with Tom and Myrtle to an apartment they keep for their affair. At the apartment, a vulgar and bizarre party takes place. It ends with Tom breaking Myrtle's nose after she annoys him by saying Daisy's name several times. As the summer progresses, Nick eventually receives an invitation to one of Gatsby's parties. Nick encounters Jordan Baker at the party, and they meet Gatsby himself, an aloof and surprisingly young man who recognizes Nick from their same division in World War I. Through Jordan, Nick later learns that Gatsby knew Daisy from a romantic encounter in 1917 and is deeply in love with her. He spends many nights staring at the green light at the end of her dock, across the bay from his mansion, hoping to one day rekindle their lost romance.

Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle and wild parties are an attempt to impress Daisy in the hope that she will one day appear again at Gatsby's doorstep. Gatsby now wants Nick to arrange a reunion between himself and Daisy. Nick invites Daisy to have tea at his house, without telling her that Gatsby will also be there. After an initially awkward reunion, Gatsby and Daisy reestablish their connection. They begin an affair and, after a short time, Tom grows increasingly suspicious of his wife's relationship with Gatsby. At a luncheon at the Buchanans' house, Daisy speaks to Gatsby with such undisguised intimacy that Tom realizes she is in love with Gatsby. Though Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair, he is outraged by his wife's infidelity. He forces the group to drive into New York City and confronts Gatsby in a suite at the Plaza Hotel, asserting that he and Daisy have a history that Gatsby could never understand. In addition to that, he announces to his wife that Gatsby is a criminal whose fortune comes from bootlegging alcohol and other illegal activities. Daisy realizes that her allegiance is to Tom, and Tom contemptuously sends her back to East Egg with Gatsby, attempting to prove that Gatsby cannot hurt him. When Nick, Jordan, and Tom drive through the valley of ashes^[11] on their way home, they discover that Gatsby's car has struck and killed Tom's mistress, Myrtle. Nick later learns from Gatsby that Daisy, not Gatsby himself, was driving the car at the time of the accident but Gatsby intends to take the blame anyway. Myrtle's husband, George, falsely concludes that the driver of the yellow car is the secret lover he recently began suspecting she has, and sets out on foot to locate its owner. After finding out the yellow car is Gatsby's, he arrives at Gatsby's mansion where he fatally shoots both Gatsby and then himself. Nick stages an unsettlingly small funeral for Gatsby, ends his relationship with Jordan, and moves back to the Midwest, disillusioned with the Eastern lifestyle. In 1940, Fitzgerald suffered a third and final heart attack, and died believing his work forgotten.

^[9] His obituary in *The New York Times* mentioned Gatsby as evidence of great potential that was never reached.^[10] However, a strong appreciation for the book had developed in underground circles; future writers Edward Newhouse and Budd Schulberg were deeply affected by it and John O'Hara showed the book's influence.^[11] The republication of Gatsby in Edmund Wilson's edition of *The Last Tycoon* in 1941 produced an outburst of comment, with the general consensus expressing the sentiment that the book was an enduring work of fiction. In 1942, a group of publishing executives created the Council on Books in Wartime. The Council's purpose was to distribute paperback books to soldiers fighting in the Second World War. *The Great Gatsby* was one of these books. The books proved to be "as popular as pin-up girls" among the soldiers, according to the *Saturday Evening Post's* contemporary report. 155,000 copies of Gatsby were distributed to soldiers overseas, and it is believed that this publicity ultimately boosted the novel's popularity and sales.^[12] By 1944, full-length articles on Fitzgerald's works were being published, and the following year, "the opinion that Gatsby was merely a period piece had almost entirely disappeared."^[13] This revival was paved by interest shown by literary critic Edmund Wilson, who was Fitzgerald's friend. In 1951, Arthur Mizener published *The Far Side of Paradise*, a biography of Fitzgerald. He emphasized *The Great Gatsby's* positive reception by literary critics, which may have influenced public opinion and renewed interest in it. By 1960, the book was steadily selling 50,000 copies per year, and renewed interest led *The New York Times* editorialist Arthur Mizener to proclaim the novel "a classic of twentieth-century American fiction". *The Great Gatsby* has sold over 25 million copies worldwide, annually sells an additional 500,000 copies, and is Scribner's most popular title; in 2013, the e-book alone sold 185,000 copies. In 2013, cultural historian, Bob Batchelor, authored *Gatsby: The Cultural History of the Great American Novel*, in which he explored the enduring influence of the book by tracing it "from the book's publication in 1925 through today's headlines filled with celebrity intrigue, corporate

