

# Great gatsby essay- social, critical, gender lens

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Society as Seen Through the Novel "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald "Well-lit streets discourage sin, but don't overdo it." -William Kennedy. The 1920's were days of carefree living, American dreaming, and wishful thinking. Society differed from just ten years before hand, and society was moving forward with the new changes. However the day to day living of this American dream was nothing but a sin in the making, and the crash resulted with immoral thoughts, harsh gender roles, and the split between the wealthy and poor. The Great Gatsby by F.

Scott Fitzgerald is a novel that goes underneath all the party, carefree living, and brings out the deeper meaning of society at the time. The author provides the reader with a writing piece that exemplifies the greed and ignorance of the upper class people, the power of the male sex over the female, with the exception of love, and the moral thoughts that stuck to people in the 1920's. F. Scott Fitzgerald's writing brought out the deeper meaning of the difference between the wealthy and the poor and how ignorant, greedy, and carefree the upper classes really were during the 1920's.

Their actions and behaviour during the parties that Gatsby had thrown were a glimpse of the ignorance, greed, and carefree living. "I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the few guests who had actually been invited. People were not invited- the [just] went there" (Fitzgerald 41). Nick comes out saying that he feels as if he were the only one who was actually invited to the party, unlike the other hundreds of people. Being the most honest person within the novel, the reader realizes how greedy and ignorant the people of the 1920's may be.

These people come to the party to have a good time for themselves and not to have a good time with the person throwing it either. Their carefree attitude is revealed when they break the stuff within the house at the party and make themselves at home as if they know the owner of the house on a personal basis. With no care in the world for Gatsby's possessions, the partygoers reveal a side of them that was seen as sociably acceptable amongst the upper class.

A second example of greed, ignorance, and carefree within the upper class in the novel comes behind the character of Tom. Tom's attitude, personality, and the vibe around him help illustrate this greedy, ignorant, and carefree behaviour. With all the money in the world he had inherited at such a young age, it is clear Tom has no worry in the world of what people may think of him or what he does. His carefree behaviour is seen with his behaviour to his wife and his unfaithful action, his ignorance towards others with his words, and the way he thinks of himself. "We were in the same senior society, and while we were never intimate I always had the impression that he approved of me and wanted me to like him with some harsh, defiant wistfulness of his own" (Fitzgerald 7). For Nick to even feel as if he had to be approved of liking Tom, shows the type of person Tom truly is. His ignorance in his thought and attitude makes him believe he has the social power due to his money to think he can approve if you may be friends and like him.

It shows that Tom only really likes Nick because of the fact that he is lower in class than him and does not have any threat to Tom's overall power in wealth. These two examples help support Fitzgerald's message of the greed, ignorance, and carefree behaviour that existed amongst the rich who had

money, or thought they had money, in society during the decade of the twenties. Gender played a substantial role in the power in the 1920's, and Fitzgerald showed this through his writing; how the male role had an upper hand on the woman, with the exception of Gatsby's love for Daisy.

Throughout the novel it is clear that the male gender almost always has the power over the female role. The male characters in the novel, such as Tom for instance, show the reader how this power can be used and what a danger it can place on the female role. " Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. Then there were bloody towels upon the bathroom floor, and women's voices scolding..." (Fitzgerald 37). The power of the male sex is clearly shown to the reader with Tom's abusive actions.

Due to an argument that got out of hand between Tom and his mistress Myrtle Wilson at a party in their apartment in New York City, Tom openly hit Myrtle across the face, breaking her nose. These abusive actions seemed to be normal to the people at the party, and although they were not overly happy with Tom's action, the male power is easily accepted amongst the group of people. It was acceptable in the time of the 1920's to lay your hand on your woman once in a while to keep them in line, and if push came to shove, the reason for the abuse was never blamed on the male in the situation, however on the female. Fitzgerald includes this power of the male gender not only because he is a male, but to show the reader that the male did truly have the upper hand in society at the time, and that the woman was placed underneath the male at every occasion. One male power was however seen to the reader as placed under the woman. In the case of

Gatsby, his love for Daisy had placed his power beneath hers, as the love that he constantly wanted from her and that was never truly given, had him on rope. His actions revolved around Daisy's love and he adored her every move.

