

# The great gatsby and enduring love essay sample

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



' Obsessive love has the capacity to drive a person to insanity, leading to irrational behaviour, alienation and despair' Compare and contrast the ways McEwan and Fitzgerald present the complexities of human love in light of this comment.

F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ian McEwan present obsessive Idealised love as deranged and harmful. Fitzgerald's ' The Great Gatsby', published in 1925, epitomises the euphoric atmosphere which permeated consumerist attitudes after WW1, during the period known as the ' Roaring Twenties' a revolutionary time associated with breaking tradition, Modernism, rapid technological change and new definitions of the ' modern' woman.

Fitzgerald's fictional characters can be understood as victims of a Capitalist culture which valued materialism over personal integrity. Complexities of love and lust co-exist with cultural conflict and moral blindness in a decade dubbed by the French as ' l'années folles'; (the crazy years<sup>1</sup>.) McEwan's Post-modern novel ' Enduring Love', published and set in 1990's, also explores the damaging and potentially destructive consequences of intense and passionate desire.

Both authors convey the complexion of human emotion and explore how obsessive love differs from the conventional view of romantic love. Sharing the theme of idealised love, presented as unwavering loyalty and passion, the authors take these traits to extremes. McEwan questions what we think we understand and making the reader uncomfortable; pastiche of narrative style catches the reader off guard, especially when the novel switches abruptly from being a philosophical exploration of ideas to a thriller style, metafiction which challenges the suspension of disbelief by being self referential.

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McEwan, strongly influenced by E. O. Wilson's critical scientific development of socio-biology and uses the narrative to explore aspects of human love and the evolutionary mechanics behind behaviours such as altruism and aggression. Both novels therefore offer interesting and varied perspectives on the experience of alienation and despair.

The antagonist of EL Jed Parry suffers from DeClérambault's Syndrome, an uncontrollable mental illness which forces Parry' to obsess over the object of his desire, Joe. Joe struggles to understand Parry's attitudes and behaviour simply through logic. At first glance, Jed's obsessive love seems similar to society's idea of ideal love an emotion, defined Oxford English Dictionary: ' a strong feeling of affection and/ or sexual attraction for someone' McEwan uses our inability to fully define love to highlight the characters' different viewpoints. Jed does indeed have ' a strong feeling of affection' for Joe although it is ambiguous whether or not it is sexual. When Joe asks ' Are we talking about sex? Is that what you want?', parry has no reply. Initially Joe's partner, Clarissa, has a very detached view of the situation and mistakenly writes off Jed's declaration of love of love for Joe and intrusion into their lives as ' some poor fellow [who] has a crush' and teases Joe about his ' secret gay love affair with a Jesus freak!' Clarissa's very different perspective doesn't help Joe who feels threatened by Parry. He sees his presence as an intrusion. To Clarissa, Joe's urgent fear seems irrational.

The couple occupy ' very different mental universes' and Joe's Isolation from his partner starts to become apparent. Joe functions as a first person narrator but McEwan also includes Clarissa's viewpoint she tells Joe ' You

were so intense about him as soon as you met him. It's like you invented him' their very different perspectives encourage the reader to make their own judgements about 'rational Joe's' sanity. The exploration of individual perspectives is a prominent feature of post-modern literature. When the conflict is perceived from Clarissa's perspective Joe's behaviour sounds absurd, 'You phoned the Police? Thirty-three messages on the machine? But she saw it when she came in, the indicator said zero. He wiped them, he insists.' Using this technique of changing narratorial perspective proves uncomfortable for the reader because it reminds us that our understanding of others and the world around us is filtered through our own personal experience and assumptions. Our understanding can only ever be partial, and consequently we will always be 'partially' isolated from the truth... but to what extent? McEwan's characterisation of Jed Parry provides an extreme example of how isolation and obsession can become a damaging force in our lives.

Similarly in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald also leads his reader to make their own response to Gatsby's filtered perspective and moral choices. Fitzgerald uses his narrator Nick Carraway to steer us to respond to Gatsby's unconventionally intense desire for Mrs Daisy Buchanan (a beautiful and wealthy socialite), as romantic and inspiring. But equally it could be argued that Gatsby's attempt to seduce Daisy and breach her marriage to Tom is damaging and destructive, and to some extent as delusional as Jed Parry's desire to separate Joe and Clarissa. Tom shouts incredulously, 'I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife.' The principal difference between the two novels is that Gatsby and his

idealised love for Daisy is portrayed sympathetically by his narrator, Nick Carraway, who has a romanticised view of Gatsby's capacity to dream. Whereas Joe, as a victim of Jed Parry's unwanted love, is more critical. Fitzgerald opens the novel with Carraway's judgment that Gatsby possessed 'an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in another person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again.' and reflects 'Gatsby turned out alright at the end'.

