



The Fundamentals of Play

Caitlin Macy

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"Kate was what you wanted, somehow, in this infinitely ironic age. She was the kind of girl about whom other girls used to say, 'All right, so she's thin but,' trying vainly to suss out the appeal. And even now, when her name comes up, and with it the sulky protest it invariably evokes--'She's not that great'--I do not feel compelled to argue in her defense."

Some fiction debuts have remarkably strong stories, some have refreshing new voices, some have perfect cultural timing. The Fundamentals of Play is that literary rarity which has all three.

George Lenhart is, chronically, in love with Kate Goodenow. So is Nick Beale, the working-class son of a Maine lobsterman from the town where Kate spent her childhood summers. So is Chat Wethers, an old-money friend of George's from Dartmouth. And so is Harry Lombardi, a brilliant, startlingly successful, but socially awkward Dartmouth upstart who has been trying to enter this circle for years.

It is George who tells the interwoven stories of these five young people, some of whom, in their lineage or finances, represent the last gasp of the old Northeastern Upper Class. Starting with the year after college, when they all land in Manhattan, George describes the good times and disappointments, ambition and manners, sexual secrets and money-cursed friendships, that have tied these people to one another for a lifetime. He tells of Nick's charismatic past and drug-ridden present, and he shows the snobbery and avarice that lurk in Kate's background--in stark contrast to her ineffable allure. And as George tells these stories (and observes Harry's spectacular rise in the new, as-yet-unnamed phenomenon of the Internet), he implicitly chronicles the end of an era and the emergence of a new definition of class--just as The Fundamentals of Play represents the emergence of a distinctive new talent in American fiction.

The Fundamentals of Play Details

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From Reader Review The Fundamentals of Play for online ebook

Erin Egan says

This is one of those books that I just wanted to be done reading! I kept hoping something would happen to hook me in, but it never did. I didn't really like any of the characters. They were not at all sympathetic and their way of speaking and relating to each other did not seem realistic. Why would any of these people be friends? Also, I couldn't figure out when the story was supposed to be set - sometime in the 1990's, I think. If you value your time at all, skip this book.

James says

Great Gatsby for Turn of Millennium? Perhaps. But you might say it was Twilight meets House of Mirth, as well. It was all about that spooky dream of adolescence and especially, nostalgic adolescence, mixed with the tragedy of pointless wealth. There was really something unreal about a lot of it.

I liked the first 3/4ths or 4/5ths of the book pretty well, especially the author's somewhat cryptic insightful observations, the Gatsbygothic spookiness, and the reasonably good characters. Calling George a "good sport" gives a name for such fellows as the protagonists of Haruki Murakami's Norwegian Wood-class novels. The book was readable, i.e. lacking boring sections, so at the first order of book success, it passed with flying colors.

However, that last 1/4th or 1/5th caused it quite some trouble at the higher order of things, that is, how the book held together. If I thought she wrote the book a chapter at a time, in order, against a deadline, I might say she ran out of time and rushed her way through the ending, but I don't think this was the case. Nor do I think she was making it up as she went along and kind of lost interest, as I suspect was the case with Richard Bartle's InSight InFlames. Rather, I think she's stronger at observations and characters than at plot, and where she had to rely on plot, she didn't have the imagination to make something that lived up to the foreshadowing (and the promise of the strengths of the earlier book, especially the backstories). I looked her up and see that she subsequently wrote a book of short stories and has not written another novel, which makes sense.

Grace Hoffmann says

A little heavy handed with the whole preppy/sailing thing. But interesting cover of the The Great Gatsby. I'm reading this now with a view to reading her new book, Mrs.

Kate Childs says

This book was recommended to me by a friend who mentioned casually during lunch that I reminded her of one of the main characters who also happens to be named Kate. Obviously, I scooped up the book to figure out what exactly she meant. The book is marketed as a Gatsby-esque tale of post-grads in Manhattan during the 1990s, and it lives up to all of the stereotypes that that description evokes. What makes it stand out, however, is Caitlin Macy's vibrant rendering of the characters and the way she humanizes them by

displaying all of their flaws and quirks. Much of the story revolved around New England locales, which I loved, especially the descriptions of summers spent in Maine, as well as life in Manhattan. It was interesting how Macy's version of Manhattan is more Mad Men than grunge—her characters work 9-to-5 jobs, hold mixers in their apartments, go to city clubs, and long to be engaged by 25. *THE FUNDAMENTALS OF PLAY* meanders a little bit too much in the end, but overall it is a great and interesting read that is sure to satisfy readers searching for a modern *GATSBY*.

Terrill says

The Great Gatsby meets Bright Lights, Big City. Entertaining, but with annoying sentences along the lines of "He gave me a glance that told me he understood why I had done what I did last July and, what's more, he approved of it." Authors love glances like that, but they never seem to occur in my life.

