

To what extent and in what ways is Fitzgerald purely critical of Gatsby?



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Dreams are a large part of "The Great Gatsby", both in the wider sense and in terms of individuals, and Gatsby is the character whose dream is focussed on the most. It is difficult to tell what Fitzgerald truly thinks, due to the fact that he uses Nick as the narrator - meaning the reader finds it hard to separate their feelings. However, by looking at how he presents the characters in the novel, and the society as a whole, we can perhaps see what Fitzgerald thinks about Gatsby's dreams in the novel.

Fitzgerald's views are presented ambiguously in the novel, with the comparison to the rest of society being the main point against the title views, and the presentation of Daisy and materialism perhaps being the main arguments to support the statement in the title. One way in which Fitzgerald shows his views to the reader is in his presentation of Gatsby's dream itself, otherwise known as Daisy. From the beginning of the novel, she is presented by Fitzgerald as a rather annoying, simple character who seems to have very few redeeming qualities about her other than her looks.

From her simple and repeated dialogue "Do you always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it? I always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it", the reader is made to feel that Daisy has very little substance to her character, with the exception of her "low, thrilling" voice. Despite the reader having a screen in front of Fitzgerald's viewpoint in terms of Nick as the narrator, who clearly Fitzgerald intends to show as somewhat drawn to Daisy, we are still able to see that the only characteristics of Daisy's that are praised seem to be superficial.

Therefore, when we are told that this woman has been Gatsby's dream and who he has built his life around for the past five years, it perhaps makes us question whether Fitzgerald is trying to portray Daisy as worthwhile of this dedication. This doubt arises I feel that if Fitzgerald was applauding Gatsby's dream of Daisy, he perhaps may have presented her as a more likeable, intelligent character with qualities that could easily be admired universally.

As a result of this portrayal of Daisy, I believe it shows Fitzgerald to be mainly critical of Gatsby and his dream. However, this could depend on the era that the individual is based in - readers today could find Daisy as more of an annoyance due to the change in women's roles, in that today women are far more independent and take far more responsibility than they did in the 1920's. Daisy's apparent simple nature may therefore annoy modern readers more than in the past as we are less able to understand that this was how women were expected to be in the 1920's.

Nevertheless, even taking these time changes into account I believe that Fitzgerald still intended Daisy to appear perhaps lacking in typical good qualities to highlight a potential point about Gatsby's dream. However, Daisy's apparent lack of appeal as a character could be used by Fitzgerald to portray Gatsby's dream in a better light, if we look from the angle of his loyalty to Daisy. The way that Gatsby has stayed so faithful and loyal to his dream to be with Daisy, despite (in our eyes) the fact that she is not worth it, could show that Fitzgerald is praising his dream as a cause of this admirable quality in Gatsby's character.

This would go against the statement that Fitzgerald is purely critical of his dreams, as it would imply that they bring out the best in people. However, the other interpretation of Gatsby's loyalty could support the title statement, as Fitzgerald at times implies that Gatsby is foolish for holding on to the memory of Daisy, and building her up to such a high status in his mind. An example of this is when Fitzgerald writes "and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath".

Although it is implied that it is Gatsby who says the words, I still believe it shows Fitzgerald's dislike of Gatsby's attitude towards Daisy by making the phrase so exaggerated - it implies that he is blinded by his past perceptions of her, in addition to the actual phrase that seems to imply Gatsby is foolish for putting all his hopes into someone who could leave him. I believe that in this way Fitzgerald is criticising Gatsby's dream because of how he holds it in his mind and how it affects him. Another aspect that could show that Fitzgerald is critical is how he links Gatsby's dream of Daisy to material objects and status.

Throughout the novel, he creates the impression that these two things are intertwined in Gatsby's mind with his dream of being with Daisy. He describes her voice as "full of money", and shows off his house to her, lingering on his wardrobe with the "pile of shirts [...] in many coloured disarray". The first quote shows how Gatsby links Daisy with money in his mind, and as a result of this Fitzgerald makes the reader question whether it is really Daisy he wants or if it is the social status that she represents to him.

The close link to materialism in his dream can also be seen in the section where Gatsby shows Daisy his shirts, where he is literally trying to prove himself to her using what he owns. They are even described as a "rich heap", which I believe could be a play on words by Fitzgerald - obviously "rich" in terms of the colours of the shirts, but also literally "rich" as perhaps this is what the shirts mean to the characters. The description is also given as a list - the frequent repetition of the word "and" in the paragraph also implies that Gatsby is showing off as much of his material worth as he can.

I think both of these things are a criticism of Gatsby's dream by Fitzgerald, as it seems as if he is trying to say that this love he has had for Daisy all these years is really fuelled by status and money - a criticism because it therefore becomes even less of a worthwhile dream. It also appears to be critical as these links would imply that Gatsby has spent all this time chasing after a somewhat empty dream, as he has money and a certain amount of status in his community. It could also give the impression that Fitzgerald feels that Gatsby may never feel that his dream has been completely fulfilled if it is status that he wishes to have.

This point could be linked to Fitzgerald's overall views about dreams in America at that point, as he could be trying to say that these people who think that material objects and status will make them happy (perhaps those people who were or are enticed by a vision of the American Dream) will never be truly happy as there will always be somebody richer, more popular or at a higher status than themselves. If the reader links this point to Fitzgerald's feelings about Gatsby's dream, it would indicate that he is critical of it for the most part.

