**Social Security: Wealth's Influence on Relationships in *The Great Gatsby***

Money, with its inherent ability to enchant, beguile, and manipulate, has long been an object of man's obsessions. It evokes feelings of anger, lust, greed, and jealousy, feelings of power, superiority, and contentment. The sense of security that wealth offers provides the premise for Daisy Buchanan's relationships with Tom and Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*.

Daisy's need for this feeling of protection compels her to wed the affluent Tom Buchanan, rather than the impecunious Gatsby. At first, Gatsby exploits her desire for a secure social position in order to win her affection, and through it, her money. Though penniless, he uses an imaginary fortune to convince her that he is "a person from much the same strata as herself" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 156). Believing they are socially equal, Daisy no longer has any qualms about getting close to Gatsby, who soon falls in love with her. Upon discovering Gatsby's façade, Daisy immediately "vanishes…into her rich full life" (p. 157), remaining "safe and proud above…the poor" (p. 156). Her recusal into the luxuries of high society reflects both her fear of destitution and contempt for the penurious. For her, wealth is an essential part of any relationship, meaning Gatsby, with his lack of material possessions, is no longer an option. Tom, on the other hand, is a convenient source "of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality" (p. 159) who can supply her with the amount of social stability necessary to appease her. Therefore, in their marriage, Tom serves more as custodian of Daisy's social status and proprietor for her material wants than as a loving husband. Daisy picks him because he is the sensible choice; his ability to provide for her is certain, and his wealth quells her fears of social relegation. So, years later, when she discovers he is seeing another woman, she worries that her position of social dominance is in jeopardy and turns to the recently wealthy Gatsby.

When Daisy first leaves him, Gatsby sees that his only chance at winning her love is through his own social elevation. In his eyes, social hierarchy is a ladder that "mount[s] to a secret place above the trees" (p. 117) from where "he [can] suck on the pap of life" (p. 117). This "secret place" represents the exclusive realm of the social elite, a private empire replete with all life's luxuries, where only those with massive fortunes may dwell. With this requisite wealth brought to him through five years of successful business ventures, Gatsby hopes that Daisy, though still married to Tom, will once again be available to him. Conscious of Tom's disloyalty, Daisy sees Gatsby as a safer, steadier, source of social stability than her husband.

From his newfound position of wealth, however, Gatsby's perception of Daisy has changed. It is now apparent that she is no longer a person to be loved, but an object to be won. He soon realizes that he has "committed himself to the following of a grail" (p. 156) from the moment he lost her to Tom. She is currently nothing more than a glittering prize that can, at most, complete his dream for the future. As Gatsby sees it, Daisy's opulence can guarantee his continued prosperity, giving him the sense of security that Daisy herself has always desired. Gatsby obsesses over her wealth to the extent that it is the only part of her that he sees; for him, even "her voice is full of money" (p. 127). In his mind, she has become the wealth she possesses, and Daisy the person no longer exists. So when his dream of a luxurious life with her "seem[s] so close that he [can] hardly fail to grasp it" (p. 189) he cannot; he "[does] not know that it [is] already behind him" (p. 189). He cannot comprehend that with the Daisy he loves dead to him, the fulfillment of his dream is impossible. The only chance he ever has of accomplishing his goal is behind him, in the past, but he still believes it can be achieved. Not knowing that his efforts can only end in failure, he persists, hoping that he can win her back.

Using his opulence as a lure, Gatsby tries to resurrect his former relationship with Daisy, from before her marriage to Tom. Gatsby is so determined to "fix everything just the way it was before" (p. 117) that he retreats into his wealth in order to continue the pursuit of "his incorruptible dream" (p. 162) unhindered. Once safe within his assets, Gatsby's affluence gives him the false impression that interference with the completion of his dream is impossible, an impression that allows him the freedom to concentrate on earning Daisy's affection. He nevertheless fails to notice that with the disappearance of certain aspects of his old relationship, including the Daisy with whom he fell in love, his goal is in fact unattainable. His unflinching devotion to reliving his past and fulfilling his sole ambition, however, blinds him to the events of the present, and he soon "[pays] a high price for living too long with a single dream" (p. 169). Through his relentless pursuit of Daisy and the wealth and security she offers, Gatsby unknowingly condemns himself to a premature and ultimately unnecessary death. Unable to change his life's course when his only dream becomes impossible, his existence comes to an abrupt and painful end. Though their marriage is ultimately responsible for the destruction of Gatsby's life and only dream, Tom and Daisy "[retreat] back into their money…and let other people clean up the mess" (p. 188). Not wishing to be held liable for Gatsby's death, they temporarily ostracize themselves from society, once again looking to their wealth for security and protection. Furthermore, Daisy's disregard for Gatsby after his death confirms that her primary motive in their relationship is the social stability that his financial success offers her. Consequently, once this stability is no longer available, her desire for Gatsby dissipates.

As Gatsby's relationship with Daisy and their wealth's intrinsic impression of security show, successful people tend to be more desirable than the unsuccessful. Rarely establishing relationships outside their social rank, the wealthy seek only to maintain their fortunes, whereas underprivileged individuals seek improved wealth and social status. The social elite, by hiding themselves in mansions, use money as a means to escape the lower class. By dissociating themselves from the masses, the poor remain poor and the rich get richer, drastically increasing the distance between the social classes of contemporary America.

**References**

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. (1925). *The great gatsby*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.