

The great gatsby presentation

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Wealth and social class permeate much of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby' and 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz'. Set during the roaring twenties when many people had newly accumulated wealth after the war, both texts seek to explore and satirise the complexities of wealth and social class. They particularly focus on how far people may go to fit into a social class or protect their fortune. Despite 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz' being set within the fantasy genre, elements of Fitzgerald's own life run as undercurrents throughout both texts.

Fitzgerald's life features heavily in the texts, be it through the characterisation of Nick and Gatsby or the underlying references to his personal experiences. The experiences of the main protagonists' form parallels with Fitzgerald's interactions with the wealthy, both at Princeton and Great Neck and in his relationship with Zelda. 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz' satirises the exuberant wealth experienced by Fitzgerald when visiting a Princeton classmate. 'The Great Gatsby' on the other hand, is more reliant on aspects of Fitzgerald's own life which forms the emotional foundation of the novel.

Gatsby's relationship with Daisy mirrors Fitzgerald's turbulent relationship with Zelda who much like Daisy, was regarded as being incredibly materialistic. Gatsby can therefore be seen as representing Fitzgerald's pursuit of sufficient wealth to support an aristocratic love interest. He does this to the detriment of his artistic integrity which he compromised by writing short stories to fund Zelda's opulent lifestyle. This is mirrored by Gatsby compromising his integrity and personal worth by bootlegging and lying

about being the 'son of some wealthy people in the Middle-West', in order to please Daisy and hopefully gain acceptance.

He fails in both these areas. In integrating elements of his personal life, Fitzgerald may be implying that loving someone of a different social class comes with compromises and that one may lose sight of who they are in the process. 'The Great Gatsby' by virtue of its representations of wealth and class can be seen as a running criticism of the American Dream and America's obsession with wealth amidst the hedonistic culture of the 1920's. The American Dream had originally been founded on the notion that anyone, irrespective of their background could achieve anything in the 'land of opportunity' if they worked hard enough.

Fitzgerald however, believed that the American Dream was just an 'illusion' and that it had been corrupted by the of pursuit wealth. He consistently challenged the idea of the achievability of the American Dream in 'The Great Gatsby'. The geographical motifs of East and West Egg embody just how unachievable the American Dream is. This geographical separation may symbolise the hypothetical and literal divides between the nouveau riche who reside in West Egg and aristocrats of East egg, consequently highlighting how they will forever lead separate existences.

This gives the impression of the American Dream being highly flawed, as having acquired great wealth does not translate into acceptance for the people of West Egg, who are seen as the social subordinates of the aristocrats of East Egg. This is further established by the behaviour of the guests at Gatsby's party. The people of West Egg lack the refinement, grace

and manners of their aristocratic counterparts for whom these traits form the rudiments of their social class. This consequently demonstrates how East and West Egg are separated by more than geographical distance but also by simple things such as social etiquette and fashion choices.

Jordan's party (who consist of fellow East Eggers) are 'spread around a table on the outside of the garden' 'carefully on guard', emphasising that even within the intimate confines of the party the divide is still apparent and the people of East Egg are reluctant to mix. The corruption of the American Dream is further explored through the main protagonists' initial amazement and delight (early on in the text) at the great wealth they encounter.

Fitzgerald employs a myriad of symbolisms, metaphors and similes to depict the sheer luxury and over exuberance of the aristocrats within both texts.

Through these devices he is able to satirise the materialistic world the aristocrats inhabit, making it appear outlandish. In 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz' John Unger, a boy from Hades with 'meager standards of living' is 'amused and delighted', by the luxurious lifestyle Percy and his family lead. When he arrives with Percy they are driven in what Percy dismissively calls a 'buggy'. However, the reader can extrapolate from John's reaction at the 'thousand minute tapestries of silk, woven with jewels' that the vehicle is far from an old buggy.

