ADAPTATION AND ORIGINALITY IN THE GREAT GATSBY

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IN

THE GREAT GATSBY

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In August 1924, as The Great Gatsby neared completion, F. Scott Fitzgerald announced in a letter to Maxwell Perkins, managing editor of Charles Scribner's Sons, "I am grown at last."[1] In the fifty years since then, one critical work on Fitzgerald after another has concurred with this proclamation of artistic maturity. The Great Gatsby (1925) is generally considered to be his finest novel, the product of an undeniable talent. Despite the fitful brilliance of Tender Is the Night (1934) and the tantalizing promise of The Last Tycoon (unfinished at his death and posthumously published in 1941), the zenith of Fitzgerald's career came early.

If Fitzgerald's five novels are read in the order of their composition, the achievement represented by Gatsby appears all the more remarkable in comparison with the two essentially undistinguished novels that preceded it. The usually restrained Perkins had praised This Side of Paradise (1920) and The Beautiful and Damned (1922) for their vitality, but his response to the initial manuscript of Gatsby approached

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[1] John Kuehl and Jackson Bryer, eds., Dear Scott/Dear Max: the Fitzgerald-Perkins Correspondence (New York, 1971), p. 76.

rapture:

> . . . it has vitality to an extraordinary degree, and glamour, and a great deal of underlying thought of unusual quality. It has a kind of mystic atmosphere at times that you infused into parts of "Paradise" and have not since used. It is a marvelous fusion, into a unity of presentation, of the extraordinary incongruities of life today. And as for sheer writing, it's astonishing.[2]

Here, in addition to the vitality upon which he customarily placed a premium, Perkins also admires the novel's "unity of presentation". In a subsequent letter he remarked that Fitzgerald had plainly "mastered the craft",[3] thus noting the successful achievement of an intention that Fitzgerald had communicated to him earlier:

> . . . in my new novel I'm thrown directly on purely creative work - not trashy imaginings as in my stories but the sustained imagination of a sincere and yet radiant world. So I tread slowly and carefully and at times in considerable distress. This book will be a consciously artistic achievement and must depend on that as the first books did not.[4]

Fitzgerald's sense that The Great Gatsby represented a new direction for him can be further seen in his request to Perkins that the book-jacket carry no "signed blurbs": "I'm tired of being the author of This Side of Paradise and I want to

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[2] Ibid., p. 82. In all references to this correspondence spelling and punctuation have been left uncorrected.

[3] Ibid., p. 84.

[4] Ibid., p. 70.

start over."[5]

Coming upon Gatsby after its predecessors one cannot avoid being struck by the novel's economy and compression, by that "consciously artistic" element which is so noticeably absent from This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned. Arthur Mizener, while discussing the lack of organization in the former, notes the difference between the first two novels and Gatsby as follows:

> His instinct was to write what James called in "The New Novel" the novel of "saturation" . . . rather than the novel with a clear "centre of interest" and "a sense of the whole." The very purity of his imagination and the tenacity with which it fixed itself on the life about him only made more obvious his failure to organize all his imagined experience. Not till he wrote his third book did he produce a novel in which the form is adequate to the realized life.[6]

The achievement in Gatsby of an adequate form is, then, what distinguishes the novel from This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned. Between his second and third novels Fitzgerald acquired a concern with form as an absolute essential that he later passed on to his daughter at a time when she too seemed destined for a literary career:

> If you have anything to say, anything you feel nobody has ever said before, you have got to feel so desperately that you will find some way to say it

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[5] Ibid., p. 80.

[6] Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise (New York, 1959), pp. 110-111.

> that nobody has ever found before, so that the thing you have to say and the way of saying it blend as one matter - as indissolubly as if they were conceived together.[7]

Two years after Fitzgerald's death Edmund Wilson expressed a belief that it would be through his grasp of form and structure that Fitzgerald's work would survive. "I think you are right," he wrote to Gertrude Stein, "that he had the constructive gift that Hemingway doesn't have at all - and I feel sure that some of his work will last."[8]

It is with Fitzgerald's "constructive gift" as displayed in The Great Gatsby that I shall be concerned in this thesis. In July 1922 Fitzgerald told Perkins that he wanted to write "something new - something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned",[9] and it is the simultaneous simplicity and intricacy of the novel's pattern that I intend to illustrate in Chapter III. Robert Stallman has written that "nothing is in the novel that does not exist in relation to everything else",[10] and analysis bears this out.

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7 Andrew Turnbull, ed., The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 25.

8 Quoted by Robert Stallman in "Tender Is the Night", The Houses That James Built and Other Literary Studies (Michigan, 1964), p. 172.

9 Quoted by Mizener, p. 186.

10 Robert Stallman, "Gatsby and the Hole in Time", The Houses That James Built, p. 131.

The illustration of an intricate pattern in The Great Gatsby, however, does not alone constitute a discussion of Fitzgerald's "constructive gift". The artistic maturity revealed in the novel was no mere accident but can be shown to result in a large measure from the novelist's admiration for one other author in particular, Joseph Conrad. Any discussion of the artistic achievement in Gatsby must take into account the influence Conrad exercised upon Fitzgerald. In the next chapter I shall discuss in detail the evidence for a substantial indebtedness on Fitzgerald's part; here I wish only to review certain critical estimates in respect to the extent of the debt and its nature.

The frequency with which the name of Conrad appears in Fitzgerald's correspondence provides clear testimony to his consciousness of Conrad's work, but there are also less definite signs, instances where it is impossible to point definitely at Conrad and yet where possible verbal echoes may testify to an influence no less powerful for being unacknowledged. To return for a moment to that earlier passage in which Fitzgerald told Perkins of the "purely creative work" upon which he was thrown in Gatsby, and particularly to the phrase regarding "the imagination of a sincere and yet radiant world." The use here of "sincere" in conjunction with "radiant" may well be an unconscious echo of a similar combination of "sincerity" and "light" in Conrad's "Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'". It occurs after Conrad's caution that

"to snatch, in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task" for the artist: "The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment in the light of a sincere mood" (my italics).[11] The echo is faint, certainly, but in his preface to the 1934 Modern Library edition of Gatsby Fitzgerald stated that he had indeed re-read Conrad's "Preface" prior to working on his own novel.[12]

In any case, as the next chapter will show, Gatsby itself provides ample evidence of Conrad's strong influence upon Fitzgerald at an important stage of his career. Critics, so far as I am aware, have never positively denied the existence of the influence, but what is disputed is the extent of the influence and its exact nature. What follows is a brief outline of the discoveries and differences of certain critics who have examined the influence, prior to a detailed discussion of three contributions in Chapter II.

It is generally agreed that Conrad influenced The Great Gatsby in two ways, and Arthur Mizener's pioneering biography

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[11] Joseph Conrad, The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'/Typhoon/ and other Stories (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 13.

[12] James E. Miller, F. Scott Fitzgerald: His Art and His Technique (New York, 1967), p. 93.

neatly summarizes the general consensus. In the first place, Nick Carraway's literary ancestor is Conrad's narrator Marlow, for in Marlow Fitzgerald discovered a device that allowed him "to keep clearly separated for the first time in his career the two sides of his nature, the middle-western Trimalchio and the spoiled priest who disapproved of but grudgingly admired him."[13] In the second place, the debt did not end at certain structural features, but included "the constant and not always fortunate echoes of Conrad's phrasing."[14] Mizener considers these to be the extent of the influence, and concedes them but minor importance.[15] But these two areas represent a general consensus only in so far as they are the two most obvious parallels between Conrad and Gatsby. Subsequent to Mizener the question has become one of establishing just where Conrad's influence does in fact end.

On both counts - the extent of the influence and its importance - critics have gone much further than Mizener. In 1954, three years after the publication of Mizener's biography,

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[13] Mizener, p. 187.

[14] Ibid., p. 186.

[15] In fact, in the preface to the Vintage Books edition of his biography (New York, 1959) Mizener speaks of "such comparatively superficial critical facts as the influence of Conrad on the style of The Great Gatsby" (p. vii).

