

Public Abstract

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While the American Dream is an oft trod, even cliched, terrain in literary criticism, discourse around the topic tends to rely on a dichotomized discourse of celebration or critique. This tendency is a result of understanding the American Dream in literature to be merely a thematic concern. This dissertation approaches the American Dream as a narrative structure whose aim is to mediate symbolic citizenship between the poles of stable social order and innovative progress. Thus, the texts covered are characterized by narrative doubling, with characters possessing normative American attributes (money, a good job, a stable home life) paired with marginalized opposites who possess a more fluid, creative, and multiplicitous sense of identity. The narrative, then, becomes the means by which the models of Americanness represented by these doubles become merged into an effective model of American citizenship.

The Introduction examines the intellectual history of the American Dream and traces different, competing definitions of American identity. The first chapter traces the relationship between Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The second chapter compares models of American economic success offered by Horatio Alger in his novel *Risen from the Ranks* and the film *Scarface* by Howard Hawks. The thrid chapter discusses Sal Paradise and his relationship to domesticity in *On the Road*. The last chapter discusses first and second generation immigrant stories in *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan.