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American Classics H: Period 1

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Reading Log 3 - Crazy Rich Dumb People

Towards the beginning of Chapter VIII, Gatsby reveals his true identity to Nick for the first time and describes why his dreams will always be married to Daisy:

Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor. (150)

F. Scott Fitzgerald juxtaposes diction like “imprisons” and “safe” to illustrate the beneficial yet restrictive effects of wealth. Only those who come from old money—and thus have been shielded their entire lives—possess the innocence and naivety that Daisy exemplifies. It is this purity and innocence—attributes of the wealthy that James Gatz could never learn—that completes the dream of Jay Gatsby.

In this passage, Fitzgerald uses heat as a symbol for poverty by describing the “struggles of the poor” as “hot.” Heat is mentioned repeatedly throughout Chapter VII as F. Scott Fitzgerald describes the inevitable day when Daisy finally turns her back on Gatsby:

The next day was broiling, almost the last, certainly the warmest, of the summer. As my train emerged from the tunnel into sunlight, only the hot whistles of the National Biscuit Company broke the simmering hush at noon. The straw seats of the car hovered on the edge of combustion. (114)

It is during this sweltering hot day that Daisy receives an unwelcome glimpse at the “hot struggles of the poor” Gatsby has endured in order to amass enough wealth to even approach her:

“[Gatsby] and this Wolfsheim bought up a log of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That’s one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him, and I wasn’t far wrong.” (133)

Daisy realizes she will never be comfortable with Gatsby. He simply lacks the innocence and innate naivety that comes with old money. Gatsby did all this just to be with Daisy, but in doing so he corrupted his second chance and is ultimately abandoned:

The voice begged again to go.

“*Please*, Tom! I can’t stand this any more.”

Her frightened eyes told that whatever intentions, whatever courage she had had, were definitely gone. (134-135)

In her desperation, Daisy returns to the man who shares her blissful ignorance and decides to stay with Tom. Unlike Gatsby, Tom also possesses the old-money naivety as described by Nick towards the end of the novel:

I shook hands with [Tom]; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace—or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons—rid of my provincial squeamishness forever. (179)

The child-like behavior exemplified by Tom can not be learned by an outsider like James Gatz. Gatsby tried his entire life to become one of the upper class, but there are certain traits that one can not learn: genuine ignorance is one of them.