CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT GATSBY
The publication of *The Beautiful and Damned* brought only a sense of disappointment to Fitzgerald. His avowed intention of producing a serious novel did not make the novel a success. It got only a mixed reception from the critics, and its reception from the public was not up to what Fitzgerald had expected. This made Fitzgerald's financial situation more difficult. So he was forced once again to write stories for popular magazines to get himself out of the difficult financial situation. His book of stories *Tales of the Jazz Age* was published at this time and it contained a few really good stories like "Dalyrimple Goes Wrong," "May Day," and "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz." These stories have the precision and the genuineness of feeling because they are based on Fitzgerald's own inner experiences. These stories also reveal Fitzgerald's growing concern for the technique of narration.

Another collection of short stories, *All the Sad Young Men*, was published before the publication of *The Great Gatsby* and the stories in this collection are also of an uneven quality. But some of the stories in *All the Sad Young Men* are interesting because Fitzgerald used certain basic situations in
them which he had used before and would use again in *The Great Gatsby*. In fact the story "Winter Dreams" included in this collection appears to be an early and much shortened version of *The Great Gatsby*. As James Miller observes, "A comparison of the novel and the short story demonstrates the vastly different achievements resulting from the use of different techniques to develop an identical theme. At the centre of "Winter Dreams" is Dextour Green's, illusion of Judy Jones, an illusion which grows ridiculously out of proportion to its object, just as Gatsby's dream is to begin with Daisy but inflate to an epic vision."¹

Another story called "Absolution" is of interest not only because it has certain intrinsic merit as a well-written story but also because it was first written as prologue to *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald used a certain framework to give the story a compact structure and also experimented with a rearrangement of the chronology of events. In language he achieved the art of "magic suggestiveness" in this story. It is significant that Fitzgerald had come to practise these technical and narrative devices before he wrote *The Great Gatsby*.

It is sometimes said that *The Great Gatsby* is a miraculous occurrence in the career of an irresponsible writer. This view is disproved by Fitzgerald's letters to Edmund Wilson and Maxwell Perkins written during this period. These letters show that Fitzgerald was consciously working towards discovering an appropriate form, which would express his theme in the right way. In spite of the financial muddle into which he often ran himself, and the dire need for writing something to earn money, Fitzgerald never lost sight of his earnest goal of proving himself a serious writer. It was during this time that
Fitzgerald seriously attempted to write a play called *The Vegetable*, about which he wrote to Perkins, "It is awfully funny play that's going to make me rich for ever. It really is. I am so damned tired of the feeling that I am living up to my income."  

After finishing the play, Fitzgerald began trying it on various producers, but without success. When it was finally staged at the Apollo Theatre in Atlantic City, *The Vegetable* flopped totally. Fitzgerald was terribly disappointed and his financial plight grew worse than before. Fitzgerald had expected that his play would bring him a lot of money and this was perhaps the chief motive for his writing *The Vegetable*. But, at the same time, it is significant to note that the play was written with care and literary ambition. As Arthur Mizener rightly points out,

> Even his play, *The vegetable*, though clearly written with an eye on the Big Money, was written with care and literary ambition. Though 'The Vegetable' is usually considered to be a political fantasy and satire, its main point really lies elsewhere. The main point of the play, is the American dream of rising from newsboy to president, is ridiculous, and that the Jerry Frosts of this world are far happier being the postmen nature made them than being presidents.  

The reference to the American dream is significant at this point because *The Great Gatsby*, which followed *The Vegetable*, has been considered by many critics to be a commentary on and criticism of the American dream. Though *The Great Gatsby* is essentially the expression of Fitzgerald's mature romantic vision
and an ironical distrust of it, the superb craft of fiction that has gone into the making of the novel has raised it to the level of providing a profound corrective insight into the nature of American experience.

After the failure of *The Vegetable*, Fitzgerald and Zelda went away to Great Neck, Long Island, and it was there that he started writing his new novel. In a letter to Maxwell Perkins, his editor, he announced, "I want to write something new, something extraordinary and Beautiful and simple plus intricately patterned." Fitzgerald started writing an early version of the novel in the summer of 1923 at Great Neck which provided the locale for the novel. But serious work on the novel commenced only after he and Zelda went to France and idyllically settled on the Riviera. He finished the novel in November 1924, but on the suggestion of Perkins, he rewrote and restructured the novel in galley proof into its present form. As Matthew Bruccoli rightly says, "Gatsby achieved its greatness in proof." Thus *The Great Gatsby*, a work of unmistakable genius, has become equally a triumph of craftsmanship.

A great deal has been written about the central theme of *The Great Gatsby*. Several themes have been traced by different critics, and in a sense, the novel embodies all these themes and produces a unified sense of experience. Acknowledging *The Great Gatsby* as a classic of the Jazz Age, Robert Lee goes on to say that the novel can be read "as a reworking and critique of the American Dream, a tale of doomed errantry, a peculiarly American comedy of Manners, a sexual pathology of sorts, or even a tacit Marxian onslaught on capitalism and the fetish of commodity." This comment of Robert Lee clearly shows how *The Great Gatsby* can be read from different
points of view. Each point of view postulates a particular theme and tries to evaluate the experience in the novel from that thematic point of view. Most of the themes suggested by the critics do not exclude one another, and the different themes must be seen in relation to what Fitzgerald really had in mind while writing *The Great Gatsby*. It was clearly not the conscious intention of Fitzgerald to bring in different themes into his novel. It is well-known that Fitzgerald's life and writings are always very closely related. Fitzgerald always worked from his own experience and vision and he was quite conscious that he had only a limited number of themes to write about. It is not surprising that the basic themes of Fitzgerald appear in his novels and many of his important short stories because Fitzgerald himself says in his *One Hundred False Starts*,

> Mostly, we authors must repeat ourselves - that is the truth. We have two or three great and moving experiences in our lives - experiences so great and moving that it doesn't seem at the time that anyone else has been so caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and rewarded and humbled in just that way ever before.

