CHAPTER III

THE GREAT GATSBY

As optimistically anticipated by Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* was critically acclaimed as a great work of art instilling the essence of glamour and illusion into some two hundred pages. Successive generations of readers have discovered something tantalizingly appealing in the novel. Some were appalled by the surface glitter—the paraphernalia that pass for the appurtenances of the generation that Fitzgerald literally invented and christened as the "Jazz Age." Others have discovered an extension of the American culture—the illusions that inspired generations of American explorers and settlers, the initiation of the young man into the intricate mazes of acquiring social sanction with the prospect of affluence, purchasing warmth of love and opening up wonderful promises of life, and getting wrecked by inhuman materialism and malice.

II

Fitzgerald opined that "the Jazz Age" was born "about the time of the May Day riots in 1919" and spectacularly leapt to death by October 1929. The decade stretching in
between, had seen startling changes in manners and morals, perhaps as a direct consequence of the ravages of war.
"A kiss meant that a proposal was expected, as young officers in strange cities sometimes discovered to their dismay." Finally, the traditional expectations of the righteous older generation were thwarted by the adolescent wild youth. Hedonism and alcoholism appeared to be the moderate outcome of the crushed favours, vanquished aspirations and repressions because of the notions of respectability.

Knowledge of Freudian and Jungian psychological formulations made the entire American race preoccupied with sex, irrespective of their being perfectly mated.

The word Jazz in its progress towards respectability has meant first sex, then dancing, then music. It is associated with a state of nervous stimulation, not unlike that of big cities behind the lines of war. To many English the war still goes on because all the forces that menace them are still active—wherefore eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

Sex seemed to appeal to the generation as fun to be ravenously enjoyed without any moral compunctions and without any stressing responsibilities arising out of it.

Another characteristic of the Jazz Age was the economic boom. Politics conspicuously lacked much influence over the youth — they seemed to have been swayed by the prospect
of acquiring wealth in the shortest possible space of time. More than the means employed for amassing the wealth, how flamboyantly it was spent and glamour gained demanded appreciative approval from the society. It was considered "style" to purchase suits from London by dozens.

Even when you were a broke you didn't worry about money, because it was in such profusion around you. Towards the end one had a struggle to pay one's share; it was almost a favour to accept hospitality that required any travelling. Charm, notoriety, mere good manners weighed more than money as a social asset.  

When The Great Gatsby was published (in 1926), the Jazz Age was at its peak. Commentators like John Aldridge found it difficult to estimate the worth of Fitzgerald's work without a preceding understanding of the time.

In Fitzgerald one has the sense of such a literal contemporaneity that it is almost impossible to read him without giving more attention to his time than to what he had to say about it. Mahjongg, crossword puzzles, Freud, bathtub gin, Warren G. Harding, and Fitzgerald are inextricably one; the time amounts to a consistent betrayal of the man. . . . What matters and will continue to matter is that we have before us the work of a man who gave us better than any one else the true substance of an age, the dazzle and fever and the ruin.  

Fitzgerald drew upon the manners and behaviour of his generation—the fever and the fret, the big business and gangsterism, prohibition and bootlegging, the yearning
and monstrous moral indifference. Gatsby, the protagonist, who lends to the novel was identified as an embodiment of the Jazz spirit, fatedly in love with Daisy, viciously empty and unsubstantial as the movie—star of the screen she approved of during one of Gatsby’s fabulous parties, betraying her own response to life as the queen of the Jazz Age.

Daisy had all loveliness gathered into her personage, rounded off by a siren’s voice—the jingle of money, the cymbal’s song, the king’s daughter, beyond the hot struggles of the poor, “a voice full of money” as Gatsby aptly understands. Her isolation from the common man and attentions bestowed on her by many an ardent lover made Daisy’s desirability more enticing for Gatsby. He had to devote all his ingenuity to grab wealth to rival the splendour of Tom Buchanan who married her; Gatsby had to adopt questionable means, accepting the only way open to men like him for easy money—by selling liquor during the Prohibition through a chain of drug stores, efficiently organizing the disposal of the stolen Liberty bonds, gangsterism and even sharing the spoils of “fixing the World Series in 1919” like a day-time burgler.

He is a gentleman bootlegger: . . . making a damn ass of himself bragging about how much his bath-room was worth and how he never wore a shirt twice—and he had a revolver studded with diamonds.
Gatsby was perhaps the fictional variation of a Teutonic-featured Long Island bootlegger Von Oerlach, as vouch-safed by Zelda, described by Fitzgerald in *This Room and This Gin and These Sandwiches*; or a Great Neck resident Edward M. Fuller whose fake bankruptcies swindled millions of public money, enriching himself, without of course, the law declaring him guilty though accused of operating "a bucket shop—which meant illegally gambling with the customer's money. Many mysterious links between Fuller and the gambler Arnold Rothstein appeared during the trials though never satisfactorily unravelled. Further, unfolding the past of Gatsby, Carraway dispassionately suggested that the protagonist must have lived "by gat"—a simple inversion of the syllables that constitute Gatsby's name, thus unravelling the mystery behind his possessions and the flaunting of wealth.