Both Gatsby and Jed experience forms of obsession and self-delusion which they believe is love. Nick's description of Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy is that '... He had committed himself to the following of a grail.' The Holy Grail metaphor portrays perfectly the idea of Gatsby's devotion, his spiritual quest for Daisy. Gatsby is an obsessive dreamer in search of god-like perfection because of the purity of his belief in Daisy. To Gatsby she is not only the woman he loves, but also the woman he has invested all his hopes and dreams in. 'For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing.' However his own personal heaven is just as unattainable as the Grail, which thousands of men have lost their lives in for. His world is founded on the 'fairy's wing', the fragility of his dreams is irrational and when it breaks down so does his delusion; ultimately leading to his death and despair.

Jed Parry's mental illness is a prominent theme in Enduring Love. His condition causes Joe a great deal of confusion until he can find reason to explain it, 'De Clerambault's Syndrome. The name was like a fanfare, a clear

trumpet sound recalling me to my own obsessions. There was research to follow through now and I knew exactly where to start.' Jed reads the ordinary as extraordinary, everyday occurrences become signals from Joe that he alone can read '...you brushed the top of the hedge with your hand. Then I got it. You had touched them in a certain way, in a pattern that spelled a simple message.' McEwan uses these bizarre signs and signals to give readers an insight to the depth of Jed's delusions. In his world leaves are not just leaves, when touched they are able to convey a deep meaning that no one else in the world understands. Insane as defined by the OED is 'Of actions (also colloq. of things): Mad, idiotic, utterly senseless, irrational.' Jed's irrational thoughts lead to irrational behaviour. Sending hit men to kill Joe is 'mad' and 'utterly senseless' because what he believes is real is not there in reality. McEwan incorporates the letters from Parry to Joe to emphasise that the character is not only physically but mentally isolated because of the depth of his insanity.

In Parry's case details of a dormant psychosis embedded in the narrative become key features in understanding McEwan's decision to include the Appendices that give us Jed's back story, helping us to understand possible causes for his obsession. Inheriting a mansion and a fortune leaves him searching for a purpose and his social inadequacy which already made him quite an isolated figure makes his thoughts eccentric to the point where he is no longer able to function in social situations. Joe experiences this feeling of losing his mind with only a few days of separation from normality 'I felt like a mental patient at the end of visiting hours. Don't leave me here with my mind, I thought. Get them to let me out.' Gatsby and Parry's social isolation

means neither was given the chance to grow and be shown normal social conventions. Society idolises the passionate romantic love we see in most literature. Both novels highlight the fine line between passion and potentially destructive obsession; between sanity and insanity of love, making us question how rational our own feelings and passions are. Joe realises, ' De Clerambault's syndrome was a dark, distorting mirror that reflected and parodied a brighter world of lovers whose reckless abandon to their cause was sane'.

Kieran Ryan offers a rather bleak view of love, arguing ' If Jed is not the bizarre caricature of love but the spitting image, the hard core of a common affliction, the title encapsulates the predicament in which most men and women in modern Western culture still find themselves ensnared. The novel pays lip service throughout to the sacrosanctity of the emotional bond that binds Clarissa and Joe together. But covertly it contends that what we have been taught to revere as love is a creed outworn, the last illusion and nature's cruellest hoax.' Jed's mental illness can be seen as a cruel, parasitic condition, especially from those who reject the artistic, romantic view of love. From Joe's rational scientific perspective love is an evolutionary development and as the victim of Jed's intense emotions he can only see it as a form of torture. Art and faith, represented by Clarissa and Jed, are in a constant battle with science. They both believe the capacity to love and dream is an experience to be celebrated. Gatsby, Nick, Clarrissa and Jed share this view of ideal love as the pure form of happiness but the authors must disagree with it showed by both Gatsby and Parry's unfavourable ends.

Gatsby believes he can find a similar form of fulfilment and acceptance in a relationship with Daisy. His delusion is that Daisy's promise endures and their love has 'been going on five years'. He refuses consider any evidence which might reveal the depth of his delusions. Nick realises the extent of Gatsby's fantasy when he tries to reason with him. "I wouldn't ask too much of her," [Nick] ventured. 'You can't repeat the past. 'Can't repeat the past?' he cried incredulously. 'Why of course you can!" Gatsby has a past to hide and a future to dream, so he fabricates his own reality in a vain effort to find acceptance in the materialistic world of the Buchannans. He has 'a gift for hope and a romantic readiness' but truly he is a tragic figure, chasing the shadows of his past. His obsession with re-writing the past is what gives his life meaning. '...he had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way.' His passion echoes the theme of obsession, his dream is inescapable.

