

THE AMERICAN DREAM AND THE MARGINS IN TWENTIEH CENTURY FICTION

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ABSTRACT

While the American Dream is an oft trod, even clichéd, 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. This narrative line is traced through F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Howards Hawk's film *Scarface*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.