'Gat' was widely understood as a common underworld synonym for pistol, apparently derived from the similar appellation of the Gatling gun, (a forerunner of machine gun), 'gat' began to be applied to the revolver, became thoroughly established slang during the teens and 20s. When the prevalence of 'gat' is remembered, Fitzgerald's choice of name for his gorgeous gangster emerges as ideal for his literary purposes: in view of the unmistakable, if, ill-defined connotations with the criminal element which Fitzgerald's crook-hero possesses as the lieutenant of the racketeer Wolfsheim.6

The "elegant rough-neck" as Gatsby was called, displayed the
wealth so acquired, by purchasing "a colossal affair of a mansion," entertaining innumerable visitors with hospitality for "the subtle tribute of knowing little" about the host. "The Great Gatsby implies indirectly: that society leaders, financial tycoons, politicians, magistrates, pimps, jurors, lawyers, baseball players, sheriffs, bond salesmen, debutantes, and prostitutes—all shared in some degree the responsibility for Gatsby's fate." The guests help in creating a mysterious halo around Gatsby by floating rumours about his antecedents and attributing notoriety to him either as a German spy or a murderer or a descendant of a ducal family. Gatsby himself strove to create an impression that he was an Oxonian and that he was the solitary survivor of a large family with vast fortunes, leading a purposeless life in all the capitals of Europe—and wrongly quotes Paris, Venice, Rome—chiefly collecting rubies like a "turbaned character," trying to forget something really sorrowful that had happened in his life. Gatsby's posture of a hurt heart, his spending spree and interminable parties which required the services of eight servants including an extra gardener on a Sunday, to clear the ravages of the previous night; a guest unable to discover the cause of his automobile accident after soaking himself with Gatsby's hospitable liquor—were all relics of the Jazz Age.
The Great Gatsby contained a veritable reproduction of the manners of the era. Good manners, charm and money tended to become the ideals of the Jazz Age—and Gatsby was an embodiment of precisely those traits. A formal gesture of farewell, a fixed and mesmeric smile that involuntarily influenced others in his favour, an impeccable punctiliousness were to keep Gatsby above mediocrity.

Fitzgerald supplies us an ideal not of American dream but the Jazz Age dream of money without taint, of charm, innocent power, the inexhaustible love of untarnished girls, sense experience that holds for ever the ecstasy of youth's most thrilling moment.

Gatsby tried by implication that his money had legal validity, and by lavishly spending he had been following the family tradition of living in grace. With that money he considered that he not only qualified himself for Daisy's affection but thought it possible to allure her away from wedlock. His appearance at the West Egg, Long Island, had evoked the response from Daisy as breathlessly anticipated and meticulously calculated by Gatsby, that she was prepared to break away from Tom. The extra-marital sexual relations as maintained by Daisy, Tom and Myrtle reflected the domestic strife of the era, what Margaret Marshall called, "the excrescences of contemporary life"9 in The Great Gatsby. At one of the parties at Gatsby's, a woman "had a fight with a man who says he's her husband. . . . Most of
the remaining women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands.\textsuperscript{10} The moral promiscuity of the period can be perceived from \textit{Simon Called Peter}, a novel with religious and war theme found in the New York apartment of Tom where his mistress was kept.

These extra-marital relations seemed to be more in the nature of adventures to deride their husbands who happened to be less romantic to the possibilities of life than hoping for sublimation. Daisy could never dream of such lavish parties with so many distinguished guests attending them while living with Tom; so did Myrtle consider her life with Wilson. Daisy wept over a pile of multi-coloured shirts imported from England for she had never seen so many. These exterior pretences of affluence influenced the thinking of Daisy into considering Gatsby's love more than the rioting bonfire of his heart. Similarly Myrtle, the Jazz Age goddess of dynamo-energy with "no facet or gleam of beauty," was all sophistication of a converted votary, to hold her husband unworthy of licking her shoe; that her marriage had been an insult to her sensibility, for there are romantic possibilities in Tom's wealth. Fitzgerald thus presented these love affairs as motivated not by genuine love but as frivolous interludes. There was no reality of experience in such of these encounters except a sense of seeking relief from the boredom
of life and gaining a reputation of "a speed." Daisy tried to retain her reputation by kissing Gatsby in the presence of Jordan and Nick, by jocularly offering to issue a green card to Nick whenever he wanted to kiss her, forebode a

breathless adoration of flapper heroines whose passionate kisses are tinged with frigidity and whose daring freedom masks an adolescent desire for the reputation rather than the reality of experience.10

Daisy had had a notorious reputation of murmuring so as to encourage listeners to lean towards her in stupid attention. Both Daisy and Jordan worried themselves for entertainment and preferred an outdoor expedition to avoid the ennui and existential fear about boredom. "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon?" cried Daisy, "and the day after that, and the next thirty years?" The problem of boredom and a resurgent hope at the end of an affair and commencement of another,--"Don't be morbid," Jordan said. "Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall."12--were the values held high during the Jazz, as evidenced from the scores and snatches incorporated into the texture of the novel _The Great Gatsby_.

