



Anthropoetics: the Journal of Generative Anthropology

UCLA's first Open Access journal. Published continuously since 1995.  DIRECTORY OF OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS

Share (<http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=xa-4cbe6ce5170394e7>)

|  [Subscribe to](#)

[Chronicles RSS \(/category/views/feed/\)](#)

Anthropoetics XXI, no. 1 Fall 2015 (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/category/ap2101/>)

Desire in *The Great Gatsby*

Per Bjørnar Grande

**Bergen University College
Norway
pbg@hib.no (<mailto:pbg@hib.no>)**

In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald depicts the attitudes and character of the upper class in 1920s America. The residents of Long Island are drifting, with a feeling of having been uprooted. Both Nick, the narrator, and Gatsby, the protagonist, have been in World War I; Nick even confesses that he enjoyed the experience. War has made men restless and Nick claims that it has, at least temporarily, made him unfit to join the family business. Restlessness and a feeling of alienation have caused him to move East, to sell bonds instead of hardware. The feelings of restlessness and rootlessness, combined with a dream of new opportunities, have inspired the whole set—Gatsby, Nick, Daisy, Tom, and Jordan—to move from the Mid-West and West to the East. The East is the America of desire; of adventure, excitement and freedom. Society is on the brink of great upheavals as the result of desire, although the West is still rather entrenched in its regularity and established patterns. Thus, in contrast to the East, the West represents a traditional society, where desire is kept under control.

World War I transformed the USA into a global political and financial power, and marked the end of its isolationist policies and its sense of inferiority vis-a-vis Europe. By 1920, it is in a position of dominance, the most powerful nation in the world. **(1)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n1>) It had the capacity to impose its will on other nations. Given its position, America also became a leading cultural nation, creating what has come, partly through Fitzgerald's writings, to be called the Jazz Age. The 1920s in America was a time of great contrasts, as well as of changes; for example, on the one hand, there was a breakdown of traditional moral values, and, on the other, a puritan revival that attempted to control this development by banning alcohol. This was also a time of great violence. Lynching reached a peak in the early 20th century and immigrant-dominated gangs roamed the big American cities. **(2)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n2>) Soldiers had returned from World War I, tired and confused after their nightmarish experiences, only to discover that there were no jobs. In this context of rootlessness, the dream of a new life seemed to flourish, creating the perfect setting to investigate how desire works.

René Girard's Theory of Desire

In this article I will consider French philosopher and literary critic René Girard's theory of desire, and apply it to *The Great Gatsby*. Girard considers that desire is evoked by other people's desires. The common denominator in the European novelistic tradition is, according to Girard, the revelation of metaphysical desire. Metaphysical desire is contrasted with spontaneous desire and arises when the protagonist desires an object via a mediator/model. Usually, desire is considered object-related. However, if that is the case, it is possible to desire freely and attain the object of one's desire. Girard views desire as less straightforward, postulating a triangular structure that includes a mediator. As long as there is a mediator present, there cannot, initially, be any freedom or autonomy in desire. The mediator can both receive and hinder desire so that one's desires are transformed into secondary and rival desires. Thus, by imitating through a mediator instead of experiencing direct, object-related desire, the subject becomes entangled in the mediator's desire. Desire may then work both ways and pave the way for intense rivalry between the subject and the mediator. As long as they desire through each other, their desires will become more and more symmetrical.

The romantic understanding of desire is that this phenomenon is original and individual. If desire were based on the object alone, it would be based on a spontaneous attraction towards different objects, such as money, houses, and cars. In contrast to these views, Girard claims that desire is not spontaneous, individual, or primarily generated by objects, but is mediated through what other people desire. He maintains that there is no such thing as original desire, only mediated desire. Thus, desire "is always reaching past its ostensible objects and finds little or no real satisfaction in them." (3)

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n3>) Desire in mimetic theory is not static and therefore cannot be fixed except in stages. The stages of desire as described by Girard are stages of decline, developing from a fascination with the rival to the final stage of being possessed by the same rival; and they can be explained in terms of the increasing intensity of the imitation of the other, which gradually becomes more and more conflictual. There is a development from fascination to rivalry, to conflict, and hate, and eventually to madness/murder/suicide. (4)

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n4>) If there is a stage where desire is most poignant, it is clearly in the later stages, characterized by serious conflict, violence and illness. Thus, desire must be linked to and defined in relation to these negative phenomena.

Desire in this sense has no substance. At the same time, however, desire is the force that has the greatest impact on shaping individuals—and society as a whole. The deeper one penetrates into the process of desire, the more symbolic, blurred, and sterile the desired objects become in the mind of the subject. Moreover, the references to reality become more and more blurred. The process associated with the ongoing desire for pleasure results in pain, again and again. This is the process by which acting on one's attraction leads to wounding. (5)

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n5>) The process of desiring through desirous models leads eventually to nothingness.

Ultimately, desire leaves people barren inside, leading to a nothingness that resembles death. This does not primarily refer to physical death but to spiritual death, where all that really exists in the mind of the subject is the conflictual presence of the other. Within the logic of desire, the problem is the mediator or the model, but the model will, if the rivalry is heated, seldom respond to the other's wishes. In this gradual development towards a death-ridden existence, the desiring person does not understand that the problem is desire itself. When desire has the upper hand in human relations, it is always the desired and despised model which is the problem.

Romanticism, Modernism, Mimeticism, and the Breaking down of Boundaries

According to Girard, both the illusion of autonomy and the process of becoming possessed by the other are phenomena which have been addressed by great novelists. Fitzgerald has produced some of the greatest descriptions of desire in the 20th century. Typically, the characters in *The Great Gatsby* want to live with the illusion of spontaneous desire and they believe that they are doing so. Fitzgerald is, as will become evident in the following discussion, one of the great explorers of metaphysical desire. He hardly ever describes healthy and natural erotic relations. The joy of sex is not evident in his work and sensuous desire hardly seems to exist; everything is about rejection, social climbing, and a desire to be accepted

The difference between the romantic novelist and the realist novelist is based upon their different perceptions of the mediator. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n6>) The romantic writer reveals and propagates the mediator's presence, often as a rival, but does not reveal his role in mediating desire. The romantic writer believes in the autonomy of the characters and, according to Girard, is himself governed by a desire for autonomy. The romantic lie consists in seeing desire as spontaneous and linear. In contrast, the realist novelist both presents and reveals the decisive role of the mediator in relation to the protagonist's desire.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald seems to shift between a romantic and a novelistic understanding of desire. The enchantment lies initially in the romantic dream and its remoteness from reality. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n7>) Gatsby is clearly a romantic hero who tries to live his life on the basis of a single romantic longing. His dream is what James E. Miller Jr. calls immature romanticism <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n8>) as it belongs not to the present but to a past transfigured by imagined memory.

This examination of how desire works in *The Great Gatsby* begins with the objects described initially in order to attract the reader. Desire in *The Great Gatsby* is enhanced by references to technical innovations such as phones, cars, and airplanes. For example, the name Jordan Baker is constructed from two brands of car, <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n9>) emphasizing Jordan's machine-like character. Desirable objects are in the hands of people with desires who live outside conventional morality, having loosened their sexual and marital constraints.

