



HEDONISM OF JAZZ ERA SOCIETY IN THE CHARACTERS OF THE SHORT STORY “THE DIAMOND AS BIG AS THE RITZ”

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Abstract

Literary works can raise social stories, namely stories that describe the conditions, problems, and social dynamics of society in a certain period. This study aims to describe the hedonistic lifestyle of American society in the jazz era of the 1920s, as reflected in the characters of the short story *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* by Scott Fitzgerald. This research method uses qualitative data. The data source for this study is the hedonistic behavior of the Washington family characters, who are full of luxury and greed through the narrative in the short story. The results of this study show that in this short story there is a reflection of the hedonistic lifestyle of American society in the jazz era. Among them are material luxury, loss of social morals, prioritizing personal interests at all costs, and alcohol addiction as a form of self-satisfaction, as well as the impact of hedonism, namely discrimination against negro.

Key words: Hedonism, The Jazz Era, Character

A. INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle in general can be considered a lifestyle that is expressed in the way individuals carry out their activities, how they feel interested in what is considered important or interesting, and how individuals think about themselves and the world around them (Seftiana et al., 2023). Over time, lifestyles will always change dynamically, both at the individual and collective levels of society. Kotler in (Dewi et al., 2024), argue that lifestyle is a person's pattern in this world that expresses himself clearly based on his activities, interests, and opinions. People's habits and lifestyles change very quickly, today's society tends to have a lifestyle that always follows the times. Their lifestyle leads to luxurious living habits; they like to spend money beyond their needs and spend time just having fun. Hedonism is a theory that states that the main benefit of life is pleasure.

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Hedonism is a view of life that views pleasure or enjoyment of the world as the goal of life. Hedonistic attitudes arise from a misunderstanding of the meaning of happiness and being trapped in the wrong attitude toward achieving it. A hedonistic lifestyle can generally be said to be a way of life that can be seen in how individuals carry out activities and how they feel attracted to what is considered important to them without thinking about anything.

The Diamond as Big as the Ritz is a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, first published in 1922. The story follows a young man named John T. Unger, who spends his summer vacation at the home of his classmate, Percy Washington, in the Rocky Mountains. However, what John does not know is that the Washington family has a big secret: the existence of a diamond as big as a mountain that is very valuable. The short story explores themes such as luxury and greed through the depiction of the Washington family's luxurious life. Through a rich and detailed narrative, Fitzgerald presents a luxurious world colored by unimaginable wealth. However, behind the luxury lies greed, which threatens to destroy everything. Not only that, Fitzgerald also conveys moral messages and social criticism through his narrative.

Fitzgerald, in his essay entitled "Echoes of the Jazz Age," reviews the consequences of American society at that time from the consumerism and hedonism that dominated the jazz era and how they can lead to moral destruction for some individuals. Hedonism refers to a lifestyle that emphasizes pleasure and self-satisfaction without limits. In the context of the Jazz Age, Fitzgerald reflects in his work the lifestyle of characters filled with luxury, pleasure, and self-satisfaction. They pursue pleasure with passion without considering moral or social consequences.

The year this story was published, 1922, was one of the peaks of the jazz era and hedonism culture in the United States. This short story is a social satire fiction genre that highlights social inequality in American society during the jazz era, which was full of luxury in the 1920s. The Jazz Era was a period when jazz music flourished and became a symbol of freedom of expression and hedonism. In terms of language, hedonism comes from the Greek, namely "hedone," which means pleasure. Hedonism is a type of ideology or outlook on life that states that happiness is only obtained by seeking as much personal pleasure as possible. On the other hand, hedonism is a view of life that considers that pleasure and enjoyment of life are the main goals. This happened to American society during the Jazz Era, also called the Roaring Twenties (a term used to refer to the period of American history in the 1920s), which was marked by rapid economic growth and significant cultural development, so that interest in hedonism in American society emerged in that era.