John W. Bicknell, in a brief study of the parallels between Fitzgerald's three major novels and T.S. Eliot, extended Conrad's sphere of influence. Through "the dependence of Eliot's 'The Hollow Men' upon Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'" he traced an "interrelated" influence of Conrad upon Fitzgerald, and remarked that "Gatsby is in some ways akin to Lord Jim and to Kurtz", the kinship with the latter being somewhat closer.[16] In the following year Robert Stallman took direct issue with Mizener's opinions. In his biographer's eyes, Stallman writes, Fitzgerald is too completely "an Original Genius - almost nobody at all influenced this Very Bright Boy." Dismissing as "peripheral" the "authorized influences" of Thackeray and Edith Wharton upon Gatsby, Stallman states that "the central one . . . is the obsessive hold of Conrad in shaping Fitzgerald's greatest novel." By the time that he wrote Gatsby Fitzgerald "admitted" to having read Nostromo and the "Preface to The Nigger", but Stallman believes that in addition his reading of Conrad "must have included 'Heart of Darkness' and Lord Jim."[17]

Thus far he has little to add to Bicknell's observat-

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16 John W. Bicknell, "The Waste Land of F. Scott Fitzgerald", in Kenneth E. Eble, ed., F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1973), p. 72.

17 Robert Stallman, "Conrad and The Great Gatsby", The Houses That James Built, p. 150.

ions. He proceeds, however, to elaborate a sphere of influence for Conrad that goes far beyond those seen by Mizener and Bicknell:

> What he learned from Conrad includes not only the device of the perplexed narrator and turns of phrasing, but also themes and plot-situations, ambivalence of symbolism, etc. - in fact, the craft of the novel, including a theory of its construction. Fitzgerald, as he wrote in his notebooks, examined "Conrad's secret theory" and discovered the secret, that Conrad wrote the truth - "adding confusion however to his structure."[18]

In 1928 Fitzgerald told Perkins that "Conrad has been, after all, the healthy influence on the technique of the novel",[19] suggesting that his debt did indeed go beyond Mizener's conservative estimate and amounted somewhat to that perceived by Stallman. The latter points out numerous correspondences between Gatsby and Nostromo, Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness" in the areas of structure, symbolism, characterization and phraseology, and establishes that Conrad's influence is indeed extensive.

As will become clearer in the following chapter, the numerous parallels traced by Stallman are not the last word on the subject of Conrad's influence. To establish the mere existence of such an influence is insufficient, and subsequent

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[18] Ibid., pp. 150-151.

[19] Kuehl and Bryer, eds., Dear Scott/Dear Max, p. 151.

critics explored the question of why Fitzgerald was so responsive to Conrad at that stage of his career. James E. Miller, concerned with demonstrating that the "undeniable artistry" of Gatsby was not an "accident", also considers Conrad to have been a powerful influence upon Fitzgerald.[20] For Miller, much of Fitzgerald's interest lies in the fact that he is an example of a novelist who matured in the midst of the conflicting theories about the novel represented by the protagonists in the James-Wells controversy that climaxed in 1915. In this controversy James championed the novel of "selection" against Wells and the proponents of the novel of "saturation",[21] and Miller's examination of Fitzgerald's novels demonstrates the young author's gradual transfer of allegiance from the Wells camp to the James camp, until in 1937 he finds Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe re-enacting the 1915 controversy, Fitzgerald championing the "novel of selected incident" against the more discursive Wolfe.[22] James had singled Conrad out for especial praise, and the latter thus assumes importance as the novelist whose example did most to persuade Fitzgerald in favour of the novel of "selection": "Probably the

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[20] Miller, p. 1.

[21] These terms derive from James's essay "The New Novel", published in 1914.

[22] Miller, p. 159.

greatest influence on Fitzgerald during the gestation period of The Great Gatsby was Joseph Conrad",[23] from whose "Preface to The Nigger" Fitzgerald gained "a new approach to his craft".[24] Unlike Stallman, Miller does not trace parallels in incident, phraseology, characterization, etc., but concentrates almost exclusively upon Fitzgerald's technical debt to Conrad, seeking to place the relationship between the two into a particular novelistic movement, that away from Wells towards the Jamesian novel of "selection."

In 1966 Robert Emmet Long published a long article in which he began by suggesting that Miller's concentration upon Fitzgerald's technique was too limited, and that a "more organic criticism would consider not only form but also content, structure, and treatment of subject."[25] Long undertakes an examination of those novels of Conrad's that date prior to 1900 in the hope that if "substantial correspondence exists" Gatsby will be endowed with "a new dimension."[26] What exactly this means becomes clearer when he discovers interesting cor-

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[23] Ibid., p. 92.

[24] Ibid., p. 94.

[25] Robert Emmet Long, "The Great Gatsby and the Tradition of Joseph Conrad", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, VIII (1966), p. 259.

[26] Ibid., p. 260.

respondences between Gatsby and Almayer's Folly, Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness." These correspondences all fall within the categories defined by Stallman, but Long goes further in suggesting why it was that Fitzgerald adopted so much from the early Conrad. In doing so, he groups Gatsby with This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned with regard to a common thematic concern: "Fitzgerald's first two novels describe young idealists and their engagement with romantic illusion, their collision with reality, their disenchantment. The subject matter of the early Conrad was Fitzgerald's also."[27] Thus Fitzgerald's sensitivity to Conrad is explained by similarity of subject, and from this Long proceeds to suggest that "new dimension" mentioned above. He recalls Flaubert's "Bovaryism", the detached realism from which stem Conrad's first two novels. However, in the "Preface to The Nigger" Conrad proclaimed the "romantic realism" that he developed from "Bovaryism", and it is from this that Gatsby descends:

> . . . it is out of Conrad's romantic interpretation of French realism that The Great Gatsby, putting aside the question of direct influence, may be seen logically to evolve. The American and local character of The Great Gatsby has often been discussed, yet criticism has not taken adequately into account that The Great Gatsby represents an extension in American literature of a European tradition - a tradition which has been concerned above all with the subject of romantic illusion and with the problem of aesth-

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[27] Ibid., p. 417.

etic form in the novel.[28]

Whether or not Long's thesis is accepted in its entirety, his concentration upon thematic reasons as being behind Fitzgerald's various debts to Conrad represents a significant advance over the simple tracing of parallels.

If the major part of this chapter has been concerned with the influence on Gatsby of a man who died a year before its publication it is nevertheless a measure of Conrad's figurative 'presence' in Fitzgerald's novel. It seems to me that, given such a presence, a consideration of the artistic unity of Gatsby cannot proceed without first of all distinguishing elements possibly adopted from Conrad from those that seem distinctively Fitzgerald's. As has been suggested in this chapter and will become more apparent in the next, critical opinion on the matter of the relationship between the two novelists represents a gradual expansion of the former's sphere of influence, and while this doubtless increases Conrad's stature there is a danger that it has the opposite effect upon Fitzgerald's. For example, when Robert Stallman remarks that Fitzgerald "admitted" to having read Nostromo (page eight) the reader may detect a subtle suggestion that his reading of other novels by Conrad was concealed.

Originally this thesis was intended to comprise a tracing of Conrad-Fitzgerald correspondences with a view to est-

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[28] Ibid., p. 422.

ablishing the existence of a definite relationship between the two novelists. However, in the course of preparatory research two things became apparent. Firstly, that, as the next chapter will show, such a relationship had already been established thanks to the work of Robert Stallman, James E. Miller and Robert Emmet Long. Secondly, as these critics pointed to more and more correspondences I began to have doubts concerning the claims of The Great Gatsby to be an original and distinctive work of art. Where, for example, does a certain degree of indebtedness end and wholesale borrowing begin? Fortunately, a return to the text of Gatsby provides ample evidence of an artistic control that is Fitzgerald's own.

As Robert Long writes, Fitzgerald's debt to Conrad as "a model of method does not 'explain' the maturity of The Great Gatsby - it does not explain how Fitzgerald was capable of assimilating and transforming the material from which he drew".[29] In the following chapter I shall elaborate the correspondences between Conrad's novels and Gatsby suggested by Robert Stallman, James E. Miller and Robert Emmet Long. Between them, these critics have demonstrated the extent of the relationship. In Chapter III I shall examine certain facets of the "intricate pattern" of the novel with a view to illustrating that Gatsby is more than a derivative gathering-together of elements culled from Conrad. My intention, then, is to illus-

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[29] Ibid., p. 419.

trate not only the debt to Conrad apparent in Fitzgerald's finest work, but also the originality that went into the making of the only novel he wrote that is successful as a "consciously artistic achievement".

