
KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN SPEZIAL

F. Scott Fitzgerald, THE GREAT GATSBY

von Patrick Charles

PRÜFUNGSAUFGABEN MIT MUSTERLÖSUNGEN

In Ergänzung zu den Aufgaben im Buch (Kapitel 6) finden Sie hier zwei weitere Aufgaben mit Musterlösungen. Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

Task 5**

Argue the following point: Jay Gatsby is not in love with Daisy – he is in love with the *idea* of Daisy.

Model answer:

WEALTH, STATUS
AND FREEDOM

When Nick learns from Jordan, and later from Gatsby himself, about the history of Daisy and Gatsby's love affair, it is interesting to see how important objects and appearances are to the young Jay Gatsby. The fairy-tale wealth and luxury she is surrounded with are very important when trying to understand the nature of Gatsby's love for her: he is seduced by the world in which he discovers Daisy. Daisy represents everything he wants – wealth, status and freedom.

Towards the end of the novel, when we learn from Henry Gatz about his son's strict programme for self-improvement, it becomes clear that Gatsby's great powers of determination and his ambition and will to succeed were developed at an early age, and focussed on escaping the poor, unremarkable world into which he was born. This has been his motivation since he was a teenager. The time he spends with Dan Cody is instructive, and it is during this period that James Gatz creates "Jay Gatsby". But he still doesn't have a focus for his energies. When he meets Daisy – the "first "nice" girl he had ever known" (p. 192 l. 24) – he is amazed by the wealth and beauty in which she lives (p. 193). For her, luxury is "casual". He feels that her world has a "ripe mystery". Surrounded by such wealth and admired by so many other men, Daisy becomes increasingly interesting – "excitingly desirable" – and her "value" increases in his eyes (p. 193 ll. 16–18).

After seducing her he discovers that he loves her ("I can't describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her, old sport" p. 195 ll. 8–9). She has become a "grail" for him – living with luxury and wealth and belonging to the powerful, untouchable upper class, Daisy has become the symbol for what he is searching for in trying to escape both himself and his origins. He has had experiences with other women before Daisy ("He knew women early" – p. 133 l. 22), but none of them has been suitable to take a place in his "grotesque and fantastic conceits" (p. 134 l. 6). He needs a woman, a focus for his romantic love, who can become his fairy-tale queen in his "incorruptible dream" (p. 200 l. 27).

DAISY IS AN
IDEAL OF
IMPOSSIBLE LOVE

Despite the messy, passionate confusion of his love for her, Gatsby occasionally has a very clear understanding of what Daisy is. "Her voice is full of money" (p. 160 l. 21) he says to Nick, summing up in a very non-romantic way the famous charm and seductive power of her voice. This again shows that Daisy, for him, is symbolic of something, that she represents an idea that was there in his mind before he met her. When he and Tom confront each other in Chapter VII (pp. 172–179), Gatsby speaks for Daisy as if she is a character of his own creation. This is why he is so stunned by – and refuses to believe – her decision to remain with Tom. Daisy represents for him an ideal, an impossibly pure love, and this idea refuses to acknowledge the possibility that she may have also loved Tom. The claims he makes about Daisy's feelings ("...in her heart she never loved anyone except me!" p. 173 l. 17) sound as if he is quoting from a story. In the world he has created for himself – his "incorruptible dream" – Daisy is a "golden girl" (p. 160 ll. 25–26) who only didn't marry him at the time because he was poor. There are many things about Daisy that Gatsby can't see or refuses to acknowledge. The exclusive, elitist nature of her social class is interpreted by him in different ways – the seductive context in which he found her: the prison-like nature of her marriage to Tom – but it always comes down to a world he desperately wishes to enter, yet cannot. Daisy represents his romantic desire to belong to this world, and his focus on her concentrates his obsession until the wealth and the status have become irrelevant (consider his thoughtlessly casual, extravagant generosity).

A FAIRY-TALE
PRINCESS

Daisy becomes the focus for his ambition and energies, and when the material world he has conquered with his vast wealth proves to be uninteresting and unsatisfying, she is all he has left, the idea of the perfect, pure princess from the fairy-tale world he was seduced by. Even when confronted with the reality of her choosing to stay with Tom, with all that that decision implies about her and Tom's class values and the shallowness of her real feelings for Gatsby, he refuses to accept reality and continues to hope that he can

capture his dream. One of the last things he says to Nick before being killed is that he expects Daisy to call him (p. 200 l. 7). In the unreal world he has spent his life creating, this is what must happen. Daisy, the idea, must behave in this way. Of course, Daisy the real woman is already long gone with her husband, and will not even return to attend his funeral.