In *The Great Gatsby*, everything is speeding up, and even the natural world is called into question as people's vision of what is real and unreal in nature becomes blurred. Leaves on summer trees, for example, are growing the same way things grow in fast-forwarded movies. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n10> People look perfect but slightly dehumanized, and their identities overlap. However, desire, which outwardly creates difference and individuality, is slowly turning everyone into clones, and even male and female are less distinguishable. For example, at the end of the novel, Nick is mistaken for Gatsby (Fitzgerald, 158). People are often described in fragments or gestures; a butler is reduced to a nose, Wolfsheim to nose and cufflinks. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n11>

The descriptions of Daisy and Jordan emphasize fashion, luxury, and leisure; for example, Jordan looks like an illustration in a (sports) magazine. Gatsby is likened to a machine which registers distant earthquakes (Fitzgerald, 8), thereby highlighting his sensitivity and indicating that he will be present wherever some sort of frenzy for the new is aroused. Gatsby is in control of that which is new and he owns everything which is desirable. On the other hand, everything he owns and controls has a single purpose: to win back Daisy Buchanan.

Desire and the Narrator

Fitzgerald's literary style combines Romanticism with Modernism. His prose is both poetic and psychological. Images and rhythms derived and developed from 19th-century poetry are combined with the precision, consciousness, and topical references that were, at the time, becoming the hallmark of Modernist writing in both poetry and prose. Fitzgerald updates Romanticism for the 20th century to meet the Modernist demand for high-impact language; every sentence is packed with both poetry and meaning. At the same time, he challenges the conventional Romantic opposition between technology and art, between machine and imagination. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n12>

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald writes from a distance that enables him to discover a more refined literary structure. There is no longer any "authorial" author or narrator with full access to the characters. In his two previous novels, *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), Fitzgerald was playing out his own life, letting his protagonists wrestle with his own conflicting ideas regarding such philosophical perspectives as Nietzscheism, Naturalism, Romanticism, and Catholicism. The omniscient narrators in these novels are therefore constantly shifting perspectives in order to explore the author's ideological frustrations. In contrast, the story in *The Great Gatsby* is narrated by a character with limited access to the other characters. By making Nick Carraway the storyteller, Fitzgerald established the needed distance, especially between himself as the author and the protagonist. Nick dreams of absolute knowledge, but he is more and more inclined to see things from Gatsby's point of view. He vacillates between his father's bourgeois morality and Gatsby's romantic perspective. According to Gary J. Scrimgeour, Fitzgerald's first two novels reveal a fault that is common in the work of romantic writers, which is the inability to understand the true nature of the characters created. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n13>

In his early career as a novelist, Fitzgerald clearly had difficulty in distinguishing himself from his characters. One reason for the success of *The Great Gatsby* is precisely the fact that he managed to create characters who were not his alter egos. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n14>

<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n14>

Nick's reflections are always tainted by his snobbish and bourgeois background. Even though he comes from a privileged background, his attitude toward the wealthy elite is characterized by a certain aggression, as expressed in relation to Daisy, Tom, and Jordan. This aggression seems to be moral. At the same time, his descriptions of people of the working class (Myrtle and Mr. Wilson) reveal an attitude of mild disdain. Nor are the people from the lower middle-class, such as the McKees, exempt from his disdain, and his reflections on Gatsby are never completely free from this attitude.

While not a neutral observer, Nick is a relatively reliable observer. He is the only character in the novel who is low-key, observant, and perceptive enough to tell the story. The other characters are all prisoners of their own drives, uninterested in people other than those who can stir desire. Nick refers to himself as "slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes of my desires" (Fitzgerald, 58). His curiosity, nearing voyeurism, and his inability to act upon his desires make him a perfect narrator. Although his moral principles seem to be basically unchanged throughout the book, his perspective gradually changes; he finds Gatsby acceptable after experiencing the violent lives of the very rich—even though he represents all that Nick had previously despised.

The novels and short stories that Fitzgerald wrote in the early 1920s tend to chronicle events that extend over several years. This lengthy timespan was necessary in order to elaborate on the nature of desire. In contrast, the main story of *The Great Gatsby* is more condensed and takes place between early June and September 1922. However, these intense months are viewed against the backdrop of what happened five years earlier, in 1917, when Gatsby fell in love with Daisy. These two timelines come together when Gatsby arranges a surprise meeting with Daisy at Nick's humble and run-down cottage. In this extremely awkward, nervous, and initially uncomfortable meeting, the lovers are reunited after five years, and this inspires Gatsby to fulfill his great desire of recapturing the past as if nothing major has happened during the intervening years.

However, already at this reunion the impression is created that Gatsby is starting to lose his faith in his quest; doubts are surfacing (Fitzgerald, 82-85). It could hardly be attributed to suspense alone that he almost changes his mind and wishes he could cancel the tea party where he will finally meet Daisy again. This is one of the very few scenes in which the narrator actually enters into Gatsby's head, revealing Nick's growing identification with Gatsby.

Nick as a Go-Between

The first person narrator, Nick, is constantly trying to become an omniscient narrator, understanding everything that is happening. In order to achieve this, he acts as a go-between. His initial reaction to the notion of infidelity is extremely puritan; when he hears that Tom has a lover, his instinctive impulse is to call the police. However, he soon moderates his moralism and becomes Gatsby's aid in the process of winning Daisy back. Nick is moral in a traditional sense, but he clearly does not consider the fact that Gatsby's liaison is not very different from Tom's.

The word pander is used in the closing chapter of the novel (Fitzgerald, 171) to describe the settler's optimism. However, the word also sums up Nick's role in the affair between Daisy and Gatsby. Pander is derived from Pandarus, a character in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, who acts as a go-between to foster the love affair between Criseyde and Troilus. Just like

Pandarus, who advises Troilus in the wooing of Criseyde, Nick enables Gatsby to fulfill his love. Pander means to gratify or indulge an immoral or distasteful desire or habit. **(15)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n15>) In the original context in *The Great Gatsby*, "pander" is used in a lyrical description of America's past. **(16)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n16>)**

Thus, the fresh green breast of the new world appeals to various desires such as nostalgia for the past and optimism upon arrival in the new world. However, it also hints at a decadent modern America by evoking the crime-scene where Myrtle's left breast swings loose like a flap, incapable of giving sexual pleasure.

Snobbery, Class, and Money

The concept of class is a more important theme in Fitzgerald's novels than in the works of any other writer in the American tradition. Whereas American writers such as Dos Passos, Faulkner, and Hemingway focus on World War I from a soldier's perspective, Fitzgerald records the preparation for war in *The Beautiful and Damned*; and although the aftermath of war is evident in *The Great Gatsby*, it is seen from the perspective of Nick and Gatsby, as something distanced, from the past.

Fitzgerald's postwar darkness is merged with class distinctions. According to Robert Emmet Long, class and success are issues that Fitzgerald both delights in and at the same time perceives as darkly apocalyptic due to the upheaval of the traditional social order. **(17)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n17>)** The young Fitzgerald combines Romanticism with Nietzschean cynicism, gradually moving away from his Catholic roots. However, in the midst of his ideological struggle, there is a more acute struggle for prestige, and a desperate desire for acceptance. For Fitzgerald, this meant being accepted by the elite, meaning the rich and beautiful. It seems correct to say that the young Fitzgerald was a romantic caught in his own trap. **(18)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n18>)** While Proust and Waugh were spellbound by the aristocracy, Fitzgerald is spellbound by the very rich. Hemingway had once said that the only difference between us and the rich is that the rich have more money; Fitzgerald, perhaps due to his family's mild slide from riches to rags, felt there was something rare, seductive, and mysterious about those who have great wealth.

