The nature of the dream in The Great Gatsby.

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THE NATURE OF THE DREAM IN

THE GREAT GATSBY

by

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Abstract

All of the characters in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, The Great Gatsby, are partially defined by the dreams to which they aspire and the means by which they attempt to realize them. Tom Buchanan, his wife Daisy, and Jordan Baker are associated with the wealth and elegance of East Egg. In spite of the opulence manifested in their world, they lack the moral responsibility to fulfill their lives. Myrtle and George Wilson seek a method by which they can escape "the valley of ashes." However, the dissipating quality of their environment prevents them from altering the conditions of their lives. Jay Gatsby also fails to achieve his desires, because his imagination exceeds the possibilities afforded by life. Unaware of the distance between the corruption in his life as a gangster and his dream to possess Daisy, Jay is subject to shifts in his consciousness which he himself does not perceive.

The inability of these characters to realize their aspirations is partially a result of inherent flaws in the nature of dreams. Twentieth-century man must harbor illusions as a viable part of the human experience, but his pursuit of these wistful illusions must ultimately be frustrated. Dreams, if they were ever a sensible form, belong to an age that has already past. Modern man is apparently incapable of reconciling his dreams to the stultifying
aspects of reality.

Nick Carraway, however, is at least capable of escaping the sordid milieu of Long Island and return to his home in the Middle West. Through the actual process of writing the narrative and his inherited moral traits, Nick learns to appreciate the capacities of romanticism while perceiving their limitations. The knowledge that Carraway acquires in the East transcends his personal experiences and takes on a universal quality. Nick, capable of recognizing both the positive and debilitating aspects of romanticism, learns to distinguish his own different states of consciousness and returns to the West in possession of the incommunicable knowledge of his experiences.
Chapter One

The only character encountered directly by the reader in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is Nick Carraway, the narrator of a brief history recounting his experiences in the East. Therefore, whatever the reader perceives is filtered through the medium of Nick's subjective consciousness. If Nick matures and increases his understanding of human nature while perceiving it throughout the novel, then such changes must be reflected in the prose of the narrative which mirrors his consciousness. Since what the reader is told comes through a particular personality, the meaning of Gatsby's story and his dream to move in high society with Daisy Buchanan is largely the effect of that story and dream upon Nick Carraway. Similarly, the reader's knowledge of the narrator will establish the limits of his understanding of Jay and the entire action of the novel.

The Great Gatsby is in itself the product of Carraway's attempt to explore the complex and confusing reality at the heart of his experiences in the East. After abandoning the security of life in the Middle West, Nick discovers that Long Island is a "twentieth century media-permeated urban world" in which the boundaries between life and art, and stereotypes and individualities have lost their distinctiveness. The question of when some of the
characters are being truly "themselves" also becomes increasingly difficult to answer. Carraway undertakes the task of attempting to tell the truth about Jay Gatsby to listeners who are forced to labor under extensive illusions concerning his character and background. The difficulty of Nick's job is further compounded by his own vague conception of the man he is describing. Since he does not clearly understand his Eastern experiences in general and his feelings toward Jay, it is not surprising that Carraway's attitudes and the quality of his prose are not necessarily consistent throughout the novel. Instead, his efforts to understand Jay lead Nick to view Gatsby as alternately attractive and repulsive while he finds his visit to the East both appealing and appalling.

Carraway records his initiation into a mysterious and complex world which requires him to constantly adjust and readjust the credibility of his perception and check and recheck to determine whether or not his vision has been inaccurate. Nick is continually confronted by images that are blurred and confusing. Catherine's eyebrows have been "plucked and then drawn on again at a more rakish angle, but the efforts of nature toward the restoration of the old alignment gave a blurred air to her face" (30). Gatsby's house is an incoherent agglomeration of rooms that have apparently been chosen arbitrarily from different periods in
time. Nick encounters other visual shocks such as Wolfsheim's cufflinks which are composed of the finest "specimens of human molars" (73) and Ewing Klinsprnger, "a dishevelled man in pajamas . . . doing liver exercises on the floor" (92). The unintelligible quality of Carraway's Long Island environment is additionally demonstrated by the abundance of anacoluthic statements with which Nick is confronted. Daisy's voice continually breaks off in the middle of a sentence or a thought. She claims to have married a "hulking physical specimen _____" (12). When describing Pammy, she asserts that Nick should see her. "She's _____" (10). Finally, Daisy recalls her "white girlhood," her "beautiful white _____" (20). Tom Buchanan is unable to coherently complete his explanation of certain scientific theories. While strolling in his yard and later in a New York restaurant Jay Gatsby abruptly vanishes from sight. In an atmosphere of these bizarre and contending verbal and visual elements Carraway strives to create a synthesis of his experiences which the chaotic nature of the reality he inhabits seemingly denies. Central to Nick's personal dream is his hope to find some kind of order behind the chaos he witnesses.

The meaning of The Great Gatsby tends to be inexorably linked to its scheme of organization which is largely established by Nick's style of writing. This is true to the
extent that when the language is "stripped" away the events alone lose their appeal and coherency. Working rhetorically, the lyricism of the prose frequently isolates qualities of setting, conduct, and states of mind. Readers accept that a non-professional writer such as Nick can write so well partially because of his comment that he "was rather literary in college" and wrote "a series of . . . editorials for the 'Yale News'" (4). The fact that his prose is not only a means of telling the story, but often the meaning itself is evidenced throughout the novel. Carraway takes pride in maintaining that he is reserved in applying moral and social judgment. Nick's self-acclaimed moral reservation does not prevent him from writing prose that is often hyperbolic. Nick claims, for instance, to have been "privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men" (1). When his mental reserve is juxtaposed with such hyperbolic statements, the result is a very distinctive writing style that is peculiar to Carraway. His exaggerated speech, however, does not function merely to insulate him against more disturbing emotions or "frame the witticisms of the clever."? The disparity between Nick's moral reserve and his hyperbolic speech creates a tension in his prose that is indicative of his psychic condition.

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was some-
thing gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promise of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impression-ability which is dignified under the name "creative temperament" (2).

These comments depict Carraway's ability to discriminate between the unggenuine and insincere romantic and the true one. While the negative syntax of the final phrase of the statement implies Nick's reluctance to accept any judgment without investigation, it also suggests his willingness to recognize Gatsby's romantic capacities as being distinct from something false or spurious.

Creating the impression that Nick is mentally struggling and searching his thoughts is his habit of employing a large number of nouns and adjectives that create an aura of uncertainty and mystery. He implements words and phrases such as "abnormal," "strangest," "secret griefs," "shining secrets," and "curiosities" as if he is not only probing for a meaning, but also attempting to extract it from a reality that is grotesque and vague. The peculiarity of his reality and its inherent tension is also suggested by Carraway's fondness for pairing opposites. He couples the "abnormal mind" with the "normal person" (1), "reserving judgment" with "infinite hope" (1), and the "unbroken series of successful gestures" which is shortly
followed by the "short-winded elations of men" (2). Nick's practice of pairing paradoxical statements generates a sense of unaccountable disjointedness.

Nick also frequently takes a single object or image and uses it to act as a vehicle for dissimilar emotional or thematic points of view. Carraway uses martial imagery on the first page of the novel when he remarks that he has been the "victim of a few veteran bores" (1), and later when he comments about his participation "in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War" (3). This imagery is lighthearted and humorous, but when Nick describes the limitations of his tolerance in preparation to praising Jay's "heightened sensitivity to the promise of life" (2), he employs martial imagery in a fashion that demands to be taken seriously. "When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (2). Nick's various states of consciousness are also demonstrated in the contrasting tones of his prose. Nick deals with an issue humorously on one occasion, and then considers the same subject seriously and intensely in a subsequent passage. Carraway makes little jokes about his tolerance by confessing that he "feigned sleep" to avoid the "intimate revelations" of "wild, unknown men" (1). Then, however, he shocks the reader by bluntly stating that
his toleration has limits. The "secret griefs" of the college confessions combine with the "turbulent riot" of Gatsby's heart without any tiresome transition. The two elements are separated only by the qualification that Nick's tolerance has a limit that was reached during his stay in the East, although Jay was exempt from this reaction.

Arthur Mizener suggests that by employing Nick Carraway as a first person narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, Scott Fitzgerald was able for the first time in his career to keep the two sides of his nature clearly separated, that of the "Middle-Western rimalchio" and the "spoiled priest" who disapproved of but grudgingly admired him. Mizener contends that a great deal of the novel's color and subtility comes from the constant play of Nick's judgment and feeling over the events. Carraway uses at least four different sensibilities as he examines his stay in the East. At times his point of view is that of the "romantic poet" who believes the young can fulfill their dreams by creating the lives they imagine. Originally Nick confesses that he is "afraid of missing something" (1) if he criticizes too quickly, and he thinks that by reserving judgment he can create an atmosphere of "infinite hope" (1). At other times, Carraway is the "satiric priest" who recognizes the shallowness of dreams and those who attempt
to realize them. His condescending attitude toward the unsought confidences he shared in while at college depicts this attitude. The position of the "satiric priest" is fundamentally untenable since it denies any romantic possibilities that may actually exist. Nick also assumes the role of the "historically conscious poet" who creates a past to go along with the past that he imagines. Shortly after he arrives in the East, Carraway claims to be an "original settler" by virtue of directing a man to West Egg. Nick's stance as a "pathfinder" is completely fictitious, but it makes his uncomfortable situation in his new surroundings easier to endure. The fourth point of view from which Carraway views the action is that of the "historically conscious priest" who sees the past as an unembellished reality. This pose is displayed when Nick shockingly reveals Jay Gatsby's real past as the son of Henry Catz and the pupil of Dan Cody. By using several different points of view to tell his story, Nick suggests the complexity of the world in which he is caught, and the shifting and complex nature of his consciousness. Much of the novel's meaning is derived from Carraway's constant movement between the multiple positions from which he views the events that he chooses to relate.

*The Great Gatsby* contains numerous patterns which function to provide fuller characterization, shape the
reader's attitude toward events and personalities, and create and control unity and emphasis. These patterns are manifested in the repetition of dialogue, gesture, and detail. Fitzgerald commented that he took a special pride in having written a novel that was a "consciously artistic achievement" and "intricately patterned." The first three chapters of the novel present the primary settings and social groupings on three different evenings. Nick records the events of a dinner and strained conversation at the Buchanan's house, a party and violent argument at Myrtle's New York apartment, and finally the unruly behavior of the guests at one of Gatsby's dinner parties. Carraway employs the similar social function of an evening gathering to compare and contrast the central characters in the novel.

Nick calls the reader's attention to his habit of patterning.

Reading over what I have written so far, I see that I have given the impression that the events of three nights several weeks apart were all that absorbed me. On the contrary . . . they absorbed me infinitely less than my personal affairs (56).

Carraway is aware that he is not presenting the facts in a realistic fashion. Whether or not the distortion of the events is conscious, Nick's habit of patterning and his
ordering of the experience reveal something about the working of his mind. One of the effects of the repetition of events and detail is the sense that Carraway is attempting to bring his experiences on Long Island into a sharper focus. Michael Millgate notes that Nick's technique of writing is largely cinematic. He attains "economy, speed, and tautness" by building up the narrative through scenes, "cutting abruptly from one scene to another, using the flashback, and creating a total pattern through the recurrent phrases, scenes, situations, and images."

"The tension created by Carraway's prose, the multiple sensibilities from the events are viewed, the intricate patterns, and the cinematic technique are not consciously infused by Nick into his writing. These stylistic characteristics are all integral parts of form which Carraway uses to tell his story, that of the dramatic monologue. The form itself accounts for the poetic quality of the work since the dramatic monologue is traditionally a poetic medium. Carraway cannot be seen as consciously plotting the structure of The Great Gatsby since he is recording the story as it simultaneously unfolds to him, but it is only natural that he continually returns to incidents that are central to the mystery he is attempting to unravel.

