

## **Demythologizing the Sacred: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as a Misnomer**

**Sayed Mohammed Youssef**

Department of English Language and Literature,  
College of Languages and Translation,  
Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University  
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

### **Abstract:**

The first moment the reader catches sight of the cover of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*, the thing that most immediately strikes him is the 'greatness' of the eponymous character which is taken for granted as early as the very title given to it. Nevertheless, as the book unfolds, the reader comes to realize the irony that lies behind this title, thereby conjuring up the old saying "all that glitters is not gold ". Surprisingly enough, the title turns out to be no more than a mere misnomer ironically referring to a racketeer whose ill-gotten money makes of him a prominent person. The present article attempts to demythologize the *ideals*, if it is in anyway meaningful to call them so, of Gatsby who is considered to be *great* and venerable. In demythologizing Gatsby, the article challenges such values as romanticism, the American Dream and the new American elite, if not modern Western society values, held by him. This is done through dismantling the mythical and mysterious elements from Gatsby's character, thereby dealing with him as an ordinary, if not 'ungreat', man.

**Key Words:** Demythologization, loose morality, misnomer, quixoticness, the American Dream

**Introduction:**

Ninety years have passed now since the eminent American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) first published *The Great Gatsby*, his real *tour de force*, in 1925. Yet its fame still goes far beyond America and the Western countries: it is read throughout the world by English and non-English readership altogether. It is a set book at some world universities and high schools. Furthermore, it still attracts significant critical attention. The more one reads this text, the more one is astonished at the remarkable artistry of its language, structure and themes. As Lehan (2000) puts it, "It is a novel, the meaning of which refuses to be limited: every reading offers a new insight" (p. 78). Likewise, part of the fame given to this novel is ascribed to its penetrating description of the American society in the 1920s, a period in the modern history of the United States that is often referred to as the Roaring Twenties. For many critics, Fitzgerald is considered to be one of the best American novelists who gave a full description of the social ills which were quite prevalent at that time, such as loose morality, superficiality and flapper culture with its opulent revelry, wild parties, adulterous behavior and scandalous speakeasies that led to the failure of the ideal of the American Dream. Slater (1973) contends, "The writer who is usually considered to have created the most penetrating literary accounts of the American 1920's is F. Scott Fitzgerald" (p. 53).

Despite the quantity of scholarly work on *The Great Gatsby*, some tend to reduce it to a mere rags-to-riches story that simply chronicles a *nouveau riche* whose wealth and humble social background fail him to reclaim his past mistress. However, a more thorough critical analysis of this literary work shows how oversimplified this reading is. When reading *The Great Gatsby*, it would be more appropriate to take the symbolic and mythic dimensions of Gatsby's story into consideration as his successes and failures are those of America and the American Dream as well. Pelzer (2000) may not be exaggerating when she writes, "Gatsby's story is, however, more than the story of an individual. It is, in fact, the story of America. Gatsby's dream is the American Dream; his successes and failures are America's successes and failures. And in this correspondence, Fitzgerald creates his own version of national tragedy" (p. 77).

**Demythologization of Gatsby's 'Greatness':**

As early as the very opening pages, money or gross materialism is introduced as one of the predominant driving forces, along with social class. A better understanding of the tremendous impact of money is significant enough right here, since it provides a clue into understanding the true nature of Gatsby and those who are close to him, thereby contributing to demythologizing the ideals they hold. Tredell (2007) appositely comments that *The Great Gatsby* is simply a novel about money and that money is crucial to the understanding of its characters who are all defined by their relationship to it,

In this novel, money is sexy, in both the erotic and the more generally exciting sense; it gives the kind of buzz that it would give again in the heady financial sprees of the 1980s. But it is also one of the most romantic and mysterious elements in the novel...it is crucial to the American Dream; and it is crucial to the twenty-first-century dream of global capitalism. All the major characters, perhaps all the minor ones as well, in the novel are significantly defined by their relationship to money. (pp. 50-51)

As the book opens, the reader is first introduced to the narrator, Nick Carraway, whose need of money brings him from Minnesota to New York to work in bond business. As he puts it himself, he belongs to a family that trades in bonds and that he has come to New York, the centre of this business, for the same reason. Later, it turns out that money is the driving force that sets in motion most, if not all, of the significant threads of the plotline. The division of the novel's main settings is mainly based on money, along with social background: East Egg is the village where the 'established rich' people of aristocracy and landed gentry like the Buchanans live; whereas the 'newly riche' people, who are often offensively called *nouveaux riche*, like Jay Gatsby inhabit the "less fashionable" West Egg (Fitzgerald, p. 3). Halfway between these two districts and New York a third setting, the Valley of Ashes, stands. It is a place where the hardworking or 'no money' people such as the Wilsons live. The wealthy East and West Eggers have to pass through this place to and fro New York. The narrator first emphasises the role money-oriented social stratification plays in society through his description of the Valley of Ashes, where utter desolation is juxtaposed with the luxury of the rich Eggs. It is described as a sinister and lifeless place, where the New York ashes are dumped:

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 men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight. (Fitzgerald, p. 14)

In symbolic terms, this desolate and barren area is significant as it bears witness to the loose morality of the neighboring Eggs, if not the whole community depicted in the novel. For Hauhart (2013), the ashes of the Valley of Ashes and the gigantic eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg, a big billboard located at the entrance of this place, serve as "a form of reproach" (p. 201) for those living in these places. As an inevitable corollary of their decadence, the eyes of God represented by the Dr. T. J. Eckleburg signpost seem much angry: "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 nonexistent nose" (Fitzgerald, p. 14).