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A second quote that could show that Fitzgerald is critical of this intense build-up of dreams is on page 93; " No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart". I believe that this quote is Fitzgerald telling the reader that what is there in reality can never match our dreams - in Gatsby's case, that the real life Daisy can never live up to the image he has stored of her in his heart and mind, the realistic approach being represented by the " fire" and " freshness".

Again, I believe that this is also referring to dreams in general, and how it is so often the case that dreams are not always so amazing in reality, and can often disappoint - and could perhaps be a specific reference to the " American Dream" and how, for many people, this is not as amazing as it is built up to be when achieved. This seems critical from Fitzgerald, both of Gatsby's dream and of dreams universally as he appears to be making the point that dreams are often built up and aimed too high - perhaps giving false hope.

Although there are many aspects throughout the book that indicate Fitzgerald is solely critical of Gatsby's dream, by giving us the comparison to the rest of the East Coast society, parts of the novel seem to be suggesting that this is not the case. Throughout the novel, the residents of the East and West Eggs have been presented by Fitzgerald as very materialistic - living for objects, and trivial gossip, rather than people or feelings.

Mrs Wilson describes how she knew Mr Wilson wasn't right for her when she discovered he had " borrowed somebody's best suit" to get married in - showing the focus on objects rather than feelings in the society. Therefore,

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amongst the gossiping and whispering (for example at Gatsby's parties), to have Gatsby focused on someone and loyal to someone for an extended period of time makes for a very refreshing comparison. Fitzgerald is therefore showing to the reader how having dreams can make you a better person, and almost more real in comparison to the rest of the society, which has been portrayed as somewhat fake by Fitzgerald.

In this sense, it would go against the statement that Fitzgerald is purely critical of Gatsby's dream, as this seem to be a positive side to his dreams. Another element of the novel that could be seen to contradict the title statement is also a comparison between Gatsby and the rest of the East Coast society. We are shown throughout the novel how many of the residents do not seem to care about anything, anyone or consequences of their actions.

An example of this is Jordan, who confesses to Nick that she feels she can avoid being careful whilst driving because " other people will keep out of" her way. This shows a disregard for the consequences of her actions and of other people and can be seen to be representative of many of the upper class people on the East Coast - expecting everyone else to comply with the rules and regulations but disregarding them themselves. Again, in this way Gatsby is definitely a contrast - he obviously cares about something, which is the first main difference that I believe Fitzgerald wants us to see.

In addition to this, Gatsby has been shown to think very carefully about the consequences of his actions - for example when he re-enters Nick's house after Daisy arrives to make it appear as if he has not been waiting. Whilst

this could be seen as somewhat calculating, I believe Fitzgerald intended it as another comparison to the rest of society, as it again uplifting for the reader to see that at least one character is concerned about the effect his actions might have on others.

This once more shows that the effect of Gatsby having a bigger dream and ambition in his life has led to him seemingly being portrayed as a better person. This aspect of the comparison would also contradict the title statement, as to me it seems that Fitzgerald wished for this positive difference to be shown - meaning that he would not be purely critical of Gatsby's dreams. A view that Fitzgerald seems to put across to contradict the belief that he is purely critical is when he links dreaming and dreams to vitality and life.

More than once in the novel he describes Gatsby in terms of the life Daisy seems to give him - describing the "colossal vitality" of his dream and the two of them as "possessed by intense life". Both of these quotes seem to imply that Fitzgerald dreaming is natural, and is almost what makes you human. More specifically, the way that Fitzgerald implies that reaching his dream has given Gatsby life makes it seem as if we are completed by our dreams and that finally having Daisy in his life has completed Gatsby.

Considering that Gatsby has already what many people might dream of - a lot of money and a mansion, the fact that it has taken his sentimental dream based on feelings and love to give him life seems a very positive view from Fitzgerald. It also links to the earlier comparison between Gatsby and the rest of the East Coast society that we view, as this clearly shows that Gatsby

puts more emphasis on emotions and feelings than many of the other people.

These quotes from the book could possibly be taken as negative, as it could perhaps be seen as somewhat pathetic that Gatsby relies on somebody else (and, as mentioned earlier, particularly Daisy) to complete his happiness, meaning that Fitzgerald would perhaps view Gatsby as foolish. However, I believe that the way Fitzgerald has tried to make Gatsby's dreams and feelings seem more natural are a direct pointer to how dreaming is a part of human nature, and as such, he is not criticising Gatsby's dream at this point.

Due to Fitzgerald's seeming disregard for Daisy in the novel, I believe that he is critical of Gatsby's dream to be with her. However, I believe the other aspects of his presentation linking to dreams in a wider context prevent this view from seeming as if he is purely critical of it - the way that he suggests dreams are important to human nature and separate Gatsby from the crowd imply that Fitzgerald finds dreaming admirable, to an extent.

For him to be purely critical I believe that he would have to feel purely critical of dreaming in general, which I believe not to be the case. Therefore, I believe the conclusion that Fitzgerald is critical to an extent is far more feasible and takes into account the more positive aspects of dreaming that he seems to incorporate and believe in.