Nick uses the genre of the novel for the vehicle of his dramatic monologue, not because he has foreseen its
suitability to the story he is telling, but because the narrative he reveals demands the novel as its form. It is not unusual for an eyewitness to record the actions of a protagonist, and by so doing, come to a more complete understanding of both the subject of his scrutiny and himself through an imaginative sharing of the protagonist's experience. Since the imagination is fundamental in such an account, the factual or empirical aspect of the protagonist's life becomes interpreted in accord with the narrator's understanding of it. What really happened becomes elusive, and the narrator's perception of what occurred gains paramount importance. Since Carraway must imagine much of what he describes, it is natural that Gatsby as a character does not appear realistic. In The Great Gatsby, Nick does not merely document facts, but also adds an understanding of the action which Gatsby himself could not provide.\textsuperscript{15}

Carraway, however, uses the novel as the form of his narrative as more than simply a mode of expressing his imaginative observations of Gatsby. As Nick writes, he not only records his perceptions of Gatsby, but also reacts to them in the present. Traditionally, the narrative stream in Western culture have been divided into factual and fictional modes normally labelled "history" and "romance." These streams have reunited in the novel, which is a conscious and sophisticated attempt to combine the fictional and factual
elements. It is imperative that Nick employ the novel as the form of his narrative, because the genre's very nature allows him to remain poised between the ideal represented by Jay's dream, and the evident reality manifested in the life style of Gatsby, Tom Buchanan and Eastern society in general. Nick can simultaneously hold these conflicting elements in opposition to one another without being forced to commit himself to either of them. In effect, the novel is a "single window" (4) through which Carraway can witness and probe the multiplicity of life.
Notes to Chapter One


2 John Fraser, "Dust and Dreams and The Great Gatsby," ELH, 32, No. 4 (December, 1965), 556.


5 Westbrook, 80.

6 Westbrook, 78-9.


8 Elmore, pp. 135-6.

9 Elmore, p. 135.


16 Scholes and Kellogg, p. 82.
Chapter Two

Unlike Fitzgerald's earlier novels, _The Great Gatsby_ is consistently related through a first person point of view as the author has Nick Carraway tell the entire story. It is therefore necessary that Nick introduce himself. This is accomplished in the short prologue that precedes Carraway's recounting of his actual experiences on Long Island. It is important to understand that two different periods of time must be considered when examining the novel. The first four paragraphs postdate all of the action that is narrated throughout the rest of _The Great Gatsby_. The subsequent chapters explain Nick's adventures in the East until he returns to the Middle-West. The prologue is largely used to express Carraway's reactions to those experiences right up to the time he had sat down to write.¹ Since Nick reveals his narrative looking back into time, his present point of view shades the past with a morbid tone that intensifies the events.² He recalls that Jay "turned out all right at the end; it was what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust float in the wake of his dreams" (2) that has generated his own disillusionment.

While the prologue postdates all of the novel's action, it also antedates all of the events that Nick chooses to record since it is the first thing that he writes. Carraway, therefore, cannot be expected to reflect his final
feelings about his entire experience in East and West Egg in the opening statements of his narrative. Nick recalls that Gatsby "represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (2). The present tense that is employed in writing "I have" indicates that Carraway's feelings concerning Jay are reflected in the very moment he records the statement. His judgment of Gatsby at this point, however, is not indicative of his feelings about Jay at the conclusion of the novel. By the actual process of writing the novel, Nick is led to a greater understanding of what he witnessed in the East. Since this is true, it is necessary that narrator's grasp of the meaning of the experiences is incomplete in the prologue.

Nick begins his narrative by remembering some suggestions that his father had given him in his youth.

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone . . . just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had" (1).

The distance between the time Nick received the advice and the time which he recalls it seems to be a great one if the tone of the passage is used as a guideline. Carraway, only thirty-two years old, apparently feels that he has aged or matured remarkably since the point at which he received the
counseling. Immediately establishing his intimacy with his father, Nick explains that they have "always been unusually communicative in a reserved way" (1). Having given himself a basis from which he can examine his Eastern experience, Nick candidly reinforces his father's opinion by "snobbishly" repeating that "a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth" (1). Carraway is still "turning over" (1) the paternal recommendation, even now "afraid of missing something" (1) if he forgets his father's words. While these observations reveal Nick as believing he has a surplus of the fundamental decencies, they also depict him as possessing a compulsive and sympathetic curiosity about life.

Carraway asserts that "to reserve all judgments" is ultimately "a matter of infinite hope" (1). This affirmation has opened up many "curious natures" to Nick while also making him "the victim of not a few veteran bores" (1). The tone of his prose reveals a sarcastic and condescending attitude toward the "secret griefs" that came to his attention during the confessions of "wild, unknown men" (1) he listened to at college. The supposedly "intimate revelations" (1) were generally "plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppression" (1). Despite his apparent scorn reflected in his attempts to "feign sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity" (1) in order to avoid such confronta-
tions, Nick is made the willing victim of his commrade's intimacies because of his conscious tendency to withhold judgment. There is also an interesting irony concealed within Carraway's attitude toward the confessions. Throughout *The Great Gatsby*, Nick maintains a certain confessional tone indicating that he wishes he would have acted a little differently while living in West Egg. In spite of his precautions to be honest with Jordan Baker, Nick still hurts her feelings causing him to feel somewhat guilty. Carraway's intimate revelations, like those of the students at Yale, also contains obvious suppressions that are only brought to light by Nick's considerable mental struggle.

After boasting about his tolerance, Carraway comes to the admission that it is limited in its scope.

> When I came back from the East last autumn
> I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform at a sort of moral attention forever;
> I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart.
> Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction (2).

This rather angry and bitter statement comes as a shock to the reader after Nick's whimsical treatment of his days at college. The desire for moral censure and withdrawal is representative of Carraway's effort to symmetrically crystallize reality. While this may make experience easier to
deal with, it seems dramatically opposed to his desire to "reserve all judgments" (1).

At this point in the narrative, Nick begins to examine the character of Jay Gatsby. Carraway believes that his neighbor embodied "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness" (2) that Nick had neither witnessed before, nor does he expect to find embodied in anyone else. In spite of his attraction to Jay, Carraway remarks that the time he spent in the East "temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (2). Nick, however, is now ready to rekindle his interest in mankind as he attempts to re-examine and sort out his experiences.

Carraway's exposition now shifts back in time to the spring of 1922 when he decided to leave the home of his "prominent well-to-do" (2) Middle Western family. In order to establish himself in a bond business, Nick makes what he thinks is a permanent move to the East. This move is partially inspired by his participation in the "delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War" (3), which has left him restless and discontent with life in the Midwest. He now considers his home to be "the ragged edge of the universe" (3). In spite of this dissatisfaction with rural life, Nick goes to Long Island. Instead of taking a "practical" room in New York City, he decides to live in the
country. This represents an attempt on Nick's part to re-create the atmosphere which he insists he is trying to escape. Carraway yields to his desire for the "widelawns" and "friendly trees" provided by West Egg, which is consistent with his concept of nature at the beginning of the novel. He seems to want to enjoy the benefits of nature without cultivating a genuine understanding of it. The Nature which Nick initially observes appears to have a rather spurious and hallucinatory order. Stimulated by the sunshine, Carraway imagines "great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies" (4). While depicting Nature as somewhat uncontrolled and artificial, Carraway's comment reveals his own romantic readiness to view things as exceeding the possibilities of life.

Throughout the novel, Nick is very sensitive to his feelings of loneliness. After providing a stranger with directions, Carraway's sense of belonging in his new environment is intensified. "I was lonely no longer. I was a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler" (4). In this state of mind, Nick reveals his fascination for Midas, Morgan, and Maecenas, connoisseurs of art and wealth whose histories promise to unfold "shining secrets" (4). There is something wistful in this recollection by Carraway, which contains a note of disappointment with the memory of a time
before he became disillusioned with life on Long Island.

Nick takes special care to meticulously describe East Egg and the less fashionable West Egg. Commenting that "their physical resemblance must be a source of perpetual confusion to the gulls that fly overhead" (5), Carraway also notices that the inhabitants of the two areas insist on their "dissimilarity in every particular" (5). Nick's observation demonstrates the dilemma established by point of view. The birds, who see reality from a detached, omniscient position are able to see the similarity of the two Eggs. Because the residents can only view their society in fragmented parts they perceive reality disjointedly.

Nick visits Tom and Daisy shortly after arriving in the East. In the process of depicting the Buchanan's, Carraway reveals his own character which is romantic and sarcastic, while capable of appreciating wealth and elegance. There is a poetic quality in the prose Nick uses to describe Tom's Colonial mansion.

The lawn started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens -- finally when it reach the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run. The front was broken by a line of French windows, glowing now with reflected gold and wide open to the warm windy afternoon (6-7).

Carraway, however, is also capable of exhibiting an ex-
tremely sarcastic and exaggerated tone filled with off-handed familiarity as he presents himself as more of a provincial than he really is. Nick describes the "enormous couch" on which Daisy and Jordan are "bouyed up as though upon an anchored balloon" (8), and then proceeds to depict Miss Baker as "the balancing girl," nervously maintaining an absurd posture with her chin raised as if "the object she was balancing had obviously tottered" (9). Carraway's mocking attitude toward the young ladies' poses is reinforced when he chooses to retell Daisy's ridiculous story about "the butler's nose" (14). In the middle of this anecdote, however, Nick's consciousness shifts.

For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened -- then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk (14).

Carraway's romantic sensibilities have been dramatically reasserted, triggered only by a ray of light. His ultra-sensitivity to his cousin's voice increases as her charming voice now tells the story of her growing callousness and sophistication with "breathless, thrilling words" (15). As soon as she stops talking the spell is broken, and Nick is able to detect "the basic insincerity of what she had said" (18). This skepticism is characteristic of another altera-
tion of Carraway's psychic perception.

After denying rumors that he was to have married a Midwestern girl, Nick drives home "confused and a little dismusted" (20) by what he has witnessed while in East Egr. Filled with sarcasm, he comments that the fact that Tom 
"'had some woman in New York' was really less surprising than that he had been depressed by a book" (21). Restless from the events of the evening, Nick decides to take a walk and sees Jay Gatsby for the first time. His neighbor creates an encompassing romantic atmosphere by merely extending his hand toward a green dock light and then mysteriously vanishing. This causes a transition in Carraway from cynical humor to romanticism as he is left in the "unquiet darkness" (22) contemplating his loneliness. During his self-introduction and visit to the Buchanan's home, many facets of Nick's consciousness are exhibited which may be compared to his state of mind at the conclusion of the narrative.

Through a "matter of chance Carraway has "rented a house in one of the strangest communities in North America" (4). Poised between the worlds represented by the Buchanan's and Gatsby, Nick's environment is a continual source of tension. While attending Myrtle Wilson's party in New York City, Carraway writes:

I wanted to get out and walk eastward toward
the park through the soft twilight, but each time I tried to go I became entangled in some wild, strident argument which pulled me back, as if with ropes, into my chair. Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life (36).

Nick is at the same time both an observer and a participant in the action. Capable of distinguishing the beauty and the vibrant glow of the East, he also has the capacity to recognize the greed and irresponsibility of its inhabitants. Finding his impressions of Long Island mixed, Carraway already desires to escape the macabre surroundings. He realizes, however, that he is already too deeply involved in the events to do so.

It is not only Nick's cultural environment that he views from seemingly opposed points of view. As previously noted, when he arrives in West Egg Carraway's perception of nature is generally artificial. He is also capable of describing his milieu quite naturally as in the scene in which he comes across Gatsby as he is taking a walk. The bright sky, the wind, and the frogs that are "full of life" (21) suggest an unadulterated nature that seems eerie and inexplicable in contrast to the leaves which grow in "great bursts" as if they were in a fast movie.  

When Carraway travels to New York with Gatsby, he de-
scribes the city as he is about to enter it.

The city seen from the Queensboro bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world (69).

This statement comes as somewhat of a shock to the reader since the last time Nick was entertained in New York he left Myrtle's party only to end up half-drunk, reading a newspaper in the lower level of the Pennsylvania Station. At the moment he crosses the Queensboro bridge with Jay, however, the events of the drunken debauch seem to have been erased from Carraway's consciousness. Similarly, the Jay Gatsby who sits by Nick's side as he approaches the city appears to have little connection with the Jay Gatsby whose parties lead to irresponsible behavior typified by Owl Eye's automobile accident.

The prose that begins Carraway's narrative is filled with contradictions. Nick comments that Gatsby represented everything for which he has an "uneffected scorn" (2), but also maintains that Jay "turned out all right at the end" (3). Carraway does not care if conduct is founded on "hard rock" (2) or "wet marshes" (2), but still calls for the world to be "in uniform at a sort of moral attention forever" (2). Ironically, the "either marshes or rocks" sensibility of his thinking allows no room for Jay's conduct which he feels is founded on a "fairy's wing". Nick
boasts of his tolerance, but before Tom Buchanan can utter a word Carraway recalls that "there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts" (7). Coming to Long Island to pull "so much fine health . . . out of the young breath-giving air" (4), Nick's motive to make money is kept in the background. These are just a few of the many examples of the contradictory nature of Carraway's writing, but the inconsistencies are frequently concealed by the "suavity" of his prose.  

As the novel begins, Nick Carraway introduces himself as he sits down to re-examine and record his experiences in the East. His uneven tone and prose style compounded by the contradictions in the narrative suggest that Nick is writing in an attempt to know and conclude, not out of knowledge possessed or conclusions reached. Because of the fragmented quality of his environment and the complexity of his sensibilities, Carraway continually undergoes shifts in consciousness. This does not, however, preclude Nick from appearing as a sensitive and intelligent young man seeking a standard by which he can measure his life.
Notes to Chapter Two


3Elmore, p. 132.


