Chapter -4

The Great Gatsby - A Romantic American Tragedy
The Great Gatsby, the magnum opus, was begun in 1922 while the Fitzgeralds were living in St. Paul, Minnesota. Increasing financial pressures compelled Fitzgerald to temporarily abandon the novel during 1923 in order to devote himself to writing commercial short stories. In April 1924 Fitzgerald resumed work on the novel, discarding much of the material he had previously written. The Great Gatsby was completed while the Fitzgeralds were staying in the south of France and was published on April 10, 1925. It was a masterpiece and better than any other American work of fiction since Golden Bowl. As a matter of fact, The Great Gatsby is the shortened version of the short story "Winter Dreams".

The Great Gatsby has drawn a universal human characteristic like William Shakespeare, who called life a stage and all men and women the players. In the novel Fitzgerald successfully depicted the representative image of American life of 20th century and it is one of the most concise and compressed great novels in any language. When the novel was published the puzzled and disappointed Fitzgerald wrote to Edmund Wilson that "of all the reviews, even the most enthusiastic, not one had the slightest idea what the book was about". But he was well gratified by the excellent response he received from the respected author and critic T.S. Eliot. He commented "I am not in the least influenced by your remark about myself when I say it has interested and excited me more than any new novel I have seen, either English or American, for a number of years. When I have time I should like to write to you more fully and tell you exactly why it seems to me such a remarkable book. In fact it seems to me to be the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James".
Let us now see the plot of *The Great Gatsby*. The Chief narrator of the entire novel is Nick Carraway, the neighbour of Gatsby; Jay Gatsby meets his ex-beloved Daisy Buchanan in a Party hosted by himself. She is married to a rich person Tom Buchanan, who keeps a mistress – Myrtle. Myrtle's husband has a garage and they live in the valley of Ashes. After seeing Daisy, Gatsby revives his old love affair; when he was serving in military and due to his financial status, he could not get Daisy. Now he has amassed wealth; hence he wants to possess Daisy who is not happy with her married life. Nick, who is a distant cousin to Daisy, arranges a meeting of Daisy and Gatsby at his house. From where Gatsby acquired so much of wealth, is a mystery. His attachment to Wolfsheim and some mysterious phone calls hint at his engagement in bootlegging business. One day Daisy, Gatsby, Nick and Tom go to New York city. Gatsby drives Tom's car accompanying Daisy and Tom drives Gatsby's car with Nick. They return in the night and Daisy takes the driving seat now. While crossing the Valley of Ashes suddenly a figure comes in front of the car confusing Daisy and an accident occurs. That figure is killed and now Gatsby takes over to wheel from the stunned Daisy at once and starts for home. That figure killed was Myrtle, who seeing the car of Tom with a lady, comes out of jealousy and by the ill fate of Gatsby, thinks Tom in the dark of night. Tom in Gatsby's car was behind and he stops for gas at Wilson's garage. There he sees the accident and thus clearing himself out of it consoles bereaved Wilson, Myrtle's husband. Next day an angry Wilson, who is full of revenge, reaches Tom's house and enquire about the murderer. And as pre-planned, Tom tells him the name of Gatsby to save Daisy. Now Wilson goes to Gatsby's house and after killing him shoots himself too. In the last chapter the funeral takes place and Nick returns to his home town, undertaking his family business.
The story is organized around a series of parties which serve as vehicles that allow the imagery and relationships of characters to present the ideas – the evaluation of materials – that Fitzgerald wished to offer. Chapter One focuses on the Buchanan’s dinner party, which demonstrates the nature and quantity of the Buchanan fortune as well as how it is used. Chapter Two, immediately in contrast, opens with the Valley of Ashes, which demonstrates the nature and effect of the Wilson’s poverty. This chapter revolves about a party in Tom’s and Myrtle’s clandestine apartment, a party which insists upon the grossness of middle-class affectations when wealth is added to coarsening poverty. Chapter Three explores a party that is a culmination of the first two chapters. Here Gatsby’s party is the center of the action, and all the pretentiousness, ostentation, and energy hinted at in Myrtle’s party is brought to the highest summary pitch in the introduction of Gatsby. Chapter four opens with a recapitulation of the cast of characters at Gatsby’s parties and proceeds to a luncheon party with Nick, Gatsby, and Wolfsheim. The introduction of Gatsby via parties in Chapter Three is completed here in the suggestion that there is something shady about Gatsby’s wealth and in the connection between the Buchanan fortune and Gatsby’s money: “Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay,” Jordan tells Nick. For Nick, the reason for Gatsby’s money suddenly becomes stunningly clear, and Gatsby “came alive” for him, a Gatsby “delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor.” Chapter Four, then, ties together all levels of American wealth—or lack of it—in the same web of aspiration and meretriciousness, and spins a strong but gossamer thread of connection between Gatsby and Daisy. That connection is made by the party—sequence plot, in swift consequence of the parties that preceded it, in the party in Chapter Five, the tea party in Nick’s bungalow. The reunion of Daisy and Gatsby at this party brings the flashbacks of the first four chapters up to date and so allows Fitzgerald to talk
about the consequences of the histories of his characters in the present, allows him to prepare the denouement that caps his evaluation of those histories. Chapter Six, the party at Gatsby’s attended by Daisy, is a transitional statement that hints at the impossibility of a real and final reunion between Gatsby and his dream, and which foreshadows the death of that dream’s energies at the hands of the dream’s object-in effect, Daisy “turns off” Gatsby’s house. The chapter prepares the expectation that the consequences of the histories and their interrelationships will be death. Chapter Seven presents the party that fulfills the prophecies of the novel so far. In the party at the Plaza, on that baking day of perspiration and boiling tempers, the impossibility of Gatsby’s dream is announced, and the action leading away from this last party, which is accompanied ironically by the strains of a wedding march, eventuates in precisely what the story has promised—death. Daisy and Myrtle have never met—neither even knows what the other looks like, and Daisy doesn’t even know Myrtle’s name or who or where she is, and yet, logically, with the logic of his symbolism, Fitzgerald has Daisy kill Myrtle during the drive away from the Plaza. No one is unrelated to anyone else in the web of hopes and money. All are tainted, and only Gatsby is exempt from the moral condemnation which is Fitzgerald’s central idea of the relationships. No more parties now. Only missed connections and broken promises. Chapter Seven closes with a non-party “party” in which Tom and Daisy sit alone over a bowl of cold chicken and two bottles of ale, “and neither one of them had touched the chicken or the ale,” and with Gatsby alone, “standing there in the moonlight—watching over nothing.” Chapter Eight opens with a non-party breakfast “party” in which Gatsby and Nick participate and during which Nick hears from Gatsby the rest of the story of his aspiring, dreaming attempt to regain Daisy. A meeting between Nick and Jordan is missed—for life. Wilson kills Gatsby and then himself, “and the
holocaust was complete.” The non-party party of Chapter Nine, the funeral, is some “party” indeed. There are no guests, and the one exception, Owl Eyes, brings home the point when he hears that no one visited Gatsby’s house to pay respects” “Go on!” He started. “Why, my God! They used to go there by the hundreds.” The final fleshing out of the history of Gatsby’s dream grows from the presence of Gatsby’s father and the Gatsby juvenilia he brings, while, in contrast, the carelessness and irresponsibility of American wealth, the deceit and hollowness of its appearances, its jewels, its parties, lives on. It is Jordan, ironically, who reintroduces the charge of “careless driving,” and Tom and Daisy continue on as always, rid of Nick’s judgment, his “provincial squeamishness, forever.” All that remained for Fitzgerald at the end of Chapter Nine were those magnificent seven closing paragraphs in which to make it clear that this has been a story of the Golden West, after all, a story of America from the beginning. The fate of Gatsby, the romantic, had been the test of his society, and his society had been found wanting. The wealth, the appearances, the parties continue; the history of America as a continual party, as the “greatest gaudiest spree in history,” is the irresponsible actuality into which the dream of America has deteriorated. The history of the dream continues, too, but always doomed, always located in the past, where the transcendent expectations of youth were, “borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