> Then we learn out trade, well or less well, and we tell our two or three stories each time in a new disguise – may be ten times, may be hundred, as long as people will listen. ⁷

Fitzgerald's romantic vision is the one basic or central theme that is expressed in all his works with different situations. The theme of romantic vision and wonder of life is basic to *The Great Gatsby* also, but this becomes
the American dream because of the novel's superb construction and expression. Kenneth Eble says,

A great deal has been written about the central theme of *The Great Gatsby*, but over and above everything else, it seems to me, is, Fitzgerald's attempt to capture the essential truth of the romantic vision. Such truth is ambiguous ... Yet, the vision is not in itself false; and the truth does gleam there at the centre, hard and bright and true, an inexhaustible lure to man, an ineradicable part of the vision that gives him his worth. 8

Thus *The Great Gatsby* is primarily an expression of Fitzgerald's romantic vision and it explores the truth of that romantic vision and shows how it tragically fails when it is faced with the harsh realities of life. The tragedy is not merely in the life of Gatsby at the personal level, or the tragedy of the failure of the American dream, but it is the tragedy of human predicament itself. Fitzgerald's masterly craftsmanship and magic suggestiveness of language have raised the theme of *The Great Gatsby* to a universal level and made it into a classic.

Youth, love money, and time — and mutability — are the essential elements of Fitzgerald's romantic vision. His earlier heroes, Amory and Anthony, express this romantic vision, and they fail because of Fitzgerald's deep critical and skeptical view of the attainability and sustainability of such a romantic vision. Fitzgerald was unable to produce a true tragic effect in the case of Amory and Anthony because he had not discovered the art of keeping himself apart from his principal characters and dramatizing the theme, without his own intervention as a writer. But this he achieved in *The Great Gatsby*
owing to his thoroughly matured craftsmanship. As Arthur Mizener says, "He had found a story which allowed him to exploit much more feeling about experience, and he had committed himself to an adequate workable form which he never betrayed."  

In creating the character of Gatsby, Fitzgerald borrowed the external details from a Long Island bootlegger whom he happened to know to some extent. He described this man and told everything about him to Edmund Wilson. Wilson put his description in *The Crime in the Whistler Room*:

> He’s a gentleman bootlegger: his name is Max Fleischman. He lives like a millionaire. Gosh, I haven’t seen so much to drink since prohibition ... Well, Fleischman was making a damn ass of himself bragging about how much his tapestries were worth and how much his bathroom was worth and how he never wore a shirt twice and he had a revolver studded with diamonds.

But these details refer only to the externals of Gatsby. The spirit of Gatsby is created by Fitzgerald out of his own self-knowledge. Gatsby, like the other major characters in the novel, has a double aspect in his personality. He is vulgar and romantic at the same time, and Fitzgerald wonderfully succeeds in establishing the double aspect of the characters through Nick Carraway. Though Fitzgerald is very satirical about Gatsby’s romantic vision, he still has sympathy for him. One of the reasons for this sympathy is that Fitzgerald found Gatsby inside himself. As Arthur Mizener observers, "The vulgar and romantic young man Fitzgerald found somewhere inside himself to fill this outline of a character is what matters." Again Mizener points to the two sides of
Fitzgerald’s nature, the middle-western Trimalchio and the spoiled priest who disapproved of but grudgingly admired him. In fact Fitzgerald struggled hard to find a suitable title for the book which would suggest both these aspects at the same time. He tried titles like “Among Ash and Millionaires,” “Trimalchio in West Egg,” and “On the Road to West Egg,” but finally settled down to the title of The Great Gatsby. Still in his heart of hearts Fitzgerald wanted to call his novel “Trimalchio” which for him held the essence of his satirical attitude to Gatsby. Trimalchio is the vulgar and ostentatious multi-millionaire in Satyricon, a play written by a Roman playwright Petronios Arbiter. Trimalchio is the subject of literary allusion because of an extravagant banquet he gave. Fitzgerald must have felt that the title “Trimalchio” would precisely express Gatsby’s vulgar and ostentatious nature. This naturally makes it clear that Fitzgerald intended to lay greater stress on the corruption of Gatsby’s vision.

It is significant that there is a reference to Gatsby’s “romantic readiness” even at the beginning of the novel. The story goes on to unfold Gatsby’s romantic vision with all its implications and its tragic failure at the end. Beginning his narration, Nick Caraway gives a clear insight into the personality of Gatsby though he says that Gatsby “represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn” (1). He adds,

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 earth quakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness ... was an extraordinary gift for
hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person. (15)

It is interesting to note that the expressions “heightened sensitivity to the promises of life,” “an extraordinary gift for hope,” and “a romantic readiness” describe Fitzgerald as much as they do Jay Gatsby. In spite of Fitzgerald’s brilliant technique to distance himself from the principal characters, one is able to see that the above traits are common to Gatsby and his creator. Referring to Fitzgerald’s hope of finding a new rhythm for their (Fitzgerald and Zelda’s) lives, before he started writing The Great Gatsby, Arthur Mizener rightly point out that “like Gatsby, Fitzgerald wanted to recover something, some idea of himself, perhaps that had gone into loving (Zelda).” 12 This comment of Mizener suggests certain emotional affinity, though not apparent, between Fitzgerald and Gatsby.

Nick Caraway’s account of Gatsby’s personality draws out the essential features of Gatsby’s romantic vision. Fitzgerald surrounds the character of Gatsby with a certain sense of mystery and this heightens the romantic aspect of Gatsby’s personality. His earlier story called “Absolution” was intended by Fitzgerald to be a picture of Gatsby’s early life, but he did not include the details about Gatsby in the novel to preserve a sense of mystery. But the novel makes no mystery about the beginning and development of Gatsby’s romantic vision.

At the age of seventeen, Gatsby changes his name from James Gatz to Jay Gatzby. His parents were poor and unsuccessful farm people and Gatsby’s imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all.
Having emotionally broken himself away from his parents and having given up his real name, Gatsby tries to be re-born with a new identity:

The most grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed at night. 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 provided an outlet for his imagination; they 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. (65)

The expression "unreality of reality " is very significant because The Great Gatsby is an expression in dramatic terms of the unreality of reality and the reality of a dream or illusion. A romantic vision looks upon reality as unreality in order to sustain itself. In the novel what is real in the world of Tom and Daisy is unreal in the world of Gatsby, and vice versa. Through the integrity of his own imagination, Gatsby creates for himself a romantic vision. In this sense we can say that Gatsby springs from his platonic conception of himself:

The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God ... 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. (64)

Again, the expression "Platonic conception" is of great value in understanding the nature of Gatsby's romantic vision and the reason for the failure of the vision and Gatsby's tragic end.