5Westbrook, 83.


8Samuels, 790.
Chapter Three

Tom Buchanan, a Protestant who is descended from an "enormously wealthy" (6) family of Anglo-Saxon stock, is part of the tradition of the American aristocracy. Tom's most impressive qualities are his tremendous physical strength and his unlimited financial resources which allow him to generate an oppressive, arrogant assertiveness.

"'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!" (7). Buchanan's "enormous power" (7) seems to dominate any perception by which one chooses to view him. Tom, "one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven" (6), is a "sturdy" man with a "hard mouth" and "arrogant" (7) eyes. This posture gives him "the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward" (7). Buchanan's physical composition is made more ominous, since it is coupled with a psychological nature that is characterized by traces of "contempt" (7). It is a "cruel body" that is "capable of enormous leverage" (7).

Tom is first observed by Nick Carraway as he stands immovable on the front porch of his Georgian mansion. Buchanan's house, while representing his wealth and ultra-conservatism, is also juxtaposed to his oppressive immobility. The mansion, "glowing . . . with reflected gold" (7) of the sun, manifests a variety of different motions.
The lawn "started at the beach and ran toward the front door" (6). Inside, a "breeze blew through the room" (8) animating every object except an "enormous couch." Everything remains in motion until Tom "shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room" (8). This seemingly innocent act typifies Buchanan's character. With a deft physical movement he frustrates the vitality of the atmosphere he inhabits. Here the action is insignificant and apparently harmless, but it is this sort of general reaction by Tom that precipitates a large portion of the chaos throughout the novel. Possessing unlimited physical strength, he lacks the physical grace to properly channel it. Commanding a boundless financial reservoir, Buchanan is deficient of the moral and spiritual temperament to enjoy what wealth affords.

Tom believes himself born to lead civilization, but as a debilitated country squire he is both bored and restless. All of the major figures in the novel are described as being "restless," but an overwhelming majority of these references are ascribed to Buchanan. The word restless suggests both the randomness and purposelessness that predominate his life. At the apex of the social scale, Tom should feel a sense of security and moral responsibility, but instead he is rendered culturally impotent with the exception of primitive physical responses. He escapes the
burden of self-awareness and masks his cultural inadequacy by taking refuge in rhetoric about lost values and ideals. Buchanan's restlessness coupled with the fact that he is nibbling "at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart" (21) indicate that he is not completely contented with his present position. Unfortunately, even stale ideas confuse Tom. He cannot quite remember whether "the earth's going to fall into the sun . . . or . . . just the opposite" (118). This lack of understanding of the philosophies he adheres to, however, does not deter him from asserting the supremacy of the white race because its "all scientific stuff" (13), proved beyond a doubt to his simple mind. The "pathetic" (14) range of Buchanan's mental scope may render him a moral adolescent. Shielded by his wealth and bigotry, Tom is able to look wistfully to the past to dreams that are as immature and stultified as his moral being.

The life which Buchanan leads appears to confine him as though the elegance of his environment were an elaborate prop that he is ill suited to use.

Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body -- he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat (?).
Tom's discontentment with his situation is demonstrated by his unmotivated traveling. He and Daisy had apparently "spent a year in France for no particular reason, and drifted here and there unrestfully" (6). Nick Carraway ultimately concludes that Buchanan is somewhat of an anachronism and would continue to "drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game" (6). Tom, "a great, big, hulking physical specimen" (12) who has both the power and desire to manipulate people "as though he were moving a checker to another square" (12), seeks relief from his social anxiety and impotence by entering into an affair with Myrtle Wilson.

Buchanan naively believes that his wealth and social stature will keep the world of his mistress separated from the world of his wife. The telephone, however, creates a link between Myrtle and Tom, and its startling ring can stifle the domestic atmosphere until "all subjects" (16) vanish into the air. His relationship with Mrs. Wilson, which is compared to Jay's affair with Daisy, is characteristically based on her "perceptible vitality" (45) and her "surplus flesh" that she carries "sensuously" (25).

Buchanans reaction to his laison with Myrtle typically lacks any degree of sensitivity. He takes a sadistic pleasure in drawing attention to his social superiority.
when he teases her about giving "a letter of introduction" (33) to Chester MacKee, a third-rate photographer, so that he might enter Long Island society. When Myrtle presumes to insist upon her equality with Daisy by repeatedly chanting his wife's name, Tom quickly responds by breaking her nose with his open hand.

Buchanan's illicit affair with Mrs. Wilson is not the first such incident in his life. On his honeymoon, he became involved in a relationship with a chambermaid that also culminated violently.

Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night, and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers, too, because her arm was broken -- she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbra Hotel (78).

The automobile accident in this episode links Buchanan to the moral irresponsibility demonstrated by the drunken behavior of the people who caused the car accident at Jay Gatsby's first party. The girl, who shares Myrtle's lower class origins, is the one who suffers the physical brutality caused by Tom's carelessness.

The capricious and sensual aspects of his extramarital affairs undercut Buchanan's quest of any romantic vision he chooses to pursue. Although Tom seems wistful at times, a quality toward which Carraway always feels a little tenderly, it is a "harsh, defiant wistfulness" (7). While he
imagines that he is participating in bold, romantic adventures, Buchanan only achieves degenerated enterprises that afford immediate sexual satisfaction. Tom chooses Myrtle as a mistress because she is capable of gratifying his physical desires, rather than any emotional involvement she might afford.

Tom's self-imposed ignorance and his arrogance make his position absurdly irresponsible. It is quite natural that the reader's sympathy is aligned with Jay when Gatsby and Buchanan confront each other. The compassion that Jay merits is partially generated in the scene in which Tom cruelly snubs him. Buchanan and Sloan callously stand up Gatsby after the girl Sloan is with has invited Jay to dinner. Tom takes a sadistic pleasure in ridiculing Gatsby by emphasizing the social distance between East and West Egg. Later, during their struggle to possess Daisy, Buchanan again attacks Jay through his cultural position. "I'll be damned if I see how you got within a mile of her unless you brought the groceries to the back door" (132). Confessing that he occasionally goes off on a "spree" (132), Tom unsuccessfully gropes for a "paternal note" (131) as he explains the disentigration of old and valued social standards.

"Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermar-
riage between black and white" (130).

Making the "transition from libertine to prig . . . complete" (131), this "impassioned gibberish" allows Buchanan to deceive himself into believing that he is "standing alone on the last barrier of civilization" (130). As A. E. Elmore suggests, if "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (130) can win Daisy's love, then Toms worst fears of a "cultural Armageddon" are confirmed. 4

Music from the marriage taking place downstairs in the ballroom comments ironically on the confrontation scene. Tom, with a promiscuous and illicit past, argues to preserve the sanctity of marriage when he is faced with the possibility of losing Daisy. Ultimately, however, Buchanan's appeal for his wife to side with him is primarily based on his physical verity rather than his charges against Gatsby. 5 With a "husky tenderness in his tone" (133), Tom recalls the time that he carried Daisy down from the Punch Bowl to keep her shoes dry. At this point she confessed that she loved her husband, and leaves Jay powerless against the assault of Buchanan's words which seem "to bite physically into Gatsby" (133).

When he returns from New York, Tom appears to exult as much in having crushed Jay as he does in having regained his wife. Buchanan responds typically when he sees an accident on the highway. "Wreck . . . . that's good."
Wilson'll have a little business at last" (138). Ironically, this statement follows his pious accusation against Gatsby's brutal treatment of Tom's friend, Walter Chase, in a bootlegging incident. After learning that it is Myrtle Wilson who has been killed in the accident, Buchanan loses his cruel self-assurance when for the second time that day "hot whips of panic" overwhelm and confuse his "simple mind" (125). Hearing a "low husky sob," Nick Carraway sees that tears are "overflowing down his face" (142). Tom is generally callous and unable to sympathize with the predicament of others when their dreams are being shattered. However, when his self-interests are at stake he is capable of displaying a wealth of emotion. Buchanan, like Gatsby, is really quite sentimental. Tom's sentimentality is based on a depraved self-pity that is employed to condone his most criminal acts in his own eyes as long as his deeds are not "imputable."

After "conspiring" (146) with Daisy, Buchanan directs George Wilson to Gatsby's residence. Tom does this knowing that the garage attendant plans to revenge his wife's death for which he feels Jay is responsible. In effect, Buchanan is guilty of premeditated murder, and Wilson is merely the instrument he utilizes to commit the crime. After displaying this moral insensibility, Tom attempts to arouse Nick's sympathy. Claiming to have been the victim of an unusual
"share of suffering" (180), Buchanan creates the illusion that he was doing his civic duty by contributing to Jay's destruction.

He broke off defiantly. "What if I told him? That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's, but he was a tough one. He ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car" (180).

His new identity as a policeman of society's morals is as ill suited to him as his other visions and dreams. Characteristically, Tom is still "defiant," wrong in what he claims to be the facts, and insistent on his own privileged superiority.

Buchanan, while unconsciously undergoing shifts in psychological perception, remains morally impervious throughout the novel. At the conclusion of the narrative, Tom is still "aggressive" and "restless" (179), confusedly insisting upon scientific principles that bestow him with "a second sight" (172). Carraway seems to shake Buchanan's hand out of frustration and fatigue rather than as a token of forgiveness.

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused . . . .

I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for suddenly I felt as though I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace -- or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons --
rid of my provincial squeamishness forever (181).

Tom's corrupt and eternally immature sensibilities have transformed a portion of "the green breast of the new world" (182) into a tensiled show place of social snobbery. The splendor and opulence of Buchanan's world is exceeded only by his "blind malice." A "prig" by upbringing, but a "libertine" by nature, Tom appears to be destined to blunder carelessly through life unaware of the tension between these two poles.

Tom's last act in the novel is to disappear into a jewelry store to either buy a pair of cuff buttons or a pearl necklace. The cuff-link image recalls Wolfsheim's intolerable inhumanity and corruption. Buchanan has already given Daisy a pearl necklace. The new acquisition must either represent careless and undirected wealth, or else it is being purchased for a new mistress. In either case, Tom lacks the moral vision to recognize his own degenerate illusion and lacks the sensitivity to create any valid dreams.
Notes to Chapter Three


3 Messenger, 406.


Chapter Four

When Daisy first appears in *The Great Gatsby*, Nick describes her as one of "two young women . . . bouyed up" on a sofa "as though upon an anchored balloon" (7). In spite of the sarcasm that is manifested in this observation by Carraway, the reader is aware of Nick's confession that he "had no sight into Daisy's heart" (6), and his cousin appears rather mysterious to him. Indicating that she has at times felt the same restlessness which afflicts her husband, Daisy claims that the move to East Egg is "permanent" (6). Lounging in her white dress amid the gentle motion of her elegant surroundings, she seems to be at ease in the elite social world of Long Island. However, when Daisy remarks that she is "p-paralyzed with happiness" (9), the hesitancy in her voice and the inappropriateness of the comment imply that she is frozen in a reality that is neither happy nor charming.

The grace and refinement of Daisy's environment is emphasized by the light of the "last sunshine" which "fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face" (14). Nick also notices that her "face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth" (9). Daisy's most intriguing and compelling attraction is the quality of her voice.
It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. . . . there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her had found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered "Listen," a promise that she had done gay exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next house (9-10).

Daisy's voice that is emblematic of her romantic façade, like her dreams, promises past and future fulfillment while leaving the present barren of any satisfaction. Her romanticism is without reality and only represents an effort to "alchemize" the dreariness of an unsuccessful life into an "esoteric privilege of the sophisticated." This attitude is reflected by the coolness of her "impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire" (12). In spite of a "stirring warmth" (14) that seems to emanate from Daisy's speech, Nick comments that the "instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said" (18). Her self-acclaimed cynicism, disillusionment, and sophistication merely constitute a worldly role that is maintained by the effect produced by her voice.

As Daisy looks to her past wistfully, she appears to be trying to recapture the romantic adventure of her youth and its Southern gentility. "Our girlhood . . . . Our beautiful white ____" (20). Her current reality offers
Daisy only boredom and restlessness, leaving her to ask despairingly "What do people plan" (12)? When she looks to the future, Daisy finds little consolation. "What shall we do with ourselves this afternoon . . . and the day after that, and the next thirty years" (118)?

Daisy's condition is epitomized by her banal efforts which nevertheless are continually frustrated. "I always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it" (12). This act is superficially dramatic, but in reality it is the restless preoccupation of a vapid and childish mind. Daisy exists both in, and as, an emotional vacuum. It is not surprising that Jay Gatsby employs "contrived" and "obvious" sentimentalism in attempting to appeal to Daisy. It is also not unexpected that Jay's romantic technique is not lost on the bored and simpleminded Daisy.