In an early review H.L. Mencken appraised the plot as “no more than a glorified anecdote, and not too probable at that” But beyond the simple, melodramatic narrative of The Great Gatsby are larger levels of meanings that derive from its intricate thematic and symbolic patterns.
A contributing feature to the multiple interpretations to which the novel lends itself is the ambiguity surrounding the character of Gatsby. In a letter to John Peale Bishop, Fitzgerald acknowledged. "... You are right about Gatsby being blurred and patchy. I never at any one time saw him clear myself— for he started out as one man I knew and then changed into myself—the amalgam was never complete in my mind"\(^{(5)}\).

But, far from being a technical flaw this unfocused delineation gives Gatsby a universal, almost mythic stature that a more realistically defined characterization could neither warrant nor sustain.

At the age of seventeen, James Gatz, itinerant beachcomber and former farm boy, disowned, in his imagination, the "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" who were his biological parents. At this point the legendary Jay Gatsby "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself."

Fitzgerald makes use of "platonic conception" to indicate the most rarefied form of ideality. In his short story, "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," he describes "a room that was like a platonic conception of the ultimate prison-ceiling, floor, and all, it was lined with an unbroken mass of diamonds... until... it dazzled the eyes with a whiteness that could be compared only with itself, beyond human wish or dream"\(^{(6)}\).

In the novel, although Gatsby is hardly capable of articulating such a philosophical concept, he is aspiring toward nothing less than the platonic ideal of the beautiful and the good. To compensate for the sordid realities of his origin
and early life, James Gatz recreates himself according to his romantic conception of the ideal man. His name change notifies us of his personal ideals: the prosaic James contracted into Jay suggests the casual intimacy of the affluent that is offset by the formalizing of Gatz into an anglicized Gatsby. It is as Jay Gatsby that he is taken under the tutelage of Dan Cody, multimillionaire miner and yachtsman. In his five years on Dan’s yacht Gatsby receives a “singularly appropriate education” in debauchery and ruthlessness that serves to fill out “the vague contours of Jay Gatsby to the substantiality of a man.” Deprived of Dan Cody’s $25,000 legacy by legal maneuvers, the penniless Gatsby drifts into the army to continue the pursuit of his dream of future glory.

In 1917 the dream is personified in the lovely Daisy Fay to whose beautiful home Lieutenant Jay Gatsby is brought by a “colossal accident” of wartime socializing. Intending to “take what he could and go, Gatsby takes Daisy Fay one October night, and finds, instead that “he had committed himself to the following of a grail.”

At the moment, in Louisville, when Daisy seems willing to accept his love, Gatsby notes “that the blocks of the sidewalk really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place about the trees – he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder.” Gatsby is aware that if he throws in his lot with Daisy he must forfeit the freedom to range through the fantasy world he has created: “his mind would never romp again like the mind of God.” But he hesitates only momentarily, “listening for a moment longer to the tuning – fork
that had been struck upon a star.” Then, at his kiss, Daisy blossoms “for him like a flower and [her] incarnation was complete.” Gatsby’s conception of the absolute good becomes incarnate, for him, in the perishable physical beauty of Daisy Fay. The name Fay (fey) assures us that she is from the same fantasy world of ideals from which the name Jay Gatsby derives.

The character of Gatsby functions on two levels just as Gatsby, himself, has two names: on the one, the naturalistic – Gatz – Gatsby’s a vulgar, ostentatious parvenu for whom money is the touchstone that transforms fantasy into reality; on the other – the mythic, Jay Gatsby is the embodiment of every man’s unfulfilled aspirations.

Myth has its origins in man’s need to transform his deepest emotional urges into universal images, to fit his individual experience into the larger contexts of the social and metaphysical patterns of the human race. The mythic hero is a personification of the human consciousness, and, as such, transcends the limitations of individual experience. Ordinary men concede to the pressures that circumscribe human achievement, but for mythic heroes – the Jay Gatsbys – the impossible does not exist. Gatsby truly believes that by his fiat the past can be recaptured; the present restructured, the future guaranteed.

Fitzgerald invests Gatsby with many of the characteristics of the heroes of myth and romance: the miraculous birth (he springs from his own platonic conception) or the metamorphosis (from the unpromising James Gatz to the fabulous Jay Gatsby): the unknown parentage (he tells Nick he is the son of wealthy Midwesterners who are dead): the mysterious, vaguely sinister
background (it is bruited about that he is a bootlegger, a nephew to Von Hindenburg, a cousin to the Kaiser); the acquisition of untold wealth (he had lived in the capitals of Europe like a “young rajah... collecting jewels, chiefly rubies.”); and, finally, the unswerving dedication to his quest – the attainment of Daisy Fay, the “king’s daughter, the golden girl.”

Despite the satiric tone with which Fitzgerald, through Nick Caraway, describes Gatsby’s flights of fancy, he is in obvious sympathy with Gatsby’s quixotic goal. Fitzgerald, himself, until the last few years of his life, did not relinquish the “old dream of being an entire man in the Goethe-Byron-Shaw tradition, with an opulent American touch, a sort of J.P. Morgan, Topham Beauclerk and St. Francis of Assisi”(7).

In Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald objectifies the visionary side of his own divided consciousness. He was, on the one hand, the exuberant dreamer who saw life as purely a romantic matter; on the other, he was a “natural idealist, a spoiled priest” who was appalled at his hedonistic excesses (8). Fitzgerald had been brought up a Roman Catholic, and, although he had long since rejected the doctrines of the church, he had never been completely exorcised of his attraction to its ritual and of his, perhaps, guilt-ridden awareness that in his personal life he had fallen short of its moral precepts. Fitzgerald had intended to give Gatsby a Catholic background, but, in the final revision of the novel, he deleted the Catholic elements and published them separately in a short story called Absolution. In The Great Gatsby Fitzgerald uses Nick Caraway to present a moral perspective that is based upon “a sense of the fundamental décencies” rather than the more narrow doctrinal judgments of a specific religious code. It was hedonism that served as religious code in the 1920s.
The novel dramatizes the reckless profligacy of the *Jazz Age*, a phenomenon in American history that is without parallel. Fitzgerald, who was one of its chief exponents, claimed “credit for naming it.” In his own words, the Jazz age began “about the time of the May Day riots in 1919,” and, “as if reluctant to die outmoded in its bed, leaped to a spectacular death in October, 1929.” Fitzgerald saw it as chiefly an affair of the young in 1922, when the “wildest of all generations, the generation which had been adolescent during the confusion of the War, shouldered my contemporaries out of the way and danced into the limelight.” By 1923, “their elders, tired of watching the carnival with ill-concealed envy, had discovered that young liquor will take the place of young blood, and with a whoop the orgy began.” It was “a whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure.”

*The Great Gatsby* takes place in jazz-age New York City and its glorious adjacent playground, Long Island. Nick Caraway, the narrator and controlling consciousness of the novel, is a restless young man who has come to the east in the summer of 1922 to become a bond salesman. At this point his native Midwest no longer seems “the warm center of the world,” but, rather, “the ragged edge of the universe.” So, far a time, Nick finds himself “simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” in the east.

As narrator – character, Nick is an indispensable part of the structural scheme. Not only does he relate the action, he brings to his account an immediacy, an incisiveness of feeling, of authority, that can be conveyed only by one who has experienced, directly and indirectly, the events he reports. As
character, Nick is only peripherally involved in the action proper, which is limited to those events of some several months in 1922 that lead inexorably to the novel's fatal conclusion of betrayal and death. Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, and even Jordan were essentially affected by the crucial events that occurred in the antecedent action of the novel, whereas Nick reconstructs the story from what is told to him, piecemeal, by the principals involved. Yet, Nick’s role is much more important than spectator-narrator: he is moral commentator. Because Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, and Jordan appeal to Nick in varying degrees for assistance, advice, or understanding, their actions and motives are evaluated and interpreted through Nick’s consciousness. This device permits Fitzgerald to manipulate his material without losing his objectivity. Nick stands as a buffer between the writer and his characters, between the writer and his readers. In fact, Nick shapes these Jazz Age figures for us.

Gatsby’s story is told at two removes. First, from the viewpoint of Nick as he is experiencing the events of the summer of 1922. At this point he is a young provincial, who, through his involvement with Gatsby, discovers the nature of his own search for self-definition. “I’m thirty,” he tells Jordan Baker. “I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor:

Second from the viewpoint of Nick, who, two years later, is writing a book about his association with Gatsby. In the two years since Gatsby’s death, Nick has achieved the freedom of spirit to make positive judgments about the “fair and foul” of life: “No – Gatsby turned out all right at the end ; in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elation of men.”
Although Nick believes, for a time, that he has come east permanently, he never loses sight of his heritage. The Caraways, a prominent well-to-do Midwestern family, are solidly established in the American tradition of trade and free enterprise. Nick’s father operates a wholesale hardware business founded by an uncle in 1851. Nick has the saving grace both of family background and a well-defined set of moral attitudes instilled in him by his father. That Nick is convinced of the validity of these inherited values is evident in that he prefaces his book on Gatsby with his father’s precepts.

The contrast between Mr. Caraway and Gatsby’s father is obvious and telling. Henry C.Gatz arrives for his son’s funeral on the point of collapse. As he surveys the splendor of his dead son’s possessions, his grief is intermingled with “an awed pride.” Having had nothing to impart to his son during his life, Gatz is impressed by the trite youthful “resolves” Gatsby had written for himself, as a boy, in a ragged copy of Hopalong Cassidy.

Although Nick accepts his father’s suggestion that a “sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth,” he also demands that everyone be aware of at least the rudimentary rules of conduct. After seeking the wanton carelessness of the Buchanans and of Jordan Baker, Nick wants the whole world to discipline itself and to be “at a sort of moral attention forever.” Despite his practice of reserving judgment, Nick ultimately concludes that the conduct of the world of the east falls short of even the minimum standards of behavior.
Ironically, Gatsby, who represents everything for which Nick has "an unaffected scorn," is the only one in the end who is exempted from his revulsion. Nick, himself, does not see Gatsby clearly at first. One moment Nick finds himself under the spell of "one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal assurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life." The next, he sees only "an elegant young rough-neck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd." Yet, before Gatsby's death, Nick delivers his judgment in the only compliment he has ever paid Gatsby: "They're a rotten crowd." I shouted across the lawn. "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." With all Nick's disapproval of Gatsby's shady associations, he realizes that only Gatsby has maintained his innocence despite his tainted wealth. It is only Gatsby who has retained a pure conviction in his "incorruptible dream." In Nick's eyes the greatness of Gatsby lies in his "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life"; his redemption in his "extraordinary gift for hope."

In direct contrast to Gatsby's idealism is Tom Buchanan, a degenerate representative of the American man of strength. Fitzgerald believed that Tom was the best character he had ever created, and one of the "three best characters in American fiction in the last twenty years." A hard, aggressive man with a "body capable of enormous leverage - a cruel body," Tom expresses himself primarily in terms of physicality. When he does speak, he utters platitudes, fallacies, lies, or contemptuous indictments of human weaknesses. Nick concludes that, despite his material possessions Tom is a disillusioned man, having reached "such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything
afterward savored of anticlimax.” His psychological insufficiencies inspire blustering attempts to assert his superiority on such flimsy grounds as belonging to the “Nordic race.” Beneath Tom’s harshness and defiance Nick detects a wistful desire for approval. It is not surprising that he seeks approval where it cannot be denied – in the lowest levels of society. Tom’s mistress, Myrtle Wilson, is a pathetic, vulgar woman, lacking in either social graces or intellectual capacity, but possessing a smoldering sensual vitality that responds to his sexual needs.