Lynn Spencer says

The author of this book obviously loved **The Great Gatsby** a lot more than I did. Much of this book seems to be an homage to the earlier classic. The tone, the narration by a young man who is somewhat an insider and somewhat an outsider to the charmed circle he writes about, etc...

The basic setup here is that our narrator, George Lenhart, comes from an old family that has lost its fortune. He got a good education at Dartmouth and now he's a baby investment banker living with a roommate in New York. The story meanders through the dramas of the newly graduated as friends start to establish circles and slowly pair off. The Daisy figure in this book is Kate Goodenow, who comes from a wealthy family. George is obviously attracted to her, as are both his old money friend Chat and up-and-coming (but very much "not our kind") Harry Lombardi.

The growing disillusionment of post-college life builds against the backdrop of this love triangle (quadrangle?), but it never really catches fire. The book has a few clever moments and there are some great observations of life during the tech boom, but much of the narration feels politely bland.

It's a shame that so much of the story gets lost in the voluminous narration because when Macy lets her characters talk, there are some great observations of social class and mores of the early to mid 90s in the book. While the action appears to be taking place in the early 90s, many of the social observations struck home for me. I was a new grad in DC in the early 2000s, and if you switched out investment banking for lobbying and government contracting, this world would seem instantly familiar in many ways.

Not a bad book, but it could have been so much more.

Sundai Valcich says

This book covers the topic of wealthy young adults in New York City. A review on the book compared it to a modern "Great Gatsby" but I wouldn't go that far. It was an interesting read to learn about the different players in the game, but I didn't find it to be very original. Parts of the book dragged along and I didn't feel any sense of accomplishment or enrichment upon finishing the book. The writing style was okay. I may check out other books by the author but this isn't a book that I would recommend to others.

Heather says

I read this book about a decade ago. At the time, I was a young twenty-something, and Caitlin Macy's debut novel definitely spoke to me. I don't remember many specifics, but what I do remember is how well Macy captured post-college disillusionment. As others have stated, the book focuses on a group of privileged New Englanders who attended boarding school together and are now navigating their twenties. Quite simply, it's about four men's obsessions with their former classmate, Kate Goodenow.

I distinctly remember my favorite of the four guys, the "Heathcliff" of the novel – Nick Beale. He skipped the college scene to become a sort of Bohemian sailor. (That wasn't spoiler, I promise). I only mention this for the "Dawson's Creek" fans. People keep comparing this novel to *The Great Gatsby*, and while that's a valid comparison, I also saw a little bit of the Joey/Dawson/Pacey love triangle in this story. So, if you miss *Capeside*, you might want to read this novel. And, with that, I'll leave you with this: "I don't want to wait / for our lives to be over ..."

M says

This was a smart book - in the writing style as well as the overall conceit - but there were too many things bugging me.

This novel centers around one woman, Kate, who has four men panting after her, and the narrator, George, is a sort of wash out who chases her for most of the book. Kate is a spoiled and demanding woman who has no endearing features that I could discern, so the obsession over her made no sense to me. In addition, she seems to leap from man to man with little thought and I found this rather troubling.

Overall the story served as a commentary to the rich world of NY as well as an interesting turning point as the world was about to break into the internet (it was funny to read about characters who think having a "mobile phone" is arrogant and dumb), but it was trying too hard to be a modern *Gatsby* and the characters left me cold.

Sam Steyer says

I have read this book 5+ times and it will always be one of my favorites. So fun, so relatable, and so sad.

Dena says

And see, I know it's a different novel, a different milieu, a different time, but I found this to be much more resonant than, say, *PREP* (or even *GOSSIP GIRL*). I read this at the same time as the Aimee Bender and the Kevin Brockmeier (perhaps?), up in Western Massachusetts, and together they all created a world as substantial and desirable as cotton candy for me. And I've remembered it fondly and desultorily looked for it from time to time. So I think you should read it, too.

Stephanie Sun says

Caitlin Macy is a smart and savvy young writer, but in **The Fundamentals of Play** she strives for a tone that her material unfortunately just can't carry. The Great Gatsby in the internet age this is not. However, reading it, one hopes that in five years Macy bangs out her version of Tender is the Night. I would love to read a great novel about the American marriage in the internet age.

Nicholas says

I've read Caitlin Macy's fiction in reverse order of when she wrote it, which means I read this, her first novel, last. I also liked it least. It just seemed to be trying way too hard to evoke Gatsby in a way that felt self-consciously literary or writerly or something.

I think her short stories, Spoiled, are the best of the lot, though Mrs. was certainly entertaining, if a bit preposterous.

Susan says

An entertaining enough read, but Macy inhabits a male narrator unconvincingly.

Aashikhan says

I can't decide either to hate or love this book. Just putting it back on shelf.