CHAPTER II

JOSEPH CONRAD AND THE GREAT GATSBY

In the following summary of correspondences traced by Messrs. Stallman, Miller and Long I shall discuss each critic's contribution separately. In addition to being the simplest approach it is also the most appropriate, for, as I suggested in the previous chapter, each regards the matter of Conrad's influence upon Fitzgerald in a slightly different light and thus concentrates upon those correspondences that best illustrate his thesis.

I shall discuss Robert Stallman's article - "Conrad and The Great Gatsby" - to begin with. The article is densely-packed with suggested correspondences, and although I have tried to be brief in the following discussion the variety and extent of his suggestions require more space than do those of Miller and Long.

He first compares Gatsby and "Heart of Darkness". The summer he worked on Gatsby Fitzgerald read Oswald Spengler's The Decline of the West, and later wrote to Perkins to say that he didn't think he "ever quite recovered from him": "Spengler . . . prophesied gang rule, 'young peoples hungry for spoil,' and more particularly 'the world as spoil' as an

idea, a dominant supercessive idea."[1] This idea, Stallman suggests, Fitzgerald "had already found in Conrad", for it dominates both "Heart of Darkness" and Nostromo. "The Great Gatsby transposes Conrad's world-as-spoil idea into the contemporary idiom", in which "Gatsby as gangster represents this idea." Conrad's cannibals are now "reformed" and prosper in Wolfsheim's "Swastika Holding Company"; Kurtz's enslaved blacks threaten Tom Buchanan's white supremacy, and in Daisy's mocking "We've got to beat them down" (The Great Gatsby, 13)[2] there is an echo of Kurtz's "Exterminate all the brutes!" (HD, 130)[3]. Kurtz's wilderness rings of ivory to Marlow's ears, while to Gatsby and Nick Daisy's voice is "full of money" (GG, 120). Wolfsheim's cuff-buttons, which are "finest specimens of human molars" (GG, 73), "substitute for Kurtz's hoarded ivory."[4]

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1 Fitzgerald to Perkins, June 6, 1940. Quoted by Stallman, p. 151.

2 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925). All subsequent references are to this edition. Henceforth the novels referred to in this chapter will be designated by the following abbreviations:

GG - The Great Gatsby
HD - "Heart of Darkness"
LJ - Lord Jim

3 Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness" (London, 1969). All subsequent references are to this edition.

4 Stallman, p. 151.

The preceding summary of Stallman's initial remarks provides a good example of the overall fluctuating quality of his analysis. Despite the confidence with which they are put forward several of the correspondences are dubious in the sense that although they reflect a similarity between the two works they are not evidence of a definite indebtedness on Fitzgerald's part. For instance, the "gangster" element of Gatsby's character is given comparatively minor emphasis in the novel, and the book's "gangster" is Meyer Wolfsheim, who stands behind the "Swastika Holding Company" (GG, 171) and "made" Gatsby (GG, 172). Elements of Kurtz's voracious character seem rather to have their counterparts in Wolfsheim than in Gatsby, as a comparison between Wolfsheim's cuff-buttons and the decapitated heads surrounding Kurtz's house (HD, 142-143) suggests. In cases like this, it is difficult to point to a clear debt, and the most that can be suggested is that, unconsciously or otherwise, Fitzgerald refashioned for his own purposes certain elements of Conrad's work.

Stallman next considers the works' respective heroes. Here again he is on less than firm ground. He first compares them in the matter of "unscrupulousness": "Like Kurtz," he writes, "Gatsby is unscrupulous and without restraint (as Marlow says of Kurtz), except for the restraint of keeping up appearances. Like Gatsby, Kurtz lacks 'restraint in the gratification of his various lusts . . . there was something want-

ing in him. . . .'"[5] True, as Stallman notes, Gatsby seduces Daisy and takes "what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously" (GG, 149), but Marlow's reference to Kurtz's lack of "restraint" is occasioned by the sight of those decapitated heads. While on the surface Stallman's quotations seem to be interrelated, an examination of their respective contexts reveals a difference in degree of unscrupulousness that makes the relationship possible rather than probable. It is also difficult to accept Stallman's remark that both "violate time; they corrupt the point-present Now" (of Gatsby this is a valid observation), while there seems only slight significance in the fact that "Kurtz's name contradicts him, and Gatsby's name is false."[6] In noting, however, that Tom refers to Gatsby as "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (GG, 130) and that Marlow describes Kurtz as an "initiated wraith from the back of Nowhere" (HD, 128) Stallman has an interesting point, although Tom's phrase is not uncommon and the echo could be coincidence. He is correct in noting that both men are "beguiled by a dream",[7] although by dreams of different natures. Marlow's description of Kurtz as "a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything

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[5] Stallman, p. 151.

[6] Ibid., p. 151.

[7] Ibid., p. 151.

high or low" (HD, 158) can perhaps also be applied to Gatsby, although Marlow's remark seems to convey an amorality more profound than Gatsby's splendid romantic illusion.

Thus far Stallman's correspondences do not constitute especially firm evidence of indebtedness. When he compares the descriptions of Gatsby's smile and Kurtz's stare, however, he has a much more solid case. It is Nick's evocation of Gatsby's smile that conveys the latter's glowing attractiveness and charm:

> It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced - or seemed to face - the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrate on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor (GG, 48).

In Gatsby Fitzgerald stamps all his major characters upon the reader's mind with similarly powerful personal attributes, and it is a technique employed effectively by Conrad in creating Kurtz. Stallman cites Marlow's description of his stare, "that could not see the flame of the candle but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness" (HD, 165). One can also cite Kurtz's gaping mouth, which "gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him" (HD, 147). The parallels are not verbally exact (very few of those seen by the various critics are) but the use of a single physical characteristic to endow a character with a universal stature

is common to both passages.

With the remark that both Gatsby and Kurtz are "conceived in the mode of a deity, with the difference that Kurtz is idolized and Gatsby is not"[8] Stallman returns to vague suggestions that offer little. He does have an interesting point when he sees Gatsby ("Mr. Nobody from Nowhere") as the Fitzgerald counterpart of the Russian "harlequin" Marlow encounters at the Inner Station (HD, 133-146), although this correspondence seems less likely than Robert Long's between the Russian and 'Owl Eyes' in Gatsby.[9] Gatsby shares, Stallman further notes, "Kurtz's phenomenal capacity for vanishing from sight",[10] and Gatsby does indeed vanish from Tom and Nick in the New York restaurant (GG, 75) and almost as rapidly from the Plaza Hotel after the confrontation with Tom (GG, 136). But when Marlow speaks of Kurtz as confiding in him "before he vanished altogether" (HD, 128) he surely has in mind a figurative vanishing: as an "initiated wraith" Kurtz does not so much die as abandon his ravaged body. Gatsby's occasional disappearances serve a different purpose, conveying a certain boyish frailty, a tendency to avoid Buchanan's solid reality and

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8 Ibid., p. 152

9 Long, p. 409.

10 Stallman, p. 152.

nurse his fragile dream. However, that "the corrupted Kurtz and the corrupted Gatsby are, after all, incorruptible"[11] is an undeniable similarity, as is Stallman's remark that both Marlow and Nick Carraway remain loyal to the two heroes, Gatsby alone being exempted from Nick's "bitter - and Conradian - indictment of 'the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men.'"[12]

Stallman picks up this idea of fidelity and loyalty in noting that "What redeems Gatsby is his fidelity to an idea, his faith in the power of dream, and what redeems Nick Carraway is his fidelity to Gatsby." For fidelity is "the all-redeeming virtue" for Conrad, and his works are "in the main variations on this theme." As he notes, "betrayals condition Conrad's plots, and they shape Fitzgerald's plot in The Great Gatsby."[13] Tom and Daisy deceive one another; Daisy betrays Gatsby, as does Ella Kaye when she robs him of his legacy from Dan Cody (GG, 101-102); Nick deceives both Jordan Baker and the girl he has back home, while Myrtle Wilson deceives her husband. "Nostromo is riddled with betrayals", remarks Stallman,[14] and

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11 Ibid., p. 152.