Daisy's involvement with Gatsby exhibits characteristics that are in keeping with her shallow nature. At the time of their reunion, Daisy's voice sounds an "artificial note" (87), and she appears "frightened but graceful" (87). Within an hour, however, she is ready to renew her relationship with Jay, and her "throat, full of aching, grieving beauty, told only of her unexpected joy" (90). The spontaneity of emotion suggested by the use of the word "unexpected" is made somewhat suspect because of the complex system of go-betweens used to arrange her meeting with
Jay and her immediate willingness to be at least psychologically unfaithful to Tom. When Jay, in the motley style of a harlequin, absurdly displays his shirts "in many-colored disarray" (93), Daisy superficially responds in a dramatically sobbing and muffled voice that they are "such beautiful shirts" (93). It seems unlikely that shirts, even beautifully monogrammed shirts, could generate such excitement from Daisy since she is already bored with the elegant wealth of East Egg. Later, after the rain stops and the sun appears, Daisy whispers to Jay "I'd like to just get one of those pink clouds and put you in it and push you around" (95). The immaturity of her whimsical desire to push Jay around in a cloud is reflected by the sentence's monosyllables and childlike directness. These incidents make Gatsby's apparent success with Daisy questionable and recall Nick Carraway's earlier thoughts when he had visited the Buchanan mansion. "I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said" (17).

The fact that Daisy is uneasy in Gatsby's environment is made evident by her behavior at his second party. Although this party is very similar to the first one, the affair is given an absurd and exaggerated quality by subtly presenting it from Daisy's point of view. Gatsby's first party was seen from Nick's impressionable point of view, but now Carraway lingers near his cousin, and he is more
interested in observing and recording her reaction than participating in the festivities. Nick comments that the entire evening had a "peculiar quality of oppressiveness" (105).

I was looking at it [the party] again, through Daisy's eyes. It was invariably saddening to look through new eyes at things upon which you have expended your own powers of adjustment (105).

Only two weeks before, Nick had been amused by what he had witnessed at Gatsby's house. Now, when seen through Daisy's eyes, the events "turned septic on the air" (107).

She looked around after a moment and told me the girl was "common but pretty," and I knew that except for the half-hour she'd been alone with Catsby she wasn't having a good time (107).

The embarrassing quality of Jay's gauche surroundings and Daisy's condescending attitude toward them, foreshadow her ultimate betrayal of Gatsby. She does, however, feel an attraction to the romantic possibilities present in Jay's environment that are totally absent from her own life.

After all, in the very casualness of Gatsby's party there were romantic possibilities totally absent from her world. What was it up there in the song that seemed to be calling her back inside? What would happen now in the dim, incalculable hours? Perhaps some unbelievable guest would arrive . . . who with . . . one moment of magical encounter,
would blot out these five years of unwavering devotion (110).

In Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan sees a means of fulfilling dreams that she thought she had left behind her several years earlier in Louisville.

Characteristically, Daisy's romantic desires are demonstrated in a manner that lacks sensitivity and depth of understanding. Daisy walks into Jay's garden and sees "a gorgeous, scarcely human orchid of a woman" (106), who is in the process of slowly being drawn into a kiss with her director. This actress appears to be very lovely according to Daisy's standards. Daisy's judgment is not tempered by the actress' lack of substance. The "ghostly celebrity" (106) is committed to nothing more than the unreality of her own image on the "silver screen." Perhaps it is Jay's "unbroken series of successful gestures" (2) that Daisy finds appealing and representative of an escape from reality. What Daisy fails to understand is that Gatsby's gestures are the reflex of an aspiration toward the possibilities of life and entirely removed from the ephemeral, vacant images of romance that she imagines.

Part of Daisy's frustrations arise from her inability to remain uncompromisingly faithful to her desires. An aura of insecurity pervades all of her actions. When Daisy
attends Gatsby's party, she explains that she is handing out green tickets that she will later redeem with kisses. Although this incident is a relatively minor event in the narrative, Daisy's lack of concern about developing genuine affection is indicative of her willingness to sacrifice herself for security rather than experience the enjoyment of real love. This is, after all, exactly what Daisy did when she married Tom Buchanan.

She was feeling the pressure of the world outside. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately -- and the decision must be made by some force -- of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality -- that was close at hand (151).

In spite of the affection that her tears over Jay's letter imply, Daisy watched the letter and the dreams it represented "coming to pieces like snow" (77). The following day she married Tom "without so much as a shiver" (78).

After the reunion between Jay and Daisy, Nick Carraway decides to revisit the Buchanan's home. When Nick enters their living room, the appearance of Daisy and Jordan Baker vividly brings to mind the first time Nick had called on his cousin. Once again the two women "lay upon an enormous couch, like silver idols weighing down their own white dresses against the singing breeze of the fan" (115). However, the glittering exterior of their elegant façade seems to be crumbling. The breeze, the sofa, and the white
dresses that the ladies are wearing were all commented on by Nick during his previous visit, but at that time he had also displayed an adept sensitivity to the animation and vitality of the scene. In spite of the similarities between the two scenes, there is presently a quality of oppressiveness in Nick's observations, and his earlier sarcasm has now acquired a rather cynical tone. And as Tom Buchanan talks with Myrtle Wilson on the hall phone, Daisy remarks that "We can't move" (115). Despite her affair with Gatsby, Daisy has remained physically and spiritually immobilized. The personal intimacy that she shared with Jay five years before in Louisville has apparently eluded her forever, and now she is rendered eternally frozen in the crystallized reality of Tom's world. The vague and obscure quality of the character of Pammy, the Buchanan's daughter, make Daisy and Tom appear more barren and sterile than if they had remained childless. The distance between Daisy and her daughter is evidenced when Daisy addresses her as "Pleased precious" (116).

Daisy may actually believe that she can flee Tom's world and that she will ultimately reward Jay for acting as the vehicle of her escape. Jay, however, makes demands upon Daisy that she is too weak to fulfill. When he insists that she maintain the stance of never having loved her husband, her support disintegrates before his eyes.
Oh you want too much! she cried to Gatsby.
"I love you now -- isn't that enough? I can't help what's past" (133).

After this, Daisy's "frightened eyes told that whatever intentions, whatever courage she had had, were definitely gone" (135). Tom can now appeal to Daisy by emphasizing his verility and by offering her a security that has been completely stripped away from Gatsby. "Tom has accomplished this by making Jay appear as "some kind of cheap sharper" (151).

Careless driving has already been associated with a moral carelessness. This idea is epitomized when Daisy runs down her husband's mistress after Tom and Jay's confrontation in New York. Daisy characteristically manifests her usual cowardice and is unable to face the consequences of her actions.

Well, first Daisy turned away from the woman toward the other car, and then she lost her nerve and turned back (145).

Daisy, seeking to protect herself, runs over a helpless woman and then refuses to stop the car. Daisy is then willing to let Jay, whom she had betrayed less than an hour earlier, assume the blame for her deed as she vanishes into her "rich house, into her rich, full life, leaving Gatsby -- nothing" (148).
Nick comments on the immorality of the Buchanan's.

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy -- they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness; or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made (180-1).

After the accident, Nick witnesses Tom's and Daisy's lifestyle, and he realizes that Daisy willingly chooses to remain a part of it as they appear to discuss stratagies at their kitchen table.

They weren't happy . . . and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said they were conspiring together (146).

Daisy shares Tom's callous selfishness, and she is incapable of realizing any dream that conflicts with her self-interests. Nick has witnessed the deterioration of their picture of wealth and elegance into a tableau of two people conspiring over ale and chicken. The illusion of what Daisy initially seemed to be and Jay's corresponding vision of her have been stripped away to show her as a self-indulgent, insecure society matron who is incapable of capturing the essence of her dreams.
Notes to Chapter Four


Chapter Five

Nick Carraway associates Jordan Baker physically and morally with the world that is represented by the Buchanans. In fact, when Nick first sees Jordan, she is "bouyed up" on a sofa with Daisy. Presented as being just as spiritually immobile as Nick's cousin, Jordan also embodies a quality of languidness.

She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless, and with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Kiss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me almost imperceptibly and then quickly tipped her head back again -- the object she was balancing had obviously tottered (8-9).

Nick's hyperbolic observation demonstrates his sense of humor, while the facetious tone and slap-dash familiarity embedded in this prose present him as more of a rural person than he really is. At the same time, the hyperbole, facetiousness, and humor in Nick's description of Jordan undercut her air of self-sufficiency. Carraway emphasizes her self-interest by conveying Jordan's insistence upon maintaining her social pose.

Jordan reveals that her character is somewhat conservative when she claims "like a young cadet" that she is "absolutely in training" (11). Since Jordan's entire
family is now represented by "one aunt about a thousand years old" (19), it is understandable that Nick represents her most personal connection in the narrative. In spite of the sarcasm that Nick employs when he describes her as balancing a tea cup on her chin, he also notices that she exhibits a quality of self-sufficiency. Jordan's "erect carriage" (11) and her commitment to training associate her with the "sort of moral attention" (2) that Nick confesses he admires. Nick is also capable of identifying with Jordan's apparent loneliness and rootlessness.

The Great Gatsby, however, depicts the deterioration of Carraway's attraction to Miss Baker, which largely results from the stultified quality of her aspirations and desires. It soon becomes obvious that Jordan's attempts to become self-sufficient are based on a brutal callousness. This is antithetical to the notion of the individual soul in search of self-knowledge that would necessarily be appealing to Nick. She displays a chilling distance and lack of human understanding when she calmly explains to Carraway that "'Tom's got some woman in New York" (15). She amplifies her lack of any intimate human contact or concern when she defends her statement by claiming that "I thought everybody knew" (15). Jordan is shockingly oblivious to the tragedy that could result from Tom's affair with Myrtle.
Miss Faker, who seemed to have mastered a certain hardy skepticism, was able to put this fifth quest's shrill metallic urgency out of mind (16).

Her oppressive egoism is demonstrated when she tells Nick about the circumstances surrounding Daisy's childhood.

I was flattered that she wanted to speak to me, because of all the older girls I admired her most. She asked me if I was going to the Red Cross and make bandages. I was. Well, then, would I ... (76).

In telling this story, Jordan uses "I" no less than fourteen times denoting that she is more interested in relating her own tale than rendering an account of Daisy's earlier life.

Nick believes that the "bored haughty face" that Jordan "turned toward the world concealed something" (58). He begins to suspect that when she holds his hand "impersonally" (42), yawns "gracefully" (53) in his face, or seeks intimacy in large parties, she is really attempting to conceal something and thereby gain an advantage over the people who surround her. Similarly, Nick suggests that Jordan is "incurably dishonest" (58), because "she wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage" (58). Although he thinks that her ascetic militancy suggests the absence of any real desire, Nick senses that she does have needs that have to be satisfied.
I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body (59).

In this fashion, she is able to embody the duality of character that is indicated by her name. "While capable of manifesting the excitement represented by the popular car, the Jordan "Playboy," she also feels "safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible" (58). Her moderate characteristics could be associated with the "Baker," a conservative electric car.  

As the narrative progresses, Jordan comes to be representative of the inverted standards of the East. Nick realizes that Miss Baker, "unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age" (136). However, Jordan is also repeatedly associated with Daisy, and Myrtle Wilson mistakes Jordan as Daisy when she sees her sitting in an automobile with Tom Buchanan. Jordan is not only physically and socially connected to Daisy, but she is also morally tied to her. The resemblance between the two women is partially developed by the use of the poor-driving motif that has already been established as an emblem of moral carelessness. Nick recalls that while Jordan was driving "she passed so close to some workman that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat" (59).
While this is a typically careless act, Jordan claims that she hates "careless people" (59). Believing that it "takes two to make an accident" (59), she feels that by associating with careful people that she can avoid the consequences of her irresponsible behavior. Jordan, also possessing the Buchanan's sense of restlessness, is a drifter whose "movements between hotels and clubs and private houses" (155) make her difficult to find.

Like Daisy and Tom, Jordan Baker makes very little progress in developing her moral character by the narrative's conclusion. After witnessing the disastrous confrontation between Tom and Jay, Jordan egoistically comments to Nick that "You weren't so nice to me last night" (155). Instead of displaying any concern over her friend's crumbling marriage or the moral irresponsibility manifested in her environment, Jordan typically focuses on her own limited situation. Jordan drifts through life protected by the mutability of her personal beliefs and a security that is founded on dishonesty. Nick visits Jordan once more before leaving the East in an attempt to leave all of his affairs in order.

She was dressed to play golf... her chin raised a little jauntily... When I had finished she told me without comment that she was engaged to another man. I doubted that... but I pretended to be surprised. For just a minute I wondered
if I wasn't making a mistake, then I thought it all over again quickly and got up to say goodbye (178-9).

While Nick was initially attracted to Jordan because of her conservative character, he is now forced to reject her because of her moral carelessness.

