

DISILLUSIONMENT AND DECAY: THE AMERICAN DREAM IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE DAMNED*

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study investigates the portrayal of the American Dream through the character of Anthony Patch in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the Damned*. Set during the Jazz Age, a period marked by cultural transformation and material excess, the novel highlights how social pressures, moral decay, and consumerism undermine the traditional ideal of success. This research is urgent because it examines the American Dream at a historical moment that resonates with contemporary debates about wealth, ambition, and ethical values in society. The study employs a textual analysis procedure, including close reading, thematic coding, and interpretation within a sociocultural literary framework, to trace Anthony's pursuit of wealth and status and the ethical compromises that lead to his decline. Findings show how societal expectations and Gloria Gilbert's influence shape Anthony's values, resulting in his gradual disillusionment with the American Dream. This study contributes to cultural criticism of early 20th-century American literature and highlights the enduring relevance of Fitzgerald's critique in today's consumer-oriented society.

Key words: American dream, jazz age, materialism, disillusionment, cultural criticism

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is often shaped by the socio-historical context in which it is produced (Alfisuma et al., 2024), as well as by the personal experiences of its author (Alfisuma et al., 2023). Both of these factors play a significant role in influencing the themes, tone, and character development within a literary work. This paper explores the literary climate of the 1920s in the United States, a period characterized by rapid social change, economic prosperity, and the growing belief in individual freedom and self-determination, often referred to as the "American Dream." During this era, the notion of achieving success through hard work and personal ambition became a defining cultural ideal. However, the pursuit of material wealth and personal gratification frequently came at the expense of ethical values and social responsibility. Many individuals,

including immigrants from Europe, were drawn to America by the promise of a better life, one defined not only by opportunity but also by the pursuit of luxury and status.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Beautiful and the Damned* presents a compelling critique of the American Dream through its protagonist, Anthony Patch. The novel serves as a reflection of the era's moral decline, revealing how the American Dream, when interpreted through the lens of indulgence and materialism, can lead to spiritual emptiness and personal downfall. The narrative captures the decadence, hedonism, and shifting social norms of the post-World War I "Jazz Age," as well as the emergence of a more individualistic and pleasure-driven society. The character and characterization of Anthony Patch are used to portray these themes (Alfisuma & Pujiati, 2022); (Alfisuma et al., 2023). The urgency of this research lies in its examination of how the critique of the American Dream in Fitzgerald's work resonates with contemporary society, where consumerism and material success continue to dominate cultural values. By analyzing Anthony Patch's pursuit of wealth and status, this study exposes the inherent disillusionment embedded within the dream of affluence, demonstrating how the relentless chase for material success can lead to personal, ethical, and moral decay. Understanding this portrayal is crucial for both literary scholarship and cultural criticism, as it provides insight into the enduring social and moral questions surrounding ambition, success, and the pursuit of happiness.

This work is particularly significant because it draws upon Fitzgerald's own life experiences. Known for his lavish lifestyle, Fitzgerald, along with his wife Zelda, embodied many of the traits he later explored in his fiction. According to (Fitzgerald & Fitzgerald, 2019), the early years of their marriage were marked by excessive partying and extravagant living, traits reflected in many of his characters. As documented on *Some Unfinished Chaos: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* by (Krystal, 2023) Fitzgerald's personal life was punctuated by both the highs of early success and the lows of financial instability and emotional turmoil. His literary works, especially *The Beautiful and the Damned*, serve as cautionary tales about the pitfalls of unrestrained ambition and the darker side of the American Dream.

Numerous scholars have explored the theme of the American Dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's works, particularly focusing on its representation in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Beautiful and the Damned*. According to (Brucoli, 2022), Fitzgerald's novels consistently depict the disillusionment underlying the pursuit of wealth and status, revealing how such aspirations often end in moral decay and personal failure. (Lehan, 1990) emphasizes that Fitzgerald critiques the hollowness of modern life, particularly during the Jazz Age, when consumerism and hedonism began to dominate American cultural values. In the case of *The Beautiful and the Damned*, critics such as (Prigozy, 2002) highlight the protagonist Anthony Patch as a symbol of cultural stagnation and spiritual emptiness, noting that his reliance on inheritance rather than merit reflects the erosion of traditional values. Other cultural critics, including (Tyson, 2023), interpret the novel through a Marxist lens, suggesting that Fitzgerald exposes the ideological contradictions of capitalism by portraying Anthony's descent into existential despair as a consequence of his blind faith in material wealth. These readings contribute to a broader understanding of how Fitzgerald's narratives offer a critique of the American Dream not as a noble pursuit, but as a cultural myth shaped by unequal access, class privilege, and systemic illusion. This study builds upon these insights by providing a more focused analysis of Anthony Patch as a cultural product of the American Dream, a dream that promises fulfillment through wealth, but ultimately delivers emptiness when detached from ethical labor and social responsibility.

