

# Women and the american dream

Literature, American Literature



Daisy and Myrtle are two women on opposite sides of the social hierarchy. In spite of their differences, both women face similar obstacles that prevent them from living fulfilled lives. Social expectations keep women from achieving their American dreams, forcing them to rely on men who own all of the power in society.

Daisy Buchanan is a woman born with a silver spoon in her mouth. Daisy's status as an East Egger gives her various opportunities to achieve the American dream.

Daisy marries Tom who grants her stability and a family- this marriage is only possible due to their similar positions in society. Gatsby and many other suitors are attracted to Daisy's wealth and the fact that she is "dressed in white" (Fitzgerald 74). Ultimately, Daisy chooses a stable future with Tom over Gatsby's potential for love and wealth- her connection to Gatsby allows Daisy to avoid persecution and continue the stereotypical American dream with Tom.

Although Daisy's status as an East Egger gives her more agency, Daisy's pursuance of her true American dream is hampered by her society's expectations of her class and of women in the 1920's.

Daisy is hesitant to split with Tom due to her class deeming the West Eggers beneath them as their identity "chafed under the old euphemisms" (Fitzgerald 107). Daisy also may have been unwilling to damage her reputation as the golden girl- leaving her perfect East Egg lifestyle to start a life with the mysterious West Egger may have been too great of a sacrifice for Daisy. Daisy chose Tom over Gatsby as she couldn't bear to lose what

she already had for the potential for happiness; humans are reluctant to risk what they have for the chance of something greater.

Myrtle has as much control over her dream as she does her own death. While Daisy had the fortune to be born an East Egger, Myrtle is stuck at the bottom of the class hierarchy. She has little wealth as someone living in the Valley of Ashes, and her connections are all of the same class as her. Myrtle's only chance at ascending the class ladder is Tom, who she believes can give her the material life she longs for. Unfortunately for Myrtle, Tom would never damage his East Egger reputation in order to start a life with her- Myrtle is below Daisy to the point where Tom believes she does not " have any right to mention Daisy's name" (Fitzgerald 37). Without Tom, Myrtle is destined to remain where she is now- the reputation of the Valley extends to her and makes her undesirable to those of a higher class. What makes her unique however is the liveliness that attracts Tom to her.

While Daisy and many other characters seem aimless and in constant limbo, Myrtle is driven and passionate as Nick realizes " there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her" (Fitzgerald 25). When Tom appears in her life, she latches on to him and acts as though she has already achieved her dream of becoming wealthy- while Myrtle does act unlikeable in many ways, this drive makes her similar to Gatsby. Both characters have a dream that drives their actions throughout the story- pursuing a character who they believe can grant them their American Dream.

A similarity between Myrtle and Daisy is both women turn to men in order to achieve their dreams. When both women reach the climax in their ability

to achieve their dreams, they seek out powerful male figures to get what they desire. Daisy, with all of her class, has to rely on her marriage to Tom, a male East Egger, in order to achieve the modern American dream; Myrtle depended on Wilson to give her the life she wanted, only to end up in a stagnant marriage and “ living over that garage for eleven years” (Fitzgerald 35). Even if Myrtle wanted to work in order to ascend the class ladder, the stigma around women in the workforce at the time would prevent her from succeeding. As the 1920s saw the emergence of the new woman, the stigma around them remained in society.

Women are still perceived as trophies for men to covet and are expected to play the “ beautiful little fool” (Fitzgerald 17). Even in Gatsby’s eyes, Daisy is seen as a trophy for achieving his American dream of becoming an East Egger. Jordan, who personifies the modern woman, feels the pressure to maintain this image, for fear of failing and inadvertently proving her image as unrealistic and wrong- this pushes her to cheat and lie at her golf games. There is a prominent double standard in what is tolerated for men and women in the Great Gatsby, and the punishments society deems fit for each case.

Tom is an unmistakable cheater, as there are many cases of him cheating on his wife. In spite of all of the witnesses of his infidelity, he is never reprimanded for his actions, while he turns and acts the part of a victim when Daisy cheats on him with Gatsby. While both characters are morally wrong in their actions, Tom is being hypocritical in his anger. Tom has also resorted to physical violence with Myrtle, only to walk away without penalty

after he “ broke her nose with his open hand” ( Fitzgerald 37). Gatsby also acts questionably when standing outside Daisy’s house at night and tracking her through newspaper clippings, although this behavior is portrayed in a romantic sense, it is problematic. Without discipline or rebuttal for negative actions, those who engage in such behaviors are bound to become more dangerous in the future. Overall the dynamic between men and women during the 1920s was unbalanced and forced women to rely on males in order to achieve their dreams.