A stanza attributed to Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, perhaps a fragment of Fitzgerald himself though it was, however John Peale Bishop, in _This Side of Paradise_, was inscribed at the outset of the novel _The Great Gatsby_ which should serve as the motto for the thematic representation
Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her; 
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too; 
Till she cry 'Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover, 
I must have you!' 

Love here had been reduced to a farcical child-play, where 
the lady bestowed her love primarily for his gold hat and 
then for the romantic fun of high-bouncing, thus effectively 
reserving the right of transferring her fickle affections to 
another and more gorgeous lover should she encounter one, 
who can bounce higher and put on a costlier hat.

As if to emphasise the implications of the era and to 
suggest the flow of events, the guests were treated to 
"Vladimir Tostoff's Jazz History of the World!" by the 
orchestra at Gatsby's request; and in response, the fraternal 
hilarity increased. When 

the 'Jazz History of the World' was over, 
girls were putting their heads on men's 
shoulders in a puppyish, convivial way, 
girls were swooning backward playfully 
into men's arms, even into groups, knowing 
that some one would arrest their falls.13

Another popular sketch is heard in the backdrop after Jordan 
completed narrating Daisy and Gatsby's affair during 
nineteen-seventeen. It looked a strange coincidence to 
Nick that the Plaza should blaze, (found in the novel on p.85) 

I'm the Sheik of Araby, 
Your love belongs to me, 
At night when you're asleep 
Into your tent I'll creep--
which evokes the oriental granduer of the Arabian tales of fantasy. Incidentally, soon after Jordan transmitted Gatsby's modest request that Nick should invite Daisy for tea and permit him to "come over." Gatsby, as the snatch suggests, would like to "creep" into her company as he did earlier, for he knows for certain that she can belong to him only when she is half conscious. Gatsby crept into her "tent" once, when she was very young and in a romantic mood, and now intends to regain what belonged to him five years ago.

Klipspringer, popularly known as the boarder at Gatsby's, had played another Jazz hit, "The Love Nest." The song precisely reflected the sentiments and the nostalgia of Gatsby.

'In the morning,  
In the evening,  
Ain't we got fun -'

The atmosphere in the hall was surcharged with emotion conducive for recapturing the glow and excitement of the past.

'One thing's sure and nothing's surer  
The rich get richer and the poor get—children  
In the meantime,  
In between time—'

Klipspringer very appropriately complained of lack of practice suggesting the lack of continuity in their contact,
but Gatsby commands him to play. By pounding on the key-board mechanically, Klipspringer not only performed a popular song but also recreated an atmosphere for their re-union; Nick had left Gatsby and Daisy together in a state "possessed by intense life." A sense of living in the past is recalled by a reading of \textit{The Great Gatsby}, where Fitzgerald as Malcolm Cowley remarked,

\begin{quote}
tried hard to catch the color of every passing year: its distinctive slang, its dance steps, its songs... its favourite quarterbacks and the sort of clothes and emotions its people wore.\footnote{14}
\end{quote}

\section*{III}

Many American commentators lunged forth with fervour to appraise \textit{The Great Gatsby} from the fetish of the American dream. Marius Bewley declared with assurance that

\begin{quote}
The theme of \textit{The Great Gatsby} is the withering of the American dream, (for it)... stretched between a golden past and a golden future, is always betrayed by a desolate present—a moment of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers. Imprisoned in his present, Gatsby belongs even more to the past than to the future. His aspirations have been rehearsed, and his tragedy suffered, by all the generations of Americans who have gone before. His sense of the future, of the possibilities of life, he has learnt from the dead.\footnote{15}
\end{quote}

Lionel Trilling was equally emphatic about the virtues of the novel, for Gatsby the protagonist, comes
inevitably to stand for America itself. Ours is the only nation that prides itself upon a dream and gives its name to one, 'the American dream.' . . . Clearly it is Fitzgerald's intention that our mind should turn to the thought of the nation that has sprung from its 'platonic conception' of itself.16

The early settlers on the new continent were explorers, men endowed with imagination, hardy temperament to withstand the ravages of nature, with an extra-ordinary gift for hope and wonder. The settlement of America was a direct corollary to the unsettlement of Europe. The condemned Puritans in homeland ruthlessly enslaved the Red Indians, and shielded themselves by holding on to the hypocritical theory of colour and Calvinistic modes of good or evil, god or Satan, which answered their need for self defence, in exterminating the native's long and unmolested contact with and harmonious existence in nature. The Western man after landing in the New world, plundered and grabbed indiscriminately, without ever betraying any sense of the guilt or responsibility for the horrors perpetrated on the innocent. Complicity in the crime became a part of the burden of the frontier adventurism. These displaced Europeans held themselves elected by the Providence and guided to a virgin continent with fertile soil and bowls of gold. So their election was determined and demonstrated by the material possessions.

