

The Great Gatsby Summary - Our narrator, Nick Carraway, begins the book by giving us some advice of his father's about not criticizing others. (But—but what if they're lying, possibly sociopathic murderers?) And now it's time to meet our cast of characters: Nick's second cousin once removed Daisy Buchanan; her large and aggressive husband, Tom Buchanan; and Jordan Baker. Jordan's a girl, and she quickly becomes a romantic interest for our narrator. Probably because she's the only girl around who isn't his cousin.

While the Buchanans live on the fashionable East Egg (we're talking Long Island, NY in the 1920's, by the way), Nick lives on the less-elite but not-too-shabby West Egg, which sits across the bay from its twin town. We (and Nick) are soon fascinated by a certain Mr. Jay Gatsby, a wealthy and mysterious man who owns a huge mansion next door to Nick and spends a good chunk of his evenings standing on his lawn and looking at an equally mysterious green light across the bay.

Tom takes Nick to the city to show off his mistress, a woman named Myrtle Wilson who is, of course, married. Myrtle's husband, George, is a passive, working class man who owns an auto garage and is oblivious to his wife's extramarital activities. Nick, who has some good old-fashioned values from his childhood growing up in the "Middle West," is none too impressed by Tom.

Back on West Egg, this Gatsby fellow has been throwing absolutely killer parties, where everyone and his mother can come and get wasted and try to figure out how Gatsby got so rich. Nick meets and warily befriends the mystery man at one of his huge Saturday night affairs. He also begins spending time with Jordan, who turns out to be loveable in all her cynical practicality.

Moving along, Gatsby introduces Nick to his "business partner," Meyer Wolfsheim. This is starting to sound fishy. Next, Gatsby reveals to Nick (via Jordan, in the middle school phone-tag kind of way) that he and Daisy had a love thing before he went away to the war and she married Tom, after a serious episode of cold feet that involved whisky and a bath tub. Gatsby wants Daisy back, and he enlists Nick to help him stage an "accidental" reuniting.

Nick executes the plan; Gatsby and Daisy are reunited and start an affair. Everything continues swimmingly until Tom meets Gatsby, doesn't like him, and begins investigating his affairs. Nick, meanwhile, knows all about it: Gatsby grew up in a poor, uneducated family until he met the wealthy and elderly Dan Cody, who took him in as a companion and taught him how to act rich. But Dan isn't the one who left him the money.

The big scene goes down in the city, when Tom has it out with Gatsby over who gets to be with Daisy; in short, Gatsby is outed as a bootlegger and Daisy is unable to leave her husband. Everyone drives home, probably in a really bad mood, and Tom's mistress, Myrtle, is struck and killed by Gatsby's car (in which Gatsby and Daisy are riding). Gatsby tells Nick that Daisy was driving, but that he's going to take the blame for it. Tom, meanwhile, feeds Gatsby to the wolves—or at least the ticked-off husband—by telling Myrtle's husband George where to find him. Bang-bang, and George Wilson and Gatsby are both dead.

Daisy and Tom take off, leaving their mess behind. Nick, who by now has had just about enough of these people, ends things off with Jordan in a way that's about one step up from breaking up via text message. He arranges Gatsby's funeral, which is very sparsely attended—although Gatsby's dad does show up with some more info about his past. Standing on Gatsby's lawn and looking at the green light (which, BTW, turned out to be the light in front of Daisy's house across the bay), Nick concludes that nostalgia just ends up forcing us constantly back into the past.

Themes: 1. Society and Class – In this novel, America is a classless society. There's no such thing as the American Dream or the up-from-the-bootstraps self-made man. You are who you're born, and attempting to change classes just leads to tragedy. It's a pretty grim picture of American society—and life, to those who lived through World War I, could feel pretty grim indeed.

2. Theme of Love - Only fools fall in love, and the biggest fool in The Great Gatsby is Gatsby. Tom and Daisy may have some kind of affection and loyalty for each other, but we're pretty sure it's not actually love. Jordan and Nick are happy enough to do some summer loving together, but they're not exactly in it 4EVA. It's Gatsby who falls in love, but is he in love with Daisy, or with a dream of Daisy, or with the idea of being in love? And does true love always come with destruction and violence?

3. Theme of Visions of America - Did the American Dream die in 2008, or did it die in 1918—or did it never really exist at all? In *The Great Gatsby*, the American Dream is supposed to stand for independence and the ability to make something of one's self with hard work, but it ends up being more about materialism and selfish pursuit of pleasure. No amount of hard work can change where Gatsby came from, and old money knows it. Merit and hard work aren't enough, and so the American Dream collapses—just like the ballooning dresses of Jordan and Daisy when Nick first sees them.

4. Theme of Wealth - In *The Great Gatsby*, money makes the world go 'round—or at least gets you moving in the right direction. It can buy you yellow Rolls-Royces, "gas blue" dresses, and really nice shirts, but in the end it can't buy you happiness. Or class. It does, however, buy you the privilege of living in the world without consequences, leaving a trail of bodies halfway from Chicago to New York. But being poor isn't exactly the moral choice, either. So, where does that leave us? Somewhere in the middle class.

5. Theme of Memory and the Past - If the best years of your life took place in high school, you're in for a long downhill slide. There's nothing wrong with remembering the good times, but living in the past just leads you to tragedy. (Or at least to being a major bore at parties.) In *The Great Gatsby*, living in the past is a lot direr than being boring. Characters pursue visions of the future that are determined by their pasts, which—in the memorable phrase that ends the book—makes us all into little boats beating against the current. And, unfortunately, some of those boats are doomed to sink.

6. The Great Gatsby Theme of Dissatisfaction - You have a handsome, wealthy husband; a string of polo ponies; and a closetful of really nice white dresses. What more could you want? Apparently, a lot. None of the characters in *The Great Gatsby* are happy: they're dissatisfied with marriage, with love, with life, and most of all with themselves. But they're not satisfied with just being dissatisfied. Instead, they wreak havoc trying to make themselves happy. Best case scenario? They end up fleeing back East. Worst case? They end up dead.

7. Theme of Isolation - There's a reason they called it the Lost Generation: the world Fitzgerald lived in, and the world his characters inhabit, is one without connections, friends, or family. People may come together in *The Great Gatsby*, but they always end up falling apart in the end. Only Daisy and Tom stay together in the end, and is that really togetherness?

8. Theme of Mortality - Sure, there's the hit-and-run and murder/ suicide at the end. (Oops. Did we spoil it for you?) But *The Great Gatsby* is also interested in metaphorical kinds of death: the kind where Gatsby kills the James-Gatz version of himself in order to take a new life, or the kind where the narrator feels himself constantly getting older, or the kind where the various characters' obsession with the past becomes a stand-in for the universal fear of our own mortality. Morbid? Well, when you think about the massive tragedy that was World War I, you can understand why Fitzgerald had death on the mind.

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10. Theme of Marriage - If the marriages in *The Great Gatsby* are anything to go by, we want nothing to do with marriage. Love? Optional. Loyalty? Definitely not. The only marriages we see are marked by adultery, deception, and dissatisfaction. Gatsby thinks that his life (and Daisy's) would have been better if she'd chosen him instead of Tom, but we're not so sure. Fitzgerald seems to take a dim view of marriage in general. Based on his relationship with Zelda, we can understand that.

11. Theme of Gender - Here's a fun scavenger hunt for you: see where and how often the word "woman" shows up in *The Great Gatsby*. (Helpful hint: this online text is searchable.) We'll give you a hint: it's mostly in reference to lower class women, like Myrtle or some of the servants. Upper class women are "girls," like the "men and girls" who wander around Gatsby's garden (3.1). That doesn't quite tell you all you need to know about gender in *The Great Gatsby*, but it tells you a lot: Fitzgerald is no feminist, and neither, apparently, is Nick.

12. Theme of Lies and Deceit - Nick may say that he's one of the few honest people he knows, but we're not so sure about that. The Great Gatsby is built around lies, and why should this be any different? Human beings are inherently dishonest, whether they're male or female, born or made, poor or rich—and they're selfish, hypocritical, and destructive as well. And you may be able to fool your friends, but the eyes of God—or T. J. Eckleburg—are always watching.

13. Theme of Education - In The Great Gatsby, education is a must-have for the socially elite. For the most part, characters in The Great Gatsby are well-educated – this is reflected by their speech and dialogue. The narrator takes note, however, of Gatsby's effort to sound like everybody else. It is clear that Gatsby must practice sounding educated and wealthy. Mr. Wolfsheim speaks in a dialect that indicates his lack of education, lack of class, and general lack of what wealthy people in the 1920s might have called "good breeding." Oxford becomes "Oggsford." "Connection" becomes "gonnection." The use of different dialects works to reveal the differences between the working class and the upper class. By contrasting Wolfsheim's and Gatsby's diction with that of people like Nick Carraway, Fitzgerald suggests that people involved in organized crime are from the working class only, no matter how wealthy and powerful they are or how educated they appear to be. Education is what distinguishes the upper class from those below them. It is also a source of connection as loyalty – Nick and Tom have Yale in common and are therefore tied to each other.

14. Theme of Compassion and Forgiveness - The characters in The Great Gatsby all show a unique combination of a willingness to forgive and a stubbornness not to. Gatsby is willing to forgive Daisy's marriage to another man, but not her loving him. Daisy is willing to forgive Tom for cheating but unwilling to forgive Gatsby for deceiving her about what kind of person he is. Much of the sadness of The Great Gatsby comes from this kind of almost-forgiveness; the characters are taunted with the possibility that all will be forgiven, only to have it torn away because of another character's stubbornness.

15. Theme of Religion - The fact that religion is absent among the upper echelons of society suggests that a moral standard might also be absent – as much is borne out by characters' actions. When God does appear, it is only in George Wilson's dialogue, when he lets his wife know that she can't fool God, that he sees and judges all. Instead of being guided by the moral precepts of religion or of God, other characters find other codes to determine their behaviors: a father's advice, or a self-serving mantra, a jaded viewpoint, or an undying love. In Fitzgerald's jaded America, the only God that can exist takes the form of a billboard, perhaps suggesting that capitalism rules where religion once did.

Characters: 1. Nick Carraway - although Gatsby's name is the one in the title; however, I believe that Nick is the major player. And here's why: Gatsby is almost shockingly simple once you can put his character together from the various pieces picked up along the way. (Check out his "Character Analysis" for our thoughts on that.) But Nick –plain, straightforward, "honest" Nick – ends up being the novel's most interesting character. Nick changes profoundly over the course of the novel, and his transformation is what makes reader's heart beat just a little faster.

2. Jay Gatsby - a fabulously embellished, impossibly perfect reflection of a kid's dreams and fantasies. Let's take a look at how he got there. As a rural farm boy growing up in North Dakota without connections, money, or education, Jimmy Gatz had a plan: he was going to escape his circumstances and make a name for himself. And, luckily, his dad has saved his plan.

3. Daisy Buchanan - Gatsby's entire life is devoted to the faint hope of rekindling his old love affair with Daisy. But what's so great about this Daisy, anyway? She's got a killer voice. Nick describes her early in the book, namely:

"I looked back at my cousin, who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling 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. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her 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 hour."

It appears that there's a "singing compulsion," an "arrangement of notes" that makes men wild. It's full of promises, hints that wonderful things are on the horizon. Thinking about Gatsby stretching his arms out to the green light across the water, we can't help thinking of the Sirens: the mythical island dwellers whose singing was so seductive that sailors would throw themselves into the sea and drown trying to reach them. To Gatsby, Daisy's seductive voice speaks of wealth, social status, glamour, family, and of course Daisy herself—everything that Gatsby wants. It is quite obvious that it's not a coincidence that Gatsby dies in a pool.

Lover - Daisy's voice makes her sound untouchable. Nick thinks of it as "full of money," and that it sounds like it belongs to someone who lives "high in a white palace, the king's daughter, the golden girl [...]" (7.99). You know, the prom queen, the sorority president, the pageant winner: exactly the kind of girl that neither Gatsby nor Nick would ever have a chance with. But Tom does. And Daisy may marry him at first because she feels like she has to, but she does end up falling in love with him. (Or at least lust.)

Jordan introduces us in when he tells us: *"If he left the room for a minute she'd look around uneasily, and say: 'Where's Tom gone?' and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door. She used to sit on the sand with his head in her lap by the hour, rubbing her fingers over his eyes and looking at him with unfathomable delight."*

This doesn't sound to us like a girl living "high in a white palace." It sounds like a pretty normal 20ish year old, head-over-heels in love with her husband. What we learn from this is that Daisy isn't just a frivolous rich girl—or, she wasn't always. She has a deep capacity for love, and she wants to be loved. And if that's what she wanted, it's pretty clear that she married the wrong guy.

Poor Little Rich Girl - Or maybe she didn't marry the wrong guy; maybe she just likes to think that she did. One of the things Gatsby and Daisy share is an idealized image of their relationship, a rose-colored view makes everything in the present seem dull and flat in comparison. She longs for the innocent period of her "white girlhood," before she was forced/forced herself into her marriage to Tom. Though the Daisy of the present has come to realize that more often than not, dreams don't come true, she still clings to the hope that they sometimes can.

And to Daisy, most of this trouble comes down to one fact: she's a girl. In her mind, women (or girls—Fitzgerald never uses "women" when he could use "girls") need to be foolish. They need to be as careless as Nick ends up thinking that she is, because the world is cruel to women. When her child is born, she tells Nick, she weeps: "'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool'"

If Daisy had been a fool, she would have accepted her fate. She would have married Tom—her right, as the beautiful Southern belle that she was; she would have had kids and ignored them; and she would have turned a blind eye to Tom's philandering with the housemaids. But she didn't.

Daisy the Child - Daisy may be a married woman with a child, but she doesn't seem like she's managed to grow up very much. She can't live with the consequences of her actions, trying to (drunkenly) change her mind on the night before her wedding (4.120), and then being unable to make up her mind between Tom and Gatsby: "I did love him once," she says, "but I loved you too" (7.266). This girl is more fickle than Taylor Swift. (Burn! J/K Taylor, we love you.)

Pure-hearted Gatsby can't understand this kind of indecision. But to Daisy, it's just part of the girlhood: she's never learned how to be a woman, and we get the feeling from this novel that she's never going to. There's no one to teach her. She's expected to be a "beautiful little fool," just like every other girl of her social class. And ultimately, like a kid, she lets Tom make the decisions for her. She's used to her life being a certain way – she follows certain rules, she expects certain rewards – and when Gatsby challenges her to break free of these restraints, she can't deal. Ultimately, Daisy returns to Tom because facing a life without a \$300,000 pearl necklace is even worse, apparently, than facing life with her "hulking" brute of a husband. Do we blame her? Is she responsible for her poor choices? Or is she just living her life in the best way she knows how to live it?

4. Tom Buchanan - He's a sturdy, straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face, and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward ... you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body. It appears that our narrator does not like Tom. Nonetheless, Nick is fascinated with Tom. He probably can't help it; like Daisy, Tom is a fascinating kind of guy. Like Daisy, he's got something that everyone else wants: he's got power.

Maybe He's Born With It - Tom's family really rich. Not well-to-do like Nick's family, and not nouveau riche like Gatsby, but staggeringly wealthy, with money going way back. Moreover, he does extravagant, crazy things with it, like bringing "a string of polo ponies for Lake Forest".

In his own way, Tom is just as flashy as Gatsby. But everyone somehow knows that Gatsby's a newcomer. Tom, on the other hand, has something you can't buy. You might call it "breeding," but that sounds weird and a little racist, or even eugenicist. So, we're going to call it "arrogance": the absolute conviction that, thanks to money and family, he was born to inhabit a certain world; to marry a certain type of woman; and to receive homage from, well, pretty much every other man he encounters.

Tom has been doing some light reading, and he's obsessed with the idea that the "lesser races" are going to come and consequently knock the Aryans race, albeit "Nordic" people off their white privilege pedestal." If we don't look out the white race will be utterly submerged.

But why is Tom obsessed with the idea that his "race" is on the verge of being submerged? He certainly doesn't seem like he's going anywhere, because money isn't the only thing that makes him loom larger than life. He's also physically powerful, a college football star for Yale, and someone whom Daisy calls a "brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen." Nevertheless, the problem is, Tom doesn't like being called "hulking." Narrator hasn't divulged why; however, but we do have an idea since Tom believes that he has natural superiority. He's better than everyone else because of his family, his "blood," his station in life.

In fact, Daisy suggests, he comes by his power in the oldest, least classy way: he's just bigger and stronger than anyone else. And maybe, this passage seems to suggest, that's the root of all power. It has nothing to do with naturally superior races, or naturally superior families: it just has to do with whether or not you're big enough to steal someone else's woman.

Cruel summer - Tom is definitely big enough—and he's also mean enough. He's a cruel man. It's not enough for him to take a mistress; he flaunts her "wherever he was known", making sure that everyone sees her with him and apparently unconcerned with Daisy finding out about it. And when he wins his little battle of wills with Gatsby, he drives the metaphorical knife in just a little bit more when he insists that Daisy drive home with Gatsby, saying "Go on. He won't annoy you. I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over.

This little exchange makes Gatsby's undying love seem like a middle school crush; it deflates any feelings Daisy might have had for him; and it put Gatsby in his place by calling him "presumptuous." That's a lot of insult for a few words. And that's the point. He doesn't care about Daisy; he doesn't care about Gatsby. All he cares about is getting what's his. And Daisy, unfortunately for everyone, is his.

5. Jordan Baker - Nick might end up "halfway in love" with Jordan, but he consistently describes her as cynical, having seen too much and heard too much to be fooled by anybody. Jordan is a golfer, indeed a professional golfer. We might easily adduce she's different from Daisy. Where Daisy is always fluttering and babbling and giggling and basically acting like a dumb girl, Jordan is hard, direct, and cynical. And she's bored to tears.

We don't know much about her family, except that she has "**one aunt about a thousand years old**" , but we know that she and Daisy spent their "**white girlhoods**" together. Given the looks that Daisy and Tom give each other, we suspect that she might not be so "white" anymore. Nevertheless, there's a problem with her game. She's a cheat.

Nick, also describes her as not just a golf cheat, but a cheat at life: Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, 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.

Euphemism aside, she's dishonest, hard, cool, insolent, and deceptive. Oh, and her body has excessive sexual drive. Golf, sex, and dishonesty: Jordan may come from the same world as Daisy, but she's a modern woman, with "slender golden arms."

Jordan may not make a rich, brilliant match like Daisy, but we get the feeling she's going to have a much more successful life. Maybe it won't be happy—we're pretty sure no one in this novel gets to be happy—but she's going to make it in the modern world. In fact, she might be the only one who doesn't end up retreating back West.

One of the first things she says to him is that she "hates careless people". Nick hates careless people, too. It's a match made in heaven. And Jordan has a little bit of the same glamour that Daisy does; when he's thinking about breaking up with his Chicago girlfriend, he thinks about how that girlfriend gets a little sweaty when she plays tennis. And Jordan, apparently, never sweats at all.

So, like Gatsby, Nick is drawn in by the rich glamour of this world. Unlike Gatsby, though, he's eventually able to see through it, and he recognizes that Jordan, like Daisy and Tom, is nothing but a careless person herself. Even if she's a really sexy one.

6. George Wilson - Poor George. He really gets the short end of the stick in this one. And, seeing as he's one of the few characters without staggering flaws, he doesn't even deserve it. From what we can tell, Wilson is hard-working and not cheating on his spouse. He's in a marriage with a woman who doesn't love or respect him, who walks through him as though he's a ghost; and meanwhile he just does what she says: "'Oh, sure,' agreed Wilson hurriedly", and I think not for the first time.

After Myrtle's death, Wilson is in serious emotional pain. He cries out "Oh, my God" over and over—but because his wife is dead? Because he just found out she was having an affair? Or because he feels guilty for making her run out into the street?

The other thing to note about Wilson is that he's the only character who talks about God. He tells Myrtle that she "can't fool God," that "God sees everything" (8.105). His comment reminds us that, unlike the rich careless classes, the lower classes can't just retreat "back into [...] money" (9.136). Wilson and his class actually have to take responsibility for their actions, and they don't have trips to Paris to make it all more palatable. No wonder Wilson decides that he doesn't want to live with the consequences.

7. Myrtle Wilson - Myrtle Wilson is not too smart. If she were, she'd have recognized that Tom is Bad News. Look at the way she describes their meeting:

It was on the two little seats facing each other that are always the last ones left 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 had to pretend 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 a 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.'

This is creepy, right? He stares her down on a train, shows up beside her in a way menacing enough for her to threaten to call the police, and then apparently practically forces her into a cab. Does he even say hello? Tell her his name? But this ridiculous performance of masculinity pushes Myrtle's buttons in all the right ways. George is passive, but Tom is controlling and authoritative—and she equates that with masculinity.

Obviously Tom tells her his name at some point, and he also tells her a lot more: that the reason he can't leave his wife is because she's Catholic. And Myrtle, the poor fool, believes it. Daisy would be proud.

Class Warrior - Myrtle and Gatsby have one thing in common: they're both trying to rise above their station. Like Gatsby, Myrtle isn't happy with the class she was born to. She insists that she married beneath her, and she tries to talk about the "lower orders" as though she's not one of them: "I told that boy about the ice." Myrtle raised her eyebrows in despair at the shiftlessness of the lower orders. "These people! You have to keep after them all the time". So, what makes Gatsby and Myrtle different? Gatsby is a tragic hero, while Myrtle, in Fitzgerald's portrait, is a ridiculous fool. Is it that Gatsby strives out of love, while Myrtle does it out of greed? Or is it simply because Gatsby is a man—and Myrtle had the tragedy of being born a woman?

8. Meyer Wolfsheim - We don't know a lot about Meyer Wolfsheim – and we're not supposed to. Beyond the fact that he's a business associate and a friend of Gatsby's, all we know is that he's an inhabitant of New York's seedy underworld and a dead ringer for real-life Arnold Rothstein: the man who really did fix the 1919 World Series—one of Meyer Wolfsheim's impressive accomplishments.

Although Wolfsheim remains a mystery, we end up learning quite a lot about other characters through him. First of all, his business "goneggtings" with Gatsby shine a rather dubious light upon the latter's dealings. Even though Gatsby wants everyone to believe that he's the real deal, we begin to wonder how he really earned that fortune.

Wolfsheim also reveals some rather unfortunate things about one of our other main characters, Nick, like that he's innately judgmental. Nick is clearly intrigued by the guy, but he also acts like he's got a bad taste in his mouth around him. This shows us the bias against the foreign "Other" (Wolfsheim is Jewish) prevalent in so-called "respectable" society of the time—the same kind of bias that makes Tom declare that the "Nordic race" is being submerged, and the same kind of bias that led just two decades later to the Holocaust.

9. Owl Eyes and Klipspringer - These two odd characters sum up two extremes of the ludicrous and bizarre people who populate Gatsby's parties, drinking his liquor and gossiping about him. On one hand, you have Owl Eyes, who shows a genuine interest (or something akin to it) in Gatsby; Owl Eyes simply cannot believe that Gatsby has real books in his library, and he seems to have a real fascination with the guy: "See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too - didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"

Klipspringer, on the other hand, lives at Gatsby's house and takes advantage of his generosity without having any real feelings for him. These two attitudes towards Gatsby diverge after his death – Klipspringer rudely calls up Nick, not because he wants to give his last respects to a former friend, but simply because he wants to pick up a pair of tennis shoes, while Owl Eyes wistfully shows up at the house. Unlike the rest of the fair-weather friends, Owl Eyes has some real sympathy towards him. (Think that has something to do with the books? Check out our "Symbols" section for some thoughts on that.)

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory: An owl-eyed man at a Gatsby party sits in awe in the library, murmuring with amazement that all the books on Gatsby's shelves are "real books":

"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too - didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"

Quick Brain Snack: books used to come with their pages uncut, meaning that the sheets that are folded to make the books aren't sliced open on the top. You'd have to cut them open before reading. If you didn't, everyone would know that you hadn't actually read the book.

Gatsby's uncut books tell us that much of what Gatsby presents to the world is a façade. He wants people to believe that he's a well-educated man, an Oxford man, but in fact he only spent a short time there after the war. He wants people to think that he's well-read, but he's never even cracked the covers.

So, the simple answer is that the books represent the fact that Gatsby is a fraud. He's built up an image of himself that isn't consistent with the facts of his life. But you could also argue that the unopened, unread books represent Gatsby himself: eternally mysterious, eternally unopened. Well, maybe not eternally mysterious. We think we've got some ideas: check out his "Character Analysis" for a peek inside those flashy covers.

The Owl-Eyed Man - Speaking of those books, what's up with that guy in the library? We did list the owl-eyed man as a character, but we're not so sure that he really qualifies. Even Nick reduces him from a man to a pair of eyes. So we're thinking he's really more of a symbol than a full-blown character. (Disagree? Check out his "Character Analysis" for some tasty evidence.)

And, yes, we are getting to the point. First, there's the owl bit; owls are a symbol of wisdom, but can also be an omen of death (we don't know how that came about, either, but we're thinking someone got their signals crossed). Did you notice that it was the owl-eyed man who had the car accident outside of Gatsby's house? And that, shortly after he got out of the car, he revealed that someone else was driving? He really is acting as an omen, or a harbinger, of death. Spooky, right?

Four Eyed - But it's really the glasses bit that has our hearts beating faster right now. A man with large eyes and spectacles would be expected to be more perceptive than those around him, right? And Fitzgerald makes sure we notice the glasses; the guy is always taking them off and wiping them: "He took off his glasses and wiped them again, outside and in" (9.118). Is all that wiping the reason that the owl-eyed man is the only one of Gatsby's guests who really gets him?

Well, he is the only guest who, in doubting Gatsby, is also wise enough to investigate further. And when he does investigate, he understands what he sees: "See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too – didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"

There's a lot stuffed into that paragraph, so let's unpack it: first, the owl-eyed man is surprised (and a little delighted) to find out that the books are real. So, Gatsby's done his due diligence in trying to fool people: he's actually gone out and purchased real books. But, as the man discovers, he hasn't cut the pages and actually read them. That's because he's the perfect Belasco, a reference to theater producer David Belasco. Gatsby knows how much he has to do to fool people, and he knows that he doesn't need to cut the pages. Nobody in this crowd is going to check, because they're just as fake as he is. That's what the owl-eyed man sees.

