

A Study of Fitzgerald

—Gatsby's Death and the Loss of the American Dream—

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INTRODUCTION

Francis Sott Key Fitzgerald was born at 3 : 30 in the afternoon on September 24, 1896, at 481 Laurel Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota, and he was baptized either eleven or twelve days later. When he was a year-and-a-half, his father Edward failed in his business, and his family went east to Buffalo where Edward Fitzgerald worked as a salesman. The Fitzgeralds stayed in St. Paul until 1898 when they moved to Buffalo for the first time. In 1901 they moved to Syracuse and in 1903 back to Buffalo again. In September 1905, when Fitzgerald was nine, his family moved to 71 Highland Avenue. The first year after their return to St. Paul the Fitzgeralds lived with Grandmother McQuillan, who had sold her house on Summit and moved to lesser quarters on nearby Laurel. Thus Fitzgerald was propelled into the Summit Avenue community which, at the time, meant fashionable, residential St. Paul. Fitzgerald's story began in the city of St. Paul, whose promise of fortune drew his parents to it by separate ways.

Fitzgerald entered St. Paul Academy (a nonsectarian prep school that had been established in 1900) at September 1908 and the fall of 1909, his second year at the St. Paul Academy, he began publishing in the school magazine. His English teacher at St. Paul Academy encouraged him to write. His first contribution, 'The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage,' bespoke the influence of Gaston Leroux and Anna Katherine Green, whose detective fiction he had been devouring and analysing. Later he recalled the exaltation of his literary debut. The lack of a sense of place in his boyhood affected his own life and the lives of his fictional brothers.¹ In 1911, Aunt Annabel McQuillan provided the money to send Fitzgerald to the Newman School which was founded in 1900 by Catholic laypeople, the Bostonians Dr. and Mrs. Jesse A. Locke, a select Roman Catholic academy in Hackensack, New Jersey. Consequently, Fitzgerald was an Irish Catholic, in fact. In 1913, when he was seventeen, he was admitted into Princeton University which was founded in 1746 as a Presbyterian college and is now one of the most desired and desirable places in

America in which students study through four years of their youth, and next year, he associated with John Peale Bishop who was the West Virginia-born poet, a close friend of Fitzgerald at Princeton and helpful as the teacher of poetry for him, and with Edmund Wilson who was the chief editor of *The Nassau Literary Magazine* and had the composed intelligence and critical sense, and both of them exerted influence on his literary career. He would be attracted to and instructed by the erudition of Edmund Wilson and John Peale Bishop. Also Fitzgerald was an active letter writer, and the most frequent location for letters is 'Princeton' which he loved from the first.

At the time Fitzgerald began to write seriously, his Princeton days were equal to his years of literary apprentice. At that time he fell in love with Ginevra King, who was a very rich girl like Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* which is his best novel. Ginevra King with a startling brunette beauty was to become the prototype of the elusive "golden girl" who was to fire the imagination of so many of Fitzgerald's male protagonists. It seemed to Fitzgerald that Ginevra was looking beyond him while all his desires were centred on her. Therefore, in the long run, his love with her broke because of his poorness, and for this reason he felt that he lived in another world different from the rich class which she belonged to. Ginevra had been the princess for whom he had sought fame and honours at Princeton in the spirit of a knight errant. She belonged to the moneyed aristocracy of Chicago and as such was beyond his grasp. To her he seemed a weak reed to lean upon. His longing for Ginevra turned into Gatsby's timeless and untouchable love for Daisy Fay.

At twenty-one Fitzgerald joined the army to go Fort Leavenworth in the State of Kansas. His youth on the plains of Kansas was a severe period. And at twenty-two he fell in love with beautiful Zelda Sayre, who was to be his wife. Zelda was the very incarnation of a Southern belle. Her flaw was lack of discipline. Next year, he was discharged from military service, but, in reality, Fitzgerald had not been to the front.

He was living in the American dream —youth, beauty, wealth, early success —and he believed in these things so passionately that he endowed them with a certain grandeur. He and Zelda were a perfect pair, like a shepherd and shepherdess in a Meissen.² You could hardly imagine one without the other, and you wanted to preserve them and protect them and hope their idyl would never end. Fitzgerald got married to Zelda in rectory of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City at April 3, 1920. His greatest novel, *The Great Gatsby*, contains many splendid illuminations and criticisms of American way of life at the end of the First World War.