While previous studies have examined Fitzgerald's critique of the American Dream, this paper offers a distinctive approach by positioning Anthony Patch's psychological and moral collapse within a triangular framework that interweaves the 1920s socio-historical context, the author's biographical background, and character construction. This integrated perspective reveals how Fitzgerald's personal disillusionment mirrors Anthony's downfall, highlighting the novel's deeper function as a cultural and moral commentary. By focusing on this dynamic interplay, the study contributes a nuanced understanding of how literature reflects and critiques dominant values of its time.

In analyzing the character of Anthony Patch, this paper seeks to illuminate how Fitzgerald critiques the illusion of the American Dream by portraying its consequences; moral disintegration, emotional emptiness, and existential despair. Through a close reading of the novel (Muhid & Alifsuma, 2010);(Alifsuma et al., 2023), the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how literature can reflect and challenge the values of its time, particularly those associated with identity, ambition, and societal expectations in 1920s America.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive method (Bulqis et al., 2025); (Hasanah et al., 2025) with a focus on textual analysis to investigate the portrayal of the American Dream through the character of Anthony Patch in *The Beautiful and the Damned* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. As (Moleong, 2017)states, qualitative research is designed to understand the meaning behind human behaviour, perceptions, and social phenomena holistically and contextually.

The primary data source of this research is the novel itself, (Alifsuma, M.Z., et al., 2023). analyzed using a sociocultural literary approach. This method situates the literary work within its historical, cultural, and ideological contexts, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of how Fitzgerald's narrative reflects and critiques the American Dream in the Jazz Age milieu. The analysis also considers secondary sources such as literary criticism, historical references, and theoretical frameworks relevant to both the novel and its social background.

Literature should be seen as a social institution that both reflects and shapes the values of its time. Applying this perspective, the research interprets Anthony Patch's character not merely as an individual, but as a symbol of a generation's confrontation with shifting ideals, especially the transition of the American Dream from a pursuit of moral virtue to a pursuit of material excess. This approach allows for a nuanced reading of Fitzgerald's work as both a product and a critique of its time.

Data Source

The primary data source is the novel *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922), which is analyzed as a cultural product of its era. The focus of this study is on the characterization, dialogue, setting, and narrative structure that reveal Anthony Patch's desires, ambitions, and eventual downfall. In addition to the novel, secondary sources such as journal articles, books, and literary critiques are used to support the analysis and provide a theoretical foundation on the American Dream, hedonism, and sociocultural influences.

Data Collection

Data was collected through close reading and annotation of relevant passages. The patterns and recurring themes that relate to Anthony's belief in achieving wealth and status without effort; hallmarks of the distorted American Dream are identified. Attention was given to scenes illustrating Anthony's reliance on inheritance, his indulgence in alcohol and parties, and his relationship with Gloria, who represents the allure of a glamorous but empty lifestyle. As (Miles et al., 2014) describe, qualitative data collection involves the systematic gathering of detailed information from textual sources, allowing researchers to detect thematic consistencies and sociocultural symbols across the narrative.

Analytical Framework

This study used thematic analysis, as defined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to identify and interpret key themes such as materialism, ambition, laziness, disillusionment, and social influence. These themes were used to trace Anthony Patch's transformation from a man of ambition into a symbol of moral and economic decline.

In line with Adams' definition (2017) of the American Dream as the pursuit of a better, richer, and fuller life, the study highlights how Anthony's understanding of that dream becomes corrupted by laziness and dependency. Cullen's reinterpretation (2004) of the American Dream as a myth often shaped by consumer culture and individualism also informs the analysis of Anthony's failed aspirations and disconnection from moral values.

Ultimately, this analytical framework allows for a deeper understanding of how Fitzgerald critiques the socio-economic and moral consequences of a culture driven by wealth, pleasure, and instant gratification.

