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## An Analysis of the Character Daisy and Her Boys in the Great Gatsby

Throughout literature, there are countless characters whose only positive attributes seem to be the fact that they are utterly detestable - the reader loves to hate them. From Shakespeare's conniving Iago to Dickens' endlessly cruel Estella, these characters bring nothing but pain to those around them. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy fits rather snugly into this category. She is shallow, self-absorbed, and completely lacking any sort of heartfelt emotion. Yet it is impossible to understand the novel as a whole without possessing an understanding of Daisy. Perhaps the clearest way to examine Daisy's character is to look at her relationship with Gatsby. They seem, at a glance, to be in love, but the novel's end leaves readers wondering if Daisy is even capable of loving another human being. She is wrapped in wealth, charm, and aristocracy, and these attract Gatsby to her. At the same time, the very things that Gatsby loves about Daisy are what inevitably keep them from being together.

It is clear from the novel's outset that Daisy is indescribably beautiful, graceful, and charming. She is the quintessential representation of the 1920's female. When Nick encounters Daisy for the first time, he notes that she speaks so softly that, unless in very close proximity, the listener cannot hear her. Yet more interesting than this observation is the reasoning behind it: Nick states, "I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming"(13). Here, it is as though even Daisy's faults are endearing, and the reader sees just how permeating her charm truly is. To Gatsby however, Daisy is far more than simply charming; she is the physical embodiment of his goals and aspirations. To obtain Daisy is to obtain all the wealth, poise, stature, and aristocracy that she possesses. Gatsby realizes even before Nick does that Daisy is inextricably linked to her richness, telling him that "Her voice is full of money"(127).

Yet long before Gatsby pinpoints the sound of wealth in Daisy's voice, he realizes exactly how enveloped in class and gentility she is. When he and Daisy first meet in Louisville, Gatsby is enthralled by the aura of sophistication surrounding Daisy. Gatsby falls in love with Daisy's enchanting beauty and grace, not her strength of character. On one of the last nights he spends with Daisy, Gatsby reveals to Nick that he was "overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor"(157). This statement alone indicates that Gatsby knows and acknowledges that Daisy will always be attractive and alluring to him because of her wealth and its ability to sustain her charm and beauty.

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The problem however, is that Daisy is too entwined with these qualities to ever escape or overcome them. She can never fully "stoop" to Gatsby's level. Her dependency on wealth and aristocracy makes her incapable of loving anything but herself, money, and material luxuries, evidenced by the fact that she chooses Tom over Gatsby not once, but twice in the novel. The first time, obviously, is while Gatsby is away at war and Daisy grows tired of waiting for his return, even though he continually sends letters professing his desire to be with her. Daisy however, is far too impatient to wait, and Nick comments:

"She [Daisy] 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... That force took place in the middle of spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan. There was a wholesome bulkiness about his person and Daisy was flattered."(159)

Again, Daisy's need for wealth and prestige are stronger than any emotional attachment she has for Gatsby, and she is won over by mere "bulkiness" and flattery.

Furthermore, Daisy never outgrows this shallow attachment to material luxury; in fact, it seems as though she becomes more and more controlled by it. Although her reunion and subsequent relationship with Gatsby after many years seems as though it is based on true love, Daisy's shallow and self-absorbed nature shines through. After killing Myrtle Wilson and allowing Gatsby to take the blame, Daisy simply disappears again. When Gatsby is murdered and Nick instinctively calls Daisy, he finds that she and Tom have moved and left no forwarding address. Several days go by, and finally, at Gatsby's funeral, Nick remarks, "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"(183). Not only has Daisy chosen Tom over Gatsby after their confrontation at the hotel, she appears to feel absolutely no remorse over Gatsby's death. The event is inconsequential to her, as she maintains her social standing, wealth, and prestige. Had Daisy somehow lost her money or fallen out of social graces because of Gatsby's death, perhaps then she might have felt grief or sorrow; however, she is unable to feel any affection for anything but her wealth and standing.

Beyond observing Daisy's shallow obsession with class and riches, however, it is important to note the amorality of her character - which is not to be confused with immorality. She (along with Tom) is a clear representation of values in the 1920's. She never does anything illegal or socially unacceptable, and by all accounts is probably considered an upstanding citizen. Yet she is far from moral. She and Tom share this common amorality, which is why the novel must end with the two of them together. She knows it, and Tom knows it; it is only Gatsby who seems unaware of this ability to mate for reasons other than love. When the two men finally confront Daisy in the hotel room, each demands that she make a decision between the two of them. When Gatsby, confident of the love he and Daisy share, announces that she is leaving Tom,

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Tom proclaims, "She's not leaving me!...Certainly not for a common swindler who'd have to steal the ring he put on her finger...I picked him [Gatsby] for a bootlegger the first time I saw him and I wasn't far wrong"(141). Here, Tom denounces Gatsby's questionable business ventures, but fails to see any wrongdoing in his blatant infidelity. He possesses a clear understanding of what he considers to be immoral, yet cannot see that his own behavior lacks morality of any kind. Likewise, Daisy sees nothing wrong with any of her behavior throughout the novel, including accidentally killing Myrtle Wilson. In fact, the only clue the reader gets of her reaction to the event is Gatsby's report to Nick that upon telling Daisy he believes Myrtle was indeed killed, "She stood it pretty well"(150). Like Tom, Daisy is blind to the amorality of her actions, which is precisely why the two belong together and must end up together. Although at times it seems as though Daisy truly does love Gatsby, choosing him over Tom is never an actual option. Nick captures their entire relationship perfectly when he says:

"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...." (188)

And it was exactly their money and carelessness that kept them together, that and nothing else, for neither of them is capable of anything more. Again, Daisy's intense need for material comfort and ease does not allow her to be with anyone but Tom, and least of all with Gatsby.

Daisy's character is central to the understanding of *The Great Gatsby*. Without Daisy, the reader would never truly realize Gatsby's own character. To him, Daisy represents everything that he has struggled for his entire life - wealth, class, sophistication, and aristocracy. Yet when Gatsby believes that his love for Daisy is enough to obtain her - and subsequently all of these things - he drastically overestimates her character. Daisy's love affair with her money, beauty, and grace fully prevent her love for another human being. And perhaps on some level Gatsby realizes that, and loves Daisy in spite of it. However, she is not worth a fraction of his devotion, and as such, can never be with him. The very things that Gatsby admires in Daisy are what disallow a relationship with her, because she can only love those things. Consequently, only someone who shares her inability to love (Tom) can ever truly be with her. Through Daisy, Fitzgerald allows the reader to gain a better understanding of the great Gatsby.

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