

Masculinities in F. Scott Fitzgerald's
The Great Gatsby

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Introduction

In the second chapter of *The Great Gatsby* the novel's narrator, Nick Carraway and his companion, Tom Buchanan get off the train midway between East Egg and Manhattan. They visit the Wilson garage in order to pick up Myrtle, Tom's mistress and, coincidentally, the wife of George Wilson. "Doesn't her husband object?" (37), Nick asks prudently. Tom's answer comes in an off-hand manner: "Wilson? He thinks she goes to see her sister in New York. He's so dumb he doesn't even know he's alive" (37). The conversation reflects the hierarchy between the three men. Obviously, Tom is the most confident and most powerful among them.

The male cast of *The Great Gatsby* perfectly models the patriarchal society of the 1920s and the complex relationships between men from different classes. There is a noticeable hierarchy between the male characters, based on men's power or to assert themselves on the extent of this power. We can infer what positions the male characters take in the society from the conspicuous power relations between them. Based on these relations, the Australian sociologist R. W. Connell differentiated between the types of hegemonic, complicit and subordinated masculinity, which I am going to explain and analyze in my essay.

By having Myrtle for a mistress, Tom proves that he can do whatever he wants. We know that Daisy is his wife, but this does not prevent him from seeing another woman. Tom is aware that he has such power over Daisy that she is not going to leave him. Of the categories Connell defines in his seminal book *Masculinities* (1995), Tom Buchanan represents hegemonic masculinity. From Daisy's example we can see that male hegemony in modern society "guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). On the other hand, hegemony also "refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life" (77). Male hegemony, the dominance of men over women, is the defining characteristic of patriarchal society. The gist of the hierarchy between men is that only the strongest men can rule women totally.

The distinctive group of powerful men who represent male hegemony, "men's dominance over women" (Connell and Messerschmidt 832), also dominate other men. The latter do not contest their position: they are either complicit with the hegemonic men, or occupy such a subordinate position that they do not even think of challenging those who are above them. The fact that Nick knows about Tom and Myrtle's affair and does not warn Daisy, who is his cousin, shows that being in Tom's company is more important for him than the interest of one of his relatives. Nick is not as powerful as Tom and he does not have such a great inherited wealth, but he knows that if he plays a good game then he can use Tom's

power and hegemonic position to his own advantage. Nick's behavior can be associated with the idea of complicity. "Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy are complicit in this sense" (79). In other words, the idea of complicity means that there are people who do not represent hegemonic masculinity and they usually stay in the background, but still "benefit from the patriarchal dividend" (79).

Tom Buchanan talks about George Wilson as if he were a nobody. Saying that Wilson is "so dumb he doesn't even know he's alive" (37) is very degrading, and signals what position Wilson has in the patriarchal hierarchy. The fact that he does not suspect what his wife is doing behind his back shows that he cannot dominate her the way Tom can rule Daisy. The manner in which Tom talks about Wilson suggests that he does not respect him at all, and that Wilson is absolutely powerless. Moreover, the fact that Tom does not tell his opinion directly to Wilson means that he does not want to waste his time with such helpless men. On the other hand, Tom does not make any offensive remarks at the expense of Nick because he knows that Nick is higher in the social hierarchy than Wilson.

Wilson is in a subordinate position in respect to hegemonic men like Tom and his friend Nick. Connell defines subordination mainly as "the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men" (78). Of course, we know that Wilson is not homosexual so this argument does not fit his situation. But Connell also adds that "some heterosexual men and boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy" (79). Subordination, just like the other two types of masculinity mentioned above, is also based on power, and on the power relations between men. Thus, we can see that Wilson's subordination is due to the class hierarchy of American society as well. Those who are excluded are usually the most powerless men who cannot even stand up for themselves. This is exactly the case with Wilson who belongs to the working class and his livelihood depends on men like Tom Buchanan.

After being acquainted with these concepts related to what Carrigan, Connell and Lee call "the gender order" of patriarchy (589), we have to realize that the concept of hegemony is complex in another way, too. Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" rests on the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci's definition of hegemony. Gramsci states that hegemony rests on "[t]he 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (qtd. in Berthens 88). Hegemony is not in connection with politics because there the leading position is based on the political structure operating in a particular society. However, "in social life"

one has to build and maintain one's own power in order to become a representative of hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, hegemony is a "cultural dynamic" which suggests that it is not constant and not a matter of course because "new groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony" (Connell 77). Thus, hegemony does not guarantee a life of ease because there are always other people who compete with the most powerful ones in order to get a leading position in society.

To demonstrate the former idea, that hegemony cannot be taken for granted, I am going to discuss the threats that, in the world of *The Great Gatsby*, endanger Tom Buchanan's hegemony. These threats are coming from upwardly mobile ethnic groups who are able to gain similar positions to Tom's: Jay Gatsby about whom we do not know exactly where he is from, and Meyer Wolfsheim who is a Jew, and black people. Originally, these groups were not part of the hierarchy between hegemony, complicity and subordination because these "are relations internal to the gender order" (Connell 80). The economic and social conditions of the 1920s made it possible for only a limited number of individuals belonging to these groups to rise on the social scale. The majority of men were outside the system, they were marginalized. Therefore, the fourth concept I will discuss is marginalization, which "is always relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group" (Connell 81). We have to be very careful with this concept because it does not always refer to the same groups of people. Just like hegemony, it is liable to change as well. This is why Tom needs to protect his position: if the marginalized groups, i.e. the other races in the novel, take over the already existing hegemony and build a new one, it is possible that formerly hegemonic men like Tom will be marginalized.