Of the characters whose moral corruption challenges the values of the new American elite, if not all modern Western society, are Gatsby, the Buchanans and Gatsby's party attendants. Before embarking on analysing the character of Gatsby, a point to be stressed right here is that it is unfair to stigmatize Gatsby as corrupt and unscrupulous as any of the aforementioned characters. With the exception of Nick, "the moral center of *The Great Gatsby*" (Pelzer, 2000, p. 85), all the characters do pale in comparison with Gatsby because of his ideal, if not quixotic and impractical, love of Daisy that never wanes in time—a point that will be discussed in some detail later as the discussion progresses. However, regardless of his romanticism, Gatsby is still a person with moral blemishes. He is one of those whose love of the glittering of ill-gotten money corrupts them. Despite his being the cynosure of all eyes in New York as the fantastically generous and hospitable host of opulent parties, it turns out that his whole fortune is amassed through illicit production of alcoholic beverages. Indeed, the idea that Gatsby is simply a bootlegger is sufficient enough to demythologize his 'greatness' which is taken for granted as

early as the very title of the book. To reduce the mounting crime and corruption rates in the 1920s, the Eighteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution was passed to prohibit bootlegging, thereby encouraging bootleggers like Gatsby and the like to show up. Ironically enough, it is corrupt money that makes of James Gatz, a poor farm boy from North Dakota, to forge a new identity as the "Trimalchio" of New York (Fitzgerald, p. 69).

Although the novel is called after Gatsby, he makes his debut in the third chapter. He turns into a mystery about which nobody seems to know anything. Part of this mystique is attributed to his late appearance which gives way to a lot of rumors around him. The opening parts that precede this appearance speak of his lavish parties given frequently to which a great number of people are admitted without invitation. It is through the obvious opulence of his parties that the reader is given a peek into the excessive extravagance of the upper class of the Roaring Twenties. Nick, "one of the few guests who had actually been invited" (Fitzgerald, p. 25), can hardly believe his eyes once he first attends one of such parties. Hundreds of people from New York, and even beyond, are seen there, and all of them are generously and lavishly enough catered. Everything at Gatsby's magnificent mansion seems within the hand reach of the partygoers, such as his most expensive cars, boats, beach, hydroplane, and so forth:

In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched 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 week-ends 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. (Fitzgerald, p. 24)

Surprisingly enough, Gatsby's excessive generosity and hospitality are met with much ingratitude on the part of his guests as they are always heard circulate innumerable rumors about their host. Chief of such rumors are his being a murderer; his being a spy for the Nazi regime during the First World War; his being an Oxford man; and his being a bootlegger and bond-sharper. Rumor-mongering is one of the social ills scathingly criticized in *The Great Gatsby*. It is through his description of gossip and scandalmongers, all members of the social upper classes, that Fitzgerald challenges what may be described as the ideals of the elite. This is the reason why Nick, who can be taken as an authorial mouthpiece, is discomfited and feels an outsider in such a gossipy company once he comes to hear of their rumors about Gatsby. However, it seems that Gatsby has been pleased with the common gossip whispered about him as he does nothing to dispel such accusations. One may go further and claim that Gatsby has helped reinforce such scandals. In one of his usual idle chats with Nick he acknowledges he is quite aware of the rumors going around: "Well, I'm going to tell you something about my life...I don't want you to get a wrong idea of me from all these stories you hear " (Fitzgerald, p. 40). What comes to prove this claim is Gatsby's confirmation to Nick of the rumor of his being an Oxford man: "I'll tell you God's truth...I am the son of some wealthy people in the middle-west—all dead now. I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition" (Fitzgerald, p. 40).

