

# AQA English Literature A-level

## The Great Gatsby: Themes Class and Wealth

*All page numbers are from the Wordsworth Classics edition (1993)*

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF WEALTH

Wealth plays an important role in *The Great Gatsby*. All the characters in the novel are **driven** by wealth somehow, not least by their involvement in the 1920s **consumerist** culture which emerged following the post-WWI economic **boom**. Fitzgerald explores different types of wealth and money throughout the novel. He not only focuses on how much wealth and money a character has, but also **how** they went about acquiring their money and what it **represents**.

Fitzgerald's focus on different locations to describe different levels and types of wealth is of significance to the overarching message of the book and how he critiques the flawed money-driven nature of 1920s America. The **lavish** lifestyles lived by the rich East and West Eggers contrast directly with the **poverty-stricken** Valley of Ashes, whilst the **fashionability** of the old-money East Egg sits in direct opposition to the overly-compensating flashy display of West Egg's newly-acquired wealth.



Novel cover designed by Aled Lewis.  
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Fitzgerald accurately uses different characters' wealth to explore his motif of **materialism** and **consumerism**, as well as how it affects the morality and ethics of society. This shows how wealth, which created different classes, **shaped** America's social **hierarchy** which plays a key role in the implications of the American Dream [see *Themes: Idealism*] and the workings of Gatsby's world. Class **division** are so explicit that the novel becomes a satire of the different characters' ridiculous lives, and also a brutal **exposé** of how Americans' morality is affected by this race towards wealth.

The novel therefore, presents a sociology of wealth that explores the differing characteristics of the East Eggers and newly minted West Egg millionaires: the Buchanans set the **stereotype** of the selfish, careless aristocracy who understand the ability of their money and class to **ease** their way through life, allowing them excess privileges.

People like Gatsby, on the other hand, **suffer** the consequences of having a more **loyal** and **sincere** heart. Despite his shortcomings, he is **inherently** good and suffers the consequences. Those who suffer like Gatsby die by the end of the novel. The deaths of Gatsby, Myrtle and Wilson are more than just an individual, physical death but serve as overarching **metaphors** of Fitzgerald's condemnation or revelation of the results of such **empty** wealth **pursuits**.



### Wealth as an important factor for first impressions:

“Then wear the **gold** hat, if that will move her;  
If you can bounce **high**, bounce for her too,  
Till she cries “**Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,**  
I must **have** you!”

- Thomas Parke D’Invilliers

The **epigraph** of the novel is from D’Invilliers’ poem *Then Wear the Gold Hat*. Thomas Parke D’Invilliers is F. Scott Fitzgerald’s pen name, as well as a character in his novel *This Side of Paradise*. This helps the reader orient in the **world** Fitzgerald is creating, establishing themes and context even before Nick’s narration begins.

This is of significance to the explorations of **money** and **materialism** throughout the novel: by **imploing** the reader to “**wear the gold hat**”, wealth is presented as the **key** to gaining one’s love, to win the love of whom he desires. This also indicated the use of **material deception ostentatiously** to capture the heart of a woman – a direct link to Gatsby’s efforts to **immerse** himself in displaying **vast materialism**, figuratively wearing the **gold** hat, in an attempt to win Daisy.

The reference to a hat and high-bouncing is **clownish** and highlights the absurdity of such advice, with Fitzgerald’s satirical undertone, but this is the reality of 1920s America. Gatsby’s over-portrayal of wealth makes Nick describe his party setting demanding the behaviours of “**an amusement park**” [chapter 3, p.27] and Tom describes his car as a “**circus wagon**” [chapter 7, p.77]. The mockery of the image conveyed by this advice highlights the **absurdity** of Gatsby’s **monomaniacal obsession** in his quest for Daisy and what she represents. Finally, the last line of that opening “**I must have you!**”, strays away from the **romantic reciprocated** love of the woman, rather points to the **consumerism** and demanding **materialism** of the Roaring Twenties, as the bouncing hat-wearer captures her **materialistic attention**, not her heart.