Tom’s investigation of Gatsby is motivated less by a sense of righteousness than by a malicious impulse to destroy a superior strength that is inexplicable and therefore threatening to him. As Nick perceives it, Tom cannot understand that Gatsby’s nature derives its impetus from the impalpability of an indestructible idealism. Having originally bought Daisy with the gift of a $350,000 pearl necklace, Tom maneuvers to keep her at all costs – even at the far greater cost to Gatsby of his reputation, his dreams, his life.

Tom and Daisy are what Nick terms “careless” in the strongest sense of the word: “.... 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...”

Daisy, according to Nick’s perception, is as ephemeral as Tom is physical. She is a creature primarily of promises that have little hope of fulfillment, although her emotional bankruptcy is concealed by her physical beauty and vitality:
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.

The essential Daisy is as incorporeal as that voice whispering empty promises. After a token acknowledgement of her undeniable physical beauty, Nick always notices her voice, her "low, thrilling" siren's voice that is also "artificial" and "indiscreet" and full of money.

Watching Daisy and Gatsby's ecstatic reunion, Nick remarks:

I think that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be over-dreamed-that voice was a deathless song.

After Daisy decides to give up Gatsby, she becomes just a voice for Nick as he sadly comments that only Gatsby's,

Dead dream fought on... trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, un-despairingly, toward that lost across the room.

Daisy is a vacuous creature whose self-identity is defined by externals. She is so empty that Fitzgerald can only portray her through the qualities of another. Most important among these definitions are Tom Buchanan's hulking, brute strength, and his money and position. One of the few creative acts she has
performed in her life is the replication of herself in her daughter. Daisy tells Nick that when she discovered that she had given birth to a girl, she cried: "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." Significantly, Daisy’s daughter is the only child in the novel, for, where adults are childishly irresponsible, children are superfluous.

Daisy greets Nick, on their first meeting, with a stuttering little inanity: “I’m p-paralyzed with happiness.” On another occasion, this girlish spirit in a woman’s alluring body dissolves into tears in Gatsby’s home because she has “never seen such beautiful shirts before.” After one of her dinner parties, she turns to Nick, helplessly:

“*What’ll we do with ourselves this afternoon: cried Daisy, ‘and the day after that, and the next thirty years?’*

Before Daisy kills Myrtle Wilson, she swerves the car indecisively from Myrtle to an oncoming car, and then strikes the woman rather than risk injury to herself. In criminal denial of the consequences of her action, Daisy hides her guilt behind Gatsby’s final act of devotion, leaving him to bear the onus of Myrtle’s death. When Nick peers into the Buchanan home after the accident, he sees Daisy and Tom sitting together. “There was an air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together.” Their unstated conspiracy is their shared comfort in irresponsibility.
Jordan Baker, at first glance, might seem to be a more substantial person than Daisy. Her character is chiefly defined in terms of cars and sports. In actuality, she is just as hollow as her friend. Her very name is like an industrial merger. Laurence E. MacPhee has pointed out that Fitzgerald probably derived the name from the highly romanticized advertisements of the 1920s for Jordan automobiles and Baker upholstery. The name Jordan is more often a masculine than a feminine name. The ambiguity suggests Jordan's complicated sexual identification. Brittle, self-sufficient, carrying herself "like a young cadet," Jordan is a golf champion and part of the "sporting life at Asheville and Hot Springs and Palm Beach."

Nick comments that Jordan uses men only to satisfy "the demands of her hard jaunty body, avoiding relationships with clever, shrewd men" who might detect that beyond her "cool, insolent smile" she is "incurably dishonest." Jordan's female qualities are observed by Nick only when she is with Daisy, and then in such superficial matters as their "rippling and fluttering" dresses or their languid walk. Suggesting that there is little distinction between Jordan and Daisy as persons, Nick often refers to them either as a pair, "the two young women," or in a curiously detached manner:

Sometimes she and Miss Baker talked at once; unobtrusively and with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire. They were here, and they accepted Tom and me, making only a polite pleasant effort to entertain or to be entertained."
It is interesting that cars provide Nick with his major insights into Jordan’s personality. When Jordan leaves a “borrowed car out in the rain with the top down. And then lied about it,” Nick remembers that she had been suspected of cheating in her first big golf tournament. Through her careless driving, he discovers that she conducts her life as she handles a car with a total disregard for anything other than her own comfort and satisfaction. Ironically, at their final parting, Jordan accuses Nick of being guilty of the same kind of dishonesty and carelessness in his conducting of their romance.

Though Fitzgerald’s character Gatsby represents the irony of American history and the corruption of the American dream, Fitzgerald has rung in his own characteristic charges, doubling and redoubling ironies. At the center of the legend proper there is the relationship between Europe and America and the ambiguous interaction between the contradictory impulses of Europe that led to the original setting at America and its subsequent development mercantilism and idealism. At either end of American history, and all the way through, the two impulses have a way to bring both radically exclusive and mutually confusing, the one melting into the other: the human faculty of wonder on the other hand the power and beauty of things. The Great Gatsby dramatizes this continuing ambiguizing directly in the life of Gatsby and retrospectively by a glance at history at the end of novel. Especially does it do so in the two passages of the novel of what might be called the ecstatic moment, the moment when the human imagination seems to be on the verge of entering the earthly paradise. The two passages are (1) the real Gatsby looking on the real Daisy, and (2) the imaginary Dutchmen, whom nick conjures up at the end of the novel, looking on the “green breast” of Long Island. Here is the description of Gatsby and Daisy.
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 pup of life, gap down the incomparable milk of wonder.

His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy’s white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning fork that had been struck upon a start. Then he kissed her. At his lip’s touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete.

And below is Nick’s imaginative reconstruction of the legendary Dutchman. He is sprawled on the sand at night, with Gatsby’s mansion behind him and long Island sound in front of him.

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island that flowered once for Dutch eyes — a fresh green breast of the new world. Its varnished 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.
The Great Gatsby begins in a dramatization, as suggested of the basic thesis of the early Van Wyck Brooks: that America had produced an idealism so impalpable that it had lost touch with reality (Gatsby) and a materialism so heavy that it was in human (Tom Buchanan). The novel as a whole is another turn of the screw in this legend, with the impossible idealism trying to realize itself, to its utter destruction, in the gross materiality. As Nick says of Gatsby at the end of the novel.

....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.

Yet he images too that Gatsby, before his moment of death must have had his "realization" of the intractable brutishness of matter.