We can also discuss *The Great Gatsby* in terms of another concept related to gender studies. The concept of "homosociality" was first proposed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who applies it to describe "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (696). I am going to analyze these bonds between the male characters of the novel, between Gatsby, Tom and Nick, and even Wilson. What is important in my analysis of homosociality is the role of women in patriarchal society. Sedgwick claims that "the status of women [...] is deeply and inescapably inscribed in the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women—even in male homosocial/homosexual relationships" (711). In the novel we witness the exclusion of women. Evidently, the social milieu of *The Great Gatsby* is patriarchal. Relationships develop between men in which women are only objects, and only have exchange value. This is exactly the case when we look at the situation of Daisy and Myrtle. They are used by Tom who wants to show his power over them, by Nick who wants to

maintain his profitable relationship with Tom, and by Gatsby as well, who, following the example of Tom's attitude, wants to gain a hegemonic position in society.

Chapter 1 – Patriarchal society in *The Great Gatsby*

Based on the three concepts I have just introduced, hegemony, complicity and subordination, I am now going to analyze the power relations between the “Old American” male characters in the novel: Tom Buchanan, Nick Carraway and George Wilson. Tom Buchanan is totally aware of his position and power in society. With his way of talking he makes everyone feel his superiority, which Nick describes as follows: “‘Now, don’t think my opinion on these matters is final,’ he seemed to say, ‘just because I’m stronger and more of a man than you are’” (11). When Tom talks Nick feels that “there was a touch of paternal contempt in [Tom’s voice], even toward people he liked” (10). Thus, Tom actually cannot change his style even towards people he likes. He is unable to talk without making people feel that he is better than them. He must show his dominance with his behavior in order to be taken seriously, and this also includes the way he talks. Moreover, “his speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed” (10). His voice confirms his behavior and his hegemonic position because men with deep speaking voice are more likely to be trusted and considered masculine than those with shy or high-pitched voices.

Tom is also very strong and masculine physically which, just like his voice, fits his social status very well. Someone who is at the top of patriarchal society should look like Tom in order to be recognized and to be taken seriously. Nick says that Tom’s “two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward” (10). The two important words in Nick’s remark are “arrogant” and “aggressively,” because these are the two attitudes that characterize Tom the most. He is very arrogant because he is aware of his power and, of course, he has the right to be arrogant because he has such reputation that he can achieve anything he wants in his life. Aggression is part of his character because he needs to protect his hegemony and therefore he is actually capable of doing anything he likes. Nick continues describing him: “you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his coat” (10). Obviously, a masculine man needs to be strong and muscular because his build proves his physical power and gives him a commanding presence. However, Nick adds that “it was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body” (10), which suggests that Tom not only has a commanding presence but maybe he is intimidating at the same time because of his enormous physical power. Tom is obviously a person capable of dominating others.

In the case of Tom, it is important to mention that his wealth comes from inherited money. “His family were enormously wealthy—even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach” (8). This gives him a high and stable position in society because

inherited wealth has some sort of superiority over self-made men and, altogether, over other wealthy people who did not inherit their money but earned it. Throughout history people with inherited money, or “old money,” were more appreciated than other wealthy people. Tom is well aware of this fact. He can afford anything he wants and he is “clear” in the sense that he is not into any shady businesses like Wolfsheim or Gatsby. Therefore, Tom does not appreciate Gatsby and Wolfsheim just because they are rich. He has a traditional idea about how society should work; he still believes that one’s position is first of all determined by one’s social background. He is proud of his heritage which includes not only his money but also his name and ancestry, which is why he does not accept those who are rich but came from nowhere. Money in itself does not grant a hegemonic position. Also, heritage is not as risky as doing illegal business. Of course, one has to know how to treat their money in order to keep being wealthy because no matter how big one’s heritage is, it can easily be spent and then nothing is left. In the case of illegal business, however, there is always the opportunity of getting caught, or even failing, because money can be lost as fast as it was earned.

Nick’s masculinity is greatly affected by his father’s advice given to him when he was younger: “‘Whenever you feel like criticizing any one’, he told me, ‘just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had’” (1). As a consequence, Nick suppresses all his prejudices about other people of his own class which we can see throughout the novel. “Like his father, Nick projects an upper-middle-class masculinity, taking pride in his patient objectivity, moral discipline, and emotional reserve” (Kerr 410). He has an opinion about almost everything but he does not say it out loud, he keeps it to himself. I do not think that this fact makes him a weak person because it is natural that people behave according to their upbringing. As I already described the concept of complicity, we can see how Nick stays in the background. He is not in the spotlight, and therefore he can enjoy the benefits of Tom’s hegemony.

The idea of complicity does not mean that Nick is not a representative of the dominant class. We just have to consider his social background: “My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations” (4). Obviously, his family is not as rich as Tom’s because Nick has to work for a living; his heritage is not that enormous. On the other hand, his family is well-to-do enough to grant him a good education because Nick “graduated from New Haven in 1915” (4). We also know that Tom went to the same school because Nick knows him from there, he claims that “I’d known Tom in college” (8). Based on these pieces of information we can conclude that Nick is also part of the dominant class just like Tom, however, he is not as powerful as Tom and he does not even want to be.