With fall coming on, he and Zelda moved to a house on Goodrich Avenue in St. Paul. Fitzgerald sensed a corruption in the rich and mistrusted their might. Gatsby's love for

Daisy was Fitzgerald's love for Zelda — and before her, Ginevra — decked out in a Keatsian prose. The many faces of Fitzgerald appear in his novels and short stories. The 'Americanness' of the novel is emphasized by his literary life and his own dream in the Jazz Age of 1920's.

In *The Great Gatsby* which is said one of the key books of the twentieth century, Rudolph Miller is born again as Jimmie Gatz, while Blatchford Sarnemington is renamed Jay Gatsby, a man whose world is shaped and sustained by the pursuit of romantic illusions. T. S. Eliot called this novel a "remarkable" book and "the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James." Jimmie's decision to change his name, Fitzgerald tells us, was at "the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career." That career began, as we know from "Absolution," when an eleven-year-old boy named Rudolph made up his mind to commit himself to the moral world of his own imagination, that is, a world where he could be "safe from God." He is an imaginative young boy and lives in the romantic world.

Jay Gatsby has "some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life," in other words, "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness." The theme of "imagined glory" is dramatized through the his experiences. On this subject, in chapter I of the novel, Fitzgerald describes clearly as follows :

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, *some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life*, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the 'creative temperament' —it was *an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness* such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again.³ (Italics mine)

In this respect, Jay Gatsby can be completely said the rebirth of Rudolph Miller in the brave new world of Romanticism. He indulges his romantic fantasies. Gatsby's background is a midwestern Catholic boyhood.

The Great Gatsby begins, by the retrospective words of the narrator Nick Carraway who is a Middle-Westerner, in the spring of 1922. Nick is the confessor and censor who upholds the established order. In the spring of 1922 he rents a house on Long Island, and near by live Nick's cousin Daisy Buchanan and her wealthy, burly, innately heartless hus-

band Tom Buchanan, whose mistress is Myrtle Wilson. On his right in a gorgeous and splendid mansion lives Jay Gatsby, very rich too, mysterious as his rare smile "with a quality of eternal reassurance in it." Nick Carraway, a midwesterner, has come to New York to learn the bond business and lives in the cottage next to the Gatsby's mansion. Gatsby is unable to find the sense of tradition and stability he seeks in his "ancestral" mansion built by a brewer who had wanted to establish a baronial manor and Nick Carraway rejects the transient life of the East for the Middle West where houses are called for decades by a family's name.⁴ While visiting the Buchanans, Nick meets Jordan Baker, a typical flapper girl flawed by an incurable dishonesty; from her he learns that Gatsby was in love with Daisy who is the Golden Girl five years before the novel begins. That is, Gatsby has been yearning after Daisy for five years and is obsessed with her.

At Gatsby's request, Nick arranges a reunion between Gatsby and Daisy who is a sweet destroyer. At the center of his vision of the ideal is Daisy Fay, who is more to him than a particular woman; rather she is the embodiment of the rich life he seeks, and with a religious fervor he worships and pursues her.⁵ She cannot, however, break away from Tom, and she learns that Gatsby's fabulous wealth comes from racketeering and bootlegging. When Daisy and Gatsby are driving back to Long Island from a party in New York, they accidentally run down Myrtle Wilson and do not stop. Gatsby unconsciously reveals to Nick that Daisy was driving the car at that time. But to protect her, Gatsby allows it to be assumed that he was driving the car when the fatal accident occurred. Being driven mad by his wife's death, George Wilson, convinced that Gatsby had been Myrtle's lover and that he had deliberately caused her death, shoots Gatsby and then himself. So the Buchanans survive in this corrupt reality of merciless and cruel broken society.

