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# Jay Gatsby: Is it the Real Life or is it just Fantasy?

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*The Great Gatsby* is one of the most criticised and controversial novels due to the many pressure points that are developed along the narrative. In spite of the negative and destructive criticism, there is one element in the equation that cannot be ignored: the charismatic but tormented Jay Gatsby. Its author, F. Scott Fitzgerald, builds up a complex character whose psychological aspects embark the reader on a journey in which understanding Gatsby's eccentric behaviour becomes the ultimate purpose.

The erratic and peculiar behaviour of Jay Gatsby along the novel can be analysed taking into account the Freudian Theory of Trauma, but before diving into these turbulent waters it is relevant to explore Gatsby's origins in order to have a whole perspective of his personality.

The first point that should be taken into account is the conception of the 'self-made man.' Gatsby rejects his origins and his true self from an early age as he considers his future can be brighter and remarkable:

His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people - his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. (...) So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to his conception he was faithful to the end. (Fitzgerald, 1925/2019, p. 86)

Moreover, his natural ambition and charisma make him a captivating and bewitching human being, which ends up being crucial in the development of his relationship with Dan Cody and the construction of his new self: "At any rate Cody asked him a few questions (one of them elicited the brand new name) and found that he was quick and extravagantly ambitious" (Fitzgerald, 1925/2019, p. 87).

Once Jay Gatsby kills his shameful past and is reborn from the ashes, his encounter with the astonishing and captivating Daisy represents a turning point in his new and early life. Since their first meeting, Gatsby idealises Daisy, puts her on a golden pedestal and worships her as a goddess. He is captivated by her wealth, her youth and the fact that she is also worshipped by other men. The love he professes to Daisy can be perceived as harmless and born from his own isolation, but what he is really doing is rebuilding her according to his own desires and expectations, which leads to the conversion of Daisy into a malleable character of his delusive fantasies. Gatsby's perception of reality is distorted from the very beginning and that prevents him from seeing Daisy for who she really is.

Gatsby's delusions come to an abrupt end when both take different paths. Many people would grieve the loss of their loved one and make an effort to overcome the loss. In the case of Gatsby, his delusions strengthen and take full control of his already entangled mind. He experiments what Sigmund Freud defines as "traumatic neurosis", a "kind of repetition of compulsion of unpleasant and traumatic events." (Huong Giang Bui, 2013, p. 43) Jay Gatsby, being separated from the object

of his desire, re-lives over and over again the experiences shared with Daisy. He is not capable of carrying on with his life as he is trapped in the past. Trying to resurrect his old life, his happiness and to recapture Daisy's love, Gatsby embarks on the mission of finding a suitable solution to his existential dilemma; this is how his crowded and peculiar parties are born. At first sight, these gatherings could have been a way of escaping from his fantasies and having a fresh start. Nevertheless, they are just a mask, a means to an end. The parties represent one step further in Jay Gatsby's fantasies. In spite of being the host, he seems to be a mere spectator and has no interest in meeting new people because his only purpose is finding Daisy among the guests. Gatsby reinforces his self-imposed isolation to keep the fantasy alive, and only gets involved with the people who have connections to Daisy, such as Nick and Jordan.

The parties enclose a deeper meaning in Gatsby's life as he builds this artificial world of wealth, luxury and power to lure Daisy. Gatsby not only has to deal with the loss of his first love, but also with the guilt of thinking that he cannot retain her due to the lack of those attributes: "(...) he had deliberately given Daisy a sense of security; he had let her believe that he was a person from much the same strata as herself - that he was fully able to take care of her" (Fitzgerald, 1925/2019, pp. 126-127).

Gatsby is so absorbed by his delusion that when he finally meets Daisy again, he cannot face the reality: the real world and the fantasy collide, increasing his trauma and the distortion of reality. This is how it is possible to understand that Gatsby only loves the memory of Daisy. He just wants to go back to the past when everything was perfect for both of them. Seeing Daisy married to Tom changes his plans, which leads him to firmly believe that Daisy does not love Tom and her marriage is just a fantasy, a way of reaching the life she desires and deserves. Gatsby also provides reasons in order to support his theory: "She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved anyone except me!" (Fitzgerald, 1925/2019, p. 111).

Gatsby is so convinced that Daisy is meant for him that he expresses feeling married to Daisy. Following this logic, Gatsby is a faithful 'husband' whose sole purpose is to protect Daisy from all evil. He remains loyal to his ideals by assuming the responsibility of Myrtle's death, which leads him to his own death.

Jay Gatsby is one of the most complex characters ever portrayed in literature. He lives a lie, clutching to a fantasy born from his trauma, and dies believing in it. His own illusions trace the path to his own destruction.

## References

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- Huong Giang Bui, T. (2013). Jay Gatsby's Trauma and Psychological Loss. *English Language and Literary Studies*, 3(1), 42-46. Canadian Center of Science and Education, Japan. Retrieved from <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ells/article/view/23965>