Nick has realized how he can turn Tom's and other powerful men's hegemony to his own advantage. This becomes more obvious if we look at his job. Nick sells bonds for a living: "everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I supposed it could support one single man" (4). This position grants him enough money to sustain his position and, as he invests the money of wealthy people, he benefits from their hegemony in a sense that while he helps them increase their wealth, he acquires his own profit from the business. Therefore, he does not express any desire about changing his situation; he is away from the lime-light, yet he gets his fair share from the patriarchal hierarchy.

It is interesting what Nick suggests about his own integrity: "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (85). His statement proposes that even if he is not wealthy, morally he is way better than those who are above him on the social ladder. This includes not only Tom who is the representative of hegemonic masculinity but also Gatsby and Wolfsheim who basically undermine the social hierarchy. Gatsby and Tom are everything but honest because Gatsby lies about his life to everyone, Tom is unfaithful to Daisy, and Wolfsheim is running illegal businesses together with Gatsby. Of course, this does not mean that powerful people are evidently dishonest, but in the novel there are no counterexamples of this fact. However, Nick is not as honest as he wants us to see him because he knows what Tom, Gatsby and Wolfsheim commit in order to sustain their position. Yet, Nick does not stand up against them; he does not express how dishonest they are. Rather he plays up with the men whose power he can use to his own benefit.

George Wilson, the man who is mocked at, despised, and pitied by the powerful male characters of *The Great Gatsby*, is a typical blue-collar worker; everyone can tell that he is not a wealthy and powerful man. When Nick sees him for the first time, he describes him as follows: "He was a blond, spiritless man, anemic, and faintly handsome" (35). He is totally the type of man who accepts his low social position but tries to make a good living by the restricted means available for him. Of course, we could say that basically his behavior is similar to Nick's; he is compliant with the power structures of society. However, we have to understand that Wilson is in a clearly subordinate position. He greatly depends on Tom. Unlike Nick, he does not know how to make use of Tom's hegemonic position without asking Tom for help. Tom is aware of Wilson's powerlessness and, therefore, he dangles the promise of a great deal in front of Wilson so that he can exert his power over him. There is a deal between Wilson and Tom about a car. Tom wants to sell his car to Wilson and, of course, Wilson wants it really bad because he could make a great bargain out of it: "When are you going to sell me that car?" (35), he asks anxiously. Here we can see that Wilson knows how

he can benefit from Tom's hegemonic position and he wants to use this opportunity to his own advantage, but he is not clever enough to do it without asking. Tom obviously does not need that car; he could buy a new one anytime, but he seems to be slowing down the process so he has a reason to go to the garage to see Myrtle. Wilson does not recognize what is going on between his wife and Tom, but even if he knew about their affair, he could not do anything about it because his position does not allow him to openly confront Tom. Despite the fact that Wilson is "spiritless," he seems impatient about when he is going to get the car: "Works pretty slow, don't he?" (35), he wonders. He tries to push Tom a little but he forgets how powerful Tom is. When Tom threatens him that he is going to sell the car to someone else, Wilson is "defeated" by Tom and he quietly withdraws. He is clearly oppressed by Tom's masculine behavior and is not brave enough to stand up against the latter's domineering attitude.

Wilson's weakness and his lack of power become obvious when he finds out that his wife has a lover. "He had discovered that Myrtle had some sort of life apart from him in another world, and the shock had made him physically sick" (177). Wilson is not strong and confident enough to do something about his wife's affair, so he just becomes sick of helplessness. I think it is better for Wilson that he does not suspect who Myrtle is going out with because this knowledge would destroy him totally.

Tom knows how he can turn Wilson's vulnerability to his own advantage when he manipulates him and basically arranges Gatsby's murder. When Daisy runs Myrtle over in Gatsby's car, Myrtle dies immediately. Wilson sees that the vehicle was a yellow car, which he thinks was the one Tom wanted to sell him: "I know what kind of car it was!" (201). Tom, however, averts the danger of Wilson's impending rage by lying to him. Apparently trying to comfort Wilson, Tom "carried him into the office, set him down in a chair, and came back" (203). We can suspect that this was the moment when he told Wilson that it was Gatsby's car which hit Myrtle. This resulted in both Gatsby's and Wilson's death: "It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete" (233). On the one hand, Wilson wants to take revenge on Gatsby, and he commits a rash act that he would not have dared before. On the other hand, all he had was Myrtle, so he shoots himself because he does not have a reason to live anymore. The lucky winner is, of course, Tom, because he is able to defeat Gatsby and to make him disappear from Daisy's life forever. However, if it had turned out that Tom was Myrtle's lover, then Wilson might not have done anything in order to take revenge on Tom because he was totally under Tom's influence.

Thus, the power relations between the major male characters of *The Great Gatsby* demonstrate that American society during the 1920s was dominated by powerful male figures whose position rested on the grounds of inherited money. Their dominance over women and other men was solid, their social assertiveness scripted and smooth. However, this dominant position was not entirely secure. The social mobility during the post-WWI years and the Prohibition era encouraged other, formerly subordinated male groups to challenge the old patriarchal order. Moreover, new rules of male competition were being developed.

Chapter 2 – Threats to Hegemonic Masculinity

The issue of race has several aspects in the novel but it takes the position mainly as a threat to hegemonic masculinity. The novel presents many ethnic groups: for example, black people are represented in opposition to the whites, immigrants are shown as aliens even if they are white, and the reader also becomes acquainted with gypsies and Jews. We can also witness the hierarchy between the Americans and the British as perceived by the narrator, Nick Carraway. However, race is a submerged topic in *The Great Gatsby* because there are not any open debates about it.