T. J. Eckleburg - The first time we see the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg, they're looming over the valley of ashes, which Nick and the others have to pass through any time they travel between the Eggs and the city: "above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg" (2.2) The ashes are, as ashes tend to be, "desolate" and "grotesque" (2.1). Think of the valley of ashes as one big, grey reality check. Compare Gatsby's lavish parties of fresh fruit and live music and champagne to this land of smokestacks and ash-men, and you quickly realize that not all the world is as privileged as our cast of characters.

But the valley of ashes can also be seen as more commentary on the American Dream. The America of The Great Gatsby is ashen, decaying, and barren. And the Wilsons live there, which means their whole sordid story—the infidelity, immorality, lack of compassion, and anger—is associated with this failed American Dream, too. Lovely.

The Eyes Have It - Which brings us to the eyes. T.J. Eckleburg's billboard is the second notable pair of eyes in the novel (owl-eyes being the first). But these ones are a little different from those of the party-going bibliophile: "The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose."

This description is only slightly less freaky once you realize that they're not actually giant disembodied eyes; they're on a billboard, an ad for an eye doctor. Nick goes on for three sentences about these weird, disembodied eyes before actually explaining that they're on a billboard. He gives your mind time to picture eerie images, to wonder what's going on, even to form other notions of what the eyes could be. Clearly, to us, the readers, the eyes are more than just a billboard.

Not long before the Tom vs. Gatsby showdown, Nick notes the eyes again keeping a "watchful vigil" (7); and then, George takes Myrtle to the window (from which, we know, the billboard is visible) and tells her she can't fool God. Wilson makes the same connection you might be: the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg are always watching, and so are the eyes of God.

There are a few directions you can take from here. The first is that, despite the absence of religion from the characters in this story, God is still there. He's all seeing, ever-present, and, as Nick points out, frowning. Things are not well in the valley of American ashes. The other shot you could take at this is to say that God has been replaced by capitalism. Instead of a truly religious representation, the best this world can do is manifest God in a billboard – an advertisement.

The Waste Land - One last thing. If T. J. Eckleburg and his valley of ashes sounds a lot like T. S. Eliot and his "Waste Land," A+ for you: you were clearly paying attention in English class. T. J. Eckleburg is Fitzgerald's nod to Modernist poet T. S. Eliot, whose vision of a post-World War I society was just about as depressing as Fitzgerald's. So, what to make of this allusion? Is Fitzgerald setting up Eliot to be the god-like prophet of his generation? Or is he indirectly tying Eliot to the valley of ashes?

The Green Light - We hate to think about the amount of ink that's been spilled writing about the green light in Gatsby. This is a grade-A, prime-cut symbol: the "single green light" on Daisy's dock that Gatsby gazes wistfully at from his own house across the water represents the "unattainable dream," the "dream [that] must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it."

Okay, you're right: it's not quite that simple. The green light also represents the hazy future, the future that is forever elusive, as Nick claims in the last page of the novel: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run farther, stretch out our arms farther...." (9.149). But if the green light represents Gatsby's dream of Daisy, in the past, then how does it represent the future, as well? Is the future always tied to our dreams of the past?

Colors - The green light isn't the only symbolic color in Great Gatsby. Fitzgerald uses color like a preschooler let loose with tempera paints—only a little more meaningfully. First off, we've got yellows and gold, which we're thinking has something to do with...gold (in the cash money sense). Why gold and not green? Because we're talking about the real stuff, the authentic, traditional, "old money" – not these new-fangled dollar bills. So you have Gatsby's party, where the turkeys are "bewitched to dark gold," and Jordan's "slender golden arm[s]" and Daisy the "golden girl" (7.99), and Gatsby wearing a gold tie to see Daisy at Nick's house.

But yellow is different. Yellow is fake gold; it's veneer and show rather than substance. We see that with the "yellow cocktail music" at Gatsby's party (1) and the "two girls in twin yellow dresses" who aren't as alluring as the golden Jordan (3.15). Also yellow? Gatsby's car, symbol of his desire—and failure—to enter New York's high society. And if that weren't enough, T. J. Eckleburg's glasses, looking over the wasteland of America, are yellow.

White: Innocence and Femininity. While we're looking at cars, notice that Daisy's car (back before she was married) was white. So are her clothes, the rooms of her house and about half the adjectives used to describe her (her "white neck," "white girlhood," the king's daughter "high in a white palace").

Everyone likes to say that white in The Great Gatsby means innocence, probably because (1) that's easy to say and (2) everyone else is saying it. But come on – Daisy is hardly the picture of girlish innocence. At the end of the novel, she's described as selfish, careless, and destructive. Does this make the point that even the purest characters in Gatsby have been corrupted? Did Daisy start off all innocent and fall along the way, or was there no such purity to begin with? Or, in some way, does Daisy's decision to remain with Tom allow her to keep her innocence? We'll keep thinking about that one.

Then there's the color blue, which we think represents Gatsby's illusions -- his deeply romantic dreams of unreality. We did notice that the color blue is present around Gatsby more than any other character. His gardens are blue, his chauffeur wears blue, the water separating him from Daisy is his "blue lawn" (9.150), mingled with the "blue smoke of brittle leaves" in his yard.

His transformation into Jay Gatsby is sparked by Cody, who buys him, among other things, a "blue coat," and he sends a woman who comes to his house a "gas blue" dress (3.25). Before you tie this up under one simple label, keep in mind that the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg are also blue, and so is Tom's car. If blue represents illusions and alternatives to reality, maybe that makes the eyes of God into a non-existent dream. As for Tom's car...well, you can field that one. Grey and a General Lack of Color: Lifelessness (no surprise there)

If the ash heaps are associated with lifelessness and barrenness, and grey is associated with the ash heaps, anyone described as grey is going to be connected to barren lifelessness. Our main contender is Wilson: "When anyone spoke to him he invariably laughed in an agreeable colorless way" (2.17). Wilson's face is "ashen," and a "white ashen dust" covers his suit (2.17), and his eyes are described as "pale" and "glazed." We're not too surprised when she shows up with a gun at the end of the novel.

Green: Life, Vitality, The Future, Exploration - Last one. We're thinking green = plants and trees and stuff, so it must represent life and springtime and other happy events. Right? Well, the most noticeable image is that green light we seem to see over and over. As you know, the green light of the "orgastic future" that we stretch our hands towards, etc. etc. (9.149). Right before these famous last lines, Nick also describes the "fresh, green breast of the new world," the new world being this land as Nick imagines it existed hundreds of years before. Green also shows up—we think significantly—as the "long green tickets" that the rich kids of Chicago use as entry to their fabulous parties, the kind of parties where Daisy and Tom meet, and where Gatsby falls in love. So green does represent a kind of hope, but not always a good one.

When Nick imagines Gatsby's future without Daisy, he sees "a new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about...like that ashen fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees." Nick struggles to define what the future really means, especially as he faces the new decade before him (the dreaded thirties). Is he driving on toward grey, ashen death through the twilight, or reaching out for a bright, fresh green future across the water?

Setting - Long Island and New York City in the Early 1920. Great Gatsby is set in New York City and on Long Island, in two areas known as "West Egg" and "East Egg"—in real life, Great Neck and Port Washington peninsulas on Long Island. Long Island's beach communities really were (and still are) home to the rich and fabulous of the New York City area, and Fitzgerald actually lived in a small house in West Egg. Apparently, he listened to his teachers and wrote what he knew, because Nick describes his own house as "an eyesore" that's "squeezed between two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season."

These people are rich, and they have a lot of leisure time to spend worrying about how they're perceived socially. Nobody seems particularly interested in politics, or religion, or even education (you need the degree, but you don't need to have learned anything): instead, they spend their time conforming to certain standards, like not wearing pink suits (7.132). This setting matters, because it means that a lot takes place through innuendo and suggestion. There's very little violence or even outright arguing—people snap at each other and make snide comments, but these aren't the type of people to settle things with violence, at least not with each other. That's why the violent acts—Tom breaking Myrtle's nose; Wilson shooting Gatsby—take place between classes. It's not rich people beating up other rich people; it's violent conflict between the rich and the poor.

East Side/ West Side - Rich people do like to spend their time drawing subtle distinctions between types of wealth. Nick tells us right away that East Egg is the wealthier, more elite of the two Eggs. Despite all his money, Gatsby lives in West Egg, suggesting that he has not been able to complete his transformation into a member of the social elite. The distance that separates him from Daisy isn't just the water of the bay; it's also class.

The second contrast is between the city scenes and the suburban ones. Like Nick Carraway, Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby commute into the city for their respective lines of work, while the women are left behind. This geographical divide ends up being a gender distinction, too. But the city is important in other ways, too; Tom only interacts with his mistress in the city, and Gatsby only sees Meyer Wolfsheim there. They both use the city to hide their goings-on from the people they value on Long Island.

Roaring Twenties - We open in the early 1920s: just after World War I, and right in the middle of Prohibition, when alcohol was effectively illegal. We say "effectively," because plenty of people manufactured, sold, and drank alcohol anyway—like all the characters in the book, which seem to be constantly drunk, and Gatsby, who made his money bootlegging: selling illegal alcohol.

But it's not all champagne and yellow Rolls-Royces. Myrtle and George Wilson inhabit a totally different setting: the grey valley of ashes that joins the fabulous worlds of the Eggs and Manhattan. Fitzgerald didn't know yet, but we do, that the excesses of the 1920s collapsed with the stock market in 1929—leading to a much grayer, grimmer life all over the country. Did Fitzgerald suspect that the fabulous lifestyles of Tom and Daisy's crowd were doomed from the start?

The Great Gatsby Narrator: Who is the narrator, can she or he read minds, and, more importantly, can we trust her or him? First Person (Peripheral Narrator). Nick Carraway is our first-person narrator, but he's not the center of the story—and that makes him a peripheral narrator, someone who's always on the outside looking in. He tells us at the beginning of the first chapter that "I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores". Translate? People like to tell Nick their stories. And boy do we get stories: Gatsby's story, of course, but also Tom's story, Jordan's story, Daisy's story, and even the story of the Wilsons.

Ultimately, Nick's major character trait – reserving judgment – allows him to be almost an "invisible" narrator, similar to a traditional third-person omniscient point of view. Which leaves us with a question (or three): why choose a first-person narrator at all? Why not just a third-person and be done with it? And how "invisible" and "non-judgmental" is Nick, really?

The Great Gatsby Genre - literary Fiction, Modernism, Satire - We admit it, "literary fiction" is a little bit of a cop-out: it's an umbrella term for a story or novel that focuses more on character development and style than on page-turning plots. Less Twilight; more Freedom. This is the kind of lit that you usually read in school: books that provoke discussion over what it all means.

The Great Gatsby definitely fits. Fitzgerald is much more interested in plumbing the depths of Gatsby's heart and in experimenting with symbolic language than he is in working through the latest forensic evidence to figure out who hit Myrtle with his (or her) car. We're not talking CSI: West Egg.

And the way Nick's narration jumps around, shifting from dialogue to personal meditation to foreshadowing and back again, tips us off that The Great Gatsby is also a Modernist work. It's fragmented and non-linear, because it's trying to get at difficult truths that a more realistic book might not capture. (So, if The Great Gatsby floats your boat, check out some of our learning guides on Fitzgerald's fellow modernists, like Ernest Hemingway or James Joyce.)

The Great Gatsby Tone - Take a story's temperature by studying its tone. Is it hopeful? Cynical? Snarky? Playful? Cynical, Controlling. Nick is one cynical little cookie. Even though Nick reserves explicit judgment on the characters, Fitzgerald still manages to implicitly criticize through his narrator's tone. (Think about how ludicrous Myrtle seems when, although she isn't upper class, she still tries to look down on her husband.) Let's take a look at two passages. This first one is from Chapter 1, when Nick is hanging out with the Buchanans and Jordan for the first time:

"I love to see you at my table, Nick. You remind me of a – of a rose, an absolute rose. Doesn't he?" She turned to Miss Baker for confirmation: "An absolute rose?" This was untrue. I am not even faintly like a rose. She was only extemporizing, but stirring warmth flowed from her, as if her heart was trying to come out to you concealed in one of those breathless, thrilling words. Then suddenly she threw her napkin on the table and excused herself and went into the house.

Nick may be aware of the ridiculousness of certain social circumstances, but he's also aware of the seductive quality of the upper class. The tension between the two produces this cynical tone, where it's almost as though he's mocking himself for being taken in by it. "Untrue," he says: "I am not even faintly like a rose." At the same time, he responds to her words, seeing them as "stirring" and thrilling."

Take My Word For It - In the end, Nick passes along his judgment as the absolute truth. For instance, take a look at this excerpt from the last few pages of the novel, when Nick has become disillusioned with his former acquaintances:

I couldn't forgive [Tom] or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. 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. I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child.

Nick sums up Tom and Daisy as "careless." We don't get to decide for ourselves (or, at least, Nick doesn't want us to); we're just supposed to believe him, and believe his interpretations of events. But we know that Nick already feels torn about these people, torn between hard-nosed cynicism and romantic indulgence. Can we really trust him?

Writing Style: It seems to us that F. Scott Fitzgerald loves winding sentences that begin with one idea, person, or location and end up somewhere else entirely. Because of this, he draws amazing connections. In this example, watch how he begins with personality and ends with earthquakes:

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away.

How's that for some plate tectonics? Our speaker talks about the "unbroken series of successful gestures" that characterizes personality, but we can't help but think of the series of successful words that live in this very sentence. Unlike a personality, these words are broken up by three commas. We can't get enough of the commas and semi-colons that live in *The Great Gatsby*; they are everywhere, and they make for some juicy, action-packed sentences. Sometimes, we have to read sentences over and over again, just to make sure we actually did read the phrases "whole caravansary" and "card house" in the same sentence. These commas tell us that, while Fitzgerald may like beautifully ornate sentences, he also loves to enforce order. The sentences may look like they're rambling, but there's always a map.

The Title? For such a short title, *The Great Gatsby* raises a lot of questions. Is *Gatsby* great? Or is Fitzgerald being ironic? And why is he "the" great *Gatsby*? Let's break it down. The way we see it, there are three ways to read the title. First, there's the surface level of *Gatsby's* persona. He's one of the wealthiest people on Long Island, and definitely one of the wealthiest in West Egg. He's got a mansion loaded with the nicest, most expensive stuff. And his parties... oh the parties. Any one of them would qualify as a legendary event in itself, and he hosts at least one every weekend. He gives all of his guests first-class treatment, even though he doesn't really know any of them—down to sending some rando girl a new dress after she tears hers at his party.

Gatsby is a local celebrity, and everyone has a theory about how he's gotten to be so wealthy. In short, everyone seems to know his name and is endlessly interested in his life. So in that way, he's, well, "great." He seems to live a dream-like existence; he even briefly wins back the girl of his dreams.

Isn't It Ironic - Then there's the ironic reading: *Gatsby's* dream-like life is a sham. He rises to the top of society in a dishonest way; he's earned his fortune through illegal activities. The "old money" folks see right through his appearance. He's not "great" to them – he's a phony. And when his house of cards crumbles, all those friends of his turn out to simply be people who take advantage of his generosity and riches.

Great Heart - But then there's a third way of looking at that adjective. Although Nick doesn't quite approve of *Gatsby's* means, he knows that *Gatsby* is driven by a noble emotion: love. Also, Nick believes that *Gatsby* is truly a good person; the man is generous, loyal, and sincere. In this way, *Gatsby* is great. He's a victim of Tom and Daisy's selfish, shallow addiction to their wealth and lifestyle, and, in the end, Nick sides with him.

What's Up With the Epigraph? Epigraphs are like little appetizers to the great entrée of a story. They illuminate important aspects of the story, and they get us headed in the right direction. What, you've never heard of Thomas Parke D'Invilliers? That's because Fitzgerald made him up. This is breaking the normal rules of epigraphs, which usually use someone else's words and not the author's. On top of that, this fictional Thomas guy made an appearance in another one of Fitzgerald's novels as a typical college intellectual in *This Side of Paradise*. So basically, we get an idea of Fitzgerald's trickiness and perhaps literary hubris before the story even begins.

But notice that it's not just a gold hat, albeit, the "lover" of this epigraph is bouncing, too. Okay, now picture a man bouncing up and down while wearing, say, a gold top hat. Did you giggle a little? We're pretty sure this is supposed to be kind of absurd, like Fitzgerald is telling us already that there's no way this situation can possibly end well.

the Ending? Gatsby is dead; Myrtle and George Wilson are dead; Tom and Daisy have fled back West; and there's Nick, standing on Gatsby's beach and "brooding on the old unknown world" (9.150), thinking that we all chase after our dream, believe that one day we'll achieve it—and all the while, we're "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into our past."

Way to send us off, right? This is a tricky passage, and we don't want to beat all the life out of it by offering you The One Interpretation. But here's what we think is going on: Nick realizes that chasing a future dream just ends up mirroring us in the past. All of our dreams are based on visions of our past self, like Gatsby who in the past believed that he would end up with Daisy and who believed in the American myth of the self-made man. By chasing these dreams into the future, he just ended up destroying himself.

And we think that this is a larger metaphor for post-World-War-I America. The U.S. is bound to a certain vision of its past—but what is that past? Is it a world that Gatsby believes in, a world where men can make themselves? Or is it Tom's world, where self-creation was always a myth, and what really matters is your family and your breeding?

One last question. Does this ending leave us feeling that there's a way to move forward—or, does looking to the future mean ending up like the only character who seems unaffected by the events of the summer: the hard, dishonest Jordan?

Meter - For the most part, *Gatsby* is straightforward. It's got some funny 1920s turns of phrase, like "ecstatic cahoots" (8.46), but you're not going to run into too many unfamiliar words. But that doesn't mean the book is easy. Narrator Nick has a literary bent, so occasionally he lets loose with something like this:

His gorgeous pink rag of a suit made a bright spot of color against the white steps, and I thought of the night when I first came to his ancestral home, three months before. The lawn and drive had been crowded with the faces of those who guessed at his corruption – and he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream, as he waved them good-bye. (8.46)

Hard? Not exactly. The toughest word is "incorruptible," and we bet you've got that one. But the way he moves from the present to the past, and really-not-clear-at-all phrases like "concealing his incorruptible dream"—make this a paragraph that you're going to want to read slowly. But, then again, why wouldn't you want to take your time over knockout sentences like that?

Plot Analysis - Most good stories start with a fundamental list of ingredients: the initial situation, conflict, complication, climax, suspense, denouement, and conclusion. Great writers sometimes shake up the recipe and add some spice.

Exposition - East or West, Home is Best - Our narrator Nick Carraway is back from World War I and renting a house in West Egg, a small but fancy town on Long Island. Cousin Daisy and her ex-football player husband Tom live across the bay in fancier East Egg. Jay Gatsby, Nick's next door neighbor, is a wealthy newcomer who throws large parties weekly, during which his guests are happy to drink his (illegal) booze while snubbing him for being (1) nouveau riche and (2) possibly involved in some shady activities. If you said that sounds like a good set up for some juicy conflict—you'd be right.

Conflict - Gatsby wants something he can't have: Daisy, and a shot at being in the American upper class. Tom wants something he can't have: a mistress and a wife who know nothing about each other. Nick wants something that he definitely can't have: all these crazy people to stop being crazy. Oh, and the hot young golf pro, Jordan. He'll have her, too.

Complication - Tom Buchanan takes an instant disliking to Gatsby, even before he knows that Daisy is weeping over Gatsby's beautiful shirts. His investigation complicates matters considerably. Turns out, Jay Gatsby is really James Gatz, a poor kid who earned all his wealth from organized crime (gambling, bootlegging liquor). Uh-oh. No wonder Gatsby has so much trouble fitting in.

Climax - The Love Train - Tom and Gatsby have a tense but understated showdown around who gets to control Daisy, and (surprise) Tom wins. He seals his victory by letting them drive home together, just to rub it in Gatsby's face. But when the others follow behind, they discover that Myrtle was killed by a speeding yellow car that failed to stop. Apparently, a meteoric rise to the top sometimes comes with casualties.

Suspense - Gatsby watches Daisy's house all night, worried that Tom will do something to her now that her infidelity has been revealed. We don't blame him: he broke his mistress's nose just for saying Daisy's name. What's going to happen to our intrepid anti-hero?

Denouement - Pool Boy - Nick starts digesting last night's events and comes to the understandable conclusion that "They're a rotten crowd" (8.45). We're with you on that one, Nick. It's too bad Gatsby didn't have the same revelation: George Wilson finds him in the pool and then kills both Gatsby and himself in retaliation for mowing down his wife.

Conclusion - Don't Follow the Light - Daisy and Tom have fled, Nick and Jordan have broken up, and Gatsby is dead. We end with Gatsby's dismal funeral, of course, sparsely attended by Nick, Gatsby's father, and the owl-eyed man who once marveled at all of Gatsby's books. And Nick sends us off with this enigmatic conclusion: the future is always out of reach. Instead, "we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past"

Tragedy Plot - Christopher Booker is a scholar who wrote that every story falls into one of seven basic plot structures: Overcoming the Monster, Rags to Riches, the Quest, Voyage and Return, Comedy, Tragedy, and Rebirth. I have explored which of these structures fits this story like 'Cinderella's slipper.'

Plot Type: 1. Anticipation Stage - It's fun to have a crush. Will he ask to borrow your pencil in Biology? Will she walk by you in the hall today? Did he really just ask for your phone number? It's not so fun when the object of your crush is married with a two-year-old child. But Gatsby still acts like this is middle school: his crush on Daisy has driven him to bootleg alcohol, buy a house across the bay, throw lavish parties, and befriend Nick. Talk about anticipation! We sure hope it pays off.

Dream Stage - Well, kind of. When Nick reunites Daisy with Gatsby, they fall back in love. For a few weeks, it's gravy: she spends her afternoons with him, and he thinks he's this close to getting her to leave her husband and run off with him.

Frustration Stage - It turns out Gatsby has focused all his attention on an illusion, on a dream, rather than an actual person. The reality, of course, fails to live up to his expectations. Daisy isn't the same innocent teenager she used to be. She's a mom with a kid and a family, and no desire to upend her entire life. Talk about frustrating.

Nightmare Stage - Tom challenges Gatsby's claim on Daisy, but it's not a straightforward duel; it's a sneering battle of who has more social power. (Hint: it's not the up-by-his-bootstraps bootlegger.) Gatsby's dream starts to slip irretrievably away. He loses Daisy to Tom – in more ways than one.

Destruction or Death Wish Stage - Now for a classically tragic ending with a lot of people ending up dead. The thing to keep in mind here is that there are more "deaths" than the literal ones. Gatsby's image of Daisy is now completely dead in the mind of the reader (because she leaves Gatsby behind), and the fiction of Jay Gatsby dies with the arrival of the real James Gatz's father. Talk about tragedy.

Three-Act Plot Analysis – 1. For a three-act plot analysis, put on your screenwriter's hat. Moviemakers know the formula well: at the end of Act One, the main character is drawn in completely to a conflict. During Act Two, she is farthest away from her goals. At the end of Act Three, the story is resolved.

Act I - Nick meets his party-hardy next-door neighbor, the immensely wealthy Jay Gatsby, who has a suspicious past and a suspicious access to illegal alcohol. Turns out, that suspicious past also includes a flight with Nick's distant relative Daisy, now married to a belligerent and wealthy Yale graduate. The first act ends when Nick arranges a meeting between Jay and Daisy.

Act II - Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous - Daisy and Gatsby resume their love affair. Tom isn't too pleased, despite the fact that he has himself a little bit on the side. After digging into Jay's past, Tom reveals the shocking truth one hot night: Jay is a bootlegger. Gasp! Rich people are rich; do nasty things to each other.

Act III - It Happened One Night - Daisy returns to Tom, obviously, because she's old money and Gatsby is new money, and new money is okay if you're attending its fabulous parties—but you aren't actually going to leave your society husband to marry it. On the way home from New York City, Gatsby's car hits and kills Tom's mistress. Tom isn't too upset, but the woman's husband is. He murders Gatsby; Tom and Daisy flee back west, and Nick stays behind to pick up the pieces. And apparently write a book.

The Great Gatsby Trivia - The F. Scott stands for Francis Scott – which means that, yes, Fitzgerald was named after his distant relative Francis Scott Key, the man who wrote the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner." This is only slightly ironic, given the portrayal of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*.

Summary – chapter 1 - As *The Great Gatsby* opens, Nick Carraway, the story's narrator, remembers his upbringing and the lessons his family taught him. Readers learn of his past, his education, and his sense of moral justice, as he begins to unfold the story of Jay Gatsby. The narration takes place more than a year after the incidents described, so Nick is working through the filter of memory in relaying the story's events. The story proper begins when Nick moves from the Midwest to West Egg, Long Island, seeking to become a "well-rounded man" and to recapture some of the excitement and adventure he experienced as a soldier in WWI. As he tries to make his way as a bond salesman, he rents a small house next door to a mansion which, it turns out, belongs to Gatsby.

Daisy Buchanan, Nick's cousin, and her husband, Tom, live across the bay in the fashionable community of East Egg. Nick goes to visit Daisy, an ephemeral woman with a socialite's luminescence, and Tom, a brutish, hulking, powerful man made arrogant through generations of privilege, and there he meets Jordan Baker, the professional golfer and a girlhood friend of Daisy's. As the foursome lounge around the Buchannans' estate, they discuss the day's most pressing matters: the merits of living in the East, what to do on the longest day of the year, reactionary politics, and other such shallow topics. When Tom takes a phone call, Jordan informs Nick that Tom's mistress is on the phone. Tom, known for his infidelities, makes no pretense to cover up his affairs. As Tom and Daisy work to set up Nick and Jordan, they seize the opportunity to question him about his supposed engagement to a girl back home. Nick reassures them there is no impending marriage, merely a series of rumors that cannot substitute for truth.

