

Quotes

Society and Class Quotes

Quote:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments [...]. (1.1-3)

Thought:

The very opening of *The Great Gatsby* sets the tone for a book about society and class. We know immediately that our narrator is privileged, and that he is painfully conscious of it.

Quote:

"About Gatsby! No, I haven't. I said I'd been making a small investigation of his past."

"And you found he was an Oxford man," said Jordan helpfully.

"An Oxford man!" He was incredulous. "Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit."

"Nevertheless he's an Oxford man."

"Oxford, New Mexico," snorted Tom contemptuously, "or something like that."

"Listen, Tom. If you're such a snob, why did you invite him to lunch?" demanded Jordan crossly.

"Daisy invited him; she knew him before we were married – God knows where!" (7.130-136)

Thought:

Tom demonstrates that wealth alone cannot win a man entrance to the upper echelons of

society. They must be educated as well.

Quote:

I called up Daisy half an hour after we found him, called her instinctively and without hesitation. But she and Tom had gone away early that afternoon, and taken baggage with them.

"Left no address?"

"No."

"Say when they'd be back?"

"No."

"Any idea where they are? How I could reach them?"

"I don't know. Can't say." (9.4-10)

Thought:

Because of their wealth and privilege, Daisy and Tom manage to escape the consequences of their actions.

Quote:

We shook hands and I started away. Just before I reached the hedge I remembered something and turned around.

"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. First he nodded politely, and then his face broke into that radiant and understanding smile, as if we'd been in ecstatic cahoots on that fact all the time. His gorgeous pink rag of a suit made a bright spot of color against the white steps, and I thought of the night when I first came to his ancestral home, three months before. The lawn and drive had been crowded with the faces of those who guessed at his corruption – and he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream, as he waved them good-by.

I thanked him for his hospitality. We were always thanking him for that – I and the others.

"Good-by," I called. "I enjoyed breakfast, Gatsby." (8.44-48)

Thought:

Nick points out that wealth and class mean nothing in terms of character.

Quote:

I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth. (1.3)

Thought:

Nick is fully aware of how important class is to personal identity, especially in the society in which lives. He knows that he was born into a life of privilege and a certain amount of wealth. The rich may be "above" him, but there are many people "below" him, and Nick keeps the influence of class in mind with everyone he meets.

Quote:

When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. (1.4)

Thought:

Nick tells us from the get-go that he's done with the upper class's shenanigans. By saying he wanted "the world to be in uniform," we can guess that class difference will play a huge role in this story's events (and indeed it does). Nick also wants everyone to be at "moral attention" forever... so we can guess that some sort of immoral behavior happens. When we read this for the first time, we don't really know what Nick is talking about, but the second time around we recognize it as a pretty awesome bit of foreshadowing.

Quote:

I lived at West Egg, the – well, the least fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them. My house was at the very tip of the egg, only fifty yards from the Sound, and squeezed between two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season. The one on my right was a colossal affair by any standard – it was a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden. It was Gatsby's mansion. Or, rather, as I didn't

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know Mr. Gatsby, it was a mansion inhabited by a gentleman of that name. My own house was an eyesore, but it was a small eyesore, and it had been overlooked, so I had a view of the water, a partial view of my neighbor's lawn, and the consoling proximity of millionaires—all for eighty dollars a month. (1.14)

Thought:

Here we get Nick's perspective on class. First, he's honest about the fact that he lives on the less fashionable island. What makes an Egg fashionable? We don't quite know yet, but we know the difference is "bizarre and not a little sinister." Nick has issues with class differences. But the West Eggers and the East Eggers are all wealthy, so to some extent, it's just a matter of whether they were born rich or climbed the social ladder to get where they are. This divide will prove "sinister" in some way in the pages ahead. Also, look at those last two sentences of this passage. Nick knows his place is small, but he seems happy with it and with the fact that he's only paying eighty dollars a month. He's more concerned with his own happiness than he is with what others think of his wallet.

Quote:

"You live in West Egg," she remarked contemptuously. "I know somebody there."

"I don't know a single—"

"You must know Gatsby."

"Gatsby?" demanded Daisy. "What Gatsby?" (1.58-61)

Thought:

Well, nice to meet you too, Jordan Baker. It sounds like she doesn't even try to hide her contempt for the "other" Egg. Jordan, like the Buchanans, is from old money, and she only knows one person who lives in West Egg. Daisy doesn't know a single person in West Egg. The Eggs are so close in distance, but they seem to be worlds apart.

Quote:

"You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy," I confessed on my second glass of corky but rather impressive claret. "Can't you talk about crops or something?"

I meant nothing in particular by that remark, but it was taken up in an unexpected way.

"Civilization's going to pieces," broke out Tom violently. "I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read 'The Rise of the Colored Empires' by this man Goddard?"

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"Why, no," I answered, rather surprised by his tone.

"Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved."

"Tom's getting very profound," said Daisy, with an expression of unthoughtful sadness.

"He reads deep books with long words in them. What was that word we—"

"Well these books are all scientific," insisted Tom, glancing at her impatiently. "This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things."

"We've got to beat them down," whispered Daisy, winking ferociously toward the fervent sun. (1.74-81)

Thought:

Nick's playful suggestion that they talk about something less upper-class-ish gets Tom ranting about race and class. Tom thinks he's at the top of society, and wants to stay there.

Quote:

Their interest rather touched me and made them less remotely rich – nevertheless, I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away. (1.150)

Thought:

"I told that boy about the ice." Myrtle raised her eyebrows in despair at the shiftlessness of the lower orders. "These people! You have to keep after them all the time."

She looked at me and laughed pointlessly... (2.69-70)

Quote:

Myrtle tries to fake being a part of upper class by dissing on the lower classes. Clearly that's what she thinks that all rich people do. It's ironic, since she herself is technically in the lower class.

Thought:

There was music from my neighbor'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. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his motor-boats slid the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before. (3.1)

Quote:

This is just a little glimpse into the extravagant lifestyle of Mr. Jay Gatsby. Pretty crazy, huh?

Thought:

I had been actually invited. A chauffeur in a uniform of robin's-egg blue crossed my lawn early that Saturday morning with a surprisingly formal note from his employer: the honor would be entirely Gatsby's, it said, if I would attend his "little party" that night. He had seen me several times, and had intended to call me long before, but a peculiar combination of circumstances had prevented it—signed Jay Gatsby, in a majestic hand. (3.8)

Quote:

We learn here that most of Gatsby's guests are just random people taking advantage of his immense wealth and open door. The invitation he sends to Nick is slightly over the top – a bit like Myrtle's imitation of upper-class women in the previous chapter. It's our first big hint that Gatsby might be somewhat new to his wealthy lifestyle.

Thought:

A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.

"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.

"About what?"

He waved his hand toward the book-shelves.

"About that. As a matter of fact you needn't bother to ascertain. I ascertained. They're real."

"The books?"

He nodded.

"Absolutely real - have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and – Here! Lemme show you."

Taking our scepticism for granted, he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."

"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too - didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"

He snatched the book from me and replaced it hastily on the shelf, muttering if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse. (3.41-51)

Quote:

Well, at least one person in the partying crowd knows about the lengths to which Gatsby has gone in order to show off his wealth. The owl-eyed man is amazed that the books are real, as opposed to cardboard imitations with which some people stocked their libraries. Gatsby didn't "cut the pages," though, which means he had never actually opened any of the books. That Gatsby hasn't gotten around to reading any of his books just highlights the difference between Gatsby's modest beginnings and the highly educated, old money East Egg. Gatsby's books are only for show, while the books of his old money counterparts would have been read. Education is a major factor that divides the nouveau riche from the old money aristocrats. For more analysis of what both Gatsby's books and the owl-eyed man symbolize, check out the "Symbols, Imagery, Allegory."

Thought:

"All right, old sport," called Gatsby. We slowed down. Taking a white card from his wallet, he waved it before a man's eyes.

"Right you are," agreed the policeman, tipping his cap. "Know you next time, Mr. Gatsby. Excuse me!"

"What was that?" I inquired. "The picture from Oxford?"

"I was able to do the commissioner a favor once, and he sends me a Christmas card every year." (3.50-53)

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Quote:

Evidently, money buys certain privileges in New York. Money, influence, and power are all closely linked in this society.

Thought:

The largest of the banners and the largest of the lawns belonged to Daisy Fay's house. She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville. She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster, and all day long the telephone rang in her house and excited young officers from Camp Taylor demanded the privilege of monopolizing her that night. "Anyways, for an hour!" (4.130)

Quote:

Back home in Louisville, Daisy was the richest and most coveted girl in town. This sheds some light on the concept of old money. Daisy was born and raised in the highest class, and she's never known anything else. For more on Daisy Buchanan, check out her "Character Analysis."

Thought:

By the next autumn she was gay again, gay as ever. She had a debut after the Armistice, and in February she was presumably engaged to a man from New Orleans. In June she married Tom Buchanan of Chicago, with more pomp and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before. He came down with a hundred people in four private cars, and hired a whole floor of the Seelbach Hotel, and the day before the wedding he gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. (4.135)

Quote:

Daisy had her pick of any man she wanted, presumably in the entire United States. She and Tom didn't have a long courtship, so we can assume their marriage is based more in their reputations than in their actual personalities. This insight into their world is also another example of how insanely rich Tom is. And \$350,000 was a lot more money back in the 1920s than it is today.

Thought:

Something worried me.

"Why didn't he ask you to arrange a meeting?"

"He wants her to see his house," she explained. "And your house is right next door."

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(4.156-158)

Quote:

Gatsby counts on his wealth to win Daisy back. This implies that she only cares about wealth, or that she can only marry someone who's in her class.

Thought:

I suppose he'd had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people – his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God – a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that – and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (6.7)

Quote:

Even before he met Daisy, Gatsby placed importance on being wealthy, and he was determined to abandon his modest roots. He came up with his alter ego at a young age, and immersed himself in doing whatever it took to climb the social ladder. "Jay Gatsby" comes from a materialistic conception of what it means to be successful. For the whole history on Gatsby's class-bending past, you should read his "Character Analysis."

Thought:

He stayed there two weeks, dismayed at its ferocious indifference to the drums of his destiny, to destiny itself, and despising the janitor's work with which he was to pay his way through. Then he drifted back to Lake Superior, and he was still searching for something to do on the day that Dan Cody's yacht dropped anchor in the shallows alongshore. (6.10)

Quote:

Young Gatsby's frustration with his education at a Midwestern college (read: not Ivy League) leads him to strike out on his own and look for an easier way to climb the social ladder. His big break comes in the form of Dan Cody. This paragraph pinpoints the exact time in Gatsby's life that he actively chased his destiny. (Get the full scoop on Gatsby by checking out his "Character Analysis.")

Thought:

At any rate Cody asked him a few questions (one of them elicited the brand new name) and

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found that he was quick and extravagantly ambitious. A few days later he took him to Duluth and bought him a blue coat, six pairs of white duck trousers, and a yachting cap. And when the Toulumne left for the West Indies and the Barbary Coast Gatsby left too. (6.12)

Quote:

Voila! New clothes make a new man. Does this remind you of a character who dons a new outfit to masquerade as "old money"?

Thought:

"I'm delighted to see you," said Gatsby, standing on his porch. "I'm delighted that you dropped in."

As though they cared!

"Sit right down. Have a cigarette or a cigar." He walked around the room quickly, ringing bells. "I'll have something to drink for you in just a minute."

Quote:

This shows Gatsby's need to please, almost in a desperate way. He caters to Tom's riding party in sort of an over-the-top manner. Nick's interjection of "As though they cared!" says a lot; people see right through Gatsby's act, and they look down on his hunger for their approval.