The Franklinian doctrine of diligence coupled with
the myth of a self-made man as Horatio Alger spun out his imaginary tales of success of an unknown sensitive and audacious adolescent miraculously gaining wealth and social recognition, had become a recurring theme in the American literature. The schedule scribbled on the last fly leaf of Hopalong Cassidy and the general resolves have verisimilitude to indicate Gatsby’s affiliation to the historical tradition, “something beyond a mere member of the lost generation: an American who was a personification of the national dream.”\(^{17}\) Finally, James Gatz looked at Carraway rather eagerly after enumerating his son’s resolves, half expecting the other “to copy down the list for my own use.”\(^{18}\)

In the context of the American dream, one is no longer born of one’s parents into this world, rather one symbolically gave birth to oneself. This Platonic conception elevates one over the level of the common lot, to consider oneself the Son of God,

a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end.\(^{19}\)

The “vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty” that Gatsby preferred to serve was America of the frontier. Figuratively
he was the descendant of Dan Cody, the pioneer plunderer whose medium was matter and whose psychology centred round violence and debauchery. Cody pandered to the animal instincts in human nature and vicarious experience of the "frontier brothel and saloon." Many a rootless young man had no alternative for seeking social acceptance except by dubious ways, by serving the underworld lords like Dan Cody whose apprenticeship is the "singularly appropriate education." Gatsby organized himself so exceedingly well in a small span of five years as to outstrip the grace and opulence of inherited wealth as represented by Tom Buchanan. Thus through his endeavours for material prosperity, Gatsby embodied a commendable aspect of the American dream, urging himself for improvement, which had become a national characteristic consciously pursued by the whole race:

What is mythology but this same process of projected wish-fulfilment carried out on a larger scale and by the whole consciousness of a race? Indeed, before we are quite through with him, Gatsby becomes much more than a mere exercising of whatever false elements of the American dream Fitzgerald felt within himself; he becomes a symbol of America itself, dedicated to 'the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty.'

The myth of America is, in other words, the scope offered by the American dream, which in turn is reduced to the accomplishment of material prosperity enabling one to purchase the magic of the world. The saga obviously
exempted one from the qualms and pricks of conscience; while violating and plundering, the robber barons relegated morality to the junk. No wonder then that the culture engendered in the wake of the American dream is that plunder.

Even a person like Gatsby endowed with sensibility and imagination, "falls a victim to an unconscious correspondence between Daisy and the fruits of success. . . . To Gatsby, Daisy . . . changes from a woman to treasure."21 Gatsby had assured Nick when he was puzzling over Daisy's voice: "her voice is full of money." Thus her tonal effects of articulation appropriately had become not simply an epitome of charm but also of money that kept her safe from the hot struggles of the poor. Gatsby "takes" Daisy one October night like a robber baron of the frontier, in the tradition of Dan Cody because he had no right to really touch her hand. But while taking, unconsciously he fell in love with Daisy and felt committed. Like the Dutch sailors whose spiritual descendant he was, Gatsby "was compelled into an aesthetic contemplation" after violating Daisy; but unlike them he felt married to the transitory apparition of beauty in her.

"The fresh green breast" of the virgin American continent which pandered in whispers to the greatest of
human dreams symbolically became "the green light" burning on Daisy's dock, pandering to the ghostly dreams of Gatsby. By 1900, in the mechanistic modern civilization, values have changed and manners undergone a radical alteration. In the mechanistic tradition, the green light represents a beaconing for drivers to move ahead. For Gatsby, "the green light" was a symbol of hope and adventure, an invitation to reach the nebulous close to the stars; in short, to repeat the past. This green light too, had the lure and pandered to the instincts, as Edwin Fussel remarked:

The most impressive associations cluster around the word 'pander', which implies the illicit commercial traffic among love, youth, and beauty, and which thus effectively subsumes most of the central meanings of the novel.

Living in the halo of the American dream and its corollary of the American experience as offered by the cult of materialism one is painfully aware of the dichotomy implied in the dream-content. Wealth is the central symbol around which the moral problems of the Americans are gathered.

Those who were rich like Tom Buchanan became insensible to the promises of life and squandered away the best part of their lives to carelessness and malicious gratification of the animal desires whereas for those with heightened sensibility and imagination like Gatsby, wealth became an
impediment, a frustrating reality, "an alchemic reagent that transmutes the ordinary worthlessness of life." 

Gatsby lived in style and spent lavishly the wealth earned through questionable means. He would represent not the snob of an American but an aristocratic spirit struggling to realize an aspiration of unpruned luxurience. In doing so, Gatsby unwittingly committed himself to a tawdry object, restricting his own option, as a correlative to his aesthetic imagination. Daisy, whom Gatsby consecrated as the fruit of his success dream, "the golden girl," his hope made flesh, was after all an ordinary woman who catches cold, who could barter her love for luxury and for "a membership of a secret society," thus betraying her banality and corruption implicit in the American dream. As "golden girl" Daisy had permanence at the level of Gatsby's imagination but as a woman, she ages, delivers a child and her desirability wanes in the world of reality.