In this instance John's amazement may have been employed to paradox Percy's dismissive attitude towards wealth as he refers to the luxurious car as 'old junk'. Fitzgerald may have used this paradox highlight the hollow nature of the wealthy, whose lives are fueled by consumerism to the extent

that they place little value to the possessions everyone else would deem as extraordinary. In 'The Great Gatsby', Nick is also amazed by the wealth he experiences at the Buchanan home. His first interaction with Daisy and Jordan has a dream like quality to it.

When he meets the women they are dressed in white, 'their dresses rippling and fluttering ... a short flight around the house' this gives the women an angelic quality which hints at how Nick is initially drawn in by their great wealth. This surreal and dream like quality of wealth is also reflected in 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz' with the depiction of the girl who is dressed like 'Titania'. In the play, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Titania is the queen of the fairies which Fitzgerald may have used to allude to the magical and mystifying qualities of wealth present within both texts.

Conversely, the amazement the main protagonists' initially showcased soon dissipates when they discover the corruptive nature of wealth and the wealthy. Despite the people of East Egg possessing an abundance of grace, elegance and taste (that comes with adhering to the norms of aristocratic society) they lack compassion. The East Eggers are presented as little more than bullies who use their money to alleviate any concerns they have, irrespective of who they hurt in the process.

This morally corrupt nature of the rich is explored through the Buchanan's in 'The Great Gatsby' and the Washingtons' in 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz'. The Buchanans' are presented as 'careless people' who 'smash[ed] things up' only to retreat back into 'their vast carelessness'. Their lack of moral fiber is further emphasised when instead of attending Gatsby's funeral they

move into a house far away. Fitzgerald may have used the Buchanans' as a moral didactic for the readers to illustrate how wealth can corrupt when one allows themselves to become consumed by it.

On the other hand, it could represent the unfair nature of capitalist societies whereby the wealthy upper-class can afford to pay for peace of mind. This conflicts with Gatsby whom despite accumulating his wealth through criminality is kind and loving, keeping watch outside Daisy's window to insure Tom does not hurt her, consequently illustrating that wealth alone does not corrupt but when coupled with high social status it can have disastrous effects. Moreover, in both texts religion (which is supposed to strengthen one's moral compass) has been replaced by consumerism.

Atrocious things are carried out in the name of wealth in the texts, including murder and imprisonment. These things are written off as a natural prerequisite of success and expansion. Here Fitzgerald argues that wealth can be its own prison blinding its pursuers, dehumanizing them to the extent that they devalue human life and assume that everyone can be bought.

Fitzgerald satirizes the absurd nature of the rich when Mr. Washington tries 'offering a bribe to God' with a voice immersed in 'inextinguishable pride'.

Ross Posnock, a Marxist writer, praised Fitzgerald in his essay 'A New World, Material Without Being real' for his presentation of the capitalist society in 'The Great Gatsby'¹. Posnock believed that Fitzgerald had captured the capitalist society's obsession with material wealth and how it leads to people being regarded as little more than objects that can be acquired along with capital in order to boost one's social status. Gatsby's vast wardrobe is a

'heavy defensive wall' consisting of 'thick silk' and 'expensive dye' which support the Marxist view of material possessions providing a barrier against hardship which the rich can hide behind.

For Gatsby, and many others, material possessions help to protect their status in the same way the 'invisible cloak' of Gatsby's army uniform had hidden his lower class status when he first met Daisy. In general, the negative portrayal of consumerism in his work has made him very popular with Marxist writers. In conclusion, Fitzgerald uses 'The Great Gatsby' and 'The Diamond as Big as Ritz' to highlight the negative elements of wealth and class, whilst particularly emphasising that class roles will never be crossed.

Both texts highlight the potential hazards of capitalist societies when one becomes consumed by materialism, placing greater importance on monetary fortune and status than the consequences of their actions. Although Fitzgerald presents both wealth and class in negative lights he reminds the reader that wealth alone does not give way to moral corruption hinting that it is wealth in conjunction with high social class that leads to the decaying of one's moral compass.