Likewise, Nick asks Jordan Baker, another 'old money' lady and famous golfer, about Gatsby and she says that he is an Oxford man and that it is Gatsby himself who has once reported this about himself. As the book unfolds, it turns out that Gatsby's association with Oxford University is a mere lie fabricated by him. This is disclosed during Gatsby's encounter with Tom Buchanan at the Hotel Plaza. Tom asks, "By the way, Mr. Gatsby, I understand you're an Oxford man", and Gatsby, embarrassingly enough, replies, "It was in 1919. I only stayed five months. That's why I can't really call myself an Oxford man" (Fitzgerald, p. 80). The idea that Gatsby has spent a five-month period at Oxford stands in stark contrast to his earlier statements to Jordan and Nick, thereby reducing him to a liar. This act may have further implications. First, by linking himself with a prestigious university like Oxford, Gatsby seems serious to improve his self-image in front of Daisy following the circulation of the rumors of his direct involvement in the criminal underworld. Second, it may be interpreted as a way through which he tries to disown the common gossip about his poor family and low Midwestern origin. Third, it can be a way through which he does not want to be inferior to Tom, his main rival over the heart of Daisy, who is a Yale graduate. However, his fabrication is by no means skillfully interwoven: with the exception of Gatsby's notorious business associate Meyer Wolfsheim, all around him seem to doubt this. Jordan tells Nick, "Well, he told me once he was an Oxford man...However, I don't believe it". When asked why, she replies, "I don't know...I just don't think he went there" (Fitzgerald, p. 30). Nick, too, is quite doubtful about what Gatsby has first reported about his early life and experiences, especially his version about his being an Oxford man:

He looked at me sideways—and I knew why Jordan Baker had believed he was lying. He hurried the phrase 'educated at Oxford,' or swallowed it or choked on it as though it had bothered him before. And with this doubt his whole statement fell to pieces and I wondered if there wasn't something a little sinister about him after all. (Fitzgerald, p. 40)

Most of Gatsby's fabrications, starting with his new identity down to his aristocratic social background, are disclosed by Tom who digs deep into his corrupt past and humble origin and comes to validate what is rumored about him. He unravels the Gatsby mystery and exposes his association with gangsters and bootleggers, thereby shattering Daisy's admiration for him.

Gatsby's moral imperfections trigger the decline of the American Dream ideal: his material gains, initiated by his quest for his mistress, come to dominate all his life to the exclusion of any morals. According to Pelzer (2000), in the post-war America of *The Great Gatsby*, the commodification of people, in which Gatsby is involved, also distorts the American Dream and turns it into an impossibility:

Money, it seems, can buy anything in this world, from a dog leash of leather and braided silver to an easy life and a new identity. For the right price, and with the right currency, even Daisy is for sale. Money, then, has changed the nature of the American Dream; it has destroyed its finest conception. The result is *The Great Gatsby* world of diminished things, and that world reflects Fitzgerald's tragic awareness of loss, given what it has become. (pp. 91-92)

**Love Commodified by Gross Materialism:**

However, the so-called elite values and the American Dream ideal are not the only ideals corrupted by money. Love, too, is much corrupted by gross materialism. Money and love are inextricably associated in this book. For Shain (1961), "Gatsby's mingled dream of love and money, and the iron strength of his romantic will, [that] make up the essence of the fable" (p. 34). Gatsby throws opulent parties in order to win back the heart of his past girlfriend, Daisy, who is now married to the 'old money' man Tom. This is the reason why the parties come to an abrupt end once Nick and Jordan orchestrate that reunion. Gatsby's excessive exhibition of wealth is also manifested as early as the epigraph of the novel:

"Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;  
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,  
Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,  
I must have you!" –

Thomas Parke D'Invilliers

In this short poem said ostensibly by Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, a fictitious poet and a character in Fitzgerald's first novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920), love-struck man is advised to show off in front of his beloved to keep her: to wear a hat studded with gold if this will move her; to bounce up and down till she notices his deep love for her and hurries back to him. And this is what Gatsby literally does. The question here is why is Gatsby instructed to do such bizarre things like wearing a gold hat or bouncing high in particular? For Bloom (2006), such things would impress Daisy, a typical flapper of the 1920s: "such feats as high-bouncing and wearing a gold hat might impress a young woman of the time" (p. 22).

It is money and its glittering appendages, such as the lavish parties, magnificent mansion, expensive cars, piles of clothes of all colors and so forth that forge a reunion between Gatsby and Daisy. Yet, Gatsby's wealth fails him, too: money alone, when not tempered by social background, is insufficient to reclaim the heart of an 'old money' lady like Daisy Buchanan. For Gross and Gross (1998), money alone is inadequate to "bridge the gap between his world and that of the Buchanans" (p. 5). Although Daisy seems at first sight much impressed by Gatsby's new life, she prefers Tom to him and, consequently, refuses to renew their old relationship. Pragmatically enough, Daisy finds Tom as the one who is able to secure her the sort of life she aspires to, along with his 'old money' privileges. The idea that Daisy succumbs to Tom's money and his 'old money' appendages to the exclusion of Gatsby's deep true love reduces her to a shallow woman who is attracted to people because they can secure her fleeting things. Also, in so doing she willingly accepts to be commodified: she is dealt with as a commodity sold and bought for the one who is ready to pay more. However, Gatsby seems oblivious to all this, thereby conjuring up the old saying "love is blind". Platonic love seems to haunt him and blind his eyes to Daisy's moral corruption. Samuels (1966) may not be mistaken when he contends, "*The Great Gatsby* tells another tale: a tale of the blindness of desire and of the rock-like indifference of the universe. Nothing lives up to your image of it" (p.788).