**Gold-hatted Gatsby** and **The High-Bouncing Lover** were both under consideration as working titles for Fitzgerald’s novel. This highlights the importance of this epigraph’s notions of **wealth** (conveyed by ‘gold-hatted’) and **aspiration** (highlighted by ‘high-bouncing’). Throughout the novel, the use of rich colours like gold, silver, brass, white dominates the wealthy representations, with Gatsby conforming to this culture of materialism and affluence to appeal to Daisy [see *Themes: Idealism*].



## THE IMPORTANCE OF CLASS

There are three distinct classes in *The Great Gatsby*:

- **Old Money**

This includes people like The Buchanans or even Nick who serve as the **elite** of American society and have fortunes dating back for generations. Their wealth and privilege is **inherited** and needs no further justification or extravagant display as they hold undisputed family titles. All of the New England states or original states such as New York and Virginia were originally inhabited by **wealthy families of European descent**. This meant that those who sought to create their own wealth looked westward towards the new America across the new frontier. People went westwards in hopes of increasing their wealth in various ways, creating a new class of 'New Money'.

- **New Money**

People in this class are 'self-made' and their representative in the novel is Jay Gatsby, who profited from the 1920s boom. People in this class have no aristocratic heritage and, to compensate for this, resolve to display their wealth **lavishly** through **conspicuous consumption**. Gatsby flaunts his wealth through his purchase and subsequent parading of his hydroplane and his gaudy, cream-coloured - and in Nick's view "**monstrous**" - Rolls Royce. Nevertheless, Gatsby's goal of integrating into the social elite is unsuccessful and forced as he develops a verbal tic by addressing everyone as "**old sport**", which is a forced **attempt** of appearing upper-crusty and rather serves the opposite purpose by pointing Gatsby out as a **nouveau riche**.

Gatsby's car is described by Elizabeth Morgan as an "**emblem of his gilded success**", for obtaining all of his wealth. The colour and model of his car make a **statement** to the pass-byers as they are made aware of his belonging to the **moneyed** classes now. This is **ironic** as Gatsby trusts Daisy, not with his heart, with his prized possession which she betrays when accidentally hitting Myrtle, and ultimately killing Gatsby (through Tom's revenge). This is extremely **tragic** and Gatsby is made to pay more than one price, simply for having such an eye-catching item under Daisy's control.

- **No Money**

This includes people like The Wilsons, such as workers, servants or the unemployed, who are unable to acquire any of the American Dream's **monetary** or **social** gains. They are overlooked by the emergence of a **new class conflict** between those of old money and those from new money backgrounds, embodied through the struggle between Tom and Gatsby over Daisy - whose love they attempt to gain.

People like Tom Buchanan, wealthy by birthright, **prevail** in getting what they desire in life: he wins Daisy from Gatsby not once but twice because of his status from a solid aristocratic wealthy background. This shows the **failure** of the American dream, as **careless** and **privileged** people like Tom and Daisy always win in the end and "**retreat**



**back into their money**” and do not give a hand to ‘new money’ **dreamers** like Gatsby or the lower classes like Myrtle who are willing to sacrifice everything to break through the **glass ceiling**. It can be argued that the ‘no money’ people - those who live in places like the Valley of Ashes - are directly oppressed or exploited by both the nouveau riche and the ‘old money set’. This is neatly symbolised by Myrtle’s death, caused by ‘old money’ Daisy in Gatsby’s **“death car”**, his ultimate symbol of wealth.

## Quotations

- **“...her **artificial** world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful **snobbery** and orchestras which set the **rhythm** of the year, summing up the **sadness** and **suggestiveness** of life in new **tunes**.” [chapter 8, p.96]**

The use of music as a metaphor for Daisy’s affluent life serves as a direct parallel to the lifestyle of many in American society during the Jazz Age: superficial, snobbish, sad but equally pleasant and cheerful. Nick’s frequent association of Daisy with **nature** (signified by her floral name) and **musicality** (her voice), indicates her natural beauty. She does not need to try hard or **overcompensate** like the other characters because of her position. She is attractive in more ways than one and manages to capture the heart of Gatsby.