....he must have felt that he had lost the old warm would paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grails.

Fitzgerald multiplies the ironic of the whole legend: that the mercantile Dutchmen should have been seduced into the esthetic, that Gatsby's wondrous aspirations should attach themselves to a southern belle and that in pursuit of her should become gangster's lieutenant; that idealism, beauty, power, money should get all mixed up; that history should be a kind of parody of itself.
Still The Great Gatsby would finally suggest, at a level beyond all its legends and in the realm of the properly tragic, that it is right and fitting that the Jay Gatzes of the world should ask for the impossible, even when they do so as pathetically and ludicrously as does Gatsby. Himself writing to Fitzgerald about his novel, Maxwell Perkins, after enumerating some specific virtues said,

...there are such things as make a man famous. All the things the whole pathetic episode, you have given a place in time and space, for with the heap of T.J. Ecklebury and by an occasional glance at the sky, on the city, you have imparted a sort of sense of eternity.

The Great Gatsby does not deal with local customs or even national and international legends but with the permanent realities of existence on this level nothing or nobody is to blame, and people are what they are and life is what it is, just as in Bishop Butler's words, "things are what they are". At this level, too, most people don't count; they are merely a higher form of animality living out its mundane existence: the Tom Buchanans, the Jordan Bakers, the Daisy Fays only Nick and Gatsby count. For Gatsby with all his absurdities, his short, sad, pathetic life, is still valuable; in Nick's parting words to him: "you are worth the whole damn bunch put together," Nick, who is his way is as much of this world as Daisy is in hers, still sees, obscurely, the significance of Gatsby. And although he knows that the content of Gatsby's dream is corrupt, he senses that its form is pristine. For in his own fumbling, often gross way, Gatsby was obsessed with the wonder of human life and driven by the search to make that wonder actual. It is the same urge that motivates visionaries and prophets, the urge to make the facts of life measure up to the splendors of the human imagination, but it is
utterly pathetic in Gatsby's case because he is trying to do it so subjectively and so uncouthly, and with dollar bills. Still Nick's obscure instinct that Gatsby is essentially all right is sound. It often seems as if the novel is about the contrast between the two, but the bond between them reveals that they are not opposites but rather complements, opposed together to all the other characters in the novel.

Taken together they contain most of the essential polarities that go to make up the human mind and its existence. Allegorically considered, Nick is reason, experience, waking, reality and history, while Gatsby is imagination, innocence, sleeping, dream and eternity. Nick is like words worth listening to "the still sad music of humanity", while Gatsby is like Blake seeing hosts of angels in the sun. The one can only look at the facts and see them as tragic; the other tricks to transform the facts by an act of imagination. Nick's mind is conservative and historical, as is his lineage; Gatsby's is radical and apocalyptic – as rootless as his heritage. Nick is too much immersed in time and in reality; Gatsby is hopelessly out of it. Nick is always withdrawing, while Gatsby pursues the green light. Nick can't be hurt, but neither can he be happy. Gatsby can experience ecstasy but his fate is necessarily tragic. They are generically two of the best types of humanity: the moralist and the radical. A lesser writer might have attempted to make Nick a literal sage and Gatsby a literal prophet. But it is certain that such a thought would never have entered Fitzgerald's head, as he was only dramatizing the moral and manners of life he knew. The genius of the novel consists precisely in the fact that, while using only the stuff one might better say the froth and flotsam of its own limited time and place it has managed to suggest, as Perkins said, a sense of eternity.
In a way, Nick Carraway begins his story with the recollection that his father advised him to reserve his judgment of other because they may not have had the same “advantages.” Nick’s tolerance has made him the confidant of some and the victim of others, but to preserve his caution he has always reminded himself that “a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth.” Carraway’s father has warned him about the difficulties of moral judgment, a difficulty originating in circumstances of origin and inheritance. But conduct, Nick observes, must be principled in some fashion. There is a “limit” to tolerance. “Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or on the wet marshes, but after a certain point I don’t care what it’s founded on.” That is, while it may be impossible to fix moral responsibility or to determine derelictions from that responsibility, Nick insist that action reveal some principle and that toleration does not permit indifference. His criticism of the standards and conduct of his Long Island friends has tired him, he concludes: he can wish the world “to stand at a sort of moral attention forever”; he wants no more “riotous” glimpses into the human heart. We should be too hasty if we condemned Nick for an unhealthy curiosity or for pompous self-righteousness.

The tone of his narrative is never offensively positive, and we shall see that what may appear to be a peculiar from of pride is actually a serious kind of candor. Nick considers not only his friends, but himself as well. He tells us plainly what should interest us in his tale, and he introduces us to a period of his own life in which he is not entirely blameless and neutral. The quality of plainness, the device of direct revelation, has appeared to R.W. Stallman as the mask of the
hypocrite, who is betrayed, symbolically, by his "irregular lawn". To the contrary, Nick’s irregularities of behavior, his carelessness, do not escape his judgment; he does not grow more confused but learns to see more clearly what Eastern society and morality are and how he has been corrupted by them.

Nick prepares us for his personal involvement in the action by his next words, when he reveals his own origins, or his reasons for thinking that he had "advantages." He came from a family of "prominent, well-to-do people" who have lived in "this Middle Western city for three generations". They have enjoyed commercial success, act together as a family, and regard the decisions and conduct of their relatives with grave concern. They have inherited the moral seriousness of their Scottish ancestors, sustain their business and social position as a manifestation of their moral superiority, and have passed down to their heirs a strong "sense of the fundamental decencies."