Plato's philosophy rests on the distinction between reality and appearance. In order to explain "being" and to distinguish between the real and the apparent, he developed the theory of the existence of immaterial forms of objects, which he called "forms" or "ideas". He identified them with "being." To these "ideas" Plato counterpoised "non-being," identified with matter and space. According to Plato, the sensible world or the world of objects which is the product of "ideas" and "matter" occupies an intermediate position. "Ideas" are eternal and they neither arise nor perish. They are not relative and they do not depend upon time and space. Sensible objects are transient, relative, and they depend upon time and space. It must also be noticed that, in Plato, all particular sensible objects have a contradictory character. What is beautiful is also, in some respects, ugly. What is just is, in some respects, unjust. So, authentic knowledge is not possible about sensible things and phenomena and we can have only a probable opinion. Absolute knowledge is possible only of truly existent "forms." For example, opinion is concerned with particular beautiful things, but knowledge is concerned with beauty in itself.

In saying that Gatsby sprang from a platonic conception of himself, it is suggested that Gatsby, through his imagination, raises himself to cognize an absolute romantic vision and that he identified his being with it. It is in this
sense that Gatsby is the son of God because all "forms" or "ideas" are created by God, but particular, sensible objects are created by man. But it is rather presumptive on the part of Gatsby to think that, like God, he should be in the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty. The tragedy of Gatsby is the result of his making Daisy the object of his romantic vision. Daisy is too small and Gatsby's vision is too immense; and in a vulgar, corrupt society, it is the man with a vision that meets his tragic end.

All the heroes of Fitzgerald entertain a romantic view of wealth. It is the romantic assumption that all the magic of the world can be had for money. Fitzgerald himself was strangely fascinated by the immensely rich. So, it is only natural that Gatsby, with an instinct towards his future glory, sets out in search of big money. His life takes a turn when he meets Dan Cody, a multi-millionaire, who takes a liking for Gatsby, finding that the young man is quick and extravagantly ambitious. As per Gatsby, Dan Cody's yacht represents "all the beauty and the glamour in the world." He inherits a legacy of twenty five thousand dollars after the death of Dan Cody. Then he goes into the army and rises to the positions of major and even receives "honours for valour extraordinary." It is while he is in the army that Gatsby meets Daisy and falls deeply in love with her. Daisy's parents are very rich and Daisy is "High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl...". Gatsby realises that Daisy will not be his unless he has a lot of wealth and pomp. He has to climb the ladder if he wants to make his romantic dream of Daisy a reality: "Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the side walks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees - he could climb to it, if he
climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder" (71). Gatsby's pursuit of money is inspired by his love for Daisy and his romantic yearning to suck the pap of life and gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder. As Roger Lewis says,

> It is true that from Wolfsheim to Nick Caraway, people are in the East to earn their livings, to pursue the shining secrets that only Mydas and Morgan and Maecenas knew. But Gatsby, with his boundless capacity for love, a capacity unique in the sterile world he inhabits, sees that the pursuit of money is a substitute for love. He knows himself well enough to see that his own attraction toward wealth is tied to his love for Daisy. The fact that Gatsby's money, like his love, should be self-made gives his description of her voice authority and depth.¹³

Gatsby goes to Daisy's house, at first with other officers from Camp Taylor and then all alone. He at once realises that Daisy belongs to a very rich family. But he doesn't feel the "indiscernible barbed wire" between him and Daisy, and on the other hand, he finds her exceedingly desirable. He is amazed by the beauty and richness of Daisy's house which excites his romantic imagination:

> what gave it an air of breathless intensity was that Daisy lived there – it was as Casual a thing to her as his tent out at camp was to him. There was a ripe mystery about it, a hint of bedrooms upstairs more beautiful and cool than other bed rooms, of gay and radiant activities taking place through its corridors, and of
romances that were not musty and laid away already in lavender, but fresh and breathing and redolent of this year's shining Motor Cars and of dances whose flowers were scarcely withered. (90)

But Gatsby is, all the time, aware that his presence at Daisy's house is only by a "colossal accident" (90). Of course, he has his own romantic vision of a glorious future as Jay Gatsby, but he is at present a penniless young man without a past. He knows that he has no real right to touch Daisy's hand, but he does not despise himself for this. He feels that he is truly in love with Daisy and that he has "Committed himself to the following of a grail" (91). This expression raises Gatsby's quest for wealth in order to win Daisy to a mythical dimension. Thus wealth becomes inextricably woven into Gatsby's romantic vision, as he becomes "overwhelmingly aware of 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" (91). Gatsby is also aware that his commitment to Daisy is sure to affect the purity of his romantic vision:

He knew that when he kissed this girl, and for ever 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 star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (71)
The tragedy that is to follow in Gatsby's life is very skillfully suggested here. These lines refer back to the statement that Gatsby sprang from his platonic conception of himself. The Platonic "idea" is absolute, and beyond time and space. It cannot be applied to particular expressions of the "idea" as they are bound to be imperfect, contradictory, and transient. The tragedy of Gatsby is that he tries to wed his vision to Daisy who is an expression of "perishable breath". This makes Gatsby's romantic vision foredoomed to failure. His extraordinary sensitivity is suggested by the reference to the vibrations of a tuning-fork that has been struck upon a star. Even earlier in the novel, it is said that Gatsby is as sensitive as a seismograph that registers earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This very sensitiveness goes against Gatsby, who is caught in the midst of corrupt, commercialized society that worships wealth for its own sake. Another tragic error committed by Gatsby is that he feels his vision to have become incarnated in Daisy. In Plato, the particular expression cannot totally manifest the "idea" or "form" which is absolute. In mistaking the incomplete for the complete, the imperfect for the perfect, Gatsby's vision degenerates into an illusion.

Gatsby associates himself with Wolfsheim, a bootlegger and swindler, and grows immensely rich in no time. The sole aim of making so much wealth is to win Daisy, whom he has lost to Tom Buchanan. Money for its own sake holds no interest for Gatsby. Gatsby's money is meant to make a dream real and even make it possible to repeat the past. But the money of Daisy and Tom is totally divested of any dream. As Roger Lewis says, "Gatsby's on the other hand, is new money, money in the processing of being
acquired. This newness gives the money some purpose and vitality; what Gatsby buys he buys for a purpose: to win Daisy. But there is a danger for Gatsby in this redeeming purposefulness. When he buys his fantastic house, he thinks he is buying a dream, not simply purchasing property."  