The disastrous events of the summer of 1922 which bring Gatsby's brave quest of the holy grail to a close are narrated through Nick's point of view. Gatsby sacrifices his precious youth on the altar of his romantic dream, unaware that it is composed of the transient love affairs of the past that never existed. Nick is a kind of Middle Western moral exemplum. In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald uses Nick Carraway to present a moral perspective that is based upon "a sense of the fundamental decencies" rather than the more narrow doctrinal judgments of a specific religious code. In other words, Middle West is the heart-land for Nick and maybe all the young idealists in modern America. This part of America symbolizes the naiveté, the innocence and the human spirit of the frontier in America. Nick stands for the older values that prevailed in the Middle West before World War I. He is moral commentator. Tom and Daisy live in the world of the corruption of the fabulous life of the rich class, and on the other hand Gatsby lives in the world of the

romantic dream of the unlimited vitality among the East society symbolizing the material civilization in America. Fitzgerald always used his father's standards as a moral touchstone, and they pointed up the limitations of materialism in American society.

In ironic juxtaposition to the gorgeous world of Long Island is the symbol introduced in chapter II, that is to say, what is called a "waste land," half-way between West Egg and New York as follows :

About half-way between West Egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. *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*. Occasionally aline of grey cars . . . their obscure operations from your sight.

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.⁶ (Italics mine)

Fitzgerald's notable example of the wasteland, his metaphor for the desolation of modern life, is the "valley of ashes", representing the reality of American industrialism, that lies midway between West Egg and New York City. The valley of ashes which is a desolate area and a godless world represents the human situation in an age of chaos and the grim reality of American society in 1920's. The valley of ashes poisoning the American landscape with waste produced in the manufacture of wealth symbolizes, in other words, the mental desolation of modern society and modern industry in America of the Jazz Age. East Egg, where the Buchanans live, is the stronghold of inherited wealth and West Egg, where Gatsby lives, is the home of the *nouveaux riches*. In this connection, Robert F. McDonnell says precisely about the moral aspects of two Eggs in the novel as follows :

Just as Owl Eyes represents the focusing of the attention of God on Gatsby's idealistic but vain life and just as the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg represent the brooding of the deity over the waste land of Tom's, Daisy's, and Gatsby's

lives, the peninsulas represent the omniscient, all-encompassing and largely disinterested God who sees the folly of society as a whole and of mankind in general.⁷

The presiding deity of the ash heaps is symbolized by the painted eyes of an oculist's advertisement. Also, in this point, Joan M. Allen says as follows :

Dr. Eckleburg keeps his vigil over the wasteland, Fitzgerald's metaphor for the desolation of modern life; he is an anti-God in this sterile world of false values. This representation of God as an advertisement points up the sort of distortion of religious values that had taken place in America in the years after World War I, when the association of business with religion was common.⁸

Symbolically in the cultural history, the fact is that the "green breast of the new world" comes to be the "valley of ashes." And also, ash-grey men represent, not only symbolically but also ironically, the mental situation of agony and disturbance in the restless society of the Jazz Age. It is a physical desert that represents the spiritual desolation of modern American society. The Valley of Ashes is a hideous image of a spiritually dead world and is a prominent result of American industrial progress.

At the first of chapter III, American young men's and women's manners of life in the Jazz Age and the turbulent emotions of their younger generation in the 1920's of America are vividly described as follows :

There was music from my neighbour's house through the summer nights. *In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne* his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On weekends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing—brushes and hammers and garden—shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.⁹ (Italics mine)

Fitzgerald highlights the lavishness of young men's and women's affairs, but he ironically regards youngsters as 'moths' aimlessly drifting and swarming for the light. These young men and women have no sense of responsibility, and cling to other's sleeves. Fitzgerald suggests that those who have no consciousness and fixed will are no more than base insects like moths, and at the same time, the word "moths" represents ironically the real mode of life among the rich in New York. *The Great Gatsby* is the rest of the story of the career of Jay Gatsby which began when he vainly rejected God for the tenets of a materialistic society and was drawn like a moth to the fatal carnival lights.¹⁰ He characterized the mood of the 1920s as that of a whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure.

In chapter IV, Gatsby's gorgeous car symbolizes the absurdity created by fabulous wealth to fulfill the American dream of individual material success. Later, it is also the fatal car that leads indirectly to Gatsby's sad death. Here the attentive reader can see Fitzgerald's sense of scrupulously careful construction at work in the use of the symbolic death-car to prove the theory that an ideal based on American materialism alone is eventually destructive and that life is an empty dream itself. That is to say, Gatsby commits himself to the false values of materialism in America.