In *The Great Gatsby* class consciousness is evident throughout the entire novel. Fitzgerald's marriage to Zelda Sayre, who belonged to a wealthy southern family, was only possible due to the great success, especially financially, of *This Side of Paradise*. Before his marriage to Zelda, Fitzgerald was denied the opportunity of marrying Ginevra King because her family was very wealthy. **(19)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n19>)** Ginevra, like Daisy, embodied refined elegance rooted in wealth. Le Vot claims that Ginevra did not love any man; she was in love with love. Only recurrent crisis, dramatic quarrels, betrayals, and reconciliations could keep her restless heart ensnared. Against any man who thought he had won her over, she used jealousy artfully as a weapon, never losing control, maneuvering him into indefensible positions until his dignity was lost. Each of her affairs was a campaign in which she played at being conquered, giving a little to take a lot. **(20)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n20>)** Ginevra later became the archetypal model in Fitzgerald's work for the unattainable and reckless woman men fall in love with.

Fitzgerald's father had told his young and ambitious son that "poor boys shouldn't think of marrying rich girls" **(21)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n21>) In much the same way as Fitzgerald, Gatsby longed to be loved by a wealthy and beautiful girl; and like Fitzgerald, Gatsby had great difficulty in establishing a permanent relationship with a girl from the upper classes.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald explores what money can do to a person without a wealthy background. In earlier novels, Fitzgerald had also been acutely aware of the themes of class and money, but he considered them from a different perspective, that of the seriously rich. In his two previous novels both protagonists (Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise* and Anthony Patch in *The Beautiful and Damned*) come from extremely wealthy backgrounds. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald shifts the focus and places a man from a poor background in the central role. His protagonist vacillates, therefore, between being the one who sacrifices others in order to fulfill his dreams and the one who himself becomes the sacrificed victim, cast upon a desirous altarpiece built by the super-rich to preserve their class from anybody who threatens to destroy their unquenched desire for more wealth and success.

While both Amory and Anthony are initially super-rich, spoilt, sensitive, well-spoken, naturally charming (and at the same time despicable), and capable of making the most unattainable girl fall in love with them, Jay Gatsby has had to make enormous emotional and moral sacrifices in order to arrive where he is. However, Gatsby's background enhances the drama and makes the character more multidimensional and mysterious.

The theme of being rejected by the rich appears with great force repeatedly in Fitzgerald's works in the period 1920-26. In this period, Fitzgerald is constantly depicting scenes in which desire is at its hottest. This seems to be Fitzgerald's most fertile literary period. In several short stories, the theme revolves around the unattainable woman. In this respect, "Absolution," "Winter Dream," "The Sensible Thing," and "The Rich Boy" are short stories that are closely related to *The Great Gatsby*. Like Dexter Green in "Winter Dreams" (1923), Gatsby is a moneymaker and a romantic. The handicap both must overcome is their background. Dexter starts a laundry business that gradually makes him enormously wealthy, while Gatsby is initially able to cross the class border by becoming a soldier. As a soldier Gatsby is accepted into Daisy's upper-class society. The uniform becomes a shield against his humble background and allows him both to be someone else and to mingle with the rich.

Gatsby and Dexter, due to their modest backgrounds, are spellbound by wealth and money. For Gatsby, love becomes more important than the object of the love, revealing an advanced stage of delusion. Gatsby is in love with love, or the idea of love, which he thinks can bring some order into his confused and disordered life. There is scarcely a hint of real sensual love, either in Gatsby's relation to Daisy or Dexter's to Judy. In "Winter Dreams," Judy Jones is exciting and desirable, capable of making any man fall in love with her. She has understood that in order to always be the winner in mimetic desire, she has to be in a situation of continuous flirtation and give each man only a faint hope of success, never really giving in to anyone. However, her endless flirtations corrupt her, and in the end make her incapable of love. According to Roger Lewis, the wealth that surrounds her destroys at the same time as it creates. **(22)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n22>) The girls in Fitzgerald's world frequently reject the men, making them feel like they are constantly being denied what they most desire, and this creates in them a world-view of the absurd.

Dexter's love, however, involves a simpler desire than Gatsby's, since it is devoid of any idea of recapturing the past, and this makes it easier for him to move on and accept the inevitable decay. Nevertheless, Dexter does have a certain yearning for the past. Neither he nor Gatsby is able to perceive the illusions of the intense love game which has crippled them into yearning for the past.

In "The Sensible Thing," George O'Kelly, like Gatsby, wants to recapture the past. However, he is less of a hero initially. O'Kelly is madly in love with Jonquil, a girl from a wealthy background who gradually comes to question whether George, because of his lack of wealth, is the right man for her. **(23)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n23>) In contrast to Gatsby and Dexter, George is desperate and oversensitive in the act of lovemaking. George suddenly becomes hugely rich and is able to win Jonquil and recapture his intense love for her. However, at the critical moment when he knows she is his, the magic has gone.

The common theme in these short stories is the nothingness of desire. These love affairs are reminiscent of a cherry tree in bloom. The flowers on the trees look intensely beautiful, then suddenly the blossoms fall. Similarly, the characters seem only to be really alive in the few years when they are young, vital, and physically attractive, before desire overcomes them. In *The Great Gatsby*, the name Daisy must also be understood in this context as having a short life span. This "Spenglerian" cycle of springing to life and waning into a dull and meaningless existence where only nostalgia is left is a theme which Fitzgerald returns to numerous times, although never with the same intensity as in the 1920's.

These motifs of rejection, loveless love, and impossible relationships all come together in *The Great Gatsby*. In this novel Fitzgerald further heightens the tension by creating a hero who tries to enhance his social status by means of criminal activities and lies, thereby slightly changing Fitzgerald's cherished scene where the poor, handsome, honest, and vulnerable men are being rejected by wealthy women. Gatsby, in contrast to the typical honest protagonist, tells Nick that he belongs to an old family with old money. By claiming to be an Oxford man and the heir of a San Francisco family, he tries to elevate his past to the level of Tom and Daisy's which, if possible, would grant him a similar social status. **(24)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n24>)

Gatsby's deficiency lies partly in his belief that one can create an earthly paradise. However, this belief is naïve, stupid, and defenseless when juxtaposed with the world of Tom and Daisy. Tom and Daisy are incapable of not showing their contempt for members of a lower class. Daisy despises West Egg, the home of the nouveau riche where Gatsby lives, which is described as "this unprecedented 'place' that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village—appalled by its raw vigor (...)" (Fitzgerald, 103). This contempt, as well as the bond between her and Tom, is a matter of similar

upbringing and education. The fact that Daisy, who represents old money, is appalled by West Egg foreshadows that her affair with Gatsby will be short lived. Her reaction to what she sees as a vulgar place and a rather vulgar party indicates that Gatsby will never succeed in his attempt to win her back and recapture the situation of five years earlier.