Upon returning home that evening, as he is sitting outside, Nick notices a figure emerging from Gatsby's mansion. Nick's initial impulse is to call out to Gatsby, but he resists because Gatsby "gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone." It was while watching Gatsby that Nick witnesses a curious event. Gatsby, standing by the waterside, stretches his arms toward the darkness, trembling. This gesture seems odd to Nick, because all he can make out is a green light, such as one finds at the end of a dock, across the Sound. Looking back at the mysterious figure Nick realizes that Gatsby has vanished.

Analysis - Fitzgerald opens his novel by introducing Nick Carraway, the story's narrator. Nick has, by his own admission, come "back from the East last autumn," jaded and embittered by his experiences there. The reader knows immediately that the story has already taken place and that Nick is telling it to us through the filter of time. He is distanced from the events at hand and is recounting them by way of memory. It is imperative that readers trust him, then, because time can distort memories, and the reception to the story hinges largely on his impartiality and good judgment.

As a means of establishing faith in the narrator, Fitzgerald carefully develops Nick and positions him both within and without the dramatic situation, creating a dynamic and powerful effect. From the very beginning, even before learning about Gatsby, "the man who gives his name to this book," Fitzgerald gives details about Nick. In his "younger and more vulnerable years" (suggesting he is older and wiser now), his father gave him advice that he has carried with him ever since: "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one . . . just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." The implications are strong: Nick comes from at least a middle class family that values a sense of moral justice. In this was, the reader is encouraged to trust Nick and to believe in his impartiality and good judgment; a biased narrator will make the narrative reactionary, not honest, so stressing his good judgment is crucial. To ensure that readers don't think Nick is superhuman in his goodness, however, Fitzgerald gives him a mortal side. Nick's reservation of judgment about people is carefully calculated ("snobbish," as he even says) and even Nick, the rational narrator, can be pushed too far. His tolerance has a limit, and it is the challenge to this limit that forms the basis of the book at hand.

As the chapter continues, more of Nick's background is discussed: the way in which he was raised and his moral character. Nick continues to sell himself, informing the reader that he is an educated man, having graduated from New Haven, home of Yale University. He comes from "prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations." This seemingly simple detail is crucial. It qualifies Nick to be part of the action which he will unfold — a tale of socialites, money, and privilege — while also keeping him carefully apart. He has come from the Midwest, which for Fitzgerald is a land of perceived morality. Nick has moved East, and disgusted, returns to the Midwest. The reader knows that Nick is not only upset over the action that he will unfold, but he is downright offended by the moral rancor of the situation. Readers, wanting to believe in their own moral fortitude, find themselves siding with Nick, trusting him to exercise the same sound judgment they themselves would exercise.

The story begins. It is 1922, and Nick has moved East to seek his fortune as a bond salesman, a booming, thriving business that, he supposes, "could support one more single man." Fitzgerald introduces one of the novel's key themes, wealth, upon Nick's arrival in the East. Nick settles in West Egg, rather than East Egg, living in a small rental house adjacent to Gatsby's mansion, paying \$80 per month, rather than the \$3000 to \$4000 per month for which the houses around him rent. This detail immediately encourages readers to see the difference between the "haves" and the "have nots." Although both Eggs have beautiful mansions, East Egg is home to "old money," people whose families have had great wealth for generations. West Egg, although also home to the rich, was home to "new money," people whose wealth was recently earned, as well as to working class people such as Nick. On another level, the delineation between the Eggs can also be a metaphorical representation of the sensibilities of people from the Eastern and Western parts of the United States.

The story's first adventure, and the one that comprises a large portion of Chapter 1, is Nick's visit with his cousin, Daisy Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, at their mansion in East Egg. The visit not only introduces the other characters crucial to the story, but it also presents a number of themes that will be developed in various ways throughout the novel. Daisy and Tom appear in stark contrast to the image of Nick: Whereas he is relatively industrious (after all, he came East by himself to make his fortune rather than staying home and doing what is expected of him), the Buchannans live in the lap of luxury. Arriving at the mansion, Nick is greeted by Tom, dressed in riding clothes. Tom is an impressive figure, dressed for a sport linked closely with people of wealth and means ("effeminate swank" as Nick calls it). He stands boldly, with "a rather hard mouth," "a supercilious manner," "two shining arrogant eyes," and speaks with "a touch of paternal contempt." Clearly, Tom is not a gentle and sensitive man. Rather, he is harsh and powerful, caring little for social equality and protocol. He has rank and privilege and that's the way he wants to keep it. The first words out of his mouth — "I've got a nice place here" — bring home his inbred superiority as well. As the story unfolds, Tom serves as a foil to Gatsby, marking a striking contrast from Gatsby's newly found wealth and dreamy nature.

Fitzgerald sets the women, Daisy and her friend Jordan Baker, in a dreamlike setting, emphasizing their inability to deal with reality. Both young women, dressed entirely in white (suggesting purity or, in contrast, a void of something such as intellectualism), are engulfed by the expansiveness of the room in which they are sitting. In one of Fitzgerald's many evocative and imagistic passages, he notes how both women's dresses are "rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house." As Tom shuts the windows and the breeze dissipates, "the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor." Hardly could a more languid image be created. These are not people who concern themselves with eking out a living.

As the scene unfolds and they begin conversation, the superficial nature of these socialites becomes even more pronounced. Daisy speaks in a voice known for its ability to draw people in (a voice that Gatsby later defines as having money in it). She appears she hasn't a care in the real world, with fulfilling her own whims. The conversation at the dinner furnishes a few key details: This collection of East Eggers focuses on matters of little practical or significant importance and when they do speak of what they perceive to be weighty and meritorious matters, the parts of themselves they reveal are not flattering. For instance, when Tom chooses to discuss politics, he reveals himself not just as one who discriminates against people on the basis of class (a classicist), but also a racist. He comes from a land of privilege and unlike Nick, doesn't subscribe to the adage about withholding judgment because not everyone has had the same advantages. For Tom, all that matters is that he has had advantages; everything he does in the book comes from his selfish attempt to keep himself in a certain strata while denying anyone else access, even his mistress, who is introduced in Chapter 2.

Another key theme introduced at the dinner party is that of societal expectation. Much of *The Great Gatsby* centers on appearances and the rift between who or what one is and who or what society wishes or expects. Fitzgerald has already given a sense of this dichotomy when first introducing the Buchannans: They're expected to be gracious and generous, but instead seem shallow and superficial. Just as Nick prepares to head home for the night, Daisy calls for him to wait because she "forgot to ask [him] something, and it's important." "We heard you were engaged to a girl out West," Daisy begins. Nick denies the rumor flatly: "It's a libel. I'm too poor" (curiously, his response also brings home another of the story's key themes — wealth — and as the story unfolds, money and marriage are at its heart). Daisy insists, "But we heard it . . . we heard it from three people, so it must be true." Nick, aware of what they are referring to, reveals that the hometown gossip over his engagement was, in fact, part of what brought him East; he had "no intention of being rumored into marriage." Nick, strong enough to withstand social pressure, becomes a striking contrast to the people introduced throughout the rest of the story who will, time after time, succumb to the power of suggestion, oftentimes to dire ends.

Nick, strangely "confused and a little disgusted" as he drives home, finds an equally curious sight waiting for him when he arrives at his house. While sitting outside, he sees Gatsby's silhouette as he crosses to the water. Nick, seeing something in Gatsby's behavior that suggests he wishes to be alone, remains in the shadows watching. Gatsby proceeds to the water and stretches out his arms toward the water, trembling. Nick, looking to see what Gatsby was gesturing to, finds nothing but "a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock." This single green light has gone on to become one of the most famous symbols in all of American literature (see the Chapter 5 commentary for an explanation). It appears here, in Chapter 5, and again at the book's end. The light marks Daisy's house — Gatsby's gesture toward it, as the later chapters show, is a gesture of love.

Chapter 2 - begins with a description of the valley of ashes, a desolate and forsaken expanse of formerly developed land that marks the intersection of the city with the suburbs. In addition to its desolate feel and uniform grayness, this forlorn area is home to a decaying billboard that calls attention to itself. Depicted on the advertisement are the Eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, which are described as "blue and gigantic — their retinas are one yard high." It was in the valley of ashes that Nick first meets Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson. The two men are headed to New York when Tom insists they get off the train in order for Nick to "meet [his] girl."

The two men proceed to a car repair garage owned by George Wilson, a "spiritless man" who is also Myrtle's husband. Tom chats briefly with Wilson about business matters. Myrtle, a sensuous, fleshy woman in her middle thirties, joins the men. Tom quietly informs her he wishes to see her and so she arranges to meet them shortly, leaving her husband under the pretense of visiting her sister in New York. While on their way to Tom and Myrtle's apartment, Myrtle spies a man selling dogs and insists on having one. Once at the apartment, Myrtle phones her sister, Catherine, and her friends, the McKees, to join the party. The six people spend the afternoon in a haze of drunkenness. As the afternoon wears on and she becomes increasingly intoxicated, Myrtle becomes more and more outspoken about her situation in life, her marriage, her impassioned first meeting with Tom, and finally, Tom's marriage. Upon mentioning Daisy's name, Myrtle becomes enraged, shouting "Daisy" at the top of her lungs. Tom, incensed by this outburst, lashes out with his open hand and breaks Myrtle's nose in one "short deft movement." The party enters into a downward spiral and the guests take their departure. The chapter ends with Nick seeing Mr. McKee home and then heading home himself.

Analysis - Whereas Chapter 1 ended with the mysterious Gatsby reaching out to his dream in the night, Chapter 2 opens with a striking contrast. Nick tells us about a stretch of land lying "about half way between West Egg and New York" which is so desolate that it is merely a "valley of ashes — a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into the ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses . . . [and] with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air." As the geographic midpoint between what is in effect the suburbs and the city, the valley of ashes, a dreamless, colorless place bound on one side by a putrid river, is home to the sorts of people that the wealthy citizens of the Eggs and the sophisticated people of the city are content to overlook.

The ashen quality of the community is reflected in every element — including the dilapidated billboard of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, perhaps the second most memorable image in *The Great Gatsby* (following closely behind the green light at the end of the dock). In many regards, the mysterious eyes hovering above the valley of ashes serve as spiritual force. They are, as George Wilson says, the eyes of God. The faceless eyes hover over all that goes on in the book — a book decidedly void of traditional spirituality. The eyes, in this sense, represent the lack of Godliness in the lives of the characters, and by extension, the society on which Fitzgerald comments. The 1920s, for a certain sect of society, were characterized by an increasing freedom and recklessness — Gatsby's parties are perfect testament to the growing debauchery of the upper class. Through Doctor Eckleburg's sign, Fitzgerald indicates that although people are turning away from traditional (established) morality and rules of socially acceptable behavior, neglecting to tend to their spiritual side, the eyes of God continue to watch all that passes. Even though God's image may become increasingly removed from daily life (just as the face surrounding Eckleburg's enormous eyes has faded and disappeared), His eyes continue to witness all that passes. Through the eyes the reader has an implicit call to action, reconnecting with a lost spiritual connection.

After Nick and Tom get off the train (notice how Tom orders Nick around and announces what it is they are going to do; these are clear indicators of Tom's nature and continue to mark him as the story continues), they proceed to George Wilson's repair garage. Much can be learned about Wilson, as well as everyone trapped in the valley of ashes, through the brief exchange. There is little about Wilson to indicate he will ever be anywhere but the desolate wasteland of the valley. He is common, "blond," "spiritless," "anæmic" and only faintly handsome. His business totters on the brink of failure, and he seems ignorant of what goes on around him. It is unlikely that he is, in Tom's elitist words, "so dumb he doesn't know he's alive," but he does seem trapped by an unnamable force.

Myrtle Wilson appears in striking contrast to her husband. Although she does not possess the ethereal qualities of Daisy, in fact, she appears very much of the earth, she does possess a decided sensuality, as well as a degree of ambition and drive that is conspicuously absent in her husband. After a few attempts at social niceties (showing that Myrtle, despite being trapped in a dead-end lifestyle, aspires in some sense to refinement and propriety), Nick and Tom leave, with the understanding that Myrtle will soon join them to travel into the city to the apartment that Tom keeps for just such purposes. It is worth noting, however, that Myrtle rides in a different train car from Tom and Nick, in accordance with Tom's desire to pander, in this small way, to the "sensibilities of those East Eggers who might be on the train." The irony runs deep, giving a greater sense of Tom's character. He is bold about his affair, not worrying that Daisy knows, but he sees the need to put up a pretense on the train, as if that one small gesture of discretion makes up for all the other ways in which he flaunts his affairs.

As soon as the group arrives in New York, Myrtle shows herself to be not nearly as nondescript as is her husband. She is, however, far from refined, despite how she may try. Her purchases at a newsstand (two tabloid-like publications), as well as the way she painstakingly selects just the right taxicab (lavender with gray upholstery) suggests that she is concerned with appearance and fashion, aspiring to be part of the jet-set that she reads about in her magazines and which, she thinks, she can gain entrée to through her wealthy lover.

At the apartment in New York, after "throwing a regal homecoming glance around the neighborhood," Myrtle undergoes a transformation. By changing her clothes she leaves behind her lower-class trappings, and in with donning new clothes she adopts a new personality. She invites her sister and some friends to join the afternoon's party, but her motivation for doing so goes beyond simply wanting to enjoy their company. Her intent is largely to show off what she has gained for herself through her arrangement. It is irrelevant to Myrtle that what she has gained comes through questionable means; clearly, for her (and Tom, too), the morality of infidelity is not an issue. Her affair with Tom allows her to gain something she wants — money and power — and therefore it can be justified.

As Nick describes, when Myrtle changes her clothes, she exchanges her earlier "intense vitality" (clearly a positive and refreshing attribute) for "impressive hauteur" (a decidedly unappealing quality invoking Nick's respect and disgust simultaneously). While entertaining, Myrtle comes across as perceiving herself to be superior, although that isn't hard to do, given the people with whom she surrounds herself. The McKees, for instance, are trying desperately to be accepted by the upper class, but are really shallow, dull people. Mr. McKee, despite his attempts to be seen as an artist, is conventional (even boring) in his photography. His skill is technical, at best, rather than artistic, as he would have people believe, as evidenced by the completely unoriginal titles he gives his photos — 'Montauk Point — the Gulls' and 'Montauk Point — the Sea.'

As Myrtle has more and more to drink, she becomes increasingly belligerent, ordering people about and assuming a false sense of social superiority, casually offering derogatory comments about various types of people — in many ways, mirroring Tom's sense of social superiority. By this point she sees herself not only as superior to her guests, she is Tom's equal.

All this changes, however, when Tom brutally reminds her of her place in his life. After bringing up Daisy's name, Tom and Myrtle stand "face to face, discussing in impassioned voices whether Mrs. Wilson had any right to mention Daisy's name." Myrtle, made bold by the whiskey, begins to shout Daisy's name while Tom, exhibiting the brute force Nick has known he was capable of since first meeting him, quickly hits Myrtle with his open hand, breaking her nose.

The shocking violence of this incident is calculated and underscores a nastier side of life that most people would like to ignore. Through Tom's assault, Fitzgerald not only demonstrates more about Tom and his callousness toward humanity, but also suggests a hidden side to the Jazz Age. Although most people associate good times and carefree abandon with the reverie of the 1920s, Fitzgerald suggests a much darker side. Tom is a decidedly unpleasant man, held in check by very few rules. The reader must wonder, if he is capable of this sort of violence, what else is he capable of? In just the second chapter of the book, Fitzgerald is already showing the seedy side to a supposedly charmed life. The incident piques the reader's interest, shocking and appalling as it is, making the reader wonder to what depths this society will fall — in the book and in real life, as well.

It is appropriate to briefly explore the tones of homoeroticism that underlie the party at Tom and Myrtle's. Catherine, Myrtle's sister who is "said to be very beautiful by people who ought to know" (again introducing the notion of rumors and truth, as well as the idea that a certain portion of society has the right to set standards for other portions), speaks in couched terms about her travels and living arrangements with "a girl friend at a hotel." Although this does not, in any way, indicate that Catherine is a lesbian, it does introduce the possibility. As Fitzgerald shows by the afternoon's party, anything can happen. It's a wild time — people, particularly the trendy people, are eager to break established boundaries. It is not unlikely that they would challenge established social mores, as well. Nick, himself, has an encounter shrouded in mystery in this chapter, which again hints at challenging the accepted sexual morality of the time — homosexuality was not commonly spoken of at this time in history.

At the end of the chapter, Nick says that after he sees McKee home, after a curious use of ellipses by Fitzgerald, he "was standing beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands." Fitzgerald very purposely skirts the issue, dropping hints, but no concrete evidence, and leaves the reader to ponder the possibility of a sexual encounter between the two men. Some may argue that looking at this chapter's homoeroticism is pointless; if the author had wanted to focus on it, he would have made it more pronounced in the text. What these critics overlook, however, is the possibility that Fitzgerald is hinting at it, just as the society of which he was a part, hinted at it. By refusing to make the book's underlying homoeroticism pronounced, he is mirroring the refusal of society at large to acknowledge a lifestyle choice that was socially unacceptable in most circles. The hints of homoeroticism also bring into focus the debauchery which marks *The Great Gatsby*. The 1920s, Fitzgerald suggests, was not just a time of challenging social boundaries. It was also a time of changing sexual — and even spiritual — boundaries.

Chapter 3. *Gatsby*, in the summer months, was known far and wide for the extravagant parties he threw in which "men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars." During the weekend, people flocked to his house for his parties, as well as to use his pool, his boats, his car, and so on. His gatherings were lavishly catered (serving two complete dinners), boasting not just a small combo of musicians, but a whole orchestra.

The guests enjoyed themselves, flirting and dancing, until the wee hours of the morning. After seeing these parties from afar, Nick is invited by Gatsby by a handwritten note to join in the festivities. Nick is one of the few to have actually been invited. The others simply arrive, knowing only that there will be a party and they won't be turned away. At the party, Nick tries to find Gatsby, but has no luck. No one can tell him where Gatsby is, suggesting that they, themselves, didn't know the host. As Nick mills around the party, he encounters Jordan Baker and the two of them mingle around, inadvertently gathering rumors about Gatsby, including that he had once killed a man. After several glasses of champagne, Nick begins a conversation with a fellow who is, unbeknownst to him, Gatsby himself. Later, Gatsby takes Jordan Baker aside to speak with her privately. What they discuss is not revealed, but Jordan passes along that it is "the most amazing thing."

Not wanting the reader to think his summer was composed merely of the three events outlined in the book's first three chapters, Nick interjects that much more happened to him, although it largely entailed working, dating casually, and dining at the Yale Club. His affinity for New York has been growing throughout the summer as he begins to appreciate its "enchanted metropolitan twilight" and how everyone hurried "toward gayety." Nick meets up with Jordan Baker in mid-summer and as the two begin to see more of each other, Nick begins to look upon her with "a sort of tender curiosity." He realizes, though, that Jordan is "incurably dishonest." In fact, the reason Nick remembered her name initially is that she had once been accused of cheating in a golf tournament. Despite Jordan's downfalls, she intrigues Nick, although he ends the chapter by touting his own cardinal virtue, claiming modestly, "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known."

Analysis - Chapter 3 is, in many ways, like Chapter 2, moving from one party to another, encouraging the juxtaposition of the two events. Tom's party and Gatsby's party are quite different, although in some ways alike, encouraging the reader to explore in what ways the two men are also similar. The purpose of Chapter 3 is, also like Chapter 2, to provide essential background, although this time it is Gatsby who is introduced. By inserting the chapter about Tom, Fitzgerald has effectively held off introducing the story's main character, helping to build an air of mystery around him, not unlike the mystery that Nick and the others initially associate with him, and by keeping the reader from meeting Gatsby, Fitzgerald links the reader even more closely to Nick. However, the information is sketchy — later chapters help to round out the picture of him: who he is and where he comes from.

Nick tells of Gatsby's parties, elaborate and grand affairs that attract entertainers, socialites, and even ordinary people. Gatsby is a perfect host, generous and hospitable. In fact, he is courteous to the point of being taken advantage of. People routinely come to his house for the parties, but also to use his boats, his plane, his cars, and so on. Gatsby must not mind all his guests, however, because every weekend continues in the same patterns of excess and opulence as he provides his guests with only the finest food, drink, and entertainment.

Nick, living next door to Gatsby, has been observing the parties at a distance, as a casual observer, but in Chapter 3 he is officially invited to attend one. As he moves from being a spectator to being a participant, Nick is able to provide an informed view of not only what goes on at Gatsby's parties, but also what the partygoers themselves are like. When Nick reveals that he is one of the few invited guests at the party, this little detail tells quite a lot: It signals that in some yet unexplained way, Nick is set apart from the typical party guest. Despite living next door to Gatsby, he has never succumbed to the urge to crash one of the parties (which would have been easy enough to do, given the way in which people come and go from Gatsby's affairs). Perhaps it is Nick's Midwestern roots and their implied propriety that keep him at a distance, but regardless, his sense of decorum shows brightly throughout this scene, helping readers see him as a character with integrity.

Having Nick at Gatsby's party provides an unprecedented chance to peer into the lives of the seemingly well-to-do people who attend. The impression is not very appealing. It turns out that the glamorous and glib party guests are, in fact, quite shallow. Nick says that they "conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks," again stressing the carefree, stereotypical roaring '20s atmosphere. Much to the partygoers' discredit, however, "sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all." In stark contrast, Nick "as soon as [he] arrived . . . made an attempt to find [his] host." He had little luck, however, because no one could help him. In fact, when Nick asks people for help in finding Gatsby, they can only look at him "in such an amazed way" and vehemently deny "any knowledge of his movements," again setting a stark contrast between himself and the people he tells us about.

The only person Nick encounters at the party whom he knows is Jordan Baker. The mere fact that Jordan is at the party suggests that she is, in some ways (ways that are explored later in this chapter and beyond) an extension of the party-going set. Although little is known of her, up to this point, her presence at the mansion suggests that she likely runs with the sort of people who frequent Gatsby's house. She seems intrigued by Nick, however, just as he is intrigued by her, for reasons that remain unstated. Perhaps she finds Nick a welcome relief to the kinds of men she generally meets, or perhaps she is drawn to his Midwestern sensibility, for it is clear he doesn't yet blend in with the East Coast crowd. Whatever it is that draws her to him, she has never before been involved with anyone quite like Nick (this is especially brought out in Chapters 8 and 9).

While Nick and Jordan mingle at Gatsby's party, they learn many intriguing things about their host, and everything they learn underscores the idea of reality versus rumor that underlies so much of *The Great Gatsby*. One of the first things the couple find out is that when one partygoer tore a dress at a party, Gatsby sent her a new evening gown worth a small fortune. Nick and Jordan also discover that part of the Gatsby mythos is that "he killed a man once." Another romantic rumor places Gatsby as "a German spy during the war." How interesting that no one really knows much about Gatsby! In a way, it is a sad commentary on the people attending the party: Can they really care so little about their host that they don't even have the common courtesy to find the difference between fiction and fact? Instead, they believe what is convenient or easy for them, creating a version of Jay Gatsby that meets their ideals. Ironically, the guests' construction of their host is not unlike how the host himself, as is later revealed, has constructed himself.

As Nick and Jordan saunter around, they also shed more light on the partygoers themselves. For example, while Nick and Jordan explore the house (under the pretense, at least, of looking for Gatsby), they meet a man known throughout the book as "Owl Eyes" due to his glasses. Two things are striking about him. First, he seems impressed that the books in Gatsby's library are real. Although this may seem merely a careless remark, in fact, it speaks volumes. Gatsby, unlike Tom, is "new money," and Owl Eyes knows it. Clearly he has spent a great deal of time among the nouveaux riches and knows them well enough to know that they are, by and large, about appearances. He is surprised that the books are real, expecting, instead, for them to "be a nice durable cardboard," giving the illusion of a library where none really exists. Instead, Gatsby does indeed have real books. Everything in the house, Gatsby reveals later, has been painstakingly chosen to create an image of affluence. The second revealing statement Owl Eyes makes is that he's "been drunk for about a week now." In this respect, he is a perfect poster boy for the Jazz Age, drunk to incapacitation for weeks on end.

The carnivalesque atmosphere of Gatsby's party continues as the couple heads outdoors, still searching for their host. Nick offers a telling commentary on the way of life he's witnessing, stating that after he had enough champagne, "the scene had changed before [his] eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound." Sober, this scene has no more significance than any other, but through the haze of alcohol, it seems to become steeped in meaning. Again, Fitzgerald offers candid commentary into life in the Jazz Age. He is, in effect, offering harsh social criticism, by suggesting that the only way in which a sense of meaning is to be found in this time is through altering one's sense of consciousness. Through the partying, people were able to bring meaning (regardless of the fact it may be false meaning) into their otherwise meaningless lives. For them, drinking was an escape, allowing them to exit the mundane world and take part in something bigger, something more meaningful.

The first glimpse of Gatsby reveals a man who stands apart from the type of guests he routinely hosts at his parties. Much to Fitzgerald's credit, the reader, just like Nick, falls into the trap of interacting with Gatsby before his identity is ever revealed. Nick strikes up a conversation with someone of a bit more substance than the typical party guest — someone who asks him questions about himself and is somewhat interested in him (albeit a general passing interest). In fact, as Nick remarks that Gatsby possesses "a quality of eternal reassurance . . . that you may come across four or five times in life." His smile, Nick asserts, "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." The understanding projected through Gatsby's smile is not without its roots — the incidents in his past (especially those discussed in Chapter 6) have led him to value a well-crafted appearance.

The image of Gatsby is one of extreme propriety. From the "majestic hand" that signed Nick's invitation to the full-sized orchestra and exquisite catering, Gatsby appears the perfect gentleman. He is gracious and kindhearted (or else how could he put up with his own guests?), a combination that gives rise to rumors. He is, however, set apart from the guests, both mentally and physically.