12 Ibid., p. 152.

13 Ibid., p. 153.

14 Ibid., p. 153.

a brief allusion to the loneliness felt by Emilia Gould in that novel leads him to remark further that "Gatsby's loneliness is proverbial, and Nick shares it in admitting 'a haunting loneliness' that he feels in himself and at times in others."[15] Such isolation is "typical of Conrad's plots: Kurtz as Chief of the Inner Station, cut off from the outer world; Haldin (in Under Western Eyes) isolated by his betrayal of Razumov; the lonely Leggatt and the untried captain in "The Secret Sharer"; and in Victory Heyst on his island."[16]

The remainder of Stallman's study is concerned with Gatsby and Lord Jim, save for occasional digressions back to "Heart of Darkness", and it is in Lord Jim that some of the clearest signs of indebtedness are found. In the first place, the relationship between Marlow and Jim is unmistakably the prototype of that between Nick Carraway and Gatsby. Nick and Marlow introduce themselves in an almost identical manner as men who resent the tendency of others to select them for confidences. Nick sees himself as "a normal person" easily spotted as such by persons possessed of an "abnormal mind":

> . . . in college I was unjustly accused of being a politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men. Most of the confidences were unsought - frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some

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15 Ibid., p. 153.

16 Ibid., p. 153.

> unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon (GG, 1).

Marlow's first words in Lord Jim are curses upon the "familiar devil" that lets him in for things like the 'Patna' inquiry:

> . . . the kind of thing that by devious, unexpected, truly diabolical ways causes me to run up against men with soft spots, with hard spots, with hidden plague spots, by Jove!, and loosens their tongues at the sight of me for their infernal confidences; as though, forsooth, I had no confidences to make to myself, as though - God help me! - I didn't have enough confidential information about myself to harrow my own soul till the end of my appointed time. (LJ, 31-32)[17]

There are no exact verbal echoes in Fitzgerald's writing, but the desire of both men to avoid confiding tongues and the accompanying scorn for their owners makes the correspondence unmistakable. To be noted, however, is the difference between Marlow's impassioned oaths and Nick's coolly ironic tone. In connection with this Stallman notes that Nick lacks Marlow's "compassion and humility" and alludes to Nick's "hypocrisy", and I shall deal with this important issue at length in Chapter III.[18] He next compares Nick's pride in his one suspected cardinal virtue - "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (GG, 60) - with Marlow's loathing of dishon-

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[17] Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (Harmondsworth, 1971). All subsequent references are to this edition.

[18] Stallman, p. 154.

esty in "Heart of Darkness": "You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of of death, a flavour of mortality in lies - which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world - what I want to forget" (HD, 89). Yet lie is exactly what Marlow does at the end of the work in denying Kurtz's last words in the face of his fiancee's luminous faith, and Robert Long further notes that Nick also lies to preserve Mr. Gatz's illusions about his son.[19]

Following these remarks Stallman notes that Gatsby "refashions in contemporary idiom what was for Conrad 'the moral problem of conduct', the problem which Conrad explored notably in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and in Lord Jim."[20] Jim's father's advice to his son not to "judge men harshly or hastily" (LJ, 257) is echoed in Nick's father's tacit warning that his son "reserve all judgments" (GG, 1). Jim's neglected father, says Stallman, is paralleled by Gatsby's abandoned one, and he further suggests an extremely tenuous correspondence between Gatsby as "a son of God" (GG, 99) and the "cosmic wit" with which Conrad defines Jim's father as "the finest man that ever had been worried by the cares of a

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[19]Long, p. 413.

[20]Stallman, p. 154.

large family since the beginning of the world" (LJ, 65).

Stallman notes an illuminating parallel in both heroes' obsession with the past, Gatsby wishing to "reinstate" it, Jim to "obliterate" it; and he cites an interesting passage where Marlow recalls Jim's feelings after escaping from his imprisonment in Patusan. Jim leaps the palisade only to become stuck in a clinging mudbank, and in the fear of capture that overtakes him he longs to be back in confinement repairing the Rajah's clock, the task he was engaged in when the nature of his peril dawned on him: "He longed - so he said - to be back there again, mending the clock. Mending the clock - that was the idea" (LJ, 193). This is the idea, says Stallman, "not only of Lord Jim but also of The Great Gatsby."[21] Neither Gatsby nor Jim can alter the unalterable past, and Stallman notes that the impossibility of their respective dreams is suggested in both novels by placing the heroes symbolically on the shore gazing across water. Marlow sees Jim as standing "on the brink of a vast obscurity, like a lonely figure by the shore of a sombre and hopeless ocean" (LJ, 133), and in Gatsby this ocean becomes the "courtesy bay" separating Gatsby from Daisy over on East Egg.[22]

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[21] Ibid., p. 154.

[22] Ibid., p. 155.

Stallman's final correspondence is between the heroes' symbolic significances, for both symbolize "the power of dream and illusion." He then hints at the common subject matter shared by the two authors which Long later explored: "Fitzgerald's romantic idealism and satiric detachment are patterned upon the characteristic Conradian ironic combination employed in the creation of Jim, Nostromo and Kurtz. Deluded idealists!"[23] Marlow's remark in "Heart of Darkness" that "The mind of man is capable of anything - because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future" (HD, 105) thus finds an echo in Nick's awe at the power of Gatsby's dream: "No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart" (GG, 97). Both Gatsby and Jim, says Stallman, refuse to submit to the "destructive element", the "heap of dirt" upon which man cannot keep still and which Stein uses as an analogy for "life as it is - the colorless routine existence of our submission to the established order of things".[24]

Stallman concludes his study by noting that whereas Marlow "penetrates the mask of Kurtz and the soul of Jim" Nick Carraway "presents Gatsby only from the outside", for his mind

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[23] Ibid., p. 155.

[24] Ibid., p. 155.

"lacks Marlow's range and points of curiosity."[25] As I shall demonstrate in Chapter III, Stallman here hints at a feature of Gatsby that, if considered at length, provides clear evidence that the novel is far from derivative.

Despite the tenuousness of several of the correspondences that he cites, Stallman's study does suggest that Lord Jim in particular exercised a strong influence upon The Great Gatsby. But it does not on the whole seem fair to speak, as he does, of Conrad's "obsessive hold" upon the novel (see above, page eight). Fitzgerald may have adopted the novel's 'scaffolding' from Conrad, but, as I shall show in the following chapter, the novel's total structure transcends it.

Rather than trace parallels in the manner of Robert Stallman, James E. Miller concerns himself with Conrad's influence upon Fitzgerald's fictional technique. His study shows that Fitzgerald's first three novels demonstrate a steady movement from "saturation" towards "selection". This Side of Paradise exemplifies the novel of "saturation", in which "the theme would seem to be an accidental accretion of the several episodes rather than a dominating center toward which all the action is directed."[26] The Beautiful and Damned represents

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[25] Ibid., p. 157

[26] Miller, p. 43.

"a novel of transition" and is "an advance toward selection."[27] Frequently Miller's research into Fitzgerald's book reviews is valuable in reinforcing his observations, as when he cites a 1923 review in which Fitzgerald first displayed an understanding of the methods of "selection" and "saturation". In this review (of Grace Flandrau's Being Respectable) Fitzgerald noted the lack of anything "to draw together the entire novel" and that the author had "little sense of selection."[28] Thus, by 1925 and Gatsby he had abandoned the 'saturationist' camp, and "James Joyce, Willa Cather, and, most important, Joseph Conrad . . . all figured prominently in the evolution of Fitzgerald's concept of the novel as a work of art."[29]

Miller begins his consideration of Conrad's influence with a discussion of the "Preface to The Nigger", for since in 1934 Fitzgerald still recalled its effect upon him "Conrad's preface . . . must have impressed the American novelist deeply."[30] Miller locates "the heart of that preface" in Conrad's description of his "task" as "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to

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27 Ibid., p. 77.

