



THE GREAT GATSBY

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Style, Technique, Plot
and Characters



Jay Gatsby



The American Dream & Reality/Apearances

“Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn...there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life...” (2).

sincere a feeling or belief that someone is despicable

Nick's description of Gatsby suggests that Gatsby is very charming. Although Gatsby might seem to have some negative characteristics, his personality is so charming that Nick overlooks it. Gatsby appears to be a sensitive dreamer type who is looking for potential and the good things in life.

Jay Gatsby



Reality/Apearances & The American Dream

“...it is what preyed upon Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the [sorrows of men]” (2).

Nick can sense that something troubling happened to Gatsby in the past. It “preyed upon Gatsby” shows that something is stalking Gatsby in his mind. The “foul dust” that “floated in the wake of his dreams” refers to something that haunts Gatsby from the past. Nick is intrigued by Gatsby; Nick finds himself drawn to what makes Gatsby tick.

A watch over the body of a deceased person before burial, sometimes accompanied by festivity; also called a viewing.



Nick



Social Status/Class Structure

“the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe — so I decided to go east and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business so I supposed it could support one more single man...Father agreed to finance me” (3).

Nick reveals to the reader how he came to his profession. He reveals his status within society by mentioning who he socializes with: “Everybody I knew was in the bond business...” The reason he moves out East is because his father pays his way. It is obvious Nick enjoys the perks of being a benefactor of the wealthy class, yet this quote also reveal a sense of restlessness with Nick.

Tom



Social Status/Class Structure & Gender Roles

“His family were enormously wealthy—even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach—but now he’d left Chicago and come east in a fashion that rather took your breath away: for instance he’d brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest” (6).

Nick sees Tom on the porch and passes judgement. Tom seems rich and extravagant. The polo ponies symbolize Tom’s wastefulness with money; he spends freely to the point where others think he is showing off. The polo ponies are a giant expense that has little purpose other than amusement. Nick should disapprove of Tom’s behavior, yet he “took your breath away” suggests that Nick values this behavior and is possibly envious of Tom’s possessions.

Daisy



Gender Roles & Social Status/Class Structure

“The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back...” (8).

Nick's describes what he sees upon entering the home of Tom and Daisy. These women are women of leisure. They do not have to work but can spend the afternoon on the sofa in a daze. The “anchored balloon” image suggests they are like fairies or fantasy creatures, and their fluttering dresses make them seem thin and delicate. The fact that Nick describes them the way he does suggests that he feels they are different from him and a bit strange. Maybe this is because they represent the new woman.

Daisy



“I’ve heard it said that Daisy’s murmur was only to make people lean toward her...” (9).

Nick makes this observation/judgement about Daisy. If this is true, what does this show about Daisy?

Gender Roles

“Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth...” (9).

Full of promise and hope

Nick sees so much in Daisy’s face. He describes her face as “sad and lovely”, but he also sees “bright things”, “bright eyes”, and a “bright passionate mouth”. The repetition of the word “bright” creates a positive optimistic which makes Daisy seem to represent the women of the Roaring 20s - full of hope, yet trapped by the rules of society.

Jordan



How do eyes get sun-strained?

Gender Roles & Social Status & Reality/Appearances

“Her gray sun-strained eyes looked back at me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a wan, charming, discontented face (11).”

Unnaturally pale, as from physical or emotional distress.

unsatisfied

Nick remarks on the other woman in the room, Jordan. Jordan not only seems to represent a woman from old money/leisure class, but she and Daisy represent the new modern woman. Yet, there is a sense here that Jordan is unhealthy and tired (“wan” and “discontented”). She and Daisy both continue to display politeness and act out social conventions, but it is tiring and they struggle through their existence.

Tom



Close Reading for Characterization

“He was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward.” He had “a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body” (11).

This strong description of Tom provides the reader with a physical description of a character.

But, this passage is much more about the adjectives or qualities described in relationship to the physical description.

How does this description of Tom foreshadow future events?