- **“...as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished **secret society** to which she and Tom belonged” [chapter 1, p.13]**

This observation that Nick makes is more than a reference to East Egg and upper-class society. Daisy is aware of her status privilege, but she is also aware of the **exclusivity** of being this rich and **elite**. People like Myrtle and Gatsby **lust** for her social **advantages** and status yet they remains **unobtainable**. Both Gatsby and Myrtle die from their **futile** attempts to associate themselves with higher society (Myrtle’s manner of death makes the connection between social climbing and death/ inevitable failure obvious). The secrets of ‘old money’ are not easily shared or reached, the codes difficult to grasp (hence Gatsby’s ‘old sport’ faux pas) and the **taboo** regarding **cross-class** marriage helps maintain the **status quo**.

- **“Just as Daisy’s **house** had always seemed to him more **mysterious and gay** than other houses, so his idea of the **city** itself, even though she was **gone** from it, was pervaded with a **melancholy beauty**.” [chapter 8, p.97]**

This direct focus on Daisy’s house instead of her physical self shows Gatsby’s **consciousness** of her status and her possessions, which **appeal** to him. This is so **romantically** described yet denotes the most **selfish** or materialistic aspects of Gatsby’s desires, as the Louisville house Daisy and Gatsby made love in symbolises more than just **young maturing love**, but a dream of wealth and **material acquisition**.

- **“Why they came **east** I don’t know. They had spent a year in France, for **no particular reason**, and then **drifted** here and there **unrestfully** wherever people played **polo** and were **rich** together” [chapter 1, p.6]**



Nick questions Tom and Daisy Buchanan's **purpose** in life as they appear **empty**, drifting around where **affluent** society revolves and associates and attempting to **occupy** themselves with rich people's activities. This is mentioned again when she exclaims "[Daisy] I've been **everywhere** and seen everything and done everything...Sophisticated - God, I'm **sophisticated!**" [chapter 1, p.13], in a lighthearted manner but it is clear that she is **exhausted** from her lifestyle.

- Belonging to East Egg society, Daisy has the world at the tip of her finger, yet she is **dissatisfied** with the privileged that means she is handed everything on a silver platter. It appears here that Daisy is aware of her status but still desires the **forbidden 'fruit'**, which makes her pursue Gatsby. After all, Daisy is also restless in a way, despite her permanent resolution to remaining largely **passive** throughout the novel.

- **"Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay."** [chapter 4, p.51]

With his mansion, Gatsby hopes to one day cross the **social boundary** between 'new money' and 'old money'. The bay between his mansion and Daisy's home serves as the physical barrier (or glass ceiling) between the two classes, but the **distance** is further than Gatsby anticipates, and the more he tries, the closer to his tragic doom he becomes. Nonetheless, this presents to the reader Gatsby the dreamer, through the **romanticisation** of living 'across' from Daisy instead of as a next-door neighbour. It also goes to show all that Gatsby represents the **antithesis** of what the Buchanans and East Egg represent. Gatsby's house's location serves as a spatial metaphor for his **social aspirations**; buying the house is an attempt to cross social boundaries. However, this attempt will inevitably fail, just as Daisy and her 'old money' acquaintances are so close - "just across" from him - and yet forever separated by a body of water.

### Critics (AO5)

Marxist literary theory would critique the position of Gatsby in various ways. His inability to grasp the fact he has **lost** Daisy for the first time in 1919 leads to his **journey** to acquire immense amounts of wealth to charm Daisy and convince her that he is of an **aristocratic background** to win back her love. His **class consciousness** is revealed as he attempts to conceal his peasant/blue-collar background. However, this is a partial class consciousness; he wants to play the game and pass for old money, rather than critique the game. Gatsby's longing for extreme wealth and an elite status makes him sacrifice everything, including his morality. This becomes Gatsby's **fatal flaw** as he partakes in **criminality** such as his questionable dealings with Wolfsheim, to achieve the impossible. Pay attention to Gatsby's secret phone calls which creates an ominous tone as Nick presents the **dark aspects** of America, as well as the time he presents a **white** card to the policeman which is a symbol of his **corruption** and **escaping justice** using his status.