If American history is considered a story of romantic imagination, two predominant motifs unravel themselves—quest and seduction. The quest is a search for romantic wonder, a flight from time, from fate and from the limitations of reality. Seduction is the resultant trap of corruption that accompanies the quest. The sensibilities implied by the phrase "romantic wonder" are "the extraordinary gift for hope" and "a romantic readiness for the
possibilities of life" as evinced by the Americans like Gatsby:

Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees—he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the sap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder. 24

This was the rhythmic pattern of many an American in history that Nick seemed to have heard somewhere, long ago. The colossal accident that played its part in bringing the Dutch sailors to the New World played its part again by bringing the penniless young army officer Jay Gatsby into Daisy's contact. It was wonder and then her desirability plagued Gatsby. He dreamt of regaining the old warm world by obliterating the reality of Daisy's marriage, decked his dream with all the stray and brilliant feathers that came his way till it looked much more real than the reality. The world of imagination in which he lived offered:

A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain while the clock ticked on the wash-stand and the moon soaked with wet light his tangled clothes upon the floor. Each night he added to the pattern of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene with an oblivious embrace. For a while these reveries were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing. 25

For those under the "mass neurosis" called the American dream,
life became detached from the reality of the world and
when reality confronted them, life, simply cracked up.

The American dream depicts two modes of time and
human experience. One is the mythic moment—the moment
when experience is so over-powering as to annihilate time
and space. Alongside, the historical time breaks in
suggesting the reality of perishability of that which is
idealised in the mythic moment. The mythic moment for
Gatsby was the speak of time that he kissed Daisy—she
blossomed like a flower:

He knew that when he kissed this girl,
and forever wed his unutterable visions
to her perishable breath, his mind would
never roam again like the mind of God.
So he waited, listening for a moment longer
to the tuning-fork that had been struck
upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his
lips' touch she blossomed for him like a
flower and the incarnation was complete.26

All the efforts of Gatsby were concentrated to violently
recapture that mythic moment after a lapse of five years.
Money was the means to the spacious arrest of youth and
glamour—which looked doomed from the beginning. Gatsby's
dreams were caught up inexorably in the dissipated past
instead of looking forward into the future.

The contradictory nature of the dream and its realiza-
tion were ingeniously introduced in The Great Gatsby
through the image of a seismograph. Nick Carraway appraised:
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.

This seismographic quality in Gatsby—a machine responding and recording the intensity of earthquakes—was an appropriate symbol in the backdrop of American industrialization and dehumanised approach to personal problems. Precisely in the same manner did Gatsby gauge the quivers of the human hearts.

Ultimately Gatsby was proved to be a correspondence of the American dream which was necessarily corrupted, for it asked too much. Nothing of this earth even the most beautiful of earthly objects, could be anything but a perversion of it. America had produced an idealism so impalpable that it had lost touch with reality (Gatsby) and a materialism so heavy that it was inhuman (Tom Buchanan). The novel as a whole is another turn of the screw on this legend, with the impossible idealism trying to realize itself, to its utter destruction, in the gross materiality.

Gatsby in his whole-hearted allegiance to an imagined future was hopelessly out of touch with reality, the foul dust floating in the wake of his dream, the brutishness of matter. The incompatibility of the dream in *The Great Gatsby* betrayed itself as the historical "fresh green breast" gradually
turning into the valley of ashes overlooked by the eyes of
Dr. Eckleburg. Fitzgerald's cruel criticism about the
failure of the agrarian myth was ingeniously depicted through
the mysterious eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg. "Dr. T.J.
Eckleburg is none other than a devitalized Thomas Jefferson,
the pre-eminent purveyor of the agrarian myth. What is it
that Dr. Eckleburg's eyes survey? It is the valley of
democracy turned to ashes—the garden defiled." They
eyes of Dr. Eckleburg surveyed a waste land, perhaps so much
horrified, that he remained there suspended on a signboard,
"without a mouth to utter and without a brain to think." The
symbol of blindness so conspicuous in the novel, could
not be rectified by the false promise of the ophthalmologist,
like the false promise of Daisy's moneyed voice, which
could not redeem Gatsby. Here is the place where human
beings glided like the inessential ghosts. The Paradise
had become a dust-bowl, a place of exhaustion, nightmare,
mistaken identities and death—the industrialization that
had overtaken and destroyed the agrarian base of the
American Dream.

Nick's judgment that Gatsby turned out alright at the
end—"worth the whole damn bunch put together" hinged on

the conviction that life untouched by imagi-
nation is brutal and intolerable and that
the imagined life must be made actual in the
world if a man is to become anything more
than a self-indulgent day-dreamer. It is,
I believe, a peculiarly American attitude. Americans are no doubt proud of their wealth and of the enterprise that is at least in part responsible for it. But they are seldom content with a merely material life... material without being real. Only when it is animated by an ideal purpose does it seem real to them. This is, in fact, what we mean by the American dream, insofar as that dream is something possessed by each of us individually.