Although Gatsby is living a delusion, he perceives, in a flash, that Daisy's charm and sentiments are founded purely on money. "Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly. That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell on it, the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it. . . . High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl (Fitzgerald, 115). Gatsby is so spellbound by money, luxury and snobbism that the insight is merely an observation without any consequence, either in relation to Daisy or his own lifestyle. However, this voice full of money has been modulated by good breeding, confidence, and good schooling, as well as by always having been loved,_(.)
(25) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n25>) things Gatsby has been deprived of and still yearns for. Not only is Daisy's voice full of money, the very language in which Gatsby seduces Daisy the second time is also commercial._()(26) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n26>)

When Tom reveals Gatsby's background and criminal activity in the scene at the Plaza suite, fright and revulsion are reflected in Daisy's expression, which Gatsby, blinded by his narcissism and gnostic vision of life, is unable to see as a consequence of his exposure as a fraud. In this scene (Fitzgerald, 120-129), Nick is initially impressed by Gatsby's cleverness. Simultaneously he is baffled by the enormity of Gatsby's vision. Even after having been exposed, Gatsby clearly believes that he will still be able to change the past so that he and Daisy can start anew. Gatsby's rivalry is now so intense that the objects of both his love and his rivalry are totally blurred, and he seems to have reached the stage of madness at which there are no longer any objects present. Behind his gnostic canopy, his self-understanding, his sense of being a Son of God, lies the most intense desire to be among the elect, with the same status as the super-rich. At the end of the Plaza scene, everything is desire. The reader clearly sees that Gatsby's chances of realizing his dream are waning minute by minute, leaving only a pathetic shell that Tom does not consider a threat; he allows Gatsby to drive off with his wife, knowing that she will never leave him for a bootlegger and criminal.

After the car accident, when Gatsby is watching over Daisy outside Tom and Daisy's mansion, it is evident that desire has destroyed everything. Gatsby's vision seems weak and pathetic. As he leaves Gatsby to himself, Nick's thought is that Gatsby is waiting for nothing (Fitzgerald, 139). Daisy has gone back to Tom, Myrtle is dead, and, some hours later, Mr. Wilson will kill Gatsby and then himself. Desire for love, success, and acceptance has been growing and maturing, and ultimately culminates in murderous acts, leaving the reader to unravel the puzzle of how class-consciousness, rejection of the lower classes, infidelity, and the yearning for success could end so tragically.

Despite his privileged background, Nick becomes gradually aware that although Tom and Daisy are not typical criminals, they are worse than Gatsby. In the course of the novel, readers come to see how little they value other people's lives. Nick concludes that they "were careless people . . . 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" (Fitzgerald, 170). This critique of the careless attitude of the upper class is an indirect critique of the American

culture depicted in *The Great Gatsby*, a culture which is surprisingly class-ridden. The American dream, as it appears in this novel, can never be fully attained because the people who have old money will never really accept the nouveau riche. In "The Rich Boy," Fitzgerald claims that the rich "are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early and it does something to them." (27) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n27>) However, Fitzgerald also highlights the fact that, when people of different classes mix, despite their outward differences, their desires are similar.

Gatsby cannot win Daisy with his money, but without it he would not stand a chance of taking her away from Tom. However, this chance is not real; despite his fantastic ability to hope and no matter how hard he tries, he cannot change his past and he cannot change other people's pasts. Gatsby dreams of restoring order amidst chaos, but his actions only create even more chaos.

In the novel, Gatsby is depicted as a superman based on his outward performance; he is the master of water, earth, and air, represented by boat, car, and plane; however, fire, the fourth element, symbolized by love, cannot be conquered. (28) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n28>) As mentioned, this rejection by the rich is something Fitzgerald himself had experienced, although in a milder and less violent manner. Before his breakdown around 1934, Fitzgerald believed life was something that you dominated if you were any good. (29) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n29>) Afterwards, in his later years, he came to see that life dominates you. Gatsby, on the other hand, like so many great romantics, dies young and does not experience this gradual downfall.

Gatsby: Hero and Criminal

There is a certain mystery about how Fitzgerald has been able to make Gatsby into a hero. Gatsby is depicted as being boorish; he has no friends, only hangers-on. He is a roughneck, a fraud, and a criminal. He is frightening in his own lack of morals and his lawless aestheticism is rather despicable. His taste is vulgar, his behavior ostentatious, his love adolescent, and his business dealings ruthless; and he is clearly dishonest on a personal level. He is interested in people only when he needs them to achieve his goals. His nice gestures stem from the fact that he does not want any trouble. (30) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n30>) Most of what Gatsby is involved in is tinged with the most intense danger and desire; for example, bootlegging, fixing results in sporting events, and dealing with stolen bonds.

However, Fitzgerald does not describe in detail the shady and criminal sides of Gatsby's life; instead he hints, thereby holding the reader in suspense. The initial gossip is about his wealth, his parties, and his criminal past. When first introduced, Gatsby is described as a tanned, smartly dressed man of around 30, with short hair, exceedingly charming and discreet, and bearing an aura of mystery.

According to André le Vot, Fitzgerald at the age of nine noted in his diary his suspicion that he was not his parents' son, but a foundling of more exalted origins. (31) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n31>) This theme is taken up in *The Great Gatsby* when Gatsby disowns his poor and very ordinary background and denies that his parents are his parents. Instead he looked upon himself as a Son of God (Fitzgerald, 95).

Nick thinks that Gatsby turned out all right in the end because, in contrast to the Buchanans and Jordan, he had a goal in life beyond personal satisfaction. However, a closer examination of Gatsby's Neo-Platonic self-understanding and his urge to recapture past experiences reveals little beyond self-satisfaction. In a way, Gatsby represents the American dream. However, he is also dishonest and passive in relation to religion, and therefore fundamentally estranged from the ideals of the founding fathers. **(32)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n32>) The references to the founding fathers are more nostalgic than real; their religious aims and ethos are inverted.

In *The Great Gatsby* religion or religious hope has evaporated. Nevertheless, Gatsby himself is enormously hopeful. His ability to hope makes Nick admire him. But because there is such a gap between Gatsby's hope and the reality of his life, the novel is devoid of hope at the end; there is no fundamental change or breakthrough in any of the characters' lives or world-views. Desire in this illuminating novel has thoroughly released the characters from conventional Christian morals, and in so doing, exposed them to violence and death.

The Workings of Desire

Desire is initially a weakness; it consists of an urge to acquire something which one thinks others have. However, the core of desire lies in the notion that if one has what the other person seems to have, one will be fulfilled. In the act of desiring, the other person's weakness is not taken into consideration, since desire makes people blind to the underlying causes of desire. Therefore, the desiring subjects always have the feeling of being hindered in reaching their goal. They do not consider the fact that the other either desires the same object (and the last thing they will do is let the subject have it) or will begin desiring the object of the subject's desire and compete with the subject for it. In both cases, rivalry will have the upper hand, and the chances of the subject achieving the desired object is minimal. Thus, the main weakness of desire is the fact that humans are not only unable to fulfil the goals set out by desire, their goals often end up the opposite of what one expected:

Modern people imagine that their discomfort and unease is a product of religious taboos, cultural prohibitions, even the legal forms of protection. They think that once this confinement is over, desire will be able to blossom forth. (René Girard. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 285.)

All the main characters in *The Great Gatsby* are liberal in the sense that they are willing to break the puritan code. **(33)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n33>) Tom and Daisy find the American dream in a dreamless, visionless complacency of mere matter. They represent substance without form. **(34)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n34>) Fitzgerald's early novels contained a breathless adoration of flapper heroines whose passionate kisses are tinged with frigidity and whose daring freedom masks an adolescent desire for reputation rather than the reality of experience.