Tom Buchanan is the only character who explicitly brings up the issue of race: he is anxious about the minorities taking over America. He is very upset by this issue and we can see that he is actually afraid that “other races will have control of things” (19). Early in the novel Tom introduces to his dinner companions, especially to Nick, a book he has read: “Have you read ‘The Rise of the Colored Empires’ by this man Goddard?” (19). In the dinner scene at the Buchanans we can see that Tom’s fear of the racial Other is first of all based on this particular book, therefore we can say that he is very narrow-minded because he does not acknowledge different ideas and opinions. He mentions that he has read other books as well, but he only insists on “The Rise of the Colored Empires.” He is very stubborn about the book’s argument and he keeps insisting: “This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things” (19). Here we can see what I proposed in my introduction, that Tom is well aware of the fact that hegemony can easily be changed if those on the top do not protect their position. It is important to note that ‘The Rise of the Colored Empires’ is “a pseudonym for Lothrop Stoddard and his *The Rising Tide of Color Against World White Supremacy*” (Slater 54), so the title of Tom’s book is just an assumed name for a real book that shaped racial attitudes in America at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Tom’s hatred towards other races reaches its height later in the novel when he argues with Gatsby about Daisy. By then, Tom knows that Gatsby is not Anglo-American and he uses this fact against him in order to make Daisy uncertain. He calls Gatsby “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (186) and then he says that “nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they’ll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white” (186). It is evident that Gatsby is not black. Tom wants to express his anger at Gatsby because he is not of Anglo-American origin and yet he could sneak into his life with the purpose of taking Daisy away from him.

All these manifestations of Tom's fear can be explained with the simple fact that he feels his youthful energy slipping away from him: "at the age of thirty his sense of personal worth can no longer be sustained on the basis of his physical prowess" (Slater 54). Daisy says about him that "Tom's getting very profound" and that "he reads deep books with long words in them" (19). As Tom is getting older he realizes that he cannot rely on his physical appearance as much as he could when he was younger. Therefore, he is looking for intellectual material he can acquire so that he can prove he is not just brawn without brain. Also, Tom has realized that by being a member of the dominant class he has to be well-informed and has to keep up with the new ideas and theories so he can spread them to other people, in this case to Nick. If we look at history, most of the new ideas were spread from powerful people to the lower classes, and Tom feels that now it is his mission to protect America—as well as his own hegemonic position—from the racial Other.

As I have already mentioned, there are no open debates about the issue of race in *The Great Gatsby*. There is no one to argue with Tom; however, this does not mean that no one else has an opinion. From time to time, racial references can be discovered in the novel due to Nick's observations and descriptions of people. The most important characteristic of these references is that Nick does not judge people by their ethnic backgrounds but he "tends to point out the ethnic affiliation of the individuals with whom he comes in contact whenever their ethnicity is not of an Old American type as is his own" (Slater 55). He describes people according to their physical appearance and he always discovers the differences between him and those of other ethnicities. What we can see in Nick's case is that he is not so desperate about the racial Other like Tom, he is not afraid of them. Maybe the reason for him not being afraid is that his social status is not endangered by other races because he has not so much to lose as Tom.

For Tom it is very important to preserve his dominant position as an "Old" American because there are more and more ethnic minorities whose wealth competes with his. In this case it is Tom's reputation and prestige as an upper-class individual that is at stake, while the other threat is Gatsby who is trying to take his wife away from him. However, it is evident for the reader that no other man of ethnic origin competes openly with Tom, but still he has the impression that he has to protect his hegemonic position. Tom's case is very complex because on the one hand he tries to protect his heritage and, on the other hand, he is protecting his family as if his wife were his possession. His wealth and his wife represent his name, social position and reputation. He desperately tries to secure these because he knows that "hegemony does not imply total power and domination but instead is focused on a balance of

forces and an ongoing struggle for power” (Hammarén and Johansson 3). Nick as a representative of complicit masculinity does not possess any features of Tom’s life and he has not that much to lose because as long as there are powerful upper-class white men in hegemonic positions, Nick can benefit from their power no matter who they are. For Tom, unchallenged dominance matters because if he loses his status, he will not be able to practice his power over others but others will practice their power over him. But Nick is not affected by the negative aspects of ethnic minorities making their fortune in America and getting into dominant positions.

There are a lot of examples for Nick’s observations in the novel about other people, and most of them contain a comment on their particular ethnicity. These comments show Nick’s judgmental opinion but none of them are as harsh as Tom’s. Right in the beginning Nick describes “a Finnish woman, who made my bed and cooked breakfast and muttered Finnish wisdom to herself over the electric stove” (5). This is a fair comment; however, it is always unusual if somebody is talking to oneself, and Nick highlighted this fact about the woman. Of course, this is not a racial characteristic of the Finns, just a note that she is talking to herself, but it still makes a negative impression on the reader. Later in the novel, when Nick goes to Gatsby’s party for the first time, he mentions that “one of these gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and, moving her hands like Frisco, dances out alone on the canvas platform” (58). In my opinion this remark implies a lot more criticism than the one about the Finnish woman. Nick says “one of these gypsies”: the use of the demonstrative “these” sounds disdainful because it seems as if there were a lot of them who could not be distinguished from one another.