In his single-minded pursuit of the object of his vision, Gatsby forgets the limits of what money can do. Nor does he realize that he has corrupted his romantic vision by taking recourse to illegal and shifty means to win Daisy. Gatsby makes two colossal mistakes. First, he thinks that Daisy truly loves him and that her marriage with Tom is only a mistake. Second, he naively believes that he would win Daisy by turning into a "bootlegger gentleman." He expects Daisy to go and tell Tom that she has never loved him. He is taken aback when she quietly declares that she loves Tom also. Again, when Tom exposes the nature of Gatsby's wealth and Daisy begins to draw further and further into herself, Gatsby feels a deep sense of gloom:

It passed, and he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly, towards that lost voice across the room. (83)

Though Gatsby's dream is dead, he is utterly faithful to Daisy till the end. He takes the blame on himself for the accident in which Myrtle Wilson is killed, and he keeps a vigil through the night outside Daisy's house lest some
danger should befall her. He does not realize Daisy has reconciled herself to Tom, and Nick Carraway beautifully sums this up saying, "There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together" (89). It is but natural that Tom misinforms Wilson that Gatsby has been responsible for the death of Myrtle. When Gatsby lies dead, killed by Wilson, Daisy does not bother even to telephone and find out what has happened. As Nick Caraway says, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy - they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (106). Nick's observations explain the behaviour not only of Tom and Daisy but of the entire class to which they belong. In spite of all his drawbacks, Gatsby evokes our sympathy because the colossal vitality of his illusion is more real than the unfeeling reality of Daisy and Tom.

Fitzgerald's maturity of craftsmanship consists in creating a sympathetic and sensitive point of view in the character of Nick Carraway. This helped Fitzgerald distance himself from his characters, which makes it easy for the reader to make his own judgement about the incidents and the characters in the novel. But, at the same time, we should not overlook the fact that Fitzgerald is very much present in the novel. Gatsby fully manifests the romantic wonder and the heightened sensitivity to the promises of life which were an inalienable part of Fitzgerald himself. Fitzgerald had the same fascination for wealth as Gatsby and he too was almost on the point of losing his girl due to lack of money. Fitzgerald's commitment to Zelda was as total as that of Gatsby's to
Daisy. Gatsby cannot even imagine that Daisy loved Tom also. An incident which occurred at Riviera before Fitzgerald started writing *The Great Gatsby* clearly reveals his simple moralistic outlook. A French aviator called Edouard Josanne, a romantic and classically handsome young man, fell deeply and openly in love with Zelda. Fitzgerald was not so much shocked by this. But when Zelda in her turn began to show an interest in Josanne, Fitzgerald was deeply hurt and upset by her attitude. He went to the extent of creating noisy and undignified scenes to drive Josanne away. Zelda herself did not have any sense of guilt for what had happened, but the effect of this experience on Fitzgerald was very great. As Arthur Mizener observers,

> Sexual matters were always deadly serious to him, a final commitment to the elaborate structure of personal sentiments he built around anyone he loved, above all around Zelda. His attitude was the attitude of Gatsby toward Daisy, who was for him, after he had taken her as Zelda was for Fitzgerald, a kind of incarnation.\(^{15}\)

This explains Gatsby’s total commitment to Daisy, which is like following the grail. In spite of Nick Carraway’s harsh observation that he had “an unaffected scorn” for all that Gatsby stood for, Nick comes to feel Gatsby’s truthful and unflinching abidance in his own immense romantic vision and expresses his sympathy for him. Readers partake of Nick’s sympathy for Gatsby and this is surely the effect that Fitzgerald intended to produce in his novel. In this sense the novelist becomes the hero not merely because the autobiographical element enters the hero, but because the hero comes to manifest the author’s vision which is inseparable from him.
Gatsby is at the center of action of the novel, and he also forms the center of Fitzgerald's vision expressing itself in the novel. Gatsby is the only character in the novel who has a vision of life. The other characters surrounding Gatsby illuminate the essential truth in Gatsby's romantic vision. They are not only far from being visionary but also they are residents of the "valley of ashes," which represents a sordid reality as opposed to Gatsby's romantic vision. Nick Carraway is perhaps the only character who does not belong to the valley of ashes, but he is, as Kenneth Eble says, "too cool, too reasonable, too moral, too much both the realist and the observer, ever to do more than touch the centre. His honesty, which at most is fidelity to fact, will not permit him to remain there." Though he is able to understand Gatsby's extraordinary gift for hope and romantic readiness, he does not share those qualities and remains true to his own practical understanding of life. His observations about Daisy provide the reader with valuable insights into her character. This makes the reader realize how Gatsby erroneously bases his romantic vision on Daisy, who is beautiful and rich but without a sense of romantic wonder.

Nick Carraway is drawn to Jordan Baker, the golf champion, but he is too cautious to fall in love with her. He finds that Jordan is careless and "incurably dishonest," though he goes on to say that dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply. Nick's attitude to Jordan is in sharp contrast to the immense vitality of illusion cherished by Gatsby about Daisy. The single green light that Gatsby sees in Daisy's house inspires him with a hope of "orgiastic future". Nick has no such imaginative flight, and what he says of Jordan, even when he feels a sense of love for her, clearly reveals his practical
perception: "It was dark now, and as we dipped under a little bridge I put my arm around Jordan's golden shoulder and drew her towards me and asked her to dinner. Suddenly I wasn't thinking of Daisy and Gatsby anymore, but of this clean, hard, limited person, who dealt in universal skepticism, and who leaned back jauntily just within the circle of my arm" (55). It is surprising that after Gatsby's death, Nick bids a final goodbye to Jordan Baker. But it is very clear that neither Nick Carraway nor Jordan Baker disprove or disrupt Gatsby's overwhelming romantic vision.

