

How does fitzgerald tell the story in chapter 2 of the great gatsby

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In chapter 2 Tom takes Nick to meet Myrtle, his lover, in the Valley of Ashes, where her home is. They all then go to New York, to the apartment bought by Tom for Myrtle, and Myrtle organises a 'party', during which she argues with Tom, which ends with him punching her. The purpose of this chapter is to show what Tom Buchanan is like, and how he acts towards other people and his money. Also, the reader is prepared to meet Gatsby as the party scene continues to build an aura of mystery and excitement around Gatsby, who has yet to make a full appearance in the novel.

Here, Gatsby emerges as a mysterious subject of gossip. He is extremely well known, but no one seems to have any verifiable information about him. There is only one narrative voice in this chapter, which is Nick. The fact that Fitzgerald has made him a participant first person narrator, shown by the use of personal pronouns such as, 'I think, created the effect of an unreliable narrator. The reader only finds out things in the story as and when Nick does, and we also get his point of view on everything, 'stretched tight over her rather wide hips'.

The reader makes conclusions on the other characters based on what Fitzgerald writes that Nick thinks. We are made to think that Tom is quite short tempered and aggressive, 'his determination to have my company bordered on violence'. Because this is what we read, we characterise Tom Buchanan as an aggressive person. Fitzgerald's descriptions of the settings in chapter 2 also help to tell the story. Two main settings feature in this chapter; the valley of ashes and Myrtle's apartment.

Fitzgerald describes the valley of ashes as ‘ a certain desolate area of land’ and ‘ a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens’. The valley of ashes is significant in this chapter, and in the whole novel, as it symbolises the huge contrast between the rich and the poor in America, which can be seen from the contrast with the Buchanan’s mansion in chapter 1. It is ‘ about halfway between West Egg and New York’ where rich people live, and is where the ashes produced by the rich people living in New York are dumped, making the poor suffer the effects.

It could be interpreted that Scott Fitzgerald had used the valley of ashes to foreshadows future events in the novel, which conclude with other people (Gatsby and Mr Wilson) having to deal with the effects caused by the rich (Tom and Daisy Buchanan). Myrtle’s apartment is the opposite to the valley of ashes as it is garish and loud. Myrtle is cheap and from the working class, and so has no taste. This is reinforced through Scott Fitzgerald’s description of the apartment bought for her by Tom Buchanan, so that he can conduct his affair with her.

Fitzgerald describes everything as small, ‘ a small living-room, a small dining-room, a small bedroom’. As it’s only intended for two people, Myrtle and Tom, it should only be small, but this is also a hint from Fitzgerald that Tom doesn’t think very much of Myrtle as he don’t spend his money on her, which he was freely spending in Yale, but on himself. Nick says (through Fitzgerald) that the apartment ‘ was crowded to the doors’ in the living room, with ‘ a set of tapestried furniture, entirely too large for it’.

This suggests that Myrtle wants to put on an act of being rich and wealthy, and so copies their styles but with no taste and so ruins the effect. She is trying to hide her social class, and her apartment is used by Fitzgerald to highlight an extreme, and unsuccessful version of what Gatsby is doing with his house, and therefore used as a narrative technique to reinforce both Myrtle's and Gatsby's facades. The chronological time and narrative time are generally the same in this chapter, and Nick seems to be talking afterwards, about his experiences and of meeting Myrtle.

The narrative is retrospective, we can tell this from the use of the past tense, 'the interior was unprosperous and bare', which has the effect on the way the story is told, as Fitzgerald makes it seem as if Nick is recounting the events to the reader personally, drawing us into the story. Fitzgerald has included the events of Nick meeting Myrtle in the valley of ashes and then going to her apartment in New York which contrasts to the valley of ashes and has a 'party'. The fact that Fitzgerald writes that Tom takes Nick to meet Myrtle in her own house, in front of her husband, reinforces Fitzgerald's point that the rich can do whatever they want, and that Tom abuses the power he gets from his money.

Another interesting event that takes place in this chapter is when Tom hits Myrtle in an argument, 'Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand'. This highlights not only Tom's physical strength, but his short temper and aggressiveness described in chapter 1. Tom treats others how he wishes and even afterwards, the other people at the party try to protect the couch rather than helping Myrtle, which

highlights Fitzgerald's criticism of society, which is the moral behind this novel.

The rounded character of Myrtle Wilson is introduced in this chapter. Fitzgerald (through the narrative voice of Nick) describes her as carrying 'her flesh sensuously' and having no 'gleam of beauty'. The very fact that Fitzgerald has chosen to name her as Myrtle, which is the name of a garish purple shrub, which is often seen as ugly, symbolises her personality and character, in comparison to the name of Daisy, which suggests beauty, purity and innocence.

There are also some flat characters in this chapter, such as Myrtle's sister, Catherine, who gossips to Nick about Daisy being a Catholic, who 'doesn't believe in divorce', and also Gatsby being 'a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's'. It could be said that Fitzgerald has only included Catherine in this chapter to show the contrast in social class and the vulgarity that the working class showed in their speech and actions compared to the upper classes. This is actually something that, later on in the novel, Gatsby tries to rid himself of to fit in with Daisy and her social upbringing.