The narrator’s part complicates the action. We are expected to realize that what we are told comes to us through his peculiar agency, and therefore - to complete an obvious matter - our knowledge of the narrator will establish the limits of our knowledge of the whole action. Fitzgerald understood these limitations and in the direct, economical way of The Great Gatsby engages the reader at once in the particular interests which the novel should arouse. Immediately after his introductory remarks, Carraway narrates his first visit to the Buchanan household, where he delivers an exact description of a moneyed and corrupt Eastern society in Daisy’s despair and in Tom’s adulteries.
Here Nick meets Jordan Baker, a professional tennis player who has succumbed to the ennui of the frantic search for novelty and excitement to which she and others of her post-war generation had devoted themselves. She is also a persistent and obvious liar, and Nick soon perceives this fault. Yet he is interested in her, though exactly how intimate they become is only suggested by a scene in which Jordan easily accepts Nick's first attentions. Her unconcern for any standards beyond those of a frank self-indulgence is evidence enough that the two have become lovers. This relationship Nick's most personal involvement in the dissolution which Jordan represents, and the perception of his share in a common guilt comes with his initial revulsion to his summer's experience, directly after Myrtle Wilson's death. He is suddenly disgusted by the vicious and now violent life about him, but even in his new wisdom, his passion for Jordan has not been completely destroyed. In his last conversation with her, he can feel that he might be "making a mistake" by ending their affair and finally that he is "half in love with her." We learn most about them at this point in Jordan's accusation that Nick is a "bad driver." He is not the person she thought—not what he pretended to and she says, "It was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride." Nick answers: "I'm thirty. I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honour." It was Nick's pride to feel that he could accept Jordan on her own terms, with her cynicism and her irresponsibility, and yet that he could escape the consequences of that acceptance. But what was subdued or ignored has now erupted, with Gatsby murdered and with Daisy and Tom exposed in their terrible selfishness. It can no
longer be honorable for Nick to maintain the pretense that nothing serious is
involved in his affair with Jordan. Nick was dishonest because he acted as
though he brought no other standards of conduct to judge their liaison with than
those which Jordan’s hedonism impose: and it is now plain, in his disgust and
self-recrimination, that Nick has in fact deceived Jordan. She accuses him of
having thought of her all along as he does now, when he has given her up. She is
right, of course, and Nick, who is (he tells us) the most honest man he knows,
admits his twice-compounded duplicity, a duplicity analyzed in a similar way by
R. W. Stallman. But he does not accept Nick’s understanding of his personal
responsibility. When Jordan “calls his bluff,” as Stallman puts it, the effect is to
make public Nick’s own shame, so that, far from being “identified” with
Jordan⑩, Nick is separated from her and from her society. He can no longer
lie, and he leaves the east, without honour perhaps, but with a new-found vision
of his own guilt.

There is another complication in Nick’s discovery of his error. Even
Jordan Baker, he says came from the West. All the Westerners – Tom, Daisy,
Gatsby, Jordan and Nick – “possessed some deficiency in common which made
us subtly unadaptable to Eastern society than Nick, none is entirely at ease.
None can rid himself of that “sense of the fundamental decencies,” however
attenuated it may have become, which their origins have given them. None can
finally be comfortable in the hedonism cultivated by the Eastern representatives
of his generation, or at least by those with money and enough intelligence to be
disillusioned by the war. After his revulsion, Nick returns to the comparatively

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rigid morality of his ancestral West and to its embodiment in the manners of Western society. He alone of all the Westerners can return, since the others have suffered, apparently beyond any conceivable redemption, a moral degeneration brought on by their meeting with that form of Eastern society which developed during the twenties.

Nick makes another commitment to the life he at last rejects, a commitment that includes what we should ordinarily take to be his humiliating part in the affair between Gatsby and Daisy. Nick is used and knows it, but his attachment to Gatsby leads him to make another important discovery, however vague it may remain in some respects, about the nature of morality itself. We should ask: What does Nick think of Gatsby? And why? And again a passage at the beginning of the novel will reveal the essential information.

After Nick has explained that there must be limits to his tolerance, he excepts Gatsby from his general reaction, “Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn.” “There was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life...” Gatsby had “an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness.” Gatsby, Nick says, “turned out all right at the end,” and it was not he who drew Nick’s scorn, but the “foul dust” which “floated in the wake of his dreams.” We learn gradually about Gatsby’s dream: about the events of his early life and his peculiar training, about his obsession, about his impersonal – indeed, royal – view of his own personality about the reality which his vision of the perfect life must have seemed to him. Now, the capacities which Nick admires are the capacities of will: a tremendous energy to accomplish certain purposes, and a self-imposed delusion which makes
those purposes meaningful. The delusion is the vision of Gatsby's life with daisy, and the purpose are his need for money and social position to make himself worthy of her. Gatsby differs from the others of his time by virtue of these capacities. Whereas the behavior of the Eastern rich, the racketeers, and the Westerners who adopt Eastern ways is restricted and debased by the selfish motives of personal and sensual gratification, Gatsby acts for a good which he conceives, almost absurdly, as being beyond personal interest. Gatsby's last heroism in protection of the mistress of his dream confirms Nick's judgment. Gatsby does turn out all right, while Tom and Daisy sit comfortably at their family table, bound in their private safety. If Gatsby, as Nick says at the end, "felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream," his sacrifice has already been made and his life consummated. He had found a way to live as men had once lived, with a purpose and a meaning which transcended personal fate.

Nick accepts the probability that Gatsby himself realized the insufficiency of his dream. The vision was only Gatsby's and his goal only a personal one, if somehow ennobled, as Nick sees it, by Gatsby's strength of will. Further, Gatsby is a fraud. The structure of appearance erected to impress Daisy is founded on some kind of illegal traffic which only repels, her, so that she is lost to Gatsby even before the accident of Myrtle's death. Nor is Nick ever in any doubt that Gatsby has valued only the tawdry and the vain. He is left at last with Gatsby's morality, or rather Gatsby's capacity to live according to a morality, his "romantic readiness." It is this ability which Nick feels that he and the others lack, presumably because of historical circumstance.
That, at least, is what it takes to be the meaning of the last words of the novel, on the night when Nick left West Egg forever, and the "inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes — 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..." In Nick's day, I conclude, such dreams no longer correspond to any reality. They present no real challenges, and only disillusion, even for a man like Gatsby, can ensue, if a lesser dream like Gatsby's is accepted. When Gatsby "picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock," Nick continues, "he did not know that it [his dream] was already behind him." A last contrast may now be made clear between Gatsby and Nick, Gatsby who thought he could remake the past and Nick who knew that it was irretrievably lost and that more than Gatsby's dream had gone with it.

Nick's discovery is that the power of will without the direction of intelligence is a destructive power, that there must be some real end beyond the satisfaction of private desire — however desire may be exalted — to justify the expenditure of life. But he believes too that, except for the anachronistic and fatal instance of Gatsby, the time when such ends could have existed is now done. We can only "beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

The Great Gatsby is not a melodrama about Jay Gatsby but a definition of the senses in which Nick understands the word "great". Its subject is an American morality. It is explored historically through the conflict between the surviving puritan morality of the west and the post-Hedonism of the East; topically, through characteristic manifestations of American money values.
formally and most significantly, through the personal history of a young American provincial whose moral intelligence is the proper source of our understanding and whose career, in the passage from innocence revaluation dramatizes the possibility and mode of a moral sanction in contemporary America.

Fitzgerald's most celebrated novel, *The Great Gatsby*, dramatizes the ribaldry of the Jazz age. The most apparent symbol of the Jazz age is the party that captures the mood of carnival. Significantly, the action of the novel takes place in some important parties to index the riches of the wealthy, to reveal the frustration of the poor and to expose the boredom, fear and inevitable crack-up the post-war generation.