28 Quoted by Miller, p. 80.

29 Miller, p. 84.

30 Ibid., 93.

make you see."[31] As Miller notes, this is an attempt to "remove, as much as possible, all obstruction separating the reader from the actual scene",[32] and Conrad turned to the other arts for an explanatory analogy, stating that writing "must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music - which is the art of arts."[33] There is, however, a certain artistic irony to be noted here, for the removal of "all obstruction separating the reader from the actual scene" is accomplished in Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness" by filtering the scene through the seemingly 'obstructive' consciousness of Marlow. While he fails to note this irony, Miller, when discussing Fitzgerald's adoption from Conrad of "modified first person narration",[34] unconsciously explains it by remarking that Marlow, ever prepared to quote verbatim characters who have information that he lacks, acts as a device whereby "the happening, by the time it reaches the reader, has in effect filtered through a number of minds", thus presenting "a variety of points

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[31] Quoted by Miller, p. 93.

[32] Miller, p. 93.

[33] Quoted by Miller, p. 94.

[34] Miller, p. 94.

of view."[35] In Lord Jim, for example, he reports the French lieutenant's account of finding the crewless Patna (LJ, 107-116). All the time, however, Marlow's search for the elusive truth holds the novel on course, acting as a dominating centre of interest. Miller's remarks here are acutely relevant to The Great Gatsby. In Chapter III I intend to demonstrate that, to a greater extent than in Conrad's works, the "centre of interest" in the novel lies in the narrator, in the interpretation of Jay Gatsby's story through Nick Carraway's complicated consciousness. While Nick clearly assumes Marlow's role and while the novel is patterned upon that "characteristic Conradian ironic combination" noted by Stallman (see above, page twenty-seven), it will be my contention that to this ground-plan Fitzgerald added an extra dimension.

Before concluding this discussion of Miller's contribution, it is worth noting the other "specific elements"[36] that he suggests Fitzgerald adopted from Conrad. These are "the use of style or language to reflect theme", and "the use of deliberate 'confusion' by the reordering of the chronology of events."[37] Miller prefaces his illustration of the first

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[35] Ibid., p. 107.

[36] Ibid., p. 94.

[37] Ibid., p. 94.

of these with another illuminating reference to Fitzgerald's book reviews, another from 1923 in which he began by quoting a passage from Conrad's "Youth" and remarking that "since that story I have found in nothing else even the echo of that lift and ring."[38] Gatsby, however, is rich in sentences and whole paragraphs that have an evocative "lift and ring". Miller chooses as his example the novel's closing paragraphs, noting that the prose "becomes more and more rhythmical simultaneously with the expansion of the significance of Gatsby's dream."[39] Given the reference in the book review, it seems certain that such poetically rhythmical and intense writing was inspired by Conrad.

The question of the chronological "confusion" in Gatsby is more difficult. As Robert Stallman notes (see above, page nine), Fitzgerald's notebooks contain the remark that Conrad wrote "the truth" but added "confusion . . . to his structure." Of this Nostromo is perhaps the supreme example, although it is a noticeable feature of Lord Jim in addition. Such a degree of confusion, however, is not found in Gatsby, and what is there is restricted to the gradual revelation of Gatsby's past. In 1925 Ford Madox Ford, Conrad's collaborator on certain works, set down certain fictional devices and maxims of his late friend

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[38] Quoted by Miller, p. 122.

[39] Miller, p. 122.

in Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, and had the following to say on the subject of characterization:

> You meet an English gentleman at your golf club. He is beefy, full of health, the moral of the boy from an English Public School of the finest type. You discover, gradually, that he is hopelessly neurasthenic, dishonest in matters of small change, but unexpectedly self-sacrificing, a dreadful liar, but a most painfully careful student of lepidoptera and, finally, from the public prints, a bigamist who was once, under another name, hammered on the Stock Exchange. . . . Still, there he is, the beefy, full-fed fellow, moral of an English Public School product. To get such a man in fiction you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past. . . . That theory at least we gradually evolved.[40]

Gatsby's smile (GG, 48) is certainly an instance of a strong initial impression, and only gradually are the true facts of his past revealed. But the idea for such a gradual revelation came in fact not from Conrad but from Maxwell Perkins. As Henry Dan Piper notes, the initial manuscript placed the biographical information all together in Chapter VIII, first as a long "autobiographical confession" by Gatsby himself, and then as a summary by Nick.[41] In a lengthy appraisal of the initial manuscript, however, Perkins suggested that the info-

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[40] Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (Boston, 1925), pp. 136-137.

[41] Henry Dan Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait (New York, 1965), p. 148.

rmation be released "bit by bit."[42] While subsequent to this suggestion Fitzgerald may have been influenced by Conrad's use of such 'delayed revelation', the only firm evidence that we have points to Perkins as the immediate source of the "confusion".

It seems to me that much of the value of Miller's contribution lies in the fact that it serves as an 'antidote', as it were, to Stallman's enthusiastic tendency to see parallels between Conrad and Fitzgerald in almost all areas of The Great Gatsby. While Robert Long may be justified in remarking that Miller's steady concentration upon Fitzgerald's fictional technique is too limited (see above, page eleven), it does credit Fitzgerald with a degree of independence and originality that an unrestrained suggestion of correspondences threatens to obscure.

Robert Long's study is similar to Robert Stallman's in that it consists of suggesting cases where Fitzgerald possibly borrowed from Conrad. I referred earlier (see above, page twenty-nine) to a 'scaffolding' adopted from Conrad and apparent in Gatsby, and it is this that Long illustrates most persuasively, demonstrating that Fitzgerald drew to a large extent upon Conrad for what Stallman calls "plot-situations" (see above, page nine).

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[42] Kuehl and Bryer, p. 84.

The works with which Long compares Gatsby are Almayer's Folly, Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness". In citing the first of these he breaks new ground, and although the parallels he suggests are not as strong as those in the other two works they deserve a brief summary. Both heroes have "an exalted dream which is to be realized in the future"[43] and in the person of a woman (in Almayer's case, his daughter Nina). Long also notes Conrad's characterization of Almayer's dream as "splendid" and "gorgeous", and that these "characterizing phrases are used so often that they have, as it were, the function of a recurring motif."[44] This remark applies to Gatsby not only because "gorgeous" is a frequent epithet in the novel but also because, as I shall show in Chapter III, the repetition of certain 'key' words and phrases is a notable feature of the novel's texture. The illusions of both heroes are suggested by their houses: Gatsby's, for example, has a history of failed aspiration (GG, 89). Furthermore, the Buchanans' "Georgian Colonial mansion" (GG, 6) symbolizes their "solidity and permanence"[45] and both heroes face the mansions of their more secure rivals across a stretch of dividing water. "In the backgrounds of Almayer and Gatsby

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[43] Long, p. 260.

[44] Ibid., p. 260.

[45] Ibid., p. 262.

. . . there is a remarkable parallel", continues Long, comparing Conrad's Lingard with Fitzgerald's Dan Cody.[46] In both novels there are scenes where the heroine, faced with a choice, chooses against the hero,[47] and he concludes his analysis by noting that in both novels the heroes' houses are reintroduced at the end to "heighten the shattering of their illusions."[48]

While none of these can definitely be said to constitute indebtedness on Fitzgerald's part, neither can they be said to stretch a point. Like Stallman, however, Long is on firmer ground with Lord Jim. Almayer, he notes, differs from Gatsby in that he lacks the latter's determination, and this leads him to the subject of Jim:

> The conception of Jay Gatsby, whose collision with reality grows out of his uncompromisingly romantic conception of himself, is so unique that I know of only one other parallel to Gatsby in modern fiction - that of Jim in Lord Jim.[49]

Both men begin their careers in their youthful dreams, and the naivety of both is on "the same vast scale as their visions."[50] In both this naivety is represented as a child-like

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46 Ibid., p. 262.