Similarly, Myrtle's cramped New York apartment on 158th Street serves as a metaphor for her social and material **aspirations**, as well as Tom's **contempt for people of her class**. The



apartment is on the very top floor, signifying **neglect** in the relationship; top floors are often the cheapest and Myrtle's rooms are repeatedly described as being **"small"** yet **"crowded to the door"**. The fact the rooms - **"a small living room, a small dining-room, a small bedroom and bath"** [chapter 2, pp.23-24] - are inappropriately furnished with overly-large furniture with **"scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles"** as her visitors **"stumble continually"**, is a **comedic** representation of Tom and Myrtle's extramarital affair as well as a visual representation of Myrtle's **outsized aspirations**. The location and position of the apartment also reflect the insignificance of the relationship to Tom.

Nevertheless, Myrtle's **"regal"** glance and her **adoration** of her apartment highlight how proud she is of her small achievement, whilst Nick's narration highlights the **pathetic** nature of the apartment and by extension the affair, which appears of little **value** to Tom. This entire section or scene is characterised by Nick's satirical undertone of Myrtle's **pompousness** as she attempts to appear more **refined** and upper-class, by imitating a lady's dress. This portrays her **dualistic** life as she moves from **Mrs Wilson** in the Valley of Ashes to Tom's **mistress** in New York: Myrtle's aim of acquiring a higher social standing inevitably sets her out as **"artificial"** and **pretentious**, and requires her to **betray Tom**. Here, wealth is a **corrupting** symbol as it undermines **traditional** social institutions such as marriage.

**"All I kept thinking about, over and over, was 'You can't live forever; you can't live forever.'" [chapter 2, p.24]**

Myrtle's **rationale** for pursuing the affair with Tom stems from a **carpe diem** urgency which brings to the fore her **hedonistic, amoralistic** approach to life. The repetition emphasises her desperate **ambition** of attaining the social prestige of someone like Daisy, which becomes her **fatal flaw**. Myrtle can be likened to Gatsby in the sense they both search for money that is accessible but fail to achieve the social status they repeatedly search for.

**"The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air."** [chapter 2, p.x]

Nick narrates Myrtle's transformation from a **sensuous** persona into someone who is violently, **desperately** attempt to **appear** affluent and **reshape** her identity. This **conceit** is directly contrasted with her lively **personality** in the garage setting - her natural **habitat** - which she attempts to **stray** from unsuccessfully. The **violent** imagery of this quote signifies the metaphorical **claustrophobia** which presents itself as an inability to **disconnect** herself from her Valley of Ashes' identity as she is **trapped** in the small room with **"smoky air"**. Myrtle's persona appears much more **transparent** and **simplistic** than Gatsby's elaborate attempts to **blending** into East Egg society, yet both are seen through and exposed by Nick.

Marxist literary theory (AO5) would critique the **morals** and **ethics** of 1920s American society as it promotes an **artificial dualism** of the individual as they aim to assert their chosen identity.



This applies to both Myrtle and Gatsby as they aim to transcend the social barrier between their 'no money' roots and old money - Gatsby gets stuck in the **purgatorial** (in a miserable sense) position of 'new money', which does not allow him to claim and reshape his **identity** successfully to match East Eggers [see below].

## WEALTHY APPEARANCES AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

Characters' appearances are significant **indicators** of their wealth and class status. The characters are very much aware of this. Wealth and class are the **doorway** to social success and to access these privileges, lower-class characters attempt to **mingle** with the rich upper-classes to attain a **fraction** of their luxury and benefits. The two characters **obsessed** with **reshaping** and controlling their appearance or how they are presented are Jay Gatsby and Myrtle. However, they struggle to **enter** the upper-class lifestyle.

Gatsby's way of dress - **“An Oxford man!”. He [Tom] was incredulous. ‘Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit.’”** [chapter 7, p.77] - identifies him as part of the glamorous **emerging new money class** and his shirt reflects his **ostentatious** lifestyle. This is apparent in the shirts scene with Daisy in chapter 5 where he throws all his **expensive** shirts at her. The shirts themselves do not mean much to Gatsby as he is willing to **discard** them to **please** Daisy and maintain her **attention**, but they definitely go to represent the importance of **appearances** and wealth to both characters.