Nick’s most important racial observation is when he compares the English and the Americans. This occurs at the same party when he says that “I was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about; all well dressed, all looking a little hungry, and all talking in low, earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans” (59). In this statement Nick places Americans over the English because he describes the former as “solid and prosperous,” which suggests that they are powerful and wealthy. Nick tries to support this notion of dignity by saying that the Englishmen were “talking in low, earnest voices,” so they knew how much power Americans have and that they have to respect the Americans. This antithesis between the English and the Americans can be related to the First World War. America got very strong after the war which granted her a respectable place in the world, whereas Britain suffered from financial problems and she also had to pay back the wartime loans acquired from

America. In this sense America was undoubtedly superior to Britain, which all the Englishmen could feel at that time.

When Nick and Gatsby are driving to Manhattan in Gatsby's car, another car comes which is "driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish negroes, two bucks and a girl" (98). This scene is of course very strange for Nick, and I think it would be strange for any other Old American. In that limousine the usual social roles are totally turned upside down because "negroes" were considered poor, and actually no one regarded them as equal to whites; they were a marginalized racial group in America. What we can see here is that, for white Anglo-Americans in hegemonic position not only Gatsby and Wolfsheim threatened to undermine the social system but actually all the other ethnicities that were able to make their fortune. Nick claims that "I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry" (98). As those black people became rich and, as Nick says, "modish," their self-confidence grew bigger and bigger and now they see white Americans as rivals, which is a very natural thing among rich people. The fact that Nick laughs at their looks is because he cannot imagine why they think they are rivals. Rivalry suggests equality and it is hard for white Americans to accept that black people, who were once slaves and were seen as property, now can enter into the dominant circles. Seeing these rich black people is shocking for Nick because they are an exception, there are not many other blacks like them. It is also shocking for him that those blacks were fortunate enough to get rich, while there are white people like him who are not so wealthy. In this sense, those blacks in the limousine are superior to him. Nick realizes that "anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge" (98). The bridge refers to the bridge through which they get to West Egg Village where "new money people" live. In West Egg it was not that surprising to see such scenarios as blacks in a limousine with a white chauffeur than it would have been in East Egg, among the established rich.

I already mentioned that Wolfsheim is a Jew and at the same time he is a very dominant and rich man. Nick's description of him is also based on the visible differences from Old Americans, and confirms the idea that he does not look like a dominant man. Nick says the following about him: "A small, flat-nosed Jew raised his large head and regarded me with two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril. After a moment I discovered his tiny eyes in the half-darkness" (99). These are very high-contrast differences that everyone would recognize, and Nick's description seems to be absolutely fair; there are no openly degrading comments in it. Still, it is repulsive if we imagine the picture of Wolfsheim. When Gatsby tells Nick that Wolfsheim is the one who fixed the World's Series, Nick is struck by

this disclosure. “It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people—with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe” (105). Nick has never encountered such a dishonest man and he cannot imagine how Wolfsheim did it, how he did not care about all those people whose money he basically stole. There is no racial remark about what Wolfsheim did, Nick talks in general terms. However, we can infer his anxiety. He realizes that Wolfsheim’s hand reaches so far in civil society that he could get away with fixing the baseball championship, something unimaginable before. That is why he represents a threat to the traditional hierarchy: he was able to undermine it, and he could form a new hegemony if he wanted to.

We only get pieces of information about where Wolfsheim’s money comes from, but towards the end of the novel Tom gives us the clear picture. Tom wanted to know more about Gatsby—probably because he was jealous of Daisy—and he did some research: “I found out what your ‘drug-stores’ were [...]. He and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drugstores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter” (192). Now we can see that Wolfsheim’s business is totally illegal because at this time there was prohibition on selling alcohol in America. However, no one does anything in order to put a stop to his illegal affairs because he has a high social status that gives him enough power to run this business; presumably he has a lot of high-placed corrupt people involved who make great money out of it. Wolfsheim associates with common people, unlike Tom who is above common society. Wolfsheim’s business is successful because he sells liquor to everyone. He knows that people want alcohol and therefore he infiltrates the society without showing off his power or wealth, so people can trust him. Tom, on the other hand, does not want to be a part of the civil society; he enjoys his position and wants to show everyone his superiority.

Jay Gatsby’s family is of European origin, probably from Eastern Europe or Germany because his real name is James Gatz. However, Gatsby was probably born in America and must have lived near the border of Canada because the novel mentions “James Gatz of North Dakota” (140) and that “he saw Dan Cody’s yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior” (140). Both North Dakota and Lake Superior are on the border with Canada. Dan Cody was basically a fortune-hunter, he was “a product of the Nevada silver fields” (142) and his wealth comes from “the transactions in Montana copper” (143). In the novel he is the one Gatsby looks at as a role model. Dan Cody’s wealth and success inspired Gatsby to start his own business one day. However, what Dan Cody did for a living was not illegal, people seek for silver, gold and other valuable metal in rivers and abandoned mines today as well. Obviously, this is not the reason why Gatsby started running illegal businesses; Dan Cody

was not a bad example for him. However, as Gatsby did not receive the legacy left to him by Cody, “a legacy of twenty-five thousand dollars” (144), he needed to look for other opportunities and maybe this is when he met Wolfsheim who offered him an illegal but great opportunity to get rich fast.