47 Ibid., p. 265.

48 Ibid., p. 266.

49 Ibid., pp. 268-269.

quality: Nick scolds Gatsby for behaving "like a little boy" (GG, 88), while the villainous Cornelius describes Jim as "No more than a little child - a little child" (LJ, 248). Subsequent to these dreams both men suffer what Long calls a "stunning defeat" that occurs in a "central symbolic scene"[50]; in Jim's case, it is the desertion of the Patna, and in Gatsby's it is Daisy's wedding. Both respond by commencing careers that "proceed from the illusion of a second chance"[51] and bring them to "a pinnacle of fame and success",[52] Jim in Patusan and Gatsby in West Egg. Here the identities that both assume are false in so far as they are a denial of their true names, and this leads Long to suggest that their behaviour verges on being schizophrenic: "Neither is able to accept that part of reality which contradicts his imaginative identity."[53] Both, in Stein's terms, follow the dream, but in their second careers they are unable to escape the past, which breaks in in the form of "recurrences of central symbolic scenes."[54] Thus Long sees in the name "Patusan" an approximate

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[50] Ibid., p. 270.

[51] Ibid., p. 270.

[52] Ibid., p. 271.

[53] Ibid., p. 272.

[54] Ibid., p. 273.

anagram of Patna and in Gentleman Brown's arrival and assumption of identity with Jim a repetition of the past. In Gatsby the confrontation scene in the sweltering Plaza Hotel is punctuated by "the portentous chords of Mendlessohn's Wedding March from the ballroom below", which cause Daisy to recall her wedding in Louisville's June heat (GG, 128). All the above parallels seem eminently reasonable. One of Long's most convincing parallels concerns what he calls the "tableaux" in the two novels. He compares Marlow's last sight of Jim with the Gatsby that Nick sees as he leaves his neighbour's party:

> He was white from head to foot, and remained persistently visible with the stronghold of the night at his back, the sea at his feet, the opportunity by his side - still veiled . . . For me that white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma. The twilight was ebbing fast from the sky above his head, the strip of land had sunk already under his feet, he himself appeared no bigger than a child - then only a speck, a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world.... And, suddenly, I lost him.... (LJ, 253)

> A wafer of a moon was shining over Gatsby's house, making the night fine as before, and surviving the laughter and the sound of his still glowing garden. A sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell. (GG, 56)

In these tableaux both heroes stand on their respective thresholds and are seen by their narrators as representing a poignant grandeur, Jim catching "all the light left in a darkened world" before vanishing, Gatsby frozen in his gesture of farewell to a gaggle of drunken motorists, as always seen in the

doorway or outside, never within. That the inspiration for Fitzgerald's richly evocative tableau was Conrad's in Lord Jim seems certain.

Long sees the relationship between Gatsby and "Heart of Darkness" as being the most apparent. Both, he says, operate on two levels: (1) both are "the drama of a spiritually alienated hero"; (2) both portray "the gradual exposure of a society with which his life places him in opposition."[55] The first point of similarity that Long notes is the novels' mutual employment of "distortion" as a technique.[56] Distorted and irrational events counterpoint Marlow's progress towards Kurtz: some of the soldiers put ashore from the boat are said to have drowned, but "nobody seemed particularly to care" (HD, 64); there is the encounter with the man-of-war "firing into a continent" (HD, 66); the "objectless blasting" of a cliff by railway-builders, although the cliff "was not in the way or anything" (HD, 68). In Gatsby this effect is not so "radically irrational" but the novel shares a "similarity of effect - an incongruity and grotesqueness."[57] As Long notes, Chapter II - Myrtle Wilson's party - is full of instances of distort-

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[55] Ibid., p. 407.

[56] Ibid., p. 408.

[57] Ibid., p. 408.

ion: the dog-seller who bears "an absurd resemblance to John D. Rockefeller" (GG, 27); Nick's inability to make any sense of the book entitled Simon Called Peter (GG, 29); Myrtle's affectation culminating in Nick's sense of her "revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air" (GG, 31). This, Long feels, extends into the descriptions of Gatsby's parties, which have "a grotesque foreshortened effect",[58] and of his car, "terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns" (GG, 64).

He next approaches the correspondence through the narrators' relationship with the heroes, much as did Stallman, but in dealing with the events after the heroes' deaths Long adds some interesting observations. For example, both Nick and Marlow come into possession of certain documents that emphasize the heroes' illusions: Marlow holds Kurtz's report on the "Suppression of Savage Customs" (HD, 168), while Gatsby's father shows Nick his son's copy of Hopalong Cassidy, its flyleaf containing young Gatz's "Schedule" and "General Resolves" (GG, 174). Another parallel occurs in the final visions granted both narrators, and which reflect the concern in both novels with relating the fate of their heroes to society. Thus Marlow's vision outside the door of Kurtz's fiancee's house of Kurtz "opening his mouth voraciously, as if to

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[58] Ibid., p. 410.

devour all the earth" (HD, 170) corresponds with Nick's "night scene by El Greco", the drunken woman carried, like Kurtz, upon a stretcher (GG, 178). Furthermore, Marlow's resentment at "the sight of people hurrying through the streets" of "the sepulchral city" (HD, 166-167) parallels Nick's desire upon returning from the East that the world be "in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (GG, 2). The relationship between the endings of the two works is rounded off by Mr. Gatz adopting the role played by Kurtz's Intended: as Marlow lies to preserve the latter's fervent faith in Kurtz, so too does Nick Carraway, agreeing with Mr. Gatz that his son would have "helped build up the country" (GG, 169).

Although scanning substantially the same ground as Robert Stallman, Long's is a more illuminating study, and perhaps the most illuminating of the three. Particularly interesting is his demonstration of the extent to which Gatsby resembles "Heart of Darkness" as regards common plot-situations, especially when the narrators' final disillusionment is being conveyed. Ever uncomfortable with the mechanics of plot, Fitzgerald seems clearly to have drawn upon Conrad's study in disillusionment and fidelity to solve his dilemma.

As I said earlier (see above, page thirteen), originally this thesis was to have been just such a tracing of parallels as those summarized above, but Robert Stallman and Robert Long have already covered that particular area. Still,

it is tempting to mention the one possible parallel that has, so far as I am aware, remained 'unclaimed'. Towards the end of Nostromo a minor character, Ramirez, is introduced, the rejected lover of Giselle Viola. Banned from her father's lighthouse, he pays tribute to Giselle in a manner that may foreshadow Gatsby's: "It seems as though he had been in the habit of gazing at night upon the light" (Nostromo, 423).[59] As with many of the parallels mentioned in this chapter, however, there is no way of knowing if Viola's distant lighthouse became Gatsby's "green light".

In the Introduction I suggested that before discussing the artistic unity of Gatsby it was necessary first to isolate the features possibly adopted from Conrad (see above, page thirteen). In this chapter I have attempted such an isolation, and in the next I shall demonstrate the novel's claim to being considered an original artistic achievement.

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[59] Joseph Conrad, Nostromo (Harmondsworth, 1969).

CHAPTER III

SCOTT FITZGERALD AND THE GREAT GATSBY

The matter of Conrad's influence upon The Great Gatsby having been given a fair hearing in Chapter II, I intend in the following discussion to illustrate the originality of the novel by concentrating upon certain features that Fitzgerald added to the basic narrative framework adopted from Conrad. I shall concentrate upon two elements, both of which serve to give Gatsby artistic unity: upon the case for Nick Carraway as a unifying "centre of interest", serving a more important purpose than his ancestor Marlow; and upon Fitzgerald's use of constantly recurring motifs, woven for the most part seamlessly into the novel and fulfilling various reverberative functions.

Despite the similarities shared by Nick and Marlow, Nick is far from being Marlow transplanted to Jazz Age Long Island. I remarked earlier that Robert Stallman noted that Nick's mind lacked "Marlow's range and points of curiosity" (see above, page twenty-eight). Stallman also perceived that, while Gatsby's significance for Nick is patterned upon "the characteristic Conradian ironic combination", Nick differs from Marlow in an important respect: "Nick lacks Marlow's

warm humanity, his compassion and humility. Nick's 'morality' camouflages his hypocrisy. He masks his duplicity. Nobody wrings from him a confession, but everybody confesses to Nick: . . ."[1] In another article Stallman launches a more scathing assault upon Nick as an "archprig all dressed up in a morally hard-boiled starched shirt of provincial squeamishness and boasted tolerance, the hypocrite!"[2] Analysis bears this out to a degree, in that Nick's narrative is often misleading and evasive. But "hypocrisy" is too simple a characterization of Nick Carraway's inconsistency: the grounds of his evasiveness are more complicated, and once grasped provide the key to the novel. Furthermore, to concentrate upon Carraway's character and interpretation of events is to realize the unity of the novel's simple yet intricate pattern.

