

The unpleasant tom buchanan

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Tom Buchanan is an important figure throughout the course of *The Great Gatsby*, and is used as Fitzgerald's symbolic representation of the moral and emotional decadence of the era. Tom forms part of Fitzgerald's social critique of the upper classes, and reflects the perceived lack of values beneath the "glittering façade" of the rich. Tom Buchanan is made repulsive to the readership through his violent aggression, buttressed in his vast wealth and his maltreatment of all those around him, including his wife. Thus, Fitzgerald ensures that the readers' sympathies lie with the tragic hero of the novel - Gatsby.

Nick's speculation about how Tom seemed to be constantly seeking "the dramatic turbulence of some irrevocable football game" presents Tom as a restless character whose endless demands are unable to ever be fully satisfied. Nick personification of Tom's "supercilious mouth" and "shinning arrogant eyes" echoes Tom's innate sense of superiority. Fitzgerald's lexical choice of "aggressively", "dominance" and "power" repulse the reader by portraying him as overassertive, forceful and conceited.

Moreover, the fact that "not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body" seems to denote Tom's barely restrained mental attitude. For example, during the dinner party Tom unexpectedly declares "Civilisation's going to pieces", broke out Tom violently... 'The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be- will be utterly submerged". What Tom is reproducing here are racist ideas echoing the superiority of the white race. Fitzgerald's use of aposiopesis makes Tom appear inarticulate, and unable to express his thoughts in a calm and civilised manner. Tom's attitude of hereditary supremacy places him entirely

in opposition to the self-made man. Thus Fitzgerald is able to juxtapose Gatsby's "romantic readiness" with Tom Buchanan's "complacency", and hence allow the reader's preferences to be drawn to Gatsby.

Tom is made particularly repulsive by his blindness to the truth about himself. Whilst he feels he is entitled to have "some woman in New York", he is outraged by the thought of Daisy having an affair with a "Mr Nobody from Nowhere". Tom's double standards reveal him to be a hypocrite, but more importantly, Tom appears to be more outraged at who Daisy is having an affair with, rather than the fact that she is having an affair in the first place. Fitzgerald creates sympathy for Daisy by revealing her exuberance and her "glowing and singing" voice to be merely a mask to hide her true feelings. When she confides to Nick that the "best thing a girl can be" is a "beautiful little fool", the reader glimpses the effect of Tom's multiple affairs, which have caused Daisy to adopt a veneer of shallow cynicism. Tom's repulsive behaviour seems to justify Daisy and Gatsby's relationship, which seems to offer Daisy the scintilla or romance she is unable to acquire from her marriage.

Tom's sense of self-righteousness is once again demonstrated in his attitude towards Gatsby. Tom repeatedly mocks Gatsby, calling his car a "circus wagon" and denouncing the vulgarity of his parties. The class division between the 'old money' and the 'Nouveau Riche,' represented by the physical and psychic division between West Egg and East Egg, remains a constant source of tension throughout the novel. Fitzgerald seems to be criticizing the fact that in post-war America, people are valued by their

material possessions- and in Gatsby's case, a "pink suit". Gatsby's inability to break into the upper classes is largely due to the whimsical actions of Tom Buchanan, who merely "smashed up" his dream and "then retreated back into [his] money" and "vast carelessness". Tom's inherent prejudice and ease at which he crushes Gatsby's dream with a simple "short, deft movement" can be therefore seen as the measure of the moral decay of the 1920s itself, as the novel can be seen as a microcosmic representation of the greater American Dream.

In conclusion, Tom Buchanan's unpleasantness stems from his vast sense of superiority and wealth, which has created a moral void in his life. Tom characterises the decadence of the upper classes, and uses his social status to enable him to carry out his misdeeds, uncommitted to any code of ethics. Tom's concerns for the decline of civilisation are somewhat ironic, as his own actions can be seen as the measure of the decline itself. Fitzgerald suggests that American society was far from egalitarian, and instead, people like the Buchanans continued to live "safe and proud; above the hot struggles of the poor".