RESULTS

a. The American Dream Concept Reflected in Anthony Patch's Life

The concept of the American Dream, which promises prosperity, success, and upward mobility, serves as a central theme in *The Beautiful and The Damned*. Anthony Patch's journey in the novel illustrates a distorted pursuit of this dream, exposing its unattainability when rooted in materialism and idleness. Through close reading and character analysis (Alfisuma & Pujiati, 2022), this study reveals how Anthony's life reflects the paradoxes of the American Dream in the early 20th-century American context.

Historically, the early 1900s in the United States was a time of massive change. Following World War I, America experienced significant immigration and internal migration, especially to cities like New York, seen as the epicenter of culture, opportunity, and wealth. As described in the narrative, "*Anthony Patch was happy to be in New York again... He was very pleased to be in New York*" (p.7). This excitement symbolizes his anticipation of achieving a prosperous future not through labour or effort, but through inheritance.

Anthony Patch is introduced as a man with modest literary ambition and no financial independence. He chooses to rely solely on his grandfather's wealth, a decision rooted in his belief that money equates to happiness and prestige: "*Anthony was thinking of money, his grandfather's money. Old Adam Patch was going to die soon. Then Anthony would be rich. He would have millions of dollars*" (p.7). This reliance marks the beginning of his downfall, as it shows his dependence on unearned wealth and his refusal to engage with the American Dream through hard work. This means that

Anthony's approach to life encapsulates a critical shift in American society: from the value of hard work to a culture of entitlement and instant gratification. Rather than working to build his future, Anthony merely waits for it to arrive via inheritance:

Instead of embodying the ideal of self-made success, Anthony represents the corrupted dream, one in which wealth is inherited rather than earned. His obsession with social status, luxury, and idleness places him in the circle of New York's elite, where he becomes further influenced by his hedonistic environment. The city, at the time, was a hub for the extravagant lifestyles of the wealthy: Rich people went to the theatres and they wore expensive clothes. New York, as the novel's setting, represents the peak of modernity and consumer culture at the time. The city's fast-paced social life and entertainment industry further tempt Anthony and influence his desire for a life of glamour and pleasure.

b. The Role of Society and Gloria Gilbert in Shaping Anthony's Values

Fitzgerald uses Anthony's relationship with Gloria Gilbert to underscore the destructive potential of the American Dream when it is reduced to materialism and sensual gratification. Gloria is depicted as shallow, beauty-obsessed, and resistant to responsibility, which complements Anthony's own aversion to labor and discipline. Anthony's marriage to Gloria Gilbert further solidifies his departure from traditional values. Gloria, portrayed as materialistic and superficial, reinforces Anthony's indulgence in luxury and avoidance of responsibility. Her own declaration reveals her priorities: *"I like bright colors and noise. I don't like clever people. I want people near me who are happy. I want people who tell me I'm beautiful. I want to enjoy life, that's all..."* (p.13). Their mutual pursuit of indulgence leads to a toxic cycle of parties, alcohol, and financial irresponsibility. Fitzgerald suggests that both characters become victims of their environment, New York's elite social scene, while also being agents of their own moral downfall.

Anthony and Gloria's lifestyle are marked by unceasing parties and self-destructive behaviours: *"Two months went by; the parties went on lots of parties. The little apartment always smelt of smoke and whiskey. They were having parties every day. They went on spending more and more money..."* (p.49). This behaviour illustrates how the American Dream, when solely associated with material wealth and devoid of ethical grounding, leads to moral and social decline.

Anthony's internalization of this flawed dream results in a loss of direction and ambition. He does not pursue a career seriously, claiming instead to want to be a writer: *"I am thinking of becoming a writer," he says, but admits he has not done anything to achieve this goal. "What do you do?" "Me? Nothing." Anthony replied with a laugh. "I haven't found anything that interests me. Perhaps I'm lazy..."* (p.13). His passivity and unwillingness to take control of his life reflect a deeper crisis of identity and purpose. Ultimately, Anthony's relationship with his grandfather, Adam Patch, deteriorates due to his irresponsible behaviour. Adam, a man who despised drunkenness and indulgence, witnesses Anthony's moral collapse. During a party, the old man appears unexpectedly: *"And there, standing in the open doorway, was Adam Patch! The old man's face was hard and angry... Adam Patch hated drink and drunkenness more than anything else in the world"* (p.44). This moment signifies the climax of Anthony's failed dream, his inheritance is taken away, and with it, his imagined future of wealth. As Anthony neglects work and continues his descent into hedonism, his relationship with his

grandfather deteriorates. Adam Patch, a figure of old-fashioned moral rigor, ultimately disinherits Anthony after witnessing his behavior at a drunken party.

