

Differences in Social Class in The Great Gatsby

eyes – above even Gatsby. Tom feels that he can be ‘arrogant and condescending’ (Claassen, 2013) to those he feels are not worth it, specifically ‘those who are newly rich (like Gatsby)’. He feels that it is well within his rights to ‘treat Daisy with contempt’ but it is only when he is close to losing Daisy to Gatsby that he begins to pay more attention to her. Myrtle Wilson is referred to as ‘his girl’ even though she is not actually Tom’s wife, nor has she ever actually met Daisy, as shown by ‘...whom she took to be his wife’ on page 79. Myrtle is of a lower station than Tom and, at least in Tom’s eyes, she is seen as little better than property, easily dispensable, and therefore she is only referred to as ‘his girl’ rather than Myrtle.

15. “‘That dog? That dog’s a boy.’ ‘It’s a bitch,’ said Tom decisively.” (Page 19).

- Tom’s passionate and harsh expression about his views on race sheds light on his character, his relationship with Daisy, and his sense of his place in society: it portrays his ruthlessness in protecting the way of life of the established rich from romantic dreamers. - http://reading.cornell.edu/reading_project_06/gatsby/documents/Ramos.pdf - Tom Buchanan: The Ruthless Protector – Christine Ramos - 2013
- Fitzgerald uses ambivalence in this statement in that Tom Buchanan is very decisive and stuck in his ways and yet nearer to the beginning of the novel he cannot stay still or settle down. ‘His eyes flashing about restlessly’ (page seven) is one prime example of this. Therefore Nick thinks that Tom is extremely decisive and yet unable to settle down. Tom is able to say something and nobody will dare to correct him even when he is obviously wrong. The dog-seller in this scenario would know better than Tom what gender the dog was, but when Tom deemed it to be a girl no one disputed it. His position as an upper-class gentleman gives him an air of confidence that cannot be seen in anyone else, and this gives him the courage to determine things that are obviously wrong. The difference in class of Tom and the dog-seller is gigantic as he is merely a man on the streets whereas Tom lives in a huge mansion with expanding lawns and a beautiful view. Tom looks down on him because he is of a higher class and does not wish to be associated with those of a lower class, with some exceptions, such as Myrtle and Nick. Tom is very ‘...ruthless in protecting the way of life of the established rich...’ (Ramos, 1013). The ‘established rich’ in this environment is people belonging to the East Egg, or ‘old money’. They believe that they are better than those from the West Egg because they come from ‘old money’ rather than ‘new money’. Tom is so used to getting his own way because of this that he feels he is able to determine the sex of the dog without being fought against.