Toxicity Of Materialism At Midnight In Paris And The Great Gatsby

As a shopaholic, I find myself impulse buying items of clothing, its uncontrollable as it is love at first sight! I just wanted the shirt so bad, so bad that after three days I am bored of it and to satisfy my emotional happiness I buy another item of clothing. It just becomes a repetitive cycle. People's dreams that the pursuit of material happiness will bring emotional happiness are illusions. The pursuit of material goods most often brings disaster to relationships and dreams. Midnight in Paris is a feature film made in 2011 written and directed by Woody Allen. The Great Gatsby is a novel published in 1924 written by American author F. Scott Fitzgerald. Materialism causes relationship problems with protagonists and their love interests. These problems lead to the protagonists' dreams becoming an illusion. Emotional happiness is achieved through pursuing dreams but these characters think emotional happiness is sought through material goods causing problems with relationships and tarnished dreams.

The relationship between the protagonists and their love interests represents the toxicity of materialism. Fitzgerald was concerned with the materialistic obsession of the 1920s being an obstacle to emotional happiness. In Chapter V of The Great Gatsby Daisy visits Gatsby's house. She remarks, "'It makes me sad because I've never seen such -- such beautiful shirts before.'" The shirts act as a metonym for Gatsby's wealth and therefore the potential love that Gatsby and Daisy could have shared. Moreover, Fitzgerald demonstrates that Daisy's pursuit of material happiness has hindered her pursuit of emotional happiness. This is evident when she becomes emotionally overwhelmed and speechless. The use of aposiopesis shows that she doesn't want to reveal her departure from the contextual value of the time causing problems in their relationship.

This is similar In Midnight in Paris, Gil loves Paris and dreams of becoming a successful novelist but this dream is an illusion with his fiancée as she enjoys the material comforts provided by his successful screenwriting in Hollywood.

A wide shot of Inez lying seductively on the bed saying, "stop beating your brains out and just go back to doing what you do best. I mean the studios adore you, you are in demand, do you really want to give it all up just to struggle" It is clear from this point forward that Inez's pursuit for material goods causes a problematic relationship between her and Gil. Her materialistic attitude comes at the expense of emotional engagement and she diminishes his dreams and emotional happiness as a result. This shows how the pursuit of material happiness can be a detriment to emotional happiness.

Gatsby achieved the American Dream of accumulating wealth but he lost sight of who he was by creating an illusive personality that caused false hope for class mobility. He adopted a different persona to distinguish himself from his past with his accent from 'Oggsford' and constant repetition of the term 'old sport'.

In Chapter 3 the book shelf represents the illusion that Gatsby has created to seem as if he is from the upper class. "Didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?" The use of a rhetorical questions emphasises the fact that everyone knows no matter how much of a

show Gatsby puts on through his extravagant parties that he is not from their class. The bookshelf is just a part of the illusive personality. No amount of money will afford Gatsby entrance into the ‘true’ upper middle class or give him Daisy as no amount of money can change the circumstances of his birth.

Also, Spoiler alert! Myrtle and Gatsby were killed due to their endless pursuit for wealth and material goods in order to be accepted in the upper class and win Daisy’s heart.

Gatsby loves Daisy as she represents the paragon of wealth, aristocracy and materialism. “Her voice was full of money.” This metaphor that objectifies Daisy’s voice demonstrates the materialistic culture of the 1920s America, as her voice is characterised as currency, as inhuman, not as uniquely human.

Gil’s pursuit of emotional happiness is facilitated by Gabrielle and Adriana’s similar rejection of materialism.

Whenever Gil travelled back into the 1920s he leaves the materialistic context of Inez and her republican parents and becomes visually and emotionally happy. A close up shot of Adriana and Gil strolling to leisurely non-diegetic music in Paris during the 1920s before they stop and kiss, the change of the saturation of the shot to a golden tinge, symbolises his awareness of the emotional happiness he feels with Adriana. He then gives Adriana some earrings, which contrasts her reaction to Inez’s who is materialistic and had exclaimed that she hated the necklace he had gotten her previously as it was “to simple” and “cheap as cheap”. His rejection of Inez who represents materialism allowed him to follow his dream of becoming a novelist.

At the end of Midnight in Paris it is evidently clear that Gil is emotionally happy through following his dreams and thus has created a stable human relationship with Gabrielle.

In the novel and film the characters’ dreams of emotional happiness are pursued by seeking material goods which ends with problematized human relationships and satisfaction and makes those dreams an illusion. In order to be emotional happy, I have learnt that the constant cycle of buying clothes needs to stop not just for my wallet but so I can fulfil my dreams and build human relationships.