In the short story *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*, Fitzgerald depicts a powerful representation of the hedonistic culture that was rampant in jazz-era society. In accordance with the statement (Fitzgerald, 2003), "A whole race is going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure." The nature of hedonism is expressed through his characters and the depiction of their luxurious lives. Fitzgerald deeply explores how wealth and pleasure become the main focus while moral and social consequences are ignored. Thus, this story is not only a narratively interesting literary work but also a sharp critique of the values and lifestyles highlighted by the hedonistic culture of the time. Fitzgerald not only depicts their luxurious lives physically but also delves into the psychology and morality of his characters. They are obsessed with materialism, hedonism, and the pursuit of instant gratification without thinking about the impact on others or society as a whole.

This reflects the hedonistic culture that was widespread among the upper class of the Jazz Age, where traditional values were often neglected in favor of personal pleasure and satisfaction.

Through this story, Fitzgerald provides a sharp critique of the values and lifestyles promoted by the hedonistic culture of the time. He highlights how the obsession with wealth and instant gratification can obscure the view of more important moral and social values. In addition, this story is also a mirror that reminds us of the dangers of excessive materialism and the unawareness of the consequences of a limitless hedonistic lifestyle. Thus, "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" is not only a narratively interesting work of literature but also a thought-provoking critique of the hedonistic culture that was rampant during the Jazz Age, as well as a thought-provoking reflection on the values and priorities of life that should be more appreciated.

F. Scott Fitzgerald was an American writer best known for his works reflecting the lavish lifestyles and moral conflicts of the early 20th-century United States (Dianti, 2017). Fitzgerald was born in 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota, and grew up in a middle-class family. He entered Princeton University in 1913 but eventually dropped out to join the United States Army during World War I. This experience influenced his works, including his critical views of society and military life. When Fitzgerald wrote, the United States was going through a significant period in its social and political history. The Jazz Age, which spanned the 1920s, was marked by changes in culture, music, and lifestyle. The economy was booming, but there was also a large social gap between the classes. The administrations of Harding, Coolidge, and then Hoover were marked by pro-business economic policies and increased consumption. During this period, Fitzgerald was also influenced by Prohibition, a ban on the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol that lasted from 1920 to 1933. Prohibition created a black market for alcohol and increased the popularity of speakeasies and nightclubs that sold alcohol illegally. These themes are reflected in Fitzgerald's works, in which alcohol is often a symbol of freedom and moral bondage.

Thus, when Fitzgerald wrote "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" in 1922, he was involved in a rapidly changing society, influenced by war, the economic boom, Prohibition, and profound cultural changes. His work reflects the chaos and tension of the period while presenting a vivid picture of the luxurious life and hedonistic pleasures that marked the jazz era. F. Scott Fitzgerald was an American novelist, essayist, and short story writer. In addition, Fitzgerald also felt that during the jazz era, Fitzgerald lived in luxury at the Boiltmore Hotel in New York City. This is in accordance with (Nurholis, 2019) in his book *Introduction to the Sociology of Literature*: "In essence, a poet is a member of society." Fitzgerald describes the era as a race that competes with its own strength and represents a morally permissive time when Americans became disillusioned with prevailing social norms and obsessed with self-gratification. Even during this hedonistic era, alcohol increasingly fueled the Fitzgerald family's social life.

There are several previous studies that discuss similar objects and studies, including: The first study was written by (Key, 2014) entitled "A Love-Hate Relationship": F. Scott Fitzgerald, Money Management, and "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz." The similarity of this study is the object used, namely the short story by Scott Fitzgerald entitled *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*. The difference between this study and the researcher's study lies in the study that will be analyzed, namely the hedonistic lifestyle of jazz era society. The second relevant study was written by (KENJO, 1990), entitled *A Study of Fitzgerald. The world of fantasy and dream in "The Diamond as Big*

as the Ritz." The study has similarities and differences. The similarity of this study is the object used, namely the short story by Scott Fitzgerald entitled *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*. While the difference in this study is the analysis study discussed, The third research was written by (Burrows, 2010), entitled "An Art Scene as Big as the Ritz." This research discusses the same object, but the analysis study is different. From several studies found, there has been no research that specifically discusses the representation lifestyle of hedonism of the jazz era society in America reflected in the short story *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* by Scott Fitzgerald. So, this study aims to describe it. It is expected to add to the wealth of research in the field of literature.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study uses a qualitative method. According to Moleong (2011, 2022), a qualitative approach is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words of people and observable behavior. Meanwhile, according to Creswell (2015), the qualitative method is the process of investigating understanding based on various methodological traditions for investigating social or human problems. It can be concluded that this method functions to specifically explain the conditions and situations related to the object, namely the hedonism of American society in the jazz era as reflected in the short story "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz." It begins with the author reading the short story *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* in its entirety so that the contents of the text can be understood properly.

