The Great Gatsby Essay, Research Paper

English 1000

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The Great Gatsby

In today?s society, people use money in many different ways. The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, portrays this very effectively. In the novel, Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby are both very wealthy men, but they use their money for very different reasons. The narrator, Nick Carraway, who we must trust, because we take his perspective throughout the novel, draws out the differences between these two men. He also exposes what each of these characters represent in the novel. Tom is the antagonist of the novel. Pleasure motivates him, and he lives his life with luxury and ease. Gatsby on the other hand, is the protagonist in the novel. Even though he may be as rich as Tom, he does not live in elegance for the same reason. All Gatsby really wants is the love of his life, Daisy Buchanan. Knowing that fortune is the only way to win Daisy, he spends his money just to attract Daisy. Basically, Tom is avaricious, and he cares for no one but himself, and in the story he represents the stereotypical pompous rich person, whereas Gatsby represents the people who are dedicated in life to carry out one task, and will go through any means possible to get it.

Tom Buchanan is the primary antagonist in The Great Gatsby. He inherits his fortune from his family, and lives his whole life without working, living in elegance and indulgence, making him a spoiled man. All of Tom?s actions are covetous and his feelings are all for himself. He boasts in front of his guests about his possessions, he says ?I?ve got a nice place here?, with eyes flashing about restlessly (Fitzgerald 7), and even gloats about his mistress, making no attempt to keep his affair secret. ?I want you to meet my girl? Tom insists (24). He shows no concern for the consequences of his actions, because all his life, he hasn?t had to worry about any consequences. Tom shows little affection throughout the novel and shows signs of apprehension only when he sees signs of losing both Myrtle and Daisy. After causing Gatsby?s death, he shows no signs of sorrow or regret for causing his death, only self-pity over the loss of his mistress, Myrtle. Tom is a very violent person. From the beginning, when Nick pays them a visit, Tom is very forceful with him, and this forcefulness comes naturally.

Before I could reply that he was my neighbour [Gatsby] dinner was announced; wedging his tense arm imperatively under mine, Tom Buchanan compelled me from the room as though he were moving a checker to another square. (12)

Tom even breaks Myrtle?s nose without any thought, or any regret. This is an act of pure brutality, not of respect for his wife, because if he respected his wife, he would not be having an affair. At the end of the story, Tom and Daisy leave, so they can leave their problems behind them. Tom does this because he is a nonchalant person, who will not be bothered by the problems he causes. Tom symbolizes the classic, arrogant rich class of society.

Gatsby is the protagonist of the story. He starts young as a poor man and makes his fortune himself. Although it is not clear how he made his fortune, it is evident that he is involved with organized crime.

?This is Slage speaking…?

?Yes?? The name was unfamiliar.

?Hell of a note, isn?t it? Get my wire??

?There haven?t been any wires.?

?Young Parke?s in trouble,? he said rapidly. ?They picked him up when he handed the bonds over the counter. They got a circular from New York giving ?em the numbers just five minutes before. What d?you know about that, heh? You never can tell in these hick towns??

The motivation for making this money is to win his past lover, Daisy Buchanan. After he left her to go to the war, she was romanced by Tom, and eventually married him, because Gatsby didn?t have the wealth to keep her at the time. His later-acquired wealth was made because of a fantasy he created with his return from the war. That fantasy being to make enough money and riches to win back the love of his life, Daisy. His fantasy was symbolized in the story with the green light at the Buchanan home across the bay. Gatsby?s entire struggles in this story are focussed on bringing him and Daisy back together, in a way, bringing back time. ?Can?t repeat the past?? Gatsby cried incredulously. ?Why of course you can!? (111). Gatsby is not a violent person, despite his connection with organized crime, and Nick overlooks the moral significance of Gatsby?s bootlegging, and his association with Meyer Wolfsheim, who apparently rigged the World Series in 1919. When Gatsby is about to meet Daisy for the first time in years, he is more nervous and helpless than a young boy. Because of his motivation, and his commitment, he is affectionate, and generally a more noble person compared to Tom. Gatsby signifies in the novel, the aspiring, the wishful, and the hopeful people of today?s society. He also conveys an image of an obsessive fanatic. The only real affection Nick shows in the novel is towards Gatsby. ?You?re worth the whole damn bunch put together? said Nick (154). He admires his optimism, and his ability to dream and live as if the dream were to come true. This is the reason he overlooks Gatsby?s criminal affiliations.

These two characters, Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby, are very similar in that they are both equally wealthy, however they both have differences that are very significant, and the narrator, Nick, displays these differences very well. Tom lives his life with luxury and ease, without any burdens. Gatsby on the other hand, is the good guy of the novel. All Gatsby really wants is the love of his life, Daisy. Gatsby will go through any means necessary to get this love he so long desires. This is what Nick appreciates about Gatsby – his optimism and determination.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott, The Great Gatsby 1925

New York: Charles Scribner?s Sons, 1953