Nick indicates that during the course of the evening, as men and women began to move closer to each other in gestures of flirtation, Gatsby was strikingly marginalized. No one sought to rest her head on his shoulder, no friends sought him out to join their small and intimate groups. Gatsby, the host, remained strikingly aloof from his guests. Nick, likely, is one of the first people to ever realize this. (Again, as a testament to his general nature, Nick comes off as a credible and trustworthy narrator.) Just as one may think that Gatsby will have nothing to do with any woman, however, he sends for Jordan Baker, wishing to speak to her privately. When Jordan returns, Fitzgerald, wanting to maintain suspense for a bit longer, withholds the purpose of their discussion, but Jordan says that it was "the most amazing thing," which is finally discussed at the end of Chapter 4.

In addition to providing information about Gatsby, his parties, and his party guests, Chapter 3 also chronicles a return to the issues of morality and equity introduced in Chapter 1. Toward the chapter's end, Nick shifts his focus away from Gatsby and toward Jordan. He reveals his interest in her, but tempers it by discussing her apparent penchant for lying. While he is initially "flattered to go places with her," largely because of her fame, he isn't "actually in love" but feels "a sort of tender curiosity." Nick's opinion of Jordan changes, however, when he finds that she makes a habit of lying her way out of bad situations, thus revealing two contrary facets of his nature. Unlike many of the novel's characters who delight in basking in the fame and notoriety of others (take for instance Myrtle's delight at the power and prestige she gets from being with Tom), Nick's judgment is not entirely clouded by fame. Even though Nick is fond of Jordan he is still able to discern her lack of honesty. However, as admirable as that is, Nick contradicts this good judgment when he confesses that "Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply — I was casually sorry, and then I forgot." Clearly, although he wouldn't admit it, he does hold a double standard, excusing Jordan's shortcomings because of her gender. As the chapter ends, Nick reveals his own sense of self worth: Of all the people he has known, he is one of the few who is honest. In many respects, this is true, and as the story continues, Nick's moral fortitude becomes more and more pronounced, but the mere fact that he has dismissed Jordan's dishonesty makes the reader wonder, at least momentarily, whether this is true.

Chapter 4 - opens with a cataloguing of Gatsby's party guests: the Chester Beckers, the Leeches, Doctor Webster Civet, the Hornbeams, the Ismays, the Chrysties, and so on. From socialites and debutantes to the famous and the infamous, Gatsby's parties draw only the most fashionable of people. One fellow, Klipspringer, in fact, was at Gatsby's house so often and so long that he became known as simply "the boarder."

One late July morning, Gatsby arrives at Nick's and announces they are having lunch that day in New York. During the "disconcerting ride" to the city, Gatsby attempts to clear the record about his past so that Nick wouldn't "get a wrong idea" by listening to the rumors. Nick is suspicious, however, when he hears Gatsby reveal that he was born into a wealthy Midwest family (in San Francisco) and educated at Oxford, "a family tradition." After touring Europe, Gatsby served as a major in the military where he "tried very hard to die" but, in his own words, "seemed to bear an enchanted life." As in testament to this disclosure, Gatsby is pulled over for speeding, but is let go after producing a card from the police commissioner for whom Gatsby had once done a favor.

In New York, two important things happen to Nick. First, at lunch Nick meets Meyer Wolfshiem, a professional gambler and the man rumored to have fixed the 1919 World Series. Wolfshiem is Gatsby's link to organized crime and there is an intimation that Gatsby may be able to fix Nick up with Wolfshiem in an undisclosed venture (this hint is again brought out in Chapter 5). The second memorable thing which happened to Nick comes through Jordan Baker. She recounts how one morning in 1917 she met Daisy and an unknown admirer, a military officer, who watched Daisy "in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at." His name: Jay Gatsby. Daisy's family didn't approve of the match and so she eventually turned her attentions away from Gatsby and to Tom Buchanan. On the day before the wedding, Daisy reconsidered her actions but after a drunken cry, she thought better of her situation and married Tom. The following April, Daisy gave birth to a daughter. Jordan continues, noting what Gatsby told her on the night of the party. Apparently, it was not coincidence that brought him to West Egg: He purposely selected his house so that the house of his lost love would be just across the bay. Jordan then relays Gatsby's request: that Nick invite Daisy over some afternoon so he can arrange to come by and see her, as if by accident. She is to know nothing about the intended reunion with her former lover; it is all supposed to be a surprise.

Analysis - All three of the major incidents in this chapter — Gatsby's disclosure in the car, the meeting with Wolfshiem, and Jordan's story about Daisy's soldier — all serve one common purpose: they all give a better understanding of Jay Gatsby's past and, in turn, his present. Gatsby, as if aware of the rumors flying about him, attempts to set the record straight, but doesn't touch on every aspect of his past, only what he wishes Nick to know. Later chapters will give more and more information, even after his death.

The opening paragraphs of the chapter read much like a Who's Who of 1922. Nick expands upon an idea brought out in the prior chapter: Gatsby's party guests. Nick recounts dozens and dozens of names, all of them supposedly recognizable. Clearly, everyone who was anyone wanted to be seen at Gatsby's lavish gatherings. Some of the people came from East Egg (they are distinguished by their aristocratic-sounding names: the Endives, the Stonewall Jacksons, the Fishguards, and the Ripley Snells), while others came from West Egg (sporting more ethnic-sounding names such as Pole, Mulready, Schoen, Gulick, Cohen, Schwartz, and McCarty). Fitzgerald's use of names here brings out the notion that East Egg is symbolic of the established social order (the old money) while West Egg is home to the newcomers, people who may have equal wealth, but haven't had it nearly as long. It is curious that Nick recounts the names off notes he took on a timetable dated July 5, 1922, the day after Independence day, as if to indicate these people have somehow only just arrived and are enjoying the benefits of independence that they didn't even fight for.

After the conspicuous cataloguing of Gatsby's guests, Nick recounts another of his adventures — this time one that changes the course of his life forever. Gatsby, arriving at Nick's house for the first time, informs him that because they will be having lunch together, they may as well ride together. The real reason for Gatsby's visit, however, is to talk to Nick alone, and so the two men head to the city driving Gatsby's car — so big and excessive as to border on being gaudy. (How ironic it is that a car, a massive symbol of the American dream and here an outward manifestation of Gatsby's wealth, will ultimately lead to his undoing.)

When the two men leave for town Nick, by his own disclosure, has little real knowledge of Gatsby, having "talked with him perhaps half a dozen times in the past month." All that soon changes, however, as Gatsby unfolds his story. The discussion is particularly important because it gives the first strong indication that Gatsby isn't quite what he presents himself to be. Up to now, there has been mystery and speculation, but Fitzgerald hasn't revealed enough of Gatsby to allow readers to figure him out. Gatsby tells Nick, "God's truth," that he comes from wealthy people in the Middle West and was "educated at Oxford." Gatsby's inability to deliver that phrase without difficulty alerts Nick that something may be amiss. When Nick questions him as to where in the Middle West he hails from, readers get their first clear indication that Gatsby is recounting an elaborate lie — "San Francisco" is hardly the Middle West, and Nick knows it.

Sadly, Gatsby isn't even a good liar and he continues to tell his story, as if telling it will make it so. Fitzgerald later reveals that nearly everything (perhaps everything) he tells Nick during this ride, the candid self-disclosures he freely offers so that Nick doesn't get "a wrong idea" of him from the stories floating around, are themselves fictions created by Gatsby as part of his plan to reinvent himself. In fact, the past that Gatsby describes reads like an adventure tale, a romance in which the hero "lived like a young rajah," looking for treasures, dabbling in everything from the fine arts to big game hunting. Gatsby's past is highly unbelievable — a point not lost on Nick. When Gatsby informs Nick that his "family all died and [he] came into a good deal of money," it is wishful thinking at best, and Chapters 7 and 9 disclose that Gatsby's money came from a very different place.

As the two men head to the city, they pass through the valley of ashes, moving from a desolate gray world of dead-end dreams to the city, the place where anything at all can happen. When Gatsby is stopped for speeding, Gatsby need merely to wave a card before the officer and he is let go with a polite "Know you next time, Mr. Gatsby. Excuse me!" Apparently Gatsby once did a favor for the commissioner and receives his eternal thanks. Although Gatsby has just fed Nick an elaborate series of lies, this is the first piece that may well be true. Gatsby, through a business associate whom they are on their way to see, may likely have done a favor for the commissioner — and it is likely to have been something of a questionable nature.

The luncheon with Gatsby is not remarkable, save for the character who is introduced: Meyer Wolfshiem, a notorious gambler who is rumored to have rigged the 1919 World Series, an unprecedented scandal that degraded America's Game. Mr. Wolfshiem, a business associate of Jay Gatsby, is everything his name suggests: He is a perfect combination of human and animal. He is wolf-like in his ways, and no where do we get better evidence of this than by the human molar cufflinks he sports proudly.

Although Nick has begun to like Gatsby and wants to give him the benefit of the doubt, Gatsby's taste in business connections is not at all what a man who comes from the background Gatsby has just recounted would make. Wolfshiem is Gatsby's connection (or gonnection, as Wolfshiem would say) to the world of organized crime. Wolfshiem, as is later made known, has been instrumental in Gatsby's ability to accumulate wealth. There is a partnership in which Gatsby feels some sort of indebtedness to Wolfshiem — although they are partners on some levels, they are not at all equals.

That same afternoon, after hearing Gatsby's story and meeting his business contact, Nick has tea with Jordan Baker wherein he gets a more accurate reading of Gatsby. Jordan recounts the "amazing" story she learned the night of Gatsby's party. The story recalls Jordan's girlhood in Louisville and one of her memories of Daisy Fay (who would later become Daisy Buchanan; notice, too, "Fay" is a synonym for "faerie" — an appropriate name for someone of Daisy's ethereal nature). On one memorable day, she saw Daisy with a young officer, Jay Gatsby, who looked at Daisy "in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at." The memory stayed with Jordan "because it seemed romantic." However, she didn't put the Jay Gatsby in Daisy's car with the Jay Gatsby of West Egg until the night of the party.

Through Jordan's story of Daisy right before her wedding, Fitzgerald gives a much better sense of Daisy. She loved the young officer (as Gatsby tells in Chapter 8), but was forcibly discouraged from entering into a permanent relationship with the young man — Gatsby's lack of money was his primary character deficit. After breaking off contact with Gatsby, Daisy began to resume her activities as usual. She meets Tom Buchanan and shortly becomes engaged to him. One the eve of her wedding Daisy has second thoughts, deciding while in a drunken stupor that perhaps marrying for love instead of money is what she should do. As she sobers up she seems to come to terms with herself and what is expected of her. She puts Gatsby behind her and marries Tom. Before long, however, Tom begins to have affairs. Daisy is aware of this from early on, but fails to do anything about it. One can only speculate why. Clearly Daisy is more dimensional than the initial impression of her suggests. She is aware of Tom's indiscretions, but appears not to care. Why? It's difficult to say with certainty, but one theory holds that she enjoys Tom's money and the status she has as a Buchanan of East Egg. Challenging her husband's tomcat-like behavior would jeopardize her status and security — the things her entire life has revolved around.

When Jordan finishes telling this story of Daisy, she comes to where Gatsby figures in, and Nick learns a great deal about him through this disclosure. Jordan reveals that it wasn't coincidence that Gatsby's house is across the Sound from Daisy's, as Nick initially believes. Rather, it is all part of Gatsby's calculated plan. He purposely chose the less fashionable West Egg so that he could be across from Daisy, rather than adjacent to her. Jordan also discloses that the parties he hosts are for no other reason than to try to get Daisy's attention. Gatsby, following his dream of being reunited with Daisy, puts on excessive displays of wealth, entertaining people he doesn't know and who don't know him, all for the sake of a lost love.

He throws the parties initially in the hope Daisy might attend. Later, he begins to ask his guests if they know her. When he finds that Jordan is a friend of Daisy's, he tells her portions of his story. When Jordan suggests a meeting in New York, Gatsby won't hear of it. "I want to see her right next door," Gatsby protests, with the intimation that he doesn't want to trouble Daisy or Jordan or have them go out of their way. What he really wants is to have Daisy see his house, his nearly ostentatious display of money. In his mind, if Daisy knows how much he is worth, she will have no reason to reject him a second time. As the conversation ends, Jordan brings up Gatsby's request: that Nick invite Daisy over for tea so Gatsby can happen by.

The chapter's end raises some interesting questions and complications, again harkening back to the idea of morality that permeates the book. Jordan, confiding in Nick, tells him "Daisy ought to have something in her life," and Nick, by implicitly agreeing to pander for Gatsby, is in accord. Nick is placing himself in a position in which he will have to come to terms with helping deceive Tom while bringing Gatsby's fantasy to life. Nick, too, is becoming more and more involved with Jordan and this, perhaps, clouds his judgment. (At the end of Chapter 3, he was determined to break off relations with a girl back home so that he could pursue Jordan, again showing his moral nature.) As Chapter 4 ends, Nick comes to the realization that both Tom and Gatsby are linked by their pursuit of their respective dreams. Each of the men, Nick realizes, are motivated by their desire to be loved by a "disembodied face float[ing] along the dark cornices." Nick, feeling empty at the realization he has no such dream, pulls Jordan closer to him, ending the chapter with a kiss.

If nothing else, this moment of desire makes Nick seem more human. He has needs and longings, just as everyone does. In addition, his agreeing to help Gatsby reunite with Daisy suggests he, too, has a bit of the romantic about him. His morality isn't as rigid as may have been initially supposed; these small acts of human nature help warm the reader to an otherwise aloof man. This release of passion, too, marks a turning point for Nick. From this time, he is open to change and susceptible to the feeling and emotions that many other characters (especially Tom, and to a large extent Daisy and Jordan) work diligently to keep out.

Chapter 5 - When Nick returns home to West Egg that evening, he finds Gatsby's house lit top to bottom with no party in sight, and Gatsby walking over to see him. Nick assures Gatsby that he will phone Daisy the next day and invite her to tea. Gatsby, knowing Nick doesn't make much money, offers to arrange for him to "pick up a nice bit of money." Nick, however, declines.

The next day, Nick phones Daisy and extends his invitation with the stipulation "Don't bring Tom." She accepts his invitation, agreeing on a day. The agreed upon day arrives and Gatsby, wanting everything to be perfect, sends a man to cut Nick's grass and, later, has flowers delivered. Arriving an hour before Daisy, Gatsby is nervous and, for the first time in the novel, a little unsure of himself. At the appointed time, Daisy arrives. Nick ushers Daisy into the house to find that Gatsby has disappeared, only to reemerge at the front door, looking pale and tragic. Gatsby ushers himself into the living room and joins Daisy. The reunion is initially stilted and unnaturally polite, leaving all three people feeling somewhat awkward, but amid the tea preparations, a greater sense of ease overtakes the group. Excusing himself, Nick tries to give Gatsby and Daisy some privacy, but Gatsby, as nervous as a young man, follows him out. Nick sends Gatsby back in to Daisy, while he himself sneaks out the back and wanders around the house for half an hour.

Upon his return, Nick finds Gatsby changed entirely. He has moved from the embarrassment of his initial appearance to unbounded delight, radiating a newfound sense of well-being. Daisy, too, reflects an "unexpected joy" though her voice. At Gatsby's request, the three move from Nick's little house to Gatsby's mansion. Daisy, just as Gatsby had intended, is delighted by the magnificence of his estate. Together they wander from room to room, each one tastefully and carefully decorated to create a particular ambiance. Along the way they meet Klipspringer, "the boarder," who was busy doing exercises as if he hadn't a care in the world. At the house, Gatsby passes into yet a third phase: wonder at Daisy's presence in his house. Daisy, at seeing Gatsby's array of shirts, buries her head in them weeping at their beauty. By the end of the afternoon, Gatsby has shown Daisy all the material stability he possesses, yet Nick hints that perhaps Daisy doesn't measure up — not because of a shortcoming on her part, but because of the magnitude of the dream that Gatsby has built over the past five years. At chapter's end, Nick departs, leaving Gatsby and Daisy alone together.

Analysis - Chapter 5 introduces the heart of the matter: Gatsby's dream of Daisy. Through Nick, Gatsby is brought face-to-face with the fulfillment of a dream that he has pursued relentlessly for the past five years of his life. Everything he has done has been, in some sense, tied to his pursuit of Daisy. In a sense, Daisy's and Gatsby's encounter marks the book's high point — the dream is realized. What happens after a dream is fulfilled? Unlike other novels in which characters work to overcome adversity only to have their dreams realized at the end of the book and live happily ever after (or so the implication goes), Gatsby has his dream fulfilled early, suggesting to astute readers that this won't be the typical rags-to-riches story. The second half of the book describes what happens when one chases, and then obtains, one's dream. The end need not be "happily ever after."

The chapter opens as Nick returns home, only to find Gatsby's house "lit from tower to cellar," with no party in sight, only Gatsby "glancing into some of the rooms." In an attempt to calm Gatsby's apparent restlessness, Nick tells him he will phone Daisy and invite her to tea. Gatsby, still trying to play it cool, casually remarks "Oh, that's all right." Nick, who now knows a great deal more about how Gatsby functions (and the fact he has spent the last five years of his life chasing a dream), insists on pinning Gatsby down to a date. Gatsby, trying to show his appreciation, suggest he line Nick up with some of his business contacts in order to "pick up a nice bit of money" on the side. Of course, Gatsby is referring to his underworld connections, but what is perhaps so striking about Gatsby's gesture is the apparent tactlessness of it all. Despite his great wealth, his generosity takes curious and non-traditional forms showing just how far out of touch he really is with the "old money" world into which he wishes entrée.

On the day of the appointed visit, Gatsby arrives an hour in advance, giving us our first glimpse of his vulnerability. Wanting to make sure every detail of his meeting is perfect (meaning it measures up to his dream) Gatsby has Nick's grass cut and has "a greenhouse" of flowers delivered prior to Daisy's arrival. Gatsby dresses for the event in a "white flannel suit, silver shirt, a gold-colored tie." His clothes, like his parties, his house, and his car, are an overt reminder of his newly earned wealth. It is as if he wants to make sure Daisy does not miss the fact that he now has that one thing that eluded him before: money.

When Gatsby arrives, for the first time he shows his vulnerability and uncertainty. Up to this point, he has been collected in every situation, but when facing the biggest challenge he's faced in years, his sulking, self-conscious behavior is nearly embarrassing — the generally graceful man stammers in fright, not unlike a young boy. For the first time, Jay Gatsby seems unsure of himself.

At one point, in his nervousness, he knocks a broken clock off the mantel, catching it just before it hits the ground. The symbolic nature of this act cannot be overlooked. Although on one level it is just another awkward incident caused by Gatsby's nervousness, it goes beyond that. The fact the clock is stopped is significant. In a sense, the clock stopped at a specific point in time, trapped there forever, just as Gatsby's life, in many regards, stopped when he was hit with the realization that while he was poor, he could never have Daisy. Gatsby is, in essence, trapped by his dreams of ideal love with Daisy, just as the clock is trapped in that exact moment when it stopped working. Following this analysis through to its final conclusion, one must wonder if Fitzgerald isn't also trying to say that Gatsby's dream stopped his growth in some respects (specifically emotionally); he's been so busy chasing a dream rather than enjoying reality, that like the clock, he is frozen in time.

As the afternoon unfolds, Jay and Daisy grow more comfortable in each other's presence. After excusing himself, allowing Daisy and Gatsby the opportunity to be alone together, Nick returns to find Gatsby glowing; "without a word or gesture of exultation a new well-being radiated from him and filled the little room." Daisy, too, appears equally moved by the meeting and (not surprisingly) her voice, "full of aching, grieving beauty" gives away her happiness at the meeting. When Gatsby nears the peak of his comfort, he suggests the party adjourn to his house.

As the three people make their way up to and through Gatsby's mansion, Gatsby revels in the impact his belongings have on Daisy. They have, in essence, accomplished that which he intended: They impress her. In fact, Gatsby is able to "[revalue] everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-love eyes." Keep this image in mind during Chapter 9, when it is inverted as Gatsby's father revalues his son based on the beauty and number of his material possessions. In another of the book's memorable images, Gatsby takes out a pile of shirts and throws them in the air. The shirts keep coming, and Gatsby keeps throwing them. Shirts of every color, every style, and every texture become strewn about the room in a glaringly obvious display of his wealth. How can a man who isn't well off afford to have such an array of shirts? The shirt's impact is not lost on Daisy, who is always appreciative of a great display of materialism. In fact, the excess and bounty of Gatsby's shirts causes her to put her face into them and cry, sad because she's "never seen such — such beautiful shirts before." Although a seemingly non-sensible statement, it is really a good indication of her true nature. She isn't weeping for a lost love; rather she is weeping at the overt display of wealth she sees before her.

When the trio attempts to move down to the waterfront they are held up by the rain, giving Gatsby the opportunity to make a telling statement. He informs Daisy, who clearly has no idea, which her house is right across the Sound from where they are standing. He then continues, informing her "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock." Gatsby's admission of this secret is lost neither on Nick nor on Gatsby himself (according to Nick). Daisy, however, remains oblivious to its meaning. She is unable to grasp that by Gatsby telling her this, he has shared one of his most sanctified rituals. Prior to that day, the green light (representing many things: hope, youth, forward momentum, money) represented a dream to him and by reaching out to it, he was bringing himself closer to his love. Now that she was standing beside him, her arm in his, the light will no longer hold the same significance. His dream, the goal for which he patterned most of his adult life on, must now change.

Gatsby and Daisy are, as is evidenced in this chapter, generally a good match. Gatsby's dreamlike nature complements nicely Daisy's ethereal qualities. Gatsby, the collector of "enchanted objects," as Nick says, seems the perfect match for the otherworldly Daisy who runs exclusively on emotional responses.

As if caught up in Gatsby's dream vision, Daisy calls him to the window to look at the "pink and golden billow of foamy clouds," declaring to Gatsby that she'd "like to just get one of those pink clouds and put you in it and push you around."

As the chapter ends, Nick, the trusted voice of reason, offers an astute reading on the whole situation. He interprets a look of Gatsby's face to indicate that perhaps he is dissatisfied with the whole affair. What occurs to Nick, and perhaps to Gatsby, is that once a dream is achieved, life must still continue. How does one go about the business of reordering his life after bringing a fabrication, a fantasy, to life? For Gatsby, who has spent the past five years dreaming of Daisy, one wonders whether through the five years he was in love with Daisy, or the idea of Daisy. His relentless pursuit of his dream has allowed him ample opportunity to construct scenarios in his head and to imagine her not necessarily as she is, but as he perceives her to be. As Gatsby peers into Daisy's eyes and listens to her enchanting voice, he becomes more and more in love with the vision he has conjured in front of him. As the chapter closes, Daisy and Gatsby have become so lost in each other that Nick ceases to exist for them. In response, Nick quietly retreats, leaving the lovers alone together.

Chapter 6 - opens with an air of suspicion as a reporter comes to Gatsby, asking him "if he had anything to say." The myth of Gatsby was becoming so great by summer's end that he was rumored to be embroiled in a variety of plots and schemes, inventions that provided a source of satisfaction to Gatsby, who was originally christened James Gatz and hails from North Dakota. Nick fills the reader in on Gatsby's real background, which is in sharp contrast to the fabricated antecedents Gatsby told Nick during their drive to New York. James Gatz became Jay Gatsby on the fateful day when, on the shores of Lake Superior, he saw Dan Cody drop anchor on his yacht. Prior to that time, Gatsby spent part of his young adulthood roaming parts of Minnesota shaping the aspects of the persona he would assume. Nick suspects he had the name ready prior to meeting Cody, but it was Cody who gave Gatsby the opportunity to hone the fiction that would define his life. Cody, fifty years old with a penchant for women, took Gatsby under his wing and prepared him for the yachting life, and they embarked for the West Indies and the Barbary Coast. During their five years together, Cody and Gatsby went around the continent three times; in the end, Cody was mysteriously undone by his lady love.

After many weeks of not seeing Gatsby (largely because Nick was too busy spending time with Jordan), Nick goes to visit. Shortly after his arrival, Tom Buchanan and two others out for a horseback ride show up for a drink. After exchanging social small talk wherein Gatsby is invited to dine with the group, the three riders abruptly leave without him, somewhat taken aback that he accepted what they deem to be a purely rhetorical invitation.

Tom, apparently concerned with Daisy's recent activities, accompanies her to one of Gatsby's parties. Gatsby tries to impress the Buchannans by pointing out all the celebrities present, then makes a point of introducing Tom, much to his unease, as "the polo player." Gatsby and Daisy dance, marking the only time Gatsby really gets involved with one of his own parties. Later, Daisy and Gatsby adjourn to Nick's steps for a half-hour of privacy. They head back to the party and when dinner arrives, Tom remarks he wishes to eat with another group. Daisy, always aware of what Tom is really up to, remarks the girl is "common but pretty" and offers a pencil in case he wants to take down an address. Daisy, aside from the half-hour she spends with Gatsby, finds the party unnerving and appalling. After the Buchannans leave and the party breaks up, Nick and Gatsby review the evening. Gatsby, fearing Daisy did not have a good time, worries about her. When Nick cautions Gatsby that "You can't repeat the past," Gatsby idealistically answers "Why of course you can!" words that strike Nick soundly because of their "appalling sentimentality," which both delights and disgusts him.

Analysis - If Chapter 5 showed Gatsby achieving his dream, Chapter 6 demonstrates just how deeply his dream runs. Much of the mystery surrounding Gatsby is cleared away in this chapter and the reader learns more about who he really is, where he comes from, and what he believes. After seeing Gatsby and getting to know him, Nick presents the real story of his past. By holding the actual story until Chapter 6, Fitzgerald accomplishes two things: First and most obviously, he builds suspense and piques the reader's curiosity. Second, and of equal importance, Fitzgerald is able to undercut the image of Gatsby. Ever so subtly, Fitzgerald presents, in effect, an exposé. Much as Nick did, one feels led on — Gatsby is not at all the man he claims to be. Fitzgerald wants the readers to feel delighted, glad for someone to succeed by his own ingenuity, we also a little unnerved at the ease in which Gatsby has been able to pull off his charade.