Data collection techniques include reading short story *The Diamond as Big as Ritz* to find out and understand the meaning of the story. Then identify and classify the data found in the narrative and the hedonistic actions related to the text. In the data analysis stage, the author analyzes the characters and storylines related to the discussion, namely the hedonistic lifestyle of American society in the jazz era of the 1920s in the short story *The Diamond as Big as Ritz* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Finding

Some of the hedonistic lifestyles of jazz-era society in the characters of the short story *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* are found in seven narratives. Among them are the luxury materials owned by the Washington family (first-third narratives), the loss of social morals (fourth-fifth narratives), alcohol addiction (sixth narrative), and the impact of the hedonistic lifestyle, namely discrimination against negro (seventh narrative).

First narrative:

"Sometimes beneath layers of thick crystal he would see blue or green water swirling, inhabited by vivid fish and growths of rainbow foliage. Then they would be treading on furs of every texture and color or along corridors of palest ivory, unbroken as though carved complete from the gigantic tusks of dinosaurs extinct before the age of man..." (page. 6)

Second narrative:

"Gosh! What a car!" This ejaculation was provoked by its interior. John saw that the upholstery consisted of a thousand minute and exquisite tapestries of silk, woven with jewels and embroideries, and set upon a background of cloth of gold. The two armchair seats in which the boys luxuriated were covered with stuff that resembled duvetyn, but seemed woven in numberless colors of the ends of ostrich feathers. (page.4)

Third narrative:

"What a car!" cried John again, in amazement.

"This thing?" Percy laughed. "Why, it's just an old junk we use for a station wagon." (page. 4)

Fourth narrative:

The first time my grandfather corrupted a whole department of the State survey; the second time he had the official maps of the United States tinkered with that held them for fifteen years. The last time was harder. My father fixed it so that their compasses were in the strongest magnetic field ever artificially set up. Then he had a river deflected and he had what looked like a village built up on its banks so that they'd see it, and think it was a town ten miles farther up the valley. There's only one thing my father's afraid of," he concluded, "only one thing in the world that could be used to find us out. (page. 4-5)

Fifth narrative:

And it's always been made easier for Jasmine and me because father had it done sooner than we expected. In that way we avoided any farewell scene"

"So you murdered them! Uh!" cried John. (page. 18)

"Father took no chances and Jasmine kept writing them to come, and they had such a good time!"

Do you mean to say that your father had them murdered before they left?"

She nodded. (page. 18)

Sixth narrative:

"By 1923 their elders, tired of watching the carnival with illconcealed envy, had discovered that young liquor will take the place of young blood, and with a whoop the orgy began." (Fitzgerald, 2003)

There was a whitehaired man who stood drinking a many-hued cordial from a crystal thimble set on a golden stem.

Seventh narrative:

All these negroes are descendants of the ones my father brought North with him. There are about two hundred and fifty now. You notice that they've lived so long apart from the world that their original dialect has become an almost indistinguishable patois. (page. 12)

2. Discussion

Luxury materials

American society during the jazz era was familiar with hedonism (Fitzgerald, 2003). According to Antonius Sepriadi in (Wahidmurni, 2017), "hedonism is an assumption that pleasure or enjoyment is the ultimate goal of life and the highest good." Hedonistic interest can arise towards an object, event, or topic that emphasizes the element of pleasure in life, for example, luxury goods. The hedonistic interest of American society arose due to historical factors and the economic, technological, and industrial boom that occurred in the 1920s, commonly called the Jazz Age.