At the conclusion of their affair, it is Jordan who accuses Nick of being careless. It is true that Carraway's pride permitted him to believe that he could accept Jordan on her own irresponsible and cynical terms without facing the consequences of such an act. However, although Jordan may experience emotional pain because of their relationship, Carraway has desperately tried to prevent himself from injuring or misleading her. By rejecting Jordan, Nick is also repudiating what she represents. Jordan believed that she could maintain a hard and cool posture, remain exempt from the consequences of her actions, and still satisfy her every dream. While she is capable of sustaining her callous posture at the narrative's conclusion, she is unable to trap Nick in her moral irresponsibility.
Notes to Chapter Five


Chapter Six

Several minor figures in *The Great Gatsby* such as Meyer Wolfsheim and Dan Cody pursue their individual dreams. While their aspirations may be less significant than those of characters like Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway, they still reinforce and develop the major themes of the narrative. It is impossible to possess a complete understanding of Fitzgerald's novel without grasping the importance of the minor character's pursuits.

Meyer Wolfsheim, a "small, flat-nosed Jew" with a "large head" (69), maintains a rather grotesque appearance, but his physical and psychological deformities do not prevent him from attempting to manifest certain personal desires. While Daisy fondly remembers her youth spent in Louisville and Tom looks back on his football days at Yale, Wolfsheim recalls a past "full of memories" (70) as he wistfully preserves a sense of "the good old days."

"The old Metropole," brooded Mr. Wolfsheim gloomily. "Filled with faces dead and gone. Filled with friends gone now forever. I can't forget so long as I live the night they shot Rosy Rosenthal there" (70).

Wolfsheim's thoughts about the past are consistent with the pride he takes in his cuff-buttons, which are composed of the finest "specimens of human molars" (73).

Meyer Wolfsheim reflects the corruption that lies at
the heart of Jay Gatsby's dream. Wolfsheim, in fact, can be seen as a representation of the degenerated quality of the modern American legend. Nick Carraway is astounded when he learns that Meyer was "the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919" (74).

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 (74).

As long as Jay remains connected with Meyer's business as a source of wealth, Gatsby's own dreams that the money finances will always be morally stained.

Meyer Wolfsheim reflects the inverted values of the society to which he belongs. His poor judgment is indicative of the perception within an errant culture. He boasts to Nick that Jay Gatsby is "a man of fine breeding" (72), an "Oggsford" graduate, and a gentleman "who would never so much as look at a friend's wife" (73). He also believes that Jordan Baker is "a great sportswoman" (72) and that she would "never do anything that wasn't all right" (72). Wolfsheim's inaccurate and almost laughably inept perception of his cultural environment culminates when he mistakenly identifies Nick as a "business connection" (71).

Meyer's moral irresponsibility increases throughout the narrative and acquires a more serious tone. Ultimately, when Gatsby is murdered, "Wolfsheim seeks refuge from
the implications of Jay's death behind the closed doors of "The Swastika Holding Company." While wallowing in the sentimentalized emotions of the "sad time" (172), he recalls the first time he met Gatsby. Although these fond memories of Jay echo Meyer's tale about Rosy Rosenthal and the stories moral about duty to a friend, Wolfseheim refuses to attend Gatsby's funeral. His moral depravity is reflected by the perverted logic he uses to arrive at the conclusion that it is best to leave the dead alone.

Let us learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead. . . . After that my own rule is to let everything alone (173).

The tears that come to Meyer's eyes recall the tears that Tom coaxes himself into crying after Myrtle's death. Wolfseheim's self-induced, maudlin sentimentality and his perverted values connect him with the moral carelessness associated with the world of the Buchanans.

Dan Cody, "a product of the Nevada silver fields, of the Yukon, of every rush for metal since seventy-five" (100), is also a representative of the modern American legend. A dissipated pioneer, Cody bears the name of Buffalo Bill, the legendary hero of the Western frontier. While Cody pursued this dream, James Gatz adopts
the "pioneer debauchee" (101) as a surrogate father and ruthless educator. Physically "robust," but on the verge of "softmindedness," Dan Cody is seduced and possibly murdered by Ella Kaye after she had "played Madame de Maintemnon to his weakness" (101).

Henry Gatz, Jay's natural father, possesses his own dreams that he ardently pursues. After Gatsby's death, Henry consoles himself with the sordid lie of his son's success without forcing himself to confront the implications inherent in that death. Gatz's ignorance concerning the nature of his son's death is unexplainable considering that Jay was shot in his own backyard while swimming. After talking on the phone with Sloane, a Chicago gangster, Nick Carraway is forced to listen to Henry Gatz praise his son.

"He had a big future before him, you know. He was only a young man, but he had a lot of brain power here."

He touched his head impressively, and I nodded.

"If he'd lived, he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country" (169).

Without focusing on the immoral implications of Jay's life, Gatz absurdly seems to find vicarious pleasure in his son's superficial success. Henry is "a very solemn old man, very helpless and dismayed, bundled up in a long cheap ulster against a warm September day" (167-8), and provides an in-
teresting counterpoint to Nick Carraway who could be seen as vicariously taking satisfaction in Gatsby's romanticism.

Chester McKee, "a pale, feminine man" in the "'artistic game'" (30), echoes Jay's attempt to scale the social ladder of Long Island. If he "could get the entry" (33), Chester would like nothing better than to do more work on Long Island. Just as Gatsby's guests use him as a social stepping stone, Chester maintains his friendship with Myrtle Wilson to obtain a social advantage. It is true that Jay seeks a way into the society of East Egg, but he views the step as a means of securing Daisy's love. This is a very different thing from wanting Daisy's love in order to get into the Buchanans' social environment. However, McKee seems to want access to Long Island because it offers a method of achieving commercial wealth.5

Catherine, Myrtle Wilson's sister, is presented as a rather absurd character. She plucks her eyebrows and then draws them on again "at a more rakish angle" (30). Nature, however, makes efforts "toward the restoration of the old alignment" (30), giving a "blurred air" (30) to her face. In spite of her tawdry and cheap appearance, and her pretentious worldliness, Catherine is not without her own dreams. Her aspirations are illustrated when she is questioned at the inquest about Gatsby's death.

Catherine, who might have said anything,
didn't say a word. She showed a surprising amount of character about it too -- looked at the coroner with determined eyes under that corrected brow of hers, and swore that her sister was completely happy with her husband, that her sister had been into no mischief whatever (164).

Catherine's statement concerning her sister's domestic virtue becomes more and more of a reality to her until she "convinced herself of it," and the very suggestion of Myrtle being unfaithful to George "was more than she could endure" (164). However, when she persuades herself and the world of Myrtle's fidelity, Catherine distorts reality by reducing her sister's husband "to a man 'deranged by grief'" (164).

Even Ewing Klipspringer, an irresponsible boarder in Jay's house, has private ambitions. The "apotheosis of transiency," Klipspringer's desire is apparently to move from wealthy family to wealthy family in an effort to enjoy the benefits of money without having to earn it. The climax of his moral irresponsibility occurs when Ewing phones Nick in order to instruct him to forward a pair of tennis sneakers to his new address. When Carraway asks him to attend Gatsby's funeral, Klipspringer declines because of a prior commitment to be present at a "sort of picnic or something" (170). Because of his lack of responsibility and moral shabbiness, Ewing is appropriately chosen to
serenade Jay and Daisy with popular songs on the afternoon of their reunion. Klinspringer's mere presence ironically comments on the prospects of Daisy's and Jay's renewed affair.
Notes to Chapter Six


Chapter Seven

Just as Tom and Daisy Buchanan are associated with the wealth and elegance of East Egg, George and Myrtle Wilson are inexorably tied to the depressing condition of life in the "valley of ashes" (23). This area that lies just outside of New York City is a "desolate" land where "ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (23). Nothing is more characteristic of this "solemn dumping ground" (23) than the aura of obscurity that is produced by the absence of both color and light as "an impermeable cloud . . . screens . . . obscure operations from your sight" (23). The eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg that "look out of no face" (23) are emblematic of the encompassing despair that pervades the region.

Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away (23).

The valley of ashes can be seen as a representation of what the human situation may be reduced to during an era of exploitation and moral chaos. The bizarre advertisement that features Dr. Eckleburg's eyes may be interpreted as the remnant of a haunting force that set the land in motion,
and then either escaped or was consumed by what he had made.¹ Serving as one of the few religious references in the narrative, the sightless gaze of Eckleburg renders useless any religious norms by which moral conduct may be judged.

George B. Wilson lives in this waste land of spiritual disentanglement. Wilson is a "blond, spiritless man, anemic, and faintly handsome" (25) and lives on a "fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens" (23) in which the "natural flora" are gasoline pumps. Even while existing in this desolate environment, Wilson is capable of maintaining a "damp gleam of hope" (25). The land itself, however, seems to be wearing away Wilson's substance. Carraway watches Myrtle "walk through her husband as though he were a ghost" (25). After he learns of his wife's infidelity, his face turns "green" as he feebly mutters "I'm sick" (123). In spite of his debilitated condition and the apparent disentanglement of his marriage, Wilson still wants to escape the "fantastic farm" (23) and move to "the dark fields of the republic" (182). "My wife and I want to go West" (123). Like Gatsby, Wilson seeks money in order to consummate his dreams instead of desiring wealth for its own sake.

Tom Buchanan does not fear Wilson because of George's awareness of his own social position, and he is too weak to
provide his life with significance or a means of escape. After he learns that his wife has a lover, "ilson becomes aware of a hostile force. However, in spite of his frustration, he remains unaware of the source of the powers pressing upon him. Wilson finally rebels after Pyrtle's death, but his efforts are futile when he is misdirected and then crushed by Buchanan. Deluded by his "obeisance" to the rich, "ilson seeks aid from Tom who becomes his betrayer in revenge as well as in love.  

Living in a land of ocular confusion without physical or spiritual means to assist him, Wilson's dream to escape to the West and his desire to realize revenge are both frustrated. George relates the events of his confrontation with his wife to Michaelis, a neighbor who attempts to console Wilson after Pyrtle's death.

"I spoke to her. . . . I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. I took her to the window . . . and I said 'God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You might fool me, but you can't fool God!'" Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. . . . "God sees everything," repeated Wilson (160).

Despite Michaelis' assurance that the sign is merely "an advertisement" (160), "ilson insists on reading a portentous message in Eckleburg's eyes. Wilson, still an
"ashen, fantastic figure" (162), adopts the inspired role of avenger, but ironically kills Gatsby instead of the source of his sorrow. His life and dreams thoroughly frustrated, Wilson shoots himself making "the holocaust . . . complete" (163).

Myrtle Wilson possesses many characteristics that are also reflected in Jay Gatsby and serves to intensify and clarify the action in the narrative. Myrtle and Jay both lead secret lives. While Jay has an affair with Daisy, Myrtle secretly meets with Tom Buchanan. Myrtle views her relationship with Tom as something more than a physical liaison. Just as Daisy was the "first 'nice' girl" (148) Jay had ever known, Tom is Myrtle's "first sweetie" (35). Like Jay, she also wants to have a list stressing self-improvement.

I'm going to make a list of all the things I've got to get. A massage and a wave, and a collar for the dog, and one of those cute little ash-trays where you touch a spring. . . . I got to write down a list so I won't forget all the things I got to do (37).

Myrtle and Jay are also both given vitality by dreams that are beyond the scope of fulfillment. Myrtle and Jay are also crushed by the Buchanans as they follow their ill-conceived dreams of escaping from dreariness and finding glamorous lives. However, Myrtle's dream of living in
the West with Tom Buchanan has a sordid quality that allows for it to be only superficially compared to Gatsby's illusions. Mrs. Wilson lacks the "creative passion" and "heightened sensitivity to the promise of life" that Gatsby possessess, and she is therefore only capable of reflecting the more vulgar side of Jay's dreams or what his dreams could become.

Myrtle's most positive quality is the "perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering" (25). This tremendous physical vitality permits her to attempt to escape the station of life that she was born to, but her efforts to do so only find expression in vulgarity and disloyalty. While her ability to carry her flesh "sensuously" (25) probably convinced Tom to engage in their affair, she also seems to be inhibited by her physical passion. Her social ineptness is demonstrated by her lack of taste reflected in the gaudiness of the New York apartment that "om rents for her. The drug-store magazines that litter the living room, the furniture that is tapestried with "scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles" (29), and the artless photographs hanging on the walls all indicate her deficiency of cultural discrimination. She spends ten dollars on a dog to exhibit her newly acquired aristocratic carelessness, but the animal's "brown washrag" (27)
coat only serves to indicate her inability to meet a social role that she is ill-prepared to fulfill.