Shirts are synonymous with **robes**; both are often used as metaphors for **title** and **status** as they allow their wearer to **resemble** the image or figure they aim to be. Gatsby dresses in **luxurious** materials in order to present himself as a wealthy, upper-class man whilst Daisy dresses in elegant East-Egg style clothes, which are more **classy** and depict her social **status** and 'old money' class position.

**“An hour later the front door opened nervously, and Gatsby, in a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-coloured tie, hurried in.”** [chapter 5, p.54]

Gatsby's showy costume imitates the epigraph. He appears to understand the importance of a **wealthy appearance** to capture the attention of Daisy once again as he did so in uniform five years ago [see above]. This is a direct attempt to blend in with affluent society. Nevertheless, the 'nervous' opening of the front door indicates that he is **ill at ease** in this society.

**“She [Daisy] was appalled by West Egg's raw vigour that chafed under the old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that eroded its inhabitants along a short-cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand.”** [chapter x, p.x]

Daisy's attitude towards West Egg (new money) signifies her **condescending** attitude towards Gatsby himself. The lack of civility or 'classiness' of Gatsby's parties shows the difference between East Eggers and West Eggers, particularly with behaviour and reputation. Daisy looks down on West Eggers as **'low class' nouveau riches** who do not adhere to the same





behaviour standards of East Eggers and do not hide their **extravagance** and **hedonistic tendencies**.

Moreover, the tragic assertion of the fate of West Egg inhabitants like Gatsby, as **“a short-cut from nothing to nothing”** [chapter x, p.x] is an explicit cataphoric reference to his **tragic** end as he is left with **nothing**, to the extent that nobody attends his funeral. This doubles Tom’s view of Gatsby [see below] as a **“Mr Nobody from Nowhere”**, showing East Egg’s lack of respect for someone of Gatsby’s status. Neither Tom and Daisy do not appear to **understand** or **empathise with** those conflicted individuals who attempt to climb the **social ladder**.

**“I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that’s the idea you can count me out... Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they’ll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white.”** [chapter x, p.83]

Tom attempts to assert his **control**. Tom displays conservative fears about the breakdown of traditional institutions. This is hypocritical as it does not stop his infidelity with Myrtle, but also points to the upper-class’ condescending attitude towards those from less-aristocratic classes breaking through the barrier and acquiring the status and belongings of those from old money.

Tom’s status allows him to exploit the lower classes and assert his upper-class dominance, and his outward appearance reflects this: **“Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face”** [chapter 1. p.6] Tom is so powerful in his own right and because of his status and wealth that it comically takes over his countenance.

**“He [Gatsby] had little to say...my first impression, that he was a person of some undefined consequence, had gradually faded and he had become simply the proprietor of an elaborate roadhouse next door.”** [chapter 4, p.41]

This quote expresses a lot of Nick’s **distaste** towards Gatsby as well as his disappointment with the turnout of his **mysterious** neighbour who shifted from someone of an **“undefined consequence”** to a ‘proprietor’. Firstly, it signifies Gatsby’s lack of **substance** as he attempts to let his ‘elaborate’ wealth speak for him instead, and this does the opposite of supporting his claims of coming from an ‘old money’ background (real ‘old money’ people subtly obscure their wealth with **“euphemisms”** [chapter x, p.x]). The use of the roadhouse highlights the lack of **dignity** and **prestige** of Gatsby’s mansion and what it represents. Our narrator’s ambivalence towards Gatsby reflects Fitzgerald’s own binary or conflicting views about **wealth** and **aspiration** as he himself saw both characters of Nick and Gatsby as crossovers of his own self.