**Challenging the Elite Values:**

Similarly, Daisy's adherence to Tom reveals her classist nature and shows the struggle between love and gross materialism. It is money that finally dominates love in *The Great Gatsby*: love vanishes once Tom Buchanan shows up in the life of Daisy. This may be interpreted as an indication that love, pure love to be more specific, is an outsider in such a decadent environment. As Froehlich (2011) aptly comments, love has no existence in the presence of such social ills as

gross materialism: "there is little possibility for authentic love or desire separate from the economic realm" (p. 210). Also this shows obviously that Gatsby's idea that money is his way into the world of the social elite has been proven inaccurate, if not incorrect as well. *The Great Gatsby* abounds in other occasions proving the invalidation of this presupposition, thereby verifying the apparent class stratification and tensions in the 1920s. Once Tom, accompanied by a gentleman called Sloane and another unnamed lady, all 'old money' gentry, drop in Gatsby's house. They are cordially welcomed by Gatsby who generously offers them something to drink. The lady, slightly drunk, offers Gatsby to have supper with them, something that infuriates both Tom and Sloane. Tom, angrily comments, "My God, I believe the man's coming. Doesn't he know she doesn't want him?" (Fitzgerald, p. 64). Once Gatsby leaves to prepare himself for this occasion, the three, haughtily enough, ride off leaving him behind.

On his part, self-betrayed Gatsby is unaware of Daisy's flighty nature as well as the incapacities of his seemingly potential wealth. Once he comes to realize these two major weaknesses in his character, it is too late as he is shot dead by George Wilson who blames him for the death of his wife. In a desperate attempt to run away from her husband, terrified Myrtle rushes to the street and waves to a passing car she erroneously thinks to be Tom's and is run over on the spur of the moment. Though the "death car" (Fitzgerald, p. 86) is driven by Daisy, Gatsby, naively enough, holds himself responsible for the murder so as to save Daisy. For many critics, Gatsby's romanticism is naïve and may be aptly described as unreasonable as well as it triggers his destruction:

Gatsby's idealism is entirely misdirected. He worships a sort of life that he thinks come with great wealth. To him it is a life filled with wonder, excitement, fine things, and absolute self-worth. If one has a vast amount of money, one becomes a wonderful person and enjoys a wonderful existence. For Gatsby Daisy Buchanan is the embodiment of that life. His failure becomes tragic as he is destroyed by what he has pursued and loved so innocently and wholeheartedly. (Gross & Gross, 1998, p. 5)

That Daisy's carelessness and negligence of Gatsby's romanticism precipitate his sudden demise, and thereby the denouement of the novel, is significant, too, as it makes of Daisy a *femme fatale*, or what Settle (1985) describes as a "wrecker-temptress" (p. 118), the beautiful wicked woman whose mere presence in the life of a man devastates it entirely.

The idea that Tom blames Gatsby for Myrtle's death to cover up Daisy's hit-and-run along with Daisy's evasion of the moral responsibility for the crime are worth considering here. The implication of this misdeed is as obvious as it is painful, since it offers the reader another peek into the loose morality of the Buchanans, thereby demythologizing anew the upper class values which they are supposed to represent in *The Great Gatsby*. Nick comments, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (Fitzgerald, p. 112). This is the reason why some critics are of the view that this book is meant to be a scathing criticism of such values, which the author does through stigmatizing the upper class characters as careless and inconsiderate, if not unscrupulous, people getting power from their money:

Tom Buchanan represents the new American upper class, whose members value money and material possessions, not the development of character and taste. The

kind of interior riches cultivated by the old aristocracy had acquired effete, effeminate connotations in the new century...He is all physical and material force; he appears to have no emotional interior, and he demonstrates, repeatedly, that he has no manners, taste, or intelligence. (Kerr, 1996, p. 420)

The old truism that "money is power" is pertinently applied to many characters in the book that draw power from their wealth and social position to the exclusion of any code of ethics. Racism and classism are inextricably associated with money. This is also represented through the Buchanans. Throughout the nine chapters of the book, Tom gives himself the absolute right to snub Gatsby, to have an extramarital relationship with a married woman, to help Daisy get away with Myrtle's murder and to insult non-white races. Pelzer (2000) notes, "[H]e does so with the certainty that his money, which has conferred respectability on him, insulates him from the consequences of his actions...social standing alone has conferred on him the right" (p. 86). In so doing, he embodies the corrupting nature of money in its thorough sense. Slater (1973) also contends that obsessive concern with ethnic distinctions had always been part of the American culture in the 1920s though it was not as well remembered as the flappers and the bootleggers (p. 53).

