
Nick Carraway in the Closet

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There is a lot that can be discussed and analyzed in *The Great Gatsby*, from the use of symbols and colours to the negative depictions of the characters and the critical nature of its content. It is a layered novel and everyone will have a different take from it. However, there is something to be said about the way the point of view character Nick Carraway is portrayed; his short-lived relationship with Jordan Baker and his interactions with other men, especially Jay Gatsby, can be read as queer – gay, even. If we approach this novel from a queer perspective, many scenes can be seen and interpreted in a new and interesting light from the usual heteronormative interpretation.

In a normal reading of the novel:

Nick is merely an interested observer who helps facilitate Gatsby's mad dream to rekindle his love affair with Daisy, now unhappily married to Tom Buchanan (...). In that novel, Nick loves Gatsby, the erstwhile James Gatz of North Dakota, for his capacity to dream Jay Gatsby into being and for his willingness to risk it all for the love of a beautiful woman (Bourne M., 2018).

However, if one were to apply queer theory, the story from Nick's perspective takes on a different tone and meaning. In a queer reading of the novel "Nick doesn't just love Gatsby, he's in love with him" (Bourne M., 2018). The way Michael Bourne describes it in his essay is absolutely on point, but it is also only the tip of the iceberg of the queer-undertones of *The Great Gatsby*.

The first remarkable scene under the queer eye is the one closing chapter two, best described as "the narrator wanders off in a drunken stupor with a stranger and ends up in his bedroom" (Bourne M., 2018). What may appear to be two very drunken men not being able to recollect all of what happened after leaving the party could be interpreted as two gay men leaving to have some private time in Mr. McKee's bedroom. Given how the chapter ends with this particular highlight, it would be odd to consider it not deliberate from the author.

Another key element is Nick's relationship with Jordan Baker, a woman often described in masculine terms: "she was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her body backwards at the shoulders like a young cadet" (Fitzgerald, 2019/1925, p. 17). There are other instances in the novel where Jordan is described by Nick in this manner, such as wearing evening dresses as if they were sports dresses. On top of that, she is a golf player, a sport predominantly male back in the 20s, and "she surrounds herself with simple-minded boys" (Cotyle 2017 - 2018, p. 38). To say that Jordan contrasts with Daisy, who is described as being incredibly beautiful and feminine, would be an understatement. On top of that, Nick's relationship with Jordan is not rooted in love but mutual curiosity, and even then there were instances during the last chapters of the novel where Nick prioritized Mr Gatsby over Jordan without hesitation. Even during their break up, he says: "I'm thirty. I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honour" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 150) – under a queer eye, this is a closeted gay man telling Jordan he is done pretending to be straight and consider himself an honest man at the same time.

Finally, there is Nick and Jay Gatsby's relationship. There is no denying that this is a key part of the novel since the two connect incredibly fast during the party held at Gatsby's in chapter

three, the party at which Nick was personally invited by the man himself. Mr Gatsby's conflict with Tom Buchanan could be interpreted as the clash of traditional masculinity with non-traditional masculinity, given how both men are described by Nick himself. To Nick, Tom

was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward (...). It was a body capable of enormous leverage — a cruel body (Fitzgerald, 1925/2019, pp. 13 - 14).

A different image to Gatsby's. When Nick first met him in chapter three, "he experiences overwhelming emotions that he does not seem to have experienced before for anyone else" (Cotyle 2017 - 2018, p. 45), paying close attention to his attractive physique and how his smile "was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life" (Fitzgerald, 1925/2019, p. 46). Sounds similar to how one may feel when meeting the love of their life, doesn't it? Nick Carraway being in love with Mr Gatsby would explain why he is so fascinated with the man, but it also affects his role in the novel. He goes from being the point of view main character who is mostly passive to what is going on around him, to become an active player during the last chapters, especially regarding Gatsby's funeral since he is the one organizing and seemingly the only person, besides Jay's father, who cares about the man after his death.

Examining Nick Carraway with queer theory gives us a story of a gay man who does not come out of the closet for his own safety, due to the time period, but still displays hints of who he truly is across the novel. *The Great Gatsby*, in turn, becomes a story of a gay man pining for a straight guy who will not reciprocate his feelings. Whether or not Jay Gatsby is a queer man himself is up for debate, all of which depends on the reader. Is Nick fully gay or possibly bisexual? That may be up for debate too, but it is hard to deny Nick's own queerness when the reader does not assume being heterosexual as the norm. When I read the novel, something in my gut was telling me Nick was not completely honest about himself — after doing this deeper dive into the story, I was content with knowing my gut feeling was right this time and made me, at the end of the day, appreciate this work of fiction more than I originally had.

References

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