**“They were...agonisingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity”** [chapter 3, p.28]

Nich acknowledges the striking differences between West Egg and East Egg party-goers through the explicit reference to the **questionable dubiousness** associated with the business in the West Egg neighbourhood. New-money guests use Gatsby’s location for acquiring and accessing the business and social **opportunities** made available at his **extravagant** parties and **“conducted themselves according to the rules of behaviour associated with an amusement park”** [chapter 3, p.27]. On the other hand, East Eggers like Jordan **“preserved a**



**dignified homogeneity... the function of representing the staid nobility of... East Egg condescending to West Egg, and carefully on guard against its spectroscopic gaiety.”**  
[chapter 3, pp.29-30]

This refers to the boisterous merrymaking of West Eggers, indicative of their **new money status** to the observer. From a Marxist approach (AO5), the American Dream, which encourages anyone - no matter what their social or economic location - to chase a higher social, political or **monetary** position, evidently presents a challenge to the **status quo** (East Eggers) and the elite layer of American society. Nick himself criticises the **hedonistic** extravagant lifestyle of West Egg and people like Tom, Daisy and Jordan do not fail to hide their condescending attitude towards the West Eggers.

This condescending attitude condemns people like Gatsby. However, Fitzgerald does not endorse ‘old money’ but instead condemns the **entirety** of 1920s American society: the foundations of society serving the interests of the rich, the **materialistic** character of the American Dream and the **class conflict**, all of which contribute to a breakdown of morality and ethics.

### Context (AO3)

One of the working titles for *The Great Gatsby* happened to be *Among the Ash Heaps and Millionaires* which suggests the central theme of **class conflict** in the novel as well as the stark economic disparities in 1920s American society. There is a direct contrast between the glamour and fashionable aspects of West Egg and East Egg and the **Valley of Ashes**.

### Critics (AO5)

Marxist literary theory allows a perspective on the novel: recurring class clashes and struggles between the **haves** and **have-nots** promotes a relative **class-consciousness** which determines the inter-class relationship dynamic. Initial social perceptions of an individual fix them in the social status they began with, inhibiting **social mobility**.

Wilson is Gatsby’s **antithesis**. Gatsby becomes enormously wealthy on the back of the economic boom, while Wilson works hard his entire life but remains poor. People from Wilson’s social station **facilitate** the lives of the rich; they are the “**servants and gardeners who toil all day**” [chapter 3] to repair the “**ravages**” of parties thrown. The [working-class] **proletariat** is represented by Wilson who appears to be the **embodiment** of the Valley of Ashes. He is described as “**a blonde, spiritless man, anaemic, and faintly handsome. When he saw us a damp gleam of hope sprang into his light blue eyes.**” [chapter 2, p.x]

This bleak description of Wilson is significant as he appears to be **resigned** to his **unprivileged** working-class roots, and does not leave the Valley of Ashes until he murders Gatsby and commits suicide. The use of **spiritless**, **faint**, **damp** and **anaemic** (already physically **ill**) in association with Wilson suggests his **weak** character. Unlike his wife, he lacks **vitality**, but both meet the same end.



Nick's description of Gatsby's life is **vivacious** and Gatsby's determination to **abandon** his lower-class roots is presented in a **creative, passionate, dream-like or romantic** manner [see *Themes: Idealism*]. Wilson's **exploitation** by Tom Buchanan who asserts his demanding nature is even explicit when Tom **deceives** Wilson into believing that Gatsby is Myrtle's killer and as a consequence her lover, leading Wilson to undertake the action Tom is unwilling to carry out himself (kill Gatsby).

It could be argued that Wilson's **passivity**, as he is controlled by both Myrtle and Tom, makes him a **foil** character for both Gatsby and Tom. Wilson is the **feminised** version of the working class as he resigns himself to **hierarchical** class structures by accepting his lower-class status, although it sucks the life out of him and leaves him **ghost-like** - **"She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost..."** [chapter x, p.x] (Note the transaction between him and Tom and the way Myrtle orders him around in the garage).

### Counter-critic (AO5)

However, Fitzgerald's novel goes beyond simply assessing the **decadence** of East Egg or the **raucous extravagance** of West Egg. Sam Leith asserts that **"it is a drastic underreading to see it as a simple polemic against wealth and unthinking privilege...or the chimerical cruelty of the American Dream...it's a book about time and loss and hopelessness and the impossible longing to reinvent yourself and capture a moment in and out of time."** [The Guardian]

## THE ASSOCIATION OF COLOURS WITH WEALTH

White and gold signify wealth, aristocratic wealth in particular.

