

Brady Kondek

Mrs. Gindlesperger

Honors English III

17 November 2021

### The 1920s

The 1920s was a very monumental decade in American history. The decade brought new changes to the world and brought prosperity to the people. However, the decade had its problems. One problem in particular stuck out the most, money. People believed at the time that money could buy them whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted it. Everything was fine at first, until the end of the decade rolled around, and the stock market crashed. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Kenn Allan's "The Roaring '20s" use symbolism, vivid imagery, and figurative language to emphasize the message that money cannot get you everything.

Symbolism is a big object in both stories, and it does an excellent job of bringing the decade to life for the reader and help them to understand it. In *The Great Gatsby* there are two main symbols that stick out the most. Those symbols are the green light and the Valley of Ashes. The green light represents the hopes and dreams of Gatsby, and he associates this light with Daisy. At the end of the story the book states, "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us," (Fitzgerald 156). This statement explains, through the green light, Gatsby's belief in the American Dream, his drive for success. The Valley of Ashes, an area between West Egg and Manhattan, represents the social and moral decay, caused by people's pursuit to be wealthy, that the 1920s brought. The beginning of

Chapter 2 states, “This is the valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air,” (Fitzgerald 19). At first this description just seems like an explanation of a depressing place. However, this has more meaning than just that. The description represents how the surrounding populations, which were composed of those who were wealthy, cared more about getting lots of money. The “The Roaring ‘20s” does a good job of describing the decade in a nutshell. The sixth stanza of the poem states, “Then Wall Street collapses and drowns out the roar,” (Allan). Here the statement is talking about how the overspending of money led to the stock market crashing, which led to the Great Depression. This statement also represents people like Gatsby, who had their big highs for a while, and got shot down at an instance. Also the beginning of the fifth stanza says, “A bull in the market caused prices to soar,” (Allan). This statement is a big testament to the 1920s, and the story. As people treated money like it was nothing, as if there was an endless supply of it, the economy was being hurt. Time goes by, and eventually the market crashes, and the country says hello to the depression.

Imagery is another object found in both texts that does a great job of bringing life to the decade, for the reader to be a part of. More specifically, imagery helps the reader visualize the contents of both texts, in connection with the decade. Back to Chapter 2 again, in *The Great Gatsby*, with the statement, “This is a valley of ashes - a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air,” (Fitzgerald 19). This statement helps the reader to

really feel as if they are there, because of the use of imagery and a very descriptive word choice. Another good example of imagery can be found in Chapter 3 with the statement, “The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voice pitches a key higher,” (Fitzgerald 34). Throughout the story, it is a well-known fact that Gatsby threw lots of big parties at his house. This statement helps the reader to develop a clear picture of Gatsby’s home during those extravagant parties. He throws these parties in an effort to display his wealth status, and as another attempt to impress Daisy. Also in Chapter 7, the statement “All that wealth can't fill the hole in Gatsby's heart—but it probably makes it a little easier to bear,” (Fitzgerald), creates the image and restates the message of the fact that money cannot buy you everything in the world. Money can buy you lots, but not everything. “The Roaring ‘20s” does a good job of giving direct imagery to the decade. In the fourth stanza of the poem the statement, “While crime was ignored by the money it spends,” (Allan), creates the image of how money got people out of trouble. If you had lots of money, you could get yourself out of almost anything. This further led to people resorting to money for everything.

Figurative language is something you see all the time. This use of words helps the reader to understand the underlying aspects of the story that may not come to them if told in a regular way. *The Great Gatsby* uses a lot of figurative language throughout the story. The end of the story states, “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past,” (Fitzgerald 156). This statement represents the struggle of people trying to reach an unattainable future, which would result in their increased want to be successful and turning to whatever possible to attain that. Also in Chapter 7 the story says, “Her voice is full of money,” (Fitzgerald 104). Gatsby wanted her because he wanted only the best for himself. Because of this, he went

out of his way using money to try and get her back. “The Roaring ‘20s” gives a well overview of the effects of the money problems during the 1920s with “Then Wall Street collapses and drowns out the roar,” (Allan). This statement represents how that when the depression hit, the roar of prosperity the decade saw suddenly vanished away.

The 1920s was a very monumental, and interesting decade. A lot of things changed, a lot of things went right, and a lot of things went wrong, all at the same time. Prosperity ruled the day until 1929 when the stock market crashed, bringing on the Great Depression. *The Great Gatsby* and “The Roaring ‘20s” are two great texts that give the reader a glimpse into what the decade was like. They use strong literary elements such as symbolism, imagery, and figurative language to convey the events of the decade. Many things happened, and lots of lessons were learned throughout the decade. If there is only one lesson that could be learned from this time that the two texts do a great job of conveying, it is that money cannot buy you everything. Money can buy you a lot, but not everything.

Works Cited

Allan, Kenn. "The Roaring '20s." *Kenn Allan*, 2014,

[www.kennallan.com/poems/time/theroaring20s.html](http://www.kennallan.com/poems/time/theroaring20s.html). Accessed 10 Nov. 2021.

Fitzgerald, Francis. *The Great Gatsby*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.