Gatsby changed his name “at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career” (140). This is a very significant change in his masculine status, too, because it takes a lot of courage to change one’s name and forget about who he has been before. He was unsatisfied with the life he had with his parents so he decided to make his fortune. Living in America and the desire to fulfill the American dream became very important to the young Gatz and therefore he was ready to give up his former life and to build a new one. The fact that he was not a noticeable representative of an ethnic group allowed him to infiltrate into American society and he started to undermine the traditional system, just like Wolfsheim. However, Gatsby is a larger threat to Tom because Gatsby wants to take away Daisy, which makes the whole case personal. Therefore, Tom is more defensive against Gatsby than against any other man belonging to other races.

There are a lot of rumors about Gatsby that prove he is truly a powerful man in society because otherwise people would not be interested in him. Rumors are usually about popular and determining people who for some reason make other people curious. Gatsby’s life is not an open book to anyone, which is why there are some stories circling about him. For example, when Nick is at the party with Tom and Myrtle, Myrtle’s sister Catherine tells him the following: “Well, they say he’s a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm’s. That’s where all his money comes from” (46). Here we can see that on the one hand Gatsby’s wealth is of great interest. On the other hand, at one of Gatsby’s parties a girl tells Nick that “somebody told me they thought he killed a man once” (62). This is not impossible because Gatsby was a soldier, but it seems to be very frightening to people that a man is capable of murder. I guess that social dominance is associated in people’s minds with gentility, dignity and good manners, that is why they cannot cope with the idea about Gatsby killing a man. Gatsby does not really care about these rumors, or at least he does not deny them, maybe he does not even know what people talk about him.

However, Gatsby seems to suspect that it is important for people to know something about him because if they do not have a clue about who he is or where he is from, then they are going to start digging in his past. That is why he establishes a fake story about himself which he introduces to Nick as “God’s truth” (92). Gatsby says that “I am the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West—all dead now” (92). Of course he says they are all dead

because this way no one is going to look for his living relatives and ask them about him. Then he continues that “I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years” (92). Obviously this is not true because, as Nick finds out, he comes from a very poor family and he was not educated at Oxford, he only spent a little time there. He tells the truth when he says he was a soldier: “Then came the war, old sport. It was a great relief, and I tried very hard to die, but I seemed to bear an enchanted life” (94). Being a soldier at that time was something to be proud of, and actually that is the only reason why Gatsby could get close to Daisy. In order to prove all his lies, he shows Nick “a photograph of half a dozen young men in blazers loafing in an archway” and of course “there was Gatsby, looking a little, not much, younger” (95). With that photo he earns Nick’s trust in him, and Nick complies: “then it was all true” (95). Gatsby’s great lie about himself aims to prove to other people his right to possess as big a power as he now possesses, because with this established story people will not think about him as “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (186), as Tom called him.

Even though Tom feels threatened by the strengthening representatives of ethnic minorities, there is an unquestionable bond between him and Gatsby and also between other “Old” American men, namely Nick and Tom. This bond is based on the way they treat and use women for their purposes. Consequently, the male characters interact with each other when their interests concerning a woman overlap, which may result in either conflict or cooperation between them.

Chapter 3 – The Issue of Homosociality

Daisy is a central character if we look at the problem of homosociality because for Tom and Gatsby she is the object and key to prove and sustain their dominance. We know that Daisy is Tom's wife, but we also know that she had a relationship with Gatsby. When Gatsby was a young soldier he met Daisy and they fell in love. "One autumn night" Gatsby "kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete" (160). This was a determining point in Gatsby's life because from then on, he always looked for the opportunity to be with Daisy again. However, at that time Gatsby was a soldier, so he had to leave her. This was basically the end of their relationship because Gatsby did not write to her at all, only when it was too late. Daisy and Tom married in June two years later "with more pomp and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before" (108). Here we can see that obviously Daisy chose a very rich man with whom she could be safe even if this was just financial, not emotional safety. However, the day before their marriage, Gatsby's letter finally arrives and Daisy gets very confused: "she had a bottle of Sauterne in one hand and a letter in the other" (109). Even though she loved Gatsby she persuaded herself that she would marry Tom and the next day she did. After that Gatsby was forgotten until Daisy heard his name again after five years.

In order to get Daisy back, Gatsby needed to get as wealthy as Tom—or at least this is what he thought. He has an important remark right before the confrontation with Tom in the town when he says to Nick that "her voice is full of money" (172). This perfectly describes what he thinks about the way he can get her back. However, Gatsby's biggest mistake is that he "never comes to realize that there are different kinds of money—for example, East Egg money or the money of the established rich as opposed to West Egg money or the money of the new rich" (Lehan 140). For Gatsby, being the member of the upper-class in American society is somewhat new; therefore he feels that he needs to prove how powerful he was. That is why he wants to get Daisy: with her the American dream could be fulfilled and he could destroy Tom's already established power. Even Wolfsheim does not suspect what Gatsby plans because he claims that "Gatsby's very careful about women", and that "he would never so much as look at a friend's wife" (103). Obviously, Tom and Gatsby are not friends. Gatsby wants to take Daisy away from Tom because he thinks that he has to reproduce Tom's hegemonic position in order to win Daisy's affection again.