**"Across the bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water...Their house was even more elaborate than I had expected, a cheerful red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion, overlooking the bay... The front was broken by a line of French windows, glowing now with reflected gold..."** [chapter 1, p.6]

From the very beginning of the novel, white is associated with East Egg's high way of living. Both Daisy and Jordan wear white dresses when Nick meets them for the first time. White is used as a **recurring image** of the wealthy or **elegant** upper-class way of life, and traditionally symbolises purity as well signalling a life of leisure (one where you do not engage in manual labour and thereby dirty your clothes)

Note that whilst the Buchanan's **"elaborate"** mansion is described, Nick does not use derogatory terms like **"roadhouse"** as he does with Gatsby's, nor does he refer to it as **"a colossal affair by any standard... a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy"** [chapter 1, p.5]. The use of "imitation" is significant to Gatsby's frequent attempts to imitate an East Egg or European lifestyle to fit in with his East Egg counterparts, but Nick does not



describe Gatsby's mansion as **romantically** as he does the Buchanans' **colonial** house. Gatsby's failed imitation of a historical French town hall is significant as a status symbol for West Egg, in which Nick says that living in the neighbourhood keeps him within the "**proximity of millionaires**" [chapter 1, p.6].

**"Two rows of brass buttons on her dress gleamed in the sunlight."** [chapter x, p.58]

**"The dresser was garnished with a toilet set of pure dull gold."** [chapter x, p.59]

**"Here's my little gold pencil"** [chapter 6, p.68]

These references to golden or golden-coloured items reveal the strength of the **association** between gold and wealth. Nick's attention to these colours is important to the underlying notions of the **dichotomies** represented by each colour. Whilst gold, or yellow, has **connotations of glamour and wealth**, there is a **false sense of perfection**, innocence or purity, and gold is more **ostentatious** than white, which also - but crucially, **more subtly** - symbolises wealth.

From the very beginning, white is associated with East Egg's high way of living, as both Daisy and Jordan were wearing **white dresses** in the first scene Nick encounters them and [see above] the **romanticised** description of the welcoming feeling of the Buchanan's home. This explicit association of certain colours with physical **beauty** is misleading in 1920's America as the innate nature of society is **exposed** [see *Themes: Idealism*].

**"Mrs Wilson [Myrtle] had changed her costume sometime before and was now attired in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream-coloured chiffon...With the influence of the dress, her personality had also changed."** [chapter 2, p.21]

This quote highlights the importance of **dress** in marking one's **class** and **status**. Whilst Nick initially describes Myrtle in the Valley of Ashes as part of the working class, her expensive items of **clothing**, gifted by Tom, give her appearance a sort of **upward mobility**. This mirrors her transition from a poor garage owner's wife to an upper-class wealthy man's mistress. The **colour cream** is once again a **marker** of the **moneyed classes**. She attempts to **infiltrate** East Egg society by imitating their way of dress.

The choice of words is also notable; Nick uses vocabulary more suited to **gentle** society, such as "**attired**" in place of "dressed". Nevertheless, Myrtle's deceit is revealed through the word "**costume**", as wearing is synonymous with hiding one's **true nature**, or in this case, **her true socio-economic location**.

**"Our white girlhood was passed together there. Our beautiful white..."** [chapter 1, p.14]

Daisy also emphasises through repetition, the direct link between white and **innocence**, **beauty** and **ethereality**. Here she refers to being raised with Jordan in the elite Louisville, which attracts men from all walks of life, like Gatsby, but only accepts the aristocratic Tom Buchanans. Fitzgerald uses the **colour white** to showcase the perceived **innocence** of Daisy, as she is synonymous with **childlike beauty** and **fragility**, and always manages to maintain a **pristine reputation**.