Thought:

But the rest offended her – and inarguably, because it wasn't a gesture but an emotion. She was appalled by West Egg, this unprecedented "place" that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village – appalled by its raw vigor that chafed under the old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that herded its inhabitants along a short-cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand. (6.96)

Quote:

Daisy has a hard time understanding what goes on in West Egg (i.e., Gatsby's crazy parties) because she's so used to doing exactly what society expects her to do. The idea of doing something only "because you want to" is foreign to her. Indeed, while high society is ruled by stiff behavior and petty gestures, West Egg's wealth seems less restricted. Their money goes toward making themselves happy in the moment (i.e., all those parties), without having to worry about society's judgmental gaze. What happens in West Egg stays in West Egg, and it seems that Daisy doesn't really know how to live guided by her emotions. Read more about

Daisy in her "Character Analysis."

Thought:

"Who is this Gatsby anyhow?" demanded Tom suddenly. "Some big bootlegger?"

"Where'd you hear that?" I inquired.

"I didn't hear it. I imagined it. A lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers, you know."

"Not Gatsby," I said shortly.

He was silent for a moment. The pebbles of the drive crunched under his feet.

"Well, he certainly must have strained himself to get this menagerie together."

A breeze stirred the gray haze of Daisy's fur collar.

"At least they're more interesting than the people we know," she said with an effort. (6.98-105)

Quote:

First, we have Tom's comment that most newly rich people are bootleggers – this was true in some cases, but the generalization allows Tom to write off all of the nouveau riche as crooks or imposters. Nick stands up for Gatsby – possibly because Nick is starting to like the guy. Daisy ventures to comment that at least West Eggers are more interesting. This marks one of the few occasions when Daisy recognizes that someone's wealth and family history isn't the only way to identify a person.

Thought:

"She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of—" I hesitated.

"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.

That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl... (7.102-104)

Quote:

This says a lot about Daisy. We're still unclear on what exactly a voice "full of money" actually

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sounds like, but we take it to mean that Daisy simply exudes wealth in everything she does. Even the simple act of speaking somehow reminds people that her wealth and lifestyle are ingrained into every aspect of her identity. For more on Daisy's voice, check out her "Character Analysis."

Thought:

Through this twilight universe Daisy began to move again with the season; suddenly she was again keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men, and drowsing asleep at dawn with the beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed. And all the time something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately – and the decision must be made by some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand. (8.19)

Quote:

After Gatsby has been absent from her life for a while, Daisy gets restless and re-adopts the luxurious lifestyle that her family's wealth affords her. Unwilling to wait for long, and probably somewhat fearful that Gatsby would never make enough money to earn her hand in marriage, she throws herself back into finding a husband. If Tom Buchanan hadn't scooped Daisy up to be his wife, we get the impression that someone else of a similar background would have.

Thought:

Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old – even then it had always for me a quality of distortion. West Egg, especially, still figures in my more fantastic dreams. (9.123)

Quote:

This is a complicated comment. We're thinking that he's referring to the old money way of life, a way of life that is inherited. The West Egg lifestyle, or the world populated with the nouveau riche, seems more of a dream world to Nick. The dream of working your way up the social ladder and into a life of financial comfort? The American Dream? Nick seems to believe that one should have to earn one's rewards rather than simply being born into them.

Thought:

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made... (9.143)

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Quote:

[Jordan's] gray, sun-strained eyes stared straight ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her. But I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires, and I knew that first I had to get myself definitely out of that tangle back home. I'd been writing letters once a week and signing them: "Love, Nick," and all I could think of was how, when that certain girl played tennis, a faint mustache of perspiration appeared on her upper lip. Nevertheless there was a vague understanding that had to be tactfully broken off before I was free. (3.169)

Thought:

Nick's love for another is disturbed by something petty and immaterial (her sweat). Love, it seems, is fragile in *The Great Gatsby*.

Quote:

He nodded sagely. "And what's more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time."

"You're revolting," said Daisy. She turned to me, and her voice, dropping an octave lower, filled the room with thrilling scorn: "Do you know why we left Chicago? I'm surprised that they didn't treat you to the story of that little spree." (7.251-252)

Thought:

For Tom, love is compatible with infidelity. He and Daisy are at odds because each defines love differently than the other – just like Daisy and Gatsby.

Quote:

She looked at him blindly. "Why – how could I love him – possibly?"

"You never loved him."

She hesitated. Her eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realized at last what she was doing – and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. But it was done now. It was too late.

"I never loved him," she said, with perceptible reluctance.

"Not at Kapiolani?" demanded Tom suddenly.

"No."

The ballroom beneath, muffled and suffocating chords were drifting up on hot waves of air.

"Not that day I carried you down from the Punch Bowl to keep your shoes dry?" There was a husky tenderness in his tone [...] "Daisy?"

"Please don't." Her voice was cold, but the rancor was gone from it. She looked at Gatsby. "There, Jay," she said – but her hand as she tried to light a cigarette was trembling. Suddenly she threw the cigarette and the burning match on the carpet.

"Oh, you want too much!" she cried to Gatsby. "I love you now – isn't that enough? I can't help what's past." She began to sob helplessly. "I did love him once – but I loved you too."

Gatsby's eyes opened and closed.

"You loved me TOO?" he repeated.

"Even that's a lie," said Tom savagely. "She didn't know you were alive. Why – there're things between Daisy and me that you'll never know, things that neither of us can ever forget."

The words seemed to bite physically into Gatsby.

"I want to speak to Daisy alone," he insisted. "She's all excited now –"

"Even alone I can't say I never loved Tom," she admitted in a pitiful voice. "It wouldn't be true." (7.255-271)

Thought:

For Daisy, love can change over time. She claims she loved only Gatsby, then Gatsby and Tom, and now only Gatsby. But to Gatsby, for whom love is unchanging, this is inconceivable. Gatsby and Daisy can never really be reunited because of these fundamental disagreements about time and love.

Quote:

"Who wants to go to town?" demanded Daisy insistently. Gatsby's eyes floated toward her. "Ah," she cried, "you look so cool."

Their eyes met, and they stared together at each other, alone in space. With an effort she

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glanced down at the table.

"You always look so cool," she repeated.

She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. His mouth opened a little, and he looked at Gatsby, and then back at Daisy as if he had just recognized her as some one he knew a long time ago. (7.79-82)

Thought:

This is an interesting line to reveal Daisy's feelings to the world. The words are based on Gatsby's appearance, against the persona he projects, not his true self. We know, for instance, that Gatsby is uncomfortable in the Buchanans' house (as he reveals later to Nick that he "can't say anything" there), yet to Daisy, he looks calm and cool – and she loves him for it.

Quote:

"Nevertheless you did throw me over," said Jordan suddenly. "You threw me over on the telephone. I don't give a damn about you now, but it was a new experience for me, and I felt a little dizzy for a while."

We shook hands.

"Oh, and do you remember." – she added – "a conversation we had once about driving a car?"

"Why – not exactly."

"You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride."

"I'm thirty," I said. "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor."

She didn't answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away. (9.129-135)

Thought:

Nick loves Jordan, but it's a shallow love borne out of his own selfishness, very much like Jordan's own.

Quote:

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I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness. (1.152)

Thought:

This quiet observation of Nick's says so much. It's our first introduction to Gatsby, and he's reaching out toward Daisy's house, towards the green light. Remember, at this point Gatsby hasn't seen her for over five years. His love for her is overwhelming, and he expresses this by literally reaching out toward a light that he associates with her. For a full explanation of that green light, check out "Symbols, Imagery, Allegory."

Quote:

"'Gratulate me,' [Daisy] muttered. 'Never had a drink before, but oh how I do enjoy it.' I was scared, I can tell you; I'd never seen a girl like that before.

"'Here, deares':" She groped around in a waste-basket she had with her on the bed and pulled out the string of pearls. "Take 'em down-stairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to. Tell 'em all Daisy's change' her mind. Say: 'Daisy's change' her mine!"

She began to cry – she cried and cried. I rushed out and found her mother's maid, and we locked the door and got her into a cold bath. She wouldn't let go of the letter. She took it into the tub with her and squeezed it up into a wet ball, and only let me leave it in the soap-dish when she saw that it was coming to pieces like snow. (4.127-131)

Thought:

All it takes is a little alcohol to get Daisy talking truthfully; it's actually one of the few times we see her being honest about her emotions. It's clear here that she experienced some major hesitation before marrying Tom, mostly due to a letter that we can only assume is from Gatsby. Daisy seems to truly have strong emotions for Gatsby. But, soon after she waltzes downstairs and marries Tom. From this we can see that Daisy is torn between following her heart and marrying a wealthy suitor for the sake of social and financial comfort. We all know that she chooses financial security. This could be considered foreshadowing of her crisis at the end of the novel when she once again must choose between Tom and Gatsby.

Quote:

I saw them in Santa Barbara when they came back, and I thought I'd never seen a girl so mad about her husband. If he left the room for a minute she'd look around uneasily, and say: "Where's Tom gone?" and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door. She used to sit on the sand with his head in her lap by the hour, rubbing her fingers over his eyes and looking at him with unfathomable delight. It was touching to see them together – it made you laugh in a hushed, fascinated way. (4.133)

Thought:

Post-honeymoon Daisy seems to be genuinely head-over-heels for Tom. Is it possible to love two people at the same time? If not, how should we explain Daisy's flip-flopping behavior?

Quote:

"It was a strange coincidence," I said.

"But it wasn't a coincidence at all."

"Why not?"

"Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay." (4.137-140)

Thought:

Gatsby's gone to extreme lengths to win back the girl. If he weren't so darn earnest and unabashedly smitten with Daisy, we may think he was a creepy.

Quote:

"When I said you were a friend of Tom's, he started to abandon the whole idea. He doesn't know very much about Tom, though he says he's read a Chicago paper for years just on the chance of catching a glimpse of Daisy's name." (4.152)

Thought:

Gatsby has read a Chicago paper for years just on the chance of catching a glimpse of Daisy's name. He's either very devoted to, or somewhat obsessed with Daisy.

Quote:

He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding

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presence none of it was any longer real. Once he nearly toppled down a flight of stairs. (5.112)

Thought:

Gatsby is blinded by love. Gatsby is cute in his admiration of Daisy, but we wonder what it is that Gatsby loves. Everyone has different definitions of what love is, but at this point in the story we have to wonder if Gatsby is in love with Daisy as a person or that lifestyle that Daisy represents.

Quote:

Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily.

"They're such beautiful shirts," she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. "It makes me sad because I've never seen such – such beautiful shirts before." (5.118-119)

Thought:

Clearly Daisy is not crying about Gatsby's shirts. We assume that the shirts symbolize to Daisy how wealthy he truly is, and this is when it really hits her. He's back, he's totally loaded, and she's... married.

Quote:

His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (6.134)

Thought:

This is the moment when Gatsby went from being a guy with free-roaming ambition to a man with a purpose: to earn Daisy Fay's hand in marriage. All other aspirations went right out the window and Gatsby's sole purpose in life was to be with her.

Quote:

Tom drove slowly until we were beyond the bend—then his foot came down hard, and the coupe raced along through the night. In a little while I heard a low husky sob, and saw that the tears were overflowing down his face.

"The God damned coward!" he whimpered. "He didn't even stop his car." (7.363-364)

Thought:

"Nothing happened," he said wanly. "I waited, and about four o'clock she came to the window and stood there for a minute and then turned out the light." (8.3)

Quote:

Little does Gatsby know what that pause by the window means when he witnesses it. This is the last time he sees Daisy, and that pause might just be her way of saying good-bye. That gaze out the window does imply that she has mixed emotions about choosing Tom, but that her decision is final.