The chapter opens with an increased flurry of suspicion surrounding Gatsby. Much to his delight, the rumors about him are flying as furiously as ever, even bringing a wayward reporter to investigate (although what, precisely, he was investigating he wouldn't say). Rumors about Gatsby's past abound by the end of the summer, making a perfect segue for Nick to tell the real story on his neighbor — James Gatz from North Dakota. Gatsby is, in reality, a creation, a fiction brought to life. He is the fabrication of a young Midwestern dreamer, the son of "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" who spent his youth planning how he would escape the monotony of his everyday life — a life he never really accepted at all. He craved adventures and the embodiment of the romantic ideal, and so he voluntarily left his family to make his own way. In many senses, Gatsby's story is the rags-to-riches American dream. A young man from the middle of nowhere, through his own ingenuity and resourcefulness, makes it big.

But there is a decided downside to this American dream. For Gatsby, his life began at age seventeen when he met Dan Cody. In the years since, he has traveled the globe, gaining, losing, and regaining his fortune. All of his money, however, doesn't exactly place him within the social strata to which he aspires. His wealth may allow him to enter certain social circles otherwise forbidden, but he is unprepared to function fully in them (just as in Chapter 5 when Gatsby tries to thank Nick for his kindness by offering to bring him into a suspicious, yet lucrative, business arrangement). Although money is a large part of the American dream, through Gatsby one sees that just having money isn't enough. In this chapter in particular, Fitzgerald clearly points out the distinction between "new money" and "old money" and, regardless of the amount of wealth one accumulates, where the money comes from and how long it's been around matters just as much as how much of it there is.

Another downside to Gatsby's American dream is that it has, in essence, stunted his growth, intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. As noted, James ("Jimmy") Gatz ceased to exist on the day Gatsby was born, the day he rowed out in Lake Superior to meet Dan Cody (whose name alone is meant to evoke images of Daniel Boone and "Buffalo Bill" Cody, two oftentimes romanticized frontier figures). Since that time, he has worked to flesh out a fully dimensional fiction. When the persona he created, Jay Gatsby, fell in love with Daisy Fay, his fate was, in essence, sealed. As Gatsby became fixed on winning Daisy, his whole life became ordered around that goal. The human rationale would ask: why not? After all, he had willed Jay Gatsby into existence, why couldn't he will Daisy to be with him. It is worth pointing out, too, that there is little growth on Gatsby's part from the time he is seventeen until his death. He remains inexorably tied to his dreams and blindly pursues them at all costs. In one sense, Gatsby's determination is commendable, but there comes a point where living in a fictive world is detrimental to one's self, as Gatsby will find out all too soon. Dreams and goals are good, but not when they consume the dreamer.

After filling in Gatsby's background, Nick tells of a day at Gatsby's when three riders (Tom, Mr. Sloane, and an unnamed young woman) stop in for a drink. Gatsby, ever the good host, receives them warmly, although he knows full well that Tom is Daisy's husband. Although in some sense this may seem a strange interlude lacking in development and purpose, it is, in effect, intricately tied to the story of Dan Cody and the evolution of Jay Gatsby. The riders' visit is in many ways akin to the observations Nick made in Chapter 3 when he experienced his first Gatsby party. Just as at the party Gatsby stood away from the crowd (many of whom didn't even know him), Gatsby stands alone in this smaller setting as well. The three drop by to drink his liquor and little else. Their concern for him is minimal and their purposes mercenary. Under the pretense of sociability, the young woman invites Gatsby to join them for dinner. The three riders know the invitation is rhetorical — just a formality that is not meant to be accepted. Gatsby, however, is unable to sense the invitation's hollowness and agrees to attend. The group, appalled at his behavior, sneaks out without him, marveling at his poor taste.

This scenario contains several valuable messages. First, it gives an example of how shallow and mean-spirited "old money" can be. The trio's behavior is nothing less than appalling. Second, Gatsby takes their words at face value, trusting them to mean what they say. While this is a commendable trait, reflective of Gatsby's good nature and dreamer disposition, it leads to a third realization: that no matter how much Gatsby is living the American dream, the "old money" crowd will never accept him. Try as he might, Gatsby remains outside the inner sanctum and nothing he can do will allow him full access. He will never be accepted by anyone but the nouveaux riches.

The final incident of the chapter is the party at its end, the first and only party Daisy attends, and is, in many ways, unlike any party Gatsby has hosted so far. Up to this point, the purpose of the parties was twofold: to get Daisy's attention or, failing that, to make contact with someone who knows her.

Now, for the first time, she's in attendance (with Tom, no less), so the party's purpose must necessarily change. Daisy and Gatsby have become increasingly comfortable with each other and even Tom is beginning to feel somewhat threatened by Daisy's "running around alone." At the party, Gatsby tries his best to impress the Buchannans by pointing out all the famous guests. Tom and Daisy, however, are remarkably unimpressed, although Tom does seem to be having a better time after he finds a woman to pursue and Daisy, not surprisingly, is drawn to the luminescent quality of the movie star (who is, in many ways, a sister to Daisy). By and large, though, Tom and especially Daisy are unimpressed by the West Eggers. The "raw vigor" of the party disgusts them, offending their "old money" sensibilities, providing another example of how the Buchannans and the people they represent discriminate on the basis of social class.

After Tom and Daisy head home, Nick and Gatsby debrief the evening's events. Gatsby, worried that Daisy didn't have a good time (after all, the Daisy in his dream would have a good time), shares his concern with Nick. Carraway, always the gentle voice of reason, reminds his friend that the past is in the past and it can't be resurrected. Most would agree with this, which makes Gatsby's "Why of course you can!" even more striking. There is no mistaking Gatsby's personality: He's like an errant knight, seeking to capture the illusive grail. He is living in the past, something the reader may not have known, had he not realized his dream of reuniting with Daisy. Although it would be going too far to say Gatsby is weak in character, Fitzgerald creates a protagonist who is unable to function in the present. He must continually return to the past, revising it and modifying it until it takes on epic qualities which, sadly, can never be realized in the everyday world. Gatsby, just as he is at his parties and with the social elite, is once again marginalized, forced to the fringes by the vivacity of his dream.

Chapter 7 - As the curiosity surrounding Gatsby peaks, the routine Saturday parties abruptly cease. When Gatsby comes, at Daisy's request, to invite him to lunch at her house the next day, Nick learns that Gatsby replaced the servants with "some people Wolfshiem wanted to do something for" — he feared they would leak information about he and Daisy. The day, it turns out, is unbearably hot, making all the participants in the luncheon — Daisy, Gatsby, Nick, Jordan, and Tom — even more uncomfortable than expected. While all five are at the Buchannans' house, Tom leaves the room to speak with his mistress on the phone and Daisy boldly kisses Gatsby, declaring her love for him. Later, after Daisy suggests they go to town, Tom witnesses a soft glance that passes between Daisy and Gatsby and can no longer deny the two of them are having an affair.

Enraged by what he has just learned, Tom agrees they should go to the city. He retrieves a bottle of whiskey and the group starts out — Tom, Jordan, and Nick driving Gatsby's car, and Gatsby and Daisy in Tom's. Tom, it turns out, has been suspicious of Gatsby all along and has had him investigated. Noticing the car is low on gas, Tom pulls into Wilson's station where he finds Wilson visibly unwell. Wilson abruptly announces he and Myrtle will be headed West shortly because he has just learned of her secret life, although the identity of Myrtle's lover is yet unknown to him. Tom, doubly enraged at the potential loss of his mistress and his wife, malevolently questions Gatsby after the group assembles at the Plaza Hotel. He confronts Gatsby about his love for Daisy. Gatsby, refusing to be intimidated, tells Tom "Your wife doesn't love you . . . She's never loved you. She loves me." Tom, in disbelief, turns to Daisy for confirmation. Daisy, however, cannot honestly admit she never loved Tom. Gatsby, somewhat shaken by the scene unfolding before him — the collapse of his carefully constructed dream — tries another tactic. He declares: "Daisy's leaving you." Tom assures him Daisy will never leave him for a bootlegger. Tom orders Daisy and Gatsby to head home (in Gatsby's own car this time). Tom, Jordan, and Nick follow in Tom's car.

The narration now skips to George Wilson who has been found ill by his neighbor, Michaelis. Wilson explains he has Myrtle locked inside and she will remain so until they leave in two day's time. Michaelis, astonished, heads back to his restaurant. He returns a few hours later, hears Myrtle's voice, and then sees her break away from her husband and rush into the road. As she enters the highway Myrtle is struck by a passing car that fails to stop, continuing its route out of the city. Nick, Tom, and Jordan arrive on the scene shortly. Excited by the thought of something going on, Tom pulls over to investigate. He is grief-stricken to find Myrtle's lifeless body lying on a worktable. Tom learns the car that struck Myrtle matches Gatsby's in description. Tom, visibly upset by the day's events, can only whimper of his anger toward the man he already hates.

Returning to East Egg, Tom invites Nick inside to wait for a cab to take him home. Nick, seeing clearly the moral and spiritual corruption of Tom, Daisy, and the whole society they represent, declines. Outside the Buchannans', Nick bumps into Gatsby who asks if there was trouble on the road.

Nick recounts what he has seen. After asking a few questions, Nick learns Daisy, not Gatsby, was driving at the time. Gatsby, however, in true chivalric fashion, says he'll take the blame. The chapter ends with Gatsby, the paragon of chivalry and lost dreams, remaining on vigil outside Daisy's house, in case she needs assistance dealing with Tom, while Nick heads back to West Egg.

Analysis - Everything The Great Gatsby has been building toward intersects in this very important chapter. All of the paths, once loosely related at best, now converge — forcefully and fatally. The turbulence of Chapter 7 gives clear indications of what Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, and even Nick are about. Unfortunately, for three of the four, the revelations are complementary. As the weather of the novel becomes increasingly hotter and more oppressive, Fitzgerald finally gets to the heart of the love triangle between Gatsby, Daisy, and Tom, but lets it speak poorly of all the participants. Nick, alone, comes out of this chapter looking stronger. Like all the other characters, he has been tested in this chapter, but much to his credit, he grows and develops in a positive way.

This chapter put Gatsby and Tom side-by-side. While this happened briefly in Chapter 6, here the two men take each other on, head-to-head. Tom can no longer deny that Gatsby and Daisy are having an affair (specifics about that affair are, however, sketchy. The only item of significance is that the affair is an extension of Gatsby's dream and it leads him to the destruction of the dream and of himself). Within hours of learning of his wife's indiscretions, Tom learns that in addition to perhaps losing his wife, he is most certainly losing his mistress. This double loss enrages Tom and he strikes violently at the man he perceives as being responsible — a man who is, in his eyes, a low-class hustler, a bootlegger who will never be able to distance himself from his past. In Tom's elitist mind, Gatsby is common and therefore his existence is meaningless: He comes from ordinary roots and can never change that.

By chapter's end, Gatsby has been fully exposed. Gone are the mysterious rumors and the self-made myth. Stripped of all his illusions, he stands outside Daisy's house, vulnerable and tragically alone. Although he begins the chapter with his customary Gatsby dignity, when he comes up against Tom's hardness, the illusion of Jay Gatsby comes tumbling down. In all of Gatsby's years of dreaming, he never once suspected that he might not have his way (as is the nature of dreaming; one never dreams of having people stand in the way, preventing fantasies from coming true). As soon as Gatsby has to contend with people whose parts he can't script, he's at a loss. Instead, he will try, at all costs, to hold on to his dream. It is, in a sense, the only thing that is real to him. Without it (sadly), he is no longer able to define himself; therefore, the dream must be maintained at all costs (even when the dream has past its prime). The best example of Gatsby's last-chance efforts to save his dream come after he tries to get Daisy to admit she never loved Tom. When she admits to having actually loved Tom, Gatsby, unwilling to give up, pushes the situation forward, abruptly telling Tom "Daisy's leaving you." Tom laughs off this declaration, dismissing the whole party and ordering Daisy and Gatsby to head back in Gatsby's car. By following Tom's command, the lovers, in effect, admit defeat and Gatsby's dream disintegrates.

In addition to getting the real scoop on Gatsby, one also sees the real Daisy. She has relatively few lines, but what she utters, and later what she does, changes her persona forever. Whereas in the previous chapters she has come off as shy and sweet, a little vapid, but decidedly charming, here, there is a bit more depth to her — but what lies beneath the surface isn't necessarily good. Daisy's reasons for having an affair with Gatsby aren't at all the same reasons he is in love with her. By boldly kissing Gatsby when Tom leaves the room early in Chapter 7, then declaring "You know I love you" loudly enough for all to hear (much to Jordan and Nick's discomfiture) Daisy has, in effect, shown that to her, loving Gatsby is a game whose sole purpose is to try and get back at Tom. She's playing the games on her own terms; trying to prove something to her husband (her response to Tom's rough questioning later at the hotel also supports this idea).

The other early vision of Daisy is of the peacekeeper (although one wonders why she would want Tom and Gatsby both at the same outing). On the hot summer day, it is Daisy who suggests they move the party to town (largely in an attempt to keep everyone happy). Strange things, however, always happen in the city — in the land of infinite possibilities. By changing the location, the action also shifts.

As the chapter continues and the party moves to the neutral, yet magical, land of the city, the real Daisy begins to emerge, culminating in her fateful refusal to be part of Gatsby's vision. In a sense, she betrays him, leaving him to flounder helplessly against Tom's spite and anger.

Finally, by the end of the chapter, the mask of innocence has come off and Daisy is exposed. Her recklessness has resulted in Myrtle's brutal death. To make matters worse, one even senses that Daisy, in fact, tried to kill Myrtle. Gatsby has a hard time admitting that the object of his love has, in fact, not merely hit and killed another person, but has fled the scene as well.

Myrtle's death by Gatsby's great car is certainly no accident. The details are sketchy, but in having Myrtle run down by Gatsby's roadster, Fitzgerald is sending a clear message. Gatsby's car, the "death car," assumes a symbolic significance as a clear and obvious manifestation of American materialism. What more obvious way to put one's wealth and means on display than through the biggest, fanciest car around. Yes, it is tragic that Myrtle dies so brutally, but her death takes on greater meaning when one realizes that it is materialism that brought about her end. Looking back to Chapter 2, it is clear that Myrtle aspires to wealth and privilege. She wants all the material comforts money can provide — and isn't at all above lording her wealth over others (such as her sister, or Nick, or the McKees). Her desire for money (which allows access to all things material) led her to have an affair with Tom (she got involved with him initially because of the fashionable way he was dressed). Myrtle's death is sadly poetic; a woman, who spent her life acquiring material possessions by whatever means possible, has been, in effect, killed by her own desires. Dwelling too much on material things, Fitzgerald says, can not bring a positive resolution. Materialism can only bring misery, as seen through Myrtle.

Wilson, too, becomes more dimensional in the chapter, which is necessary in order to prepare adequately for the chapter to follow. While Wilson isn't necessarily good, he is pure. His distress at finding out about his wife's secret life is genuine but, being a man of little means and few wits, he doesn't know what to do about it. Clearly he loves Myrtle deeply — so deeply, in fact, that he would lock her in a room to prevent her running away (he plans to take her West in a few days' time, showing once again that in Fitzgerald's mind, there is something more pure, more sensible, about the West). Wilson is meant to stand opposite Tom, and the way the two men respond first to their wives' infidelities, and later to Myrtle's death, show that although one man is rich and the other poor, they still have much in common. In the end, however, the poor man comes off as the more passionate and heartfelt in his grief.

Nick is the only character to make it out of this chapter in better shape than when he went in. He has, of course, remembered that it was his thirtieth birthday during this chapter (remember, Fitzgerald himself was only 29 when this book was published so it is likely he saw thirty as a milestone for his narrator, as well as himself). For Nick, the change marks a passage away from youthful idealism (even ignorance). Although Nick begins the chapter much as in prior chapters (a bit uncomfortable with the Buchannans and what they represent, but not at all willing to take a stand against them), by the end he has seen quite clearly what Daisy, Tom, and Jordan are about.

After Myrtle's death, Nick is plainly shaken and as a man of moral conscience, he has look at his life and those around him. When Tom, Jordan, and Nick return home after the accident, Tom invites Nick in. This is where Nick shows what he's really made of. Rather than accept Tom's invitation, as expected, he tells the reader "I'd be damned if I'd go in; I'd had enough of all of them for one day." Gone is the fellow who walked the line between the working class and the upper class. Gone is the fellow who withheld judgment because not everyone "had the advantages that [he's] had." Finally, Nick has grown up enough to take a clear moral stand. His opinion of the Buchannans becomes clear and continues to ripen until he finally can stand it no longer and heads back to the Midwest at the end of the book (again, Fitzgerald is showing the Midwest as a Utopia).

The final image in the chapter is perhaps the most pathetic in the whole book. For some readers it will tug on their heartstrings, for others it will be a defining moment, showing the true Jay Gatsby. After Jay and Daisy return to East Egg, Gatsby waits outside her house, calling to Nick as he passes. He makes a strikingly odd figure with his pink suit glowing luminously in the moonlight. When Nick inquires as to what he's doing, Gatsby, ever the dreamer, replies he is keeping watch, in case Daisy should need his help. Although Gatsby has assumed the guise of a knight-errant before, nowhere does he seem so clearly on a quest (and a quest doomed to failure) than right here, willing to sacrifice his own life for Daisy's. (Besides, what good is a dream that has been destroyed? What's worth living for?) What escapes Gatsby, but is perfectly clear to Nick, is that his surveillance is unnecessary; there is no chance of Daisy having trouble with Tom. Both Tom and Daisy's actions at the hotel have shown just how alike they are and in a time of crisis, there is no question they will join together.

Daisy is likely unaware (or at least unconcerned) with Gatsby's feelings; Tom, while perhaps sad about Myrtle's death, likely sees her as he sees everyone who isn't of his social class — an expendable object. And so Gatsby, utterly lost now that his dream has died, holds on to the last piece of all he's ever known as an adult by standing guard at Daisy's. Unfortunately for him, it will be a long night.

Chapter 8 — opens with a scene when Nick wakes as hearing Gatsby return home from his all-night vigil at the Buchannans. He goes to Gatsby's, feeling he should tell him something (even he doesn't know what, exactly). Gatsby reveals that nothing happened while he kept his watch. Nick suggests Gatsby leave town for a while, certain Gatsby's car would be identified as the "death car." Nick's comments make Gatsby reveal the story of his past, "because 'Jay Gatsby' had broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice." Daisy, Gatsby reveals, was his social superior, yet they fell deeply in love. The reader also learns that, when courting, Daisy and Gatsby had been intimate with each other and it was this act of intimacy that bonded him to her inexorably, feeling "married to her." Gatsby left Daisy, heading off to war. He excelled in battle and when the war was over, he tried to get home, but ended up at Oxford instead. Daisy didn't understand why he didn't return directly and, over time, her interest began to wain until she eventually broke off their relationship.

Moving back to the present, Gatsby and Nick continue their discussion of Daisy and how Gatsby had gone to Louisville to find her upon his return to the United States. She was on her honeymoon and Gatsby was left with a "melancholy beauty," as well as the idea that if he had only searched harder he would have found her. The men are finishing breakfast as Gatsby's gardener arrives. He says he plans on draining the pool because the season is over, but Gatsby asks him to wait because he hasn't used the pool at all. Nick, purposely moving slowly, heads to his train. He doesn't want to leave Gatsby, impulsively declaring "They're a rotten crowd . . . You're worth the whole damn bunch put together."

For Nick, the day drags on; he feels uneasy, preoccupied with the past day's adventures. Jordan phones, but Nick cuts her off. He phones Gatsby and, unable to reach him, decides to head home early. The narrative again shifts time and focus, as Fitzgerald goes back in time, to the evening prior, in the valley of ashes. George Wilson, despondent at Myrtle's death, appears irrational when Michaelis attempts to engage him in conversation. By morning, Michaelis is exhausted and returns home to sleep. When he returns four hours later, Wilson is gone and has traveled to Port Roosevelt, Gads Hill, West Egg, and ultimately, Gatsby's house. There he finds Gatsby floating on an air mattress in the pool. Wilson, sure that Gatsby is responsible for his wife's death, shoots and kills Gatsby. Nick finds Gatsby's body floating in the pool and, while starting to the house with the body, the gardener discovers Wilson's lifeless body off in the grass.

Analysis - Chapter 8 displays the tragic side of the American dream as Gatsby is gunned down by George Wilson. The death is brutal, if not unexpected, and brings to an end the life of the paragon of idealism. The myth of Gatsby will continue, thanks to Nick who relays the story, but Gatsby's death loudly marks the end of an era. In many senses, Gatsby is the dreamer inside all of everyone. Although the reader cheers him as he pursues his dreams, one also knows that pure idealism cannot survive in the harsh modern world. This chapter, as well as the one following, also provides astute commentary on the world that, in effect, allowed the death of Gatsby.

As the story opens, Nick is struggling with the situation at hand. He grapples with what's right and what's wrong, which humanizes him and lifts him above the rigid callousness of the story's other characters. Unable to sleep (a premonition of bad things to come) he heads to Gatsby's who is returning from his all-night vigil outside Daisy's house. Nick, always a bit more levelheaded and sensitive to the world around him than the other characters, senses something large is about to happen. Although he can't put his finger on it, his moral sense pulls him to Gatsby's. Upon his arrival, Gatsby seems genuinely surprised his services were not necessary outside Daisy's house, showing again just how little he really knows her.

As the men search Gatsby's house for cigarettes, the reader learns more about both Nick and Gatsby. Nick moves further and further from the background to emerge as a forceful presence in the novel, showing genuine care and concern for Gatsby, urging him to leave the city for his own protection. Throughout the chapter, Nick is continually pulled toward his friend, anxious for reasons he can't exactly articulate. Whereas Nick shows his true mettle in a flattering light in this chapter, Gatsby doesn't fare as well. He becomes weaker and more helpless, despondent in the loss of his dream.

It is as if he refuses to admit that the story hasn't turned out as he intended. He refuses to acknowledge that the illusion that buoyed him for so many years has vanished, leaving him hollow and essentially empty.

As the men search Gatsby's house for the illusive cigarettes, Gatsby fills Nick in on the real story. For the first time in the novel, Gatsby sets aside his romantic view of life and confronts the past he has been trying to run from, as well as the present he has been trying to avoid. Daisy, it turns out, captured Gatsby's love largely because "she was the first 'nice' girl he had ever known." She moved in a world Gatsby aspired to and unlike other people of that particular social set, she acknowledged Gatsby's presence in that world. Although he doesn't admit it, his love affair with Daisy started early, when he erroneously defined her not merely by who she was, but by what she had and what she represented. All through the early days of their courtship, however, Gatsby tormented himself with his unworthiness, knowing "he was in Daisy's house by a colossal accident," although he led Daisy to believe he was a man of means. Although his original intention was to use Daisy, he found out that he was incapable of doing so. When their relation became intimate, he still felt unworthy, and with the intimacy, Gatsby found himself wedded, not to Daisy directly, but to the quest to prove himself worthy of her. (How sad that Gatsby's judgment is so clouded with societal expectation that he can't see that a young, idealistic man who has passion, drive, and persistence is worth more than ten Daisys put together.)

In loving Daisy, it turns out, Gatsby was trapped. On one hand, he loved her and she loved him, or more precisely, he loved what he envisioned her to be and she loved the persona he presented to her — and therein lies the rub. Both Daisy and Gatsby were in love with projected images and while Daisy didn't realize this at first, Gatsby did, and it forced him more directly into his dream world. After the war (in which Gatsby really did excel), Gatsby could have returned home to Daisy. The only difficulty with that, however, would have been that in being with Daisy, he would run the risk of being exposed as an imposter. So, rather than risk having his dream disintegrate in front of him, he perpetuated his illusion by studying at Oxford before heading back to the States. Daisy's letters begged him to return, not understanding why he wasn't rushing back to be with her. She was missing the post-war euphoria sweeping the nation and she wanted her dashing officer by her side. Eventually Daisy moved again into society, feeling the need to have some stability and purpose in her life. However, Daisy's lack of principle shows when she is willing to use love, money, or practicality (whichever was handier) to determine the direction of her life. She wanted to be married. When Tom arrived, he seemed the obvious choice, and so Daisy sent Gatsby a letter at Oxford.

The letter, it turns out, brought Gatsby back stateside. It is as if now that Daisy was married he could return and not have to fear being found out. He could carry his love for Daisy around with him, knowing full well that she was unobtainable. Although Gatsby isn't likely to admit it, in a way, Daisy marrying Tom was the perfect solution to his situation because now that she was married to another, she need never know how poor he really was. After returning to the U.S., Gatsby travels to Louisville with his last bit of money, and there the quest begins in earnest. From this moment, he spends his days trying to recapture the beauty that he basked in while with young Daisy Fay.

Upon hearing Gatsby's true story, Nick cannot help but be moved and spends the rest of the day worrying about his friend. While in the city, Nick tries desperately to keep focused on his work, but can't seem to do so. What he has realized (through Gatsby's story and the events of the previous night), and part of what is troubling him, is that he has come to know the shallowness of "polite society." Gatsby, a dreamer from nowhere, has passion and genuinely cares about something, even if it is a dream, and that is more than can be said for people like the Buchannans and Jordan Baker. In fact, when Jordan phones Nick at work he is unwilling to speak to her, finding himself more and more irritated by her shallow and self-serving ways. In rejecting her (the first man ever to do so) Nick has grown, not only seeing what dark stuff that socialites are really made of, but possessing the courage to stand against it.

Midway through the chapter, Fitzgerald shifts focus to the valley of ashes and has Nick recount what had gone on there in the hours prior. George Wilson has become overwhelmed with grief at the loss of his wife. Directly contrasting Tom Buchannan (who is unable to experience a heartfelt emotion), George is devastated and overwhelmed by emotion. His neighbor, Michaelis, tries to console him, but nothing seems to help. George lives in an effectual wasteland, void of spirituality, void of life, and when in his grief he tells Michaelis of his last day with Myrtle, he turns to the giant billboard above him.

In what is perhaps his most lucid statement in the whole book, Wilson explains the purpose of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg's enormous eyes. They are the eyes of God, and "God sees everything."