Most of the racist comments made in *The Great Gatsby* are represented through Tom who has the ideology that the white race is the dominant race and that it has the right to control the other races, whom he regards much inferior. For him, the idea that the whites are the racial dominant group is scientific: "It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved" (Fitzgerald, p. 8). Much alarmed at the prospect of the submergence of the white race by the rise of the colored races or Afro-Americans in the American society, he says that the rise of the colored ethnic groups is dangerous enough as it will render the white ethnic group extinct and hold back civilization: "Civilization's going to pieces...I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read *The Rise of the Colored Empires* by this man Goddard?" (Fitzgerald, p. 8). He goes further to add that what is said by Goddard in his book, "a pseudonym for Lothrop Stoddard and his *The Rising Tide of Color Against World White Supremacy*" (Slater, 1973, p. 54), is proven by science and that the whites have to do something to thwart this matter before things go wrong: "This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things" (Fitzgerald, p. 9). He speaks of what he refers to as the 'superiority' of the Nordics who, as he puts it, have "produced all the things that go to make civilization—, oh, science and art, and all that" (Fitzgerald, p. 9).

In his defence of the white race, Tom defends himself and his place in the world which seems to be in jeopardy because of the rise of non-white races. Nevertheless, his racism is not that limited to what he offensively enough stigmatizes as the "colored empires"; rather, it extends to include the rise of 'new money' whites, such as Gatsby and the like, whose social status and financial privileges are in the rise. For him, the ascension of such people is as dangerous as the rise of the black people. This reflects his deep inner fear of the decline of the 'established rich' people against the aggrandizement of the *nouveaux riche* in the American society. Therefore, Gatsby's advances to Daisy infuriate him much and drive him to comment, "Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white" (Fitzgerald, p. 81). Though Gatsby is not black, Tom insists on excluding him from the white race. As a mouthpiece of the racism and chauvinism of the 'old money', Tom cannot stand the rivalry of any other social class. This is

the reason why he looks down on Gatsby at the Plaza Hotel once they meet, stigmatizing him as "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (Fitzgerald, p. 81).

Tom is not the only classist in *The Great Gatsby* who alienates Gatsby and the like because of their social class or socioeconomic status. Gatsby is just a sample standing in symbolic terms for the rich American people who are ostracized from the upper social class because of their humble origin, something that provides evidence of the increasing social inequality in the 1920s America. Nevertheless, Tom's scathing criticism and harassment of Gatsby seem justified to some extent, since he simply defends his family against someone who tries to shatter the stability of his family and snatch his wife from him. On the other hand, this reduces him to a hypocrite as his extramarital relationship with Myrtle, a married woman, has shattered the entire family of George Wilson and finally led up to Myrtle's murder and Gorge's suicide.

### **Gatsby's Quixoticness—Sanctification of Daisy:**

Likewise, Daisy is depicted as unscrupulous as her husband. Nevertheless, Gatsby idolises her, spending his life amassing money and hosting lavish parties to bring her back. Since he cannot reclaim her in reality, he turns into a quixotic dreamer who is much immersed in a world of his own imagination, where Daisy is sanctified and invested with celestial attributes that make of her an angel-like figure. As Pelzer (2000) contends, "[she] comes to embody, in her beauty and purity and essential aloofness his dream. For Gatsby, to possess Daisy is to possess the ideal" (p. 77). By the end, self-betrayed Gatsby meets a tragic end while trying to achieve "a dream that can never be attained in a reality tainted by gross materialism, cold indifference, and moral corruption" (Pelzer, 2000, p. 78). His quixoticness, coupled with the mystical aura he creates round Daisy, prevents him from accepting as true that she is an ordinary human being who is married and has a little daughter. This sanctification seems to blind his eyes from accepting her moral imperfections:

Daisy's appearance as a sacred image devoid of sensuality explains Gatsby's refusal to recognize her marriage and her child and reveals his inward desire to restore her to a virginal state. One does not really know whether this concept of virginity is related to Daisy's pre-marriage years or to an unconscious desire for mystical purity. However, in the novel, poetic elements are introduced to illuminate this "Madonna" quality, especially terms evoking soft and bright colors radiating a certain lightness, freshness, similar to Gatsby's dream. One finds here an ethereal atmosphere which carries the reader into a timeless and spaceless universe inhabited by angelic figures. Women are dressed in white, and at times the characters' lives do not seem real. We enter a supernatural realm aloof from the concrete and earthly reality. (Assadi & Freedman, 2007, p. 23)

This way, Gatsby is not that good at evaluating people which is manifested in his mythologization of Daisy whose flighty nature has been obvious on different occasions. Back to 1917 when the two lovers first meet, Daisy turns her back on Gatsby and accepts another suitor. According to Jordan, Daisy fails Gatsby's love and prefers Tom "who had purchased her" for a \$350,000-pearl necklace (Pelzer, 2000, p. 86). What quixotic Gatsby considers as pure love turns out in time to be nothing but a mere illusion. What he cannot understand is that Daisy, the then Daisy Fay before she gets married to Tom Buchanan, has first pursued him because of his

military uniform which has mesmerized her. If it was not for that uniform, it could have been too difficult, if not impossible, for such a young man of humble origin as Gatsby to be accepted by Daisy who does mind class differences: "The uniform of an army officer admits him to the Fay house because it erases all sartorial evidence of class status" (Balkun, 2006, p. 133). Balkun (2006) goes further and add that Daisy Fay does not have to wait long for Gatsby, since she is a most sought-after commodity:

A one-of-a-kind item, she is intensely sought after (Jordan Baker describes her as the most popular girl in Louisville), and both Gatsby and Tom single-mindedly pursue her in their turn. This situates her as more than just a common consumer item; she is a prized collectible, and whoever wants her can expect to pay dearly, which is exactly what Tom Buchanan does (his wedding gift to her is a 350-thousand-dollar pearl necklace). (p. 134)

That young Gatsby's military uniform is his only *carte blanche* into the elite society reduces this society to a pack of inconsiderate, careless and materialistic people. Fitzgerald's assertion of this point deepens the reader's understanding of the moral corruption of the upper class in the 1920s and helps demythologize the façade of its principles. It is portrayed as a selfish social group that only seeks its own personal gains to the exclusion of any morals or code of ethics altogether. Likewise, this group is seen keen enough on keeping itself aloof from other groups by setting long barriers between itself and the other social strata. On his part, ambitious Gatsby does his best to overcome such barriers by fabricating information about his working class background so as to make Daisy secure: "[H]e had deliberately given Daisy a sense of security; he let her believe that he was a person from much the same stratum as herself—that he was fully able to take care of her (Fitzgerald, p. 93). Even after he becomes a millionaire, Gatsby still lies to Nick and many others close to him regarding his origin, since he wishes such fabricated information would reach Daisy and entice her into coming back to him. Furthermore, he erroneously attributes his first parting from Daisy to money. As illustrated before, it is by no means money alone that establishes the barrier between classes. Although the two Eggs harbour wealthy people, the East Eggers look down on the residents of West Egg. It is not money alone then that sets the dichotomy between the two neighbouring districts. In close tandem with money, other factors such as social snobbery help establish class distinctions.

Despite Gatsby's love of Daisy, part of his very attraction to her is attributed to her being a member of the aristocracy: he is in love with Daisy and her glittering world altogether. Gross and Gross (1998) may not be exaggerating when they describe this as "Gatsby's worship of the monied world of Daisy Buchanan" (p. 2). Similarly, Balkun (2006) contends that Daisy has obviously been a treasure that cannot be resisted and is worth obtaining: "She is "safe" when Gatsby meets her (that is, worth investing in), a luxurious object on the marriage market, whose value is determined by the simple rules of supply and demand: many men have desired Daisy, and so she is clearly worth having" (pp. 133-134). That Gatsby's love of Daisy is partly money-oriented does not necessarily invalidate the previous opinion that his love for her is idealistic. Gatsby is justified to have harboured aspirations of making himself financially and socially better which Daisy's very presence in his life initiates in him. It is his right, and he cannot be blamed for his ambitions. He is predestined to be born in a modest family, and it is not a stigma at all to aspire to become rich. Yet, the real problem is that following his meeting of Daisy he betrays his detachment to his working class people. Furthermore, he "can never again be satisfied

with less than this [life]" (Balkun, 2006, p. 134). His goal to be a member of the elite haunts him to the core, driving him willingly enough to be involved in the labyrinths of the criminal underworld.

Likewise, Fitzgerald's portrayal of Gatsby's party attendants helps demythologize the upper class values. Though the 'old money' people at East Egg have derogatory opinion of their neighbours at West Egg, many of them attend the parties thrown by Gatsby whom they stigmatize as socially inferior. This reduces them to a hoard of hypocrites who take full advantage of those whom they denounce. By the very end of the novel, Nick is shocked enough when they do not show up in Gatsby's funeral. To his dismay and surprise as well, all his attempts to hold an honorable funeral for Gatsby by bringing some mourners to attend the funeral fail: "[I]t wasn't any use. Nobody came" (Fitzgerald, p. 102). He telephones Daisy and Tom and is told that they are on a trip somewhere. He sends the butler to New York with a letter to Wolfsheim who replies that he will not be able to come as he is too busy. That afternoon the phone rings and Nick answers. Once he tells the speaker that Gatsby is dead, the speaker abruptly ends the call. Klipspringer, one of Gatsby's partygoers, calls up only to ask about a pair of tennis shoes he has left at Gatsby's house. Nick goes to New York to meet Wolfsheim who tells him that he does not want to attend the funeral as he simply does not want to cause himself any trouble.