greed, and a roller-coaster economy".^[14] Scribner's copyright is scheduled to expire in 2020, according to Maureen Corrigan's book about the making of *The Great Gatsby*, *So We Read On. Reality and Illusion*. Death of a Salesman uses flashbacks to present Willy's memory during the reality. The illusion not only "suggests the past, but also presents the lost pastoral life." Willy has dreamed of success his whole life and makes up lies about his and Biff's success. The more he indulges in the illusion, the harder it is for him to face reality. Biff is the only one who realizes that the whole family lived in the lies and tries to face the truth. The American Dream is the theme of the play, but everyone in the play has their own way to describe their American Dreams. Willy Loman dreamed to be a successful salesman like Dave Singleman who has both material success and freedom. His way to achieve success is to be well-liked, which is also the way he teaches his sons. His dream cannot be achieved in that way, and such that society becomes the reason for pushing him to death. Throughout Willy's flashbacks, it is found that he believes success is indicated through someone who is rich, well-liked, and demonstrates a good personality. He believes that someone who is rich and well-liked is being successful because "Society tries to teach that if people are rich and well-liked, they will be happy. Because of this, Willy thought that money would make him happy. He never bothered to try to be happy with what he had, Willy also believes in order to obtain success in his life that he must have a good personality. We see that, "He believes that salesmanship is based on 'sterling traits of character' and 'a pleasing personality'. But Willy does not have the requisite sterling traits of character; people simply do not like him as much as he thinks is necessary for success," Uncle Ben represents the ideal of American Dream. He thinks American Dream is to catch opportunity, to conquer nature and to gain a fortune. Just like what he says "Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. (He laughs.) And by God I was rich" Ben symbolizes another kind of successful American Dreams for Willy. Biff After seeing his father's real identity, Biff does not follow his father's "dream" because he knows that "Willy does see his future but in a blind way. Meaning that he can and cannot see at the same time, since his way of seeing or visualizing the future is completely wrong." Biff has a dream to get outside, to farm and work hard with his own hands, his father prevents him from pursuing his dream. Biff realized his father's dream is "wrong" during his father's funeral. Bernard and Charley One thing that is apparent from the *Death of a Salesman* is the hard work and dedication of Charley and Bernard. Willy criticizes Charley and Bernard throughout the play, but it is not because Willy hates them. He finds himself to be jealous of their success in their lives, and doing so without being under Willy's standards. The models of business success provided in the play all argue against Willy's personality theory. One is Charley, Willy's neighbor and apparently only friend. Charley has no time for Willy's theories of business, but he provides for his family and is in a position to offer Willy a do-nothing job to keep him bringing home a salary.

CONCLUSION

The main events of the novel take place in the summer of 1922. Nick Carr, a Yale graduate and World War I veteran from the Midwest – who serves as the novel's narrator – takes a job in New York as a bond salesman. He rents a small house on Long Island, in the (fictional) village of West Egg, next door to the lavish mansion of Jay Gatsby, a mysterious millionaire who holds extravagant parties but does not participate in them. Nick drives around the bay to East Egg for dinner at the home of his cousin, Daisy Fay Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, a college acquaintance of Nick's. They introduce Nick to Jordan Baker,

an attractive, cynical young golfer with whom Nick begins a romantic relationship. She reveals to Nick that Tom has a mistress, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the "valley of ashes" an industrial dumping ground between West Egg and New York City. Not long after this revelation, Nick travels to New York City with Tom and Myrtle to an apartment they keep for their affair. At the apartment, a vulgar and bizarre party takes place. It ends with Tom breaking Myrtle's nose after she annoys him by saying Daisy's name several times. Arthur Miller's Pulitzer Prize winning play of 1949 is widely considered to a cornerstone of American letters. A caustic attack on the "American Dream" of materialism, *Death of a Salesman* is a three-act play (two acts and a "requiem"), centering on the main character, Willy Loman. At age sixty-three, Willy has been a traveling salesman all his life. Despite his hard work and grueling schedule, the Lomans have always lived on the edge of poverty and Willy has always been an underling in his company. Yet Willy constantly tells himself and his family that the "big break" he deserves is just around the corner. He has raised his two sons, Biff and Happy, to also believe that somehow life has cheated them and insists that one day they will get their due. Linda, Willy's dutiful wife, lives under the thin veneer of denial that her husband has so long tried to keep from collapsing. Willy finds that because of changing economic conditions the company has no further need for his services. Willy is devastated and is unable to understand how his employer could just cast him aside after so many years of faithful service. Willy states his work ethic clearly when he says that a man who makes his appearance in the business world is the man who gets ahead. Willy's old boss has died, leaving his son the company. The new owner sees Willy as having outlived his usefulness to the company. Willy is terminated and soon discovers that he is unable to find other similar employment. Despite his protests otherwise, Willy knows he is a failure. He begins to slowly kill himself by inhaling gas fumes from a hose in the garage, an act that relieves his mental anguish and gives him a brief high. The gas also muddles Willy's mind, conflating past, present, and future. This shifting through time and space helps the reader/audience see how much pressure there has been on this simple man to be accepted in the only way he thinks is valuable: to make money. He wants desperately to be "well liked," and without the status of being a manager who makes more money, the dream is impossible. He dies as he has lived, a failure in the eyes of society.

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