Wilson's grief knows no bounds and while Michaelis sleeps, he heads in to town, eventually tracking Gatsby down and killing him while he floats on an air mattress in his swimming pool. Fitzgerald has made clear earlier in the chapter that autumn is at hand, and it naturally brings with it the ending of life — natural and human, both. Wilson, still overcome by grief and the bad judgment it invokes, finds his way to Gatsby's house (tipped off by Tom, as Nick discovers in Chapter 9) and kills Gatsby, mistakenly thinking that he is responsible for Myrtle's death.

Gatsby's death, alone in his pool, brings forth a couple of distinct images. On the one hand, his death is a rebirth of sorts. Gatsby has done nothing more than follow a dream, and despite his money and his questionable business dealings, he is nothing at all like the East Egg socialites he runs with. One admires him, if for no other reason than his ability to sustain a dream in a world that is historically inhospitable to dreamers. His death has, in a sense, removed him from his mortal existence and allowed him rebirth into a different, hopefully better, life. As Nick says, Gatsby "must have felt that he had lost the old warm world" when his dream died, and found no reason to go on. In that sense, Wilson's murdering him is a welcome end. On another level, Gatsby's death at the hands of George Wilson makes his quest complete. His dream is completely dead, but he can make one more chivalric gesture: He can be killed in Daisy's stead. By lying in the pool, Gatsby is doing nothing to protect himself, as if he saying that he won't refuse whatever is ahead of him. In some sense, Gatsby helps Wilson by refusing to be proactive in his own defense. Until the very end, Gatsby remains the dreamer, that most rare of jewels in the modern world.

Chapter 9 - The book's final chapter begins with the police and the paparazzi storming Gatsby's house. Nick becomes worried that he is handling Gatsby's burial arrangements, believing there must be someone closer to Gatsby who should be conducting the business at hand. When he phones Daisy to tell her of Gatsby's death, he learns she and Tom have left on a trip, leaving no itinerary. Nick, with increasing frustration, feels he must "get somebody" for Gatsby. In his mind, Gatsby did not deserve to be alone. Hoping to gather Gatsby's friends, Nick sends for Meyer Wolfsheimer the next day. Wolfsheimer, much to Nick's dismay, sends a letter explaining he won't be involved with Gatsby's funeral. Later that afternoon when Gatsby's phone rings, Nick answers. Upon telling the speaker that Gatsby is dead, the speaker hangs up.

Three days after Gatsby dies, Nick receives a telegram from Henry C. Gatz, Gatsby's father in Minnesota. Gatz, it seems, learned of Jimmy's (Gatsby's) death through the Chicago newspaper. Gatz refuses to take the body to the Midwest, noting "Jimmy always liked it better down East." That evening, Klipspringer phones and Nick, thinking another mourner will be joining the funeral the next day, is dismayed to learn Klipspringer is only calling to inquire about his tennis shoes. The morning of the funeral, Nick forces his way into Wolfsheimer's office, again hoping to convince Gatsby's closest business associate to attend the services. Wolfsheimer again refuses, but discloses he did not just give Gatsby a start in business — he made Gatsby's fortune by using him in various questionable activities.

When Nick returns to Gatsby's, he finds Mr. Gatz going through his son's house, growing more proud as he takes in the possessions around him. Pulling out a copy of *Hopalong Cassidy*, once owned by the young Jimmy Gatz, Gatsby's father points out his young son's drive toward self-improvement by calling Nick's attention to the daily schedule penciled in the back. Shortly after, the men adjourn to the funeral. At the graveside are a few servants, the mail carrier, the minister, Nick, and Mr. Gatz. Nick is struck by the bitter injustice of Gatsby's solitary death. Despite all the people who found their way to Gatsby's parties, not one, with the exception of a man known only as "Owl-eyes," bothered to make an appearance at his funeral (and he only made it to the gate after the services ended).

Nick then moves to memories of traveling West when he came home from college. As the train moved further and further West he became more and more comfortable, as if he were returning to a special place just his own. Remembering this memory launches Nick into a discussion of the merits of the Midwest versus the vices of the East. The story is brought to a close when Nick interacts with two people from his past. First, he speaks with Jordan and, although he still feels fondly toward her, he once again coolly dismisses her.

Finally, one autumn day, Nick meets Tom along Fifth Avenue. Tom, seeing Nick, makes the first move to speak. Initially Nick refuses to shake Tom's hand, upset with what Tom has come to represent. In the course of their short discussion, Nick learns Tom had a role in Gatsby's death — George Wilson worked his way to the Buchanan house in East Egg and Tom told him who owned the car that struck Myrtle. When Nick leaves, he shakes Tom's hand because he "felt suddenly as though [he] were talking to a child."

The time comes for Nick to leave West Egg and return West. On the last night, he wanders over to Gatsby's for one last visit. Strolling down to the water he is called to remember the way Gatsby's house used to be, filled with people and lavish parties. He considers Gatsby's wonder at picking out Daisy's dock in the darkness, how far Gatsby had traveled in his life, and how he always had hope in the future. In his final thought, Nick links society to the boats eternally moving against the current on the Sound.

Analysis - The last chapter of *The Great Gatsby* continues a theme begun in the previous chapter, bringing the reader face-to-face with the ugly side of the American dream. Throughout the story, Gatsby has been held up as an example of one who has achieved the American dream — he had money, possessions, independence, and people who wanted to be around him. Or so the reader thinks. Gatsby's funeral takes center stage in this chapter, and with the exception of Nick, who continues to show his moral fiber, what Fitzgerald reveals about the moral decrepitude of those people still living is even worse than any of Gatsby's secrets.

As the chapter opens, Nick tells readers what an impact this course of events makes upon him. "After two years," he writes, "I remember the rest of that day, and that night, and the next day" as a ceaseless string of police officers and newspaper reporters. They came to investigate, and once again, the carnivalesque atmosphere that so often accompanied Gatsby's parties establishes itself. This time, however, the situation is decidedly less merry. Nick, showing he has come to respect Gatsby over the course of the summer, worries that, in fact, the circus-like atmosphere will allow the "grotesque, circumstantial, [and] eager" reporters to mythologize his neighbor, filling the pages of their rags with half-truths and full-blown lies. For Nick, however, even more disturbing than the free-for-all that surrounds the investigation is the fact that he finds himself "on Gatsby's side, and alone."

Nick, by default, assumes the responsibility for making Gatsby's final arrangements, "because no one else was interested — interested . . . with that intense personal interest to which every one has some vague right at the end." Two important things are revealed in that short statement. First, the Nick who is blooming at the end of Chapter 7 has come into fruition in this chapter. He is a man of principles and integrity (which shows more and more as the chapter unfolds). The second idea introduced here is the utter shallowness of the people who, in better times, take every opportunity to be at Gatsby's house, drinking his liquor, eating his food, and enjoying his hospitality, but abandon him at the end: Daisy and Tom have left without a forwarding address. Meyer Wolfshiem, who is "completely knocked down and out" at Gatsby's death, and who wants to "know about the funeral etc." is speaking rhetorically, as his refusal to get involved shows. Even the partygoers disappear. The party is over, and so they move on to the next event, treating their host with the same respect in death that they gave him in life — none at all. Klipspringer is a shining example of all the partygoers when he phones Gatsby's, speaks to Nick, and sidesteps the issue of Gatsby's funeral, shamelessly admitting, "what I called up about was a pair of shoes I left there . . . I'm sort of helpless without them." Nick, again much to his credit, hangs up the phone as Klipspringer tries to leave a forwarding address. The callousness of the people who so eagerly took advantage of Gatsby's hospitality is appalling. Certainly the American dream isn't supposed to end like this, gunned down for something you didn't do, utterly forgotten in your death. Fitzgerald does a fine job of displaying the downside to the American dream and how drive and ambition can, in effect, go too far. Dreams are useful, to a point, but when they consume the dreamer, they lead to destruction.

In true Fitzgerald fashion, and in keeping with the way he has effectively withheld information regarding Gatsby's past throughout the novel, just when the reader thinks he or she knows all, Gatsby's father arrives and gives yet another peek into Gatsby's past. Henry C. Gatz, an unassuming man who is not nearly as wretched as one may have imagined, arrives for his son's burial. The relationship between father and son is estranged, even in death, as evidenced by Gatz's burying "Jimmy" in the East where "he always liked it better." In many ways, Gatz seems a perfectly normal man, yet there is a hint of the superficiality that's similar to Gatsby's former party guests. In one noted example, Nick finds Gatz "walking up and down excitedly in the hall. His pride in his son and in his son's possessions was continually increasing." Apparently Gatz, like so many others, measured Gatsby's merit not on the type of man he was, but on his possessions.

Gatz also fills in Gatsby's early days by pointing to a schedule written in 1906, when Gatsby was about fourteen years old. First, it happens to be in Hopalong Cassidy, a famous Western adventure serial from the turn of the century. The book is significant in that it helps explain where Gatsby's dreamer spirit came from. The schedule, too, speaks to a dreamer's spirit. The itinerary is commendable: Gatsby, from the early days, aspired to greatness.

After Gatsby's funeral, wherein Nick and Gatz are the chief (and nearly sole) mourners, little is left for Nick in the East. In fact, he comes to the realization that in the end, Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, Jordan, and he all come from the West and in the end they all "possessed some deficiency in common which made [them] subtly unadaptable to Eastern life." It is only a matter of time before he leaves the East, headed back to the Midwest where, presumably, morality and kindness still exist.

Before he leaves, however, Nick has two important experiences. First, he speaks with Jordan on the phone. What he learns is surprising, but strangely in keeping with her character: She chastises him for being the first man who has ever broken up with her, but before ending the conversation she gets in one last strike, hitting his secret vanity and labeling him as deceitful and dishonest. The second important experience occurs when Nick bumps into Tom on the street. Although he tries to avoid Tom, meeting him can't be helped. Tom, as arrogant as ever, initiates conversation, slightly offended that Nick won't shake hands upon their meeting. During the short conversation, Nick learns that Tom, not surprisingly, had a role in Gatsby's death. When Wilson came to Tom's house, gun in hand, Tom directed Wilson to Gatsby, not feeling an ounce of remorse. In his mind's eye, what he had done was "entirely justified," leading Nick to the apt conclusion that Tom and Daisy were "careless people," using people like objects, until they no longer serve a purpose, then they discard them and move on. This realization is more than Nick can stand and forces him to a new level of maturity. In the end, he shakes hands with Tom, finding no reason not to because Tom (and the people he represents) is really no more than a child.

The final chapter of the novel again draws attention to the green light at the end of the dock, and in turn, to the hopes and dreams of society. Readers are left with a final image of Gatsby as a powerful presence who lives on despite the destruction of the dream and the decay of the estate. Nick again reminds the reader of the thin line separating dreams from reality, causing everyone to stop and wonder about the validity of the dreams people chase. Is everyone, like Gatsby, chasing illusions while neglecting reality? Can anyone ever escape being held hostage by the past, continually working to get back to better times and sometimes missing the joy of the present? According to Nick, the more Gatsby reached for his dream, the more it retreated into the shadowy past, taking him further and further away from what is real. Gatsby had hope and believed in the bounty of what was ahead, but it brought him face-to-face with his own destruction. Although one may look at Gatsby and realize the futility of chasing dreams (at the expense of the here and now), in the end, is anyone really that different? Perhaps there's a bit of Gatsby in everyone. After all, society is, as Nick says, "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

Character Analysis - Nick Carraway - the story's narrator, has a singular place within *The Great Gatsby*. First, he is both narrator and participant. Part of Fitzgerald's skill in *The Great Gatsby* shines through the way he cleverly makes Nick a focal point of the action, while simultaneously allowing him to remain sufficiently in the background. In addition, Nick has the distinct honor of being the only character who changes substantially from the story's beginning to its end. Nick, although he initially seems outside the action, slowly moves to the forefront, becoming an important vehicle for the novel's messages.

On one level, Nick is Fitzgerald's Everyman, yet in many ways he is much more. He comes from a fairly nondescript background. He hails from the upper Midwest (Minnesota or Wisconsin) and has supposedly been raised on stereotypical Midwestern values (hard work, perseverance, justice, and so on). He is a little more complex than that, however. His family, although descended from the "Dukes of Buccleuch," really started when Nick's grandfather's brother came to the U.S. in 1851. By the time the story takes place, the Carraways have only been in this country for a little over seventy years — not long, in the great scope of things. In addition, the family patriarch didn't exhibit the good Midwestern values Nick sees in himself. When the civil war began, Nick's relative "sent a substitute" to fight for him, while he started the family business. This little detail divulges a few things: It places the Carraways in a particular class (because only the wealthy could afford to send a substitute to fight) and suggests that the early Carraways were more tied to commerce than justice. Nick's relative apparently doesn't have any qualms about sending a poorer man off to be killed in his stead.

Given this background, it is interesting that Nick would come to be regarded as a level-headed and caring man, enough of a dreamer to set goals, but practical enough to know when to abandon his dreams.

Also contributing to Nick's characterization as an Everyman are his goals in life. He heads East after World War I, seeking largely to escape the monotony he perceives to permeate the Midwest and to make his fortune. He is an educated man who desires more out of life than the quiet Midwest can deliver (although it is interesting that before living in the city any length of time he retreats to the country). What helps make Nick so remarkable, however, is the way that he has aspirations without being taken in — to move with the socialites, for example, but not allowing himself to become blinded by the glitz that characterizes their lifestyle. When he realizes what his social superiors are really like (shallow, hollow, uncaring, and self-serving), he is disgusted and, rather than continuing to cater to them, he distances himself. In effect, motivated by his conscience, Nick commits social suicide by forcefully pulling away from people like the Buchannans and Jordan Baker.

In addition to his Everyman quality, Nick's moral sense helps to set him apart from all the other characters. From the first time he interacts with others (Daisy, Tom, and Jordan in Chapter 1), he clearly isn't like them. He is set off as being more practical and down-to-earth than other characters. This essence is again brought to life in Chapter 2 when he doesn't quite know how to respond to being introduced into Tom and Myrtle's secret world (notice, however, that he doesn't feel the need to tell anyone about his adventures).

In Chapter 3, again Nick comes off as less mercenary than everyone else in the book as he waits for an invitation to attend one of Gatsby's parties, and then when he does, he takes the time to seek out his host. From these instances (and others like them spread throughout the book) it becomes clear that Nick, in many ways, is an outsider.

Nick has what many of the other characters lack — personal integrity — and his sense of right and wrong helps to elevate him above the others. He alone is repulsed by the phony nature of the socialites. He alone is moved by Gatsby's death. When the other characters scatter to the wind after Gatsby's death, Nick, unable to believe that none of Gatsby's associates will even pay their last respects, picks up the pieces and ensures Gatsby isn't alone in his death. Through the course of *The Great Gatsby* Nick grows, from a man dreaming of a fortune, to a man who knows only too well what misery a fortune can bring.

Jay Gatsby — similarly to Nick, Gatsby comes from the Midwest (North Dakota, although his father later comes from Minnesota). Early in the book, he is established as a dreamer who is charming, gracious, and a bit mysterious. As the story unfolds, however, the reader learns more and more what precipitates the mystery: that everything he has done in his adult life has been with the sole purpose of fulfilling the most unrealistic of dreams — to recapture the past. Gatsby is in many ways, as the title suggests, great, but when looking at him critically, some of the things he stands for may not be so admirable.

In one sense, Gatsby's rags-to-riches success story makes him an embodiment of the American dream. He started life with little, as the son of fairly unsuccessful farmers. By the time he was a young man he had even less, having voluntarily estranged himself from his family; unable to come to terms with the lot he had been dealt in life. While on his own, he had the opportunity to reinvent himself, and due solely to his own ingenuity, Jimmy Gatz evolved into Jay Gatsby. As such, life became much different (although he was missing one key ingredient: money). He was no longer tied to his early years, but could imagine whatever past for himself he desired. And then he fell in love, a fateful incident that would change the course of his life forever. After meeting Daisy, everything he did was for the singular purpose of winning her. Money was, essentially, the issue that prevented their being together, and so Gatsby made sure he would never again be without it. Gatsby's drive and perseverance in obtaining his goal is, in many senses, commendable. He is a self-made man (in all respects) and as such, is admirable.

However, all positive traits aside, there are aspects of Jay Gatsby that call into question that admiration. Gatsby's money did not come from inheritance, as he would like people to believe, but from organized crime. The story takes place during the time of prohibition and Gatsby has profited greatly from selling liquor illegally. In addition, while people come to Gatsby's parties in droves, he really knows very little about them. In fact, he doesn't want to know much about them, just whether they know Daisy. Finally, Gatsby's friendship with Nick really begins to blossom only after he finds out that Nick is Daisy's cousin.

In assessing Gatsby, one must examine his blind pursuit of Daisy. Everything he does, every purchase he makes, every party he throws, is all part of his grand scheme to bring Daisy back into his life for good. In one sense, this is a lovely romantic gesture, but in another sense, it perpetuates a childish illusion. By being so focused on his dream of Daisy, Gatsby moves further and further into a fantasy world. His inability to deal with reality sets him outside the norm and, eventually, has him holding on to the dream leads to his death. By the end of Chapter 7, Gatsby is standing guard outside of Daisy's house on a needless vigil. He is completely unable to realize that his dream is not a reality and so stands watching for a sign from Daisy. He sees what he is doing as noble, honorable, and purposeful. The reader, however, sees the futility of his task as he becomes a parody of his former self. Gatsby is, quite literally, fatally idealistic. He can't wait to distance himself from his past in terms of his family, but yet he lives his adult life trying to recapture the past he had with Daisy. What makes matters worse, too, is that he is in love with the idea of Daisy, not Daisy as she herself is.

Daisy Buchanan - Daisy is The Great Gatsby's most enigmatic, and perhaps most disappointing, character. Although Fitzgerald does much to make her a character worthy of Gatsby's unlimited devotion, in the end she reveals herself for what she really is. Despite her beauty and charm, Daisy is merely a selfish, shallow, and in fact, hurtful, woman. Gatsby loves her (or at least the idea of her) with such vitality and determination that readers would like, in many senses, to see her be worthy of his devotion. Although Fitzgerald carefully builds Daisy's character with associations of light, purity, and innocence, when all is said and done, she is the opposite from what she presents herself to be.

From Nick's first visit, Daisy is associated with otherworldliness. Nick calls on her at her house and initially finds her (and Jordan Baker, who is in many ways an unmarried version of Daisy) dressed all in white, sitting on an "enormous couch . . . buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon . . . [her dress] rippling and fluttering as it [she] had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house." From this moment, Daisy becomes like an angel on earth. She is routinely linked with the color white (a white dress, white flowers, white car, and so on) always at the height of fashion and addressing people with only the most endearing terms. She appears pure in a world of cheats and liars. Given Gatsby's obsession with Daisy and the lengths to which he has gone to win her, she seems a worthy paramour.

As the story continues, however, more of Daisy is revealed, and bit-by-bit she becomes less of an ideal. Given that she is fully aware of her husband's infidelities, why doesn't she do anything about it? Because he has money and power and she enjoys the benefits she receives from these things, she is willing to deal with the affairs. In addition, when she attends one of Gatsby's parties, aside from the half-hour she spends with Gatsby, she has an unpleasant time. She finds the West Egg nouveaux riches to be tedious and vulgar, an affront to her "old money" mentality. Another incident that calls Daisy's character into question is the way she speaks of her daughter, Pammy. "I hope she'll be a fool," she says, "that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." Clearly, she has some experience in this area and implies that the world is no place for a woman; the best she can do is hope to survive and the best way to do that is through beauty rather than brains. Later, in Chapter 7 when Pammy makes her only appearance, Daisy treats her like an object, showing her off for guests, suggesting Daisy's lack of concern for her child. Daisy's life revolves around Daisy, allowing Pammy in only when it's convenient. Clearly, in real life Daisy isn't all the way Gatsby remembers — but blinded by his dream, he cannot see the truth.

Although Daisy seems to have found love in her reunion with Gatsby, closer examination reveals that is not at all the case. Although she loves the attention, she has considerations other than love on her mind. First, she knows full well Tom has had affairs for years. Might this not motivate her to get back at him by having an affair of her own? Next, consider Daisy's response to Gatsby's wealth, especially the shirts — does someone in love break into tears upon being shown an assortment of shirts? For Daisy (and Gatsby too, for that matter) the shirts represent wealth and means. When Daisy bows her head and sobs into the shirts, she is displaying her interest in materialism. She doesn't cry because she has been reunited with Gatsby, she cries because of the pure satisfaction all his material wealth brings her. He has become a fitting way in which to get back at Tom. When Tom and Gatsby have their altercation at the hotel in Chapter 7, Daisy's motivations are called into question: Her inability to deny having loved Tom speaks well for her, but at the same time, it suggests that her attachment to Gatsby has been purely business. Tom also knows that after Daisy realizes Gatsby is not of their same social circles, she will return to Tom for the comfort and protection that his money and power bring.

Although Daisy's true self come out more and more each time Nick encounters her, her final actions help show what she has been really made of. When she hits and kills Myrtle Wilson, and then leaves the scene, readers know (as poor Gatsby still does not) that she is void of a conscience. Perhaps all that white that has surrounded her isn't so much purity (although Gatsby, of course, would see it as such), but perhaps the white represents a void, a lack (as in a lack of intellectualism and a lack of conscience). To Daisy, Myrtle is expendable. She is not of the social elite, so what difference does her death make? To add insult to injury, as if she hadn't betrayed Gatsby enough already, she abandons Gatsby in his death. After killing Myrtle, Daisy returns home. She and Tom resolve their differences and leave soon thereafter, moving presumably to another city where they will remain utterly unchanged and life will continue as it always does. Daisy, although ethereal in some qualities, is decidedly devilish in others.

A literary essay on the Great Gatsby

Let me begin by observing that the Great Gatsby has become such a classic of American fiction that its avowed literary merits easily obscure those qualities that also made it and thus continue to make into a cult favorite. In a way, the early history of the book is a counterpoint to the history of J. D. Salinger the Catcher in the Rye, with both books ending up as perennial favorites. The difference is that Catcher was a cult favorite first and then a critical success, whereas The Great Gatsby was praised by the critics long before it acquired a cult following.

Therefore, although Gatsby fits chronologically into an earlier time frame, one closer to Ernest Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe than to Salinger, it somehow caught the attention of a post-WW II audience and acquired a cult following that peaked in the early fifties but has by no means abated. In this respect it is like Hermann Hesse Steppenwolf, Demian, and Siddhartha, books that originally appeared a generation before they gained the cult status that has made their titles household words since the 1960s.

Although critical reception of the novel has been kind, most critics have been quick to dismiss its thin plot and shallow characters as less important than Fitzgerald's brilliant depiction of the jazz age and his indictment of its shabby values. Cult readers take a different view, praising the book precisely because its plot is thin and its characters are shallow. To them this is Fitzgerald's point that the age itself could do no better than to produce shallow people living superficial lives. Academic critics speculated about the probable causes of this phenomenon, attributing it to the disillusionment brought on by the First World War and the extreme measures taken to escape it. Cult readers concentrated on the effects and saw a culture wallowing in hedonism, high on jazz and bathtub gin, living life as if it were one long party and there was no tomorrow. But more particularly, they concentrated on one person, the sympathetic figure of Nick Carraway, the outside observer, a character straight out of Joseph Conrad or Henry James whose function it is to observe and report.

However, whereas Conrad's Marlow (Heart of Darkness) never becomes much more than a convenient narrative device, certainly not a character a reader can really identify with, Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway becomes very much a part of what he perceives, the sensitive young man that a host of sensitive young men have come to identify with. It is to him, then, that one must look to find the basic attraction of this novel as a cult book. To begin with, Nick has the sort of blessed innocence and shining ambition we associate with the mono mythical hero. Although he is more a Telemachus than a Ulysses, there is freshness about him, a basic goodness that appeals to that part of human nature that envies or craves or is irresistibly attracted to innocence. This is the quality one finds in well-mannered, unprepossessing heroes from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Werther (The Sorrows of Young Werther) to William Golding's Ralph (Lord of the Flies).

Beyond that, however, is the fact that, in the tradition of the hero, Nick goes forth into the world to encounter corruption and disillusionment and to come to terms with reality. He alone is able to see the essential worth of Jay Gatsby beneath the deceptive exterior.

It is Nick's idealization of Gatsby that ennobles him in the minds of cult readers. Gatsby on his own is not an easy character for cult readers to sympathize with without the special insight of the young and sympathetic Nick. If Nick can see the good in Gatsby, then the reader can dismiss the corrupt side as Gatsby's victimization by the system and dwell on the charming side, that side made all the more intriguing by the mystery surrounding this handsome, rich, and devastatingly detached personality. As Nick says of Gatsby

“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.”

Perhaps the best way to describe the cult reader's perspective is to imagine Gatsby standing alone in the second-story bedroom of his palatial mansion in West Egg, looking out at the pool and the tent and the lavish party going on, at his expense, beneath his window; listening to the jazz band playing, seeing the shadows of the flappers against the sides of the tent, quietly watching, smoking a cigarette--aloof, detached, amused, powerful. And then imagine Nick Carraway, having received an invitation to one of Gatsby's parties, arriving on the scene and in fact, Nick remembers vividly coming home from the Buchanan's after his first visit and seeing Gatsby standing in front of his mansion, looking intently at East Egg across the bay. Both scenes spell alienation and ego-reinforcement tied up together with the sweet suffering of loneliness and the feeling of being privy to a special version of reality created by the wizardry of the enigmatic Gatsby, within whose magic circle one might feel threatened and secure at the same time.

It does not take long for the cult reader to be drawn in, even taken in, by Nick's own fascination with Gatsby, and by then the plot, whether thick or thin, takes on a special allure, for the reader is as eager to know more about Gatsby as Nick is. Nick has rented a summer cottage near Gatsby's place, and across the bay, in more fashionable East Egg, are Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Daisy is Nick's cousin, a lovely, exciting, but shallow young woman who had once had an affair with Gatsby before the war. While Gatsby was away in the war, she married Tom Buchanan. Handsome, wealthy, but cruel and insensitive, Tom is currently having an affair with a married woman named Myrtle Wilson. Gatsby wants Daisy back and thinks that his wealth, accumulated through shady transactions, will make Daisy admire him, but he overestimates her and underestimates himself.