IV

The foregoing considerations of The Great Gatsby as a Jazz Age manifesto or a symbol of the American dream culture would have relevance to the readers acquainted with the American history. The historicity of the novel and localization of Gatsby at the West Egg, Long Island, during a particular period in time incidentally coinciding with the Jazz Age, might appeal to the American readers. For those essentially unacquainted with the American phenomena and its culture, those who read The Great Gatsby without the instructive forefinger of scholars, the novel continued to have a sustained appeal for over half a century. The Great Gatsby, thus, cannot be proscribed as a period-piece, for its appeal for an assortment of readers spread all over the world calls for an estimate of its greatness. It would be worthwhile to estimate the novel as a universal document, depicting the life, struggles and tragedy of a human being. His aspiration to achieve beatitude in life
cannot be a localized affair but is archetypal in its unfolding and intensity. It looms large as the myth of a man, a record of humanity whose endeavours are destined to fail, a universal vision of life in which tragedy becomes not a perversion but a natural sequel, where vitality is not corroded but over-drawn for investment on a single ideal which proves itself unworthy of such an attention.

Gatsby could be identified with a psychologically isolated type of human nature categorized as the Icarian complex. The Greek myth of handsome Icarus flying higher and higher till the wax wings melt, has an appropriate personification in Gatsby who strove for ever "toward a yet unrealized state of grace." The Icarian has an insatiable thirst for admiration, a desire to reach great heights and to realize the unattainable and be god-like in movements. The protagonist tries to overreach and crashes like his prototype. Eternal striving is the hallmark of an Icarian, and many gifted young men in any society possess these traits. The dream that swayed and conditioned his life had been to attain beatitude, incidentally identified by Gatsby with the beautiful Daisy—"the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor." From the metaphorical point of view, Gatsby's love for Daisy would
not simply become a private experience but a passion, a commitment "to the following of a grail." The remnant of his life had become an unswerving devotion to the single consecrated object which had ironically turned out to be shallow and ephemeral. Gatsby's love thus had assumed the proportions of collective experience of humanity, wherein every young man can vicariously identify himself with the yearning of the romantic protagonist.

Gatsby's life was an epitome of "romantic readiness" for the promises of life: he stood on the threshold of an idealized time in youth. Time becomes the arch-enemy of the romantic, for the inexorable nature of time surprises the youthful commitment to "that splendid moment of imaginative commitment with its sense of wonder and its thrusts in life's boundless possibility and opportunity." Gatsby's imaginative commitment was to lead the life of an aristocratic spirit, devoting his leisure to the wonderful promises of life, and glamour that is surprisingly imprisoned in a particular social class to which he did not belong by birth. Daisy acquired the personification of Gatsby's aspiration, his colossal vitality had gone into the making of her charm and allurement, his illusion. Social inequality and inequity deprived Gatsby of the splendid youthful commitment, bringing romantic sadness in him and thematic nostalgia in The Great Gatsby. He returned too late to claim his love
like "a trust"; Daisy had been married, leaving Gatsby to his unutterable visions. Optimistically and pertinaciously hanging on to his hope of violently arresting time and space, Gatsby returned to claim his "trust" by flaunting affluence. As Wolfshiem fixed the World Series in 1919 or McKee the photographer fixed space Gatsby intended to fix Time. He assured Nick: "I am going to fix everything just the way it was before; he said, nodding determinedly." He refused to compromise with anything other than the recapture of the romantic past which eventually had become an obsession with him.

At Nick's modest dwelling was arranged a meeting between the lovers embarrassingly aware of the lapsed time, thus introducing the "time-theme."

The clock took this moment to tilt dangerously at the pressure of his head, whereupon he turned and caught it with trembling fingers, and set it back in place..."

"It's an old clock," I told him idiotically. I think we all believed for a moment that it had smashed in pieces on the floor."

The "pressure of his head" was unmistakably his romantic imagination which, had woven an illusion in him of grace, youth and love. Gatsby's fingers trembled while restitting the mantle-piece, suggesting the nervous tension involved in his trying to recapture the flame of the past at the
reunion. Nick had been, prompted to suggest something idiotically, out of commonplace, that their love had been consigned to the irretrievable past. "In the meantime," their passion and intensity of commitment must have smashed to pieces but for Gatsby's romantic readiness to believe and his innocence in not letting it happen. He was determined to restore the lost time, to set it right at any cost.

Time and the inexorability of time were also the preoccupations of T.S. Eliot in his major poems, Four Quartets, for instance.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is redeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.

. . . . . . . . . . .
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.

Eliot's protagonist recounted "what might have been," wishfully speculating and nostalgically recounting. Eliot skilfully organised the speculative ideas in the poem to reflect the problems that twentieth-century Western world had been facing.
Fitzgerald too, was obsessed by the same predicament in *The Great Gatsby*, tried to grapple with the same problems, though denying himself the luxury of a speculative philosopher. Fitzgerald's efforts in that direction must have appealed to Eliot when he extolled *The Great Gatsby* as "the first step forward American fiction had taken since Henry James."38

Time past germinates into the time present and both project into the future; and time is unredeemable—incidentally are the universal themes of great literature all the world over.

Though Gatsby in his "Platonic conception" considered himself a son of God and about His Father's business, he was essentially a human being with a mundane incarnation with no business to tinker with time.

