Analysis Of The Great Gatsby Essay, Research Paper

ClassicNote on The Great Gatsby

Short Summary of The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel The Great Gatsby is a specific portrait of American

society during the Roaring Twenties, yet tells the quintessential American story

of a man rising from rags to riches only to find that whatever benefits his

wealth affords, it cannot grant him the privileges of class and status. The

central character is Jay Gatsby, a wealthy New Yorker of an undetermined

occupation known mostly for the lavish parties he throws every weekend at his

mansion but suspected of being involved in illegal bootlegging and other

clandestine activities. However, the narrator is Nick Carraway, a young

mid-westerner from a prominent family who came to New York to enter the

bond business. Carraway is involved in all of the events of the novel, yet does

not play a significant active role; he is only a passive observer.

When Nick arrives in New York, he soon visits his relatives, the Buchanans,

who live in East Egg. Nick resides in the nearby (and less fashionable) West

Egg, where Gatsby also lives. Like Nick, Tom Buchanan is from a prominent

family from the mid-west. Tom is a former athlete at Yale, a vulgar and

insecure man preoccupied with the decline of society and of class boundaries. It

is soon revealed that Tom is having an affair with a woman in the city. His

wife, Daisy, is Nick’s second cousin. She carries herself with an insubstantial

manner. While seemingly na?ve, she claims to be terribly sophisticated. Also at

the Buchanans’ home is Jordan Baker, a professional golfer and close friend of

Daisy. After visiting Tom and Daisy, Nick goes home that night, where he sees

Gatsby watching a green light across the bay. He stretches his arms out toward

it, as if to grasp the green light.

Tom Buchanan takes Nick into New York, and on the way they stop at George

Wilson’s garage. Tom has been having an affair with his wife, Myrtle, and Tom

tells her to join them later in the city. The garage is in the ‘valley of ashes,’ as

Fitzgerald describes it, a vast, desolate area. Other than Wilson’s garage, the

only other feature of note is a large advertisement for an optometrist, two large

eyes that look over the barren area. When Tom and Nick arrive in the city, they

visit with Myrtle and her sister, Catherine McKee. They gossip about Gatsby,

who they believe to be related to the Kaiser or perhaps a murderer. Around

Tom and away from her husband, the earthy Myrtle Wilson adopts an affected,

pretentious tone. She and Tom argue about Daisy, and Tom breaks her nose.

Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker attend a party at Gatsby’s mansion. At the

party, few of the attendees are actually invited guests or even know Gatsby.

Even Nick, when he first meets Gatsby, does not recognize him. Gatsby asks to

speak to Jordan Baker alone, and after talking with Gatsby for a significant time

she tells Nick that she learned some remarkable news which she cannot yet tell

him. During this time, Nick and Jordan begin a half-hearted romance, spending

time together occasionally while often losing sight of one another.

Some time later, Gatsby visits Nick’s home and invites him to lunch. At this

point Gatsby’s origins are unclear, but Gatsby clarifies the story: he tells Nick

that he is from a wealthy San Francisco and was educated at Oxford after

serving in the Great War (for which he received a number of decorations).

However, his tentative manner indicates that he may be lying to Nick. He tells

Nick that Jordan Baker soon will reveal to Nick the remarkable news that

Gatsby had told her. At lunch, Gatsby introduces Nick to an associate, Meyer

Wolfsheim, a notorious criminal noted for fixing the 1919 World Series. When

Nick sees the Buchanans there, Gatsby mysteriously avoids them. Later, Jordan

Baker tells Nick the story of Gatsby, recounting that he had fallen in love with

Daisy Buchanan before the war and implying that he still is in love with her.

She also implies that Daisy has been in love with Gatsby as well.

Gatsby has Nick arrange a meeting between him and Daisy. Gatsby has

planned every detail to perfection. When he shows her his mansion, it is an

ostentatious display of his wealth and possessions. Yet Gatsby behaves

awkwardly toward Daisy. Gatsby had built up such grandiose dreams for

reuniting with Daisy that any meeting was bound to disappoint.

The true story of Jay Gatsby is revealed. He was born James Gatz in North

Dakota. He had his name legally changed at seventeen, soon after he met the

wealthy Dan Cody, who served as Gatsby’s mentor until he died. While Gatsby

received none of Cody’s fortune, it was from Cody that Gatsby was introduced

to the lifestyle of the wealthy.

While out horseback riding, Tom Buchanan comes upon Gatsby’s mansion,

where he meets Nick. Tom takes an immediate dislike to Gatsby, for he was

part of the ‘new rich.’ Still, he accompanies Daisy to the next party that Gatsby

throws, where he is rude and condescending towards Gatsby. Nick realizes that

what Gatsby wants is for Daisy to fully renounce her husband and to take back

the years that had passed since he and Daisy first parted. This is Gatsby’s great

flaw: he believes that he can escape the past and undo what he and Daisy have

experienced.

After reuniting with Daisy, Gatsby stops throwing the elaborate parties at his

mansion. The only reason why he threw such lavish parties was the chance that

Daisy (or someone who knew her) might attend. Now that they are together

once more, Gatsby finds no reason to continue the practice. Daisy invites

Gatsby, Nick and Jordan to lunch at her house. Around her husband, Daisy is

indiscreet. She even tells Gatsby that she loves him when Tom can hear. The

group goes off to New York, stopping by Wilson’s garage, where they learn

that Wilson will soon move west with his wife ? he recently realized something

about his wife and they decided that they must get away. When they leave,

Nick sees Myrtle go into hysterics, for she sees Jordan and suspects that she is

Tom’s wife.

In the city, the group goes to a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Tom and Gatsby have a

bitter confrontation: Tom exposes Gatsby for his low origins, while Gatsby tells

Tom about his affair and how Daisy does not love him. Yet Gatsby demands

too much: he wants Daisy to admit that she never loved Tom, but she cannot

truthfully admit that.

When Gatsby takes Daisy back to New York, he allows her to drive in order to

calm her nerves. When they pass Wilson’s garage, Daisy swerves to avoid

another car and ends up hitting Myrtle, killing her. Gatsby explains this to Nick,

who advises him to leave town until the situation calms. He refuses to leave,

however. He remains in order to watch Daisy’s mansion across the bay and

make sure that she is safe. However, George Wilson, driven mad by the death

of his wife, goes to search out the killer. Tom Buchanan points him toward

Gatsby. Wilson shoots Gatsby before committing suicide.

After the murder, the Buchanans leave town to avoid responsibility for the

events that had occurred. Nick is left to organize the funeral, but finds that few

have any concern for Gatsby. Of Gatsby’s main confidants, only Meyer

Wolfsheim shows a modicum of regret, and few attend the funeral. However,

Nick does find Gatsby’s father, Henry Gatz, and brings him to New York for

the funeral. It is from him that Nick learns the extent of Gatsby’s vision and his

grand plans for self-improvement and achievement.

Thoroughly disgusted with life in New York, Nick decides to return to the

mid-west. Before leaving, Nick sees Tom Buchanan once more. Tom tries to

elicit some sympathy from Nick, thinking that all of his actions were thoroughly

justified. Nick leaves New York, realizing that Gatsby differed from all of his

peers, for he had grand dreams and goals, yet was unable to transcend the

boundaries and limitations that his origins and his past history had given him.