

Old money and new money in "the great gatsby"

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The acclaimed novel *The Great Gatsby* was written by the American author F. Scott Fitzgerald in the year 1925. Throughout time, the book has been recognized for accurately representing the Roaring Twenties' society in the United States, a point in history where economy grew and the country began to focus on spending money and in social hierarchy. In order to represent this mentality throughout the book, high-class society is divided in new money and old money with the aim of exemplifying two contrasting lifestyles. Particularly, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses the characters of Daisy Buchanan and Jay Gatsby to represent how social differences between "new money" and "old money" affects the values of an individual. On one side, the author uses the character of Jay Gatsby to represent how economic corruption can lead to satisfaction, even if this means losing authenticity along the way.

In the novel, Gatsby represents new money, where he is seen as inferior due to the fact that he wasn't born rich and has had a recent taste of a wealthy lifestyle. Thus, Gatsby constructs a new elite identity based on old money by saying he inherited his wealth, when in reality, he sells illegal alcohol in order to hide his poor background. Moreover, Gatsby uses his loved one, Daisy Buchanan, and her materialistic needs as the justification as to why he changes his identity to become a rich and corrupt man. This can be illustrated towards the end of the book:

He might have despised himself, for he had certainly taken her under false pretenses. I don't mean that he had traded on his phantom millions, but he had deliberately given Daisy a sense of security; he let her believe that he

was a person from much the same stratum as herself - that he was fully able to take care of her. (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 149)

Here, it is seen that Gatsby might have hatred towards his new identity, yet he has accomplished to be in the same stratum as Daisy, allowing him to finally be with her. Particularly, the author uses different punctuation marks to divide his ideas, creating a reflective and sincere tone that allows the reader to further understand Gatsby's perspective and his relevance in the whole situation. Overall, Fitzgerald uses Gatsby to show the extremes people would take in order to socially fit in, such as breaking the law and losing their authenticity; but ultimately, by accomplishing to please others, Gatsby pleases himself.

On the other side, Fitzgerald uses Daisy Buchanan to portray how greed and superficiality can lead to success, even if this means downgrading one's human value. Daisy represents old money, as well as all the social benefits and luxuries this social status had. Nonetheless, the character lives in a state of unfulfillment due to the fact that the man that provides her this lifestyle doesn't value her true self. Daisy's mentality can be illustrated towards the beginning of the book: " ' I'm glad she's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool - that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.' " (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 17) By saying this, Daisy is implying that in order to be happy, a woman needs to be beautiful and a fool. Because her husband, Tom Buchanan, is cheating on her, Daisy believes that if she were a fool, she wouldn't be aware of the infidelity and would joyously continue to live her wealthy life. Likewise, her beauty is what made Tom want to be with her,

allowing her to have the stigma and control that wealth provides. With the preciseness Fitzgerald uses, the reader understands that Daisy's mindset is indifferent towards change, implicitly stating that she would rather superficially live in a high social status where she's looked up to than having a life where her feelings, opinions and value are taken into consideration.

Despite the contrast that is given between both socioeconomic groups, Fitzgerald uses the characters of Gatsby and Daisy to illustrate the overall moral failings of a society driven by wealth in the 1920s. Both protagonists certainly represent distinctive values due to their background differences. Nevertheless, they share predominant values of betrayal that influence most of their actions. For instance, Daisy and Gatsby's biggest disloyalty was having an affair while Daisy was still married to Tom, where their selfish desires clouded their moral reason. Here, neither Gatsby nor Daisy feel somewhat guilty about the infidelity, representing precisely their lack of interest towards the consequences their actions may bring. In Daisy's case, she led Gatsby into believing that she only loved him and that they would be together, despite the fact that she was married to Tom Buchanan.

Nonetheless, she decided to turn her back on Gatsby and return to her rich husband, and once Gatsby died, she didn't even attend to his funeral.

Gatsby, on the other hand, didn't only betray his country's law but also himself. He could've been a very successful man in his life with great accomplishments. However, he lost all of his potential, and even his life, by following Daisy's caprices rather than his.

After thoroughly analyzing and understanding the social stratification and its implications within *The Great Gatsby*, it can be concluded that Daisy's high-class society is motivated by wealth, while low-class descendants such as Gatsby are driven by emotion and human value due to their lack of capital stimulus. As a result, none of the characters accomplished to be neither successful nor satisfied, contributing to Fitzgerald's overall message: an immoral lifestyle will lead you to an unhappy and tragic ending.