Gatsby's illusion is to tinker with time and reinstate past in the present. Now to him means the tomorrow he hopes to possess or yesterday he hopes to recapture.39

Gatsby lived in the present with an ecstatic anticipation of rearranging the past. When Nick suggested the impossibility of such a venture, Gatsby in his colossal innocence failed to understand the reality.

'I wouldn't ask too much of her,' I ventured. 'You can't repeat the past.'
'Can't repeat the past?' he cried incredulously.  
'Why of course you can!'
He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. 40

The motif of the defiled present appeared when Gatsby commanded his "boarder" Klipspringer to play piano to entertain Daisy on her first visit to his palace. Pounding mechanically the key-board, Klipspringer little realized the profound human change he was affecting with a Jazz rag:

'It was the hour of a profound human change, and excitement was generating on the air . . .
'In the mean time,
In between time. 41

Though psychologically Gatsby and Daisy were prepared to swim back in the stream of time, they had to account for the "in between time"--the time they were apart, in Tallowman's words, "the hole in time."

Fitzgerald renders in Gatsby this empty in between time; the void of the corrupted present canceled out by the corrupted past, America's as well as Gatsby's. Gatsby has violated time in corrupting the in between time of his life since he violated Daisy, who represents time theme 'as a day.' His repudiation of time now is a sin of omission. 42

Gatsby refused to be shackled by time--he had resolved very early in life--"no wasting time," and proceeded to fix time and history by meeting Daisy after a lapse of five years.
In the meantime he plundered money by nefarious means, "clocked on fast time." His vitality had been spent indiscriminately on a futile effort, never admitting in innocence the possibility of defeat. The "son of God" had no means to reverse the flux of time nor ability to tinker with the irrevocably wasted time; he might re-act the love-scene but without the original fervour. Daisy might repeat her honey-moon but not repeat her innocence and freshness of youth. Gatsby, in the words of D.S. Savage,

wished time to stand still forever, at the hour of youth so that an aesthetic paradise might be superimposed upon live's harsh actuality.43

Daisy's inability and refusal to obliterate her immediate past association with Tom as loveless matrimonial exercise determined Gatsby's fate. The reality of the inexorable time coupled with the hard malice of the world projected through Tom, had converted Gatsby's dream into a nightmare.

The dream in The Great Gatsby "inflates into an epic vision." The protagonist transcended the youthful obsessions and reveries--"the grotesque and fantastic conceits" of his adolescent years by formulating a self-ideal for,

Dreams are never concerned with trivialities, we do not allow our sleep to be disturbed by trifles.44
Some dreams might tend to be personal and so ephemeral; and others are founded on the intellectual activities, fraught with no evil consequences either to the self or the society and so, worthwhile pursuing for satisfaction of accomplishment.

The uniqueness of Gatsby's self lies in his human nature and yet having the divine element, with an ability to make conceptual images using memory to transcend time. Gatsby seemed to be in constant dialogue with God whose son he assumed himself to be, beyond the perceptible social contacts he had either through Nick or Wolfsheim or the innumerable guests that partook of his hospitality. He pursued his quest for beatitude with all his will power.

Will and conscience are two levels of the transcendence of the self over itself. Will is the result of the self's transcendence over the complex of its impulses and desires. Self organised for the attainment of either short or long range purposes. The Will is operative on all levels—consistency is the achievement of the self rather than reason. Self's capacity to view itself and to judge its purposes gives rise to a reality in life which is usually termed 'conscience'—a sense of obligation in contrast to inclination.

Not only that reason refused to account for the dreams of Gatsby, but was utilized on the other hand to prove his ends legitimate. He never subordinated Self to Reason for, Reason hampers the free play of impulses. These impulses
and desires, in fact, form the core of Will. Gatsby’s ambition was to transcend the elementary needs of the animal life and then to “suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder.” He would have followed the drums of his own destiny had not he met Daisy by a colossal accident during his army days. She surprised him with her beauty, charm and desirability, and offered a possibility of fulfillment of his roving ambition. He felt committed to her because she promised to be a compliment to his incomplete self:

The self sees the other as an instrument for its purposes and as a completion for its incompleteness. The sexual relation is the most vivid form of one self seeking completion in another self. The self cannot be truly happy if it is not drawn out of itself into the life of the other. In the absence of mutual love, the relation degenerates into that of mere calculation, corrupted by resentments about the lack of reciprocity. ‘Falling in love’ is nature’s initiation into maturity of intimacy—this has to be supplied some force more permanent than the original madness.

Thus had Gatsby reduced his imperceptible ambition to the apparition of beauty in Daisy. For him the world is annihilated and a doubtful new existence had emerged, directing his superhuman energy and sensitivity to recapture the past, and to the worship of Daisy. In his devotion to Daisy, Gatsby had neglected nourishment to his own self and altruistically emphasised the well-being of the other. Escorting her to his mansion, Gatsby
revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real.