The moment when Adam Patch realizes to take away the inheritance from Anthony marks the collapse of Anthony's dream, as his entire future was predicated on inheriting wealth he never earned. He becomes disillusioned, burdened by financial instability and emotional exhaustion. *"Every morning; Anthony woke up tired, restless, and worried. He was not happy until he had a drink in his hand. The rest of the day passed in a dream."* (p.53) Fitzgerald uses Anthony's downfall to critique the American Dream as it was practiced in the 1920s, not a noble pursuit of self-made success, but a shallow desire for fame, wealth, and pleasure at any cost.

Anthony's life begins to unravel as he faces the consequences of his choices. The dream of easy wealth without labour proves illusory. He falls into poverty and despair, unable to produce meaningful work or recover his grandfather's trust: "Anthony and Gloria wrote Adam Patch a letter of apologies, but the letter was never answered." In short, Anthony Patch exemplifies the corrupted version of the American Dream. Rather than striving for success through perseverance, he becomes a symbol of moral decay, driven by a false belief that wealth ensures fulfilment. His downfall is not due to lack of opportunity but due to his conscious rejection of work, responsibility, and personal growth.

c. Every Step in Anthony's Journey Illustrates the Disillusionment of the American Dream

Anthony's transformation, from an idealistic young man to a self-indulgent and disillusioned adult, demonstrates the erosion of values under the influence of a materialistic society. His steps are shaped by personal ambition, peer influence, and a cultural context that prioritizes pleasure over purpose. From the beginning, Anthony's motivation to reconnect with his grandfather is not born out of familial affection but financial expectation: *"The money came from what his mother had left him when she died. He had an income of seven thousand dollars a year... But old Adam Patch was looking ill. He might die soon. And then, Anthony would be a rich man"* (p.9-10). He moves to New York with grand aspirations. Although he holds a modest income, his life is dominated by the expectation that he will one day inherit the vast fortune of his grandfather, Adam Patch. His obsession with wealth leads him to abandon meaningful work and moral restraint in favor of a lavish and idle lifestyle

This European descent man's dream is contingent on the death of a family member; a striking commentary on how distorted and selfish the dream can become. Gloria's presence in his life magnifies his detachment from responsibility. She encourages a lifestyle of appearance and amusement over substance: *"Gloria was happy... I am happy here. I am like these people. They are the same as me, I want people near me who are happy, and I want to enjoy life. That's all..."* (p.13). Together, they become embodiments of a generation lost to indulgence, lacking a clear purpose beyond superficial enjoyment.

Anthony's failure as a writer also reflects a misuse of potential. Though he claims to want to write a history of the Middle Ages, he never seriously commits to it. His reliance on anticipated inheritance dulls his drive. Even in ambition, he is vague and unmotivated: *"Perhaps he would write one day! But old Adam Patch was looking ill. He might die soon. And then, Anthony would be a rich man..."* (p.9). When Anthony is eventually cut out of his grandfather's will, the symbolic death of his dream is complete. This moment captures the failure of pursuing wealth without

morality or work. The frustration and mental decline that follow are not surprising; they are the natural consequences of a dream built on entitlement and illusion rather than effort.

Through Anthony Patch's life, Fitzgerald critiques the American Dream's evolution in the Jazz Age; from a noble pursuit of happiness to a reckless chase for pleasure and riches. The character's journey reflects not only personal tragedy but a broader societal disillusionment, where the promises of the dream collapse under the weight of self-indulgence and moral emptiness. *The Beautiful and the Damned* offers a sharp critique of the American Dream, exposing its transformation into a hollow myth rooted in entitlement and consumption. Through Anthony Patch, Fitzgerald portrays how privilege and cultural decadence distorted a dream once founded on hope and hard work. The novel warns against reducing human ambition to mere financial aspiration. Anthony's fall is not simply due to his personal flaws but is shaped by a society that prioritizes material wealth over moral values.

DISCUSSION

From Promise to Illusion: The American Dream and Moral Decay in The Jazz Age

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the Damned* provides a sharp critique of the American Dream as it evolved in the Jazz Age. Once grounded in merit and ethical labor (Adams, 2017) the Dream became increasingly tied to materialism and individualism in postwar America (Cullen, 2004) Through Anthony Patch, Fitzgerald exposes the hollowness of a dream that promises success but delivers spiritual emptiness. Rather than striving for achievement, Anthony waits for inheritance; his passivity reflecting the erosion of core American values (Brucoli, 2022).