That Nick's narrative is characterized by more than simple hypocrisy is apparent from the self-introduction that opens the novel. Roughly summarized, Nick's intention is threefold: (1) to "boast" of his tolerance; (2) to inform us of its limits subsequent to his Eastern experiences; (3) to explain in part Gatsby's exemption from his embitt-

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[1] "Conrad and The Great Gatsby", pp. 153-154.

[2] "Gatsby and the Hole in Time", p. 137.

ered "reaction". His tone is one of moral assurance, as befits a man able to look back upon his "younger and more vulnerable years" (GG, 1) from an implied older and less vulnerable vantage-point. This is his intention, but, as is the case with most of Nick's utterances and confessions, careful reading between the lines reveals less than assurance and a tolerance that is of a distinctly circumscribed nature. Nick is "inclined to reserve all judgments", but his description of it as "a habit" modifies this sign of tolerance and suggests that it is a mechanical tendency (GG, 1). That Nick's brand of tolerance is not an indulgent openness towards the actions of others is further suggested by his self-characterization as "a normal person" prone to the attachment of "the abnormal mind". Here his tolerance is shown to be qualified by a firm conception of certain phenomena as "normal" and other phenomena as "abnormal". The latter next become "the secret griefs of wild, unknown men", a representation of uncontrolled emotion that contrasts with the depiction of "normal" Nick feigning "sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity" on occasions when he realized "by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon" (GG, 1). (It is noticeable that a certain "levity" actually creeps into Nick's description here). What begins to emerge is the impression that Nick associates normality with order and a certain decorum, while abnormality appears to

him as a kind of disordered vitality. That such a conception of experience's manifestations limits his tolerance is demonstrated in the following passage with an irony of which Nick is unaware:

> Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth (GG, 1).

Ironically, Nick's tolerance is made feasible by the very quality that circumscribes it, his righteous pride in his "sense of the fundamental decencies". His avowed faith in these further throws an ironic light upon the passage's epigrammatic opening, for what weight does his "infinite hope" carry when life's possibilities are qualified from birth by the possession or lack of such a sense? In any case, Nick's pride in "reserving judgments" is drastically qualified in the same way, for that "sense of the fundamental decencies" represents his criterion for ultimate judgment. What this passage suggests is that, firmly rooted in that sense, Nick's boasted tolerance is a species of eavesdropping (he is "afraid of missing something") upon those less well-endowed, that it is a vicarious participation in experience, a combination of curiosity, censure and a certain distaste.

The tension in Nick Carraway between curiosity and distaste is encapsulated in his oft-quoted remark in Chapter II: "I was within and without, simultaneously

enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (GG, 36). This statement is a key to Nick's character and I shall return to it frequently. It is in fact prefigured in the novel's opening pages, where enchantment and a certain repulsion constitute Nick's attitude to Gatsby:

> When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction - Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away (GG, 2).

This important passage clarifies the characteristic cast of Nick's consciousness. I noted above that Nick's sense of order and decorum is contrasted with a sense of abnormality as disordered but vital. This constitutes a kind of tension between stasis and movement which is captured vividly in Nick's feigning sleep as an "intimate revelation" is "quivering on the horizon" and is further expanded in the contrast between a world clothed in a depersonalizing moral uniform and standing stiffly at attention and the fluidity of "gorgeous" Gatsby's succession of gestures. Here at the very beginning of the novel Nick's dilemma is established: perpetually enchanted and repelled, he is doomed always to observe, never to participate. Unable to commit himself enough to participate, his "infinite hope" lies in contemplation and in the non-committal

reserving of judgments. His assured tone cannot conceal the underlying contradictions and his epigrammatic justifications are hedged around with irony. Nick's fate is to stand in the morally disciplined ranks admiringly watching Gatsby's successful gestures: there is a certain safety in numbers, but whole areas of experience are closed out. Consequently, although the book bears Gatsby's name, it is in a very real sense about Nick, taking its form from his consciousness and in part developing its theme through the same medium.

Nick's problem is not hypocrisy: it is rather the conflict between an awareness that life has "inexhaustible variety" and a reluctance to commit himself to such a condition of uncertainty. Nick comes from a background where his aunts and uncles talk over his desire to come East "as if they were choosing a prep school" for him (GG, 3), despite the fact that he has recently returned from a World War! In the East Nick is in closer relationship with "life's inexhaustible variety" than ever before, and uncertainty in the face of new experience leads him to seek the security represented by the "fundamental decencies" inculcated in him by his heritage. In a sense, a part of Nick's mind is in perpetual family council. In a sense he does "mask his duplicity", but from himself rather than from the reader. He may deceive himself, but the evasions and inconsistencies of his narrative are palpable enough to prevent the reader from being duped. For the novel to succeed the reader has to be distanced from Nick and able

to see what he does not, and this is why I noted above that the theme of the novel develops "in part" through Nick's consciousness. For the most part it develops through the synthesis between Nick's awareness of the significance of James Gatz's fable and our more complete sense of the role played by Nick himself.

This necessary distance is partly achieved by making the reader distrust Nick on account of clear inconsistencies in his narrative. For example, Nick's recurrent allusions to the anonymous girl he has back home fulfil this function. Nick first admits her existence in response to a question from Daisy Buchanan:

> Of course I knew what they were referring to, but I wasn't even vaguely engaged. The fact that gossip had published the banns was one of the reasons I had come East. You can't stop going with an old friend on account of rumors, and on the other hand I had no intention of being rumored into marriage (GG, 20).

Two things are to be noted here. In the first place, Nick originally informs us that he "decided to go East to learn the bond business" (GG, 3), making no mention of this sexual dimension to his decision. Secondly, the reasonable tone of his justification cannot conceal his failure to level with this "old friend": while denying the power of gossip he submits to it abjectly and avoids the issue completely. Later he does the same thing after his affair with the girl from Jersey City, letting it "blow away quietly" once her brother's interest threatens to rob it of its casual quality

(GG, 57). His girl in the Middle West reappears at the end of Chapter III as "that tangle back home" from which Nick must free himself before any serious relationship with Jordan Baker:

> I'd been writing letters once a week and signing them "Love, Nick," and all I could think of was how, when that certain girl played tennis, a faint mustache of perspiration appeared on her upper lip. Nevertheless there was a vague understanding that had to be tactfully broken off before I was free.
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> Everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known (GG, 59-60).

Here is a classic instance of Nick attempting to counter his ambiguous actions with an epigram of moral rectitude and succeeding only in flooding himself in an ironic light. If it is an attempt to mask his duplicity from the reader it is a botched job, but seen as an attempt at self-justification it is an example of Nick's retreat into generalizations in the face of uncertainty. Surely this explains the peculiar and highly evocative allusion to that "faint mustache of perspiration". Here I am encroaching already upon the matter of the novel's recurrent motifs, for in Nick's mind perspiration comes to signify disorder, the breakdown of decorum. In Chapter VII Nick travels home by train on the hottest day of the summer. He notes that the woman next to him "perspired delicately for a while into her white shirtwaist" before her enervation causes her to drop her pocket-book. He hands it back "by the extreme tip of the corners to indicate that I had no designs upon it - but every one near by, including the woman,

suspected me just the same" (GG, 114-115). Receiving his ticket from the conductor Nick notes "a dark stain from his hand" and exclaims upon the heat as follows: "That any one should care in this heat whose flushed lips he kissed, whose head made damp the pajama pocket over his heart!" (GG, 115). The next day, after Myrtle Wilson's death, a call from Jordan awakes him "with sweat breaking out" on his forehead (GG, 155). Nick's sensitivity in this matter suggests distaste, as if the physical presence of others becomes too real for him. The "mustache of perspiration" has him reaching for his self-image as "honest" Nick Carraway at the same time as he turns towards the antithesis of perspiring physicality, Jordan's "clean, hard, limited person" (GG, 81). As for the tactful break, we never know if he makes it or not, but it is no surprise to discover in Chapter VI that Nick has been "trotting around" New York with Jordan "trying to ingratiate [himself] with her senile aunt" (GG, 102).