However, Gatsby does not take into consideration Tom's temper and his reaction to the possibility of losing Daisy. For Tom, this would damage his reputation, so he starts looking for evidence with which he can destroy Daisy's desire for Gatsby. He succeeds

because he finds out that Gatsby and Wolfsheim sell “grain alcohol over the counter” (192). Tom knows how he can turn this situation to his own advantage because he knows that Daisy prefers financial security over emotions. We can see that Tom was right because “at that moment, Daisy, who only now understands the nature of Gatsby’s credentials, turns back to the security of the Buchanan world—and Gatsby’s dream is lost forever” (Lehan 141). Thus, obviously, Gatsby had also been right when he guessed that he could get Daisy back with money. However, as he did not understand the difference between his money and Tom’s, he did not suspect Daisy’s reaction. Obviously, Gatsby can now see that he is losing her so “he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made” (193). Gatsby wants to possess Daisy so badly that he begins an unnecessary explanation by which he spoils everything and gives himself away. In my opinion, it was not really Tom’s accusation that made Daisy insecure about Gatsby but Gatsby’s desperate comment on it because from that she could draw the conclusion that Tom was right.

Tom totally defeats Gatsby and his attempt to destroy their marriage. His advantage is, on the one hand, that he knows exactly why Daisy married him; he knows that Daisy needs the financial security he can give her. On the other hand, he knows what she feels for him even though they are not so much in love as Gatsby and Daisy were. He asks Daisy whether she has forgotten their moments of closeness and affection: “Not that day I carried you down from the Punch Bowl to keep your shoes dry?” (190). This question occurs when Gatsby wants Daisy to confess that she has never loved Tom. Tom is not afraid, not even for a minute; because he knows Daisy very well and he also knows that he has great power over her and over her emotions. We can say that what Tom did in this scene to Daisy is simple emotional blackmail. As a conclusion, we can see that Daisy “is victim first of Tom Buchanan’s “cruel” power, but then of Gatsby’s increasingly depersonalized vision of her” (Person 250). This is exactly what homosociality is about: it is not Daisy’s person that is important, but the possession of Daisy, which means that she is just an object for both Tom and Gatsby.

As Tom is sure that Daisy is not going to leave him, he can freely have a mistress who happens to be Wilson’s wife, Myrtle. Of course, Wilson does not suspect anything, “he thinks she goes to see her sister in New York” (37). Therefore, we cannot really talk about homosocial bonds between Wilson and Tom because Wilson does not know what is going on behind his back. This fact also confirms Wilson’s subordinate position because he does not contribute to Tom’s actions. However, as Nick and Mr. McKee know about this affair we can

rightly say that Myrtle is also an object, just like Daisy, because neither of these two men intends to tell Daisy about Tom and Myrtle. Again, we can see how Tom's hegemony and the profit from it are more important to Nick and McKee than telling the truth to Daisy. This is a great example of complicity between men against women whom they treat as objects in order to reach their goals.

For Tom, one way to show his hegemonic position is to manipulate Wilson, which we could see earlier in the episode when Tom wants to sell him a car. The other way is to rule Myrtle, just as he rules Daisy at home. This is why Tom needs a mistress all the time: he has to feel his power by having a strong hold over women. The manifestation of this need occurs when he hits Myrtle at the party while they are "discussing in impassioned voices whether Mrs. Wilson had any right to mention Daisy's name" (52). This is very interesting and contradictory because Tom seems to be defending his family life and Daisy from an intruder mistress whom he wants to have because ruling his wife at home is not enough for him anymore. Unfortunately, Myrtle does not understand why Tom is so upset about this topic so she keeps saying Daisy's name. This is the moment when Tom makes "a short deft movement" and breaks "her nose with his open hand" (53). Tom's brutality does not really surprise those people at the party, at least not as much as the guests at Gatsby's party were shocked at the rumor that he killed a man. Obviously, Tom is vehemently defensive when he thinks his dominance is endangered, and this is exactly what happens at the party with Myrtle. What is more interesting is that no one protects Myrtle and no man stands up against Tom's behavior, which is also a sign that the homosocial bonds between men are stronger than their conscience and morality. Myrtle's death, however, damages Tom's dominance and strength. Later he tells Nick that when he went to the flat where he used to go with Myrtle he "sat down and cried like a baby" (258). However, we can assume that he did not cry because he loved Myrtle and he lost her but because he saw Myrtle as his own property and it was hard for him to accept that she was gone forever and now he cannot practice his power over her.

Nick is very interesting when we observe his behavior in terms of homosocial relations. Due to his complicity with both Tom and Gatsby, he is able to balance between his two fellow men. On the one hand, he helps Gatsby to arrange a meeting with Daisy at his own house: "I'm going to call up Daisy to-morrow and invite her over here to tea" (117). Although Nick knows that Daisy is a married woman, he still calls her in order to satisfy Gatsby's wish so that he does not lose his company. This also means that it does not matter for Nick that Daisy is his cousin, he also treats her as an object he can use to his own benefit. On the other hand, Nick contributes to Tom's cheating without any intent to warn Daisy or to save her

from this marriage. Of course, Daisy herself knows that Tom has someone but she refuses to face it because she does not want to lose her comfortable life. Nick seems to be aware of the fact that Tom has a mistress, he says that “the fact that he had one was insisted upon wherever he was known” (33). The reason why he goes along with Tom’s behavior is that if he cannot keep in touch with Tom and Daisy, then he would probably lose Jordan Baker as well. Nick is very benefit oriented; he can see clearly when he can turn things to his own advantage and when he has to stay in the background so he does not lose anyone’s trust in him.