Class influences all aspects of Gatsby's world, particularly the field of love. Both Gatsby's and Myrtle's relationships are **bound** up with class, By the end of the novel, class **dynamics** manage to **dictate** which relationship or marriage can **survive** and which ones are **destroyed**. Tom and Daisy's elite status makes them almost **immune** to the events of the novel and their actions bear no **consequences** on their own lives and marriage but manage to destroy the lives of those **around** them.

When Nick spies on the Buchanans through the window, after the Myrtle incident, he narrates that **“there was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together”** [chapter 7, p.x]. This line is of significance to understanding how the rich and upper-class **operate** in 1920s society, whereby they are **aware** of their privileges and do not mind others taking the fall for them. A recurring theme in novels sees the poorer or the main character from a lower class than the others meet a **tragic** end, even if they are wealthy. Gatsby becomes the **victim** after he is **purposefully sacrificed** for Myrtle's **accidental death** at Daisy's hands, a rich East Egg girl who always escapes the consequences of her actions.

**Daisy's wealth and beauty make her valuable.**

It is important to acknowledge the significance of wealth in shaping love in the novel. Daisy's untainted richness attracts the crowds towards her and has Gatsby fully committing himself to her. Daisy is described repeatedly in an ethereal, story-like manner, **“high in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl...”** [chapter 7, p.76], with **“bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth”** [chapter 1, p.8]. Her beauty and wealth appear almost **interchangeable** for both Gatsby and Nick, and this is encapsulated in the word **“golden”**, which denotes both wealth as well as radiance. Her charm comes from her status and what she represents, the **beauty and elegance of wealth**, and she represents it rather well.

The stressed significance of her attractive voice, **“the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down...a singing compulsion”** [chapter 1, p.8], is part of Fitzgerald's **epic machinery** and **elegiac** mood. This is because Daisy's voice can be compared to a **siren** that **compels** those around her and **captures** the heart of Gatsby who is drawn towards her because of the money he senses behind her voice [see *Themes: Love*].

The problem with siren characters is their **danger** and **deception**. Daisy is a siren, an **enchantress**. Although she gives her heart to Gatsby, she marries Tom. When they revive their romance, and Gatsby is convinced once more that she will choose him, yet she fails him again. Gatsby's **association** with Daisy leads to his death, and she plays a direct part as she lets him take the fall, after finishing their short-lived **epic** romance. Even at the end, Gatsby is **intoxicated** by the dream Daisy's existence promises him, and he dies **devoted** to the **“colossal vitality of his illusion”** [chapter 5, p.61], which delivers the readers with a **grotesque** tragedy of **unrequited** love.



“**Daisy**, surprising me by opening up again in a **flower-like way**” [chapter 1, p.15]

It is interesting that Nick, the narrator and Daisy’s cousin, is the one describing Daisy elaborately in a **romanticised** manner, outlining Daisy’s **value**, beauty and attraction. This is of importance as it allows an outsider, not her devoted lover, to explore and justify Gatsby’s **obsession** with her.

Fitzgerald uses **wordplay** here as Daisy acts like a flower, which imitates the meaning and nature of her name. Daisy is often associated with **nature**, the most beautiful and **gentle** kind, for example, her home, “**a bright rose-coloured space**” [chapter 1, p.7], and when she describes Nick as “**a rose, an absolute rose**” [chapter 1, p.11]. This makes her **vulnerable** yet highly **valuable**, as she uses the nature-related language herself and is placed as an object of significant fragility and beauty because of it.

This proves that class is **everything**. Class dictates all the characters’ actions, whether they are **comfortable** enough to act **freely** because of their high status, or whether they attempt to **change** their class status to acquire privileges and security. The dream of economic and class becomes a **weakness** for poor characters. The inescapability of one’s roots opens up a debate about how accessible the American Dream really is: wealth can (sometimes) be acquired but acceptance by old money society is doubtful, and those who have temporarily ascended the socio-economic ladder will fall back down (as illustrated by Myrtle and Gatsby’s fates). The moral message of the novel is that the rich will always get richer and stronger, and the poor will forever **struggle** to make their own arrangements if **social reform** is not introduced to change the harsh realities of 1920s **capitalist, consumerist** America.