No matter how diligently Myrtle persists in attempting to escape her social environment, she appears to be trapped in the dreary atmosphere of the valley of ashes. On the way to her New York apartment, "she let four taxicabs drive away before she selected a new one" (27). Her choice of a "lavender-colored" (27) cab depicts her effort to achieve a visual exuberance that is normally absent from her life and cheap taste. Myrtle's attempt, however, is rendered futile when the automobile turns out to have "gray upholstery" (27). She is equally frustrated when she seeks social parity with Tom by assuming the right to maliciously repeat Daisy's name. Buchanan responds in a manner that is in keeping with his character, and with "a short deft movement . . . broke her nose with his open hand" (37).

Myrtle's romantic idealization of her affair with Tom is juxtaposed to the reality of disillusionment. Nick learns that Myrtle first met Tom on a train bound for New York City.

It was on the two seats facing each other that are always the last ones on the train. I was going up to New York to see my sister and spend the night. He had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes, and I couldn't keep my eyes off him, but every time he
looked at me I pretended to be looking at the advertisement over his head. When we came into the station he was next to me, and his white shirt-front pressed against my arm, and so I told him I'd have to call policeman, but he knew I lied. I was so excited that when I got into a taxi with him I didn't hardly know I wasn't getting into a subway train. All I kept thinking about, over and over, was "You can't live forever; you can't live forever" (36).

Myrtle's "limited word choice, additive syntax, and rushing narrative" establish both her character and her attitude toward her meeting with "om.10 The writing style and the growing sense of desperation that is inherent in the prose suggest Myrtle's social and moral limitations. At the same time, however, the prose depicts her romantic expectations that make her actions understandable.11

Later in the narrative, another version of a similar situation is described as Nick Carraway rides a train to New York.

"The next day was broiling. . . . the woman next to me perspired delicately for a while into her white shirtwaist, and then . . . lapsed despairingly into deep heat with a desolate cry. Her pocket-book slapped to the floor. "Oh my!" she gasped.

I picked it up . . . by the extreme tip of the corners to indicate that I had no designs upon it -- but everyone nearby, including the woman, suspected me just the same. . . .

"Hot!" said the conductor to familiar faces.

My commutation ticket came back to
me with a dark stain from his hand. What anyone should care in this heat whose flushed lips he kissed, whose head made damp the pajama pocket over his heart (114-5).

This version of a train ride is rendered from an unromantic point of view. Although Nick's scornful attitude toward romance is primarily directed at Jay's and Daisy's relationship, the situation parallels Tom's and Myrtle's first meeting and emphasizes the seamy side of such an event. Each of these incidents is valid in its own moment of presentation. In the context of the entire narrative, however, Myrtle's desperate romanticism and Nick's uncomfortable realism significantly qualify each other.12 Similarly, Nick's mental vitality is juxtaposed to Myrtle's physical vitality. Distressed after having heard Jay's own account of his past, Nick sees Myrtle standing next to a gas pump and notices her "panting vitality" (68).

Myrtle's destruction, like her husband's, is partially attributable to the ocular confusion inherent in the obscurity of the valley of ashes. When Tom, Jordan, and Nick ride to New York in order to meet Jay and Daisy, Myrtle believes that Miss Baker is Tom's wife. Later, because Jay and Daisy return from the city in the car that Buchanan had originally driven, Myrtle runs to meet the automobile believing it to be Tom's. At this point, Mrs.
Wilson ironically sees Buchanan as her salvation. Myrtle repeatedly fails to recognize natural limitations. Just as she had previously wanted to buy a wreath that would "last all summer" (37), she now wants to escape the restrictions imposed by her social environment. Her death incorporates both the physical nature and the depressing quality of atmosphere that characterized her life.

The mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long (138).

Her life "violently extinguished" (138). Myrtle kneels on the road with her "dark blood" (138) mingling with the "dust" (138).
Notes to Chapter Seven


3. Bicknell, p. 70.


6. Bufkin, 520.


11. Doyno, 419.

Chapter Eight

The magnitude of Jay Gatsby's dream seems to be greater than the desires of any of the other figures in the narrative. Similarly, he appears to suffer more than the others for attempting to realize the illusions that he projects. Before the reader is even aware of Gatsby's actual presence in the narrative, Nick remarks that Jay had "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely that I shall ever find again" (2). Jay possesses a "heightened sensitivity to the promise of life" (2) and an active romantic sensibility that give him an exuberant, imaginative vitality. Jay's past is a source of mystery that inspires the romantic speculation of those who surround him. Catherine believes that "he's a nephew or cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's" (33), some say "he was a German spy during the war" (44), while others insist that "he killed a man" (44). Nick comments that it was "testimony to the romantic speculation that he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who had found little . . . to whisper about in this world (44).

As Nick's story opens, Jay appears to have created a romantic environment that he is capable of maintaining. Nick recalls that he first saw Jay as he emerged from a
shadow to "leisurely . . . determine what share was his of our local heavens" (21). "With a romantic gesture, Gatsby stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way" (21). In spite of Jay trembling body, Nick senses that "he was content to be alone" (21). Suddenly, Gatsby mysteriously vanishes into the "unquiet darkness" (22). Judging from this incident it is not difficult to understand why Nick is initially attracted to Gatsby. The mysterious aura that surrounds Jay would be enough to arouse Nick's interest, but Gatsby also exhibits a contentment in isolation, and any effort at self-sufficiency always "draws a stunned tribute" (9) from Carraway. Nick repeatedly draws attention to Jay's habit of remaining separated from those about him. Carraway notices at Gatsby's first party that Jay is "standing alone on the marble steps and looking from one group to another with approving eyes" (50). Later, as the party is concluding, Nick comments that a "sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows . . . endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand in a formal gesture of farewell (56).

Carraway is attracted to the animation and vitality that are inherent in Jay's social gatherings. While attending one of Gatsby's parties, he notices that the "bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails perme-
ate the garden outside until the air is alive with chatter and laughter" (46). Nick wistfully recalls that it was at such a party that he met Gatsby for the first time. At this meeting, nothing impressed Carraway as much as Gatsby's smile.

He smiled understandingly -- much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of reassurance in it... It faced-or seemed to face the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey (48).

Although there also seemed to be something irresistible in Daisy's voice, Jay's smile appears to be much more personal. Daisy and Jay are both associated with light. Daisy "gleamed in sunlight" (91), and Catsby "literally flowed" (90) as a "well-being radiated from him" (90). However, while light is reflected from Daisy, Jay emanates a well-being that animates others as he mirrors their ideal selves.

Although Nick is impressed by Gatsby, he becomes aware of a duality that is evident in Jay's character. In spite of his intimate and "rare" smile, Gatsby is an "elegant young roughneck ... whose elaborate formality of speech
just missed being absurd" (43). Jay's expression, "old sport," held no more familiarity than a hand that reassuringly brushes a shoulder. Nick cannot help recalling the "raudy . . . primary colors" (40) of Jay's house; his Rolls Royce that has been reduced to an "omnibus" (39), and the impersonal quality of his parties where there are "enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names" (40). With "old men pushing young girls backwards in eternal graceless circles" (46), Nick cannot help noticing the seamy aspects of the social affairs.

The destructive quality of Jay's parties are evidenced by the "extra gardener" that is required to repair "the ravages of the night before" (39).

Jay may believe that he has surrounded himself with important and interesting people, but he has only become the host for parasites who "were . . . aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key" (42). These guests crudely conduct themselves "according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks" (41). The tawdry quality of Jay's parties is emphasized by the tentative guest list that Nick composes on a timetable as he commutes to New York on July 5, 1922. Ironically, the party that Nick remembers probably occurred on July fourth, America's birthday. The list of names, an "acid social satire"
pattered on the society page column, suggest the raw, vulgar, and absurd nature of the "shadowy agglomeration" of people that attended Jay's parties. Sexual promiscuity is insinuated by Claudia Hip, violence by Brewer "who had his nose shot off" (63), and Jay's underworld connections are implied by James ("Hot-put") Ferret. Paradoxically, by recording approximately seventy names, Nick reinforces the party's sense of anonymity and insubstantiality. As the names on the list become more specific, the people named become less unique and individual. The list, which conveys the size and character of a typical party at Jay's, gives the impression of there being many parties while indicating the sameness within them.  

Jay's mansion, like his parties, exhibits a mixture of wealth and madness. Like Gatsby, the man who had originally built the mansion was attempting to capture something out of the past. Since the house is a "factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy" (5), the first owner was willing to pay the neighbors to have "thatched" roofs and imitate "the peasantry" (89). The feudal mansion is a conglomeration of towers, restoration salons, a Gothic library, and a Marie Antoinette music room. Fitzgerald controls the reader's response to the opulence of the enormous house by emphasizing the inconsistency of its decor, the fact that it was an imitative product of the "period
crane" (39), and by pointing out that it was "shanking" new under a "thin board of raw ivy" (5). Even the elegance of "Gatsby's enormous garden" is qualified by the colored lights that make it look like a large "Christmas tree" (32). Although the owl-eyed man seems to realize that the house and the parties are some kind of elaborate stage set, he is still astounded by the authenticity of the props. As he pares through an "absolute real" (46) book, the owl-eyed man comments that he had expected "nice durable cardboard" (45).

See... It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. That thoroughness! That realism (46)!

Unlike the Buchanan's, however, Gatsby is only a renter and does not own the property on which he is living. Although Jay can match the Buchanan's wealth, he cannot duplicate their taste and elegance. An indication of the distance between their social worlds is evidenced by the difference between Tom's conservative blue course and Jay's "yellow circus wagon."

To Jay, money is the "alchemic reagent" that he can use to transmute the ordinary worthlessness of life into something valuable and meaningful. While wealth may be vulgar in the hands of Tom Buchanan, it is not vulgarly...
Jay's house is frequently a scene for lavish parties attended by tasteless guests, but Jay invites these people to invest his elaborate props with a tangible, animated reality. Similarly, Jay's house displays tremendous wealth, but it appears to be "incoherent" because of the many rooms decorated in the style of several different eras. The incompatibility of the different rooms is indicative of the confused "time-world" which characterizes his life. Part of this confusion is a result of the inverted morality of the era in which Jay lives. In a world where the material and impersonal cannot be distinguished from intangible human qualities, it is natural that the incomprehensibly irresponsible Tom Buchanan can be a paramount of society. In this moral environment, Jay Gatsby, a fraudulent and ruthless criminal who is mired in self-deception, can remain a sympathetic character. Jay's confused concept of time also results from his dream world in which the past, the present, and the future are all one. He does not have an accurate concept of the past because he has no sense of the limitations of time. When Nick reminds Jay that he cannot repeat the past, Gatsby understandably retorts "Can't repeat the past... Why of course you can" (111).

Jay literally attempts to create the realities of his past and present situations. His claim to have been an
Oxford man, a war hero decorated by "litte Montenegro" (66), and a big-game hunting, young rajah who collected jewels to soothe a broken heart are fictions that are employed as facts. In reality, Jay is the son of Henry Catz of North Dakota. His parents were "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" (99), and Jay was forced to spend much of his time working as a clam-digger and salmon-fisher. The distance between Jay's past and his own version of it reflect his attempt to transform facts by using his imagination.

The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God -- a phrase which if it means anything, means just that -- and he would be about his father's business. . . . So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end (99).

Jay has an unyielding faith in "the unreality of reality" and firmly believes that "the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's winz" (100).

Gatsby's hope of renewing his relationship with Daisy and luring her away from Tom Buchanan is based on his belief that time has no meaning or significance. If Daisy will tell Tom that she never loved him, Jay thinks that their entire marriage will be "wiped out forever" (132).
Jay employs a similarly immature and naive philosophy in his more personal conduct with Daisy. He purchased a Chicago newspaper for years "just on the chance of catching a glimpse of Daisy's name" (80). Then he contacts Nick about the possibilities of meeting Daisy at his house, the "modesty" of Jay's request and his childishly unwavering devotion astound Carraway.

He had waited five years and bought a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths -- so that he could "come over" some afternoon to a stranger's garden (80).

Although Gatsby appears rather immature, there is a certain innocence and unknowing quality in his actions that is its own excuse for what he does. While the Buchanans' are also ignorant in several instances, their endeavors are frequently malicious and are directed toward a purely personal satisfaction. When Gatsby is reunited with Daisy, there is something typically humorous and sympathetic in his mental agitation. "Pale as death, with his hands plunged like weights in his coat pocket" (86), Jay attempts to appear calm as he leans against the mantelpiece "in a strained counterfeit of perfect ease" (87). Then he shows Daisy his mansion, there is a tender quality in his effort to revalue "everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her" (92).
Jay's reunion with Daisy is the realization of a dream that he had given form to five years earlier in Louisville.

Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees -- he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, pulse down the incomparable milk of wonder.

His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God.

. . . At his lip's touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete (112).

Although Gatsby had initially conducted his affair with Daisy by "ravenously and unscrupulously" (149) taking what he could get, he ultimately weds his dream to Daisy's "perishable breath" (112). This decision reflects Jay's conscious choice of humanity instead of remaining unattached in order to pursue his idealized concepts. If Nick Carraway has accurately reconstructed this moment, Jay Gatsby appears to intuit that there is a self-destructiveness inherent in the kiss. Although Jay seems to be creating a new paradise, he is leaving the security of an old one.

