
Let's Talk About Sex(uality): Looking Into The Relationship Between Nick and Gatsby

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*, there is an undeniable chemistry between the two main characters, Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby. While some may see this relationship as just a strong friendship, there is evidence to believe that Nick felt something more than platonic. Throughout the novel there is a special tone that Fitzgerald portrays in his writing when Nick speaks about his old friend, Jay Gatsby. Gatsby is always the exception for Nick when it comes to the careless personalities in both the West and East egg. With a scene that questions Nick's sexuality, it is not far off to assume that he might be in love with Gatsby. There is even a noticeably different tone when Nick tells his readers about Gatsby compared to the others in West and East Egg. The two characters seem to contrast perfectly, and it is these clashing personality traits that seems to draw them even closer.

Nick Carraway's sexuality comes into question when his intense relationship with Gatsby turns into a deep infatuation. From the first chapter there is an obvious difference in the way Nick describes Gatsby to his readers. The tone that Fitzgerald uses to portray how Nick sees Gatsby shows a passion that he does not show towards any other characters. Nick goes on to describe how he despises the careless and selfish ways of the East and West Egg, but he explains that, "Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction" (Fitzgerald 2). For some reason Nick sees characteristics in Gatsby that excuses the fact that he lives in West Egg, and is around all the people he scorns. When describing the physical traits of Gatsby, Nick says that there is "Something gorgeous about him" (Fitzgerald 2). In a way there is both a physical and emotional connection between the two from the moment Nick meets Gatsby. At the party that Gatsby specifically invites Nick to, Nick immediately notices Gatsby's smile. He says that, It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. (Fitzgerald 48) Nick felt that when Gatsby smiles he is understanding everything about him, and Nick admires that quality in Gatsby. The detail in which Nick describes Gatsby's physical appearance suggests that he is interested in him more than he is willing to tell.

When Nick goes to a party with Tom Buchanan, and his mistress, he has an interesting interaction with Mr. McKee, that puts Nick's sexuality under question. Nick, while under the influence of alcohol, notices a small detail about Mr. McKee's face. He sees a small dab of shaving cream that is driving him almost mad, and that he must remove. It is very peculiar that Nick notices something so small about a man, especially the fact that it makes him so crazy that

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he has to remove it. Nick waits until Mr. McKee is dozing off to go over and wipe it off instead of just telling Mr. McKee that it is there. Nick describes Mr. McKee as a “pale, feminine man” (Fitzgerald 30), and he is attracted enough to this “feminine” man enough to feel comfortable wiping shaving cream off his face. During this whole scene at a party, Fitzgerald has put in little effort to establish Nick as purely a straight male. Even with the distraction of Tom’s mistress’ sister, Catherine Wilson, Nick seems to be more fascinated with the male in the room as it gets later into the evening. It is also to be brought up again that Nick was highly intoxicated, and in many cases alcohol makes people less inhibited. Even at the end of the chapter there is something suspicious about the scene Nick describes. He says that Mr. McKee was, “...sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands” (Fitzgerald 38). Even if Mr. McKee wanted to show his portfolio to Nick he didn’t need to be almost naked to do so. This whole chapter causes a lot of speculation that Nick is confused with his sexuality. There is also many critics that believe that Nick has a very confusing sexuality.

There is a distinct contrast in how Nick describes female characters compared to how he describes males. The amount of detail Nick pours into his descriptions allows readers to see deeply into every one of the characters, but yet there is still a noticeable difference in the effort he uses to describe the male characters. Even when Nick describes his significant other, Jordan Baker, there is a lack of passion in his tone. He says that she is, ...a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet. Her grey sun-strained eyes looked back at me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a wan, charming discontented face. (Fitzgerald 11) Nick and Jordan are together for most of the novel, but yet this is just about the extent of what is said about her. Nick never goes into any more details about her physical appearance, but when Nick talks about Gatsby’s appearance and personality he throws in a certain fire or passion in the words he uses. Some of the words include “gorgeous,” “extraordinary,” and “romantic” (Fitzgerald 2). Not once did he use such powerful words to describe any other characters, not even women that he seems to be in a “relationship” with. Nick cannot help but describe Gatsby in a more vivid way because he admires Gatsby more than anyone else, and notices more details about him.

Even a critic from The Atlantic notices that it is odd that Nick never seems to notice Tom’s mistress. He says that, “In the book, he recognizes her appeal, but seems unmoved or even disgusted by it” (Berlatsky). It is not a coincidence that multiple people notice this glitch in Nick’s descriptions. Also taking into account that Nick is remembering this summer from the past, it is possible that he only remembers specific details about Gatsby because of the strong feelings he had for him. There are many reasons for Nick to feel so strongly about Gatsby even though they were so different. The qualities that they see in each other are the qualities they wish they had themselves. That is why Nick is so curious and intrigued by Gatsby. John Henry Raleigh wrote an article about these differences and said that, “...the bond between them reveals that they are not opposites but rather complements...” (103). The phrase “opposites

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attract” is used quite literally in this sense because of how contrasting the two are. Raleigh says that Nick is, “...reason, experience, waking, reality, and history”, while Gatsby is, “imagination, innocence, sleeping, dream, and eternity” (Raleigh 103). All of the qualities of Nick and Gatsby balance each other out in a way that no one else can do. For example, when Nick invites Daisy to his house, at Gatsby’s request, Gatsby becomes very uneasy and nervous. Nick serves as a levelheaded person that Gatsby can talk to and use to calm his nerves. At this point in their friendship they have not even established a relationship, but yet Gatsby is still comfortable enough to confide in Nick at his most vulnerable state. This trust and reassurance is just the start of a deep trust in each other.

Another note to take into account is that we are reading this book in the eyes and filter of Nick Carraway. Fitzgerald was able to give us enough textual evidence to make suggestions of Nick’s sexuality, but there is no way to confirm without reading between the lines. Even a professor doing research on *The Great Gatsby* picked up on the hints Fitzgerald put in his work. She notices that, “Nick is, himself, invested in sexual passing” (Froehlich). The special tone right from the beginning starts hinting at their relationship, but when Nick begins to single Gatsby out as the only exception to everything he scorns it is reasonable to assume that there is something going on beyond a platonic relationship. Following that with a scene with Nick and Mr. McKee, Nick’s sexuality comes even further into question. There is an intense connection between them that people may not understand because of how different they are, but it is quite clear when reading a little closer that they understand each other in a way that other people cannot. It is clear that Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby’s relationship is special, but at some point Nick crosses over from curiosity to infatuation.

Citations

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