Ironically enough, Gatsby's mansion which has always been seen overcrowded with people enjoying themselves to the full is now empty. With the exception of a handful of mourners including Gatsby's father, the minister, one single party attendant nicknamed Owl Eyes, the West Egg postman along with four or five servants, Nick finds himself alone on dead Gatsby's side. Indignantly enough, Owl Eyes wonders at the ingratitude of the partygoers, "Why, my God! They used to go there by the hundreds" (Fitzgerald, p. 102).

### **Conclusion:**

In demythologizing the ideals of the elite, the American Dream and romanticism held by Gatsby, the title of the book turns into a real misnomer simply because Gatsby's moral imperfections do betray these principles and, consequently, make of his 'greatness' an impossibility. The reader, who is first asked to accept this attribute for granted as early as the very title of the novel, comes to realize the irony that lies behind it once the Gatsby mystery is unraveled. Likewise, Gatsby's moral corruption makes of him the very antagonist of himself and renders his tragic end as convincing as it is appalling. Nevertheless, to one's surprise and dismay as well, there is still an aura of uniqueness around this character that prevents one from stigmatizing him as a villain, a particular quality that makes him somewhat far better than all those close to him. With the exception of Nick, the rest of figures do pale compared to Gatsby as the reader still finds in him certain character traits they admire, more specifically his unbelievably unwaning belief in the power of love that never withers in time. This way, although love, quixotic love to be more specific right here, is a major weakness in Gatsby's character that aggravates his life and precipitates his tragic end, it wins him the reader's sympathy and makes him rather unique—even distinguished, but not *great*.

**About the Author:**

**Sayed Mohammed Youssef Ahmed, PhD** is currently an assistant professor of English literature at Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, KSA. He has been teaching modernist and postmodernist fiction for both undergraduate and postgraduate students at the Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Translation. His research interests include modernist and postmodernist fiction.

**References**

- Assadi, J. (2006). *Acting, Rhetoric, and Interpretation in Selected Novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Saul Bellow*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Assadi, J. & Freedman, W. (Eds.). (2007). *A Distant Drummer: Foreign Perspectives on F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Balkun, M. M. (2006). *The American Counterfeit: Authenticity and Identity in American Literature and Culture*. Alabama: Alabama UP.
- Barrett, L. (2006). "From Wonderland to Wasteland: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The New American Fairy Tale*". *Papers on Language & Literature*, (42) 2, 150- 180.
- Barrett, L. (1998). "Material Without Being Real': Photography and the End of Reality in *The Great Gatsby*". *Studies in the Novel*, (30) 4, 540-557.
- Beidler, P. D. (2013). "The Great Party-Crasher: *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the Cultures of World War I Remembrance". *WLA: War, Literature and the Arts*, (25), 1-24.
- Berman, R. (2009a). "F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gerald Murphy, and the New Arts". *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, (7), 127-141. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41583014>
- Berman, R. (2009b). *Translating Modernism: Fitzgerald and Hemingway*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Alabama UP.
- Bloom, H., (Ed.). (2006). *Bloom's Guides: The Great Gatsby*. New York: Infobase.
- Brauer, S. (2003). "Jay Gatsby and the Prohibition Gangster as Businessman". *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, (2), 57-57. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41583051>
- Bryer, J. R., Margolies, A. & Prigozy, R. (Eds.). (2000). *F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Perspectives*. Athens, GA: Georgia UP.
- Bryer, J. R., Prigozy, R. & Stern, M. R., (Eds.). (2012). *F. Scott Fitzgerald in the Twenty-First Century*. Tuscaloosa, AL: Alabama UP.
- Bourgeois, P. & Clendenning, J. (2007-2008). "Gatsby, Belasco, and Ethnic Ambiguity". *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, (6), 105-120. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41583131>
- Coleman, D. (2000). "Tuning in to Conversation in the Novel: Gatsby and the Dynamics of Dialogue". *Style*, (34) 1, 52-77.
- Dilworth, T. (2009). "Donne's Compass at the Death Scene in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*". *Explicator*, (68) 1, 55-57.
- Dilworth, T. (April-June 2010). "The Passion of Gatsby: Evocation of Jesus in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*". *Explicator*, (68) 2, 119-121.
- Donaldson, S. (2001). "Possessions in *The Great Gatsby*". *Southern Review*, (37) 2, 187-210.

