

# Gatsbyfitzgerald



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## Dreaming The Impossible Dream:

An autobiographical portrayal of F. Scott Fitzgerald as Jay Gatsby, in *The Great Gatsby*

Frances Scott Key Fitzgerald, born September 24, 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota, is seen today as one of the true great American novelists. Although he lived a life filled with alcoholism, despair, and lost-love, he managed to create the ultimate love story and seemed to pinpoint the American Dream in his classic novel, *The Great Gatsby*. In the novel, Jay Gatsby is the epitome of the self-made man, in which he dictates his entire life to climbing the social ladder in order to gain wealth, to ultimately win the love of a woman: something that proves to be unattainable. As it turns out, Gatsbys excessive extravagance and love of money, mixed with his obsession for a womans love, is actually the autobiographical portrayal of Fitzgerald.

While attending Princeton University, Fitzgerald struggled immensely with his grades and spent most of his time catering to his social needs. He became quite involved with the Princeton Triangle Club, an undergraduate club which wrote and produced a lively musical comedy each fall, and performed it during the Christmas vacation in a dozen major cities across the country. Fitzgerald was also elected to Cottage, which was one of the big four clubs at Princeton. Its lavish weekend parties in impressive surroundings, which attracted girls from New York, Philadelphia and beyond, may well have provided the first grain of inspiration for Fitzgeralds portrayal of Jay Gatsbys fabulous parties on Long Island (Meyers, 27).

Although Fitzgerald was a social butterfly while at Princeton, he never had any girlfriends. However, at a Christmas dance in St. Paul, MN during his sophomore year, he met Ginevra King, a sophisticated sixteen-year-old who was visiting her roommate, and immediately fell in love with her. Although Scott loved Ginevra to the point of infatuation, she was too self-absorbed to notice. Their one-sided romance persisted for the next two years. Fitzgerald would send hundreds of letters, but Ginevra, who thought them to be clever but unimportant, destroyed them in 1917. The following year, Ginevra sent Scott a letter that announced her marriage to a naval ensign. Just before Fitzgerald was to meet with Ginevra after a twenty-year absence, he proclaimed to his daughter, with mixed feelings of regret and nostalgia: She was the first girl I ever loved and have faithfully avoided seeing her up to this moment to keep the illusion perfect, because she ended up by throwing me over with the most supreme boredom and indifference (Meyers, 30).

Although heartbroken at the time, Fitzgerald answered Yeats crucial question-- Does the imagination dwell the most / Upon a woman lost or a woman won? -- by using his lost love as imaginative inspiration. For in his 1925 masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, he recreated the elusive, unattainable Ginevra as the beautiful and elegant Daisy Fay Buchanan.

Throughout the novel, Fitzgerald described Daisy as an almost disembodied voice which, Gatsby realized at the end, was full of money. Fitzgerald wrote, her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who

had cared for her found difficult to forget (Fitzgerald, 14). It should be noted that, Gatsbys ability, like Fitzgeralds, to keep that illusion perfect sustains his self-deceptive and ultimately self-destructive quest, with the help of his own fabulous money, to win Daisy back from her husband (Meyers, 30).

Although Ginevra King was Fitzgeralds first true love, she certainly was not his last. In July 1918, while stationed in Montgomery, Alabama with the military, Scott met a gracious, soft-voiced girl named Zelda Sayre at a country club dance. Scott recalled that night that, she let her long hair hang down loose and wore a frilly dress that made her look younger than eighteen. She came from a prominent though not wealthy family and had just graduated from Sidney Lanier High School (Meyers, 42).

Despite Zeldas striking beauty and strong personality, she had numerous flaws that were impossible to hide. She was often rude, selfish, sexually promiscuous, and lacked restraint. As well, Zeldas family history of mental illness and suicide would one day claim her. Fitzgerald was well aware of of Zeldas character flaws, but found them to be provocative and exciting, for she was, to Scotts delight, an inspiring example of the postwar modern girl (Meyers, 44). Fitzgerald was excited-- and sometimes tormented --by other mens love for Zelda, which enhanced her worth in his eyes. This precise uncanny feeling is felt by Jay Gatsby towards Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald writes, It excited (Jay) too, that many men had already loved Daisy--it increased her value in his eyes (Fitzgerald, 141).

Fitzgerald was very surprised and hurt to realize, despite her sexual responsiveness, that Zelda would not marry him before he had achieved financial success. In *The Great Gatsby*, this is the same reason that Daisy rejected Jay Gatsby (before he became an extremely wealthy man.) At that time, women from the middle to wealthy classes simply did not marry men from the lower-class. However, when Scott sold the movie rights for his first novel for the vast sum of \$2, 500, he expressed his generosity and love towards Zelda, and tried to convince her to marry him, by spending the money on gifts for her. This proved to be the deciding factor for Zelda to marry Scott.