Thought:

It excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy – it increased her value in his eyes. He felt their presence all about the house, pervading the air with the shades and echoes of still vibrant emotions. (8.10)

Quote:

You might wonder why the fact that other men have loved Daisy influences how Gatsby feels. Does he view this as a competition? That winning Daisy's heart really is just a way to prove his worth? This comment makes us question Gatsby's motives for loving Daisy. Is he deluding himself when he declares that he loves her for who she is? How much does Daisy's class influence Gatsby's love of her? Does Gatsby even realize how much it affects the pull of his heart?

Thought:

"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. (8.45-46)

Visions of America Quotes

Quote:

My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations.

The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother, who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War, and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on to-day. (1.5)

Thought:

We see here that Nick is from a "prominent, well-to-do" family; he's had a comfortable life, but by no means has he lived the luxurious existence that Daisy and Tom have. Based on what Nick says here, it seems as though his family has lived the "American Dream" – hard work got them to where they are today.

Quote:

I lived at West Egg, the—well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them. [...] Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed, and I'd known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago. (1.14-15)

Thought:

The main difference between the two Eggs has to do with the type of upper-class people living in each one. East Egg has mostly people who come from old money, or were born into their riches. West Egg inhabitants are mostly members of the *nouveau riche* – people who haven't always been wealthy, but instead have worked their way into their riches.

Quote:

I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the

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unquiet darkness. (1.152)

Thought:

Gatsby's reaching out for the green light, which symbolizes the American Dream for him, among other things. He seems so close to achieving it, or... is he?

Quote:

"Meyer Wolfsheim? No, he's a gambler." Gatsby hesitated, then added coolly: "He's the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919."

"Fixed the World's Series?" I repeated.

The idea staggered me. I remembered, of course, that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919, but if I had thought of it at all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened, the end of some inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people – with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe.

"How did he happen to do that?" I asked after a minute.

"He just saw the opportunity."

"Why isn't he in jail?"

"They can't get him, old sport. He's a smart man." (112-118)

Thought:

Meyer Wolfsheim saw an opportunity to achieve the American Dream (by making tons of dough fast), and he didn't let it pass him by. The same goes for Gatsby, but his opportunity came in the form of Dan Cody.

Quote:

"If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay," said Gatsby. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock." Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. (5.121-122)

Thought:

It's strange for Gatsby to know that the green light is still on across the bay, because for so long it's symbolized Daisy in his mind, and she was always so far away. Now she's right in front of him, and this realization is a difficult one. It seems as though his dream is now coming true, or at least it seems to be. For more explanation of the green light and everything it symbolizes, check out the "Symbols, Imagery, Allegory."

Quote:

"Good morning, old sport. You're having lunch with me to-day and I thought we'd ride up together."

He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness.

He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand. (4.12-13)

Thought:

Despite how hard Gatsby tries, Nick can tell that he isn't genuinely comfortable in his upper-class act. There's something very "peculiarly American" about Gatsby's demeanor – an inability to sit still that identifies Gatsby more with the middle classes (at least, that's how Nick interprets his movements).

Quote:

One of my most vivid memories is of coming back West from prep school and later from college at Christmas time. Those who went farther than Chicago would gather in the old dim Union Station at six o'clock of a December evening, with a few Chicago friends, already caught up into their own holiday gayeties, to bid them a hasty good-by.

I remember the fur coats of the girls returning from Miss This-or-That's and the chatter of frozen breath and the hands waving overhead as we caught sight of old acquaintances, and the matchings of invitations: "Are you going to the Ordways'? the Herseys'? the Schultzes'?" and the long green tickets clasped tight in our gloved hands. And last the murky yellow cars of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad looking cheerful as Christmas itself on the tracks beside the gate.

When we pulled out into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch out

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beside us and twinkle against the windows, and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild brace came suddenly into the air. We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour, before we melted indistinguishably into it again.

That's my Middle West – not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name.
(9.120-122)

Thought:

Here Nick seems to be implying that identity is not entirely dependent on socio-economic class. Nick remembers when he took an unbiased look at life, without concern about what society deemed it was worth.

Quote:

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (9.182)

Thought:

Nick reflects on what America used to be: an unknown world that stood for anything and everything for which a man could dream. At the time of *The Great Gatsby*, that world is completely gone: class and socio-economic restraints limit how high a person can reach.

Quote:

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and 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, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. Gatsby believed in the green

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light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...and one fine morning–

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (9.149-151)

Thought:

Here Nick is reflecting on what America stood for when it was first discovered – a land of new possibilities, where everything was up for the taking for anyone willing to work hard. Gatsby had believed in that idea, but to Nick it seems that his Gatsby's true greatness was in his ambition itself. The green light, in which Gatsby believed for so long, stands for several things, but now that Gatsby is gone, it seems to no longer hold any significance.

Wealth Quotes

Quote:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments [...]. (1.1-3)

Thought:

Nick paints the portrait that, despite his wealthy family, he maintains a removed objectivity. This of course, is entirely untrue, as is evidenced repeatedly throughout the novel.

Quote:

"I can't say anything in his house, old sport."

"She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of—" I hesitated.

"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.

That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money – that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it... high in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl [...]. (7.99)

Thought:

Gatsby feels unable to speak in the Buchanans' house because of the barriers of wealth. Although he has money, it isn't the kind that allows him into Daisy's world. Even her voice, the very essence of her character, is off limits for him. In fact, Nick and Gatsby find commonalities in feeling excluded from the Buchanan's world. Nick's description of Daisy as "the golden girl" also brings us back to the epigraph, a quotation quite useful for this scene. (See "What's Up with the Epigraph?" for more.)

Quote:

"Self-control!" Repeated Tom incredulously. "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr.

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Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out [...] Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white." (7.229)

Thought:

It is ironic that Tom's scorn for Gatsby's is based on his background – Gatsby's lack of money, education, and class – and not the fact that Gatsby has been sleeping with his wife.

Quote:

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made [...]. (9.136-145)

Thought:

Tom and Daisy are able to escape what they do to people only because they have the monetary means to do it.

Quote:

His family were enormously wealthy – even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach – but now he'd left Chicago and come East in a fashion that rather took your breath away; for instance, he'd brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that.

Why they came East I don't know. 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. (1.16-17)

Thought:

Tom and Daisy flit from here to there without a care in the world. That's what their money allows. While it's easy to see why most people would envy them, it's also easy to see how they could irritate Nick over time. Daisy and Tom seem to have no purpose in their lives beyond cultivating their reputations and spending money.

Quote:

His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed.

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There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts. (1.20)

Thought:

Tom's wealth gives him a lot of power, and he knows it. It's this wealth and power that allows Tom to treat others poorly. Tom is certainly elitist and believes he should be entitled to be condescending to whomever he chooses. (At least we think so. Judge for yourself after reading his "Character Analysis."

Quote:

The younger of the two was a stranger to me. She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless, and with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. (1.28)

Thought:

This first description of Jordan Baker notes that "her chin is raised a little"... this also means that her nose is literally up in the air. This makes her seem a bit snobby from the first time Nick meets her.

Quote:

There was music from my neighbor'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. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his motor-boats slid the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before. (3.1)

Thought:

The extravagance of Gatsby's parties shows how much money he has to burn. He also pays for all his guests' wild times, which makes his wealth all the more incomprehensible.

Quote:

"I like to come," Lucille said. "I never care what I do, so I always have a good time. When I was

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here last I tore my gown on a chair, and he asked me my name and address – inside of a week I got a package from Croirier's with a new evening gown in it." "Did you keep it?" asked Jordan.

"Sure I did. I was going to wear it tonight, but it was too big in the bust and had to be altered. It was gas blue with lavender beads. Two hundred and sixty-five dollars." (3.23-25)

Thought:

Gatsby is wealthy enough to drop two hundred and sixty-five dollars on a dress for a woman 1) who he doesn't know, and 2) who tore her own dress. No doubt he did so to show off how generous he's capable of being, and how generous his fortune enables him to be.

Quote:

A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.

"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.

"About what?"

He waved his hand toward the book-shelves.

"About that. As a matter of fact you needn't bother to ascertain. I ascertained. They're real."

"The books?"

He nodded.

"Absolutely real - have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and - Here! Lemme show you."

Taking our scepticism for granted, he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."

"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too - didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"

He snatched the book from me and replaced it hastily on the shelf, muttering if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse. (3.41-51)

Thought:

Although Gatsby can afford to purchase real books (which is a surprising and impressive feat in itself, according to Mr. Owl-eyes), he doesn't ever actually open them. This reveals that Gatsby may have only bought the books for show; his library is stocked to impress others. A fully stocked library implies that the owner has had an extensive education, which also implies that he was born into old money. But, since Gatsby's books are unread, it's clear that Gatsby's not educated, therefore not from old money. His uncut books might reveal him to be a phony. For more on Gatsby's books and the owl-eyed man, see Symbols, Imagery, Allegory."

Quote:

"Meyer Wolfsheim? No, he's a gambler." Gatsby hesitated, then added coolly: "He's the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919."

"Fixed the World's Series?" I repeated.

The idea staggered me. I remembered, of course, that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919, but if I had thought if it all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened, the end of some inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people – with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe.

"How did he happen to do that?" I asked after a minute.

"He just saw the opportunity." (4.112-116)

Thought:

Gatsby's association with Meyer Wolfsheim shows us that he's rolling with the bad boys. This is some seriously illegal stuff that Gatsby's up to. That last line – "he just saw the opportunity" – could go for Gatsby as well as Wolfsheim. When Gatsby jumped aboard Dan Cody's boat, he was taking advantage of a bit of luck that came his way in order to make as much money as possible. The similarity between these two men is not only that they both saw a certain opportunity in their lives, but also that both were ready and eager to take advantage of that opportunity.

Quote:

I realize now that under different circumstances that conversation might have been one of the crises of my life. But, because the offer was obviously and tactlessly for a service to be rendered, I had no choice except to cut him off there.

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*"I've got my hands full," I said. "I'm much obliged but I couldn't take on any more work."
(5.26-27)*

Thought:

Nick doesn't think about it at the time because, in a practical sense, he can't take on any more work, but he also admits that making the temptation to partake in illegal business ventures for a huge payoff is a very difficult temptation to resist. We know Nick is an honest guy, so we can deduce that the promise of wealth is capable of corrupting anyone.

Memory and The Past Quotes

Quote:

"It was a strange coincidence," I said.

"But it wasn't a coincidence at all."

"Why not?"

"Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay." Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor. (4.147-151)

Thought:

Nick can't understand Gatsby until he understands the man's motives. This is why he reveals Gatsby's past to us in the order that he does; Nick tells the story the way he would have needed to be told. Because Nick gets the information about Gatsby's history later than we do, it is only natural that he initially dislikes the man.

Quote:

He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real. Once he nearly toppled down a flight of stairs.

His bedroom was the simplest room of all – except where the dresser was garnished with a toilet set of pure dull gold. Daisy took the brush with delight, and smoothed her hair, whereupon Gatsby sat down and shaded his eyes and began to laugh.

"It's the funniest thing, old sport," he said hilariously. "I can't – When I try to –"

He had passed visibly through two states and was entering upon a third. After his embarrassment and his unreasoning joy he was consumed with wonder at her presence. He had been full of the idea so long, dreamed it right through to the end, waited with his teeth set, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity. Now, in the reaction, he was running down like an over-wound clock. (5.111-114)

Thought:

While Gatsby may have at one point loved the real Daisy, the love that survived over time is of

his dream-like conception of her.

Quote:

After the house, we were to see the grounds and the swimming-pool, and the hydroplane and the mid-summer flowers – but outside Gatsby's window it began to rain again, so we stood in a row looking at the corrugated surface of the Sound.

"If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay," said Gatsby. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock."

Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one.
(5.120-122)

Thought:

Nick sees sadness, not joy, in Gatsby's reunion with Daisy. Nick, it seems, recognizes the impossibility of Gatsby's plans.

Quote:

As I went over to say good-by I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart.

As I watched him he adjusted himself a little, visibly. His hand took hold of hers, and as she said something low in his ear he turned toward her with a rush of emotion. I think that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be over-dreamed – that voice was a deathless song. (5.152-153)

Thought:

Already, the reality of Daisy in the present is tarnishing the dream of the past.

Quote:

Gatsby and I in turn leaned down and took the small, reluctant hand. Afterward he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before.
(7.53)

Thought:

The fact that Daisy has a child, that she is actually married, has never seemed real to Gatsby before.

Quote:

It passed, and he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly, toward that lost voice across the room.

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. (7.292-295)

Thought:

Daisy changes her mind, not because she wants to stay with Tom, but because she realizes that she can never live up to the expectations – the requirements – of Gatsby's love for her.

Quote:

"I don't think she ever loved him." Gatsby turned around from a window and looked at me challengingly. "You must remember, old sport, she was very excited this afternoon. He told her those things in a way that frightened her – that made it look as if I was some kind of cheap sharper. And the result was she hardly knew what she was saying."

He sat down gloomily.

"Of course she might have loved him just for a minute, when they were first married – and loved me more even then, do you see?"

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Suddenly he came out with a curious remark.

"In any case," he said, "it was just personal."

What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured? (8.22-27)

Thought:

Gatsby is only able to maintain his love for Daisy over time by denial.

Quote:

"You ought to go away," I said. "It's pretty certain they'll trace your car."

"Go away NOW, old sport?"

"Go to Atlantic City for a week, or up to Montreal."

He wouldn't consider it. He couldn't possibly leave Daisy until he knew what she was going to do. He was clutching at some last hope and I couldn't bear to shake him free. (8.5-8)

Thought:

Nick understands that the passing of time has rendered Daisy an impossibility for Gatsby. Yet he is unable to pass this knowledge onto Gatsby.

Quote:

No telephone message arrived, but the butler went without his sleep and waited for it until four o'clock – until long after there was any one to give it to if it came. I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about [...] like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees. (8.111)

Thought:

It is no coincidence that Gatsby dies shortly after the realization that his dream his dead. Daisy to him was past, present, and future – without the hope of her love, Gatsby no longer has a

future. It is beyond the logic of the text to allow him to live.

Quote:

[...] And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and 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, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning –

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (9.149-153)

Thought:

By comparing Gatsby's stretch toward the green light to the sailor's desire for the green new world, Nick makes Gatsby's struggle universal. *The Great Gatsby*, then, is not the story of one man's love for one woman, but about man's attempt to grasp the dream ahead of him – a task Nick deems impossible.

Quote:

One October day in nineteen-seventeen – (said Jordan Baker that afternoon, sitting up very straight on a straight chair in the tea-garden at the Plaza Hotel) – I was walking along from one place to another, half on the sidewalks and half on the lawns. I was happier on the lawns because I had on shoes from England with rubber nobs on the soles that bit into the soft ground. I had on a new plaid skirt also that blew a little in the wind, and whenever this happened the red, white, and blue banners in front of all the houses stretched out stiff and said tut-tut-tut-tut, in a disapproving way. (4.128-119)

Thought:

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Jordan's story seems all the more realistic because she includes small details that only she would remember. Clearly her shoes don't matter at all to the story she's telling, but Fitzgerald includes them to mimic the way memory works and to establish her point of view. We're used to seeing everything from Nick's perspective; now, this mini-story divulges information that only Jordan can share. For us readers, it helps for Fitzgerald to take an extra paragraph in order to reinforce that he's changed to a different narrator for a few pages.

Quote:

[Daisy] went with a slightly older crowd – when she went with anyone at all. Wild rumors were circulating about her – how her mother had found her packing her bag one winter night to go to New York and say good-bye to a soldier who was going overseas. She was effectually prevented, but she wasn't on speaking terms with her family for several weeks. (4.134)

Thought:

We can assume that Daisy was trying to flee to New York to say good-bye to Gatsby. This adds a small insight into the drama that was occurring behind Daisy's pristine public reputation.

Quote:

"Gratulate me," [Daisy] muttered. "Never had a drink before, but oh how I do enjoy it." I was scared, I can tell you; I'd never seen a girl like that before.

"Here, deares'." She groped around in a waste-basket she had with her on the bed and pulled out the string of pearls. "Take 'em down-stairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to. Tell 'em all Daisy's change' her mind. Say: 'Daisy's change' her mine!" She began to cry—she cried and cried. I rushed out and found her mother's maid, and we locked the door and got her into a cold bath. She wouldn't let go of the letter. She took it into the tub with her and squeezed it up into a wet ball, and only let me leave it in the soap-dish when she saw that it was coming to pieces like snow. (4.137-141)

Thought:

Again, this is only something that Jordan could share. Clearly it wasn't easy for Daisy to abandon a future with Gatsby in order to marry Tom, and Jordan was privy to this crisis. This memory of Jordan's attests not only to the fact that Daisy did indeed love Gatsby, but also that she did not want to give up on that love. This memory provides an important insight into Daisy's character and the relationship between Daisy and Gatsby (not to mention the relationship between Daisy and Tom).

Quote:

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Well, about six weeks ago, she heard the name Gatsby for the first time in years. It was when I asked you – do you remember? – if you knew Gatsby in West Egg. After you had gone home she came into my room and woke me up, and said: "What Gatsby?" and when I described him – I was half asleep – she said in the strangest voice that it must be the man she used to know. It wasn't until then that I connected this Gatsby with the officer in her white car. (4.145)

Thought:

Originally, when Gatsby's name was mentioned earlier and Daisy didn't seem to really care, we thought that meant she wasn't too interested in this mysterious Gatsby fellow. Here we see that it is clearly not the case. With Jordan's addendum regarding the conversation between her and Daisy later that night after Nick had left, we see that Daisy was interested in Jordan's flippant mention of Gatsby's name.

Quote:

He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: "I never loved you." After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were five years ago. (6.125)

Thought:

In Gatsby's mind, the last five years have been unimportant and expendable, since he was just building himself up in society to win Daisy back. Daisy, however, has spent the past five years building a relationship with her husband, with whom she shares not only a place in society but also a child. Daisy has a lot more at stake than Gatsby does. Were they to reunite and run off together, Daisy would miss some things from the life she had built with Tom. On the other hand, Gatsby doesn't really have anything to lose.

Quote:

He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was...

...One autumn night, five years before, they had been walking down the street when the leaves were falling, and they came to a place where there were no trees and the sidewalk was white with moonlight. They stopped here and turned toward each other. Now it was a cool night with that mysterious excitement in it which comes at the two changes of the year. The quiet lights in the houses were humming out into the darkness and there was a stir and bustle among the stars. Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a

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ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees – he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once he was there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder.

His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (6.132-134)

Thought:

Gatsby remembers this time as that perfect time in his life to which he's desperate to return. But he doesn't take into consideration that he and Daisy have both changed a lot since the autumn five years prior. He's trying to recreate the past in the present. Both times Daisy has a crisis over whether to choose him or Tom; both times she chooses Tom. Gatsby's memory of their original love affair must have been very powerful, especially considering the lengths to which he went to win her back.

Quote:

"Oh, you want too much!" she cried to Gatsby. "I love you now – isn't that enough? I can't help what's past." She began to sob helplessly. "I did love him once – but I loved you too." (7.261)

Thought:

It seems like Daisy truly did love both Gatsby and Tom at the same time, a fact that Gatsby doesn't want to face. Gatsby's wish to blot out the last five years is thus ruined, since Daisy's emotional life hasn't been as uneventful as his own.

Quote:

On the last afternoon before he went abroad, he lay with Daisy in his arms for a long, silent time. It was a cold fall day, with fire in the room and her cheeks flushed. Now and then she moved and he changed his arm a little, and once he kissed her dark, shining hair. The afternoon had made them tranquil for a while, as if to give them a deep memory for the long parting the next day promised. They had never been closer in their month of love, nor communicated more profoundly one with another, than when she brushed silent lips against his coat's shoulder or when he touched the end of her fingers, gently, as though she were asleep. (8.16)

Thought:

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Again, a very tender memory of Gatsby's, that shows us how profoundly enamored he is with Daisy.

Quote:

"Look here, this is a book he had when he was a boy. It just shows you."

He opened it at the back cover and turned it around for me to see. On the last fly-leaf was printed the word SCHEDULE, and the date September 12, 1906. And underneath:

*Rise from bed.....6.00 A.M.
Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling.....6.15-6.30 "
Study electricity, etc.7.15-8.15 "
Work.....8.30-4.30 P.M.
Baseball and sports.....4.30-5.00 "
Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it.....5.00-6.00 "
Study needed inventions.....7.00-9.00 "*

GENERAL RESOLVES

*No wasting time at Shafers or [a name, indecipherable]
No more smoking or chewing
Bath every other day
Read one improving book or magazine per week
Save \$5.00 [crossed out] \$3.00 per week
Be better to parents*

"I come across this book by accident," said the old man. "It just shows you, don't it?"

"It just shows you."

"Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that. He told me I et like a hog once, and I beat him for it."

He was reluctant to close the book, reading each item aloud and then looking eagerly at me. I think he rather expected me to copy down the list for my own use. (9.104-109)

Thought:

Gatsby's father clearly cherished this remnant of his son's past ambition, and we see how driven and disciplined James Gatz was. Keep in mind, he had never even heard of Daisy at this point, and Dan Cody hadn't yet stumbled into his life either. It seems that James Gatz

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ferociously pursued the American Dream, and he broke through every hurdle that got in his way. That early schedule, written in the back of a children's book, proved how deep the roots of Gatsby's dream truly reached. Read Gatsby's "Character Analysis" for more information.

Quote:

I tried to think about Gatsby then for a moment, but he was already too far away, and I could only remember, without resentment, that Daisy hadn't sent a message or a flower. (9.113)

Thought:

After Gatsby's death, Nick already has trouble remembering his friend clearly, as so often happens when people lose those close to them.

Dissatisfaction Quotes

Quote:

Why they came East I don't know. 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. This was a permanent move, said Daisy over the telephone, but I didn't believe it – I had no sight into Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game. (1.17)

Thought:

Daisy and Tom's constant roaming is an indication that they are dissatisfied with their married life.

Quote:

"Who wants to go to town?" demanded Daisy insistently. Gatsby's eyes floated toward her. "Ah," she cried, "you look so cool."

Their eyes met, and they stared together at each other, alone in space. With an effort she glanced down at the table.

"You always look so cool," she repeated.

She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. His mouth opened a little, and he looked at Gatsby, and then back at Daisy as if he had just recognized her as some one he knew a long time ago. (7.79-82)

Thought:

Daisy only starts the affair with Gatsby because she sees in him the qualities that Tom lacks. Her feelings for Gatsby are more about her present marriage than her past love.

Quote:

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made [...]. (9.145)

Thought:

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Tom and Daisy's dissatisfaction with their own lives results in their causing destruction in the lives of others.

Quote:

Instead of being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—so I decided to go East and learn the bond business. (1.6)

Thought:

Knowing what the country has to offer – and the lifestyle that is possible in the East – Nick has a rough time trying to re-adapt to the Midwest. He can't go backwards now, because his pre-college home isn't enough to satisfy him.

Quote:

"That's true." [Daisy] hesitated. "Well, I've had a very bad time, Nick, and I'm pretty cynical about everything."

Evidently she had reason to be. I waited but she didn't say any more, and after a moment I returned rather feebly to the subject of her daughter.

