
Jay Gatsby & Tom Buchanan: Two sides of the same coin?

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The Great Gatsby, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925, is probably one of the most popular books ever published, and it has been analysed in almost every possible facet. This talented author has created a very rich and interesting story, where every single detail matters: the characters, the dialogues, the settings and even the colours. And, depending on the point of view that we might choose, we could find a different meaning for a specific topic of the novel. When we take into account all the theories developed in the Modern era of literature, Fitzgerald's era, the analysis can be carried through easily. But what happens when the novel is studied from a different perspective? Can we analyse *The Great Gatsby* with other theories?

The Great Gatsby presents us a small group of characters full of flaws and dark secrets. Even though they all seem to be very similar, in the eyes of the narrator, Nick Carraway, there is only one person in the story who he considers to be somehow better than the rest: Jay Gatsby. With few exceptions during the course of the novel, Nick always tries to depict the best of his friend, including those moments where Gatsby makes mistakes. He says that he "disapproves" of him, but he likes him, and despite the fact that he barely knows him, he cares about him:

'They're a rotten crowd,' I shouted across the lawn. 'You're worth the whole damn bunch put together.' I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end. (Fitzgerald, 1925/2013, p. 129).

On the other hand, Carraway is very harsh when he talks about his old friend Tom Buchanan, making him look like the villain:

Now he 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. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body [...] a cruel body. (Fitzgerald, 1925/2013, p. 9)

But no matter how hard Nick tries, the similarities between his two friends cannot be denied: both Gatsby and Buchanan are rich and live in beautiful mansions (located precisely one in front of the other, divided by the bay), both have an enormous fondness for Carraway and both are in love with the same woman, Daisy. So, they are very similar, but the difference between them seems to be their attitude towards others: Jay is kind, funny and elegant; Tom is rude, boring and racist. The former seems to be good, while the latter seems to be evil. Could this mean that we are in the presence of *dark doubles*, like in Gothic novels?

The dark double is a duality experienced by a character that represents the polarity between good and evil. This duality sometimes occurs within the character, but in some other cases, like the case of Gatsby and Buchanan, two characters are involved. Katherine Bowers (2015) says that the dark double

can be read as the manifestation of anxiety over a transgression. [...] The double's appearance is usually terrifying because it is the manifestation of the social encounter feared most: one in which the authentic self is revealed. [...] Dark secrets are no longer buried. [...] The terror lies in your double revealing your own hidden, true self.

From this point of view, the duality between Gatsby and Buchanan could be possible, because, by telling the origins of Gatsby's wealth, Tom exposes Jay to Nick and Jordan, but, most importantly, he exposes him to Daisy:

He looked [...] as if he had 'killed a man.' For a moment the set of his face could be described in just that fantastic way. It passed, and he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made." (Fitzgerald, 1925/2013, p. 104)

Also, the already quoted physical description of Tom portrays him as a scary man. But is this enough to determine the duality? Brian DeMars (2010) provides another important function of doubling in literature: "The double uncovers attitudes and practices that enable and perpetuate inequality because it showcases the divergent attitudes between individuals with differing social and economic status." (p. 59). In *The Great Gatsby*, this is not the case. Despite his poor origins, and despite the fact that he became rich illegally, Jay is as much wealthy as Tom, and they both lead sumptuous lives: Jay celebrates enormous parties every week at his mansion: "There was music from my neighbour's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars." (Fitzgerald, 1925/2013, p. 33). Tom, on the other hand, is a more serious man who enjoys other pleasures reserved for the rich like playing polo: "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." (Fitzgerald, 1925/2013, p. 9). Katharine McLaren Todd (2011) proposes an interesting idea regarding the dark doubles: "This inevitable conflict [...] is also reflective of anxieties created by the struggle to deny one's true nature in order to meet society's expectations." (p. 7). In *The Great Gatsby*, the only point of conflict between Jay and Tom is no other than Daisy Buchanan. The only reason why the confrontation between them takes place is because Tom is Daisy's husband and sees Jay as a threat, because he knows that Gatsby is in love with her and wants her back. It is true that Jay seems to try to meet society's expectations, but, in reality, he is only trying to meet Daisy's expectations. Finally, by using Edith Wharton as an example, Todd is giving us another great characteristic of the use of the dark double:

Wharton deftly uses setting to mirror or double the psychological states of her characters, employing houses with dark and stifling interiors to symbolize the psychological and emotional imprisonment of the inhabitants trapped inside them. This is the case in 'The Lady's Maid's Bell', 'Miss Mary Pask', and 'All Souls'. (Todd, 2011, p. 13).

Wharton was not the only one who used the resource of imprisonment for the dark double: *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Mason is a well-known example. This is not the case with Gatsby and Buchanan: neither Jay or Tom are trapped in their own houses. Both are free men, who live a very active social life, and both seem to be very lucid men. Besides, both houses are described by Nick as beautiful mansions.

Taking all these characteristics into account, we can affirm that there is no dark double between Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan. The only motive of their conflict is Daisy Buchanan, and there is not a representation of good and evil because, despite what Nick Carraway believes, neither of them would represent the "good" in this polarity. Both would represent the "evil", both have despicable traits. Like the rest of the characters in this amazing novel, both Jay and Tom represent the worst of American society.

References

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