When viewed from a romantic perspective, only the negative sides of prohibitions are evident. Seen from the point of view of desire, prohibitions only exist to hurt or modify the life of individuals. Desire creates an anthropology of freedom, a freedom that is premised on the notion that if everyone pursues their heart's desire, everyone will be happy. In deep

contrast, Fitzgerald seems to indicate in this novel that desire threatens human relationships to such a degree that there is a need for prohibitions. Desire leads to conflict; it undermines relationships and, in extreme cases such as in *The Great Gatsby*, leads to murder, suicide, and madness.

Gatsby is incapable of compromising in relation to his inner vision. He is a Son of God, therefore he controls time. [\(35\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n35) At the end of the novel, the level of Gatsby's desire has reached such a pitch that he seems to have lost sight of his object (Daisy). In the scene where he is waiting around Tom's estate, there are indications of a development towards madness; his delusion that he can repeat the past seems to have lost contact with any rational, worldly reality.

Gatsby creates his own rules and his own private morality which ultimately prove futile. Nick, however, affirms the value of Gatsby's failed dream. Since Nick is attracted to Gatsby, he is not able to lead the reader to the Promised Land, where desire is explored and revealed. At the end of the novel, he is still biased, although he has become less priggish and more broadminded.

In *The Great Gatsby* emptiness and moral indifference eventually lead to violence and death. Already in Chapter I, the brutality in Tom's behavior foreshadows death as a result of desire. At the same time, despite her wealth and beauty, Daisy makes the American dream look somewhat shallow and hollow. Her lack of contact with reality is exposed at one of Gatsby's parties when she describes a woman as gorgeous, while Nick describes the same woman as an orchid, scarcely human (Fitzgerald, 101). In the beginning of the novel, she suddenly suggests that a bird outside of the house is an owl, in order to hide the fact that Myrtle has been on the phone to Tom. [\(36\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n36)

This is a reference to Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," a poem about beauty, desire, and death, which in the novel is a symbol that echoes the hollow notes of Tom and Daisy's lost love. [\(37\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n37) Tom's infidelity makes her frivolity sterile and her sentimentality hollow.

The characters' sense of uprootedness is partly a topological problem. Gatsby, Nick, Daisy, Tom, and Jordan are all from the West. One of the issues addressed in *The Great Gatsby* is the conflict between the surviving Puritan morality of the West and the post-war hedonism of the East. In a way, all of the main characters have become slightly decadent as a result of this move. Nick, however, can return to the West since he has not suffered the same moral degeneration as Tom, Daisy and Jordan. [\(38\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n38)

Girardian Interpretations of The Great Gatsby

Two scholars have published articles on *The Great Gatsby* from a Girardian point of view. Both emphasize the scapegoat dimension in the novel. In "The Great Gatsby: Romance or Holocaust," Thomas J. Cousineau sees Gatsby as a classic scapegoat who, by his death, enables the other characters to continue living their violent and sacrificial lives. However, my main objection to Cousineau is the fact that he blames Nick for being the main scapegoater, [\(39\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n39)

a reading that focuses on deceptive self-understanding

instead of the desires that stem from violent action. Stephen L. Gardner, in "Democracy and Desire in *The Great Gatsby*," sees democracy basically being born by a heightened degree of mimetic desire, and thus seems to want to defend the old aristocratic world, the world of those born into old money, against the upcoming romantic heroes who are about to rise from their poor backgrounds and threaten their privileges. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n40>

<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n40>) This kind of interpretation probably exposes a weakness in Girardian theory where negative social upheaval is seen to be one-sidedly caused by the romantic lie. This leads to a naïve understanding of a sensualistic and naturalistic-oriented desire. Destructive acts such as the violent workings of Tom Buchanan are, therefore, less exposed. Tom is, in both Gardner's and Cousineau's articles, treated incredibly mildly. It is telling that both tone down the episodes concerning the affair between Myrtle and Tom, and the episode at The Plaza Hotel where Tom's vulgar and dark social Darwinism is exposed. Thus the reader avoids seeing the close symmetry between romantic and naturalistic desire, where Tom, in the words of Richard Lehan, seems to represent the naturalistic, physical force of the new America— "the America in which force is embodied in corporations and in money institutions, embodied in the new urban process, and controlled by finance and the power of information." <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n41>

<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n41>) My aim is to show how desire among the characters only varies in degree, not in essence, thus paving the way towards an understanding of desire as wholly based on the other's desire.

From Class and Ideology to Pure Desire

Tom Buchanan represents the old social elite, characterized as brutal, class-conscious, irresponsible, undisciplined, racist, idle, and philandering. The smug conceit of "The Rich Boy" has hardened into Tom's arrogant cruelty. This is reflected in Fitzgerald's prose, which in this novel treats racial prejudices as real prejudices to be taken seriously. In *The Beautiful and Damned*, this issue is addressed in relation to the character Gloria, who displays a mixture of playful romanticism and cynical Nietzscheanism. In contrast, the cynicism in *The Great Gatsby* is less admirable and less attractive, as evident in Daisy's willingness to sacrifice everyone and everything that stands in the way of her pleasures.

In Fitzgerald's work, there is often a connection between snobbery and racism. Fitzgerald's ambivalence is evident in Maury Noble's reflections on inferior races in *The Beautiful and Damned*. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n42>

<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n42>) However, such reflections appear to be less smart, and more violent and despicable, when Tom Buchanan claims "it's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these others will have the control of things" (Fitzgerald, 18). <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n43>

<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n43>) Tom tries to defend his position by referring to science or, more correctly, pseudo-science. Nick, however, seems to view Tom's racist remarks as an example of his limited intelligence and outmoded ideas rather than outright racism. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n44>

<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n44>) Even though Nick is the most considerate character in the novel and never directly scapegoats anyone, his attitude towards Jews and blacks is condescending and he does not incorporate them in his American dream.

Gatsby's urge to rise in society leads to naïve imitation, sometimes making him look ridiculous. His house is modelled on a typically European style. It looks like a Hôtel de Ville from Normandy. It has a Gothic library, a Marie Antoinette music room, and a study which imitates the design of 18th century Scottish architects Robert and James Adam. Similarly, Myrtle's apartment in New York reflects her social ambitions; the dining room is vulgar and its décor resembles French rococo paintings such as Fragonard's "The Swing," alluding to the frivolity going on in the apartment. [\(45\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n45)

[\(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n45\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n45) Both Myrtle and Gatsby, despite the fact that they represent populist vitality, are romantics who lack taste and refinement. In contrast, Tom and Daisy have the taste that old money can buy, although Tom reveals a lack of taste by imitating the old colonizers' style in his choice of his riding clothes. He is actually a parody of an English country gentleman. Daisy is hollow and lacks integrity. The split in her is marked by an inconsistency of her looks. Sometimes her hair is blonde, sometimes dark. [\(46\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n46)

[\(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n46\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n46)

Lewis' comment that one cannot buy integrity or taste seems generally valid. However, taste is relative. Tom and Daisy's taste is a quality that is associated with their money and their backgrounds. The link between taste and integrity is no longer evident in either of them. Within a short time span, Gatsby has acquired the taste of the nouveau riche, and he is as lacking in integrity as Tom and Daisy, Jordan, Mr. Wilson, and Myrtle. Nick is the only person with any moral integrity, so despite their different backgrounds, he is able to like Gatsby. Otherwise, the lack of likeable characters in *The Great Gatsby* is remarkable. Only Michaelis, a young Greek who runs an all-night restaurant, is characterized in a really positive way.