In one sense Gatsby is the apotheosis of his rootless society. His background is cosmopolitan, his past a mystery, his temperament that of an opportunist entirely oblivious to the claims of people or the world outside. His threadbare self-dramatization, unremitting selfishness, and attempts to make something out of nothing are the same in kind as those of the waste-land society, and different only in intensity. Yet this intensity springs from a quality which he alone has: and this we might call "faith." He really believes in himself and his illusions: and this quality of faith, however grotesque it must seem with such an object, sets him apart from the cynically armored midgets whom he epitomizes. It makes him bigger than they are, and more vulnerable. It is, also, a quality which commands respect from Carraway: since at the very least, "faith" protects Gatsby from the evasiveness, the conscious hypocrisy of the Toms and Daisies of the world, conferring something of the heroic on what he does; and at the best it might still turn out to be the way in to some kind of reality beyond the romantic facade, the romantic alchemy which, despite his cynicism, Carraway still half hopes one day to find. The novel is concerned with Gatsby's reasons for appearing out of the blue and becoming host to half the rich moths of New York. He is it turns out, in love with Daisy. The whole elaborate decor has been constructed for the sole purpose of staging a dramatic reunion with her: a reunion which will impress her with Gatsby's "greatness," and eradicate, at a stroke, the five years of married life which she has drifted through since seeing him last.

As we soon learn, his affair with Daisy had been a youthful romance, one among many, and nurtured in an atmosphere of cynicism, deceit, purposelessness. But it had, unlike Gatsby's other affairs, been complicated first by Daisy's casualness, and then by their unavoidable separation: and somehow, during the muddle, Gatsby had fallen in love, and the affair had become the greatest thing in his life.

The romantic promise which in Daisy herself was the merest facade became, for him, an ideal, an absolute reality. He built around her the dreams and fervors of his youth: adolescent, self-centered, fantastic, yet also untroubled by doubt, and therefore strong; attracting to themselves the best as well as the worst of his qualities, and eventually becoming an obsession of the most intractable kind.

Gatsby is different from the others in that he means every word he says, really believes in the uniqueness of his destiny. His romantic clichés, unlike those of Tom or Daisy, are used with simple belief that they are his own discovery, his own prerogative, his own guarantee of Olympian apartness and election.

Daisy is Gatsby's one dream, and the reason he bought his house and gives his parties is to get her back. He persuades Nick to bring him and Daisy together again, but he is unable to win her away from Tom. Nick can see this, but he is powerless to stop the chain of events that, for all their melodrama, seem necessary to act out the denouement of shallow lives lived recklessly, of shallow dreams shattered pointlessly. Daisy, driving Gatsby's car, runs over and kills Tom's mistress, Myrtle, unaware of her identity. Myrtle's husband traces the car and shoots Gatsby, who has remained silent in order to protect Daisy. Gatsby's friends and associates have all deserted him, and only Gatsby's father and one former guest attend the funeral.

Jay Gatsby may be a bootlegger and a fraud, but he is only defrauding a system that is a bigger fraud, a system that advocates a farce like prohibition, that adores glittering surfaces, that cares only for the trappings of success and not for how the gains were got. But in the American tradition of trying to have your cake and eat it too, cult readers get to envy Gatsby while respecting Nick. Nick has his head on straight; Nick learns from what he sees; Nick acquires wisdom from his experiences and thus tells us a cautionary tale. Ah, but for one brief, shining moment, for no more than the time it took Werther to love and die, Meursault to murder and die, (The Stranger) Sinclair to fall under the spell of Demian, Gatsby illuminates the sky, and if his death is all a silly mistake, its sordidness is redeemed by his nobility. He dies, after all, for love, but it is a love that, like Werther's, is unrequited.

Gatsby's opposite number in the story is Daisy's husband, Tom Buchanan, and Gatsby's stature -- his touch of doomed but imperishable spiritual beauty, if I may call it so -- is defined by his contrast with Tom. In many ways they are analogous in their characteristics -- just sufficiently so to point up the differences. Tom's restlessness is an arrogant assertiveness seeking to evade in bluster the deep uneasiness of self-knowledge. His hypocrisy and lack of human feeling make him the most unpleasant character in the book, but he is also, when it comes to the point, one of the sanest. In the battle with Gatsby he has the nature of things on his side, so that his victory is as inevitable as it is despicable. The discovery that his sanity is even less worthwhile in human terms than Gatsby's self-centered fantasy is not the least of the novel's ironies. For example, their youth is an essential quality of them both. Nick talks about Tom

“It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it that you may come across four or five times in life. 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 so 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. Precisely at that point it vanished - and I was looking at an elegant young rough-neck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd.”

In the description of Tom we are left physically face to face with a scion of those ruthless generations who raised up the great American fortunes, and who now live in uneasy arrogant leisure on their brutal acquisitions. But Gatsby's youth leaves an impression of interminability. Its climax is always in the future, and it gives rather than demands.

Gatsby's youth is not simply a matter of three decades that will quickly multiply themselves into four or five. It is a quality of faith and hope that may be betrayed by history may be killed by society, but that no exposure to the cynical turns of time can reduce to the compromises of age. Again, Gatsby and Tom are alike in the possession of certain sentimentality, but Tom Buchanan's is based on depraved self-pity. He is never more typical than when coaxing himself to tears over a half finished box of dog biscuits that recalls a drunken and illicit day from his past, associated in memory with his dead mistress. His self-pity is functional. It is sufficient to condone his most criminal acts in his own eyes as long as the crimes are not imputable. But Gatsby's sentimentality exists in the difficulty of expressing, in the phrases and symbols provided by his decadent society, the reality that lies at the heart of his aspiration. Gatsby's sentimentality is as innocent as that. It has nothing of self-pity or indulgence in it -- it is all aspiration and goodness; and it must be remembered that Fitzgerald himself is outside Gatsby's vocabulary, using it with great mastery to convey the poignancy of the situation.

The actual meeting of Gatsby and Daisy is the central episode of the novel. Everything leads up to it, and what follows is a working out of implications which are in the meeting itself. There is the tension as Gatsby waits, and the embarrassing absurdity of the first few minutes together -- the irony here highly comic, and very much at Gatsby's expense. Gatsby has ignored, and disbelieved in, such depressing commonplaces as Carraway's -- the depressing commonplaces which are at the heart of Daisy's cynicism, and of the grayness of the ash-gray men. In his own private world past and future can be held captive in the present. His faith allows almost boundless possibilities to be contemplated: and if the "universe" which has "spun itself out in his brain" does happen to be one of "ineffable gaudiness," this does not alter the fact that it is more remarkable, and colorful, than the realities against which it breaks. Like Tamburlaine, Gatsby has made a "Platonic conception of himself" out of the extravagant emotions and aspirations of an adolescent. Like Tamburlaine, too, he has made himself vulnerable by acknowledging the power of a Zenocrate. It is only poetic justice, perhaps, that his own Zenocrate should turn out to be Daisy. But whoever it had been, the result would have been the same.

The battle between Gatsby and Tom is at one level the battle between illusion and reality. Tom has the nature of things on his side, and it is part of the nature of things that he and Daisy belong together.

Tom Buchanan and Gatsby represent antagonistic but historically related aspects of America. They are related as the body and the soul when a mortal barrier has risen up between them. Tom Buchanan is virtually Gatsby's murderer in the end, but the crime that he commits by proxy is only a symbol of his deeper spiritual crime against Gatsby's inner vision. Gatsby's guilt, insofar as it exists, is radical failure -- a failure of the critical faculty that seems to be an inherent part of the American dream -- to understand that Daisy is as fully immersed in the destructive element of the American world as Tom himself. After Daisy, while driving Gatsby's white automobile, has killed Mrs. Wilson and, implicitly at least, left Gatsby to shoulder the blame, Nick Carraway gives us a crucial insight into the spiritual affinity of the Buchanan couple, drawing together in their callous selfishness in a moment of guilt and crisis.

There is little point in tracing out in detail the implications of the action any further, although it could be done with an exactness approaching allegory. That it is not allegory is owing to the fact that the pattern emerges from the fullness of Fitzgerald's living experience of his own society and time. In the end the most that can be said is that *The Great Gatsby* is a dramatic affirmation in fictional terms of the American spirit in the midst of an American world that denies the soul. Gatsby exists in, and for, that affirmation alone.

It was Gatsby's dream that conferred reality upon the world. The reality was in his faith in the goodness of creation, and in the possibilities of life. That these possibilities were intrinsically related to such romantic components limited and distorted his dream, and finally left it helpless in the face of the Buchanans, but it did not corrupt it. When the dream melted, it knocked the prop of reality from under the universe, and face to face with the physical substance at last, Gatsby realized that the illusion was there -- there where Tom and Daisy, and generations of small-minded, ruthless Americans had found it -- in the dreamless, visionless complacency of mere matter, substance without form. After this recognition, Gatsby's death is only a symbolic formality, for the world into which his mere body had been born rejected the gift he had been created to embody -- the traditional dream from which alone it could awaken into life. When his dream broke

“Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. 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 Dutch sailors' eyes -- a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had 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.”

Critics of Scott Fitzgerald tend to agree that *The Great Gatsby* is somehow a commentary on that elusive phrase, the American dream. The assumption seems to be that Fitzgerald approved. On the contrary, it can be shown that *The Great Gatsby* offers some of the severest and closest criticism of the American dream that our literature affords. Read in this way, Fitzgerald's masterpiece ceases to be a pastoral documentary of the Jazz Age and takes its distinguished place among those great national novels whose profound corrective insights into the nature of American experience are not separable from the artistic form of the novel itself. That is to say, Fitzgerald -- at least in this one book -- is in a line with the greatest masters of American prose. *The Great Gatsby* embodies a criticism of American experience -- not of manners, but of a basic historic attitude to life -- more radical than anything in James's own assessment of the deficiencies of his country. The theme of *Gatsby* is the withering of the American dream.

Essentially, this phrase represents the romantic enlargement of the possibilities of life on a level at which the material and the spiritual have become inextricably confused. As such, it led inevitably toward the problem that has always confronted American artists dealing with American experience -- the problem of determining the hidden boundary in the American vision of life at which the reality ends and the illusion begins. Historically, the American dream is anti-Calvinistic, and believes in the goodness of nature and man.

The Great Gatsby is an exploration of the American dream as it exists in a corrupt period, and it is an attempt to determine that concealed boundary that divides the reality from the illusions. The illusions seem more real than the reality itself. Embodied in the subordinate characters in the novel, they threaten to invade the whole of the picture. On the other hand, the reality is embodied in Gatsby; and as opposed to the hard, tangible illusions, the reality is a thing of the spirit, a promise rather than the possession of a vision, a faith in the half-glimpsed, but hardly understood, possibilities of life. In Gatsby's America, the reality is undefined to itself.

This is not pretentious phrase-making performing a vague gesture towards some artificial significance. It is both an evocative and an exact description of that unholy cruel paradox by which the conditions of American history have condemned the grandeur of the aspiration and vision to expend itself in a waste of shame and silence. But the reality is not entirely lost.

It ends by redeeming the human spirit, even though it lives in a wilderness of illusions, from the cheapness and vulgarity that encompass it. In this novel, the illusions are known and condemned at last simply by the rank complacency with which they are content to be themselves. On the other hand, the reality is in the energy of the spirit's resistance, which may not recognize itself as resistance at all, but which can neither stoop to the illusions nor abide with them when they are at last recognized. Perhaps it is really nothing more than ultimate immunity from the final contamination, but it encompasses the difference between life and death. Gatsby never succeeds in seeing through the sham of his world or his acquaintances very clearly. It is of the essence of his romantic American vision that it should lack the seasoned powers of discrimination. But it invests those illusions with its own faith, and thus it discovers its projected goodness in the frauds of its crippled world. The Great Gatsby becomes the acting out of the tragedy of the American vision. It is a vision totally untouched by the scales of values that order life in a society governed by traditional manners; and Fitzgerald knows that although it would be easy to condemn and place the illusions by invoking these outside values, to do so would be to kill the reality that lies beyond them, but which can sometimes only be reached through them.

For example, Fitzgerald perfectly understood the inadequacy of Gatsby's romantic view of wealth. But that is not the point. He presents it in Gatsby as a romantic baptism of desire for a reality that stubbornly remains out of his sight. It is as if a savage islander, suddenly touched with Grace, transcended in his prayers and aspirations the grotesque little fetish in which he imagined he discovered the object of his longing. The scene in which Gatsby shows his piles of beautiful imported shirts to Daisy and Nick has been mentioned as a failure of Gatsby's, and so of Fitzgerald's, critical control of values. Actually, the shirts are sacramental, and it is clear that Gatsby shows them, neither in vanity nor in pride, but with a reverential humility in the presence of some inner vision he cannot consciously grasp, but toward which he desperately struggles in the only way he knows.

Students of American literature are given to speculating about the American Dream--what it is, how ardently people pursue it, and how invariably they fail. The blame is usually laid rather vaguely at the feet of society, the convenient scapegoat for everybody's woes ever since the people seized control of the government from the privileged few. Cult readers enjoy indictments of society because such indictments reinforce their own sense of disaffection and protect them against taking blame for their own failures. However, there is more to it than that. Cult readers enjoy flirting with the demimonde, and if they can idealize a shady character, they will.

In this sense Gatsby is a "mythic" character, and no other word will define him. Not only is he an embodiment (as Fitzgerald makes clear at the outset) of that conflict between illusion and reality at the heart of American life; he is a heroic personification of the American romantic hero, the true heir of the American dream.

Veton Neziri

Literary Analysis of the Great Gatsby

Described by literal critics as the greatest work of Scott F. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* not only remains one of the greatest stories of all time but also opens insight into the intrigues of the real life situation during the "Roaring Twenties." This book has been linked by many as the best symbol to the "Jazz Age" which is an era that was depicted by the emergence of class and great promises in the lives of Americans. The greatest literary strength of this Fitzgerald's work is based on its capacity to present truth behind the twenties and the entrenchment of an atmosphere that have earned a place in the American literature. This powerful literary ability has been manifested in other works of Fitzgerald's works that gives readers unforgettable experience on the characters and the events, as well as the ability to deeply analyze the problems of the American wealth and spirituality.

The analysis of the book reveals that whereas Fitzgerald has attempted to focus on a variety of themes, the question remains what is behind the green light? This Fitzgerald's work is composed of symbolism that has made them the greatest literary works of all time. The underlining symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* is well presented and can be analyzed through deeper literal examination of quotes such as "I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone - he stretched out his arms towards the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward - and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness."

This chapter therefore comes to an end with the symbol of the green light that is mysterious. The reader's first knowledge of the green light is depicted when Gatsby tries to reach out towards it, like he is worshipping it. As we progress, we discover that the green light is at the end of Daisy's dock and is a symbol of Gatsby's dream and hope for the future.

According to Millet (1), "Green is the color of promise, hope, and renewal - so it is fitting that Gatsby's dream of a future with Daisy be represented physically in the novel by this green light". Daisy is thus depicted as a symbol of wealth and power. The ensuing chapters of this book will analytically present the role of Daisy in the entire novel. Fitzgerald (115) proceeds to compare Gatsby's green light to the green beast of the world. This demonstrates that even though Daisy is a symbol of power and wealth, there are underlying evil aspects that surround the beauty and comfort and envisaged by Gatsby.

I would like to continue by suggesting that if the one employs a comparative analysis of Gatsby's dream to the explorer's discovery of America and the promise of a new continent. Moreover, Gatsby is demonstrated as one who feels contented with his newly acquired status. Complications arise as Gatsby's dream seems to follow a tarnishing path because of his obsessions with the materials of this world, just like the Americans are fully obsessed by wealth. This fact is perhaps well illustrated by Millet in stating that "However, Gatsby's dream is tarnished by his material possessions, much like America is now with our obsession with wealth. The means corrupt the end, and Gatsby's dream dies because of Daisy, Gatsby, and Tom's carelessness and superficiality, as does Gatsby for the same reasons".

Daisy as a character in *The Great Gatsby* is effectively used to represent the aspects of wealth, power and evil in the American society. At the end of the first chapter, we see the green light as a symbol of hope, promise and a better future and something that is worth worshipping. The beginning of the second chapter is marked by the description of the green light in opposite direction. "Foul wasteland and valley of ashes (16) are used to describe the green light. Accordingly, this section of the novel can be interpreted as the foul, material-driven world that the main characters live in, and which helps to destroy Gatsby's dream.

The Critical Assessment of the Great Gatsby

The Great Gatsby now holds an undeniable place among the masterpieces of twentieth-century American literature. The green light at the end of Daisy's dock and the spell it casts over Gatsby as he tries to force the world into his version of the American Dream endures as an iconic symbol of both optimism and failure. Despite the critical accolades now showered upon *The Great Gatsby*, the novel followed a path to success marked along the way by stinging criticism and lackluster sales at the time of its publication. Fitzgerald understood that his new novel would prove problematical for publishers, as "his story contained material that put it well outside the moral boundaries" of the commercial literary magazines of his day. Given Fitzgerald's often perilous financial situation, concerns about the marketability of the novel held potentially grave consequences for the author. Indeed, several literary magazines would not serialize *The Great Gatsby* due to concerns about moral issues raised by the story, including adultery and overt sexuality. The novel finally did find a home and was published by Charles Scribner's Sons on April 10, 1925. On the craft of writing, Fitzgerald commented, "An author ought to write for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the school masters of ever afterward" (Scribner, 22). These words proved prophetic as they relate to evolving critical and popular opinion of *The Great Gatsby*.

Literary luminaries within Fitzgerald's immediate circle, including Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and T. S. Eliot, immediately showered his new novel with praise. Given that these authors emerged as the vanguard of the modernist movement in literature, their praise bolstered Fitzgerald's sense of having accomplished something truly literary. Unfortunately, the high esteem in which fellow authors held *The Great Gatsby* did not transfer to the reading public at large or the novel's profitability as "sales remained deeply disappointing," despite the often enthusiastic responses from friends and fellow writers (Hook, 71). Overall, however, the critical response to *Gatsby* immediately following its publication proved less than resounding endorsements for the novel. Influential critic H. L. Mencken reviewed the novel shortly after its publication and commented that the story was "no more than a glorified anecdote" (Mizener 1963, 2), finding the overall plot arc lacking in depth. However, Mencken did not believe that the novel was wholly without merit. He believed that it marked the evolution of Fitzgerald as an author and craftsman, writing that "the story, for all its basic triviality, has a fine texture, a careful and brilliant finish" (Mencken, 157). Furthermore, Mencken praised Fitzgerald's depiction of the decadence of the rich, including their ennui, their questionable morals, and their ever-changing habits—portraits he found accurate. Critic Laurence Stallings, who like Mencken reviewed *The Great Gatsby* in 1925, concurred with the prevalent critical view that the novel showcased Fitzgerald's ability to improve upon his previous novels and short stories. Stallings's overall praise of the novel proves conditional at best. He asserted that "the earlier Fitzgerald was barbarous; those who followed him have aped his barbarity (Stallings, 155). Yet despite the improvements Stallings found in *The Great Gatsby*, he concluded that the novel did not rise to the level of masterpiece. He wrote, "I do not think for one moment in reading this book that 'here is a great novel' or even, that 'here is a fine book'" (154) and believed that the novel felt unfinished, much like a plan without fineness of execution, a view mirrored by Mencken.

Fitzgerald's acknowledgment of the novel's problematic issues of morality and sexuality contributed to *The Great Gatsby*'s lackluster reception by critics. One anonymous reviewer, writing in 1926, focused on his or her utter contempt for the characters in the novel, finding them unlikeable. The reviewer contended that the novel needed "perhaps an excess of intensity to buoy up the really very unpleasant characters of this story" (New Novels, 176). Modern critics would likely view such criticism as backhanded praise, given that Fitzgerald's story hinges upon the decadence and corruption of nearly every character the reader meets. It will also be the modern critic who recognizes Fitzgerald's realization in *Gatsby* of a theme he visited in earlier works, that of the decline of the wealthy, lazy, and ignorant brought to life by defining "convincingly the reasons for their defeat" (Mizener 1972, 61).

However, at the time of its publication, the reading public seemed genuinely taken aback by Fitzgerald's frank depiction of moral decay. Other reviewers proved even less kind in their assessment, evidenced by the headline of a New York newspaper in 1925 which stated simply, "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Latest a Dud" (Hook, 70).

The *Great Gatsby* remained in critical and literary purgatory until the 1940s, when interest in the novel began to pick up in earnest, a trend which continued into the 1950s (Mizener 1963, 2–3). Critics G. Thomas Tanselle and Jackson R. Bryer see the year 1945 as pivotal to *Gatsby* scholarship and that a "revival" in the novel may have been ushered in by the publication of a scholarly essay praising heretofore neglected merits of the novel. Specifically, interest is centered on "Fitzgerald's preoccupation with failure" and the difficulties of living in an industrialized "modern" world (Tanselle and Bryer, 182, 190). In *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald masterfully realizes both of these themes in the crafting of his titular character and indeed, critics took notice of *Gatsby* himself as a source for close examination. Where previous critics faulted the novel for its perceived lack of scope, the literary scholars of the 1940s recognized the complexity of *Gatsby*, "for *Gatsby*, divided between power and dream, comes inevitably to stand for American itself" (Trilling, 17). Whatever the plot may lack in terms of a far-reaching arc across time or exotic locales it makes up for in abundance with its "intellectual intensity" (17). Shortly thereafter in 1948, critic George Garrett recalls attending a class at Princeton in which Fitzgerald's works, including *Gatsby*, were taught for the first time (Garrett, 29), marking the start of *Gatsby* making headway into the classrooms of academia.

Interest in the novel continued into the 1950s. During this decade, scholarly commentary on *Gatsby* began to focus on the irony inherent in the character of *Gatsby*—a romantic man surrounded by, and even participating in, corruptive acts. The American Dream, once revered as an attainable, an almost holy icon of American culture, now found itself subject to scrutiny. *Gatsby* exemplifies the man who obtains, at least for awhile, the outward trappings of financial wealth only to see the empire he envisions for himself ultimately fail to materialize. Leslie Fiedler, writing in 1951, posited that *Gatsby* needed time in order to "catch on" with the reading public and critics alike in large part due to "Fitzgerald's refusal to swap his own lived sentimentalities for the mass sentimentalities of social protest that swamp the later Hemingway" (Fiedler, 75). Fiedler's insight into Fitzgerald prefigures by a scant few years the emergence of feminism as a counter to the idealized image of woman as happiest in the role of housewife, a hallmark of the American Dream of her decade. Additionally, critics of this era started to view *Gatsby* through a wider lens, where previous studies looked only at issues of biography or Fitzgerald's place as an author in the Jazz Age (Perosa, 222). Fitzgerald exposes the darkest aspects of human nature in *Gatsby*—from the fragile, ephemeral nature of dreams to the inability of wealth to provide any sort of lasting happiness—and this resonated with critics of the 1950s. The 1960s, a decade of social protest, continued to tear down the myth of the American Dream and the acceptability of the status quo. With some four decades now passed since the initial publication of the novel, critics and readers alike seemed better able to recognize the universality of *Gatsby*'s flaws without fixating on Fitzgerald's depiction of "unreal characters" (Tanselle, 181). Arguably, Fitzgerald never set out with the intention of writing a novel which strictly adhered to the tenets of realism, a discipline steadily giving way to the modernist-era by 1925. Yet his contemporaries seemed extraordinarily uncomfortable with the novel, perhaps less out of a dislike for its break with realism and more out of discomfiture at the possibility of the decadent world inhabited by *Gatsby*, the Buchanans, and Nick Carraway.

Jackson R. Bryer describes the 1970s as an era of "consistent and serious attention" to Fitzgerald's writings (248). Bryer himself is a critical figure in Fitzgerald scholarship, compiling criticism, book reviews, and scholarly pieces. He asserts that *Gatsby* benefits from critical focus much more so than all other Fitzgerald fiction but *Tender Is the Night* (259).

The year 1973 emerged as a pivotal one for Gatsby studies. Scholar Matthew J. Bruccoli published an edited edition of Gatsby which included both rejected passages and emendations made to the text as it moved from manuscript form to publication in 1925. Bruccoli's painstaking work with Gatsby led to many interesting points for textual study, including the discovery that Daisy's green dock light was not a part of the novel in its earliest form (Perosa, 233).

In addition to the new edition of Gatsby, Bruccoli also contributed bibliographies, detailed listings of all of Fitzgerald's works, and editions of the author's letters. These scholarly works greatly facilitated those working in the field of Fitzgerald studies by providing a storehouse of information heretofore uncollected. From the 1970s to the present day, Gatsby criticism continues to branch out to include individual character studies, to close readings, to essays placing the novel in "the context of a wider vision of America and the American Dream" (Bryer, 262) freeing the work from the confines of the Jazz Age alone. By 1980, over fifty books "entirely devoted to Fitzgerald" had been published (247).

Critics continue to turn to Gatsby as a source of literary study. The complexity of the story and its biting social commentary lend itself to any number of critical perspectives, from New Historicism, to Feminism, to Queer Theory and beyond. Gatsby allows the reader to "clearly discern where we have been and where we have come from" (Garrett, 35) and the continuing healthy sales of the novel attest to its continuing power. Journal articles, books, and edited collections covering the spectrum of topics relating to Gatsby continue to emerge and the novel remains a critical component of literary studies, from the high school to collegiate levels. Critic Arthur Mizener, writing in the late 1990s, commented about the accessibility of Gatsby, since Fitzgerald so masterfully "makes the fate of his chosen people an image of the fate of Western society" (Mizener 1999, 93).

Gatsby eventually becomes the book "that would acquire classic status, and had written off those critics who had regarded [Fitzgerald] as too immature and unintellectual ever to produce a major literary work" (Hook, 79). Yet Fitzgerald did not enjoy such critical accolades during his lifetime, as the tide of opinion toward Gatsby turned only in the years following his death. Although members of the intellectual and literary elite immediately recognized Gatsby as a profound contribution, the public needed time and distance in order to come to the same level of appreciation. Recent decades have seen more copies of Fitzgerald's works, of which Gatsby remains a perennial favorite, sold each year than were sold during the whole of the author's lifetime. Publishing scion Charles Scribner III cautions that critics and readers alike should avoid approaching Fitzgerald's writings with the intention of looking for flaws. Instead, one should celebrate the poetic beauty of his prose, his ability to transform the ordinary and transport the reader (Scribner, 24). Rather than scorning the novel for its perceived lack of realism or complexity, readers and critics alike began from the 1940s onward to understand the profound social commentary embedded within the story of Gatsby's rise and fall. The varied and intensive scholarly study which continues to focus on the novel acts as a testament to the genius of its author.

