

Love theme in the great gatsby and to the lighthouse

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Both the novels *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald and *To the Lighthouse* by Woolf explore the theme of love in great depth. This is most clearly seen through the various marriages within the books. While both authors presents marriages which are not perfect, they differ in their idea of love as Fitzgerald hints to a more free approach to love, suggesting that you can love more than one person. Whereas Woolf seems to express the idea that you commit yourself to one person and work through the issues.

Both authors presents marriages which have some form of distance however remain constant and give stability to the characters. In *The Great Gatsby*, Tom and Daisy Buchanan's marriage is full of distance made abundantly clear when Daisy seemingly reveals the cracks in her marriage to Nick when she mentions that her daughter " was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where." This therefore would seem to suggest that despite Daisy's outward happiness and luxurious lifestyle she is actually quite depressed by her current situation. Saying this, Fitzgerald chooses to follow up her serious complaint with " an absolute smirk" which " asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged." Fitzgerald does this to indicate that despite Daisy's performance, she is somehow content to remain with Tom as part of the " secret society" of the extremely wealthy. Therefore, this shows how Daisy is willing to look past some of Tom ' indiscretions' as he provides her with the stability of high status and a good image.

Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf presents a distant and stable marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. This distance can be seen due to Mr.

Ramsay's pursuit of intellectual success and truth and Mrs. Ramsay's nature to soothe others. This conflict is seen when Woolf mentions that Mr. Ramsay was enraged by the "folly of women's minds" as Mrs. Ramsay "made his children hope what was utterly out of the question, in effect, told lies." This suggests that it is Mr. Ramsay's belief that everyone, especially his children, should be given the truth no matter what. In contrast, Woolf writes that Mrs. Ramsay found that the pursuit of truth with "such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings...was...an outrage of human decency." Therefore, this major difference in personalities created a distance between the two characters. Saying this, Woolf still presents the relationship as being unquestionably stable. She does this by showing the mutual support they both provide for each other in some way. For instance, Mrs. Ramsay gives Mr. Ramsay the sympathy he craves, seen when Woolf writes that "[i]t was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius." For Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay saves her from the fear of isolation and loneliness. This is seen when Mrs. Ramsay thinks about the men at the lighthouse and states "how would you like to be shut up for a whole month at a time." Woolf writes this to serve as a kind of immediate threat Mrs. Ramsay is giving her daughters which suggests her own fears of unmarried solitude.

Where the novels diverge in their treatment of love is the idea of the ability or acceptance that someone is capable of loving more than one person. Fitzgerald has free approach to love, seen in how the character Daisy clearly loves both Tom and Gatsby. This is exemplified clearly when Daisy states that "I did love him once—but I loved you too" when Gatsby tries to get her

to tell Tom that she never loved him. Fitzgerald also shows how Tom loves Daisy as, despite all his various affairs including the one he had with Myrtle, Tom also goes back to Daisy. This is seen when Tom says himself that he goes “ off on a spree and makes a fool of [himself], but.. always come[s] back” as in his heart he “ love[s] her all the time.” Therefore, Fitzgerald presents his readers with two characters who have affairs and unfaithful yet come together in the end, their marriage constant while everything is ephemeral.

While Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay’s relationship is also constant, there is never a suggestion or idea of infidelity in the minds of either characters. This is seen when Woolf discusses how Mrs. Ramsay seeks “ something more, though she did not know, could not think what it was that she wanted” from her husband. This shows that Mrs. Ramsay’s feminine ambiguity about her needs from her spouse results in her being unable to forcefully demand companionship and connection from her husband, however Mrs. Ramsay is content with their marriage.

Another great example of this is the marriage between Paul and Minta Rayley in *To the Lighthouse*. Their relationship is not a very intimate one at all as both characters are distinctively different. Woolf makes this clear when she mentions that Paul “ was withered, drawn; she flamboyant, careless.” The distance in their marriage is made apparent when Woolf discusses how they “ were “ in love” no longer; no, he had taken up with another woman” but also how “ Minta had described her gratefully, almost admiringly.” This indicates that Paul’s infidelity did not upset Minta, in fact she was almost

pleased about it as it got him out of her hair. Therefore, Woolf is showing the reader a marriage which is lacking passion but yet still strong. This is supported when she writes that their marriage was “[f]ar from breaking up” as they were “ excellent friends, obviously.” This once again hints at Woolf’s belief that marriage is an alliance rather than an act of passionate love, and that love itself is not as passionate as one would expect in strong stable relationships.

Fitzgerald has a slightly different opinion on love as his characters Tom and Daisy can be seen to be driven by passion. Both characters have affairs during the course of the novel yet still remain constant. This is made most obvious at the Plaza Hotel when Gatsby forces the two to confront their feelings where Daisy says that she “ never loved [Tom].” Fitzgerald uses this scene to show that despite the dysfunction of their marriage, Tom and Daisy seem to both seek solace in happy early memories. This is exemplified when Tom remembers how he “ carried [Daisy] from the Punch Bowl to keep [her] shoes dry” with a “ husky tenderness in his tone.” Fitzgerald chooses to mention the “ husky tenderness” of Tom’s voice as it contrasts from the usually brutish and unkind man he presents for most of the novel to show the sincerity of the moment. Furthermore, Fitzgerald shows the reckless passion between the two once again when he describes them as “ conspiring” and “ careless” despite the recent deaths of their lovers. This also shows that despite causing disasters and “[smashing] up things” Tom and Daisy stayed together. This reiterates that fact that, despite all the passion they have resulting in reckless behaviour, their marriage is still

important to both of them, since it reassures their status as old money aristocracy and brings stability to their lives. This is seen when Nick observes that they “ weren’t happy...and yet they weren’t unhappy either.”

Thus, it can be seen how both Fitzgerald and Woolf explore the theme of love in their novels *The Great Gatsby* and *To the Lighthouse*. Both authors present marriages which have distance in them however remain constant. This is seen in the case of Tom and Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* and Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* as both provide stability for each other. Their treatment of love differs, however, when it comes to passion as Fitzgerald has a more free approach to love and imbues passion into his characters and their relationships. Whereas Woolf presents marriages as almost business-like alliances which lack passion yet remain strong. This contrast is clearly seen with Tom and Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* and Paul and Minta in *To the Lighthouse*, however both marriages are long-lasting.