The Victimizing Process

In *The Great Gatsby*, the seriously rich are both winners and villains. Nicolas Tredell, from a class perspective, sees Myrtle as the sacrificial victim whose dramatic death restores the equilibrium between Daisy and Tom. However, the victimizing game can be greatly expanded. Gatsby also becomes a victim of their thwarted desire, as does Pammy, Tom and Daisy's daughter. Tom also turns Mr. Wilson into a victim, thereby provoking him to victimize Gatsby. Gatsby's disruption of the Buchanan family, as if Daisy's marriage and child count for nothing, mean that he is not an innocent victim. Jordan does not actively victimize anyone, as she is wrapped in an impenetrable narcissism. However, her haughtiness and arrogance reflect a softer form of victimizing.

The victimization process may be viewed as the pulse that drives the plot in this novel. In most of the victimization scenes, the outcome is to Tom and Daisy's benefit. They are the novel's primary victimizers, sacrificing anyone in their vicinity who threatens their hollow and wasteful lives, even each other. The novel actually culminates in the car crash, where all previous desires suddenly come together in one event and constitute what may be considered a typical modern sacrificial scene in which violence is engendered indirectly and at random.

According to Tredell, romanticism in early 20th century America is bound up with capitalism, materialism, brutality, waste, selfishness, and infidelity. [\(47\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n47) [\(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n47\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n47) He goes on to claim that romantic desire is insatiable and the desirability of the goal depends on its separation from the desiring subject. Once satiated, it ceases to be romantic desire. [\(48\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n48) [\(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n48\)](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n48) Harold

Bloom actually attributes Gatsby's greatness to the fact that there is no authentic object for his desire. **(49)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n49>) Gatsby, Bloom, claims, "is both subject and object of his own quest." **(50)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n50>)**

Gatsby thinks he can realize his dreams by breaking a moral code. He clearly does not distinguish between money obtained by crime and money obtained by legal means. Tom and Daisy are also continually trespassing on moral ground, while Jordan lives her professional life by cheating.

Nick's attraction for Jordan is superficial throughout the novel. In their first encounter, she acts as if she is totally indifferent. She is boyish, fresh, and arrogant, which attracts Nick. She reminds him of a good illustration. Their affair seems half-hearted and lacks sensuality—a typical trait in Fitzgerald's work. However, Gary J. Scrimgeour claims that Jordan's unconcern for any other standards beyond those of frank self-indulgence is evidence enough that the two became lovers. **(51)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n51>)** Nick accuses Jordan of being a careless driver, **(52)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n52>)** and she surprisingly responds with hedonistic honesty, saying that is why she chooses to associate with people who are not careless. In their last conversation, Jordan accuses Nick of the same carelessness that he has accused Tom and Daisy of; and at the end of the novel, Nick has come to the conclusion that Jordan has created her personality out of a series of successful gestures. Other than that her life is purposeless and empty.

Scrimgeour points out that the characters in *The Great Gatsby* are all weak characters, indicating that the novel lacks depth. Viewed from this perspective, Jordan may not seem to be a very significant character. However, she is a character of utmost interest when the novel is read as a depiction of the attitudes that prevailed in the 1920's and the role desire played in people's lives at the time. Scrimgeour does not succeed in distinguishing, therefore, between the characters' morals and the moral of the novel. A novel is not weak because the characters are weak. **(53)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n53>) It is also a gross exaggeration when he claims that there is no difference between Nick throwing Jordan over and the brutality of Tom. **(54)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n54>)

Although Nick is not a detached observer, he is the only character able to tell a story from a perspective that is not totally dominated by his or her own subjectivity. While Nick's moral insight is sometimes faulty, such as when he claims he never passes judgment on others while he does it all the time, he is, nevertheless, the least desiring of the characters and the one who sees the events most clearly. Nick's ability to imitate, his openness to outside influences, brings him closer to Gatsby than he realizes. They both dream of a new and enchanted life in the East. Gatsby's schedule for self-improvement is in essence not very different from Nick's plans when purchasing books on banking. **(55)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n55>) They are both in search of the American dream, one by legal methods and the other by criminal means. Gatsby would probably not have been such a fascinating and mythological character if he had not been seen through Nick's eyes.

Nick is a reliable narrator insofar as he discards what is false, exploits wild rumors and clears away misconceptions. His role resembles that of a detective. However, he is better at deciphering other people's motives than his own. He is clearly vulnerable to the luxury of the Buchanans' or Gatsby's charm and attractive gestures. His relation to Jordan is, despite the physical attraction, tinged with irritation. Her arrogance, moral relativism, and carefree approach to life seem both to attract and repel Nick. However, due to the intensity of his desire, the reader never learns much about what really happens between the two.

A Novel of Idolatry

Read as a novel about idolatry, about how people become gods in one another's eyes, the Christian symbolism which runs through the chapters takes on new meaning. The biblically inspired prose indicates that, perhaps unconsciously, Fitzgerald is exploring a society in which idolatry has replaced Christian values. Thus, *The Great Gatsby* can be read allegorically as a story about the consequences of replacing a transcendent God with worldly gods. Gatsby is, one must remember, working in "his Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty" (Fitzgerald, 95), alluding to Jesus as a twelve-year-old in the temple telling his parents "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (56) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n56>) The replacement of a transcendent God with a penetrating but non-caring god in the form of the enormous billboard of a staring occultist, Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, creates a waste land where agape gives way to Eros. Desire for money, success, infidelity, and moderate violence has replaced traditional Christian virtues such as humility, patience, fidelity, and love of one's neighbor.

The religious overtones imply that Gatsby becomes a Son of God and Daisy his Virgin Mary. Unlike Jesus in the Gospels, his conception is a matter of vulgar and meretricious beauty. His church is a fake, in the shape of an absurd mansion, an imitation of a Hôtel de Ville in Normandy; and in this place of worship, instead of pilgrims praying, there is a constant flow of lonely, uprooted people chattering indecently late into the night, sipping cocktails and drinking champagne.

Gatsby is a Platonist insofar as he holds an image of himself as a Son of God. However, I would refine this perspective by claiming that he is actually a modern gnostic; he is thrown into this meaningless existence, and has to fight his way through the emptiness clinging to a dream of recapturing the spark that was ignited five years earlier in Louisville when he experienced a sacramental unity with his goddess. The kiss is compared to an incarnation, a blossoming (Fitzgerald, 107). Gatsby's dream of being able to stop time and nostalgically repeat certain moments of the past can be viewed as replacing the Christian hope and longing for heaven. Moreover, the aesthetic scene in which Gatsby shows Daisy his piles of beautiful shirts (Fitzgerald, 89), a sight which causes her to weep, is reminiscent of a religious sacrament. (57) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n57>)

Gatsby is working his way free of the material life, renouncing his parents because they are lost in the mire of matter, while he is saved by the exertion of great willpower, which enables him to recapture and prolong these moments of bliss. The madness of the whole project lies not in the attempt to repeat the past but in the attempt to repeat the past as if the circumstances have not changed. Such attempts are, in practice, impossible when one does not consider the changes. This seems, in the case of Gatsby, absolutely impossible. The fact that he keeps looking at Tom and Daisy's daughter with

surprise, without having really believed in her existence,_(58)

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n58>) reveals the madness of his plan. Gatsby is incapable of considering the five years which have passed To Gatsby, the fact that Daisy has married and given birth to a daughter is only a preliminary hindrance. The urge to wipe out these five years is Gatsby's madness, revealing an advanced stage of narcissism.