Nick learns later that Gatsby does not exist, or rather exists only as the invention of James Gatz—the son of a shiftless Middle Western farmer. James Gatz recreates himself according to his romantic conception of the ideal man. Nick thinks of Gatsby in chapter VI as follows :

I suppose he (Gatsby)'d had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from *his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he 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.¹¹ (Italics mine)

Like Rudolph Miller in "Absolution," Gatsby has invented an entirely new person, and in becoming the new person he has given up the old heritage of Middle Westerner's way of

life, creating instead a brave new world of fabulous wealth and romantic illusion in the world of East Egg. Gatsby's romantic dream is, that is to say, the American dream of achieving an ideal state by accumulating fabulous individual wealth. *The Great Gatsby* is often said to be about the American Dream but perhaps there are two discernible dreams, that is, the dream of material success and the dream of spiritual success.

Gatsby intently wants to take off a sense of time in order to obliterate completely the five years Tom and Daisy have been married, and he has an absolute faith in his own ability to repeat his lost past, in spite of Nick's true statement that this is impossible. There is an obvious irony in Gatsby's wish to repeat the past. This romantic disregard for corrupt reality is at the heart of the American dream as well as Gatsby's own, in the belief that fabulous wealth is the most important thing to get back and fix eternally, the transitory, illusory qualities of youth and beauty of human beings. That is to say, Gatsby's way of life is based on a constant battle between splendid dream and inanimate reality in which dream must always lose.

Eternal youth, beauty, and wealth are permanently exhibited in the romantic quality of Gatsby, and it is this splendid aspect of Gatsby that most attracts Daisy's heart. As D. S. Savage says, the fact is, in *The Great Gatsby*, that "Money is valued, not for itself, but for the entry it purchases to an earthly paradise of leisure far removed from the stresses of real life: an illusory region of eternal youth."¹² The essential Daisy is as incorporeal as that voice whispering empty promises. After a token acknowledgment 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." In the flashback to Gatsby's mental bondage with Daisy five years before, the mystic elements that have contributed to Gatsby's romantic dream are revealed clearly, showing eternal youth and beauty to be inextricably bound up with fabulous wealth. Daisy gleams like silver with an incomparable beauty created and preserved by sufficient wealth. She is the symbol of the grail Gatsby is committed to pursue. Gatsby's dream divides into three basic and related parts: the desire to repeat the past, the desire for wealth, and the desire for incarnation of "unutterable visions" in the material earth.

Daisy is the symbol of Gatsby's dream and she gleams to his eyes as the green light. She is his reason for living, and also he finds his life worth living for her. She is literally the *femme fatale* for Gatsby. Green, the color of endless hope, promise and rebirth, symbolizes, for Gatsby, Daisy and his pursuit of the ideal. The green light at the end of her dock toward which Gatsby raises his arms in a ritualistic gesture of invocation is a symbol of the "orgiastic future" that he envisions with Daisy. That is to say, the green light at the

end of Daisy's dock is a symbol of romantic possibility for Gatsby. He is keeping a vigil over the votive green light at the end of Daisy's dock with the sacramental reverence. However, Daisy is not as she was. In this connection, Fitzgerald describes at the end of chapter VII as follows:

He (Gatsby) put his hands in his coat pockets and turned back eagerly to his scrutiny of the house, *as though my presence marred the sacredness of the vigil. So I walked away and left him standing there in the moonlight —watching over nothing.*¹³ (Italics mine)

In brief, Daisy is nothing for Gatsby, and in contrast to the corruption which underlies Daisy's world, Gatsby's essential incorruptibility is heroic. The green light assumes a degenerative significance as the novel progresses. The physical presence of the real Daisy dispels, in some measure, the magical apparition he has conjured up in his dream. In a sense, Daisy comes to be only a symbol like a green light in Gatsby's heart.

