

Chapter Nine Summary and Analysis

Writing two years after [Gatsby's](#) death, [Nick](#) describes the events that surrounded the funeral. Swarms of reporters, journalists, and gossipmongers descend on the mansion in the aftermath of the murder. Wild, untrue stories, more exaggerated than the rumors about Gatsby when he was throwing his parties, circulate about the nature of Gatsby's relationship to [Myrtle](#) and Wilson. Feeling that Gatsby would not want to go through a funeral alone, Nick tries to hold a large funeral for him, but all of Gatsby's former friends and acquaintances either have disappeared—[Tom](#) and [Daisy](#), for instance, move away with no forwarding address—or refuse to come, like Meyer Wolfsheim and Klipspringer. The latter claims that he has a social engagement in Westport and asks Nick to send along his tennis shoes. Outraged, Nick hangs up on him.

The only people to attend the funeral are Nick, Owl Eyes, a few servants, and Gatsby's father, Henry C. Gatz, who has come all the way from Minnesota. Henry Gatz is proud of his son and saves a picture of his house. He also fills Nick in on Gatsby's early life, showing him a book in which a young Gatsby had written a schedule for self-improvement.

Sick of the East and its empty values, Nick decides to move back to the Midwest. He breaks off his relationship with [Jordan](#), who suddenly claims that she has become engaged to another man. Just before he leaves, Nick encounters Tom on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Nick initially refuses to shake Tom's hand but eventually

accepts. Tom tells him that he was the one who told Wilson that Gatsby owned the car that killed Myrtle, and describes how greatly he suffered when he had to give up the apartment he kept in the city for his affair. He says that Gatsby deserved to die. Nick comes to the conclusion that Tom and Daisy are careless and uncaring people and that they destroy people and things, knowing that their money will shield them from ever having to face any negative consequences.

Nick muses that, in some ways, this story is a story of the West, even though it has taken place entirely on the East Coast. Nick, Jordan, Tom, and Daisy are all from west of the Appalachians, and Nick believes that the reactions of each, himself included, to living the fast-paced, lurid lifestyle of the East has shaped his or her behavior. Nick remembers life in the Midwest, full of snow, trains, and Christmas wreaths, and thinks that the East seems grotesque and distorted by comparison.

On his last night in West Egg before moving back to Minnesota, Nick walks over to Gatsby's empty mansion and erases an obscene word that someone has written on the steps. He sprawls out on the beach behind Gatsby's house and looks up. As the moon rises, he imagines the island with no houses and considers what it must have looked like to the explorers who discovered the New World centuries before.

Nick imagines that America was once a goal for dreamers and explorers, just as Daisy was for Gatsby. He pictures the green land of America as the green light shining from Daisy's dock, and muses that Gatsby—whose wealth and success so closely echo the American

dream—failed to realize that the dream had already ended, that his goals had become hollow and empty.

Nick senses that people everywhere are motivated by similar dreams and by a desire to move forward into a future in which their dreams are realized. Nick envisions their struggles to create that future as boats moving in a body of water against a current that inevitably carries them back into the past.

I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.

Analysis

Nick thinks of America not just as a nation but as a geographical entity, land with distinct regions embodying contrasting sets of values. The Midwest, he thinks, seems dreary and pedestrian compared to the excitement of the East, but the East is merely a glittering surface—it lacks the moral center of the Midwest. This fundamental moral depravity dooms the characters of *The Great Gatsby*—all Westerners, as Nick observes—to failure. The “quality of distortion” that lures them to the East disgusts Nick and contributes to his decision to move back to Minnesota.

There is another significance to the fact that all of the major characters are Westerners, however. Throughout American history, the West has been seen as a land of promise and possibility—the very emblem of American ideals. Tom and Daisy, like other members of the upper class, have betrayed America’s democratic ideals by

perpetuating a rigid class structure that excludes newcomers from its upper reaches, much like the feudal aristocracy that America had left behind.

Gatsby, alone among Nick's acquaintances, has the audacity and nobility of spirit to dream of creating a radically different future for himself, but his dream ends in failure for several reasons: his methods are criminal, he can never gain acceptance into the American aristocracy (which he would have to do to win Daisy), and his new identity is largely an act. It is not at all clear what Gatsby's failure says about the dreams and aspirations of Americans generally, but Fitzgerald's novel certainly questions the idea of an America in which all things are possible if one simply tries hard enough.

The problem of American dreams is closely related to the problem of how to deal with the past. America was founded through a dramatic declaration of independence from its own past—its European roots—and it promises its citizens the potential for unlimited advancement, regardless of where they come from or how poor their backgrounds are. Gatsby's failure suggests that it may be impossible for one to disown one's past so completely. There seems to be an impossible divide separating Gatsby and Daisy, which is certainly part of her allure for him. This divide clearly comes from their different backgrounds and social contexts.

Throughout the novel, Nick's judgments of the other characters are based on the values that he inherited from his father, the moral "privileges" that he refers to in the opening pages. Nick's values, so

strongly rooted in the past, give him the ability to make sense out of everything in the novel except for Gatsby. In Nick's eyes, Gatsby embodies an ability to dream and to escape the past that may ultimately be impossible, but that Nick cherishes and values nonetheless. *The Great Gatsby* represents Nick's struggle to integrate his own sense of the importance of the past with the freedom from the past envisioned by Gatsby.