When Daisy and Gatsby are about to kiss, Jay displays
an "unsullied sentimentality" (112) as he "waited, listen-
ing for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been
struck upon a star" (112). Gatsby's sense of melodrama,
however, has nothing to do with the self-indulgence or
pity that is manifested in Tom Buchanan's self-induced
sentimentality. Jay's maudlin demonstrations stem from
the difficulty of expressing, in the phrases and symbols
provided by his society, the reality that lies at the
heart of his aspirations.¹⁰

Then Jay returned to Louisville after the war and
found that Daisy was married, he was disconsolate.

He stretched out his hand desperately as
if to snatch only a wisp of air, to save
a fragment of the spot she had made lovely
for him (153).

Then Nick sees Jay five years later making a similar res-
ture as he reaches for Daisy's green dock light, it is a
measure of Gatsby unwavering devotion to her and demon-
strates the enduring quality of his dream. After the
initial embarrassment of seeing Daisy again gives way to
wonder, Jay finally begins to run down "like an over-wound
clock" (93). Nick believes that after thinking about the
green light on Daisy's dock, Jay might sense the inadequa-
cy of her reality to support his illusions.
Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one.

Jay responds to his feeling of melancholy by explaining a photograph of Dan Cody and requesting Ewing Klipspringer to play the piano. More than just providing the period in which the narrative takes place with immediacy, Klipspringer's songs serve as an "ironic musical prothalamion" for Jay's romance. Nick senses that as Gatsby listens to Ewing's songs, the truth about his dreams once again press upon him.

There must have been moments that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams -- not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusions. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, checking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart.

It is quite possible that Gatsby's romantic aspirations have exceeded his control, and Daisy may have become a small part of a much larger romantic vision.
bility of this ominous recognition is heightened "poeti-
cally" by a sense of the natural elements as thunder forms a background to Irving's artificial tunes. 12

Jay is frequently culturally awkward and fails to understand the nuances of social behavior. He does not realize that although Sloane invites him to dinner, he is really embarrassed by the thought of Gatsby's company. In spite of his profession, Jay does not seem to be able to recognize the callous innuendos or deceit of others in a personal situation. Similarly, Jay fails to recognize Daisy's weakness when he confronts Tom for the right to possess her love. Placing too much faith in her, he "wanted nothing less . . . than that she should go to Tom and say: 'I never loved you!'" (I11). Jay believes that the past is a tangible entity "lurking" in the shadows, and if he can take Daisy "back to Louisville and be married from her house" (I11), nothing that happened in the inter-
ceding five years will matter.

He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was . . . (I11-2).

Jay soon learns that Daisy does not have the strength to share his illusions or stand up to Tom as she cries out.
"Oh you want too much" (133). After Daisy fails to support Jay, Tom's words "bite physically into Catsby" (133) until he ultimately crumbles at the mention of Tom Chase and his connection with Wolfsheim.

Although Daisy has deserted him, Catsby remains faithful to his dream until he is murdered.

It passed, and he began talking very excitedly to Daisy. . . . But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible (135).

Even though Daisy's lack of courage in facing Tom Buchanan and her failure to avoid Myrtle Wilson directly effect Catsby, he still plans to assume the responsibility for the automobile accident. In fact, he insists upon conducting a midnight vigil under her window to make sure that "Tom does not "bother her about that unpleasantness this afternoon" (145). Jay has "committed himself to the following of a frail" (149), and although he has "broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice" (148), he is intent upon preserving the shattered pieces of his dream.

Willing to admit that Daisy "might" have loved "om for "a minute" (152), Catsby rationalizes that her attraction to Buchanan "was just personal" (152). Nick recognizes the intensity of Catsby's statement, and concludes that Jay's
"conception of the affair . . . couldn't be measured" (152).

All that Fuchanan has to do is misdirect Wilson so that he kills Gatsby who is floating in his swimming pool among the "yellow trees" (162). Nick speculates about Jay's state of mind as he becomes aware of Wilson's presence.

I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through the frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about . . . like that ashen, fantastic figure sliding toward him through the amorphous trees (162).

Nick believes that Jay may at least sense the harshness of reality, the unreasonable demands that he placed on a "single dream," and the futility of pursuing that dream any farther. Reality has become chaotic and shapeless as a random wind blows his raft and its "accidental burden" upon an "accidental course" (162). His life as Jay Gatsby, which had taken its form in the imagination of James Gatz, is senselessly terminated.

Any final judgment of Jay Gatsby remains necessarily
confused because of the many conflicting characteristics that he embodies. His study of needed inventions, dedication to not wasting time, and dumbbell exercises reflect the Horatio Alger myth. Like his father, Jay sees his list as a means to get ahead without recognizing its immature attempt to crystallize reality. His idea of the exceptionally gifted man is opposed to the Democratic myth extolling the virtues of the common man. It is also noteworthy that Jay's fundamentally secular goals are incompatible with his "medieval role as the rail knight in pursuit of good, beauty, and truth."

Jay's character is a synthesis of unpredictably antithetical attributes. His dreams look two ways; back to the past and Louisville, and to the future that he believes will reward his devotion by reuniting him with Daisy. He believes that Daisy can be "popular" and "excitingly desirable" (149), and still maintain the uncorrupted image of a "'nice' girl" (149). A young gangster serving a "meretricious beauty" (99), Gatsby unquestionably possesses a romantic sensibility that makes him sensitive to "the promise of life."

The responsibility of Gatsby's death does not rest entirely with the society in which he lives. Gatsby is at least partially a willing victim in the sense that his illusions are so large that no reality could possibly ful-
fill them, and he refuses to modify them under any circumstances. However, he sustains a sense of dignity as he remains faithful to his dreams in spite of the corruption that surrounds him.15 Ironically, Jay's demise is partially precipitated by his innocent notions of chivalry and virtue.16 Nick seems to admire Jay's tremendous "capacity of will" and his unlimited energy to accomplish specific purposes. Carraway is also aware of Jay's tendency to impose self-delusions upon himself as he strives for a goal that he conceives of as being almost beyond personal interest.17 If Jay held an innocent faith in the "orgiastic future," his corruption might be justified.18 Tatsby, however, is apparently at least vaguely aware of the incongruity of his aspirations with reality. Since Jay may be somewhat skeptical of the validity of his dreams, he might remain utterly devoted to Daisy after the accident because he has a sense of the "fundamental decencies" (1) of life.19 Nick's belief that these decencies are distributed "unequally at birth" (1) make it all the more surprising when they are manifested by James Gatz of North Dakota. If this is true, Jay Gatsby is not an ignorant victim, and gains admiration as he consciously sacrifices himself for a cause of which he is vaguely aware.

Jay's seemingly intuitive knowledge of the incompat-
ability of reality and his romantic visions may never crystallize into something that he completely comprehends. Jay is subject to shifts in consciousness of which he himself is not totally aware. He is both a young hoodlum and a romantic visionary. Although he is completely comfortable in each role, Jay is not fully cognizant of which stance he is maintaining or when he shifted from one state of consciousness to the other. This partially accounts for how some of his most positive qualities such as an unyielding faith find expression tawdry egoism. Since Jay does not completely understand the conflicting roles exhibited in his nature or the society he lives in, he is vulnerable and becomes an easy victim for Fast Eddy society. Because of the duality of his character and his dreams, Jay is able to dramatize the "unique" value and the "shabby" limitations of romantic individualism. This duality is only possible because while always remaining near the truth, Jay is never able to grasp it because of unconscious psychological shifts.
Notes to Chapter Eight


2 Przyzo, p. 100.


5 Guy Cardwell, "The Lyric World of Scott Fitzgerald," The Virginia Quarterly Review, 38, No. 2 (Spring, 1962), 214.


11 Fewley, 240.

12 Fewley, 240.


Chapter Nine

The development of the narrative has shown Nick Carraway, like Jay Gatsby, to be subject to shifts in his consciousness. Nick's continually altered perception is reflected in his understanding of Gatsby. Nick views Jay as a solitary figure reaching for an idea behind a "single green light," a man who Nick assumes clings to both the knowledge of past gaiety and the promise of "exciting things hovering in the next hour" (10) that are embodied in Daisy's voice. Carraway, however, also perceives Gatsby's unsavory connection with Meyer Wolfsheim and his habit of using his house to host a "menagerie" of people who conduct themselves "according to the rules associated with amusement parks" (41). Nick is conscious of the conflict between Jay's uncorrupted emotions and his degrading objective situation, and is also aware of the distance between Gatsby's "unutterable vision" and the "perishable breath" (112) that he attempts to wed it to.

After attending Gatsby's first party, Nick's hypersensitive curiosity concerning Jay begins to subside in spite of the rumors of bootlegging, murder and espionage that surround him. Carraway's first impression of Gatsby as "a person of some undefined consequence" (64) has slowly given way to the feeling that Jay is only "the proprietor of an elaborate road-house next door" (64). As
Nick starts out on what turns into a "disconcerting" ride to New York City with Gatsby, Carraway is in the middle of a psychological transition. During the ride, Gatsby claims that he is from a Middle West family of "wealth" and "tradition." Nick resists believing his neighbor's story after Jay chokes on the phrase "educated at Oxford" (65), as though it had bothered him before. When Nick accepts this initial doubt, Gatsby's entire story "fell to pieces" (65). Jay's assertion that he was a "young rajah" who collected jewels and also a decorated war hero appears ludicrous to Carraway.

When Jay's solemn claim to be telling "God's truth" (65) is reinforced by the ocular proof of an old photograph, "a souvenir of Oxford days" (67), and Montenegro's medal, which to Nick's "astonishment" has an "authentic look" (67), Carraway becomes willing to accept Gatsby's entire story as fact.

Then it was true. I saw the skins of tigers flaming in his palace on the Grand Canal;
I saw him opening a chest of rubies to ease, with their crimson-lighted depths,
the gnawing of his broken heart (67).

Nick was initially willing to accept as fact the popular speculation concerning Gatsby, but then grew to doubt his neighbor's character. However, when Jay's wildest claims are supported by the slightest of proofs, Nick is once
again ready to accept Jay's romanticism and view him as a heroic adventurer.

Later in the narrative, a similar incident occurs in which Nick's impressions of Gatsby are altered. Realizing that Gatsby is James Gatz, the son of "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" (99) from North Dakota, Nick begins to understand that Jay "sprang from his platonic conception of himself" (99). If this is true, Gatsby's quest for Daisy may be just another part of the "vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty" (99) that he serves. It is this Gatsby that Nick believes in after Myrtle is killed in an automobile accident that Jay is thought to be responsible for. When Gatsby steps out from some bushes near the Buchanan mansion, just his "standing" there seems to be a "despicable occupation" (144) to Carraway who now associates him with "Wolfsheim's people" (144). Nick claims "I disliked him so much by this time that I didn't find it necessary to tell him he was wrong" (144).

Noticing Jay's deep concern for Daisy, Nick soon guesses the truth about the accident. Carraway questions Jay about how long he plans to wait there, and then becomes an active agent in the vigil as he scouts Tom's house for signs of commotion. Nick's psychological stance concerning the incident is shifted even farther in Gatsby's favor when he witnesses Tom and Daisy indifferent-
ently eating a meal with the look of people "conspiring together" (146). Accepting responsibility for Jay as a comrade, Nick suggests that he get some sleep. This represents a complete inversion of his feelings at the beginning of the episode. Jay, who was not worth correcting, has become a solitary figure conducting a midnight vigil. Nick leaves Jay "standing there," feeling that his own presence "marred the sacredness of the vigil" (146). The scene not only reflects Nick's shifting view of Gatsby, but it also depicts the moment of change.

In order to understand Carraway's shifts in consciousness, it is necessary to examine Nick's romantic sensibilities. Nick attempts to regard his romanticism rather humorously and sarcastically. When he stops at George Wilson's gas station with Tom Buchanan, Nick facetiously remarks that the "garage must be a blind, and that sumptuous and romantic apartments were concealed overhead" (25). When he and Buchanan arrive in New York, Nick displays a sarcastic attitude again when he comments on the pastoral quality of Fifth Avenue. "I wouldn't have been surprised to see a great flock of white sheep turn the corner" (28). In spite of Nick's satiric tone and his tendency play-down the importance of his imagination, it becomes apparent that his romantic sensibilities are at work every moment in every situation.
I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. . . . I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others -- poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner -- young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life (57).

The lyrical quality of the prose reflects Nick's wistful yearning to view life romantically, his desire for others to participate romantically in the world, and his sympathy for those who cannot do so. Given the desires, it is not surprising that Nick is willing to believe the most romantic story that Jay can offer that seems at all plausible.

