

The great gatsby and a streetcar named desire

Literature



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GATSBY Looking at Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" and Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," one can see how the past has unique meaning in the lives of the characters, particularly Jay Gatsby and Blanche. Gatsby is still stuck in his past perception of Daisy, even though she has changed and is a married woman, he still has kept his love for her over the years. Gatsby also makes up his past to impress Daisy, allowing himself to become a sort of mysterious millionaire and object of gossip. And Blanche in Williams' play still lives in a world of her own youth, unable to acknowledge that time is passing and she is getting older, and is still apparently unable to really recover from the suicide of her husband.

Blanche Dubois is a complicated character in Williams' play. She is very superficial, but there is also something very deep and enduring about her character. A lot of her dialogue and behavior seems affected to be a sort of Southern Belle personality, which is essentially Blanche's construction of the past. This past is the light by which she sees her own life in the present. Because she is unable to get over the suicide of her husband, Blanche in many ways has stopped the clock and become obsessed with the past. "And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle" (Williams, 1994). Blanche still lives in the past and not in the reality of the present.

Blanche Dubois can be compared with and contrasted against the character of Jay Gatsby in "The Great Gatsby." Like Blanche, Jay has hit the pause button at a point in his life. Blanche cannot get over her husband; Jay cannot get over losing Daisy. He obsesses about this childhood love. The past is deeply involved with Fitzgerald's book:

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the novel closes with Nick saying to himself that humanity goes on, “boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (Fitzgerald 1989). Fitzgerald employs a supportive device in the narrative character of Nick Carraway, Jay’s friend and helper. Gatsby is defined by his attempts to become less of an individual and more of a representation of his idea of the past, just like Blanche. Also like Blanche, who acts like such a snob to Stanley because of her own ideas about social class, Jay wants social class to go along with his wealth, so he constructs a fictional past to go along with it. Though often alone, Jay Gatsby moves through the novel towards his goal of becoming a visible part of the world in which he is accepted as both wealthy and responsible. One could say the same of Blanche, replacing wealthy with beautiful and responsible with the talk of the town. Gatsby’s retreat into his past is based on Daisy and his ideals. He completely believes that Daisy will provide him with the image of his happiness, which he has perhaps mistaken for happiness itself.

In Williams’ play, Blanche Dubois has hit the pause button on her life at a point she can’t get past: the suicide of her husband. Jay Gatsby has done the same thing, but it is about losing Daisy the first time. Williams seems to see the past as additive to Blanche. Fitzgerald sees the past as subtractive to Jay, and views progress as additive, as shown by his description of boats against the current. Subtraction throws Gatsby into confusion. One can potentially see the self as Jay does: as something that must be hidden for external circumstances to occur. He winds up a wealthy man who has failed to construct a suitable explanation for his wealth.

REFERENCE

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Fitzgerald, F (1989). *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scholastic.

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