F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda Sayre were married on April 3, 1920. Over the next four years, Scott and Zelda managed to maintain their unstable marriage despite numerous problems. Scott completely succumbed to alcoholism, and Zeldas odd behaviour often got her into trouble. She would drink excessively, and then expose herself in public. After having their first child, a girl named Scottie, Zelda went on to have three abortions. Their lives in shambles, the Fitzgeralds took whatever money they had and sailed off to France in May 1924, where Scott began to write *The Great Gatsby*.

During the summer of 1924, on the beach at St.-Raphael, Zelda met a handsome French naval aviator named Edouard Joze. He was dark, athletic, and romantic, everything that Scott wasnt. As Scott worked intensely on his novel, Zelda became bored and restless, and fell completely in love with

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Jozan. Although the affair never lasted very long (as Jozan ended up fleeing), it had an extremely negative effect on Scott, for while writing *The Great Gatsby* Scott learned of (Zeldas) affair with Jozan, just as Tom learns of Daisys love for and affair with Gatsby. Tom reclaims Daisy from Gatsby just as Scott reclaimed Zelda from Jozan (Meyers, 126). Fitzgerald had now managed to weave Ginevra Kings beauty as well as Zeldas corruption into his deceiving portrait of Daisy Buchanan.

Great Neck, along the coast of Long Island, where Fitzgerald lived between 1922-24, inspired the setting of *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgeralds biographer, Andrew Turnbull, noted that while Fitzgerald was living there, his magic word was egg. People that Scott liked were referred to as good eggs or colossal eggs, and people he did not like were considered bad eggs or unspeakable eggs. Fitzgeralds favourite slang expressions were converted in the novel into the more well-to-do East Egg (based on Manhasset) where Tom and Daisy lived, and the generally more simple West Egg (based on Great Neck) where Nick lived in a cottage on Gatsbys estate. Even today, if you stand at night on Kings Point on the tip of Great Neck peninsula, and look across Manhasset Bay, you can still see-- as Gatsby did --the promising lights winking on the opposite shore (Meyers, 126).

While living in the Great Neck area, Fitzgeralds closest friend was the aristocratic war hero and polo star, Tommy Hitchcock, whom he often saw playing in championship matches on Long Island. Born into a wealthy, upper-class family in 1900, Tommy went to war while still in his teens, and after

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having his plane shot down in German territory, escaped to Switzerland by jumping off a moving train. He earned numerous awards for his bravery. After the war, Tommy attended Harvard and, like Jay Gatsby, spent a term or two at Oxford. Fitzgerald idolized Tommy, who possessed many of the qualities he himself desired. Tommy had the great wealth, social class and fine breeding of Gerald Murphy (whom Scott would meet in 1925) combined with the good looks, athletic ability and heroic war record of Ernest Hemingway (Meyers, 103). Fitzgerald held Tommy Hitchcock in such high regard, that he inspired Scott's portrait of Tom Buchanan, Daisy's husband in *The Great Gatsby*.

Fitzgerald gives a tremendously visual portrait of Tom's physical stature when he states that Buchanan's clothes could not hide the enormous power of that body--he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage--a cruel body (Fitzgerald, 12).

Jay Gatsby, like Fitzgerald, was fascinated by money and power, and impressed by glamour and beauty. However, they both knew that they could never fully belong to this prosperous and secure world, and that the goal of joining this careless class was an illusion. Fitzgerald's novel, shows what happens to people who pursue illusory American dreams, and how society (which they have rejected) fails to sustain them in their desperate hour. *The Great Gatsby* embodies the failure of romantic idealism. The hero achieves a

great deal, but he loses the individual qualities that defined him at the beginning of the book and ends, as he lived, essentially alone (Meyers, 343).

One of the dominant themes of *The Great Gatsby* was surely one of the prevailing themes of Scott Fitzgerald's life. Jay Gatsby became love-stricken and despite rejection, dedicated his entire life to winning back that elusive love, disregarding everything along the way that was moral, despite realizing at the end that reaching his goal was unachievable.

Scott Fitzgerald had the same dream as Gatsby, for he yearned to join the ranks of the upper-class and accordingly obtain the love that had escaped him. It was an unfortunate outcome, one of hopelessness and despair. In reference to the theme, it is pointed out that, in all truth. . . *The Great Gatsby* is about something a long way removed from (Gatsby's) legend and popular reputation: it is about wanting better bread than can be made out of wheat and then finding each loaf rotten with decay, about the corruption beneath the glittering surface, about the soul of man in a society bent on dissolution (Priestly, 13).

In Fitzgerald's description of Jay Gatsby, he has courageously explored and revealed his own character, leaving us not a glamorous legend, but a vivid record of self-examination. Fitzgerald's description of Gatsby's tenacious character and lust for wealth and women was so real and graphic, that it could only be expressed by someone who had actually endured such feelings. For in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses fiction to tell his own story-- reflecting on the superior and brutal qualities of the rich and on the impossibility of becoming one of them (Meyers, 123).



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