- Eble, K. (1964). "The Craft of Revision: *The Great Gatsby*". *American Literature*, (36) 3, 315-326.
- Fitzgerald, S. F. (2002). *The Great Gatsby*. Beirut: York Press.
- Forster, G. (2003). "Against Melancholia: Contemporary Mourning Theory, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and the Politics of Unfinished Grief". *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, (14) 2, 134-170.
- Fraser, J. (Dec. 1965). "Dust and Dreams and *The Great Gatsby*". *ELH*, (32) 4, 554-564. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2872258>
- Froehlich, M. G. (2011). "Gatsby's Mentors: Queer Relations between Love and Money in *The Great Gatsby*". *Journal of Men's Studies*, (19) 3, 209-226.
- Froehlich, M. G. (2010). "Jordan Baker, Gender Dissent, and Homosexual Passing in *The Great Gatsby*". *The Space Between*, (6) 1, 81-103.
- Gale, R. L. (1998). *F. Scott Fitzgerald Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Giltrow, J., & Stouck, D. (1997). "Style as Politics in *The Great Gatsby*". *Studies in the Novel*, (29) 4, 476-490.
- Gross, D., & Gross, M. (1998). *Understanding The Great Gatsby: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Hauhart, R. C. (2013). "Religious Language and Symbolism in *The Great Gatsby's* Valley of Ashes". *Anq*, (26) 3, 200-204.
- Hays, P. L. (2004). "What the Dickens? *Great Expectations* and *The Great Gatsby*". *The F. Scott Fitzgerald*, (3), 128-139. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41583074>
- Heller, S. (2005). *Absence of Myth*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Holquist, M. (1988). "Stereotyping in Autobiography and Historiography: Colonialism in *The Great Gatsby*". *Poetics Today*, (9) 2 453-472. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1772699>
- Hook, A. (2002). *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Literary Life*. Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Howard, S. B. (Fall 1963). "*The Great Gatsby* and the Grotesque". *Criticism*, (5), 336-348. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41938363>
- Kerr, F. (June 1996). "Feeling 'Half Feminine': Modernism and the Politics of Emotion in *The Great Gatsby*". *American Literature*, (68) 2, 405-431. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928304>
- Kruse, H. (2002). "The Real Jay Gatsby: Max von Gerlach, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and the Compositional History of *The Great Gatsby*". *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, (1), 45-83 Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41583032>
- Lance, J. (Oct. 2000). "*The Great Gatsby*: Driving to Destruction with the Rich and Careless at the Wheel". *Studies in Popular Culture*, (23) 2, 25-35. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414542>
- Lehan, R. (2000). "*The Great Gatsby*—the Text as Construct: Narrative Knots and Narrative Unfolding". In J. R. Bryer, A. Margolies & R. Prigozy, (Eds.), *F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Perspectives* (p. 78-89). Athens, GA: Georgia UP.
- Lena, A. (1998). "Deceitful Traces of Power: An Analysis of the Decadence of Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*". *Canadian Review of American Studies*, (28) 1, 19-42.
- Levitt, P. M. (2012a). "Point of View, Telephones, Doubling, and Vicarious Learning in *The Great Gatsby*". *Midwest Quarterly*, (53) 3, 299-306.
- Levitt, P. M. (2012b). "*The Great Gatsby* and *The Lady with a Dog*". *Explicator*, (70) 3, 157-160.

- Li, N. (Jan. 2014). "A Comparative Study between *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Great Gatsby*—the Self-Sacrifice Spirits in Romanticism". *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, (4) 1, 116-120.
- Little, M. (2015). "I Could Make Some Money: Cars and Currency in *The Great Gatsby*". *Papers on Language & Literature*, (51) 1, 3-26.
- Malkmes, J. (2011). *American Consumer Culture and its Society: From F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1920s Modernism to Bret Easton Ellis' 1980s Blank Fiction*. Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag.
- Meehan, A. (Winter 2014). "Repetition, Race, and Desire in *The Great Gatsby*". *Journal of Modern Literature*, (37) 2, 76-91.
- Meyers, J. (2014). "Gatsby Meets Macomber". *New Criterion*, (32)10, 35-37.
- Pelzer, L. C. (2000). *Student Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Plath, J. (2007-2008). "In an Odd Light: Kipling's Maisie and Fitzgerald's Daisy". *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, (6), 95-104. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41583130>
- Preston, E. (May 1997). "Implying Author(s) in *The Great Gatsby*". *Narrative*, (5) 2, 143-164. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20107113>
- Roulston, R. (Winter 1980). "Traces of Tono-Bungay in *The Great Gatsby*". *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, (10) 1, 68-76. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30224987>
- Samuels, C. T. (Autumn 1966). "The Greatness of Gatsby". *The Massachusetts Review*, (7) 4, 783-794. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25087514>
- Settle, G. (March 1985). "Fitzgerald's Daisy: The Siren Voice". *American Literature*, (57) 1, 115-124. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2926317>
- Slater, P. G. (Jan. 1973). "Ethnicity in *The Great Gatsby*". *Twentieth Century Literature*, (19) 1, 53-62. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/440797>
- Shain, C. E. (1961). *F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota UP.
- Schreier, B. (Summer 2007). "Desire's Second Act: Race and *The Great Gatsby*'s Cynical Americanism". *Twentieth Century Literature*, (53) 2, 153-181. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20479804>
- Sutton, B. (2007). "Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and *Babylon Revisited*". *Explicator*, (65) 3, 164-167.
- Tredell, N. (2007). *Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Continuum.
- Will, B. (Fall 2005). "*The Great Gatsby* and the Obscene Word". *College Literature*, (32) 4, 125-144. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115310>