The relationship between Nick and Jordan is quite ambiguous if we compare them to Tom and Myrtle, or to Gatsby and Daisy. Nick says about Jordan that “she was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage” (16). This suggests that she is a masculine woman and this is exactly what attracts Nick the most. However, he does not want to possess a woman as Gatsby or Tom do because he has nothing to prove to anyone. Since Nick is more interested in being in communication with the representatives of hegemonic masculinity, he does not really want to have a serious relationship with Jordan. He once says that “she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her” (84). To explain why he does not want to get closer to Jordan, we have to see that Nick is rather a feminine man and his attraction to Gatsby confirms this. For example, after Daisy ran over Myrtle with Gatsby’s car, Jordan invites Nick inside Tom’s house: “Won’t you come in, Nick?” (204). Nick does not follow Jordan, and later that evening he meets Gatsby in the Buchanans’ yard. Nick says that “I must have felt pretty weird by that time, because I could think of nothing except the luminosity of his pink suit under the moon” (205). Frances Kerr uses the same scene to illustrate that “immediately after Myrtle’s death, the rest of the characters turn to each other: Tom and Daisy reunite, and Jordan reaches out to Nick. Nick, however, is drawn to Gatsby’s pink *suit*” (Kerr 419). A masculine man would never think of another man’s clothing in such detailed and even romantic way. Usually women are more interested in details because we always observe colors, shapes and basically every detail. The word “luminosity” also suggests that Gatsby is not neutral for Nick because it gives a romantic feeling to this scene.

I find it very interesting that Nick “is never interested in intimacy” (Kerr 418). However, this is only true for his relationship with Jordan. There is a scene when Nick goes with Tom and Myrtle to a party where he gets to know Mr. McKee. Nick describes Mr. McKee as “a pale, feminine man from the flat below” (42). Unlike the dominant men Nick hangs out with, Mr. McKee is very similar to Nick. That is why Nick follows him when McKee leaves the party. “As the two men descend in the elevator, their conversation suggests

homosexual arousal, blocked by the elevator boy who becomes the policeman of forbidden desires between men” (Kerr 414). After their conversation in the elevator there is a very strange scene which suggests that an intimate relationship evolved between Nick and McKee: “I was standing beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands” (54). We can conclude that “Nick Carraway identifies with and feels most romantically drawn not to “masculine” women but to “feminine” men” (Kerr 418). However, he does not express his desire for Jordan sexually; therefore we can say that masculine women only attract him because he wants to be in the company of a strong woman who he does not have to rule, so the woman will not depend on him. Feminine men attract him sexually as well because he can relate to, even identify with them. Of course, a masculine man like Tom would never start a relationship with another man because his hegemonic position would never allow any association with homosexuals.

Conclusion

In my essay I examined the patriarchal society in *The Great Gatsby* by using recent concepts from masculinity studies in order to understand the hierarchical system and the power relations between the male characters in the novel.

By introducing the concepts of hegemony, complicity and subordination I examined the power relations between the Old Americans, Tom Buchanan, Nick Carraway and George Wilson. We could see that these three men's positions are in strong connection with one another. Tom uses Wilson's subordinate situation to keep in touch with his mistress, who is Wilson's wife at the same time, and also to arrange Gatsby's murder so he can protect his hegemony. Nick and Wilson use Tom's hegemonic position in order to gain some profit for themselves. Nick meets Jordan Baker through Tom, and he can only see her if he keeps in touch with the Buchanans. Nick's job is also representative of his complicity because by selling bonds for wealthy men he gains enough money to sustain his association with wealthy and hegemonic men. Wilson wants to buy a car from Tom to make some money out of it; however, we could see that he is clearly not in the situation to negotiate with or to urge Tom because it is Tom who lays down conditions for the deal.

Continuing this idea, I introduced the marginalized groups in the novel who mean a great threat to Tom's hegemony. These are ethnic groups including Gatsby, who is of unknown origin, Wolfsheim, who is a Jew, and black people. I discussed how desperately Tom protects his position and actually he succeeds because he can eliminate Gatsby who represents a major threat to his hegemony. The strengthening of the ethnic groups in America during the 1920s proves that the already existing hierarchy can be changed, which is actually Gatsby's aim. We could also see throughout Nick's observations that complicit masculinity is not affected by this threat because it does not matter from whom Nick benefits; he is focused on the profit only. When looking at Nick's observations, other ethnicities are introduced to us so we can see how multicultural America was at that time, and how class boundaries became penetrable. However, not all of these ethnic groups mean a threat to Tom's hegemony because not all of them are able to make their fortune and claim a dominant position.

In the last part of my essay I discussed the concept of homosociality between the male characters in the novel. Here we could see that male bonds are very strong, actually stronger than their relationship with women. Women play a subordinated role in the male characters' lives, they are treated as objects which men use to achieve their goals and also to show how much power they have. Therefore, Tom has two women in his life, Daisy and Myrtle, and he is in sore need of ruling them. Daisy is absolutely under his control; even Gatsby cannot take

her away from Tom despite the fact that Daisy loves him. Myrtle is not as obedient as Daisy; therefore Tom abuses her verbally and physically because he cannot bear if someone disobeys him. Nick sees Jordan whom he chose because of her masculine features, yet he is not interested in developing a deeper relationship with her. On the other hand, Nick's case is complicated because he also has homosexual desires which we could see in the case of Mr. McKee with whom Nick can identify himself. Gatsby wants to get Daisy who could be the crown of his overexposed vision of the American dream. Here we could see the objectifying of Daisy again because Gatsby is only interested in possessing her so that he can take Tom's hegemonic position.

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