"I suppose she talks, and – eats, and everything."

"Oh, yes." She looked at me absently. "Listen, Nick; let me tell you what I said she was born. Would you like to hear?"

"Very much."

"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'

"You see I think everything's terrible anyhow," she went on in a convinced way. "Everybody thinks so – the most advanced people. And I know. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything." Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like Tom's, and she laughed with a thrilling scorn. "Sophisticated – God, I'm sophisticated!" (1.113-119)

Thought:

Daisy claims to know the ways of the world, yet she finds herself unsatisfied with what life has

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to offer. It seems that her unhappiness stems from Tom's infidelity, and her inability to control him. She probably feels that she has been a fool and seems to imply that being a sensible girl has led to her current disillusionment.

Quote:

James Gatz – that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career – when he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior.

[...]

I suppose he'd had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people – his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. (4.6-7)

Thought:

Gatsby had been dreaming of working his way into the upper class from a young age; he was always unsatisfied with being poor, and he was always ready to do whatever he could to move on up. Nick surmises that Gatsby had ready his new name for a while, so it was just a matter of time before Cody dropped anchor on his shore.

Quote:

He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was... (6.132)

Thought:

Post-Daisy, Gatsby can't be satisfied with scrambling up the social ladder, using ambition alone as incentive. It seems that he needs something on which to concentrate, and since Daisy brought unprecedented joy into his life, he now focuses all his drive into winning her.

Quote:

Usually her voice came over the wire as something fresh and cool, as if a divot from a green golf-links had come sailing in at the office window, but this morning it seemed harsh and dry.

"I've left Daisy's house," she said. "I'm at Hempstead, and I'm going down to Southampton this afternoon."

Probably it had been tactful to leave Daisy's house, but the act annoyed me, and her next remark made me rigid.

"You weren't so nice to me last night."

"How could it have mattered then?"

Silence for a moment. Then:

"However – I want to see you."

"I want to see you, too."

"Suppose I don't go to Southampton, and come into town this afternoon?"

"No – I don't think this afternoon."

"Very well."

"It's impossible this afternoon. Various – "

We talked like that for a while, and then abruptly we weren't talking any longer. I don't know which of us hung up with a sharp click, but I know I didn't care. I couldn't have talked to her across a tea-table that day if I never talked to her again in the world. (8.49-61)

Thought:

Nick's sudden, overwhelming disgust with upper-class selfishness – specifically with how Daisy and Tom treated Gatsby and Wilson – leaves him unable to view Jordan in the same loving light as he did previously. Her membership in the upper class makes her guilty by association in Nick's mind.

Quote:

I wanted to get somebody for him. I wanted to go into the room where he lay and reassure him: "I'll get somebody for you, Gatsby. Don't worry. Just trust me and I'll get somebody for you – " (9.11)

Thought:

Nick is desperately saddened by the fact that no one comes to Gatsby's funeral. No one – not one of his party friends, business acquaintances, or Daisy – seems to care that he's gone.

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Nick's compassion for Gatsby leaves him angry with those who are not compassionate.

Isolation Quotes

Quote:

I was thirty. Before me stretched the portentous, menacing road of a new decade.

It was seven o'clock when we got into the coupe with him and started for Long Island. Tom talked incessantly, exulting and laughing, but his voice was as remote from Jordan and me as the foreign clamor on the sidewalk or the tumult of the elevated overhead. Human sympathy has its limits, and we were content to let all their tragic arguments fade with the city lights behind. Thirty – the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning brief-case of enthusiasm, thinning hair. But there was Jordan beside me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age. As we passed over the dark bridge her wan face fell lazily against my coat's shoulder and the formidable stroke of thirty died away with the reassuring pressure of her hand.

So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight. (7.307-309)

Thought:

Nick only fears growing older because he sees isolation in old age.

Quote:

A little before three the Lutheran minister arrived from Flushing, and I began to look involuntarily out the windows for other cars. So did Gatsby's father. And as the time passed and the servants came in and stood waiting in the hall, his eyes began to blink anxiously, and he spoke of the rain in a worried, uncertain way. The minister glanced several times at his watch, so I took him aside and asked him to wait for half an hour. But it wasn't any use. Nobody came. (9.113)

Thought:

That Gatsby is alone in death has a profound effect upon Nick; this is why Gatsby's death bothers him so – it confirms his fears of his own eventual isolation.

Quote:

"Oh, yes." She looked at me absently. "Listen, Nick; let me tell you what I said she was born. Would you like to hear?"

"Very much."

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"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (1.116-118)

Thought:

Daisy is virtually alone – nurses are present, but Tom is not – when she gives birth to her daughter. Clearly she feels very isolated from Tom at this point in their marriage, and hopes that her daughter never has to feel the same way.

Quote:

The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names. (3.4)

Thought:

Nick talks about a typical party as crowded and rambunctious, yet lonely. In his description of various parties, Nick uses two short phrases that say a ton: "forgotten on the spot," and "who never knew each other's names." This creates the paradox of feeling alone in a crowded room.

Quote:

As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host, but the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts stared at me in such an amazed way, and denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements, that I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table – the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone. (3.10)

Thought:

Guests may have been able to let down their guard at Gatsby's parties, but there were still social rules to be followed. Nick feels awkward about being alone without someone to talk to. He worries what the other guests might wonder about him, so he drowns his awkwardness at the bar.

Quote:

At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in

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others – poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner – young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life. (3.156)

Thought:

This aside of Nick's hints at the overwhelming loneliness of city life that so many modernists comment on in their writing. In the early 20th century, cities began to hold more of the American population that the countryside did and the paradox of feeling alone in a crowd set in.

Quote:

"Your place looks like the World's Fair," I said.

"Does it?" He turned his eyes toward it absently. "I have been glancing into some of the rooms. Let's go to Coney Island, old sport. In my car."

"It's too late."

"Well, suppose we take a plunge in the swimming-pool? I haven't made use of it all summer."

"I've got to go to bed."

"All right." (5.3-8)

Thought:

Clearly Gatsby's in need of some company. Although he has all the toys a man can buy, he's still bored and lonely.

Quote:

He stayed there a week, walking the streets where their footsteps had clicked together through the November night and revisiting the out-of-the-way places to which they had driven in her white car. (8.28)

Thought:

Gatsby's longing for Daisy is only exacerbated by his actions when he gets back to Louisville, such as revisiting all the places they had gone together.

Quote:

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Next morning I sent the butler to New York with a letter to Wolfsheim, which asked for information and urged him to come out on the next train. That request seemed superfluous when I wrote it. I was sure he'd start when he saw the newspapers, just as I was sure a there'd be a wire from Daisy before noon—but neither a wire nor Mr. Wolfsheim arrived; no one arrived except more police and photographers and newspaper men. When the butler brought back Wolfsheim's answer I began to have a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all. (9.20)

Thought:

Much to Nick's surprise, everyone neglects to honor Gatsby's memory. It's tragic for two reasons. In the first place, Gatsby's life was full of people who didn't truly care about him. Second, abandoning Gatsby is a sad attestation to how shallow and selfish people can be. Nick's disgust with everyone who attended Gatsby's parties, Gatsby's business partners, and even Gatsby's one true love seems justified. What do you think?

Mortality Quotes

Quote:

"No... I just remembered that to-day's my birthday."

I was thirty. Before me stretched the portentous, menacing road of a new decade.

It was seven o'clock when we got into the coupe with him and started for Long Island. Tom talked incessantly, exulting and laughing, but his voice was as remote from Jordan and me as the foreign clamor on the sidewalk or the tumult of the elevated overhead. Human sympathy has its limits, and we were content to let all their tragic arguments fade with the city lights behind. Thirty – the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning brief-case of enthusiasm, thinning hair. But there was Jordan beside me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age. As we passed over the dark bridge her wan face fell lazily against my coat's shoulder and the formidable stroke of thirty died away with the reassuring pressure of her hand.

So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight. (7.306-309)

Thought:

It is no coincidence that Nick mentions his birthday right before he utters the line about driving toward death. Literally, they are approaching the scene of Myrtle's death, but figuratively, they are driving towards their own deaths.

Quote:

The chauffeur – he was one of Wolfsheim's protégés – heard the shots – afterward he could only say that he hadn't thought anything much about them. I drove from the station directly to Gatsby's house and my rushing anxiously up the front steps was the first thing that alarmed any one. But they knew then, I firmly believe. With scarcely a word said, four of us, the chauffeur, butler, gardener, and I, hurried down to the pool.

There was a faint, barely perceptible movement of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way toward the drain at the other. With little ripples that were hardly the shadows of waves, the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool. A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of compass, a thin red circle in the water.

It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete. (8.112-114)

Thought:

Nick's description of Gatsby and Wilson as a "holocaust" is an interesting one. Perhaps Nick sees the murder as being of overwhelming magnitude because Gatsby's death represents the death of many ideals (the American Dream, or perhaps untarnished love). But the notion that it is "complete" leaves one wondering – what about the others involved? Why does Nick feel that the matter has been put to bed by the death of these two men?

Quote:

Most of those reports were a nightmare – grotesque, circumstantial, eager, and untrue. When Michaelis's testimony at the inquest brought to light Wilson's suspicions of his wife I thought the whole tale would shortly be served up in racy pasquinade – but Catherine, who might have said anything, didn't say a word. She showed a surprising amount of character about it too – looked at the coroner with determined eyes under that corrected brow of hers, and swore that her sister had never seen Gatsby, that her sister was completely happy with her husband, that her sister had been into no mischief whatever. She convinced herself of it, and cried into her handkerchief, as if the very suggestion was more than she could endure. So Wilson was reduced to a man "deranged by grief." in order that the case might remain in its simplest form. And it rested there. (9.2)

Thought:

In death, George Wilson is given a dignity denied to him in life.

Quote:

About five o'clock our procession of three cars reached the cemetery and stopped in a thick drizzle beside the gate – first a motor hearse, horribly black and wet, then Mr. Gatz and the minister and I in the limousine, and a little later four or five servants and the postman from West Egg in Gatsby's station wagon, all wet to the skin. As we started through the gate into the cemetery I heard a car stop and then the sound of someone splashing after us over the soggy ground. I looked around. It was the man with owl-eyed glasses whom I had found marveling over Gatsby's books in the library one night three months before.

I'd never seen him since then. I don't know how he knew about the funeral, or even his name. The rain poured down his thick glasses, and he took them off and wiped them to see the protecting canvas unrolled from Gatsby's grave.

I tried to think about Gatsby then for a moment, but he was already too far away, and I could only remember, without resentment, that Daisy hadn't sent a message or a flower. Dimly I heard someone murmur, "Blessed are the dead that the rain falls on," and then the owl-eyed man said "Amen to that," in a brave voice.

We straggled down quickly through the rain to the cars. Owl-eyes spoke to me by the gate.

"I couldn't get to the house," he remarked.

"Neither could anybody else."

"Go on!" He started. "Why, my God! They used to go there by the hundreds." He took off his glasses and wiped them again, outside and in.

"The poor son-of-a-bitch," he said. (9.114-122)

Thought:

It is interesting that the owl-eyed man is the one other character that attends Gatsby's funeral. It seems that the man from the library is not only perceptive, but also just. He recognizes the moral atrocity of the event, as does Nick.

Quote:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning –

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (9.152-153)

Thought:

Nick earlier feared that we were all driving "on toward death" – yet here he says that we all run forward, run faster. Nick's philosophy has been completely changed by Gatsby's death. The tragedy, he realizes, is not that we are rushing towards death in our futures, but rather that we are stuck in the dissatisfaction of the past.