Gatsby's modern version of Gnosticism is reminiscent of the classic gnostic worldview in which the development is from the material to the psychic. However, the psychic in The Great Gatsby is a development towards a form of sterility in which desire creates various forms of psychic prisons.

Even though Gatsby has been able to acquire all the material goods that people usually dream of, these give him no real pleasure. Gatsby's sole pleasure lies in trying to win back Daisy in order to fulfill his dream of evoking the same deep feelings he had experienced five years earlier. Clearly, this sacred moment was, for Gatsby, a religious epiphany. At the moment when he kissed Daisy for the first time, he sees, out of the corner of his eye, that the blocks of the sidewalk form a ladder which climbs to "a secret place above the trees" (Fitzgerald, 106). The ladder alludes to Jacob's dream (Genesis 28.10-19) in which angels are revealed going up and down a ladder, and the Lord is standing beside him in a place named Beth-El ("House of God").

Being a Son of God, Gatsby is linked to Gnostics such as Simon Magus and to later Gnostics who, according to Irenaeus, think they are spiritual by nature and do not have to live a moral life in order to be saved. As it is impossible for the earthly element to partake in salvation, spiritual man can "intemperately serve the lusts of the flesh and say that one renders flesh to the flesh and spirit to the spirit."_(59) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n59>)

While the romantics extolled the glories of nature, the world represented in The Great Gatsby gradually changes into a ghostly world in which nature becomes something grotesque._(60)

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n60>) Nick speaks metaphorically of the earth lurching away from the sun (Fitzgerald, 42). The earth is described as stumbling inelegantly and erratically away from the sun, which indicates that the earth no longer has any real life source on which to grow. At the end of chapter VIII, Nick tries to enter into Gatsby's haunted mind the day after the car accident; he tries to imagine how unreal Gatsby must find the new world into which he has been thrown so brutally. Nick describes the sunlight as raw, a rose as grotesque, and leaves as frightening,_(61) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n61>) as if experiencing a world that is material without being real.

The depreciation of nature, which Hans Jonas claims is a common trait in both Gnosticism and Existentialism,_(62)

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n62>) can, in The Great Gatsby, be the consequence of desire run wild. The last sentence in the novel, "so we beat on, boats against the current, born back ceaselessly into the past," indicates that it is impossible for those who give in to desire to fulfill their dream.

The theme of idolatry is further emphasized in the scene in which Nick stares for half an hour at Gatsby's mansion in much the same way as Kant stares at the church steeples (Fitzgerald, 85). Nick is no philosopher but there is a certain existential curiosity in his attempt to discover some kind of meaning in the increasingly dramatic events of that summer. However, this meaning is so limited that it can be summed up in Gatsby's incredible ability to hope, against all odds.

In *The Great Gatsby*, God has absconded, just like the gnostic God of the Spirit. Wilson is the only person in the novel who calls on God, but his God is strange and estranged. Wilson does not belong to any church or know any church. **(63)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#n63>) His is a new god, symbolically linked to a billboard. Wilson is transfixed by the material god, the god who sees everything and cannot be fooled, but does not care, like the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. He is depicted as lifeless and grey, as someone who has been killed by desire before he kills himself. In the enormous advertisement of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, a change in religious outlook is evident. The Christian God has been replaced by a new and inactive God, who sees everything. This God, devoid of desire and compassion, broods over the godless valley of ashes with his blue eyes, his yellow glasses and non-existent nose, illustrating the nothingness which concludes the novel.

Bibliography

Bloom, Harold. "Introduction." In Harold Bloom (ed). *Jay Gatsby*. NY: Chelsea House, 2004.

Cousineau, Thomas J. "The Great Gatsby: Romance or Holocaust?" *Contagion* 8 (Spring 2001).

Enmo, Gunhild. "Borne back ceaselessly into the past. En lesning av F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*." Master Degree; Trondheim, NTNU, vår, 2006.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Beautiful and Damned* NY: Scribner's, 1950.

_____. *The Great Gatsby*. London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000.

_____. *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.

_____. "The Rich Boy." In *The Collected Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. London: Penguin Books, 1986.

Gardner, Stephen L. "Democracy and Desire in *The Great Gatsby*." In Palaver & Steinmar-Pösel (Eds). *Passions in Economy, Politics and the Media*, Band 17. Wien: Lit Verlag, 2005.

The Girard Reader (ed James Williams). NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996.

Girard, René. *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001.

_____. Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World. London: Athlone Press. 1987.

Hanzo, Thomas A. "The Theme and the Narrator of The Great Gatsby." In H. Lockridge (ed). Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968.

Howell, James C. "History of Street Gangs in the United States 4." National Gang Center Bulletin, May 2010.

Jonas, Hans. The Gnostic Religion. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.

Langham, F.H.. "Style and Shape in The Great Gatsby." In Scott Donaldson (ed). Critical Essays on Scott F. Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1984.

Lathbury, Roger. "Money, Love, and Aspiration in The Great Gatsby." In Harold Bloom (ed). Jay Gatsby. NY.: Chelsea House, 2004.

Lehan, Richard. "Inventing Gatsby." In Harold Bloom (ed). Jay Gatsby, NY.: Chelsea House, 2004.

Lewis, Roger. "Money, Love, and Aspiration in The Great Gatsby. In Matthew Bruccoli (ed). New Essays on The Great Gatsby. Cambridge: Cambridge UP., 1985.

Lockridge, Ernest H (ed). Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968.

Mitchell, Giles. "Gatsby is a Pathological Narcissist." In Readings on The Great Gatsby. San Diego: Greenham Press, 1998.

Miller Jr., James E. "Boats against the Current." In Ernest H. Lockridge (ed). Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Minter, David L. "Dream, Design and Interpretation in The Great Gatsby." In H. Lockridge (ed). Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Ornstein, Robert. "Scott Fitzgerald's Fable of East and West." In H. Lockridge (ed). Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Scrimgeour, Gary J. "Against The Great Gatsby" in. H. Lockridge (ed). Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Tredell, Nicolas. *Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*. NY: Continuum, 2009.

Vot, André le. *F. Scott Fitzgerald. A Biography*. NY: Warner Books, 1983.

Warner, W. Lloyd; Meeker, Marcha; & Eells, Kenneth. "What Social Class Is in America." In Rhonda F. Levine (ed). *Social Class and Stratification—Classic Statements and Theoretical Debates*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Webb, Eugene. *Philosophy of Consciousness*. Polanyi, Lonergan, Voegelin, Ricoeur, Girard, Kierkegaard. London and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988.