Task 6 ***

How do you interpret Fitzgerald's attitudes towards the various social classes he presents in the book – the idle rich, those who must work, those who have no money?

Model answer:

DIFFERENT STANDARDS OF LIVING

The world in which *The Great Gatsby* is set is one of very different standards of living. At the two extremes there are Tom and Daisy Buchanan, born into vast wealth and privilege, who have never had to work, and George and Myrtle Wilson, who work and live in poverty in a wasteland between the suburbs and the city. Between these two extremes are various levels of wealth and status, including Nick Carraway, who comes from a good family but is working to support himself; Jordan Baker, who belongs to Daisy's world yet has a career as a professional golfer: the diverse crowds at Gatsby's parties: and Gatsby himself, who represents one man's transition from the bottom to the top.

Wealth and status is an obsession for Gatsby, and it is an important factor in his obsessive love for Daisy. He believes that she didn't marry him because he was poor when they first knew each other, and dedicates himself to acquiring wealth in order to give her the life he thinks she needs. He mimics the affectations and manners of the upper classes ("old sport") without ever being able to fully conform to their world. Tom sees through him from the beginning, as do his friends (as seen in the awkward scene with Sloane, pp. 138–141). Nick, who comes from a good family in the Midwest and is raised in upper class society, can read the signs that Gatsby can't – Gatsby's enthusiasm and extravagant taste are clear indicators of his lower class background.

GEORGE: LOSER OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Of all the other characters in the novel, Gatsby has perhaps the greatest similarity to George and Myrtle Wilson. They are born into poor, hard-working lives and dream of escaping from their origins and becoming something better somewhere else. But while George has been unable to escape from the valley of ashes, Gatsby has succeeded in reinventing himself and creating a new life for himself. George represents the losers of the American Dream, those who are forced down by the commercialised, competitive world of shallow success and materialism. He is an object of pity – Nick pities him from the start, and even Tom seems to soften towards the man whose life he dominates and eventually destroys. Fitzgerald's depiction of George as a hopeless, exhausted figure who is at the mercy of more aggressive forces – Myrtle and Tom – suggests that he sees no hope for the simple, unambitious and socially underprivileged people of America, and regrets their submission to the forces of the modern world.

George is unable to escape his world. His wife is more complicated: she tries to escape, through her affair with Tom, and, like Gatsby, tries to enter this dream-like world of wealth and luxury by dressing up in fancy clothes and assuming an identity which is not her own. Myrtle is a crude and dislikable character, but Fitzgerald has given her the energy and the ambition her husband lacks, a force of character which identifies her with Gatsby. And all three of them, Myrtle, George and Gatsby, die more or less directly as a result of the Buchanans' careless playing with their lives.

Fitzgerald is very clear about Tom Buchanan from the beginning. He is presented as a dominating, brutal man with bigoted opinions and an arrogant and cold attitude. Daisy's deeply flawed character is at first only suggested, and only later becomes tragically apparent with Myrtle's death and her return to Tom. Between the pity the author feels for the Wilsons and the way he makes them the tragic victims of the games of the upper class, and the careless unthinking destructiveness of the Buchanans, the less dramatic middle ground of the novel's social hierarchy is occupied by Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker.

NICK AND JORDAN

These two characters are very different. Nick says of himself "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (p. 84 ll. 14–15), and describes Jordan as "incurably dishonest" (p. 83 l. 2). Their relationship is cool and lacks the drama of the other romantic relationships in the novel. This cool, reasonable behaviour is characteristic of the two of them. Nick is an observer and a polite and cautiously non-judgemental participant. Jordan behaves like an ironic decoration, being present, being beautiful and cool, and trying not to get entangled in other people's problems. While Nick emerges from the novel as possibly the only truly sympathetic character, Jordan remains a hauntingly desirable woman, despite her dishonesty and ironic distance.

**THE RICH PLAY
AND THE POOR
SUFFER**

Fitzgerald's sympathies seem to clearly lie with the middle ground of decent behaviour (see Nick's careful and respectful attitude to the women he is involved with) and hard work (the Buchanans, the idle rich, are not positive figures). These are core values of a traditional, stable society, the old world of the Midwest from which Nick came. Fitzgerald's critique of the social hierarchies in America in the 1920s is satirical and clear – the rich play and the poor suffer. The best anyone can do is to work honestly and treat those around them with decency. Gatsby's doom illustrates the futility of trying to seek happiness and fulfilment in the pursuit of wealth and status.