Quote:

"It was on the two little seats facing each other that are always the last ones left on the train. I was going up to New York to see my sister and spend the night. He had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes, and I couldn't keep my eyes off him, but every time he looked at me I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head. When we came into the station he was next to me, and his white shirt-front pressed against my arm, and so I told him I'd have to call a policeman, but he knew I lied. I was so excited that when I got into a taxi with him I didn't hardly know I wasn't getting into a subway train. All I kept thinking about, over and over, was 'You can't live forever; you can't live forever.'" (2.121)

Thought:

Myrtle feels life passing her by as Wilson's wife, where she lives a working class existence with a husband who bores her. When Myrtle makes the decision to become Tom's mistress she can finally live the life she wants to live. Many characters in the novel seem constantly aware of their mortality, as they make selfish, sometimes immoral decisions, with entertainment and excitement often taking first priority.

Quote:

"What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon?" cried Daisy, "and the day after that, and the next thirty years?"

*"Don't be morbid," Jordan said. "Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall."
(7.74-75)*

Thought:

Daisy and Jordan's lives seem to be endlessly carefree. They both take on a sort of immortal, no-rules-apply-to-us attitude in this scene; it's almost as though they both believe their lives are literally endless.

Quote:

I stared at (Wilson) and then at Tom, who had made a parallel discovery less than an hour before—and it occurred to me that there was no difference between men, in intelligence or race, so profound as the difference between the sick and the well. (7.158)

Thought:

While the *The Great Gatsby* is concerned with class issues, Nick considers all men to be on the same level in this scene. Tom and Wilson couldn't be more different from one another, but both have just learned that their wives are unfaithful, and that shows a poignant similarity between the two.

Quote:

*Michaelis and this man reached her first, but when they had torn open her shirtwaist, still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored for so long.
(7.313)*

Thought:

Remember how Myrtle was so determined to live her life to the fullest? Well, Nick alludes to that aspect of her personality (albeit morbidly) here. Myrtle is a good example of a frustrated woman desperate to find something to make her life worth living.

Quote:

After a little while Mr. Gatz opened the door and came out, his mouth ajar, his face flushed slightly, his eyes leaking isolated and unpunctual tears. He had reached an age where death no longer has the quality of ghastly surprise, and when he looked around him now for the first time and saw the height and splendor of the hall and the great rooms opening out from it into other rooms, his grief began to be mixed with an awed pride. (9.40)

Thought:

Gatsby's father has just seen his son's dead body. Gatz's glimpse of the magnificence of his son's mansion helps him cope with such an unexpected loss. Again, money and materialistic things (like Gatsby's house) take prime importance in the society Fitzgerald presents.

Quote:

"Let us learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he's dead," he suggested. "After that my own rule is to let everything alone." (9.96)

Thought:

When there's nothing else for Wolfsheim to gain from Gatsby's friendship, he pulls himself out of the situation. He treats his friendship with Gatsby almost like another business transaction, even though the two men have been through a lot together.

Marriage Quotes

Quote:

"Who wants to go to town?" demanded Daisy insistently. Gatsby's eyes floated toward her. "Ah," she cried, "you look so cool."

Their eyes met, and they stared together at each other, alone in space. With an effort she glanced down at the table.

"You always look so cool," she repeated.

She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. His mouth opened a little, and he looked at Gatsby, and then back at Daisy as if he had just recognized her as some one he knew a long time ago. (7.79-82)

Thought:

Daisy reveals her dissatisfaction in her marriage by revealing her love and admiration for another man.

Quote:

Daisy rose, smiling faintly, and went to the table.

"Open the whiskey, Tom," she ordered, "and I'll make you a mint julep. Then you won't seem so stupid to yourself [...] Look at the mint!"

"Wait a minute," snapped Tom, "I want to ask Mr. Gatsby one more question."

"Go on," Gatsby said politely.

"What kind of a row are you trying to cause in my house anyhow?"

They were out in the open at last and Gatsby was content.

"He isn't causing a row." Daisy looked desperately from one to the other. "You're causing a row. Please have a little self-control."

"Self-control!" Repeated Tom incredulously. "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out [...] Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white."

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Flushed with his impassioned gibberish, he saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization. (7.222-230)

Thought:

Tom tries to defend the idea of civilization by defending the sanctity of marriage, *his* marriage.

Quote:

Gatsby walked over and stood beside her.

"Oh, you want too much!" she cried to Gatsby. "I love you now – isn't that enough? I can't help what's past." She began to sob helplessly. "I did love him once – but I loved you too." Gatsby's eyes opened and closed.

"You loved me TOO?" he repeated. (7.264-266)

Thought:

Daisy reveals that, indeed, she loves both her husband and Gatsby. To her, this is a defense that morally exonerates her for marrying Tom instead of waiting for Gatsby. But to Gatsby, it is a betrayal. He could never love two people at the same time; therefore, he cannot comprehend her doing it either.

Quote:

He nodded sagely. "And what's more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time."

"You're revolting," said Daisy. She turned to me, and her voice, dropping an octave lower, filled the room with thrilling scorn: "Do you know why we left Chicago? I'm surprised that they didn't treat you to the story of that little spree." (7.251-252)

Thought:

Daisy clearly does *not* forgive Tom for his infidelities. Why, then, does she accept them later this very day, choosing to remain with her husband?

Quote:

"You don't understand," said Gatsby, with a touch of panic. "You're not going to take care of her any more."

"I'm not?" Tom opened his eyes wide and laughed. He could afford to control himself now. "Why's that?"

"Daisy's leaving you."

"Nonsense."

"I am, though," she said with a visible effort.

"She's not leaving me!" Tom's words suddenly leaned down over Gatsby. "Certainly not for a common swindler who'd have to steal the ring he put on her finger."

"I won't stand this!" cried Daisy. "Oh, please let's get out." (7.275-281)

Thought:

Daisy is already doubting her decision to leave Gatsby.

Quote:

The relentless beating heat was beginning to confuse me and I had a bad moment there before I realized that so far his [Wilson's] suspicions hadn't alighted on Tom. He had discovered that Myrtle had some sort of life apart from him in another world, and the shock had made him physically sick. I stared at him and then at Tom, who had made a parallel discovery less than an hour before – and it occurred to me that there was no difference between men, in intelligence or race, so profound as the difference between the sick and the well. Wilson was so sick that he looked guilty, unforgivably guilty – as if he had just got some poor girl with child. (7.160)

Thought:

Wilson's realization that he doesn't know his own wife has made him physically sick. This is in contrast to Tom's discovery of his own wife, which only made him angry.

Quote:

Before I could answer her eyes fastened with an awed expression on her little finger.

"Look!" she complained. "I hurt it."

We all looked – the knuckle was black and blue.

"You did it, Tom," she said accusingly. "I know you didn't mean to, but you did do it. That's what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen of a—"

"I hate that word hulking," objected Tom crossly, "even in kidding."

"Hulking," insisted Daisy. (1.67-72)

Thought:

We learn a lot about Daisy and Tom's relationship from this passage. First of all, Tom is rough with Daisy (he strikes Myrtle later, though). Daisy isn't just an innocent weakling, though; she needles Tom every chance she gets. They certainly have some baggage in their relationship.

Quote:

She sat down, glanced searchingly at Miss Baker and then at me, and continued: "I looked outdoors for a minute, and it's very romantic outdoors. There's a bird on the lawn that I think must be a nightingale come over on the Cunard or White Star Line. He's sing away—" Her voice sang: "It's romantic, isn't it, Tom?"

"Very romantic," he said, and then miserably to me: "If it's light enough after dinner, I want to take you down to the stables." (1.106-107)

Thought:

You have to hand it to Daisy, she tries really hard to get Tom thinking of her in a loving way. He's totally not feeling it though.

Quote:

"Her family is one aunt about a thousand years old. Besides, Nick is going to look after her, aren't you, Nick? She's going to spend lots of week-ends out here this summer. I think the home influence will be very good for her."

Daisy and Tom looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"Is she from New York?" I asked quickly.

"From Louisville. Our white girlhood was passed together there. Out beautiful white—"

"Did you give Nick a little heart-to-heart talk on the veranda?" demanded Tom suddenly.

"Did I?" She looked at me. "I can't seem to remember, but I think we talked about the Nordic

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race. Yes, I'm sure we did. It sort of crept up on us and first thing you know—"

"Don't believe everything you hear, Nick," he advised me. (1.137-143)

Thought:

Now they're starting to air their dirty laundry in public, so to speak. Nick gets in the middle of this tense marital spat, much to his chagrin. Clearly Tom and Daisy have been having issues for a while.

Quote:

The valley of ashes is bounded on one side by a small foul river, and, when the drawbridge is up to let the barges through, the passengers on the waiting trains can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour. There is always a halt there of at least a minute, and it was because of this I first met Tom Buchanan's mistress.

The fact that he had one was insisted upon wherever he was known. His acquaintances resented the fact that he turned up in popular restaurants with her and, leaving her at a table, sauntered about, chatting with whomever he knew. (2.3-4)

Thought:

Tom's mistress is a huge issue between him and Daisy. Tom being so flippant about whether people know about it or not makes the situation even worse. It almost seems as though to Daisy the fact that people know about the affair is worse to than the affair itself. This passage also helps make clear that infidelity is not OK in this society, even though marriage seems to be a problem for most couples. Tom and Myrtle's relationship is an interesting one, especially when taking the class divide into consideration.

Quote:

She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost, shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye. Then she wet her lips, and without turning around spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse voice:

"Get some chairs, why don't you, so somebody can sit down."

"Oh, sure," agreed Wilson hurriedly, and went toward the little office, mingling immediately with the cement color of the walls. A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity—except his wife, who moved close to Tom. (2.15-17)

Thought:

Wilson is a doting husband, and Myrtle treats him poorly. We're pretty sure it has more to do with the fact that's he's poor, and less to do with his actual personality. Read more in George's "Character Analysis".

Quote:

I saw them in Santa Barbara when they came back, and I thought I'd never seen a girl so mad about her husband. If he left the room for a minute she'd look around uneasily, and say: "Where's Tom gone?" and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door. She used to sit on the sand with his head in her lap by the hour, rubbing her fingers over his eyes and looking at him with unfathomable delight. It was touching to see them together – it made you laugh in a hushed, fascinated way. That was in August. A week after I left Santa Barbara Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night, and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers, too, because her arm was broken – she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel. (4.143)

Thought:

This flashback to Tom and Daisy's relationship right after their marriage is a nice contrast to their marriage during the time of the story. Tom was cheating on his wife from the very beginning, but their relationship once seemed very idyllic.

Quote:

"You're crazy!" he exploded. "I can't speak about what happened five years ago, because I didn't know Daisy then—and I'll be damned if I see how you got within a mile of her unless you brought the groceries to the back door. But all the rest of that's a God damned lie. Daisy loved me when she married me and she loves me now."

"No," said Gatsby, shaking his head.

"She does, though. The trouble is that sometimes she gets foolish ideas in her head and doesn't know what she's doing." He nodded sagely. "And what's more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time." (7.246-248)

Thought:

When faced with losing Daisy, Tom gets protective all of a sudden. It seems that as long as he's the one cheating, it's no big deal, but her straying is something he absolutely cannot handle. Maybe Tom lost interest in Daisy over time because she was no longer a challenge. When suddenly he has to fight for her, she becomes desirable again.

Gender Quotes

Quote:

Some time toward midnight Tom Buchanan and Mrs. Wilson stood face to face discussing, in impassioned voices, whether Mrs. Wilson had any right to mention Daisy's name.

"Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!" shouted Mrs. Wilson. "I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai — "

Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. (2.125-127)

Thought:

In *The Great Gatsby*, the men are characterized by their physicality, while the women take a submissive role.

Quote:

Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body.