It is Daisy and Tom Buchanan who form the rock of a sordid reality, bereft of any vision, on which Gatsby's romantic vision shatters itself. Both Daisy and Tom belong to the rich strata of American society and wealth is quite natural for them. The beautiful house of Daisy amazes Gatsby and causes a romantic wonder in him, but for Daisy "it was as casual a thing to her as his tent out at camp was to him" (90). Wealth seems to surround Daisy's youth and beauty with an aura of mystery. But, Daisy herself has no such view about herself, and she is surely not born out of a platonic conception of herself. Though she loves Gatsby, the separation from him when he goes to war, soon causes a nervous despair in her. She cannot wait for Gatsby for five long years. Though she feels sad and agitated at the prospect of getting married to Tom, she reconciles herself soon and yields herself to "a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars" (53) presented by Tom as a wedding gift. Daisy even loves Tom, though she very soon realizes that Tom indulges in extramarital affairs. Jordan Baker's words give a clear picture of Daisy's early love for Tom: "I saw them in Santa Barbara when they came back, and I
thought I had never seen a girl so mad about her husband. If he left the room for a minute she would look around uneasily, and say: ‘Where’s Tome gone?’ And wore the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door. She used to sit on the sand with his head in her lap by the hour, rubbing her fingers over his eyes and looking at him with unfathomable delight” (53). This is why she cannot declare that she never loved Tom as demanded by Gatsby. Daisy comes to feel that her married life with Tom is hollow and meaningless. A sense of ennui begins to pervade her life and this is clearly reflected in her words “what shall we do with ourselves this afternoon? ‘cried Daisy’, and the day after that, and next thirty years?” (74).

It is when caught in this state of mind that Daisy hears about Gatsby. She begins to revive her love for Gatsby with the hope that it would remove the painful hollowness of her life. She is also able to see that Gatsby is immensely rich and this naturally strengthens her desire for reviving her love for Gatsby. Gatsby himself is quite aware that Daisy’s voice is full of money and hopes that his glitter and wealth would make him attain his goal, which is Daisy, and would make it possible for him to repeat the past. This comes out clearly in the scene in which Gatsby takes Daisy round his mansion and tries to impress her with an act like throwing a huge pile of shirts before her. Fitzgerald’s masterly craft makes two very significant things clear to the reader in this scene. Even as Daisy begins to be overwhelmed by the show of Gatsby’s wealth, the wealth begins to lose all its significance for Gatsby because he feels that he has attained the object of his vision. Wealth is an end for Daisy in a very materialistic sense whereas it is only a means for Gatsby for turning his
romantic vision into reality: "He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Some times, 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"(61). Daisy is not even aware of Gatsby's romantic vision. She has no vision of any kind, and on the other hand, she is very much a part of her own class. When Tom exposes the illegal character of Gatsby's wealth, Daisy quickly withdraws herself from Gatsby and joins hands with Tom.

Tom Buchanan is the one character who has a very close connection with the valley of ashes which symbolizes hollow lives and empty relationships. As John Bicknell observers, "... a moment's glance at Fitzgerald's characters reminds us that in his vision of society we have only a choice of mindless evils or pathetic follies. Tom Buchanan, the wealthy ex-athlete from Yale, is a liar, a hypocrite, and a bully. The splendor of his surroundings is equalled only by his Stupidity and 'hard malice.'" 17

Tom is the diametrical opposite of the romantic spirit exemplified by Gatsby. He is not only conscious of his own class but obsessed with the fear that black races may overthrow the "Nordic supremacy". Extra marital affairs are a usual thing for him, but he is very possessive about Daisy at the same time. He carries on an affair with Myrtle Wilson and uses her merely for his own sensual gratification. Myrtle Wilson, who belongs to the lower middle class and who is dissatisfied with her own class and disillusioned with her own husband, entertains an ill-conceived dream of escaping from her dreary life into the world
of riches and glamour with the help of Tom Buchanan. The affair between Tom and Myrtle is selfish and sordid, but in the process it is Tom who dominates. Tom is so appalling conscious of his class that he does not allow Myrtle even to mention the name of Daisy. When Myrtle foolishly tries to asset herself, Tom mercilessly breaks her nose. He makes use of Myrtle's violent death as a means for avenging Gatsby. He also exploits, without any compunction, Myrtle's husband, George, as an instrument of revenge on Gatsby. Gatsby's violent end clearly indicts Tom as being morally responsible for Gatsby's murder.

Viewed against the background of the valley of ashes – a wasteland inhabited by Toms, Daises, and Myrtles – Gatsby magnificently rises far above them with his stupendous capability for a romantic vision and his unflinching commitment to a dream. Gatsby's romantic vision may not be realized and his dreams may border, for ever, on the verge of unreality, yet they are the vital elements of consciousness which give meaning to life and turn the wasteland fertile. As Arthur Mizener rightly observes,

Though this commitment to the wonder and the enchantment of dream is qualified by the dream's unreality ... The dream still the book's only positive good, the rest is a world of 'foul dust', like the valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat in ridges and hills and gardens' – through which one passed every evening on his way to the night world of East and West Egg.  

It is accepted by all that Fitzgerald closely reflected the spirit and aspirations of his generation. His sense of romantic wonder and his heightened
sensitivity to the promises of life were very much part of the consciousness of his times. Thus the dream of Gatsby becomes the American dream. Fitzgerald was basically a moralist and was critical about his own romantic vision. *The Great Gatsby* unmistakably demonstrates "the withering of the American dream." The American dream was essentially an exploration of the possibilities of life. But the material and the spiritual values operating at the personal and the social levels became hopelessly confused. A dream of life really springs from the realities of life, but it also shares the quality of an illusion as it happens to be a dream. It is only when the individual or society at large is able to recognize the hidden boundary separating the reality from the illusion that a dream becomes meaningful and holds the possibility of its being realized. The American dream failed and withered away mainly because of the failure in recognizing the hidden boundary. *The Great Gatsby* provides an unsparing and candid critique of the American dream as it existed in a corrupt period. The immense vitality of Gatsby's vision doesn't save him from his violent tragic end when faced with the kind of sordid reality represented by Tom. Engulfed by his own enormous dream, Gatsby fails to see the "foul dust" that surrounds him. As Marius Bewley rightly observes,

"Gatsby never succeeds in seeing through the sham of his world or acquaintances very clearly. It is of the essence of his romantic American vision that it should lack the seasoned powers of discrimination. But it invests those illusions with its own faith and thus it discovers its projected goodness in the frauds of its crippled
In making Daisy the object of his romantic vision, Gatsby runs the risk of corrupting his own vision and in fact becomes another Trimalchio with a modern idiom and setting. In order to get rich quickly, so that he can win Daisy, Gatsby degenerates to the level of engaging himself in bootlegging and other shady activities. He does not realize that the means of his pursuit of Daisy are corrupt and that the outcome cannot be according to his expectation. As John Kuehl observes,

Like *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Great Gatsby* is an American myth, as Gatsby rises from 'rags to riches', an ascent theoretically at least open to all Americans, he is a culture hero, in so far as the concepts of American civilization deceive him, convince him that money can buy the ideal life of his dreams and illusions, divert him from his quest for the transcendental, and force him into the position of Trimalchio, his is the tragedy of a romanticist in a materialistic society.  