Things were considered real only to the extent of Daisy’s presence and her response—the rest was all immaterial for Gatsby. Even Daisy tumbled short of his dreams for no fault of hers. The reality of her physical affinity and availability seemed to have dispelled the charm of his yearning—her desirability had diminished the moment Daisy puts her hand through his. The count of enchanting objects had fallen by one; the green light on her dock lost its allurement. The most beautiful object also simply looked a perversion of his ideal.

Gatsby profaned his pristine dream by consecrating a false and corrupt woman, an unworthy object for investing his life upon. His dream had splendour but it was tawdry and frivolous. Gatsby assumed the proportion of an archetypal hero like Adam creating the woman Daisy out of his imagination and courting her in a timeless, spaceless, ideal world. When the idealist in Gatsby confronted reality of the world which distinguished between objects and image, he became helpless. Daisy participated as a dream component without, of course, sharing any responsibility for Gatsby’s well-being. Gatsby, like Adam, was disillusioned through
the agency of a woman, whom he consecrated and enshrined
as his ideal, imperilling his own self. Death for Gatsby
then became a mere formality which served in turn to expose
the viciousness of the world as much as reveal his anteced-
dents. The profanity of his consecration can only be
eliminated by lustration through water.

The existence of myths and human emotions, and human
destiny are universal as Jung explains:

The symbolists tell of the existence of
universal patterns in myths, rituals,
dreams and folk-tales, which, when their
presence is detected in literary works,
explains their organization and their
moving power. The structure of these
patterns which derives from the felt
parallels between the curve of human life
and the natural cycle of the seasons, is
largely subconscious and compulsive, being
common to mankind at large, works which
are archetypally organized therefore, touch
the deepest springs of human emotion and
raise thereby, the artistic vision into
the sphere of the universal.49

In The Great Gatsby there had been frequent references to
the seasons. At the outset, Daisy romantically alluded to
the melody of a singing bird she supposed to be a nightingale
on a windy evening. Daisy had been waiting for the longest
day of the year and always missing for the seasons overlap.
Gatsby and Daisy met in October and parted in November.
By next autumn she turned gay again and married Tom in June.
Gatsby was afraid of the season of fall and refused permission
to pump out water from the swimming pool. Ironically he 
floated like a dead leaf after being murdered by Wilson 
in his swimming pool which he had not used at all.

The Great Gatsby dealt with the eternal realities of 
human existence—the world populated by some higher kind 
of animality as Tom Buchanan; insincere and dishonest women 
like Jordan Baker and Daisy, ravishing wolves like Wolfsheim 
and Katspauh, and gifted individuals like Gatsby and Nick. 
In spite of the squalour and flotsam of Gatsby's subjectivity, 
Nick had become aware of the pristine nature of Gatsby's 
dream. It was through the growing awareness of Nick's 
consciousness that Gatsby had emerged as "great"—an 
individual "worth the whole damn bunch put together." The 
imaginative commitment to the promises of life in Gatsby 
who was out of touch with the reality, questing like a 
radical for a state of unattainable grace, the gangster's 
functionary with lofty horizons, was a romantic whose fate 
had been destined to be tragic, whose illusions were sure 
to be dispelled.

Carraway's closing meditation added poignancy to the 
disillusionment of Gatsby by elevating the personal failure 
of an individual into a symbol of the human endeavour 
destined to fail, a universal tragic vision:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the 
orgiastic future that year by year recedes 
before us. It eluded us then, but that's no
matter--tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning--
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past.

Gatsby's disillusionment was deep and his death tragic for, in his ceaseless creative passion he tried to deck his dream with all the glorious feathers that came his way, completely ignoring the "foul dust" that might blur his vision. He was untroubled by doubts, for he never felt the possibility of failure. Gatsby was real and great in his innocence in spite of his prudence and knowledge of the world and its sinister aspects. Irony of the title, The Great Gatsby, emerged with Nick's consciousness changing. A realization of the futility of human endeavour at the end of The Great Gatsby touches deeper springs of human sentiments and furthers man's wisdom.

Only where there is a real and advancing prosperity, a constant effort to push beyond all the accidental, curable ills, all easy cynicism and premature despair toward the irreducible residuum of human weakness, sloth, self-love, and fear, only where the sense of the inevitability of man's failure does not cancel out the realization of the splendour of his vision, nor the splendour of his vision conceal the reality and beauty of his failure, can tragedy be touched.
NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 12.

3 Ibid., p. 18.


5 Quoted by Arthur Mizener in The Far Side of Paradise from F. Scott Fitzgerald's "This Room and This Gin and These Sandwiches," pp. 171-72.


11 Robert Ornstein, "Scott Fitzgerald's Fable of East and West," College English, 13, No. 3 (Dec. 1956), 139-43 (139)


13 Ibid., p. 56.


18. Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p. 120.

19. Ibid., p. 105.


25. Ibid., pp. 105-06.

26. Ibid., p. 118.

27. Ibid., p. 8.


36. Ibid., p. 93.


41. Ibid., p. 102.


49. Norman Friedman, "Versions of Form in Fiction - 'Great' Expectations and *The Great Gatsby*," *Accent*, 14, No. 4 (Autumn 1954), 246-64.

50. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 188.