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Social Class and Status in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

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C-essay

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Abstract

Uppsatsen syftar till att analysera påverkan av social klass och status i F. Scott Fitzgeralds roman *The Great Gatsby* med Max Webers teori om klass och status som utgångspunkt. Detta sker genom analys av karaktärernas relationer och beteende ur ett perspektiv där klass och status är centralt. Resultatet visar hur klass och status påverkar karaktärernas beslut, relationer och liv. Det leder till ett oundvikligt slut för Jay Gatsbys och Daisy Buchanans kärleksaffär samtidigt som konsekvenserna av karaktärernas handlingar påverkas av deras klasstillhörighet.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby, Social class, status, F. Scott Fitzgerald*

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Introduction

According to Scott Donaldson , in “The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald” (2008), *The Great Gatsby* was first published in 1925 and the reviews Fitzgerald received were the most favorable he had received so far (22). The novel has had a long lasting influence in America, and according to Harold Bloom; “It is reasonable to assert that Jay Gatsby was *the* major literary character of the United States in the twentieth century” (233). The novel takes place during the early 1920s, a time that was later referred to as “the roaring twenties.” Readers of *The Great Gatsby* get an understanding of where that name came from when introduced by Fitzgerald, through the eyes of the novel’s narrator Nick Carraway, to Jay Gatsby and his extravagant lifestyle where there is no end to the luxury and where money is there to be spent.

Thomas Streissguth claims, in *The Roaring Twenties* (2007), that the American Society went through many changes during the 1920s. For the first time in history the United States became an urban society, with more than half of the population living in cities (xi). According to Malcolm Cowley, in “The Class Consumerism of Fitzgerald’s Life” (2008), the urbanization of American Society is reflected in the novel as Jay Gatsby grew up in the country but moved to the city, a choice that was typical for the time (32).

The modernization of society accelerated and life in the city was more comfortable than ever before. Accompanied by the new jazz music, this new way of life seemed to some to be a never ending display of immoral behavior (Streissguth xi). One of the most drastic counter reactions to the changes in society and the new way of life was the introduction of Prohibition, a law which made it illegal to manufacture and sell alcohol. Even though it never really succeeded with its purpose, Prohibition changed the liquor market significantly. A lot of money could be made by smuggling and selling alcohol and in some cases fortunes were made by people who came from lower social classes (Streissguth xi). The Prohibition was significant for the time and it plays an important role in the novel.

Fitzgerald was very fascinated by earning and spending money and during this time a change in how wealth was measured started to occur. His interest in money was something that Fitzgerald shared with many of the young men that he went to Princeton with and that were now trying to pursue a career in the business world (Cowley 33). Houses, land, and machinery had always been in focus when it came to measuring wealth. However, a person's yearly income became more and more relevant as earning and spending money was more than ever before a way to grade success, and failure as well (Cowley 33).

In this essay I will try to argue that even though Jay Gatsby is a very wealthy man, he is, since he falls short in most of the aspects that determines a person's social status, not an equal to the likes of Daisy and Tom in the eyes of the old upper class society. Therefore, Gatsby never stands a chance of succeeding with his attempt to win back Daisy, who is a part of that society and of a different status.

Theory

In this essay I will, by using a Marxist approach, analyze how the events in the novel *The Great Gatsby* reflect the changing society and the norms and values in America during the 1920s. The novel includes characters from several different socioeconomic classes and this essay aims to study the relationship between these social classes. I will examine the presence of social class in the novel and the effect it has on the relationships between the different characters. In *Critical Theory Today* (2006), Lois Tyson explains the differences in socioeconomic class by dividing people into the "haves" and the "have-nots":

From a Marxist perspective, differences in socioeconomic class divide people in ways that are much more significant than differences in religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. For the real battle lines are drawn, to put the matter simply, between

the “haves” and the “have-nots[“] (54).

In a Marxist perspective it is the control over the natural, economic and human resources of the world that divides people, the division is made between those who have and those who do not have. The “haves” are those with the control over these things, the natural, economic and human resources, while the “have-nots” are everybody else.

The theory that I will focus on is Max Weber’s theory on social class. Much like Marx, Weber believed that class was related to wealth. However, Weber separated status and class in his theory, and status was not necessarily dependent on wealth. Regarding social class, Weber points out four social classes and they are: “a) the working class as a whole... b) the petty bourgeoisie c) the propertyless intelligentsia and specialists... d) the classes privileged through property and education” (Weber 305). Weber also writes:

In the generational sequence, the rise of groups a) and b) into c) (technicians, white-collar workers) is relatively the easiest... In banks and corporations as well as in the higher ranks of the civil service, class c) members have a chance to move up into class d) (Weber 305).

This means that, according to Weber, a person does not, necessarily, remain in the same social class forever as it is dependent on factors such as work, wealth and property. With Weber’s class definitions, the characters in the novel belong to different classes. The Buchanans and Jay Gatsby belong to the class privileged through property and education, Nick Carraway could be considered to be a member of the propertyless intelligentsia and the Wilsons are members of the working class.

On the subject of status, Weber claims: “Status *may* rest on a class position of a distinct or ambiguous kind. However, it is not solely determined by it: Money and entrepreneurial

position are not in themselves status qualifications, although they may lead to them...” (Weber 306). In comparison with social class, money does not guarantee a certain status. The lack of something is not an automatic disqualification of a status (Weber 306). Jordan Baker, from the novel, could be seen as an example of this as her economic situation is unknown but she still has a status that is comparable with the Buchanans. Weber continues on the matter: “The class position of an officer, a civil servant or a student may vary greatly according to their wealth and yet not lead to a different status since upbringing and education create a common style of life” (306). This exemplifies the fact that there are other factors involved in determining status compared with social class. Upbringing and education can contribute to a common style of life and values that brings people together.

Background on the Author

F. Scott Fitzgerald had a writing career that peaked in the early 1920s. In “Fitzgerald’s view of Class and the American Dream” (2008) Marius Bewley claims that the concept of class has been a more important part of Fitzgerald’s novels than it has for any other writer in the American tradition (23). *The Great Gatsby* is no exception to that, as social class is present throughout the entire novel.

Social class is not only present in the novel, but in many cases similarities can be found between Fitzgerald’s own experiences of class and how class society is displayed in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald’s parents came from very different backgrounds which gave him an insight in different social groups. According to Scott Donaldson, In “Class Snobbery and Education” (2008), Fitzgerald’s father came from an old American family while his mother, on the other hand, was the daughter of an Irish immigrant who had made some money through his wholesale grocery business (17). So, on his father’s side there was a family with a

respected heritage and on his mother's side there was a family without any aristocratic pretenses, but with a better financial situation.

Due to his lack of family wealth Fitzgerald was denied the opportunity to marry the girl of his choice as her family had a nice background and were very wealthy. Supposedly, her father told Fitzgerald that "poor boys shouldn't think of marrying rich girls" (Donaldson "The Life" 18). In much the same way as Gatsby's situation with Daisy, Fitzgerald was unable to continue his relationship with a girl due to their different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Similarities can also be spotted between Fitzgerald's background and his character Nick Carraway's background. Carraway's family has a tradition that they are descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch (Fitzgerald 10). Fitzgerald's family was distant relatives to Francis Scott Key. Fitzgerald's mother was very proud of this and it had some impact on him as well, since he was christened Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (Donaldson 17). By focusing on and taking so much pride in a distant relationship to a prominent person, as Francis Scott Key was, Fitzgerald's family confirmed and reinforced the importance of status. It also reveals their own attempts of trying to gain different status than what was really the case.

Analysis

Class Society and the American Dream

The ambition to succeed is central in the American Dream and ambition is always present in *The Great Gatsby*, with several characters trying to get more than they already have. In *What Social Class is in America* (2006), Warner, Meeker and Eells describe the concept of the American Dream as follows: “In the bright glow and warm presence of the American Dream all men are born free and equal. Everyone in the American Dream has the right, and often the duty, to try to succeed and to do his best to reach the top” (67). Since everyone is born free and equal they all have the same opportunities to succeed in life. Warner, Meeker and Eells (67), however, consider that interpretation of the American Dream to be contradictory. If all men are born equal, there can be no top level to strive for. The authors claim that no such equality, neither in position nor in opportunity, exists and that a person’s opportunities is very much dependent on family background (Warner, Meeker & Eells 67).

Fitzgerald portrays the American Dream in the character of Jay Gatsby. Gatsby succeeds in changing his life as he goes from having nothing to being very wealthy. His success, however, comes during a corrupt time. Exactly how Gatsby made his fortune is not clear but it is clear that he is or was involved in some illegal business. In *Gatsby* Fitzgerald shows that the American Dream is achievable but by adding the illegal aspect to Gatsby’s success he also problematizes the American Dream. Gatsby’s success is dependent on the fact that he did not follow the rules of society. In *A Corruption of Character* (2008), Michael Millgate considers Gatsby’s involvement in an illegal business to be criticism of the American Dream: “In stressing the corruption at the heart of Gatsby’s dream, as well as exposing, in the revelation of Daisy’s character, the tawdriness of what the dream aspires to, Fitzgerald clearly intended a fundamental criticism of the ‘American Dream’...” (76). As Gatsby turns to an

illegal business to achieve his American Dream, the fact that everyone does not have the same opportunities to succeed is demonstrated by Fitzgerald.

Gatsby has a romantic view of wealth and is unaware of the realities of the American society where wealth is not the only aspect when it comes to social class (Bewley 28). There is a bond stronger than money between people like Tom and Daisy Buchanan and even though Gatsby has made a great fortune it is not enough to belong to the same social class as Tom and Daisy. Tom and Daisy's contempt against people like Gatsby, wealthy people but with a different socioeconomic background, is demonstrated by Daisy's loathing of West Egg, where Gatsby lives (Fitzgerald 102). An example of this will be explored later on in the text. This contempt as well as the bond between Tom and Daisy Buchanan can be explained, according to Weber's theory, with their similar upbringing and education. That is also evidence that no matter how hard Gatsby tries, he cannot change his past and he cannot change other people's past. "Men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx in Elster 277). Since status is, more than social class, dependent on things from the past, such as upbringing, it is also more difficult to change.

In Marxist theory, socioeconomic class is a strong factor when it comes to dividing people. Fitzgerald displays this by the unequal relationship between Tom and his mistress Myrtle Wilson, a woman who belongs to the working class. By paying for an apartment in the city and spending money on Myrtle Tom is the dominant one in their secret relationship. Tom's superior status is displayed when he argues with Myrtle about Daisy and it ends with him breaking Myrtle's nose (Fitzgerald 40). Myrtle's city life, with the apartment and the other luxuries, is dependent on Tom and his money. Without Tom she would lose it all. This creates an unequal relationship between them and puts Myrtle in an inferior position.

Tom and Daisy Buchanan are portrayed as almost indifferent to other people. After Myrtle's and Gatsby's deaths Nick meets Tom and his conclusion after the meeting is:

“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 their mess” (Fitzgerald 167). In portraying Tom and Daisy as careless toward other people Fitzgerald shows a mentality amongst the upper class as if the same rules do not apply to everyone. Tom and Daisy's mutual arrogance regarding the situation shows how little they value other people's lives – even lives of people they supposedly cared about.

In *The Universality of Class Divisions* (2008), A.E Dyson claims that Nick Carraway is the only character in the novel that has a background in the middle class. He belongs to neither the upper class of Tom and Daisy nor the working class of Myrtle. Because of his background he has enough knowledge about both worlds to be able to see both Daisy and Myrtle clearly. Because of his ability to see through both worlds he becomes a source of clarity (Dyson 63). Nick's ability to see through the upper class logic is displayed during his last meeting with Jordan Baker at the end of the novel. They discuss the previous events and he ends the discussion: “I'm thirty”, I said, “I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor.” (Fitzgerald 166). Nick does not use excuses to justify the things that have happened. Since he does not have the same background as Tom, Daisy and Jordan, he sees and values things differently. Unlike them, Nick can see the shallowness and dishonesty surrounding the situation, disguised as social class.

Barbour claims that even though *The Great Gatsby* is about the American Dream, that alone is not a satisfactory description of it since there are in fact two different American Dreams – and both are present in *The Great Gatsby*. There is the Franklinian Dream, a dream of self-validating materialism, where the sole purpose is to acquire wealth (68). According to

Barbour, Tom is the personification of the Franklinian Dream. The other American Dream, the Emersonian Dream does, also depends on wealth. The difference, however, is that wealth is not the main purpose of the dream but a means in the struggle of achieving the true purpose of the dream. Gatsby's dream can be seen as an Emersonian Dream, as his wealth produces the opportunity he needs in his attempts to win back Daisy.

Jay Gatsby

Jay Gatsby uses his money to throw extravagant parties, with the purpose of attracting Daisy's interest. The parties are spectacular with orchestras and bars filled with gins, liquor and cordials, despite the Prohibition (Fitzgerald 43). Gatsby's parties are evidence of the fact that his wealth is nothing more than a useful tool in his dream to win back Daisy.

Gatsby is mysterious, and with social status in mind, it is beneficial for him to play the part of a mystery man. Fitzgerald dramatizes this uncertainty about Gatsby's status with gossip amongst some of the guests at one of his parties:

“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 skeptically; “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 (Fitzgerald 46).

Because so little is known about Gatsby it becomes difficult for people around him to assign him a social status. As a result of not really having a social status at this point, he does not automatically become inferior to those with a high social status. The gossip amongst Gatsby's guests can be seen as a result of not knowing anything about his social status. Even though

Gatsby is not the source of the rumors, he benefits from them, since the truth would hurt his social status more than rumors about him will.

Gatsby tries to increase his social status with lies of his own. He lies about things that could influence his social status. Belonging to an “old family” with “old money” generates a higher social status than self-earned money does (Warner, Meeker & Eells 74). The lies that Gatsby tells about his background are related to his own view of social class. As he claims to be the heir of a San Francisco family Gatsby tries to turn his “new money” into “old money” which would increase his status. As this heir, his assumed upbringing and background would probably not be far from Tom and Daisy’s which would grant him a similar social status to them.

In making Gatsby a soldier, Fitzgerald at once eliminates and highlights the issue of social class. In a military uniform, Gatsby is able to hide his social background and that is the key to his acceptance amongst the upper class. When Gatsby wears his uniform he is at the same level as all the other officers, regardless of their different social backgrounds. At the same time, Fitzgerald highlights the significance of social class in Daisy’s world, portrayed by Gatsby’s first visit to her home:

He went to her house, at first with other officers from Camp Taylor, then alone. It amazed him – he had never been in such a beautiful house before. But what gave it an air of breathless intensity was that Daisy lived there – it was as casual a thing to her as his tent out at camp was to him (Fitzgerald 139).

As a soldier Gatsby is temporarily accepted in Daisy’s upper class society because of his uniform. Without it, he would never have been accepted there. The uniform hides Gatsby’s actual social class belonging and allows him to be someone else. As a soldier his background is of less importance due to the current norms of the military.

The ability to act like a gentleman may be one aspect of it, however, it is not always enough to receive a certain social status. With Gatsby's background as an officer and a student at Oxford, Fitzgerald illustrates that there are other factors than wealth and behavior included in a social status, such as heritage. Gatsby does possess the external attributes required for any social status: "In Louisville, at war, and at Oxford he is accepted as an officer and a gentleman" (Berman 81). Despite Gatsby's ability to behave like a gentleman and all his money, he does not possess the same social status as the Buchanans. The thing that is different between them is not necessarily how they act, but where they come from, their family backgrounds.

Gatsby's attempt to come off as an Oxford man can be seen as a way to hide his background and to fit in to the upper class society that Daisy so clearly is a part of.

"I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition." He looked at me sideways – and I knew why Jordan Baker had believed he was lying. He hurried the phrase "educated at Oxford" or swallowed it or choked on it as though it had bothered him before (Fitzgerald 65).

Gatsby's story about Oxford is in fact a lie and it confirms the social gap between him and the likes of Daisy and Tom Buchanan. Despite all Gatsby's money and nice things he still feels the need to pretend to be an Oxford graduate in order to be accepted and seen as an equal in the eyes of the Buchanans. Gatsby is trying hard to impress but is still not accepted. A comparison could be made between him and Jordan Baker. She is clearly accepted in the upper class society, without any real effort from her side. As far as we know, she has no big house to show and her financial situation is unknown. Without trying, she is a part of that society while Gatsby is not, despite his efforts.

Gatsby's wealth, in itself, is not important to him once he has it; it is nothing more than something that he can use to get what he really wants, which is Daisy (Barbour 69). Gatsby uses his wealth in an attempt to show Daisy that he is on the same level as her, and for a while she is fascinated by the extravagance and the luxurious lifestyle he leads:

While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher – shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange with monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry.

“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”

(Fitzgerald 89).

By displaying his wealth in this manner, Gatsby tries to impress Daisy, as he once was impressed by her house, when he could not believe that people actually lived like that. What Gatsby really does is that he shows Daisy his ability to spend money. Money is not, however, according to Weber, a guaranteed status qualification (306). Even though Daisy is impressed by the shirts it might not be more than that to it.

The uncertainties surrounding Gatsby's income and wealth affects Gatsby's social status and makes it vulnerable. Exactly how Gatsby makes his money is not really important, but the fact that the business includes some illegal aspect is relevant. It shows the lengths that Gatsby is willing to go in order to achieve his dream as well as how corrupted that dream has become in his attempts to achieve it (Millgate 76). The importance of a socially acceptable source of income is displayed by Tom Buchanan's way of using Gatsby's own business against him in an argument about Daisy. Tom claims that Gatsby owns drug-stores that sell grain alcohol over the counter (Fitzgerald 126). The fact that Daisy finds out about his

business is devastating for Gatsby's struggle to get her back, even though he might not know it himself: "...and when in the Plaza suite Tom exposes him for what he is, Jay is unable to detect the revulsion on Daisy's face" (Bicknell 100). Tom's attitude and Daisy's reaction prove that, in their world, it is not acceptable to be involved in the things that Gatsby is involved in.

Jay Gatsby and the Buchanans

With the two luxurious neighborhoods West Egg and East Egg Fitzgerald represents the divided society. The two Eggs, even though they might look alike, are different in behavior and values, which is demonstrated by the behavior of a few East Egg residents at a West Egg party: "Instead of rambling this party had preserved a dignified homogeneity, and assumed to itself the function of representing the staid nobility of the countryside – East Egg condescending to West Egg, and carefully on guard against its spectroscopic gayety" (Fitzgerald 47). Fitzgerald makes East Egg the symbol of the "old money" America that despises the "new money" America which is symbolized by West Egg.

With focus on their socioeconomic backgrounds, Fitzgerald makes clear examples of the typical residents of both East and West Egg. Tom and Daisy Buchanan are the typical residents of East Egg as they have always been wealthy and possess the freedom that comes with it. They are described as people that without any further purpose drift: "here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together" (Fitzgerald 13). To them, there is nothing more to life than existing in this state of mind (Barbour 70). Gatsby, on the other hand, is the typical resident of West Egg. With his lack of family wealth and his self-earned fortune he represents the opposite from Tom and Daisy Buchanan. While the Buchanans seem to live without goals or ambition, Fitzgerald shows Gatsby's ambitions with the schedule over his daily activities (162).

One way of determining status is, according to Weber: “through hereditary charisma, by virtue of successful claims to higher-ranking descent: hereditary status” (306). This is what tie members of “old families” together, families like Tom’s and Daisy’s. Her family was a part of the upper class society in her hometown, Louisville (Fitzgerald 73). Daisy, who in this case represents the “old money” America, displays her feelings towards West Egg:

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 the inhabitants along a short-cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand (Fitzgerald 102).

Daisy’s reaction at the party can be seen as a first hint of proof that Gatsby will never succeed in his attempt to win her back and get things back to the way they were (Aldridge 54). In Daisy’s reaction Fitzgerald exposes the opinions of people of her status towards this kind of “new money” and people without the same high “hereditary status”.

By giving Tom Buchanan characteristics that could be described as unsympathetic Fitzgerald criticizes the upper class which Tom represents. Although Tom has more money than he could ever spend, and despite the fact that he has been in that position his whole life he still has the need to show his wealth and power to those who have less than him. He toys with his mechanic Wilson, who is also the husband of his mistress Myrtle. Wilson wishes to buy his car with the intention to turn it with a profit. The car deal would not mean a lot to Tom, but it would be important to Wilson. By delaying the deal, Tom demonstrates his power. Tom also brags to Nick about his house and the previous prominent owners (Tyson 70). Both incidents could be read as examples of Fitzgerald’s criticism against the upper class society and the current norms regarding how to treat people with a different social status. Tom’s

behavior is, although unsympathetic, never regarded, in the society of the novel, as inappropriate for a man of his status, which makes it completely acceptable for him to treat others with a lack of respect.

At one point, Fitzgerald describes Tom and Daisy as members of a secret society (Fitzgerald 24). By using this metaphor of the secret society Fitzgerald illustrates the seclusion of the upper class society that Tom and Daisy represents. According to Aldridge their memberships in this secret society generate a deeper faithfulness between them (49). Gatsby's task to win Daisy is therefore not only about getting her to love him more than Tom, but also to beat the secret society that he is not a member of (Aldridge 52). If the secret society represents social status, then that is what Gatsby must defeat in order to get Daisy back.

The difference in socioeconomic status between those with "new money" and those with "old money" is exemplified by the behavior of Tom and Daisy. Fitzgerald acknowledges the difference with Gatsby's final revelation of Daisy:

"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 on it, the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl... (113)

According to Aldridge, this quality in Daisy is important, as it is what commits her to Tom. It is not only about money and Aldridge describes it as a philosophy: "... it is a whole philosophy and tradition of life belonging to those who have always had money and marking them as a separate breed superior to those who have not" (Aldridge 55). That also explains what Daisy is not willing to give up for Gatsby; if she would choose him she would lose her

belonging to that superior breed and she is unwilling to sacrifice that, perhaps since that is all she has ever known.

When Daisy finds out about Gatsby's involvement in illegal business, she distances herself from him, and no matter what he says he cannot change it. The fact that Fitzgerald separates Gatsby and Daisy stresses the importance of social status, as Daisy is unable to accept the negative impact of her social status that staying with Gatsby would mean. Tom demonstrates his superior status by reducing the importance of Gatsby's relationship with Daisy: "Go on, he won't annoy you. I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over" (Fitzgerald 127). Since Tom and Daisy have similar backgrounds, he also knows that she would not be interested in giving up her superior status. That makes Gatsby harmless.

Tom and Daisy's indifference to other people can be connected to social status. Neither Gatsby nor Tom's mistress Myrtle has the same high social status as Tom and Daisy. Gatsby is deserted by Daisy when he is no longer useful to her. Tom shows his indifference by directing the anger of Wilson, after his loss of his wife, towards Gatsby (Dyson 65). As Tom and Daisy's status is considered, by their society, to be superior, it also implies that they have different rights than those of lower status.

According to Aldridge the "secret society" wins over the romantic illusion (55). That could mean that the importance of social status wins over romance. The deaths of Gatsby, Tom's mistress Myrtle and her husband Wilson could be seen as a way for Fitzgerald to criticize the influence that social class and status have on society. By allowing Tom and Daisy, as representatives of the upper class society to continue with their lives without any consequences for their involvement in the death of Gatsby, Fitzgerald exposes a deeply unequal society.

Teaching *The Great Gatsby*

According to *The Swedish National Agency for Education*, teaching English should include the study of content and form in different types of fiction (54). There are many reasons why *The Great Gatsby* should be included in the teaching of English. One of those reasons is the way that social class and status is present in the novel. As *The Great Gatsby* problematizes social stratification it can be a helpful tool in teaching social class and status to students. By analyzing a specific character in the novel the students could get a greater understanding of the complexity of social status. Why, for example, does Tom act the way he does? How is he portrayed in the novel? Why do you think he is portrayed like that? What does he represent? By answering questions of this kind the students might be able to reason their way to those factors that affect social class and status.

In *Engelsk språkdidaktik* (2009) Bo Lundahl claims that fiction can help students find an understanding of the circumstances in different historical, economic and social environments (326). Considering this, *The Great Gatsby* could be a good choice to work with in the classroom as the setting in the novel is often thoroughly described. Regarding literary analysis questions, Jill Bloomfield discusses the importance of the setting in *The Great Gatsby: Study Guide and Student Workbook* (2010): “Fitzgerald is precise in his depictions of West Egg versus East Egg. What are the differences between these areas?” (27). Fitzgerald uses the areas to show a divided society and In this case, the two Eggs could be an introduction to separated societies.

Attitudes, values and social relationships are all included in what to teach when teaching at the Swedish upper secondary school (The Swedish National Agency for Education 54). Fitzgerald gives, with *The Great Gatsby*, a portrait of the complexity of 1920s American society with its norms and rules. With that in mind the novel can be a useful tool in teaching

social circumstances such as attitudes, values and relationships between people of different social statuses.

The Great Gatsby could be used as an introduction to the unequal society. The students could make a comparison with the society that we live in today. Have things changed? What has stayed the same? Even though the novel takes place almost a century ago, could we still find things in our society that are the same as in the novel? With questions like these the students will have to reflect on today's society as well as the novel.

Conclusion

To a greater extent than for most other American writers, F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels have been based on the concept of class (Bewley 23). In the *Great Gatsby* the upper class, or the "moneyed class", is present as well as the middle class and the working class. In his view of society in 1920s America, Fitzgerald shows the balance between the different socioeconomic classes. Fitzgerald's own experiences from both the upper class society and the middle and working class society have probably affected his work. The sense of not belonging to a specific social class is displayed in the novel as both Gatsby and Myrtle Wilson try hard to fit in where they do not, according to the social standards of the time.

According to Fitzgerald, the American Dream is real and as Gatsby exemplifies, it is possible to come from practically nothing and get almost everything. However, the novel also stresses the importance of social class and how difficult it is to ignore a person's social background. Even though Gatsby can display an enormous wealth he still does not possess the same status as the Buchanans and is not seen as an equal in their eyes. It is evident that background is just as important as money in the assessment of social status, or at least how important it was in the world of 1920s American upper class.

In Tom Buchanan, Fitzgerald shows the upper class man that uses his old family money to get what he wants, in terms of women as well as anything else. As a representative of the entire upper class Tom represents all the negative things about a divided society as he is prepared to sacrifice people around him for his own selfish purposes. Tom's arrogance could perhaps be explained by the fact that he has lived his entire life believing that he belongs to a superior group of people due to his privileged heritage.

Gatsby is Fitzgerald's personification of the American Dream, with his class journey from a farm boy to a very wealthy man living in luxury. Gatsby's dream is not, however, complete without Daisy and his dream of winning her is impossible because of the social class

system. According to Weber, family heritage is important when it comes to social status (306). Gatsby's heritage does not generate a social status that is similar to Daisy's, according to the society that she is a part of, and that is what becomes his downfall. In the end, Fitzgerald acknowledges the influence background has on human relationships. Daisy is an example of this as she chooses to commit to her, in her society, high social status instead of a life with Gatsby, which would negatively affect her status.

To conclude, Fitzgerald clearly shows the significance of social class and status in society and the depth of it, as there are more factors to it than what we can assume by looking at a certain lifestyle. As is shown in *The Great Gatsby*, no matter how hard a person tries to create a different life or past, stratification by social class is very difficult, if not impossible, to escape.

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