Carraway appears to vicariously enjoy Gatsby's romantic affairs. This accounts for Nick's willingness to both believe and be sympathetic towards Gatsby's aspirations. After Jay's second party, Nick notices that Gatsby seemed to want to recover something from the past, and Carraway warns him that time cannot be repeated. At this point in the narrative, there is a shift in voice as Nick decides to describe Jay kissing Daisy five years earlier in Louisville. After relating the incidents of the scene in
Daisy's hometown, Nick confesses his kinship with Jay.

Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something -- an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lip's parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever (112).

In telling Jay's story, Nick has succeeded in relating his own. Although he is aware that Jay's dream cannot be separated from the corruption in his life, Carraway senses that its form is fundamentally "pristine." Nick realizes that in Jay's own fumbling way, he is obsessed with the wonder of life and driven to search in order to make that wonder actual.² In the act of describing this process, Nick comes into possession of an ineffable understanding of the value of Gatsby's romanticism.

Although Nick is subject to moments of heightened romanticism when he comes to terms with some aspect of Jay's dreams, he is not deceived himself into applying Gatsby's sense of romanticism to his personal life. His ability to maintain a perspective of reality is depicted in his relationship with Miss Baker. As Nick drives home with Jordan, he realizes that there is something attractive in her universal skepticism.
Suddenly I wasn't thinking of Daisy and Gatsby any more, but this clean, hard, limited person, who dealt in universal skepticism. . . . A phrase began to beat in my ears with a sort of heady excitement: "There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired" (81).

Nick's statement echoes the desperation of Myrtle's comment when she decided to enter into an affair with Tom Buchanan. "You can't live forever; you can't live forever" (36). Although Jordan appears to be ignorant or indifferent to what Carraway is thinking, Nick himself is aware that he envies Gatsby, and he employs what is available to create his own romantic fiction.

We passed a barrier of dark trees, and then the facade of Fifty-ninth Street, a block of delicate pale light, beamed down into the park. Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs, and so I drew up the girl beside me, tightening my arms. Her wan, scornful mouth smiled, and so I drew her up again closer, this time to my face (81).

The character's have almost become archetypes to Nick as each one represents something to him. Carraway has become involved in something that exceeds the mere act of kissing the girl sitting beside him. At the same time, however, Nick realizes the short-comings that are inherent
in the moment.

Nick Carraway's ability to discern his own shifts in consciousness separates him from Jay Gatsby and the rest of the characters in the narrative. Nick's capacity to distinguish his different psychological states is developed as he actually writes the narrative. Nick's record of the events in the East is misleading when it presents Jay Gatsby as a love-smitten young rajah. After describing the reunion between Jay and Daisy, Carraway presents the actual truth about Gatsby's past. This news of Jay's youth is extremely shocking since Nick has not only unconsciously withheld this information, but has implied something quite different. The abrupt shift in the prose style between Carraway's description of Jay's and Daisy's meeting and his presentation of Gatsby's past indicates that he is also shocked, even though he had had these facts in his possession since he began recording his experiences in the East. When Nick writes about James Gatz from North Dakota, it is as if the disparity between Jay's past and present were striking Carraway as peculiar for the first time. Although Nick had initially noted that Jay represented everything for which he held an "unaffected scorn" and that he somehow "turned out all right at the end" (2), Carraway now seems to be aware of a different and more personal texture in Gatsby's character.
By recognizing and understanding the duality of Jay's character, it is possible for Nick to grasp the nature of his own ambivalent attitude of revulsion and admiration that he feels toward Gatsby. While Nick's moral education enables him to perceive the limitations of Jay's dreams, Carraway becomes increasingly aware of a "scornful solidarity" (166) developing between himself and Gatsby, and a "feeling of defiance" against the rest of Eastern society. Despite having come East closely tied to the social world represented by the Buchanan's, Nick tells Jay that "They're a rotten crowd. . . . You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (154). Nick probably extends his sympathy to Gatsby, because in him, Carraway sees a way of acting in a world that has lost the romantic possibilities of life and the values that went with them.\(^2\)

At the same time, however, Carraway is aware that Jay's dream belongs in an era that has already past. This accounts for Nick's elegiac tone in the narrative's final passage.

I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night (182).
Although this statement implies that Jay's dream might have been possible in an earlier, simpler America, Nick realizes that in another sense it was always flawed. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for the Dutch sailors' eyes— a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder (182).

Nick implies that romance does not belong to the present, but to a past that has been transfigured by imagined memory and to the illusory promise of an unrealized future that "year by year recedes before us" (182). Although Nick shares and sympathizes with many of Jay's romantic inclinations, he is spared Gatsby's cruel fate. Nick's ability to perceive Jay's character and still escape his suffering may be accounted for by the traditional values he inherited from his father and his "sense of the fundamental decencies" of life. Nick's habit of reserving all judgments has allowed him alone to grasp Gatsby's "romantic readiness" and idealism that set
him apart from his environment. At the same time, Nick's "sense of the fundamental decencies" enable him to realize the shabby limitations of Gatsby's dreams. Carraway also maintains an awareness of man's mortality. With the exception of the owl-eyed man, Nick is the only person from the East who confronts death as it is manifested by Jay's funeral. Understanding that man's mortality stands between dreams and their realization, Carraway lives in a temporal as well as an ideal world. Aware that he is thirty years old and faces a "portentous, menacing road of a new decade" (136) that promises "loneliness," a "thinning list of single men to know," and a "thinning briefcase of enthusiasm" (136), Nick does not completely despair or lose all sensitivity to the promise of life.

During his relationship with Jordan Baker, Nick is continually aware that his interest in her is stimulated by the relationship between Jay and Daisy. This does not mean that Jordan is uninteresting in herself. Perhaps in Miss Baker, Nick sees the possibility of a deliberately simple, largely unillusioned, passion free relationship. After Gatsby's death sours any intimacy that exists between Nick and Jordan, Carraway wants to break off with her because it is the fundamentally decent thing to do. By repudiating Miss Baker, Nick also rejects the moral irresponsibility with which she, Tom, and Daisy are associ-
Nick calls Jordan a final time before departing for the West in an attempt "to leave things in order" (178). During this phone call, Carraway learns that in spite of his efforts to the contrary, he has incidentally hurt Jordan emotionally. Nick recognizes his guilt in precipitating her suffering, because he had misled Jordan by bringing standards of conduct to judge their liaison other than those which her hedonism imposes. Although Nick realizes that he may have deceived Jordan by not confirming the moral foundation upon which their relationship would be based, he does not exhibit further ethical insensibilities by prolonging their affair. When Carraway grasps his guilt in mismanaging his and Jordan's relationship, he also appreciates the fact that he too contributed to the "foul dust" (2) that floated in the wake of Gatsby's dream.

Nick's increased understanding of his experiences in the East has developed slowly in the process of writing the narrative. A reflection of the difference between his states of mind at the beginning and at the end of the narrative can be seen by comparing his initially immature and whimsical claim to be an "original settler" (4) with his sincere and psychologically consistent discussion of the Dutch explorers. Carraway's prose, which were originally contradictory and very personal, have gained a universal
implication as his tone and point of view contributes to his sense of tragic loss. Because Nick comes to understand the distance between vision and reality, the invariable human dilemma, he survives his experiences in the East without completely distorting his moral philosophy. Nick has come to an understanding of what constitutes the difference between a man like George Wilson and a man like Tom Buchanan.

I stared at him and then at Tom . . . and it occurred to me that there was no difference between men, in intelligence or race, so profound as the difference between the sick and the well (124).

Nick has been afraid to make judgments because to reserve them is to hope. He also refrains from judging because of a growing fear that he may live in a world deserving rejection. This proves to be true in his affair with Jordan. However, Carraway learns that to exist one must make judgments, and it is for this reason that he realizes that he must ultimately reject Jordan Baker. Nick sees the necessity of this action if he is to maintain a distinction between tolerance and indifference.

Nick's education in the East is not entirely manifested in negative terms. He has discovered that a demand for moral attention may be necessary in times of "self-defence," but as a total attitude toward life it is very
limited. Nick learns to respond to the misfortunes of others with a pity and understanding that transcends a personal level and is extended to human suffering as a whole. By coming to terms with the human predicament, Nick realizes that "human warmth" and pity may not rectify everything, but they certainly exceed mere judgment.\(^\text{13}\)

Nick also confirms the validity of the cardinal virtue that he believes himself to possess.

Everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known (60).

It has been asserted that Nick is a moral failure, because he fails to reveal the truth about Jay Gatsby at the inquest.\(^\text{14}\) Just as Nick grasps the futility of refusing to shake hands with Tom Buchanan, he also perceives the futility of revealing the truth about the accident after Gatsby's death. Carraway, of course, ultimately presents the truth about Jay in his narrative, The Great Gatsby. The reliability of Nick's story is confirmed by the fact that he does not go back and change the first passages to conform to his feelings as they exist at the end of the narrative.\(^\text{15}\)

Nick comments on the grotesque quality of the East, noting that it was "distorted beyond my eyes' power of

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correction."

Even when the East excited me most . . . it always had for me a quality of distortion. . . . I see it as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, couching under a sullen, overhanging sky and lusterless moon. In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at a house -- the wrong house. But no one knows the woman's name, and no one cares (178).

The fact that Nick's initial dreams of wealth and adventure have been transformed into a nightmare is indicated by the passage's surrealistic images of loneliness, coldness, and impersonal wealth, while stressing a loss of identity. Ironically, Nick's real experiences in the East have become more unreal than the dreams that he and Jay maintained at the beginning of the narrative.

Nick's vision of the East as an El Greco painting, a condensation of an entire experience, is juxtaposed to Carraway's fond memories of his youth in the Middle West.

One of my most vivid memories is of coming back West from prep school and later from college at Christmas time . . . . I remember the fur coats of the girls returning from Miss This-or-That's and the chatter of frozen breath and the hands waving overhead as we caught sight of old acquaintances. . . .
When we pulled out into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch beside us and twinkle against the windows. . . . We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner . . . unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour. . . .

That's my Middle West -- not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the streetlamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow (177).

The images of light, warmth, identity, and friendship in this passage show it to be of a completely different prose texture than that of the El Greco scene. Just as significantly, however, Nick's memories of home are in direct contrast to his original vision of the Middle West as "the ragged edge of the universe" (3). Nick's experiences in the East, while making his visit to Long Island appear as a nightmare, have transformed his impression of the West into something beautiful and meaningful.

At the conclusion of his narrative, Nick is aware that the possibility of a heroic age lies somewhere in the past. Although romantic heroism may no longer be a sensible form, Nick realizes that he can confer a discipline and standard of conduct that can produce better behavior than he witnessed on Long Island. Honesty and his conception of good existing beyond the self may be only heir-
looms inherited from his father, honored for sentiment reasons, but they allow him a "contemporary, limited reality" in his own life. These moral standards permit Nick to revalue and appreciate the viable experiences of his youth.

Nick ultimately grasps the double nature inherent in dreams. He realizes that to have large romantic ideals is to be necessarily mistaken, but to attempt to exist without them is to live emptily while repressing a permanent human desire. For this reason, while not condoning Gatsby's romantic excesses, Nick views them respectfully. This respect is evidenced when Carraway erases an "obscene word" that had been scrawled on the white steps of his huge empty house.

When Nick leaves the East his hopes are modest because he regards good as a private, incommunicable possession. He judges the guilt of the East, but he does not affirm a morality of his own other than "accepting the circumstances of his birthright rather than affirming its permanent values." Nick goes home, not because he thinks it is universally better, but because it is home. Out of all the character's in the novel, only Carraway is capable of accepting the imperfections of his life.

I'm thirty years old. . . . I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor (179).
Nick can recognize the "portentous, menacing road" (136) that looms ahead and refrain from deluding himself about its reality. Nick has the unique ability to develop a romantic sensibility and still remain cognizant of the limitations of that romanticism.

The narrative concludes without Nick passing what could stand as a literal, final judgment of Jay Gatsby. He calls his narrative The Great Gatsby, but the title may be an ironic indication of Jay's dream and Nick's Eastern experience. Carraway has examined the implication of his stay in Long Island as closely as he possibly can. After realizing an "uncommunicable" knowledge about the nature of dreams, Jay Gatsby, and reality, Carraway senses that it will not serve any purpose to continue to recall his visit to the East. If a final conclusion about Jay Gatsby can be reached, the answer lies somewhere in the distant future. Nick concludes his narrative with lines that reflect a paradoxical mixture of hope and despair.

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly to the past (182).

While noting the urgent need to dream, he echoes the futility of achieving them. Nick may sense that merely possessing a dream, like his vision of the returning train rides of his youth, is enough to nourish and sustain man's romantic imagination.
Notes to Chapter Nine


8. Evans, p. 125.


16 Hanzo, p. 294.

17 Frazer, 555.

18 Hanzo, p. 295.

19 Samuels, 791.
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