Nick Carraway, the narrator and the controlling consciousness of the novel, acts both as stage manager and chorus. He not only exposes the fabulous world of the rich, he also discovers the fundamental innocence and immense vitality of Gatsby's dream. He finds the Jeffersonian dream of democracy and success crumbled under the feet of Tom Buchanan and Daisy - the representatives of the rich. He records the directionless drift of Tom and Daisy: "They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there.... I felt Tom would drift on forever seeking a little wistfully for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game" (127). The indirection of these two characters suggests the indirection of a whole civilization, of a way of life. The potential of violence of the rich class is suggested through the physical brutality of Tom: "It was a body capable of enormous leverage... a cruel body" (18). Fitzgerald hints at the perversion of the renaissance ideal of aristocracy, where by riches are utilized to cultivate mind, to achieve an ability to appreciate the arts, and to inculcate a moral sense for acquiring a higher plane of existence.
The most striking scene that captures the mood of barrenness and futility of the Jazz age is a description of the valley of ashes. Lionel Trilling has noticed a similarity between the valley of ashes and The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot. Not for instance, the mood of desolation and decay that envelopes the valley: "This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes take the form of houses and chimneys and rising smoke, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air". Another striking feature of this desolate landscape is an old billboard advertisement of eyeglasses. The eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleberg symbolize a modern deity, a faceless nonentity and description of the material society that relies on the go-getter mentality of selling everything through fallacies and exaggeration.

The long catalogue of names that Nick Carraway records on the empty space of a time table at a party given by Gatsby highlights the impact of social mobility in the years of social change. Note, for instance, the subhuman qualities of the guests who have come to the party: "From East Egg, then came the Chester Backers and the Leeches and a man named Bunsen, Whom I knew at Yale, and a Doctor Webster Civet... And the Hornbeams and the Willie Voltaire's, and a whole clan named Blackbuck" (45). The party indexes the social chaos that has resulted from social mobility. "The names and scraps of rumor are interwoven to show how people are being hurried indiscriminately together in a frantic pursuit of money and pleasure.... The wealthy, the criminal, the disreputable, the pretentious, the showy, the frivolous, the rootless and vulgar civilization drift towards their inevitable crack-up" (Way 104).
The tragedy of Gatsby springs not only from his inner conflicts, it also springs from the external forces existing in the corrupt society. Daisy, who represents the materialist phase of American civilization, is not a worthy object that can provide transcendence to Gatsby. Ironically enough, it is Gatsby who finally comments about her voice that "it was full of money" (76). Behind Tom, who is another agent in Gatsby's failure, are the dynamics of power that make him" the last link in the chain that takes the reader from the explorers of the newfound land, to the frontiersman like Cody" (Lehan 1965: 116). Finally, at the end of the novel, Nick relates the dream of Gatsby with the dream of the Dutch sailors. J.F. Callahan writes that the October month of love which Daisy and Gatsby shared is a reference to Columbus' discovery of America in October. Marius Bewley writes that Gatsby is "a myth in whom is incarnated the aspiration and the ordeal of his age" (125-26). For Sergio Perosa, "Gatsby's adventure is based on a traditional motive of American experience, divided between yearning for innocence and the compromises of reality" (73) Brain Way observes that "the novel embodies a vision of America as the continent of lost innocence and lost illusions" (110); Edwin Fusel calls Gatsby the "American representative" (291); Richard Chase notices that "the life of Gatsby reminds us of the ideal meaning of America" (163) – Together they are a band of critics who interpret Gatsby's dream as an embodiment of the American dream itself.

Contrary to the views of critics who consider the novel as a story about the American dream, several critics have maintained that the novel embodies a myth that is much more universal. For them, the tragedy of Gatsby relates to a
general human predicament. Richard Lehan observes that "[Fitzgerald] extended his novel beyond his history to the level of metaphysics" (1905:116). K.G.W. Cross (1964:67) stresses that "In Gatsby's dream and disenchantment Fitzgerald found a fable adequate to the universal tragedy of man" (67). Kenneth Eble maintains that The Great Gatsby is Fitzgerald's attempt to "capture the essential truth of the romantic vision" (94). All these critics contend that the novel relates the tragic situation in which man "is endless aspiring toward the past, toward a lost paradise. His continual quest for the future leads him into the past" (Johnson 117).

At another level, which seems more acceptable, The Great Gatsby arrest a particular moment from the flux of life during the years of social change in America. The tragedy of Gatsby is enacted against the background of social change during the Twenties. Unlike the allegorical artists, who tend to resolve the complexities of social life into polarities, Fitzgerald has tried to dramatize the complexities of post World War-I life by relying on objective social observation. In his attempt to transfuse all the three realms of meaning, Fitzgerald has raised the novel to the level of a great work of art.

Whatever faults one may find is Fitzgerald's early work, with the publication of The Great Gatsby he fulfilled his highest promise and gave to American literature one of its master works. On the surface, of course the novel is much a part of its age as a brilliant dramatization of the social and economic corruptions of the jazz Age, marked by prohibition, gangsterism, blaze flappers, and uproot dress. American morality was marked by questionable business
ethics, commercial criteria for success, and ultra conservatism in social and political thinking. Historians like Charles Beard were insisting that materialistic and economic factors rather than idealistic motives had determined the course of American history. Through character and theme, Fitzgerald dealt in one way or another with all these historic factors with such a sensitivity that one can even intuit in the text slight prophetic reverberations of the stock market crash in 1929 and the great depression in the offing.

Beyond these surface concerns, the novel deals symbolically with the failure of the American dream of success which in Fitzgerald’s time was still best known through the Horatio Alger novels. A second significant thematic concern of the novel relates to its symbolic use of Midwest as a contrast with the east. In his nostalgic reverse on the Midwest near the end of the novel, Nick Carraway concludes, “I see new that this has been a story of the west, after all – Tom and Gatsby, Daisy, Jordan, and I, were all westerners and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly inadaptable to Eastern life”.