All his power and fame due to his riches was for no one other than his past lover, Daisy. She truly held all his power, as anything that he believed needed to be done to impress her was done. An example of Daisy's power in Gatsby is shown when Gatsby admits the reason he bought the house in the location it is at. "Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay" (Fitzgerald 78). Gatsby always wanted to have Daisy close by, in a way where in one swift motion he could grasp her and hold her but that never seemed to happen, even with the location of his house.

Yet again his every move was controlled by the love he had for Daisy and the impression he wanted to lay upon her. Fitzgerald's use of the character Gatsby helped to convey how love has an effect on a male's power role, especially if he is the one chasing after that love. Man, in all means, is demonstrated as the power role in the Great Gatsby, however the love that makes a man chase after, is one that leaves the woman with the upper hand on the power, no matter the society that surrounds it.

Fitzgerald's writing did more than just bring out the social, and gender roles that impacted the society at the time. His writing brought out the immoral actions that people at the time saw as a floozy and acceptable: unfaithfulness and materialistic happiness. At any given time or day, being unfaithful is truly unacceptable in today's society. In spite of this, Fitzgerald

shows the reader that during the 1920's, being unfaithful and cheating on spouses was perfectly acceptable and in many cases was known publicly.

The author uses the character Tom as only one case of a character that has affairs with his wife Daisy, of which he shares a child with. Furthermore, the author exaggerates and proves to the reader that this was not the first time that Tom had an affair with Daisy, however even before their marriage, Tom was up to these duff ways. " A week after I left Santa Barbara, Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers, too, because her arm was broken- she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel" (Fitzgerald 77).

Through the course of Tom's behaviour with other woman, Fitzgerald shows the reader that society accepted flirtatious behaviour, affairs, and broken marriages. At the time, it was not something that was hidden or put to shame by lots of people, but on the other hand was left open and left untalked or cared about. By showing the reader that not only Tom, but Daisy, Myrtle, and even Gatsby, get involved with the life of affairs and cheating, supports the idea of unfaithfulness in society at the time. Materialistic happiness was yet another immoral view that was sought out to be done and wanted by many at the time of the 1920's.

Instead of building and finding happiness within themselves to be generally happy in life, the people within society relied on material goods to bring out their happiness. For instance, Mr Gatsby's house is described as over excessive and filled with tonnes and tonnes of possessions. Nick and Daisy had walked through " the Marie Antoinette music rooms and Restoration  
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Salons...” (Fitzgerald 91). Gatsby’s house is filled with materialistic goods that he believes will make the difference in winning Daisy over.

Daisy couldn’t marry a poor man, which is why it is believed that she went on to marry Tom. Gatsby believed by gaining all these materialistic goods worth a substantial amount of money, he would naturally win over Daisy, so that he may now be truly happy. Nevertheless, Gatsby’s plan fell short and the materialistic happiness he was hoping Daisy would fall for, never quite fell through. This materialistic want factor, shows that society’s happiness at the time was not due to good relationships, moments, and feelings, however was based on material goods, money, and being sociably acceptable.

The immoral values and beliefs that were seen as sociably acceptable during the 1920’s in society, such as unfaithfulness and materials being the keys to happiness, show the reader the real value of society’s thoughts and wants. The greed and ignorance of the wealthy, the power that came with the male role, and the immoral values that were seen acceptable during the 1920’s show the reader the Fitzgerald’s true view of society in the 1920’s. It is evident that the social, gender, and moral roles, played a great impact on the events that happened in the 1920’s and the behaviour of the people at the time.

It also shows that these three roles are influential on all aspects and decades of society and future years to come. Although this carefree lifestyle was seen to be very relaxing and fun to be along in, Fitzgerald teaches a lesson that, every perfect outlook has its flaws. Although things might seem good on one side, the other side of the fence may see the entire negative and loop holes to

the actual thing itself. Work Cited Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1996. Print.