A narrative essay on the Great Gatsby

The Great Gatsby is a story told by Nick Carraway, who was once Gatsby's neighbor, and he tells the story sometime after 1922, when the incidents that fill the book take place. As the story opens, Nick has just moved from the Midwest to West Egg, Long Island, seeking his fortune as a bond salesman. Shortly after his arrival, Nick travels across the Sound to the more fashionable East Egg to visit his cousin Daisy Buchanan and her husband, Tom, a hulking, imposing man whom Nick had known in college. There he meets professional golfer Jordan Baker. The Buchannans and Jordan Baker live privileged lives, contrasting sharply in sensibility and luxury with Nick's more modest and grounded lifestyle. When Nick returns home that evening, he notices his neighbor, Gatsby, mysteriously standing in the dark and stretching his arms toward the water, and a solitary green light across the Sound.

One day, Nick is invited to accompany Tom, a blatant adulterer, to meet his mistress, Myrtle Wilson, a middle-class woman whose husband runs a modest garage and gas station in the valley of ashes, a desolate and run-down section of town that marks the convergence of the city and the suburbs. After the group meets and journeys into the city, Myrtle phones friends to come over and they all spend the afternoon drinking at Myrtle and Tom's apartment. The afternoon is filled with drunken behavior and ends ominously with Myrtle and Tom fighting over Daisy, his wife. Drunkenness turns to rage and Tom, in one deft movement, breaks Myrtle's nose.

Following the description of this incident, Nick turns his attention to his mysterious neighbor, who hosts weekly parties for the rich and fashionable. Upon Gatsby's invitation (which is noteworthy because rarely is anyone ever invited to Gatsby's parties — they just show up, knowing they will not be turned away), Nick attends one of the extravagant gatherings. There, he bumps into Jordan Baker, as well as Gatsby himself. Gatsby, it turns out, is a gracious host, but yet remains apart from his guest — an observer more than a participant — as if he is seeking something. As the party winds down, Gatsby takes Jordan aside to speak privately. Although the reader isn't specifically told what they discuss, Jordan is greatly amazed by what she's learned.

As the summer unfolds, Gatsby and Nick become friends and Jordan and Nick begin to see each other on a regular basis, despite Nick's conviction that she is notoriously dishonest (which offends his sensibilities because he is "one of the few honest people" he has ever met). Nick and Gatsby journey into the city one day and there Nick meets Meyer Wolfsheimer, one of Gatsby's associates and Gatsby's link to organized crime. On that same day, while having tea with Jordan Baker, Nick learns the amazing story that Gatsby told her the night of his party. Gatsby, it appears, is in love with Daisy Buchanan. They met years earlier when he was in the army but could not be together because he did not yet have the means to support her. In the intervening years, Gatsby made his fortune, all with the goal of winning Daisy back. He bought his house so that he would be across the Sound from her and hosted the elaborate parties in the hopes that she would notice. It has come time for Gatsby to meet Daisy again, face-to-face, and so, through the intermediary of Jordan Baker, Gatsby asks Nick to invite Daisy to his little house where Gatsby will show up unannounced.

The day of the meeting arrives. Nick's house is perfectly prepared, due largely to the generosity of the hopeless romantic Gatsby, who wants every detail to be perfect for his reunion with his lost love. When the former lovers meet, their reunion is slightly nervous, but shortly, the two are once again comfortable with each other, leaving Nick to feel an outsider in the warmth the two people radiate. As the afternoon progresses, the three move the party from Nick's house to Gatsby's, where he takes special delight in showing Daisy his meticulously decorated house and his impressive array of belongings, as if demonstrating in a very tangible way just how far out of poverty he has traveled.

At this point, Nick again lapses into memory, relating the story of Jay Gatsby. Born James Gatz to "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people," Gatsby changed his name at seventeen, about the same time he met Dan Cody.

Cody would become Gatsby's mentor, taking him on in "a vague personal capacity" for five years as he went three times around the Continent. By the time of Cody's death, Gatsby had grown into manhood and had defined the man he would become. Never again would he acknowledge his meager past; from that point on, armed with a fabricated family history, he was Jay Gatsby, entrepreneur.

Moving back to the present, we discover that Daisy and Tom will attend one of Gatsby's parties. Tom, of course, spends his time chasing women, while Daisy and Gatsby sneak over to Nick's yard for a moment's privacy while Nick, accomplice in the affair, keeps guard. After the Buchannans leave, Gatsby tells Nick of his secret desire: to recapture the past. Gatsby, the idealistic dreamer, firmly believes the past can be recaptured in its entirety. Gatsby then goes on to tell what it is about his past with Daisy that has made such an impact on him.

As the summer unfolds, Gatsby and Daisy's affair begins to grow and they see each other regularly. On one fateful day, the hottest and most unbearable of the summer, Gatsby and Nick journey to East Egg to have lunch with the Buchannans and Jordan Baker. Oppressed by the heat, Daisy suggests they take solace in a trip to the city. No longer hiding her love for Gatsby, Daisy pays him special attention and Tom deftly picks up on what's going on. As the party prepares to leave for the city, Tom fetches a bottle of whisky. Tom, Nick, and Jordan drive in Gatsby's car, while Gatsby and Daisy drive Tom's coupe. Low on gas, Tom stops Gatsby's car at Wilson's gas station, where he sees that Wilson is not well. Like Tom, who has just learned of Daisy's affair, Wilson has just learned of Myrtle's secret life — although he does not know who the man is — and it has made him physically sick. Wilson announces his plans to take Myrtle out West, much to Tom's dismay. Tom has lost a wife and a mistress all in a matter of an hour. Absorbed in his own fears, Tom hastily drives into the city.

The group ends up at the Plaza hotel, where they continue drinking, moving the day closer and closer to its tragic end. Tom, always a hot-head, begins to badger Gatsby, questioning him as to his intentions with Daisy. Decidedly tactless and confrontational, Tom keeps harping on Gatsby until the truth comes out: Gatsby wants Daisy to admit she's never loved Tom but that, instead, she has always loved him. When Daisy is unable to do this, Gatsby declares that Daisy is going to leave Tom. Tom, though, understands Daisy far better than Gatsby does and knows she won't leave him: His wealth and power, matured through generations of privilege, will triumph over Gatsby's newly found wealth. In a gesture of authority, Tom orders Daisy and Gatsby to head home in Gatsby's car. Tom, Nick, and Jordan follow.

As Tom's car nears Wilson's garage, they can all see that some sort of accident has occurred. Pulling over to investigate, they learn that Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress, has been hit and killed by a passing car that never bothered to stop, and it appears to have been Gatsby's car. Tom, Jordan, and Nick continue home to East Egg. Nick, now disgusted by the morality and behavior of the people with whom he has been on friendly terms, meets Gatsby outside of the Buchannans house where he is keeping watch for Daisy. With a few well-chosen questions, Nick learns that Daisy, not Gatsby, was driving the car, although Gatsby confesses he will take all the blame. Nick, greatly agitated by all that he has experienced during the day, continues home, but an overarching feeling of dread haunts him.

Nearing dawn the next morning, Nick goes to Gatsby's house. While the two men turn the house upside down looking for cigarettes, Gatsby tells Nick more about how he became the man he is and how Daisy figured into his life. Later that morning, while at work, Nick is unable to concentrate. He receives a phone call from Jordan Baker, but is quick to end the discussion — and thereby the friendship. He plans to take an early train home and check on Gatsby.

The action then switches back to Wilson who, distraught over his wife's death, sneaks out and goes looking for the driver who killed Myrtle. Nick retraces Wilson's journey, which placed him, by early afternoon, at Gatsby's house. Wilson murders Gatsby and then turns the gun on himself.

After Gatsby's death, Nick is left to help make arrangements for his burial. What is most perplexing, though, is that no one seems overly concerned with Gatsby's death. Daisy and Tom mysteriously leave on a trip and all the people who so eagerly attended his parties, drinking his liquor and eating his food, refuse to become involved.

Even Meyer Wolfshiem, Gatsby's business partner, refuses to publicly mourn his friend's death. A telegram from Henry C. Gatz, Gatsby's father, indicates he will be coming from Minnesota to bury his son. Gatsby's funeral boasts only Nick, Henry Gatz, a few servants, the postman, and the minister at the graveside. Despite all his popularity during his lifetime, in his death, Gatsby is completely forgotten.

Nick, completely disillusioned with what he has experienced in the East, prepares to head back to the Midwest. Before leaving, he sees Tom Buchanan one last time. When Tom notices him and questions him as to why he didn't want to shake hands, Nick curtly offers "You know what I think of you." Their discussion reveals that Tom was the impetus behind Gatsby's death. When Wilson came to his house, he told Wilson that Gatsby owned the car that killed Myrtle. In Tom's mind, he had helped justice along. Nick, disgusted by the carelessness and cruel nature of Tom, Daisy, and those like them, leaves Tom, proud of his own integrity.

On the last night before leaving, Nick goes to Gatsby's mansion, then to the shore where Gatsby once stood, arms outstretched toward the green light. The novel ends prophetically, with Nick noting how we are all a little like Gatsby, boats moving up a river, going forward but continually feeling the pull of the past.

An explanatory essay on the Great Gatsby

The Great Gatsby, published in 1925, is hailed as one of the foremost pieces of American fiction of its time. It is a novel of triumph and tragedy, noted for the remarkable way its author captures a cross-section of American society. In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald, known for his imagistic and poetic prose, holds a mirror up to the society of which he was a part. The initial success of the book was limited, although in the more than 75 years since it has come to be regarded as a classic piece of American short fiction. In 1925, however, the novel served as a snapshot of the frenzied post-war society known as the Jazz Age, while today it provides readers with, among other things, a portal through which to observe life in the 1920s. Part of Fitzgerald's charm in *The Great Gatsby*, in fact, is his ability to encapsulate the mood of a generation during a politically and socially crucial and chaotic period of American history.

To understand Fitzgerald's genius more fully, one must be aware of the politics that underlie the story. To remove the story from its full historical context is to do it a grave injustice. The novel, published in 1925, explores life in the early- to mid-1920s. Politically speaking, this was a time of growth and prosperity, as well as a time of corruption. World War I, the first war of its kind anyone had ever known, had ended in 1919. When Warren G. Harding assumed the presidency in 1920, one of his goals was to bring the country back to business as usual. However, this proved to be a difficult task because Harding's administration was plagued by scandal and corruption, as well as opposition mounted by both unions and organized crime.

After WWI ended, Harding's administration targeted business as a means of rebuilding the country. What this entailed, however, included undermining striking laborers and largely siding with management in labor dispute issues over such things as minimum wage, unions, child labor, and so on. In addition to favoring management in labor disputes, Harding and his successor, Calvin Coolidge, enacted tax legislation that benefited the wealthy more so than any other group. In addition, because of administrative policy decisions, industries such as agriculture, textiles, and certain types of mining suffered greatly, and as a result, cities grew as people moved to urban areas to make a living. Many of them, however, remained trapped in a purgatory of sorts, looking for a better life but unable to get it, not unlike the people in *The Great Gatsby*'s valley of ashes.

Economically, the 1920s boasted great financial gain, at least for those of the upper class. Between 1922 and 1929, dividends from stock rose by 108 percent, corporate profits increased by 76 percent, and personal wages grew by 33 percent. Nick Carraway's journey to the East to make his fortune in the bond business is not entirely unfounded. Largely because of improvements in technology, productivity increased while overall production costs decreased, and the economy grew. All this would come to a grinding halt, however, with the stock market crash of 1929, sending the U.S. into the greatest depression it has ever known. Fitzgerald, of course, couldn't have forecasted the crash, but in *The Great Gatsby*, he does suggest, on one level, that society was living in excess and without curbing its appetite somewhat, ruin was just around the corner.

The commercial growth of the 1920s resulted in rampant materialism, such as that chronicled in *The Great Gatsby*. As people began to have more money, they began to buy more. In turn, as people began to buy more, profits grew, more goods were manufactured, and people earned more money, thereby enabling the economic growth cycle. People began to spend their money on consumer goods — cars, radios, telephones, and refrigerators — at a rate never before seen. People also began to spend time and money on recreation and leisure. Professional sports began to grow in popularity, and movies and tabloid newspapers gained a foothold on America, helping everyone to share, in one way or another, in the growing materialism that categorized the Jazz Age.

In addition to economics, Fitzgerald takes other national issues into consideration in *The Great Gatsby*. For example, in Chapter 1, Tom has an intense dislike for outsiders. Later, other characters, including Nick, refer negatively to immigrants who live in the community of West Egg. Although to modern readers the comments and allusions may seem to lack motivation, such is not the case. Immigration to America was at its peak in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although immigration waned during the war years, by June of 1921, immigration had returned again to pre-war levels (800,000 people between June of 1920 and June of 1921) and organized labor began lobbying against immigrants, whom they believed were taking away jobs from American citizens. Business leaders and various special interest groups also began to worry about the influx of immigrants, citing anti-American political fanaticism as a likely problem. In response, Congress passed a series of restriction bills and laws, setting quotas that limited the number of immigrants allowed in a particular year (164,000 in 1924 and 1925; 150,000 after July 1, 1927). The quota was entirely discriminatory, particularly to people from southern and eastern Europe and from Asia. Although readers may not like what Fitzgerald's characters imply, there is certainly a historical basis behind it.

Another aspect of *The Great Gatsby* that has historical roots centers on the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution: prohibition. Enacted in 1919 (and ultimately repealed in 1933), this amendment made it illegal for anyone to manufacture, sell, or transport liquor of any sort. Millions of Americans hailed this amendment as a moral advance, curbing America's growing penchant for immorality and all the vices that went (in their eyes) hand in hand with drunkenness. Despite the millions who supported prohibition, millions also broke the law and drank the outlawed liquor. Not surprisingly, when the illegal liquor business became lucrative, organized crime stepped in to meet the demand. Manufacturing and distributing alcohol were big businesses during the years of prohibition and helped make the fortunes of the nouveaux riches (newly rich) found within Fitzgerald's novel, including Meyer Wolfsheimer and Gatsby himself. An understanding of prohibition also helps explain why Fitzgerald puts such an emphasis on drinking within the novel.

Although political issues underlie *The Great Gatsby*, so, too, do social issues. In many ways, Fitzgerald's Jazz Age characters are a fairly honest representation of what could be found in the social circles of the country's younger generation. Many of the men in *The Great Gatsby* had served in WWI, and like their real-life counterparts, they returned from the war changed. They found the ideas and attitudes waiting for them at home to be representative of an outmoded way of thinking, and so they rebelled. The women at home, too, found post-war America to be too constrictive for their tastes. Many women had entered the workforce when the men went to war and were unwilling to give up the by-products of their employment, social and economic freedom when the men returned from the war. In addition, the Nineteenth Amendment, enacted in 1920, gave women the right to vote, making their independence even more necessary. In the 1920s, young men and women (including Fitzgerald himself) refused to be content maintaining the status quo, and so they openly and wholeheartedly rebelled.

Socially, the 1920s marked an era of great change, particularly for women. In a symbolic show of emancipation, women bobbed their hair, that one great indicator of traditional femininity. To compliment to their more masculine look, women also began to give up wearing corsets, the restrictive undergarment intended to accentuate a woman's hips, waist, and breasts, as if to reinvent themselves, according to their own rules. Other things women did that were previously unheard of included smoking and drinking openly, as well as relaxing formerly rigid attitudes toward sex. Fitzgerald picks up on the social rebellion of his peers particularly well in *The Great Gatsby*. He shows women of all classes who are breaking out of the molds that society had placed them into. Myrtle, for instance, wishes to climb the social ladder, and so she is determined to do so at all costs. Daisy attempts to break away from the restrictive society in which she was raised, yet she cannot make the break entirely and so she falls back into the only thing she knows: money. Jordan Baker, too, is an emancipated woman. She passes time as a professional golfer, a profession made possible largely because of the social and economic progress of the 1920s.

Part of what makes Fitzgerald's novel such a favorite piece is the way he is able to analyze the society of which he was also a part. Through his characters, he not only captures a snapshot of middle- and upper-class American life in the 1920s, but also conveys a series of criticisms as well. Through the characterization in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald explores the human condition as it is reflected in a world characterized by social upheaval and uncertainty, a world with a direct underlying historical basis. By emphasizing social groupings and how they do or do not interact with each other (see the Critical Essays section in this Note for further explorations), Fitzgerald establishes a sense the urgency.

The Jazz Age society so clearly shown in *The Great Gatsby* is, in effect, on a very dangerous course when people like Tom, Daisy, and Jordan are at the top of the ladder, working hard to ensure no one else climbs as high as they. Through *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald demonstrates the enterprising Jazz Ager, someone who has worked hard and profited from listening and responding to the demands of the society. Unfortunately, despite his success, *Gatsby* (and all of the people he represents) is never able to capture his elusive dreams. Fitzgerald's story, although a fiction, is informed by reality, helping to make it one of the most treasured pieces of early twentieth century American fiction.

A literary essay

Social Stratification in the Great Gatsby

In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald offers up commentary on a variety of themes — justice, power, greed, betrayal, the American dream and so on. Of all the themes, perhaps none is much more developed than that of social stratification. *The Great Gatsby* is regarded as a brilliant piece of social commentary, offering a vivid peek into American life in the 1920s. Fitzgerald carefully sets up his novel into distinct groups but, in the end, each group has its own problems to contend with, leaving a powerful reminder of what a precarious place the world really is by creating distinct social classes, old money, new money, and no money. Fitzgerald sends strong messages about the elitism running throughout every strata of society.

The first and most obvious group Fitzgerald attacks is, of course, the rich. However, for Fitzgerald (and certainly his characters), placing the rich all in one group together would be a great mistake. For many of those of modest means, the rich seem to be unified by their money. However, Fitzgerald reveals this is not the case. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald presents two distinct types of wealthy people. First, there are people like the Buchannans and Jordan Baker who were born into wealth. Their families have had money for many generations; hence they are "old money." As portrayed in the novel, the "old money" people don't have to work (they rarely, if ever, even speak about business arrangements) and they spend their time amusing themselves with whatever takes their fancy. Daisy, Tom, Jordan, and the distinct social class they represent are perhaps the story's most elitist group, imposing distinctions on the other people of wealth (like Gatsby) based not so much on how much money one has, but where that money came from and when it was acquired. For the "old money" people, the fact that Gatsby (and countless other people like him in the 1920s) has only just recently acquired his money is reason enough to dislike him. In their way of thinking, he can't possibly have the same refinement, sensibility, and taste they have. Not only does he work for a living, but he comes from a low-class background which, in their opinion, means he cannot possibly be like them.

In many ways, the social elite are right. The "new money" people cannot be like them, and in many ways that works in their favor — those in society's highest echelon are not nice people at all. They are judgmental and superficial, failing to look at the essence of the people around them (and themselves, too). Instead, they live their lives in such a way as to perpetuate their sense of superiority — however unrealistic that may be. The people with newly acquired wealth, though, aren't necessarily much better. Think of Gatsby's partygoers. They attend his parties, drink his liquor and eat his food, never once taking the time to even meet their host (nor do they even bother to wait for an invitation, they just show up). When Gatsby dies, all the people who frequented his house every week mysteriously became busy elsewhere, abandoning Gatsby when he could no longer do anything for them. One would like to think the newly wealthy would be more sensitive to the world around them — after all, it was only recently they were without money and most doors were closed to them. As Fitzgerald shows, however, their concerns are largely living for the moment, steeped in partying and other forms of excess.

Just as he did with people of money, Fitzgerald uses the people with no money to convey a strong message. Nick, although he comes from a family with a bit of wealth, doesn't have nearly the capital of Gatsby or Tom. In the end, though, he shows himself to be an honorable and principled man, which is more than Tom exhibits. Myrtle, though, is another story. She comes from the middle class at best. She is trapped, as are so many others, in the valley of ashes, and spends her days trying to make it out. In fact, her desire to move up the social hierarchy leads her to her affair with Tom and she is decidedly pleased with the arrangement.

Because of the misery pervading her life, Myrtle has distanced herself from her moral obligations and has no difficulty cheating on her husband when it means that she gets to lead the lifestyle she wants, if only for a little while. What she doesn't realize, however, is that Tom and his friends will never accept her into their circle. (Notice how Tom has a pattern of picking lower-class women to sleep with.

For him, their powerlessness makes his own position that much more superior. In a strange way, being with women who aspire to his class makes him feel better about himself and allows him to perpetuate the illusion that he is a good and important man.) Myrtle is no more than a toy to Tom and to those he represents.

Fitzgerald has a keen eye and in *The Great Gatsby* presents a harsh picture of the world he sees around him. The 1920s marked a time of great post-war economic growth, and Fitzgerald captures the frenzy of the society well. Although, of course, Fitzgerald could have no way of foreseeing the stock market crash of 1929, the world he presents in *The Great Gatsby* seems clearly to be headed for disaster. They have assumed skewed worldviews, mistakenly believing their survival lies in stratification and reinforcing social boundaries. They erroneously place their faith in superficial external means (such as money and materialism), while neglecting to cultivate the compassion and sensitivity that, in fact, separate humans from the animals.

Literary essay

Altered Spirituality in the Great Gatsby

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald proudly tackles the theme of spirituality. His attack is subtle, making his message heard most forcefully by what is missing, rather than what is there. The world of *The Great Gatsby* is one of excess, folly, and pleasure, a world where people are so busy living for the moment that they have lost touch with any sort of morality, and end up breaking laws, cheating, and even killing. As debauched as this may sound, however, they have not abandoned spirituality altogether. Rather, Fitzgerald's post-war partiers have substituted materialism and instant creature comforts for philosophic principles, thus suggesting a lack of order and structure in the worlds of East Egg, West Egg, and beyond.

Several elements suggest an imbalance in the moral makeup of the characters found in *The Great Gatsby*. In Nick's opening statements, he is attempting to set himself up as an honorable and trustworthy man. His reason for doing so, however, isn't made entirely clear until readers are introduced to the people with whom he interacts. Barely halfway through the first chapter, Fitzgerald reveals that Tom Buchanan is not only having an affair, but he is shamelessly bold in his refusal to cover it up; his wife knows and although she is a bit irritated, she has come to accept Tom's ways. In addition, those in East Egg discuss things of such great importance as what to do on the longest day and why living in the East is ideal, showing that the supposedly social elite are perhaps a bit out of touch with reality. They clearly treat people as objects, and are unconcerned with whether their actions impede on anyone else's.

After the Buchanan's dinner party, *The Great Gatsby* is again and again filled with excess. In fact, every one of the seven deadly sins (pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust) is well represented. None of the characters, including Nick, are free from the deadly devices, which, at least in times past, have traditionally marked the downfall of a community. It is interesting to note that although the seven deadly sins are depicted time and time again by the people in *The Great Gatsby*, the theological counterpart to the seven deadly sins, the seven cardinal virtues (faith, hope, love, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) are nearly invisible. Gatsby, of course, has more hope than all the others put together, but in the end, that one thing, no matter how strong, can't save him.

Although countless acts of questionable integrity can be found within the pages of *The Great Gatsby*, the final and most blatant acts of immorality, of course, come near the book's end. Daisy shows her true self when she runs down Myrtle without even stopping. Gatsby becomes the target for another man's murderous rage when he is gunned down by Wilson (assisted, through association, by Tom). And finally, the last great act of disregard for one's fellow human comes in perhaps the most surprising and disturbing form of all: the lack of mourners at Gatsby's funeral. Despite how people had clamored to be associated with him in life, in death he became useless to them, and so their interests took them elsewhere (with, of course, the sole exception of Nick).

Fitzgerald uses the acts and actions of his characters to convey a sense of growing moral decrepitude, but he compounds his message through other means as well. First, there is the giant billboard, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which, as George Wilson reveals, represent the eyes of God, which can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, he could be suggesting that a watchful presence overlooks society all the time, and will hold the world accountable for its actions. Given this interpretation, Fitzgerald seems to be urging readers to remember that they themselves are being watched, so they had better prepare to account for their actions. On the other hand, George's statement may be taken as a testament to his skewed judgment. Has he fallen so far away from standard religion that he does, in fact, believe the enormous eyes watching over the valley of ashes are the eyes of God? Does he interpret the eyes literally, as opposed to metaphorically? If so, Fitzgerald is offering a less uplifting message, suggesting that society has fallen so far away from traditional religious teachings that people have lost all faith and can only misread the significance of the material world around us.

Finally, Fitzgerald uses geography to represent his message of spiritual dysfunction, beginning with the distinct communities of East Egg and West Egg. Granted, their differences are largely socioeconomic, but when looking at the inhabitants of each Egg, the West Eggers stand somewhat above the East Eggers (albeit not by much). Whereas no one in East Egg has any virtues to redeem themselves, West Egg does have Nick, the one character in the book who has a fairly good sense of right and wrong. Just as Fitzgerald favored one Egg over the other (despite it being perceived as the less fashionable Egg), he also pits regions of the country against each other, with similar results. There is no denying that Fitzgerald sees the Midwest as a land of promise.

He acknowledges it is less glamorous and exciting than the East, but it has a pureness about it that the East lacks. All his characters come from the Midwest, and in the end, the East does them in. As Nick says, "we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly non-adaptable to Eastern life." Nick is the only one to realize this, however, and so after he has become completely disillusioned with life in the East, he heads home, presumably to a land that is still connected to the basic tenets of human compassion and charity.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald presents a world in which value systems have gone out of balance. He is not espousing a heavy-handed Christian message, but rather he is encouraging readers to stop and take inventory of their lives. Although some may see Fitzgerald as implying a return to God is necessary for survival, the text supports something far more subtle: Fitzgerald is urging a reconsideration of where society is and where it is going.