At the end of chapter VIII, Fitzgerald is, through Nick's standpoint as the narrator of the novel, commenting on Gatsby's state of disillusioned mind and the loss of his dream immediately before his sad death as follows:

I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that *he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream.* He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. *A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about. . . . like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees.*¹⁴ (Italics mine)

Nick's main theme is the identity with this new continent, the relation of youthful dream and romantic promise to the spirit of America itself. Gatsby's corruption is thus related to the historical collapse of the American spirit, the withering of the early American idealism by its involvement with a materialistic civilization of American society. Gatsby represents the irony of American history and the corruption of the American dream. He has the impossible idealism trying to realize itself, in the gross materiality.

It is realized that Fitzgerald is a good social historian in the world of his novels. In view of this, the historical origins of Gatsby's romantic dream are revealed to Nick in the last chapter of the novel as follows:

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a *fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made 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.*¹⁵ (Italics mine)

Gatsby's green light is compared to the green breast of the new world, and the import of this passage lies in the implied comparison of Gatsby's incorruptible dream to the dream of the New World, that is to say, the American dream. There is the historical identification of Gatsby's dream with the dream of Dutch sailors who came over to the American continent and settled there, that is, the "last and greatest of all human dreams" and also there is the wonderful association of Gatsby's transient dream with the dream of the Jazz Age in America. Gatsby's dream which exists in the green light at the end of chapter I is made parallel to the "green breast of the new world" at the end of the last chapter, relating Gatsby's vision with that of Dutch sailors who discovered the promise of a new continent in the historical background. At the end of the novel, however, the sacred green light comes to be nothing more than a light burning at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock. The green color symbolizes hope and rebirth for Gatsby and also means his pursuit of the ideal in life.

Marius Bewley says about the American dream in the historical point of view as follows:

Historically, the American dream is anti-Calvinistic, and believes in the goodness of nature and man. It is accordingly a product of the frontier and the West rather than of the Puritan Tradition.¹⁶

This historical definition of the American dream is very useful in studying the essence of

Gatsby's dream. Fitzgerald implies, through Nick Carraway, that the myth of the American dream of a utopian world in which man may hope for equality and justice and freedom has been displaced by the prosaic, immutable realities of the development of the republic as it is recorded in American history. And also David F. Trask says about the American dream as follows:

The American dream consisted of the belief that people of talent in this land of opportunity and plenty could to a fairly well-defined set of behavioral rules—rules set forth in a relatively comprehensive form as long ago as the eighteenth century by Benjamin Franklin. In addition, Americans easily assumed that spiritual satisfaction would automatically accompany material success. The dream was to be realized in an agrarian civilization, a way of life presumed better—far better—than the urban alternative. James Gatz of North Dakota had dreamed a special version of the American dream. As a child, Gatz set about preparing to realize his dream. He early decided that he could contemplate future glory so long as he scheduled his life properly and adhered to a set of general resolves.¹⁷

To Gatsby, the enchantment of the East society leads to a basic displacement of the American dream, a turning back upon itself of the historical pilgrimage towards the frontier spirit which had created and sustained that dream. In this point, Rose Adrienne Gallo says about the American dream as follows:

The most beguiling promise of the new world was freedom from religious persecution, and the material deprivation enforced by class discrimination. *The American dream was based on ambition, industry, and well-defined rules of conduct.* And, so long as the dream was allied with the religious motive, the impulse toward its attainment produced men of strength and character whose success contributed to the prosperity and greatness of the nation.¹⁸

(Italics mine)

The future to which Gatsby aspired is indeed in the past. The American dream had been nurtured in the agrarian past that was no more.

There is the moral conflict between East and West Egg in which Fitzgerald relates the corruption of Gatsby's dream to the moral conflict between East which represents the

industrial civilization of American society and West which does the rustic moral of American one as follows :

In one sense the moral conflict in the novel is resolved into a conflict between East and West—the ancient and corrupt East and the raw but virtuous West. Nick Carraway attributes his moral attitude to his Middle Western background. At the end of the story, he asserts, “I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.” It is perhaps subtly significant that Tom and Daisy live in *East Egg*, since they are really better adapted to Eastern life than Nick and Gatsby, who live in *West Egg*. Perhaps Fitzgerald in dramatizing the conflict of East and West was remembering Edmund Wilson’s advice : “it seems to me a great pity that he (Fitzgerald) has not written more of the west ; it is perhaps the only milieu that he thoroughly understands ; when he approaches the east, he brings to it the standards of the wealthy west — the preoccupation with displays, the love of magnificence and jazz, the vigorous social atmosphere of amiable flappers and youths comparatively unpoisoned as yet by the snobbery of the east.” Nick’s experience in the East results in his return with relief to the West.¹⁹

