

Obsession

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



In his book *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald explores the psychology of love's fantasies and realities through the character of Jay Gatsby. During their five-year separation, Gatsby pines for his love, Daisy Buchanan, rearranging his entire life in order to retain her love and eventually creating a sublime, intangible image of her in his head. "No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart" (p. 101) and this presents complications for Gatsby's psyche as he faces Daisy's flawed humanity. In his mind, the fantasy of Daisy and of their relationship outweighs the reality, while in real life it is quite the opposite. This theme of Gatsby's powerful yet elusive and sometimes unrequited love for Daisy is prevalent throughout the book. The eventual consequences of living in a false world catch up to Gatsby at the end of the novel, where he dies miserable and despairing for the only person he wants and the one person he cannot have—Daisy. Gatsby's insurmountable love for Daisy begins after their first kiss. He [Gatsby] knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God... At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (p. 117) After it was all over, Gatsby "felt married to her, that's all." (p. 157) Here, however, is the start of the problems that will plague their relationship until the end. Gatsby is a poor soldier about to be shipped overseas while Daisy is a Louisville socialite with a booming social life and many suitors. Gatsby remains faithful in loving Daisy during their time apart, but the distance separating them makes a torrid affair impossible. These difficulties in sustaining the human, physical side of the relationship provide the impossibility about their affair that

caused Daisy to finally give up waiting. Searching for closure and complying with tradition, she weds a young, handsome man from a respected, established family. “ She wanted her life shaped now, immediately—and the decision must be made by some force—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality... That force took shape with the arrival of Tom Buchanan.” (p. 159) This marriage, which Gatsby assumes has sprung out of pure necessity, takes its toll on Gatsby. In his outright denial that Daisy could have feelings for anyone beside himself, Gatsby creates even more of an illusion in his head of poor Daisy. The growing drive to win Daisy back that accompanies this occasion is the coal that fuels his ill-fated obsession. To Gatsby, Daisy grows into such a perfect and faultless individual that Gatsby loses sight of reality and begins to think that Daisy is the only person who can make him happy. In order to achieve this happiness, he begins to build a vast fortune through whatever means necessary in order to woo his love back into his arms. For example, he throws lavish parties in his ostentatious mansion in order to attract Daisy to his home. Finally, when Daisy and he do meet after five years’ separation, Gatsby is so beside himself that he is shocked when Daisy cannot live up to the grandeur of his fantasies.... A look of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby’s face, as though a faint doubt has occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. (p. 101)Gatsby sees getting Daisy back as a way to fill the ever-expanding void left by her memory. Without her, he cannot feel complete, and with her he

feels confused as to why she is not as perfect as he remembers. Gatsby has built up such a predetermined image of Daisy's character that she can do no wrong in his mind. This is why it comes as such a crushing blow to Gatsby that Daisy did not hold out for him the way he did for her. After Daisy explains that, while she continued to love Gatsby, she could not deny her feelings for Tom, Gatsby tries to convince himself that things will still work out the way he had hoped. "You must remember," he says, "she was very excited this afternoon... Of course she might have loved him, just for a minute, when they were first married—and loved me more even then." (p. 159) After obsessing over Daisy for so long, it is difficult for Gatsby to cope with the loss. Rather than holding the ever-perfect Daisy responsible for ending their affair, Gatsby blames himself. "He left feeling that if he had searched harder he might have found her—that he was leaving her behind." (p. 160) Because he was originally so far from reality, accepting the truth of Daisy's marriage and prior obligations is so much harder and cuts so much deeper for Gatsby than would otherwise be expected.... He must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real... (p. 169) The death of Gatsby is the only logical conclusion to the story. Daisy was the one thing he lived for, and without having her Gatsby lost his reason for living. As his created world comes crashing down around his feet, Gatsby sinks from the zenith of five years of pining for Daisy to the nadir of realizing she will be forever unattainable.

Daisy had always been out there, and though he never had her for himself, Gatsby always retained hope that he someday would. In retrospect, however, it is clear that Daisy would never have been able to live up to Gatsby's impossible expectations anyway. During the period where Gatsby tries to woo Daisy from a distance with his garish parties and other indirect means, the characters in the novel live relatively peaceful lives. It isn't until they meet again that the situation goes awry. Tom and Daisy's marriage slowly deteriorates, Myrtle is killed, and Gatsby realizes Daisy is not a fallen angel but rather a human being. These circumstances, stemming from their impossible love and the unattainable image Gatsby holds of Daisy, lead to the tragic events of Gatsby's death and the unraveling of the personal lives of all the characters in the novel.