

# Gatsby college essay



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Finally, In chapter 3 we go to Gatsby manor for his party on West Egg, representing new money. Throughout the book there is an idea of hedonism, simply living your life in order to maximize pleasure, which was a common lifestyle choice in the 1920s as people began to think life was too short after the events of World War I. This attitude is very evident in all three of the parties.

In the first party, Nick introduces the Buchannans to us by informing us of Tom's achievement in life and how everything now "savors of anti-climax", as well as telling us that the Buchannans "spent a year in France for no particular reason". This is an early indication that the Buchannans are living a life with no real purpose, simply trying to enjoy themselves above everything else.

As the dinner goes on, we learn about Tom's habit of latching on to random ideas and of his affair, "Tom's got some women in New York".

Both of these things indicate further an idea of Tom doing nothing but trying to please himself and find meaning in life, adding to the further representation of hedonism in the 1920s, in this case linking it to the established upper class. In the second chapter, we go to New York to the party in the apartment with Tom, Myrtle, his mistress, and a small amount of other characters. At this party, the attitude of hedonism is evident in the high amounts of alcohol being consumed and in the empty conversations of the party.

The actions of the people there, "I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon", "I don't care what I look like", happen

for no reason, with no aim, only in a desperate attempt for those at the party to try and enjoy themselves, an accurate portrayal of life in the 1920s for a lot of people.

Finally, the third party, Gatsby, notations yet more examples of the hedonistic lifestyle, this time from the rich, new money inhabitants of West Egg.

Again there is vast amounts of alcohol being consumed throughout the party, but, more so than the other parties, the host has spared no expense in creating an elaborate party setting. Nick describes the extravagant party, talking of the orchestra, “no thin five piece affair”, the enormous amounts of food “buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d’oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold” and the many and varying people at the party.

All of this adds to the image of hedonism as it shows the lengths the people of New York go to to have a good time. Also Nick’s comment on the people at the party, “People were not invited – they went there.

They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby door”, is a good summary of the Fitzgerald does accurately convey the lifestyle of many people in the 1920s using this theme of hedonism, which, although it may seem fun at initial thought, is definitely not portrayed as positive, rather that it is making the world a more immoral place in his post war period.

Another, similar theme running through these opening chapters is the theme of licentiousness or liberalism. People at this time began to think they could do whatever they wanted and were entitled to live their life in whichever way they liked, again the post-war 'life's too short' attitude, especially at a time in America when the law of prohibition was being blatantly ignored and crime was rife, with the rise of gangster activity.

At the Buchanan Tom seems to think he is totally entitled to his affair, as he, in contrast with Nick's sound morals, "My own instinct was to telephone immediately for the police", is perfectly fine with others, including Daisy, knowing about his affair.

In chapter 2, this idea of licentiousness continues as we go deeper into the world of Tom's affair and we witness his abusive attitude towards Myrtle, "Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand".

This combined with the copious amounts of alcohol being consumed add to the image of a more lawless, liberal society in the 1920s. Finally, at Gatsby party, the licentious attitude continues as the 'guests' also proceed to get run and, evidently, parade about with men or women they are not meant to be with. The events in these three chapters accurately show the attitudes of most people in the 1920s, who were drawn in by the invitation to live against the system in the time of promiscuity, prohibition and easy money in the world of crime.

Throughout these three chapters we also get a sense for the lives that women in the 1920s lead. In 1920 women in the USA were given the vote,

after the beginning of the suffragette movement in 1903, however Fitzgerald portrays women in 'The Great Gatsby' in a rather different light. At the first party, the women are portrayed as inert objects, "anchored balloons", and Daisy is powerless to stop Tom having his affair, expressing her hopes for her daughter that she will become no more than a "beautiful little fool".

This indicates a general lack of respect for women in the established upper class, old money. In the second party, Tom, as previously discussed, breaks Myrtle's nose, without much of a stir from the other guests at the party.

This general acceptance of violence towards and mistreating of women definitely shows us that Fitzgerald felt that at this time women were, despite the cent suffrage, still treated as second class citizens. Myrtle is very much treated simply as an object to Tom.

He buys her whatever she likes and treats her well, not for love, but for the more hedonistic elements. At Gatsby party, the women are usually described as "girls", and we get the impression that these women, therefore, are somewhat lacking in importance and intelligence. Also we get the impression that men in 'new money' seem to treat these girls as objects, only with them as a piece of arm candy to raise the profile of the man in 'possession' of the girl, "old men pushing nouns girls backward in eternal graceless circles, superior couples holding each other tortuously, fashionably".

Women are also seen to be drinking large amounts of alcohol, linking to aspects of Fitzgerald's personal life; his wife was an alcoholic. Overall, Fitzgerald in these chapters provides a good insight into the lives and roles of women at this time, certainly not in a positive way, due to his personal

experience 'roaring twenties', but in a cynical way that, whilst accurate, does not show it in a complimentary light, being rather critical of the time in America. Peter Taylor 136