It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply – I was casually sorry, and then I forgot. It was on that same house party that we had a curious conversation about driving a car. It started because she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat. (3.159)

Thought:

Nick discusses the differences in judging men and women.

Quote:

"Well, I tried to swing the wheel –" He [Gatsby] broke off, and suddenly I guessed at the truth.

"Was Daisy driving?"

"Yes," he said after a moment, "but of course I'll say I was. You see, when we left New York she was very nervous and she thought it would steady her to drive – and this woman rushed

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out at us just as we were passing a car coming the other way. It all happened in a minute, but it seemed to me that she wanted to speak to us, thought we were somebody she knew. Well, first Daisy turned away from the woman toward the other car, and then she lost her nerve and turned back. The second my hand reached the wheel I felt the shock – it must have killed her instantly." (7.396-398)

Thought:

Gatsby's decision to take the blame for Daisy's crime is simply the product of his desire to fill a chivalrous male role.

Quote:

The chauffeur – he was one of Wolfsheim's protégés – heard the shots – afterward he could only say that he hadn't thought anything much about them. I drove from the station directly to Gatsby's house and my rushing anxiously up the front steps was the first thing that alarmed any one. But they knew then, I firmly believe. With scarcely a word said, four of us, the chauffeur, butler, gardener, and I, hurried down to the pool.

There was a faint, barely perceptible movement of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way toward the drain at the other. With little ripples that were hardly the shadows of waves, the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool. A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of compass, a thin red circle in the water.

It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete. (8.112-114)

Thought:

Wilson and Gatsby alike sacrifice their lives for the women they love, fulfilling their conception of gallantry.

Quote:

Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed, and I'd known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago. (1.15)

Thought:

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Note how couples are referred to as "the (man's first name) (man's last name)s." Women had just gotten the right to vote a few years earlier, and in society, the genders were still worlds apart.

Quote:

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor. (1.27)

Thought:

Jordan and Daisy are described as floating, ballooning, rippling, fluttering, carefree beings with no control whatsoever of their lives. They can't even control their dresses, Tom shuts the window to stop their fluttering.

Quote:

At any rate, Miss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me almost imperceptibly, and then quickly tipped her head back again—the object she was balancing had obviously tottered a little and given her something of a fright. Again a sort of apology arose to my lips. Almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me.

I looked back at my cousin, who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered "Listen," a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour.

I told her how I had stopped off in Chicago for a day on my way East, and how a dozen people had sent their love through me.

"Do they miss me?" she cried ecstatically.

"The whole town is desolate. All the cars have the left rear wheel painted black as a mourning wreath, and there's a persistent wail all night along the north shore."

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"How gorgeous! Let's go back, Tom. To-morrow!" Then she added irrelevantly: ""You ought to see the baby." (1.32-37)

Thought:

Daisy is very charming. While Jordan is more sporty, Daisy displays traditionally feminine characteristics all the time. As far as society is concerned, Daisy always knows how to carry herself. She even charms the shoes off Nick, and unlike anyone else in the novel, she continues to perplex him. Read more about Daisy in her "Character Analysis."

Quote:

"Listen, Nick; let me tell you what I said when she was born. Would you like to hear?"

"Very much."

"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (1.116-118)

Thought:

Daisy thinks that all girls would be happiest if they remained "beautiful little fools." We're going to translate "fool" to something a girl who's carefree, careless, light-hearted, and blissfully ignorant of the situations in which she finds herself. Keep in mind Daisy says this after being repeatedly abandoned by Tom. Her desire for her daughter to be more concerned with fun and foolish frivolities makes sense, given the hurt and isolation she's now feeling.

Quote:

Through this twilight universe Daisy began to move again with the season; suddenly she was again keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men, and drowsing asleep at dawn with the beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed. And all the time something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately – and the decision must be made by some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand. (8.19)

Thought:

Because of the dominance of men during this time, marriage was of central importance for a young woman's future. Daisy's restlessness without Gatsby makes sense, since society

would be primarily concerned with her marriage plans.

Education Quotes

Quote:

"About Gatsby! No, I haven't. I said I'd been making a small investigation of his past."

"And you found he was an Oxford man," said Jordan helpfully.

"An Oxford man!" He was incredulous. "Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit."

"Nevertheless he's an Oxford man."

"Oxford, New Mexico," snorted Tom contemptuously, "or something like that."

"Listen, Tom. If you're such a snob, why did you invite him to lunch?" demanded Jordan crossly.

"Daisy invited him; she knew him before we were married – God knows where!" (7.230-236)

Thought:

Tom demonstrates that wealth alone cannot make somebody fit in the upper echelons of society. They must be educated as well.

Quote:

Gatsby's foot beat a short, restless tattoo and Tom eyed him suddenly.

"By the way, Mr. Gatsby, I understand you're an Oxford man."

"Not exactly."

"Oh, yes, I understand you went to Oxford."

"Yes – I went there."

Pause. Then Tom's voice, incredulous and insulting: "You must have gone there about the time Biloxi went to New Haven."

Another pause. A waiter knocked and came in with crushed mint and ice but, the silence was unbroken by his "thank you." and the soft closing of the door. This tremendous detail was to be cleared up at last.

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"I told you I went there," said Gatsby.

"I heard you, but I'd like to know when."

"It was in nineteen-nineteen, I only stayed five months. That's why I can't really call myself an Oxford man."

Tom glanced around to see if we mirrored his disbelief. But we were all looking at Gatsby.

"It was an opportunity they gave to some of the officers after the Armistice," he continued. "We could go to any of the universities in England or France."

I wanted to get up and slap him on the back. I had one of those renewals of complete faith in him that I'd experienced before. (7.208-221)

Thought:

Tom tries to discredit Gatsby by attacking his education.

Quote:

I graduated from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father, and a little later I participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War. I enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly that I came back restless. Instead of being the warm centre of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—so I decided to go East and learn the bond business. (1.6)

Thought:

Although Nick isn't upper-upper-class, he's still near the top of the social ladder. He went to Yale and his father also attended an Ivy League school. His legacy status gives him extra clout. Nick was also in a secret society at Yale, along with Tom Buchanan. In addition to the top-tier education that Yale bestowed on Nick, the connections that he made while a student in New Haven were just as important. His connection to Tom alone gets him into situations where usually only the wealthiest folks would be welcome.

Lies and Deceit Quotes

Quote:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments [...]. (1.1-2)

Thought:

Nick presents himself as a reliable narrator, somebody we can trust, somebody who "reserves judgments." Yet we soon begin to doubt his credibility.

Quote:

Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body.

It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply – I was casually sorry, and then I forgot. It was on that same house party that we had a curious conversation about driving a car. It started because she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat. (3.159)

Thought:

Nick reveals that Jordan is a dishonest woman, as well as a careless person – careless with other people's feelings, emotions, and lives. Yet, we do not see this scene through an objective lens.

Quote:

A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.

"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.

"About what?" He waved his hand toward the book-shelves.

"About that. As a matter of fact you needn't bother to ascertain. I ascertained. They're real."

"The books?"

He nodded.

"Absolutely real – have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and – Here! Lemme show you."

Taking our skepticism for granted, he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."

"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too – didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?" (3.41-49)

Thought:

The owl-eyed man is astounded that Gatsby's library is full of real books. This man – no doubt perceptive (given the symbolism of his large owl-like glasses) – is right to suspect falsity on Gatsby's part.

Quote:

"Who are you, anyhow?" broke out Tom. "You're one of that bunch that hangs around with Meyer Wolfsheim – that much I happen to know. I've made a little investigation into your affairs – and I'll carry it further to-morrow."

You can suit yourself about that, old sport." said Gatsby steadily.

"I found out what your 'drug-stores' were." He turned to us and spoke rapidly. "He and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot 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."

"What about it?" said Gatsby politely. "I guess your friend Walter Chase wasn't too proud to come in on it."

"And you left him in the lurch, didn't you? You let him go to jail for a month over in New

Jersey. God! You ought to hear Walter on the subject of YOU."

"He came to us dead broke. He was very glad to pick up some money, old sport."

"Don't you call me 'old sport'!" cried Tom. Gatsby said nothing. "Walter could have you up on the betting laws too, but Wolfsheim scared him into shutting his mouth."

That unfamiliar yet recognizable look was back again in Gatsby's face.

"That drug-store business was just small change," continued Tom slowly, "but you've got something on now that Walter's afraid to tell me about." (7.282-290)

Thought:

It soon becomes clear that Gatsby has spun many different webs of deception. As this one begins to unravel, so does Daisy's idealized conception of Gatsby, and so does her love for him.

Quote:

"Nevertheless you did throw me over," said Jordan suddenly. "You threw me over on the telephone. I don't give a damn about you now, but it was a new experience for me, and I felt a little dizzy for a while."

We shook hands.

"Oh, and do you remember." – she added – "a conversation we had once about driving a car?"

"Why – not exactly."

"You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride."

"I'm thirty," I said. "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor."

She didn't answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away. (9.129-135)

Thought:

Jordan exposes Nick as a dishonest person, even though he prides himself on being trustworthy. What she considers dishonesty on his part may be the same kind of dishonesty of

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which Gatsby was at one time guilty of with Daisy; he led her to believe he could offer her safety and security. In fact, Nick is as emotionally unavailable to Jordan as Gatsby was practically unavailable to Daisy. This is how he has been dishonest.

Quote:

He broke off defiantly. "What if I did tell him? That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's, but he was a tough one. He ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car."

There was nothing I could say, except the one unutterable fact that it wasn't true.

"And if you think I didn't have my share of suffering – look here, when I went to give up that flat and saw that damn box of dog biscuits sitting there on the sideboard, I sat down and cried like a baby. By God it was awful –"

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made [...]. (9.142-145)

Thought:

Tom is the ultimate deceiver – and it appears that he is deceiving himself as well. Tom could very well know that Daisy was driving and simply choose not to believe it.

Quote:

"You see," cried Catherine triumphantly. She lowered her voice again. "It's really his wife that's keeping them apart. She's a Catholic, and they don't believe in divorce." Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was a little shocked at the elaborateness of the lie.

"When they do get married," continued Catherine, "they're going West to live for a while until it blows over." (2.97-99)

Thought:

These lies – that Daisy's a Catholic and that Tom and Myrtle will eventually get married – are both blatant, but keep Myrtle content with being Tom's mistress.

Quote:

"Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once."

A thrill passed over all of us. The three Mr. Mumbles bent forward and listened eagerly.

"I don't think it's so much that," argued Lucille sceptically; "it's more that he was a German spy during the war."

One of the men nodded in confirmation.

"I heard that from a man who knew all about him, grew up with him in Germany," he assured us positively.

"Oh, no," said the first girl, "it couldn't be that, because he was in the American army during the war." As our credulity switched back to her she leaned forward with enthusiasm. "You look at him sometimes when he thinks nobody's looking at him. I'll bet he killed a man." (3.30-35)

Thought:

The rumors and lies spread about the enigmatic Gatsby are so ridiculous we have to wonder how they got started. Also, notice how positive each of the gossipers is that their lie is actually true. That, oddly, says a lot about the guests' gullibility – they assume that what they're told is true, no matter how outrageous. (Learn the truth about Gatsby by reading his "Character Analysis.")

Quote:

"Now you're started on the subject," she answered with a wan smile. "Well, he told me once he was an Oxford man."

A dim background started to take shape behind him, but at her next remark it faded away.

"However, I don't believe it."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," she insisted, "I just don't think he went there."