Set against the backdrop of 1920s New York, a society shaped by jazz, youth culture, and consumerism, Fitzgerald's novel mirrors a cultural shift toward surface pleasures and moral ambiguity (Cowley, 1994);(Berman, 1983). The Jazz Age's celebration of indulgence masked deeper anxieties about identity, purpose, and social cohesion (Zeit, 2009); (Kenney, 1994). Anthony and Gloria Patch embody this tension: outwardly glamorous, yet inwardly fragmented.

From a Marxist perspective, Fitzgerald critiques capitalism's promise of mobility and fulfillment. In this context, Anthony's downfall serves to illustrate the ideological contradictions of a system where value is measured by wealth rather than character (Tyson, 2023). Moreover, (Prigozy, 2002) identifies him as a symbol of cultural stagnation, representing a figure undone by privilege and the pursuit of false dreams. Together, these interpretations highlight how Fitzgerald uses Anthony Patch to reveal the inherent tensions between individual aspiration and societal pressures within the capitalist framework.

Ultimately, Fitzgerald portrays the American Dream not as a path to self-realization but as a cultural illusion shaped by class, consumerism, and systemic inequality. His vision remains relevant today, prompting reflection on how far American society has strayed from the ideals it claims to uphold.

The Concept of the American Dream

The American Dream, a central theme in American cultural and literary discourse, is traditionally defined as the ideal that every individual, regardless of their background, has the right to pursue success and self-fulfillment through hard work and personal initiative. James Truslow (Adams, 2017) popularized the term in *The Epic of America*, describing it as “a dream of a social order in which each man and woman may achieve to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable,” emphasizing merit over inherited status.

Following World War I, the Dream evolved amid rapid industrialization and a growing immigrant population, becoming increasingly associated with wealth, material success, and social mobility (Clark, 2003). (Cullen, 2004) asserts that the American Dream was reshaped into a consumer-driven “vision of the good life,” often marked by individualism and economic aspiration, but increasingly detached from communal and ethical foundations. This shift created a moral tension; success became defined by material acquisition rather than integrity or contribution to society.

Furthermore, literature from this period often critiques or problematizes this transformation. In particular, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922) scrutinizes the moral emptiness underpinning the American Dream. As (Brucoli, 2022) observes, Fitzgerald’s characters represent “the disillusionment with the American promise,” thus depicting the pursuit of wealth as a path toward alienation rather than fulfillment. Consequently, Anthony Patch, the novel’s protagonist, exemplifies this critique, since his descent into emotional and moral ruin reflects the consequences of valuing status over substance. Moreover, this transformation of the American Dream cannot be fully understood without examining the cultural environment in which it took shape, namely the Jazz Age of the 1920s.

Portrait of New York Society in the Jazz Age (1920–1930)

The 1920s, known as the “Jazz Age” or the “Golden Twenties,” marked a turning point in American cultural identity. (Berman, 1983) notes that liberalism, anchored in individual freedom and equal opportunity, shaped American society’s ideological foundations during this period. These liberal values, combined with postwar prosperity, catalyzed a cultural revolution manifested through literature, music, and changing social norms.

Malcolm (Cowley, 1994) characterizes the decade as “an age of excess,” where Americans pursued glamour, fame, and wealth with unprecedented fervor. F. Scott Fitzgerald himself coined the term “Jazz Age” to describe this societal transformation, marked by flamboyant lifestyles, cultural rebellion, and the emergence of youth-led modernity (*Tales of the Jazz Age*, 1922). Jazz, a genre rooted in African American communities, became emblematic of the era’s spirit, expressive, improvisational, and provocative (Kenney, 1994). At the same time, it was often criticized for its perceived association with social decay and moral laxity.

(Perrett, 1982) argues that this cultural upheaval was a reaction against the disillusionment of World War I. Young Americans sought meaning through self-expression, leisure, and indulgence, leading to the rise of new identities, most notably the flapper, a symbol of female independence and rebellion (Zeitzy, 2009). This social dynamism is vividly portrayed in Fitzgerald’s fiction, where his characters’ external exuberance conceals internal emptiness and moral fragmentation. These cultural dynamics not only shaped the characters in Fitzgerald’s novels but also influenced the broader construction of the American Dream during the 1920s.