Notes

(.)1. Nicolas Tredell, *Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*, NY: Continuum, 2009, 10. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b1>)

(.)2. James C. Howell, "History of Street Gangs in the United States 4," *National Gang Center Bulletin*, May 2010, 6. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b2>)

(.)3. Eugene Webb, *Philosophy of Consciousness*. Polanyi, Lonergan, Voegelin, Ricoeur, Girard, Kierkegaard, London and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988, 184. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b3>)

(.)4. "The dynamism of mimetic desire has always been oriented towards death and madness." (See René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, London: Athlone Press. 1987, 414.) "Mimetic desire thinks that it always chooses the most life-affirming path, whereas in actuality it turns increasingly towards the obstacle—toward sterility and death." (ibid, 415.) **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b4>)**

(.)5. See René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 162, 322, 416-31; *The Girard Reader* (ed James Williams), NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996, 161, 198-99, 215-16; René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001, 16. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b5>)**

(.)6. The difference between romantic and realist literature is not a difference according to epoch. The difference is based on an approach towards desire. There is, however, in Girard's work, a preference for novels written in the realist tradition. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b6>)**

(.)7. Robert Ornstein, "Scott Fitzgerald's Fable of East and West," in Ernest H. Lockridge (ed). *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968, 55. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b7>)**

- (.)8. James E. Miller Jr, "Boats against the Current" in Lockridge (ed), Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays, 53. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b8>)
- (.)9. Gunhild Enmo, "Borne back ceaselessly into the past. En lesning av F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby," Master Degree; Trondheim, NTNU, vår, 2006, 32. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b9>)
- (.)10. F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000, 9. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b10>)
- (.)11. Lockridge (ed). Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays, 10. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b11>)
- (.)12. Tredell, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, 19. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b12>)
- (.)13. Gary J. Scrimgeour. "Against The Great Gatsby," in Lockridge (ed), Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays, 73. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b13>)
- (.)14. Ibid, 80. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b14>)
- (.)15. Tredell, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, 2009, 40-41. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b15>)
- (.)16. Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 171. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b16>)
- (.)17. Robert Emmet Long, The Achieving of The Great Gatsby. F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1920-1925, London: Associated University Presses, 1979, 180-181. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b17>)
- (.)18. Tredell, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, 75. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b18>)
- (.)19. André le Vot, F. Scott Fitzgerald. A Biography, NY: Warner Books, 1983, 48-51. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b19>)
- (.)20. Ibid., 48-49. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b20>)

- (.)21. Scott Donaldson (ed), *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*, Boston Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co, 1984) 18. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b21>)
- (.)22. Roger Lewis, "Money, Love, and Aspiration in The Great Gatsby, in Matthew Bruccoli (ed), *New Essays on The Great Gatsby*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985, 43. See also Roger Lathbury, "Money, Love, and Aspiration in The Great Gatsby," in Harold Bloom (ed), *Jay Gatsby*, NY: Chelsea House, 2004, 71. **(back)**
(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b22)
- (.)23. Fitzgerald admitted "The Sensible thing" was based on him and Zelda, on Zelda breaking up with him and, later, the marriage issue. *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963, 189. **(back)**
(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b23)
- (.)24. See Warner, W Lloyd; Meeker, Marcha; & Eells, Kenneth, "What Social Class Is in America," in Rhonda F. Levine (ed), *Social Class and Stratification—Classic Statements and Theoretical Debates*, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, 74.
(back) (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b24>)
- (.)25. F.H. Langham, "Style and Shape in The Great Gatsby," in Scott Donaldson (ed), *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1984, 47. **(back)**
(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b25)
- (.)26. Roger Lathbury, "Money, Love, and Aspiration in The Great Gatsby," in Harold Bloom (ed), *Jay Gatsby*, NY: Chelsea House, 2004, 73. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b26>)
- (.)27. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Rich Boy," in *The Collected Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 110. **(back)**
(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b27)
- (.)28. Lockridge (ed), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays*, 13. **(back)**
(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b28)
- (.)29. *Ibid.*, 3. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b29>)
- (.)30. Scrimgeour, "Against The Great Gatsby," in H. Lockridge (ed), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays*, 73. **(back)** (<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b30>)
- (.)31. Le Vot, *F. Scott Fitzgerald. A Biography*, 13. **(back)**
(http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b31)

- (.)32. Tredell, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, 81-82. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b32>)
- (.)33. James E. Miller Jr, "Boats against the Current" in Lockridge (ed), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays*, 48. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b33>)**
- (.)34. *Ibid.*, 52. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b34>)**
- (.)35. Giles Mitchell, "Gatsby is a Pathological Narcissist," in *Readings on The Great Gatsby*, San Diego: Greenham Press, 1998, 62. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b35>)**
- (.)36. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 20. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b36>)**
- (.)37. Tredell, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, 35. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b37>)
- (.)38. Thomas A. Hanzo, "The Theme and the Narrator of *The Great Gatsby*," in H. Lockridge (ed), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays*, 66-68. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b38>)
- (.)39. Thomas J. Cousineau, "The Great Gatsby: Romance or Holocaust?" *Contagion* 8 (Spring 2001), 22-28. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b39>)
- (.)40. Stephen L. Gardner, "Democracy and Desire in *The Great Gatsby*," in Palaver & Steinmar-Pösel (eds), *Passions in Economy, Politics and the Media*, Band 17, Wien: Lit Verlag, 2005, 281-83. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b40>)
- (.)41. Richard Lehan, "Inventing Gatsby," in Harold Bloom (ed), *Jay Gatsby*, NY: Chelsea House, 2004, 89-90. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b41>)
- (.)42. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned*, NY: Scribner's, 1950, 255. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b42>)
- (.)43. James E. Miller Jr, "Boats against the Current," in Lockridge (ed), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays*, 1968, 31. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b43>)

(.)44. Tredell, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, 44. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b44>)

(.)45. Ibid., 47. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b45>)**

(.)46. Ibid., 86. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b46>)**

(.)47. Tredell, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, 36. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b47>)

(.)48. Ibid. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b48>)**

(.)49. Harold Bloom, "Introduction" in Harold Bloom (ed), Jay Gatsby, NY: Chelsea House, 2004, 4. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b49>)

(.)50. Ibid. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b50>)**

(.)51. Thomas A. Hanzo, "The Theme and the Narrator of The Great Gatsby," in Lockridge (ed), Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays, 64. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b51>)

(.)52. Driving represents a strain of irresponsibility deep in the whole of society. See F.H. Langham, "Style and Shape in The Great Gatsby," in Scott Donaldson (ed), Critical Essays on Scott F. Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, 51. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b52>)

(.)53. See Scrimgeour, "Against The Great Gatsby," in Lockridge (ed), Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays, 79. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b53>)**

(.)54. Ibid., 75. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b54>)**

(.)55. F.H. Langman, "Style and Shape in The Great Gatsby," in Scott Donaldson (ed), Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b55>)**

(.)56. Tredell, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, 21. **(back)**

(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b56>)

- (.)57. James E. Miller Jr, "Boats against the Current" in Lockridge (ed), Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays, 1968, 39. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b57>)
- (.)58. Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 111. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b58>)**
- (.)59. Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses I, 6.2-3, in Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, 270-271.
(back) **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b59>)**
- (.)60. David L. Minter, "Dream, Design and Interpretation in The Great Gatsby," in Lockridge (ed), Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby. A Collection of Critical Essays, 87. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b60>)
- (.)61. Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 153. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b61>)**
- (.)62. Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, 337. **(back)**
(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b62>)
- (.)63. Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 150. **(back)** **(<http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2101/2101Grande#b63>)**

ap@humnet.ucla.edu (<mailto:ap@humnet.ucla.edu>)

Last updated: October 3, 2018 at 12:48 pm

Copyright 2021 Anthropoetics