The first narrative from John T. Unger describing the luxury of the Washington family's residence that goes beyond the usual limits. This quote illustrates the hedonistic view during the American jazz era. There is a picture of a luxurious life filled with visual beauty that can be felt by John T. Unger. This can be categorized as one of the hedonistic attitudes at that time, where people tend to seek pleasure and pamper their senses by going to luxurious places. The Jazz Era, also called the Roaring Twenties, according to (Zeitz, 2017), was a decade that witnessed unprecedented economic growth and prosperity in the United States. In addition, according to (Palmer, 2006), this decade is known for its rapid economic growth, driven by industrialization, technological innovation, and mass consumption. The automotive, electricity, and radio industries flourished. Consumer culture developed, with more and more Americans buying cars, electrical equipment, and other widely available consumer products. This is relevant to what was mentioned by (Wahidmurni, 2017), namely that one of the pleasures of American society in the jazz era was having luxury goods.

This description of the interior of the Washington family home is also reflective of the hedonistic attitudes prevalent among the upper classes of the time, who tended to focus on sensory gratification and instant gratification without considering the moral or ethical implications of their lifestyle. It illustrates how American society during the Jazz Age was obsessed with luxury and materialism, where wealth and sensory pleasure were the primary goals driven by the economic boom and technological advancements of the time.

The second narrative described that the Washington family lived in a very luxurious environment where every aspect of their life was decorated with expensive and beautiful things. The interior of the car described by Fitzgerald is a small example of how they surrounded themselves with luxury and material beauty. Their hedonism was not only seen in material objects but also in the way they lived their daily lives, which were centered on seeking satisfaction and pleasure. The description of the car shows that for the Washington family, luxury was commonplace and an integral part of their identity. The narrative above provides a clear picture of the luxury and pleasure that were part of the culture of jazz-era society. When John T. Unger expressed his amazement, "Gosh! What a car!" it shows admiration for the luxury of the Washington family's car that he was driving. The interior of the car with silk lining, woven with jewels whose fabric was made of gold, highlights how important luxury was to the social society during the jazz era that lived in luxury. Therefore, the car described in the quote is not only a physical vehicle but also a symbol to represent the life of jazz-era society. This is illustrated in (Yassin et al., 2018) The 'Roaring Twenties' period is also known as the 'Age of Intolerance', the 'Era of Wonderful Nonsense', and the 'Age of Jazz'. Although this period was a period of change in economic, social, political, and cultural standards and lifestyles in American society, these changes were primarily due to rapid technological advances, artistic production, and economic improvements. Technological

advances also played a significant role in America's economic growth and power as they followed new methods of production and distribution.

But John T. Unger's amazement is only considered a small part of Percy Washington's, as shown in the third narrative. Through this narrative, it can also be seen how much more luxurious the Washington family's life is, so that they consider a car covered in gold, jewels, and silk as old trash. When John exclaimed in admiration, "What a car!" Percy's reaction, laughing and belittling the car by saying, "This thing? Why, it's just an old junk we use for a station wagon," shows how far apart their perceptions of luxury are. Percy's belittling of a car that John considered something extraordinary reflects a hedonistic view where luxury and material beauty are commonplace and less appreciated. A car decorated with gold, jewels, and silk is also considered "old trash" by Percy, which reflects the Washington family's life, which is much more luxurious than what John or even most people in general can imagine. This extreme luxury not only highlights the difference in social class between John and Percy but also provides insight into how excessive luxury can lead to a loss of appreciation for luxury goods. The Washington family, who are accustomed to abundant wealth, sees items that most people consider extraordinary as ordinary and trivial. This shows that when a person lives in an environment filled with unlimited luxury, their perception of material value and satisfaction changes significantly.

This phenomenon reveals the dark side of hedonism, where the constant search for material satisfaction is never truly fulfilled. The Washington family, who had infinite wealth, lived in a state where luxury, which for others might be the pinnacle of pleasure, was considered meaningless. This also reflects Fitzgerald's social criticism of society at that time, which was often caught up in the endless pursuit of wealth and luxury but never achieved true satisfaction. As stated by (Alexander, 2019) , for most of the American middle class, the 1920s were a decade of unprecedented prosperity. Rising incomes resulted in more income that could continue to be spent on consumer goods.