Fitzgerald clearly suggests the reason for the failure of Gatsby's dream. In the first place, it is said that Gatsby springs from his platonic conception of himself. Then it is said that Gatsby takes it upon himself to engage himself in "the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty" (64) which is personified in Daisy. This naturally brings about corruption in the ideal vision and finally destroys it. Gatsby is unaware of this dialectic operating in Nature and causes the failure of his own dream. Fitzgerald raises the theme of
the failure of the American dream from a socio-cultural level to the level of a myth. Thus *The Great Gatsby* transcends the limitations of historical time and place and becomes, in terms of a myth, an expression of the unending quest for the romantic dream.

The way the American East and West are presented in *The Great Gatsby* also reinforces the mythical dimension of the novel. In fact, the contrast between the American East and West becomes very significant in explaining the main theme of the novel, which is the romantic quest of Gatsby. At the centre of the novel is the vital contrast between America's romantic Western past and the unromantic Eastern present. Both Nick Carraway and Gatsby belong to the West, and both find it difficult to adapt themselves to the way of life in the East. They live in West Egg, which is rather the unfashionable region of Long Island. Tom and Daisy live in East Egg, which is rich, fashionable, and materialistic in spirit. Talking about the Buchanans, Nick Carraway says "why they came East, I don't know." But Tom himself declares, "I'd be a God damned fool to live anywhere else" (20). Tom and Daisy represent the East's callous materialistic spirit and lack of the romantic wonder. Robert Ornstein observes, "Gatsby is a story of 'displaced persons who have journeyed Eastward in search of larger experience of life." Further he goes on to say, "To Fitzgerald ...the lure of the East represents a profound displacement of the American dream, a turning back upon itself of the historic pilgrimage towards the frontier which had in fact, created and sustained that dream. In Gatsby the once limitless western horizon is circumscribed by the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio." 21
The East, where Gatsby sees the green light, inspires in him a romantic hope of orgiastic future. But it only shatters his dream and leads to his violent end. The East Egg appears attractive as "the city seen for the first time, in its wild promise of all the mystery and beauty in the world." But it appears so only from a distance and when one goes near, it is seen to be an "unreal city" with "ash-grey men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (26).

It is important to note that Gatsby is not destroyed by his bootlegging and the under-world connections. Coming from the West, he is unable to comprehend the materialistic ethic of the East. Daisy's selfishness and Tom's hard malice lead to the murder of Gatsby. Gatsby, whose romantic belief is firmly rooted in the ability to repeat the disembodied past, utterly fails to see through the falsity of the present. Though he is faintly aware that each step towards the green light is going to make the romantic glow less bright, he persists in his efforts towards attaining his goal, namely, winning Daisy. Even as the story reaches its climax and culminates in the violent death of Gatsby, Fitzgerald, in a highly poetic language, suggests Gatsby's essential connection with the West which represents his simplicity of heart and his romantic dream:

I (Nick) became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes - a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment, man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled
into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (107)

Gatsby carries on the spirit of romantic wonder of those Dutch sailors, but the time and place are against him, and they turn the romantic promises of the future an illusory reflection of the past. However, we cannot say that Fitzgerald totally approved of the West or totally condemned the East. In fact, *The Great Gatsby* goes beyond the appraisals like the contemporary decadence of the East or the pristine virtues of the West.

The East-West dichotomy seen in the novel provides Fitzgerald with the way to explore his own romantic vision. As Robert Ornstein rightly observes,

> Gatsby is great, because his dream, however naive, gaudy, and unattainable, is one of the grand illusions of the race, which keep men from becoming too old or too wise or too cynical of their human limitations. Scott Fitzgerald's fable of East and West does not lament the decline of American civilization. It mourns the eternal lateness of the present hour suspended between the past of the romantic memory and the future of romantic promise which ever recedes before us. 22

It is not surprising to note that *The Great Gatsby* has been extensively evaluated critically with reference to its theme, structure, style and symbols. Fitzgerald demonstrates a very mature craftsmanship, which brings the novel close to perfection as an artistic expression, and elevates it to the
level of a classic. So, a discussion of *The Great Gatsby* will surely be incomplete without a discussion of the superb art that has gone into the making of the novel. As Lionel Trilling says, "Except once, Fitzgerald did not fully realize his powers... but (his) quality was a great one and on one occasion, in *The Great Gatsby*, it was as finely crystallized in art as it deserved to be." 23

Lionel Trillings words, in fact, echo the established critical opinion. *The Great Gatsby* has been uniformly acknowledged by reviewers and critics as "one of the finest of contemporary novels," and praised for its "thoroughly matured craftsmanship" and for its "high occasions of felicitous, almost magic craftsmanship." It must also be said that Fitzgerald found a story which lent itself to a mature artistic exploration. As Arthur Mizener points out, "...whatever its limitations, *The Great Gatsby* was a leap forward for him. He had found a story, which allowed him to exploit much more of his feeling about experience, and he had committed himself to an adequate and workable form which he never betrayed." 24

The excellence of *The Great Gatsby* is the result of the conscious effort of Fitzgerald, and definitely not an accidental occurrence. That Fitzgerald was trying to make a conscious effort at developing the most appropriate form and style for *The Great Gatsby* is clear from his own words to Maxwell Perkins: "I want to write something new something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned." This clearly shows that Fitzgerald was trying to move away from the novel of saturation, in which there cannot be any intricate pattern, and that he was trying to move closer to the novel of selection. Some of the short stories written by Fitzgerald between 1920 and 1924 reveal his increasing
felicity in handling the Jamesian technique. As Kenneth Eble observes, "Though the excellence of The Great Gatsby may seem startling when that novel is put beside This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned, it seems less startling when we observe how rapidly Fitzgerald developed as a writer and how much writing — and some of it very good writing — he did between 1920 and 1924." 25

The book reviews written by Fitzgerald during this period also show him becoming keenly aware of "selective delicacy" as a necessary principle in fiction. His review of Grace Flandrau's Being Respectable reveals his comprehensive grasp of the methods of saturation and selection. It also indicates Fitzgerald's critical inclination towards the method of selection. In a particular context in a review, he uses the expressions, "muddy lakes" and "clear stream" to suggest novels of saturation and novels of selection respectively.