In brief, East Egg represents the urban sophistication and the corruption of the civilized society, and the East does the dishonesty and seductive attractiveness of established wealth, while West Egg represents the simple morality and virtues and the West does the romantic idealism and naive power of the *nouveau riche*. On this subject, in so far as Gatsby symbolizes the simplicity of human spirit Fitzgerald associated with the Middle West, he is really a ‘great’ man, and also he represents American spirit itself. The conflict between East and West Egg represents the collision of corrupt reality and romantic dream which is dramatized when Gatsby endeavours to build up his imaginative world of ineffable gaudiness through the crass materials of the real world. Fitzgerald’s fable of East and West Egg does not lament the decline of American civilization.

Fitzgerald came to believe that there was a better self that he had left in the past, just as Nick Carraway identifies Gatsby’s dream with the American dream. On this subject, Fitzgerald confesses about the connection between life and dream in “Early Success” as follows :

But never again as during that all too short period when he and I were one person, when *the fulfilled future and the wistful past were mingled in a single gorgeous moment*—when life was literally a dream.²⁰ (Italice mine)

Thus Fitzgerald himself dreamed like Gatsby that life was a dream like the American dream, and then Gatsby inherited a romantic version of the American dream of material success in the historical tradition.

The American dream is always betrayed by the hopelessly corrupt reality. The essential qualities of the American dream whose tragedy Gatsby is enacting is that it lives in the world of past that has no longer existed, and is helpless in the corrupt reality of the Jazz Age. His individual romantic vision is based on the illusory belief that time can be fixed and the human being can repeat the past in his life. The means by which this goal is to be attained is sufficient wealth, and therefore Gatsby's vision is necessarily like 'the American dream' itself, the delusion that youth and beauty can be eternally recaptured if one can only make enough money. The overt connection between Gatsby's dream and the American dream is in the historical and cultural identification of his naive boyhood ambitions with those of Benjamin Franklin who was a typical American in the eighteenth century, and also the spiritual comparison of his capacity for wonder with that of Dutch sailors, overcome with the promise and hope of the brave new world. In this respect, the fact is that Gatsby is an heroic personification of the true heir of the American dream.²¹ In other words, Gatsby, divided between the power of money and the romantic dream, comes evidently to stand for America itself in the Jazz Age. That is to say, he has something gorgeous and some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life.

The last two pages of the novel makes 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."²² The green light is successful because, apart from its visual effectiveness as it gleams across the bay, it symbolizes the profound naiveté of Gatsby's sense of the future, while simultaneously suggesting the historicity of his romantic dream. The symbol occurs several times, and most conspicuously and vividly at the closing of the novel as follows :

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—to-morrow we

will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning——
*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the
 past.*²³ (Italics mine)

The romantic tone of this wonderful concluding paragraph in which what the green light symbolizes is finally realized enhances the value of the novel out of its immediate context : in Gatsby's transitory dream and pathetic disillusionment Fitzgerald made up an American fable equivalent to the universal tragedy of human beings. Gatsby's dream consists of three basic parts. That is, the desire to repeat the past, the desire for wealth, and the desire for incarnation of unutterable illusion in the material earth.

The green light represents to Gatsby a projection of his dream : a signal to beat on. . . . against the current, to attempt so desperately with his unbroken series of successful gestures the repeating of that past which he can never do. Green color is the color of promise, of hope and renewal in the future life of human being. In other words, his greatness lies in the complicated and ironic quality of his attempt to beat against the current of life, and consequently Gatsby exists as a life force in the corrupt reality of the Jazz Age in America, and accordingly intensity of free will and passion makes Gatsby a 'great' man in comparison with the irresponsible people like the Buchanans. The American dream gives the green light through which the American returns to his spiritual source, paradoxically retreating into the historical pattern of America while endeavoring to exploit the promises and hopes of the future. Gatsby has the fundamental innocence and the measureless vitality in his dream.