Loss of social morals

In addition to luxury materials, the story of *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* also contains the loss of social morals depicted through the Washington family figures. In line with what was expressed by (Fitzgerald, 2003) in his essay entitled "Tales of the Jazz Age," American society during the Jazz era was familiar with hedonism, which caused moral destruction for some individuals. This is reflected in *The Diamond as Big as Ritz*, in the dialogue between John T. Unger and Jasmine, one of the children of the Washington family.

On the fourth narrative, the Washington family will do anything to keep their wealth a secret. By controlling geographic and topographic information through map manipulation, the family gains a huge advantage over others. Their actions reveal their ambition and desire to maintain their wealth and power, even if it is unethical or illegal. The connection to the life of jazz-era society can be seen in the context of the ambition and luxury that dominated the culture at that time. The American jazz era was marked by a spirit of prosperity and rapid social change, with people pursuing the American dream and a glamorous lifestyle. In the quote, the main family shows unlimited ambition in pursuing power and wealth, reflecting the spirit of ambition and individualism that dominated society at that time. In addition, the manipulation and deception carried out by the family also reflect the moral and trust instability that occurred during the jazz era. Society at that time was often influenced by the ambition to achieve material success

without caring about the ethical consequences of their actions. Likewise, in the story, the family guiltlessly carried out various manipulations to achieve their goals.

The loss of morality in the story *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* is depicted by the murder committed by the Washington family against people who know the secret of their family's wealth; even Jasmine's friends became victims of murder when they finished playing at the Washington family's house, such as John T. Unger, who was invited by Percy Washington. This is shown in the fifth narrative. John's shocked and angry response highlights the vast difference between the morality held by ordinary people like John and the corrupted morality of the Washington family. To this family, people are not treated as individuals with intrinsic value but as potential threats that must be eliminated in order to maintain their wealth. Jasmine also shows how cunning and manipulative the Washington family is when she recounts how they would invite their friends to come and enjoy themselves at their home, only to be killed before they could leave and possibly reveal the family secret. This quote further demonstrates the themes of moral instability, excessive self-interest, and the sacrifice of ethics in American jazz-age society. In this quote, it is revealed that Percy Washington's father went to extreme lengths to keep his family's secret. The actions of Percy Washington's father highlight how important it was to them to maintain their lifestyle and fortune, even if it meant sacrificing moral principles. The Washington family has sacrificed morality in order to maintain their wealth, showing how far a person can fall when materialism and wealth become the sole purpose of life. This also reflects Fitzgerald's critique of the society of his time, where the pursuit of wealth often leads to the loss of moral and human values. The connection to American jazz-age society is that, amidst the spirit of individualism, competition, and the desire to succeed, morality often took a toll. People of the time were often driven by the ambition to achieve material success without regard for the consequences of their actions.

Alcohol addiction

Apart from luxury and loss of morals, jazz-era society was also inseparable from parties that were synonymous with alcohol. Parties and booze became symbols of the freedom, joy, and hedonistic lifestyle embraced by the Jazz Age society. Adults who were jealous and bored of the young people's alcohol-filled parties eventually joined in the fun, turning the party into a lively and joyful "orgy." The term "young liquor will take the place of young blood" describes how alcohol was considered a substitute for the spirit and excitement of the younger generation. This reflects the rampant culture of consumerism and hedonism, where booze became a symbol of the freedom, party, and pleasure that many people pursued at that time. As Fitzgerald explained in his essay about the jazz-era society that consumed a lot of alcohol, in the story *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*, the character of Braddock Washington is depicted. It can be seen in the sixth narrative. Alcoholic drinks were not only a symbol of social status and luxury but also became part of the cultural identity of the people at that time, expressing the spirit of freedom, joy, and hedonism that dominated the era. Drinking alcohol and attending parties or nightclubs were integral parts of the lifestyle and social culture of American jazz-era society. During this time, alcohol was often consumed as part of social entertainment and as a way to enjoy freedom and pleasure. Parties and nightclubs became places where individuals gathered to have fun, enjoy live music, dance, and enjoy drinks together. In the jazz era, nightclubs were often the center of active nightlife,