Many of the reviewers of The Great Gatsby, while commenting on the technique of the novel, suggest that The Great Gatsby emulated the Jamesian model. Even T.S. Eliot, in a letter to Fitzgerald, clearly suggested that The Great Gatsby successfully adapted the Jamesian technique. But there is no evidence to show that Fitzgerald was directly influenced by Henry James. As James Miller says, "Although Fitzgerald, at the time of writing The Great Gatsby, was apparently not under the direct influence of James, he could have felt an immense indirect attraction through any number of writers who themselves had gone to schools to the master." 26
It is clear that by 1925 Fitzgerald's enthusiasm for Wells, Mackenzie, and Mencken waned and that he was being greatly drawn to writers like James Joyce, Willa Cather and Joseph Conrad. These writers were, directly or indirectly, indebted to Henry James for the novel of selection. Under the influence of these writers, and especially that of Joseph Conrad, Fitzgerald evolved his own concept of the novel as a work of art. Sometime after he had finished writing *The Great Gatsby* and before its publication, Fitzgerald told Charless C. Baldwin that he had come to realize fully that, "the writer, if he has any aspirations toward art, should try to convey the feel of his scenes, places and people directly – as Conrad does, as a few Americans (notably Willa Cather) are already trying to do." In referring to Willa Cather and Joseph Conrad, Fitzgerald was probably suggesting the two novelists from whom he had derived his most intense aspiration toward art.

It is quite probable that Fitzgerald read at this time Willa Cather's essay "The Novel Demeuble" and a review of Percy Lubbock's "The craft of Fiction" published in *The New Republic*. Lubbock's work, which is mainly devoted to proving the undeniable importance of the point of view in fiction, could have given an immense impetus to Fitzgerald's meditations on the form of the novel. He must also have learnt from Willa Cather's essay about the crucial importance of selection to the novel. But, it was Conrad's preface to his novel *The Nigger of the Narcissus* that seems to have provided Fitzgerald with a profound insight into the essential elements that go into the craft of a novel of selection. He realized that the task of the writer was "to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see." He also came to perceive
that the writer should make every effort to remove all obstruction separating the reader from the actual scene. Conrad's wonderful phrase "the magic suggestiveness of music" must have greatly affected the imagination of Fitzgerald, and *The Great Gatsby* is perhaps the finest achievement of its kind in the art of "magic suggestiveness." Summing up Fitzgerald's indebtedness to Conrad in the matter of the craft of fiction, James Miller says,

In a comprehensive sense, Fitzgerald was indebted to Conrad for a new approach to his craft, for his high 'aspirations toward art', the difficult art of 'magic suggestiveness'. He was indebted to Conrad also for more specific elements: for the use of style, or language to reflect the theme; for the use of the modified first person narration; and for the use of deliberate 'confusion' by the re-ordering of the chronology of events. ²⁸

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald gave up the omniscient point of view that he had used in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*. He employed first person narration, and the narrator is a sensitive and sympathetic observer who objectively and comprehensively presents the theme to the reader. Nick Carraway is the narrator of the story of *The Great Gatsby* and he is also an integral part of the story. Fitzgerald has used the character of Nick Caraway with a consummate skill. As Arthur Mizener rightly observes,

Nick Carraway, Fitzgerald's narrator, is, for the book's structure, the most important character. Quite apart from his power to concentrate the story and its theme into a few crucial scenes and thus increase its impact, a great deal of the book's colour and
subtlety comes from the constant play of Nick's judgement and feelings over the events. Fitzgerald had struggled awkwardly with all sorts of devices in his earlier books to find way to get these things in without intervening in his own person and destroying our dramatic perception of them.29

At the outset of the novel certain details about Nick Carraway, who provides the point of view of the novel, are given, which help the reader accept willingly the judgement of Nick Carraway with regard to the people and incidents in the novel. It is said that Nick Carraway has remembered his father's words of advice that "all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you have had" (15). So he is inclined to reserve all judgements. He is also aware that "a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth." (15). He also admits that his tolerance has a limit and that after his return from the East, after Gatsby's death, he wants the world "to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention for ever" (15). These words reveal that, coming from the West, Nick Caraway has a strong sense of order. These details define Nick Carraway's perspective of life from which he looks at Gatsby, Daisy, Tom and others.

It is interesting to note that Nick Carraway, while he says that Gatsby "represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn,"(15) also says that there is something gorgeous about Gatsby, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life. He is not only aware of an extraordinary gift for hope and a romantic readiness expressed in the personality of Gatsby but also of "what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams" (15). This account of
Gatsby, given by Nick Carraway, is accepted by the reader because he is fairly convinced of Nick Carraway’s capability for objective assessment of people and things. Fitzgerald very skillfully integrates in the character of Nick Carraway the criticism as well as the approval of Gatsby’s romantic vision. He does not allow himself to intervene at any stage into the drama that unfolds before the eyes of Nick Carraway. This is a hallmark of the maturity of Fitzgerald’s narrative technique.

It is from Nick Carraway that the reader learns about the basic insincerity of Daisy, about the carelessness of Jordan Baker, and about the crude and aggressive nature of Tom. So when he shouts across to Gatsby, “they are a rotten crowd, you are worth the whole damn bunch put together” (93), the reader is prepared to agree with him. It is Nick Carraway who exposes the corruption at the heart of the life of Tom and Daisy. The point of view in The Great Gatsby, which is of a sensitive observer, makes the fundamental innocence and the measureless vitality of Gatsby’s dream stand in sharp contrast with the selfish, careless, and corrupt life of Tom and Daisy. As Nick Carraway meets Tom unexpectedly several months after the death of Gatsby, he becomes, as it were, endowed with a deep vision into the essential nature of Tom and Daisy. He succinctly expresses his understanding, saying, “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made” (189).
Tom and Daisy are clearly indicted for being responsible for Gatsby's destruction - Tom for bringing about the physical death of Gatsby and Daisy for shattering his romantic dream. The final summing up given by Nick Carraway identifies Gatsby’s romantic dream with the American dream as a whole. As Arthur Mizener says, “The last two pages of the book make overt Gatsby’s embodiment of the American dream as a whole by identifying his attitude with the awe of the Dutch sailors when ‘for a transitory enchanted moment’, they found something commensurate to (their) capacity for wonder, in the ‘fresh, green breast of the new world.’” Though Fitzgerald was aware that the romantic vision of Gatsby shared the quality of a dream's unreality, he was equally aware that it was this romantic dream that redeemed man’s life by preventing it from becoming a wasteland of emotional bankruptcy. Fitzgerald, with his deft handling of the point of view in the novel, makes his theme clear and impressive.