The Great Gatsby is a modern dramatization of the American dream as it existed in the Jazz Age, and it is a study on the concealed boundary that divides the corrupt reality from the romantic illusions. Gatsby projects the irony of American history and the withering of the American dream, and therefore *The Great Gatsby* is not merely a chronicle of the Jazz Age but rather a sad dramatization of the collapse of the naive American dream in the corrupt reality of the civilized society. In brief, Fitzgerald relates Gatsby's lost dream to the withering of the American dream in *The Great Gatsby*. And then he identified the American dream with "the human dream and if I came at the end of it," Fitzgerald said, "that too is a place in the line of the pioneers."²⁴ The American dream was innocent originally in old times, but nowadays in the waste land (the valley of ashes) it has been corrupted by unhuman commercialism or materialism, and American egoism. After all, it is corrupted by the Buchanans who are selfish materialists.

Fitzgerald knew plainly that the American dream which was born out of pure spirit had

been degraded to a young man's dream of searching after wealth and beauty. The American dream can be defined to be the dream in which a man strove to get happiness, beauty and wealth with all his might, and yet disillusioned even when he realized it. For Gatsby, money (wealth) is only the means for the fulfillment of his dream. The green light at the end of Daisy's dock has been the beacon of Gatsby's dream.²⁵ However, the true valuable thing for mankind is rather in the human spirit and the spontaneity of his spirit than in the material abundance and comforts. Gatsby's gratuitous sacrifice for Daisy, like Christ's for mankind, is the direct cause of his violent death ; Nick conjectures that Gatsby must have felt a sharp sense of loss for having lived too long with a single transient dream.²⁶ In other words, Gatsby died sadly for his romantic dream after all. Fitzgerald accuses modern Americans of the loss of the American dream in *The Great Gatsby*. That is to say, when Gatsby died, the American dream itself collapsed simultaneously. Fitzgerald wrote a fable adequate to the universal tragedy of man in Gatsby's dream, that is, the American dream. The loss of the American dream caused by a desolate present symbolizes the Americanness of Gatsby's tragic death in the human situation.

NOTES

- 1 Joan M. Allen, *Candles and Carnival Lights : The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York University Press, New York, 1978), p. 15.
- 2 Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald : A Biography* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1962), p. 103.
- 3 *The Great Gatsby*, (A Penguin Book), p. 8.
- 4 Joan M. Allen, *Candles and Carnival Lights : The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, p. 14.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 6 *The Great Gatsby*. p. 29.
- 7 *Modern Fiction Studies ; A Critical Quarterly*, published at Purdue University. Spring, 1961, Volume 7 Number 1 , p. 36. See, Robert F. McDonnell ; *Eggs and Eyes in The Great Gatsby*, pp. 31-36.
- 8 Joan M. Allen, *Candles and Carnival Lights : The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, p. 103.
- 9 *The Great Gatsby*, p. 45.
- 10 Joan M. Allen, *Candles and Carnival Lights : The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, p. 102.
- 11 *The Great Gatsby*, p. 105.
- 12 Arthur Mizener, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, p. 150. See *The Significance of F. Scott Fitzgerald* by D. S. Savage. From the Arizona Quarterly, 8 (1952).
- 13 *The Great Gatsby*, p. 152.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.
- 16 Arthur Mizener, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, p. 125. See *Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America* by Marius Bewley. From *The Sewanee Review*, LXII (1954), pp. 223-246.
- 17 Henry Dan Piper, *Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby : The Novel, The Critics, The Background* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1970), p. 213.
- 18 Rose Adrienne Gallo, *F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Frederick Unger Publishing Co., New York, 1984), p. 54.

- 19 James E. Miller, *Fictional Technique of Scott Fitzgerald* (The Hague Martnus Nijhoff, 1957), pp. 101-102.
- 20 "Early Success," p. 63. (A Penguin Book)
- 21 Arthur Mizener, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, p. 128. See *Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America*.
- 22 Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise* (Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 178.
- 23 *The Great Gatsby*, p. 188.
- 24 Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald : A Biography*, p. 307.
- 25 Joan M. Allen, *Candles and Carnival Lights : The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scft Fitzgerald*, p. 114.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

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