

PRE-EXAM QUOTES & ANALYSIS

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Key Context:

- Published in 1925, **CANNOT OVERSTATE** how Fitzgerald's work is mortifying for an American readership – their so-called "*American Dream*" literally unravels.
- Cast your mind to America's earlier spouts of optimism* -> the **GOLD RUSH** (19th century) meet the uncomfortable truth.
- Fitzgerald himself was a partaker of the decadence and hedonism he wrote about; thus, possessing an acute awareness of 20's social climate
- Written against backdrop of the "Roaring 20's" - America's economic boom

Observations:

Demystifying Gatsby, leaves readers with a complex character owing to a checkered history. Gatsby's meteoric rise to infamy, perhaps breathes life into Fitzgerald's readership – fueling the American dream.

Fitzgerald highlights how some enter life handicapped or with a silver spoon. Even with this boiled approach of the text, some are born in the middle - in a state of limbo, like the novel's women who possess innate intrinsic value; through their beauty. One's dream is another's nightmare. Any analysis of Wilson, Daisy and Myrtle reveals how Gatsby and Tom are tone-deaf to their plight. Indeed, Fitzgerald subtly pits old and new money against each other, all the while spotlighting how Gatsby's mind is thoroughly in the pits of romantic hell.

Utterly enamored and enraptured by Daisy, Gatsby seems almost pathetic. Yet, also heroic nearing the novel's tail end, himself volunteering to take the fall for Daisy's reckless driving... His unwavering desire of a woman in wedlock is his death-wish. Perhaps, knowing there exists an infinitesimally small chance of his dream coming to fruition, Gatsby pursues anyways – destroying his life and the lives of others around him. A farcry from how one should experience their "*American Dream*". He wasn't the guidestone of the "Roaring 20's" of which Nick hyped him up to be.

Yet, this myopic reading of the text where we're all hyper-invested in Gatsby skirts away from the crux of the text. Who doesn't love a "Rags-to-Riches" story? While yes, Gatsby reveals a great deal of the male psyche, the novel highlights the working-class hellscape "Valley of Ashes", spousal and male-on-female violence, Old&New money pitted against each other, Gatsby and Tom being tone deaf towards other's sufferings... The list continues... until this homegrown ideology of the *American Dream* is proven to be theoretical and ultimately shatters alongside the eponymous figure Gatsby -> "*And the holocaust was complete*"

Gatsby gets no honorable sendoff yet is rewarded by Nick with the epithet "Great".

Quotes, motifs and obscure observations:

Dust motif: "Her life violently extinguished... mingled her thick dark blood with **dust**"

-> epitomizes a figurative/physical reclamation of the Valley of Ashes, her life force (blood) fuses with dust that is a metonymy for the Valley of Ashes. -> inability to escape the origin of class, despite being strung along by her secret lover...

"Ash-grey men... [Wilson's] veil, foul dust" - Dust, dirt etc... dirty sounding words are these people's identity.

Dream motif: "Paid a high price for having lived a single **dream** for too long"

His dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it, he did not know that it was already behind him" arm's reach, delusion, tragic irony, hubris, lack of self-awareness, American dream),

"Can't repeat the **past**! Why of course you can!"

Echoes... "*Those who don't learn from history are bound to repeat it*". Fitzgerald posits a universal comment.

Light motif: "[Gatsby] literally glowed, ecstatic patron of recurrent **light**"

-> Larger-than-life presence, mythic proportions and aura of grandeur associate Gatsby's light with the hope of the *American dream*. Recurrent patron means he is a repeated benefactor towards others, generosity.

"Reaching for the **light**, believed in the green light, [outstretched arm]"

-> Focus how the literal source of light is ARTIFICIAL from DAISY's pier -> link this with emptiness, unattainability intangibility

"[Daisy] stood there for a minute and then turned out the **light**"

-> Gatsby's entire life-buildup would climax towards his reunion with his jilted lover, only to be *extinguished* so quickly and easily, through the flick of a light switch

"Gatsby, **pale** as death, with his hands plunged like weights in his coat pockets, was standing in a puddle of water glaring tragically into my eyes"

-> Complete 180 from "*Literally glowed*". Mentally burdened... ultimately culminates in his "*unutterable depression*"

"[Wilson's] pale hair, anemic and spiritlessness"

Sidelining of other's suffering:

- Nick criminally downplays Gatsby's underworld dealings.
- Gatsby is in cahoots with Wolfsheimer, their victims whether financial, physical etc may be untold.
- Rumors may have truth to them *NEVER DENIED, "He's a bootlegger, I heard he killed a man, related to the Kaiser"
- Car-crash = recklessness of elite = "Careless people, smashed things/creatures, then retreat back into money, vast carelessness that kept them together, other people cleaned their mess" % "The best thing a girl, beautiful little fool"
- Buchanan's, "Cheerful Georgian colonial mansion" -> generations of privilege, potential inter-generational slavery were the ingredients of the Buchanan family.
- Gatsby's origin is a "shapeless shiftless" farming family,
- "Of course, I'll say I was driving" -> Gatsby takes the full extraordinary kindness

Generic advice:

Consider:

- Face-value, cursory, at-a-glance reading/understanding
- Then, Feminist, Marxist and Psychoanalytical.
- Authorial insight?
- Audience response, contemporary and historic
- Aural, gustatory, olfactory, tactile, necrotic – types of imagery

In works of tragedy, dramatic irony always fore points anagnorisis :

- High or low points in tragic downfall
- Whether or not this facilitates, mitigates, catalyzes or mitigates the tragic outcome
- Lexis, can be aggressive or calm
- Foreshadowing anticipates this
- The last and first lines, Tom's first interaction with Nick (athletic, extrovert) and his last (crying like a baby)
- What happens in extract A will facilitate what happens next
- Analyse the prose/verse and syntax, is the sentence fragmented, lineation reveals who dominates a conversation

Dead dreams are stubborn,

'In tragedy, victims suffer more than the protagonists'

In works of tragedy, such as *The Great Gatsby* and *Richard II* there exists much debate as to whether victims suffer more than protagonists. One interpretation put forth suggests victims do suffer more than protagonists, as their suffering is referenced continuously unlike suffering of protagonists. A secondary

reading argues protagonists suffer more as they have more at stake to lose. An alternative reading implies the suffering of protagonists and victims are relatively hard to compare. This essay will examine each in turn, in order to better understand implied authorial attitudes towards the suffering of victims/protagonists, in particular to pinpoint which party suffered more.

Upon a cursory reading, it is undoubtable that protagonist, Jay Gatsby, suffers the most in *The Great Gatsby* as he had more at stake to lose. Gatsby yearns to be reunited with his former lover, Daisy Buchanan, to which he goes to great lengths to accomplish this dream. Gatsby virtually transforms his “shapeless and shiftless farm” background to become a wealthy socialite throwing “large parties”, in order to appeal to Daisy because of wealth. Despite his efforts, this ultimately culminates in Gatsby’s “unutterable depression”, he cannot come to terms with Daisy being formally married to Tom and having a daughter. Gatsby’s suffering is made paramount here, his life’s purpose as it seems, was to reunite with Daisy, yet his efforts appear to have been wasted. A psycho-analytical reading would suggest that this unreconcilable fact, indeed causes Gatsby continuous woe and causes him to prioritize Daisy before himself. Gatsby reveals to Nick, “Of course, I’ll say I was driving”, Gatsby here absorbs the suffering of Daisy onto himself, he takes full responsibility for the death of a woman, unknown to him, all because of his love for Daisy. Therefore, it is undoubtable that Gatsby suffered the most, not only were his life efforts and high position in 1920’s society, essentially wasted, he absorbed the suffering of others, which led to his death. Similarly, in *Richard II*, we observe a similar notion. Richard is essentially deposed from an all-powerful King to penniless prisoner. Richard laments on how people have been essentially unable to relate to him, being King, “mistaking [him] all this while, living with bread, tasting grief, needing friends”. From this it can be inferred, Richard’s entire life has been a suffering, due to his subject’s inability to see him as a person, which if analyzed psychoanalytically suggests Richard feels extreme loneliness and isolation from the world.

Conversely, it is more plausible to argue that victims suffer more as their suffering is referenced continuously. Victims, such as Wilson are first referred to as “spiritless” and “anaemic”. At face-value, suffering can only be deduced by the sickly and mundane description provided by Nick. However, a Marxist reading infers that his “anemic” description is a telltale sign of sickness induced by poor working conditions, a typical experience of the working classes in 1920s N.America. Moreover, the superlative adjective “spiritless” perhaps reveals the monotony of Wilson’s line of work, he neither experiences the lavish lifestyles of the Buchannans or Gatsby yet works long hours yet works long manual hours. Moreover, although not mentioned continuously and to the same extent, characters such as Mowbray, suffer greatly – having to forgo “the language learnt from 40 years” and having made his “tongue [no longer useful] to [him] no more”. Mowbray, claims his physical banishment from England, is banishment from his language, which essentially strips him of freedom, he can no longer communicate with his countrymen.

On the other hand, suffering is rather difficult to compare between parties. The economic suffering England faces, after the coffers have been emptied for Irish wars and the challenges facing the working classes of 1920’s USA are relatively difficult to compare with the emotional sufferings of Richard and Gatsby. A Marxist critique would argue that the economic suffering is unjust and involves more suffering, due to class exploitation, whereas a psycho-analytical argument may argue the emotional distress of Richard being deposed King, which he believes to be his divine right and Gatsby losing the love of his life, are far more significant due to the depression it causes. Moreover, although *The Great Gatsby* clearly highlights the suffering of Wilson, we as readers do not learn of the suffering of victims from Gatsby and Wolfsheimer’s illicit operations, or the casualties of the Irish wars.

In summation, whether protagonists suffer more than victim in tragedy very much depends on the perspective each text is viewed from. A Marxist reading would consider the unmentioned victims alongside the economically challenged, as suffering more due to class exploitation. Yet on the reverse, a psycho-analytical reading would justify the notion protagonists suffer more, due to the mental stress each protagonists faces. Therefore, it is impossible to give a definitive answer, without deferring back to each reading.