

ENGLISH ADVANCED: *THE GREAT GATSBY/BROWNING SONNETS*

Despite their different forms and contexts, the values that underpin F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby' and the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (EBB) are essentially the same. Although these texts depict the values of the 1800's Victorian Era and the 1920's, they both illustrate similar themes. These themes include ideas of everlasting and enduring relationships as opposed to superficial ones, the different values of women that are reflected in both contexts, as well as the transforming power of love.

The two texts challenge the socially constructed values of their time. EBB challenges the patriarchal values of her society. In Sonnet 1, Elizabeth presents a voice of higher power which she resists, where 'A mystic shape did move behind me and drew me backward by the hair; and the voice said in mastery as I strove'. However, as the sonnets continue she presents herself as an equal to the beloved. This juxtaposition is first illustrated through the hyperbole in Sonnet 14 "Nay- Let the silence of my womanhood commend thy woman-love" as well as when she confesses her love for Robert Browning in Sonnet 22 "When our two souls stand up erect and strong, Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher, Until their lengthening wings break into fire At either curved point". Through this and the subverted sonnet form, EBB illustrates her defiance of the patriarchal values of her context as she presents herself as an equal to the beloved. Contrary to social beliefs that men were always at a higher level than women, EBB subverts the sonnet form and instead addresses him as an equal, again challenging the patriarchal values and illustrating herself and the beloved as supreme beings.

In 'The Great Gatsby', Fitzgerald challenges the hedonistic values of the 'Roaring Twenties', a reflection of people's loss of faith in humanity. Due to this, the "the green breast of the new world" has been corrupted with materialism and wealth. This created the notion of 'The American Dream' where, through determination and hard work, financial prosperity could be obtained. However, because the corrupt values of American society, the dream became unachievable even for those with pure values because of the 'foul dust that preyed' on it. The death of the American dream is epitomised through the protagonist Gatsby and his unscrupulous journey to attain his idealized version of Daisy Fay. Not only was Gatsby in love with Daisy, he worshipped her on a Petrarchan level, was also attracted to the wealth, sophistication and high status that accompanied her. To attain Daisy would mean that Gatsby was a part of this world of sophistication and wealth. However, because he attached this dream to a flawed human being, his dream was unattainable. Despite this, Gatsby is prepared to go to unmeasurable lengths in order to receive Daisy's requited love. Through this, Fitzgerald is criticizing and challenging the corrupt values of society, similar to the challenging of Patriarchal values in EBB. However, although EBB and Gatsby's contexts are different, both still have strong patriarchal values. This can be seen through Tom's character in Gatsby, Daisy's immoral husband. In contrast to Daisy, EBB chooses to fight against these constraints whereas Daisy doesn't even though she has the opportunity to. This emphasises the hollowness of Daisy's character. Furthermore, Daisy's value and perception of women is illustrated when she says 'all a girl can hope to be in this world is a fool'. Fitzgerald is critical of such values, particularly Tom's aggression.

Love has the power to transform one's life. While in *The Great Gatsby*, the force of love ultimately brings death and hurt, in Sonnets it is seen as a positive and healing force. At first, EBB rejects the idea of love because of her limited experiences which forces her to be vulnerable. However, as the sonnets progress the readers gain insights into her growing confidence and renewed sense of power. Also, EBB's love for the beloved is so strong that it "Rendered the garment of my life", where she no longer sees herself as a "worn viol". Also, in the first sonnets EBB was fearful of her father. However, as the sonnets develop, she is no longer fearful of him because it was "as if God's future thundered on my past". This religious imagery illustrates the idea that only God can criticize her relationship. Furthermore, through the subversion of the pentameter, EBB illustrates the development of her powerful relationship with the beloved through her "dead letters" from when she

“wept for” the beloved’s “touch [of] my hand... a simple thing” , to when he says “Dear, I love thee!” until the final development of “I am thine”. This further emphasises the enduring and spiritual nature of their love.

Similarly, Gatsby’s dream is to have a spiritual relationship with Daisy, which transcends the earthly realm. However, his dream was bound to fail because he attached it to a flawed human being. This is illustrated through the imagery when Gatsby first kisses Daisy where “at his lips touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete”. However, his first meeting with her five years later falls short of his high expectations. Nick says that this is because “of the colossal vitality of his illusion”. However, one thing that fulfilled his expectation was her “voice” which was “full of money”. Fitzgerald illustrates the motif of Daisy’s voice being a characteristic of many individuals of the modernist era who were full of loose morals and hollow values. Therefore this shows the differentiation in how love has the power to transform someone in different ways, even though both Gatsby and EBB had the same desire to achieve a spiritual relationship.

Furthermore, Fitzgerald is a modernist writer whereas EBB is a romanticist. However, even though Fitzgerald is modernistic, his writing still involves traditional aspects of romanticism, illustrated through Nick’s description of Gatsby’s perceptions of Daisy. This shows that despite their different forms and contexts, the values that underpin the two texts are essentially the same.

Overall, through ideas about everlasting relationships as opposed to superficial ones, the different values of women in both contexts as well as the transforming power of love, it is evident that the values that underpin the two contexts are essentially the same. This is further illustrated through Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnets and the characters Daisy, Nick and Jay Gatsby in ‘The Great Gatsby’.