Nick points out that 'no amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart.' His obsession therefore causes his dreams' inaccessibility and leads to his anguish. A. E Dyson suggests it is Daisy's fault Gatsby's dream is not realised, because she is careless and lacks any substance. When Gatsby arrives with his "romantic readiness," his unqualified faith in Daisy's ideal and absolute reality, he is broken against her sheer non-existence. She turns out to be literally nothing, and vanishes from the novel at the very point when, if she existed at all, she would have to start being really there. Her romantic facade, so adequate in appearance to the dreams Gatsby has built around it, is without reality. She has no belief in it herself, and so it means nothing. It is no more than an attempt to



alchemize the dreariness of an unsuccessful life into some esoteric privilege of the sophisticated. 3 However, in competition with the perfect personality of Gatsby's own invention, her substance is almost irrelevant ' Daisy tumbled short of his dreams - not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion.'

His acute obsession makes the real Daisy separate from his perceived Daisy and his disappointment was inevitable. Although, A. E Dyson could argue if she hadn't originally produced a ' romantic façade' in the first place Gatsby would not have fixated on her and potentially found a suitably genuine partner, but realistically Gatsby was always interested in the image not the woman. Fitzgerald uses her as a symbol of the moneyed class and it is money and class image Gatsby fixates on, rather than substance. The novel's conclusion is inevitable; it is obsession that leads to his tragic end. After the argument in the city where Daisy admits she still loves Tom, Gatsby is left in desperate despair. He begins to cling on to Daisy in the hope of regaining the only substance in his life by ' looking after her'; he waits all night in the bushes waiting for her to ' turn the lights out and on again.' Naturally, she never does. His delusion leaves him out in the rain on his own; Nick has to leave him there standing in the moonlight - watching over nothing.'

Fitzgerald presents Gatsby as a very lonely, isolated character. In our introduction to him Nick felt ' he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone - he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way...' toward ' a single green light, minute and far away,'. The green light has a ' colossal significance' representing all of his dreams and

hopes. Lois Tyson, in ' You Are What You Own: A Marxist Reading of The Great Gatsby', suggests that ' while the book portrays the tempting glamorous lifestyle of the wealthy, the novel is actually ' a scathing critique of American capitalist culture and the ideology that promotes it'' 2. Tyson's view is that Fitzgerald effectively presents Gatsby as a lonely and tragic character notably due to his ruthless pursuit of money and futile belief he can find acceptance in East Egg. This demonstrates Fitzgerald's criticism of the ' American dream', the core belief in America that through hard work you can achieve money and success no matter where you start in life.

Gatsby embodies classic rags-to-riches cliché, but his success was a product of corruption. Tom Buchanan's wealth and influence is evident in his portrayal as ' Hard mouthed...arrogant... dominant and cruel'. To get to the top and escape the poverty in which Gatsby was born he has to overcome those with money and power. Illegal activity is the only way to by-pass their influence in the material society; he is forced to be involved in the criminal underworld of bootlegging, taking advantage of the 1920 prohibition law, to achieve the ' American Dream'. His fixation on money suggests why he is not treated with ' that intense personal interest to which everyone has some vague right at the end' because he alienated himself from society through criminality rooted in his obsessions. Perhaps Fitzgerald's novel offers a critique of the capitalist culture of America in the 1920s; he recognises that nobody can break past the glass ceiling put in place by the wealthy and that the wide-spread obsession with money in the 1920s was causing despair and moral blindness.

Gatsby's past contributes to his ideals about love, for example without guidance from parents ' James Gatz' invents the perfect ' Jay Gatsby' that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and he was faithful to his invention until the end. Perhaps Fitzgerald does not agree with his narrator and is writing objectively from Nick's bland point of view, truly believing that Gatsby's ideals are immature and underdeveloped. Or on the other hand that in the decade of social rupture and rebellion, society should stick to its youthful dreams and not get lost in the ' make it new' modernity. The deeper meaning is perhaps one reason why T. S Elliott called it ' the first step American fiction has taken since Henry James' because it shows the ' darker side of the Jazz Age.' Both authors seem to express that truly stable relationships are the ' sane' ones; the intensity of society's ' ideal' love cannot last because it is an unsustainable personal madness. Relationships as opposed to love affairs need a concrete basis other than passion for each other.

F Scott Fitzgerald condemns Daisy and Tom's lasting relationship because its stability is based on money, but at the end of the novel it is them that leave unscathed ' They were careless and people, Tom and Daisy - They smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or whatever it is that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...'. Joe is confused as to why Clarissa chooses '...a beautiful woman loved and wanted to be loved by a large, clumsy balding fellow who could hardly believe his luck.' But despite of this McEwan's characters also survive their intrusion. Like the Buchannan's, Joe and Clarissa's relationship was based on practicality and sanity. Clarissa

understands the true meaning of a loving relationship ' it was always a fear that she'll live with someone who goes crazy. That's why she chose rational Joe.'

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