Something in her tone reminded me of the other girl's 'I think he killed a man,' and had the effect of stimulating my curiosity. I would have accepted without question the information that Gatsby sprang from the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower East Side of New York. That was comprehensible. But young men didn't – at least in my provincial inexperience I believed they didn't – drift coolly out of nowhere and buy a palace on Long Island Sound. (3.83-88)

Thought:

Jordan's probably just as gullible as most people, but her high-class background gives her a keen level of insight into what a stereotypical Oxford man would be like. This comment also highlights how condescending upper-class people can be in this *Gatsby* world, skeptical of anyone who doesn't seem to be on their level but is trying to be. Jordan's social senses tell her that he's not genuinely upper class, but she can't give a specific reason why.

Quote:

"Whenever he sees I'm having a good time he wants to go home."

"Never heard anything so selfish in my life."

"We're always the first ones to leave."

"So are we."

"Well, we're almost the last to-night," said one of the men sheepishly. "The orchestra left half an hour ago."

In spite of the wives' agreement that such malevolence was beyond credibility, the dispute ended in a short struggle, and both wives were lifted, kicking, into the night. (3.105-110)

Thought:

This is a hilarious scene. The short conversation somehow manages to have several obvious lies crammed into it.

Quote:

Every one suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known. (3.170)

Thought:

Nick tells us straight up that he believes most people are not very honest, but that he believes he always is. He's not so much proud of his honesty as he is aware of it; it seems like half the time he can't help his sincere remarks. But do you think that he's always trustworthy?

Quote:

"My house looks well, doesn't it?" he demanded. "See how the whole front of it catches the

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light." I agreed that it was splendid.

"Yes." His eyes went over it, every arched door and square tower. "It took me just three years to earn the money that bought it."

"I thought you inherited your money."

"I did, old sport," he said automatically, "but I lost most of it in the big panic – the panic of the war."

I think he hardly knew what he was saying, for when I asked him what business he was in he answered, "That's my affair," before he realized that it wasn't the appropriate reply.

"Oh, I've been in several things," he corrected himself. "I was in the drug business and then I was in the oil business. But I'm not in either one now." (5.97-103)

Thought:

Nick catches Gatsby in an outright lie about how he came to have so much money. Gatsby covers his mistake poorly and doesn't make much sense, because he doesn't seem to have any idea what he's actually talking about. Gatsby struggles to maintain an air of upper-class confidence, but he doesn't handle well those few times that he does slip.

Quote:

James Gatz – that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career – when he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior. It was James Gatz who had been loafing along the beach that afternoon in a torn green jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a rowboat, pulled out to the Tuolomee, and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour.

I suppose he'd had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God – a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that – and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (6.6-7)

Thought:

Here's the explanation of the extent of Gatsby's lies. How far he's come; it seems his entire

life has been dedicated to overcoming his poor origins.

Quote:

"I've made a small investigation of this fellow," he continued. "I could have gone deeper if I'd known—"

"Do you mean you've been to a medium?" inquired Jordan humorously.

"What?" Confused, he stared at us as we laughed. "A medium?"

"About Gatsby."

"About Gatsby! No, I haven't. I said I'd been making a small investigation of his past."

"And you found he was an Oxford man," said Jordan helpfully.

"An Oxford man!" He was incredulous. "Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit."

"Nevertheless he's an Oxford man."

"Oxford, New Mexico," snorted Tom contemptuously, "or something like that." (7.123-131)

Thought:

Tom is truly offended by the idea that Gatsby somehow belongs in the same class as him. Tom is judgmental, and quick to debunk Gatsby's claim to have worked honorably for his riches. It seems to us Tom's a bit threatened by this popular fellow that people seem to admire.

Quote:

Her eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realized at last what she was doing – and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. But it was done now. It was too late.

"I never loved him," she said, with perceptible reluctance.

"Not at Kapiolani?" demanded Tom suddenly.

"No."

From the ballroom beneath, muffled and suffocating chords were drifting up on hot waves of air.

"Not that day I carried you down from the Punch Bowl to keep your shoes dry?" There was a husky tenderness in his tone... "Daisy?"

"Please don't." Her voice was cold, but the rancor was gone from it. (7.254-260)

Thought:

Daisy's caught in her indecision between Gatsby and Tom. She claims that she truly loves both of them, and this is where Tom breaks her down. She does love Tom, no matter how much she'd like to deny it (and no matter how much Gatsby would like to believe that he's her one and only). Tom seems to love her, too, in his own way. The problem here is that everyone has a different view of what it means to love someone. Tom's got money and marriage on his side, but Gatsby's devotion to Daisy attests to how strongly he feels about her, and to what lengths he will go to for her and only her.

Quote:

Most of those reports were a nightmare – grotesque, circumstantial, eager, and untrue. When Michaelis's testimony at the inquest brought to light Wilson's suspicions of his wife I thought the whole tale would shortly be served up in racy pasquinade – but Catherine, who might have said anything, didn't say a word. She showed a surprising amount of character about it too – looked at the coroner with determined eyes under that corrected brow of hers, and swore that her sister had never seen Gatsby, that her sister was completely happy with her husband, that her sister had been into no mischief whatever. She convinced herself of it, and cried into her handkerchief, as if the very suggestion was more than she could endure. So Wilson was reduced to a man "deranged by grief" in order that the case might remain in its simplest form. And it rested there. (9.2)

Thought:

Rumors immediately swirl around the truth behind Gatsby's death. How could they not? Society is intensely curious and needed some sort of explanation, whether it was true or not. Michaelis's testimony stops the lies in one easy swoop, though. Also, Myrtle's sister Catherine clearly lies, but with the best of intentions. In this situation, the lies seem to be out of love.

Quote:

She was dressed to play golf, and I remember thinking she looked like a good illustration, her chin raised a little jauntily, her hair the color of an autumn leaf, her face the same brown tint as the fingerless glove on her knee. When I had finished she told me without comment that she was engaged to another man. I doubted that, though there were several she could have

married at a nod of her head, but I pretended to be surprised. For just a minute I wondered if I wasn't making a mistake, then I thought it all over again quickly and got up to say good-by.

"Nevertheless you did throw me over," said Jordan suddenly.

"You threw me over on the telephone. I don't give a damn about you now, but it was a new experience for me, and I felt a little dizzy for a while." We shook hands.

"Oh, and do you remember" – she added – "a conversation we had once about driving a car?"

"Why – not exactly."

"You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride."

"I'm thirty," I said. "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor." She didn't answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away. (9.126-133)

Thought:

Even when he wishes the truth were different, Nick can't lie. It seems like Nick feels that being unflinchingly honest is sometimes more of a burden than a personal attribute or point of personal pride.

Compassion and Forgiveness Quotes

Quote:

It passed, and he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room.

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.

"You two start on home, Daisy," said Tom. "In Mr. Gatsby's car."

She looked at Tom, alarmed now, but he insisted with magnanimous scorn.

*"Go on. He won't annoy you. I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over."
(7.292-298)*

Thought:

For Tom, forgiving Daisy for her affair is easy; because he doesn't value their marriage or her love, he sees no need for it to exist untarnished. Gatsby, on the other hand, because of the intensity of his love for Daisy, cannot forgive her for loving Tom; he needs their love to be flawless in his mind.

Quote:

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table, with a plate of cold fried chicken between them, and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table at her, and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement.

They weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale – and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together. (7.409-410)

Thought:

Do Daisy and Tom forgive each other? Perhaps not. It may be that they simply don't care

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enough about their marriage emotionally to be bothered by their mutual infidelities. Yet they care about it in other ways – they choose to stay together for reasons of practicality.

Quote:

"And if you think I didn't have my share of suffering – look here, when I went to give up that flat and saw that damn box of dog biscuits sitting there on the sideboard, I sat down and cried like a baby. By God it was awful — "

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made... (9.144-145)

Thought:

Nick draws an interesting distinction between understanding a person's motives and forgiving that person for his actions. By removing himself mentally from "that crowd," Nick puts himself at a psychological distance from Tom. He is then able to view the situation objectively, to comment but not to judge or criticize, just as his father recommended. This is why he can see that Tom's actions were justified in his mind. But, by revealing that he "couldn't forgive" Tom, Nick also makes it clear that he is slipping up, breaking from his father's advice, closing the psychological gap between himself and "that crowd."

Quote:

"I wanted to get somebody for him. I wanted to go into the room where he lay and reassure him: "I'll get somebody for you, Gatsby. Don't worry. Just trust me and I'll get somebody for you—" (9.11)

Thought:

Nick has much compassion for Gatsby after he's gone, he seems heartbroken that his friend has been abandoned by everyone. For a man who was so generous and loyal, no one is loyal or kind to him in return (besides Nick, of course, and the owl-eyed man). This says something about Gatsby's relationships with everyone around him and the shallowness of the society he was in.

Quote:

[Klipspringer's] tone made me suspicious.

"Of course you'll be there yourself." "Well, I'll certainly try. What I called up about is—"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "How about saying you'll come?"

"Well, the fact is—the truth of the matter is that I'm staying with some people up here in Greenwich, and they rather expect me to be with them to-morrow. In fact, there's a sort of picnic or something. Of course I'll do my very best to get away."

I ejaculated an unrestrained "Huh!" and he must have heard me, for he went on nervously: "What I called up about was a pair of shoes I left there. I wonder if it'd be too much trouble to have the butler send them on. You see, they're tennis shoes, and I'm sort of helpless without them. My address is care of B. F. —"

I didn't hear the rest of the name, because I hung up the receiver. (9.58-65)

Thought:

The man who was staying in Gatsby's house, won't even show up to the funeral. Not only that, but he has the audacity to ask Nick to ship his shoes to him. Nick's compassion for Gatsby spurs him to hang up, and not a moment too soon.

Quote:

We straggled down quickly through the rain to the cars. Owl-eyes spoke to me by the gate.

"I couldn't get to the house," he remarked.

"Neither could anybody else."

"Go on!" He started. "Why, my God! they used to go there by the hundreds."

He took off his glasses and wiped them again, outside and in.

"The poor son-of-a-bitch," he said. (9.114-119)

Thought:

The owl-eyed man is the only party-goer who comes through to say good-bye to his periodic host. He obviously feels some connection to Gatsby, otherwise he wouldn't have come to pay his last respects. His final comments show his compassion, albeit in somewhat abrasive form, for Gatsby's sparsely attended funeral.

Quote:

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On the last night, with my trunk packed and my car sold to the grocer, I went over and looked at that huge incoherent failure of a house once more. On the white steps an obscene word, scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick, stood out clearly in the moonlight, and I erased it, drawing my shoe raspily along the stone. Then I wandered down to the beach and sprawled out on the sand. (9.147)

Thought:

Nick's compassion even extends to the house that stood for everything he despised about Gatsby. He tries to keep it clean, since the house meant much to Gatsby, and he would have wanted it that way.

Religion Quotes

Quote:

"Have you got a church you go to sometimes, George? Maybe even if you haven't been there for a long time? Maybe I could call up the church and get a priest to come over and he could talk to you, see?" "Don't belong to any."

"You ought to have a church, George, for times like this. You must have gone to church once. Didn't you get married in a church? Listen, George, listen to me. Didn't you get married in a church?"

"That was a long time ago." (8.74-76)

Thought:

Even the most religious character in the text, George, has little use for institutionalized religion.

Quote:

"I spoke to her," he muttered, after a long silence. "I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. I took her to the window" – with an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it – "and I said 'God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me, but you can't fool God!'"

Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night.

"God sees everything," repeated Wilson.

"That's an advertisement," Michaelis assured him. Something made him turn away from the window and look back into the room. But Wilson stood there a long time, his face close to the window pane, nodding into the twilight. (8.103-106)

Thought:

Wilson believes that the one being that has the right to judge is God – even while he judges his own wife. This is an interesting notion to compare to Nick's opening lines: that one should not criticize (another form of judging). Seen in this light, Nick's father's advice takes on a religious tone.

Quote: