

The narrator of *The Great Gatsby* is a young man from Minnesota named [Nick Carraway](#). He not only narrates the story but casts himself as the book's author. He begins by commenting on himself, stating that he learned from his father to reserve judgment about other people, because if he holds them up to his own moral standards, he will misunderstand them. He characterizes himself as both highly moral and highly tolerant. He briefly mentions the hero of his story, [Gatsby](#), saying that Gatsby represented everything he scorns, but that he exempts Gatsby completely from his usual judgments. Gatsby's personality was nothing short of "gorgeous."

In the summer of 1922, Nick writes, he had just arrived in New York, where he moved to work in the bond business, and rented a house on a part of Long Island called West Egg. Unlike the conservative, aristocratic East Egg, West Egg is home to the "new rich," those who, having made their fortunes recently, have neither the social connections nor the refinement to move among the East Egg set. West Egg is characterized by lavish displays of wealth and garish poor taste. Nick's comparatively modest West Egg house is next door to Gatsby's mansion, a sprawling Gothic monstrosity.

Nick is unlike his West Egg neighbors; whereas they lack social connections and aristocratic pedigrees, Nick graduated from Yale and has many connections on East Egg. One night, he drives out to East Egg to have dinner with his cousin [Daisy](#) and her husband, [Tom Buchanan](#), a former member of Nick's social club at Yale. Tom, a powerful figure dressed in riding clothes, greets Nick on the porch. Inside, Daisy lounges on a couch with her friend [Jordan Baker](#), a competitive golfer who yawns as though bored by her surroundings.

Tom tries to interest the others in a book called *The Rise of the Colored Empires* by a man named Goddard. The book espouses racist, white-supremacist attitudes that Tom seems to find convincing. Daisy teases Tom about the book but is interrupted when Tom leaves the room to take a phone call. Daisy follows him hurriedly, and Jordan tells Nick that the call is from Tom's lover in New York.

After an awkward dinner, the party breaks up. Jordan wants to go to bed because she has a golf tournament the next day. As Nick leaves, Tom and Daisy hint that they would like for him to take a romantic interest in Jordan.

When Nick arrives home, he sees Gatsby for the first time, a handsome young man standing on the lawn with his arms reaching out toward the dark water. Nick looks out at the water, but all he can see is a distant green light that might mark the end of a dock.

I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.

Analysis

Nick Carraway's perceptions and attitudes regarding the events and characters of the novel are central to *The Great Gatsby*. Writing the novel is Nick's way of grappling with the meaning of a story in which he played a part. The first pages of Chapter 1 establish certain contradictions in Nick's point of view. Although he describes himself as tolerant and nonjudgmental, he also views himself as morally privileged, having a better sense of "decencies" than most other people. While Nick has a strong negative reaction to his experiences in New York and eventually returns to the Midwest in search of a less morally ambiguous environment, even during his initial phase of disgust, Gatsby stands out for him as an exception. Nick admires Gatsby highly, despite the fact that Gatsby represents everything Nick scorns about New York. Gatsby clearly poses a challenge to Nick's customary ways of thinking about the world, and Nick's struggle to come to terms with that challenge inflects everything in the novel.

In the world of East Egg, alluring appearances serve to cover unattractive realities. The marriage of Tom and Daisy Buchanan seems menaced by a quiet desperation beneath its pleasant surface. Unlike Nick, Tom is arrogant and dishonest, advancing racist arguments at dinner and carrying on relatively public love affairs. Daisy, on the other hand, tries hard to be shallow, even going so far as to say she hopes her baby daughter will turn out to be a fool, because women live best as beautiful fools. Jordan Baker furthers the sense of sophisticated fatigue hanging over East Egg: her cynicism, boredom, and dishonesty are at sharp odds with her wealth and beauty. As with the Buchanans' marriage, Jordan's surface glamour covers up an inner emptiness.

Gatsby stands in stark contrast to the denizens of East Egg. Though Nick does not yet know the green light's origin, nor what it represents for Gatsby, the inner yearning visible in Gatsby's posture and his emotional surrender to it make him seem almost the opposite of the sarcastic Ivy League set at the Buchanans'. Gatsby is a mysterious figure for Nick, since Nick knows neither his motives, nor the source of his wealth, nor his history, and the object of his yearning remains as remote and nebulous as the green light toward which he reaches.

The relationship between geography and social values is an important motif in *The Great Gatsby*. Each setting in the novel corresponds to a particular thematic idea or character type. This first chapter introduces two of the most important locales, East Egg and West Egg. Though each is home to fabulous wealth, and though they are separated only by a small expanse of water, the two regions are nearly opposite in the values they endorse. East Egg represents breeding, taste, aristocracy, and leisure, while West Egg represents ostentation, garishness, and the flashy manners of the new rich. East Egg is associated with the Buchanans and the monotony of their inherited social position, while West Egg is associated with Gatsby's gaudy mansion and the inner drive behind his self-made fortune. The unworkable intersection of the two Eggs in the romance between Gatsby and Daisy will serve as the fault line of catastrophe.