The Roaring Twenties as the Catalyst of the American Dream

The Roaring Twenties provided the social and economic backdrop for the reimagining of the American Dream. As (Levering Lewis, 1997) highlights, this cultural renaissance reflected broader themes of liberation, identity, and reinvention; hallmarks of the American Dream.

Technological advances like the radio and cinema helped forge a shared cultural consciousness, promoting ideals of consumption, speed, and self-realization. (Leuchtenburg, 1958) underscores that the 1920s introduced “a new definition of the good life, rooted in consumption, leisure, and self-fulfillment.” In this context, the American Dream became increasingly about personal gratification and less about civic virtue or collective progress.

Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and the Damned* encapsulates this cultural moment. Through Anthony Patch’s decline, Fitzgerald critiques a dream that promises success but delivers alienation. (Brucoli, 2022) contends that Fitzgerald’s works are “elegies for the moral loss beneath America’s golden surface,” warning of the dangers of a dream that has become hollow and hedonistic.

These redefinitions of the American Dream were closely tied to rapidly shifting socio-cultural trends that shaped identity, values, and ambition in Fitzgerald’s time.

The Impact of the Roaring Twenties on Socio-Cultural Trends

The 1920s, or the Jazz Age, was not just an era of economic prosperity but also of dramatic cultural transformation. Fitzgerald famously referred to the decade as “the gaudiest spree in history,” capturing a zeitgeist obsessed with novelty, pleasure, and visual splendor (Fitzgerald, 1931). The decade saw the rise of the “flapper,” liberated from Victorian constraints, symbolizing broader changes in gender norms and societal expectations (Zeit, 2009).

Jazz music, born out of African American innovation, became a nationwide cultural phenomenon. (Kenney, 1994) notes that jazz simultaneously represented artistic freedom and a perceived threat to traditional morality. The music’s popularity, coupled with the emergence of speakeasies and urban nightlife, reflected a society increasingly focused on pleasure, experimentation, and rebellion against past norms.

(Leuchtenburg, 1958) emphasizes that the cultural shift was driven by new media and consumerism, fostering a collective identity centered on leisure and material fulfillment. This cultural transformation, vividly portrayed in *The Beautiful and the Damned*, reveals a society captivated by surface-level pleasures but internally fractured. Anthony Patch’s journey is emblematic of the moral dilemmas of the age: wealth without purpose, freedom without responsibility, and ambition without substance.

CONCLUSION

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and the Damned* offers a stark critique of the American Dream by exposing the cultural and moral erosion beneath its glossy promise of success. Through the disintegration of Anthony Patch’s life, the novel reveals how the Dream, once rooted in ideals of self-made achievement and democratic opportunity, devolves into a myth sustained by wealth, social status, and performative consumption. Anthony’s reliance on inheritance, his refusal to work, and his immersion in a culture of hedonism reflect a broader cultural malaise of the Jazz Age, one that privileges appearances over authenticity, and pleasure over purpose.

This narrative collapse of the Dream is not just a personal tragedy but a cultural allegory. Fitzgerald's portrayal of Anthony's downfall critiques the mechanisms of privilege and the commodification of identity in a society obsessed with image and affluence. In doing so, the novel anticipates ongoing questions about who has access to mobility, who gets excluded from prosperity, and how cultural values are shaped by economic power and media-driven ideals.

In today's context, where neoliberal values continue to reframe personal failure as moral weakness and wealth as virtue, Anthony's story remains profoundly resonant. His arc, from privilege to ruin, invites readers to reflect on how cultural myths are internalized, performed, and ultimately betrayed by the very systems that promote them.

Future research may explore how contemporary representations of the American Dream, across film, music, or digital media, recycle or resist the themes seen in Fitzgerald's novel. Such studies could examine how cultural narratives around success and identity continue to evolve in response to shifting economic realities and globalized pressures. As Fitzgerald's work suggests, the myth of easy success still casts a long, seductive shadow, one that demands critical attention and cultural reckoning. Besides that, this study also encourages further cultural and literary explorations of how the American Dream mythos influences behaviour and identity, not only in early 20th-century America but in today's global capitalist society. Future research might consider comparative studies between Fitzgerald's characters and contemporary representations of success in media, particularly focusing on how similar themes of illusion, spectacle, and consumerism continue to permeate popular culture.

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