Besides the superb technique and style, the symbols, almost intuitively worked into the texture of the novel, have drawn a lot of critical attention. It is the undeniable greatness of *The Great Gatsby* that its theme is clearly and consistently worked out at the symbolic level. The symbols are so integral to the texture of the novel that one can conclude that Fitzgerald did not consciously work at creating those symbols. Fitzgerald’s integrity of imagination and intuitive way of working were mainly responsible for the creation of the symbols which so clearly define the theme and enhance the depth of meaning of the novel.
Gatsby’s romantic vision, extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness, and a heightened sensitivity to the promises of life blend together to form the basic theme of *The Great Gatsby*. But Gatsby’s romantic vision is placed in the midst of an unfeeling, commercial, corrupt society which denies the attainability of the dream. Gatsby, in fact, expresses Fitzgerald’s romantic vision, but we should remember Fitzgerald was satirical and critical about his own romantic vision. He almost saw it as a projection of the past, and so every effort at attaining the romantic dream makes one recede into the past. The symbolic structure of *The Great Gatsby* is so naturally comprehensive that all these aspects are expressed without a touch of made-up intricacy.

The symbols that are very significant to the main motif of the novel are the green light, the valley of ashes, and the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg. The green light at the end of Daisy’s dock has an enchanting effect on Gatsby and symbolizes his romantic vision. As Nick Carraway says, the green light also stands for “the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. ...I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, some where back in that vast obscurity beyond the city” (107). But the green light also symbolizes the timeless quality of man’s capacity for wonder. This is made clear in Nick Carraway’s musing about “a fresh, green breast of the new world” which once drew out the Dutch sailors’ capacity for wonder ” (107).
Another aspect of *The Great Gatsby* which stands in sharp contrast with the romantic dream of Gatsby is the atmosphere of moral horror and disillusion. This atmosphere is created by symbols and images of waste, desolation and futility. The landscape that lies half way between West Egg and New York is charged with symbolic over tones: "This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (25-26). This desolate area of land, bounded on one side by a small foul river, is of great significance in the novel.

All the main characters of the novel pass through the valley of ashes and George and Myrtle, Wilson actually live in the valley. Tom Buchanan, with his extramarital affair with Myrtle, must also be said to belong to the valley of ashes in spirit though his class and enormous wealth make him physically belong to East Egg. As John W Bicknell points out, the valley of ashes is "the valley of Dry Bones, the Waste Land, the dusty replica of modern society, where ash-grey men are crumbling, like Eliot's hollow men."^31

George Wilson, with his lack of will and energy, looks pathetic. Myrtle Wilson, dreaming of life of money, glitter and pleasure, fondly hopes of using Tom as a ladder for climbing into the upper class of society. But Tom Buchanan subjects both George and Myrtle to a heartless exploitation. When Myrtle claims her right to mention the name of Daisy, Tom breaks her nose and rudely reminds her of her position in society. This act of Tom Buchanan stands in total contrast with Gatsby's taking upon himself the responsibility for Myrtle's
death. Again it is very sad and shocking that Daisy should leave Gatsby in the lurch and join hand with Tom Buchanan. The atmosphere pervading the valley of ashes makes one become aware of the painful truth that love is not possible in the valley of ashes. Gatsby, who embodies Fitzgerald’s romantic vision, meets with a violent end brought about by Tom Buchanan, who exploits George Wilson as an instrument of revenge on Gatsby. Tom and George represent two extreme points of the valley of ashes.

It is a matter of great significance that there is a disinterested observer of all that takes place in the valley of ashes in the form of the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg:

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic, their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. ... But his eyes dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on, over the solemn dumping ground (26).

It is significant to note that Dr. T. J. Eckleburg is an oculist who, by his profession, is to correct the distortions in human vision. Human vision is considered defective when it is not able to see things as they are. If defect in vision can be regarded as disorder, correcting it would mean restoring order. When symbolically considered, the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg represent the human capacity for seeing things as they are. The valley of ashes is the result
of distorted sense of the reality of life. Nick Carraway, as a sympathetic and sensitive observer, presents an objective account of the lives of Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, and others including himself. But as he becomes an inseparable part of the emotional life in the story, there must be another point of observation. The eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg fulfil this role of an omniscient observer who stands almost detached from what goes on before him. But the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg are in a way concerned with the life in the valley of ashes because they are said to “brood on over the solemn dumping ground.” The details like “they look out of no face,” and “a non-existent nose” make the symbol more profound. Some critics, in an attempt to look at the symbol from a religious point of view, have suggested that the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg stand for God. It is interesting to note that George Wilson, distraught and grief-stricken at the sudden violent death of his wife, says, “You may fool me, but you can’t fool God,” and goes on to add that “God sees everything” (96). At this point, there is a reference to the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg.

Fitzgerald, who was a romantic, was also a moralist at heart. This made him look at his own romantic vision in a satirical and critical way. Though Gatsby embodies Fitzgerald’s romantic vision, the method he adopts in order to achieve the objective of his romantic vision cannot be treated with approval. In fact, Daisy shrinks away from Gatsby in horror when his bootlegging and shady activities are exposed by Tom Buchanan. Tom and Daisy are also corrupt as they are utterly selfish, unfeeling, and careless. Gatsby’s romantic dream gets shattered for two reasons. The first reason is Daisy and Tom. The second is the inherent flaw in Gatsby’s vision, his unethical practices to grow enormously
rich in a very short time. So we should say that there is a distortion of vision both at the East Egg and the West Egg, though the enormous vitality of Gatsby’s makes one cry out with Nick Carraway, “they are a rotten crowd, ...you are worth the whole damn bunch put together” (93). Thus we see that the eyes of Dr. T.J.E. symbolize, as all real symbols do, a process of alert and choiceless observation of “what is.” It is through such an observation that order can be restored.

In conclusion one can say that *The Great Gatsby* has transcended the limitations of time and place and has become a classic with a perennial message for mankind by embodying Fitzgerald’s romantic vision and a criticism of it, at the thematic, structural, and symbolic levels with a sheer excellence of craftsmanship.
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