Adopting a modified first person narrative from Conrad, Fitzgerald unfolds Gatsby’s tragedy for us through the eyes of the Chief narrator Nick Carraway what we learn through Nick is that pure will power divorced from rationality and decency leads to destruction, and that a merely selfish dream or notion is insufficient to justify that enormous amount of energy and life expanded by Gatsby. It is a lesson that this nation would not learn for almost another fifty years, and a suggestion that Fitzgerald’s prophetic vision saw farther into the future than the depression years.
When Gatsby is viewed against the moral decadence and cowardly conduct of the Buchanans — "You are worth the whole damn bunch put together". Nick tells him — his unassailable romanticism makes him appear heroic. As an individual, then, who dreams, higher than he can achieve, whole reach exceeds his grasp, Gatsby is at the heart of the tragic condition and thus shares certain characteristics with Oedipus, Hamlet, and other tragic heroes of western literature. Unlike Arthur Millers modern tragic figure, Willy Leman, Gatsby doesn't evoke mere pity and disgust at the end, as he faithfully waits for a phone call that will never come.

Aside from its concern the social and moral questions of continuing consequence, The Great Gatsby is one of the most carefully constructed and precisely written novels in American literature. The subtle complexity of the language, the calculated use of colors, references, and connotations, the striking configurations of verbal patterns and repetitions — all lead the reader to read and reread sentences time and time again to catch the multi-level nuances of meaning. The style is poetic and repays the application of the techniques of studied explication. The Great Gatsby is one of the four important works to come out of contemporary American literature. Fitzgerald's third novel is a work of art which, like good wine, seems to get better with age. John Dos Passos has said in his note on Fitzgerald: "It's the quality of detaching itself from its period that marks a piece of work as good." Judged by this rigorous standard, The Great Gatsby is very good indeed. It is one of the most compressed and concise of the great novels in any language. It can be compared in this respect to
Turgenev's master piece Fathers and Sons with which Fitzgerald's book has much in common. Aside from similarity of length, they are both representative of a whole civilization at a critical point in its history.

The sheer efficiency with which this little novel works upon the mind of the reader gives rise to the increasing respect it inspires. Within its strict confines, the writer has succeeded in capturing and giving form to his impressions of a vast and chaotic world. No American prose work of the twentieth century better exemplifies the epigram from the Great Anthology. Out of the jewel, grass is grown.” Out of the two hundred pages of Gatsby spring the turbulent 1920s in America with the same liveliness and spontaneity with which Proust's rural Combray sprang out of his cup of tea.

This is one of the few American novels of our time that seem to make a claim to the lasting attention of the author’s fellow countrymen. And for once Fitzgerald, who was inclined to beguile himself as to the real value of his work so long as it was too close to him is time, was perfectly right in the early estimate he formed of it. We find him writing about it to his friend John Peale Bishop in terms that are at the same time ecstatic and completely realistic: “The novel I’m sure of It’s marvelous” “May be my book is rotten but I don’t think so’ and then again: “write me the opinion you maybe pleased to form of my chef d’oeuvre and other’s opinion. Please... I think it’s great because it deals with much debauched material, quick deciders may mistake it...”
Regarding *The Great Gatsby* the critics were not alone in sensing a certain lack in the novel. Fitzgerald himself felt it, was uncomfortable about it, tried to explain it away even though there is evidence that he always regarded *The Great Gatsby* as his greatest piece of work. No one agreed, however, about what the lack was. Fitzgerald could not define it consistently; in a letter to John Peale Bishop post marked August 9, 1925, he calls *The Great Gatsby* "blurred and patchy" and adds: "I never at any one time saw him clear myself - for he started out as one man I knew and then changed into myself the amalgam was never complete in my mind." In a letter written the same year to Edmund Wilson, however, he shifts his ground: "The worst fault in *The Great Gatsby* I think is a "BIG FAULT". I gave no account and had no feeling about or knowledge of the emotional relations between Gatsby and Daisy from the time of their reunion to the Catastrophe." Later in the same letter Fitzgerald calls this "BIG FAULT" by a still different, through cognate, terms: "... the lack of any emotional backbone at the very height of it i.e. ... the Gatsby story".

Fitzgerald was considered to be a social reformer, who realized the vices of this class distinction of the society and put the mirror before the people to reflect those evils through his writings. Like Mark Twain, he saw only chaos all around him and tried to find an ordered cosmos in his own terms. The autobiographical material his love affairs with Ginerva King and Zelda Sayre is used in this novel too as in his earlier works. Unlike Lord Jim, it is a study of carelessness, not of illusion and integrity. Its theme is the American dream Fitzgerald presents a severe criticism of the American dream and at last by this book he stands in the line of great masters of American prose. *The Great Gatsby* has a double virtue. In the novel we possess the best picture of the age.
in which it was written and it also achieves a sort of moral permanence. Fitzgerald’s story of the innocent murdered suitor for wealth is a compendious fable of the 1920s that will survive as a legend for other times.

The Great Gatsby is showered by adverse criticism too. In the opinion of the New York times review the book was “curious mystical and glamorous”. The Herald Tribune stated it as” negligible, uncurbed melodrama a tragedy with the flavour of skim milk.” L.P. Hartley severely critized the book in his review “The Great Gatsby is an absured story, whether considered as a romance, melodrama on plain record of New York high life.” Another Critic Commented that ‘The Great Gatsby is evidently not a satire, but one would like to think that Mr. Fitzgerald’s heart is not in it, that it is a piece of mere naughtiness(10).”

Inspite of all these, The Great Gatsby is about the American issues and is a version if the new social world feared by the tradition of American moralists from William James to John Dewey. The novel deals with a world of broken relationships, a world of money and success rather than of social responsibility ; a world in which individuals are all too free to determine their morel destinies. Fitzgerald has brought together the American dream and the American disillusion in this novel. It is not only brilliant in its characterization, individual scenes and dialogues but also in its general effects. The characters are depicted in such a manner that the reader may measure them on a scale of social values. The high quality of this best work and most certainly the striking achievement in The Great Gatsby, has brought his work the esteem which eluded Fitzgerald himself during his own life time. It is, by all odds. Fitzgerald’s most perfect novel.
1) John Berryman – F. Scott Fitzgerald – The Kenyan Review

2) The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ed. With introduction by Andrew

3) Ibid., P. 310.

4) F. Scott Fitzgerald – The Great Gatsby in Kazin – (Scribners, New

5) Letters, P. 358.

6) F. Scott Fitzgerald. The Tales of the Jazz Age – Metropolitan

7) F. Scott Fitzgerald – Handle with Care. The Crack – Up Ed. With
P.84.

8) Mizener – The Far Side of Paradise. Houghton Mifflin, (Borton,

9) Letters - P.173.

10) Echoes of the Jazz Age – (Scribner’s Magazine New York, February

(Modern Fiction Studies, New York, 1972) PP.207-212.

13) Ibid., p. 134.

14) Robert Emmet Long - *The Achieving of The Great Gatsby -*


16) Letters – P. 120.


18) Ibid., P. 270.