where live jazz music was played and guests could enjoy the lively and energetic atmosphere while enjoying alcoholic beverages. Alcoholic beverages were not only a way to relax and socialize, but they also became a symbol of a luxurious lifestyle. Thus, drinking alcohol and attending parties or nightclubs were two of the hallmarks of the American jazz era lifestyle, expressing the spirit of freedom, fun, and self-expression that dominated the period.

The impact of the hedonistic lifestyle

In the 1920s, jazz music experienced a surge in popularity as it began to spread through recordings. Some black jazz musicians believed that they were being cheated financially and not given full recognition and compensation for being the inventors of jazz as an African American culture. Additionally, some opposed the idea that jazz was created by black people. Jazz music was more of a commodity than an art form, and the highest achievers were white men (Philipp, 2024).

In this short story, the Washington family has a Negro servant in their household. The seventh narrative shows the effect of hedonism on slavery by showing how the Washington family's luxurious life impacts the conditions of their slaves. When the main character in the story reveals that all the slaves are descendants of the slaves their father brought to the North, and now there are about two hundred and fifty slaves, this highlights the unequal relationship between the wealth and power of the Washington family and the dependence of their slaves. The condition of the slaves who live separated from the outside world, to the point that their native dialects are almost indistinguishable, shows the isolation and dehumanization experienced by them as a result of the luxurious life adopted by the Washington family. The hedonism of the Washington family displayed through their luxurious lifestyle not only emphasizes materialism and pleasure alone but also reflects a disregard for broader social conditions, including the treatment of marginalized slaves. This reveals how slavery and the horrific system of exploitation still persist behind the curtain of luxury and hedonism displayed by the Washington family, reminding us that a life of luxury is often built on deep social suffering and injustice. In addition, it was a social and cultural reality in America at the time where racial discrimination and disparity in treatment of black people were common. This depiction shows the social hierarchy that existed at the time, where black people were often considered servants or domestic workers. This quote highlights the historical legacy of slavery and its influence on the social and cultural structure of American jazz-age society. At the time, the legacy of slavery was still strongly felt in society, especially in the Southern United States. In the quote, the "negroes" mentioned are the descendants of slaves brought by Braddock Washington from the South to the North. Although slavery had been abolished, its traces were still strongly felt in the social and cultural structure of American jazz-age society. The descendants of these slaves, who had lived separated from the outside world for so long, had developed a unique dialect or hybrid language, showing the strong influence of their past. The connection to American jazz-age society is that racial inequality and oppression of black people were still part of the social reality of the time, albeit in a different form than during direct slavery.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The short story entitled *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* by F. Scott Fitzgerald raises the theme of a life filled with wealth and luxury. This story describes the life of American society during the jazz era. provides a clear picture of the hedonistic views that

dominated the culture at that time. The description of the extraordinary luxury in the story is depicted through the characters. Fitzgerald describes how life is filled with luxury, the loss of social norms, and slavery that is still felt. In this story, we are presented with a picture of the luxurious life of the main family, who has unlimited wealth, to the point of having a diamond mountain as big as the Ritz-Carlton. However, behind this luxury, there is a dark reality, where the family maintains their wealth in immoral ways, such as manipulating maps and keeping the slavery secret that exists in their family. The characters in the story take unethical actions in order to maintain their wealth and social status. The hedonistic views that dominated the culture at that time felt entitled to pursue pleasure and satisfaction without thinking about the consequences. Finally, Fitzgerald also conveys a message about the reality of slavery, which is still felt amidst the luxury of upper-class society. Although slavery was officially abolished, the Washington family still maintained it in this story, showing how the historical legacy of slavery still influenced the social and cultural structure of the jazz era. Thus, "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" is not only a story of luxury and wealth but also a complex reflection of American society during the jazz era, with hedonistic views, the loss of social norms, and the reality of slavery.

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