As more emerges of the essential Nick Carraway, Stallman's charge of hypocrisy becomes less and less relevant, for Nick is too confused, too incapable of facing the contradictions in his own nature to be able to present a convincing mask for his duplicity. When repulsion comes into effect simultaneously with enchantment Nick scurries desperately for the temporary sanctuary of his inherited moral earnestness. For the one thing Nick fears is the disorder that he sees as resulting from the lack of a "sense of the fundamental decencies".

For example, when the shrilling telephone shatters the decorum of dinner at the Buchanans' Nick makes an illuminating confession: "To a certain temperament the situation might have seemed intriguing - my own instinct was to telephone immediately for the police" (GG, 16).

But, as Nick's exemption of Gatsby from his "reaction" shows, he is not immune to the claims of "personality". His problem is that while feeling that personality must be fulfilled he yet feels that such fulfilment is hazardous. If we look at his two chief relationships in the novel - with Jordan and with Gatsby - this emerges more clearly. Jordan and Gatsby represent contrasting attitudes towards experience, and through their attraction for him Nick is shown to be seeking for some kind of integrity as an alternative to his divided personality. A consideration of these relationships further suggests that Nick is indeed the novel's centre of interest. For example, not only does his affair with Jordan serve the structural purpose of connecting Nick with the events of the summer, but also develops and clarifies his dilemma as charted above. The same is true also of his relationship with Gatsby, for, as Robert Stallman notes, "The Nick story is inseparable from the Gatsby story, the one twining around the other to provide parallelisms to it."[3]

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[3] "Gatsby and the Hole in Time", p. 136.

Both relationships are initiated by what can be called the 'romantic' aspect of Nick's character, through which his desire for participation manifests itself. One of the crucial similarities between Nick and Gatsby is the sensitivity of both to life's promises as represented by "the beauty that wealth imprisons and preserves" (GG, 150). That Nick has such a sensitivity is made clear in his response to the Buchanans, especially Daisy. Through Nick's eyes their mansion is a masterpiece of rippling fluid beauty, its lawn running "toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens - finally when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run" (GG, 6-7). The same sense of fluid loveliness characterizes his evocation of the "bright rosy-colored space" where he greets Daisy and meets Jordan (GG, 8). And Nick, like Gatsby, cannot resist the charm of his distant cousin:

> Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered "Listen," a promise that she had done exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour (GG, 9-10).

Nick himself may be one of the "men who had cared for her", for her charm works powerfully upon him, and his sense of her "promise" foreshadows Gatsby's later response to the "ripe mystery" of her Louisville home (GG, 148). Like him,

Nick feels the seductive pull of promise, excitement and romance, and in the coda to Chapter III his affair with Jordan is seen to stem from this. Nick's summary of his life in New York is a poignant revelation of his simultaneous exclusion from and desire to participate in life's variety: "I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove . . . At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others . . ." (GG, 57). What emerges here is Nick's desire to "enter" someone else's life and escape the loneliness that his moral earnestness condemns him to. And so he enters Jordan Baker's life, although the following passage demonstrates that even this is a compromise:

> Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs, and so I drew up the girl beside me, tightening my arms. Her wan, scornful mouth smiled, and so I drew her up again closer, this time to my face (GG, 81).

Here Nick's embrace is but a gesture of participation, an attempt to gain the romantic dimension to his life that he feels he lacks. It is not a tender moment, with Nick's arms "tightening" and Jordan's "wan, scornful mouth"smiling. His entry into her life is not a romantic commitment. He first goes with her because he is "flattered to go places with her, because she was a golf champion" (GG, 58). He never fully loves her (although he is "half in love with her" when he throws her over (GG, 179)), but feels only "a tender curiosity" (GG, 58).

What arouses his curiosity and attracts him to her seems to be his fascination with the scepticism with which Jordan confronts experience. When he first meets Jordan he is struck by her self-sufficiency: "Almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me" (GG, 9). In his dilemma self-sufficiency is what Nick palpably lacks, and he is attracted by the cool insolence that is the outward manifestation of Jordan's seemingly integrated identity. Naively or evasively, Nick sees his attraction for her as lying in his honesty and integrity, and once again he produces an ironic self-evaluation:

> Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body (GG, 58-59).

The irony here lies in the fact that Nick's evaluation of Jordan applies equally well to his own character as it emerges in the novel. Placed immediately prior to his revelation of the weekly "Love, Nick" letters the passage gains in ironic effectiveness. Nick's perception that Jordan feels safe on a plane where rigid adherence to a moral code is expected is accurate because it exactly describes the motives behind his own pride in his dubious moral integrity. Her subterfuges parallel his own narrative evasiveness, while

Jordan's "cool, insolent smile" suggests that she and Nick make a complementary couple, for our only guide to Nick's appearance is his resemblance to "the rather hard-boiled painting" of his great-uncle - the great-uncle, moreover, who "sent a substitute to the Civil War" and proceeded to found the family fortune (GG, 3).

Glimpses of Nick and Jordan together are few, yet those we have suggest that in Jordan Nick is searching for some kind of 'sceptical equilibrium', where life's "inexhaustible variety" is confronted with a "cool, insolent smile" that keeps it at arm's length and makes Jordan a survivor. For example, in Chapter VII Jordan and Nick greet Tom's fury at Daisy's blatant affection for Gatsby with laughter (GG, 122), a strong contrast to Nick's earlier "instinct to telephone for the police" in the face of the Buchanans' marital disharmony. Further, his attraction to her hardened scepticism is made clear in the second passage in which they display physical closeness. Having witnessed the death throes of Gatsby's dream in the Plaza Hotel Nick broods upon the new "decade of loneliness" that his thirtieth birthday has opened up before him. In the face of such a lack of promise Jordan offers reassurance:

> But there was Jordan beside me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age. As we passed over the dark bridge her wan face fell lazily against my coat's shoulder and the formidable stroke of thirty died away with the reassuring pressure of her hand (GG, 136).

This moment parallels that earlier embrace and reveals the compromise the relationship represents. Nick initially takes Jordan to satisfy a desire for some form of romantic commitment, some fragment of the excitement he feels he lacks. Concomitant with that, however, is his perpetual wariness to the possibilities represented by romantic involvement, so that now Jordan is equally attractive on account of her 'unromantic' scepticism. Seeing Gatsby's failure as justifying his own wariness, Jordan's abandonment of "well-forgotten dreams" is "wise". At this point, before Gatsby's desertion, Jordan's attitude appears vindicated, to offer Nick a way towards self-sufficiency.

Ultimately, however, Gatsby's "gorgeous" personality wins out over Jordan's hardened ability to survive. And yet analysis of this relationship, Nick's most important, reveals even more closely the nature of his personal tragedy. As I shall show, if Nick is redeemed by his fidelity to Gatsby, it is a highly qualified redemption. While his rejection of Jordan represents a romantic commitment to Gatsby, that commitment serves only to highlight Nick's dilemma and finally to clarify it as a romantic fatalism.

I noted earlier that Nick and Gatsby cannot be considered separate from one another. The truth of the matter is that Gatsby derives what significance he has only through Nick's eyes. His significance is the significance he has for

Nick. "I don't know why he should always have appeared to me symbolic", Marlow says of Jim (LJ, 201). The same could be said by Nick of Gatsby, for it is Nick who interprets the story of James Gatz and endows it with symbolic significance. Earlier I remarked that Nick exhibits a "sensitivity to the promises of life" similar to that which he sees in Gatsby, and if for Gatsby such promises are represented by Daisy Buchanan then for Nick they are represented by Gatsby himself. Nick's first extended encounter with Gatsby - the luncheon in New York - illustrates the nature of Gatsby's appeal for Nick. Through Nick's eyes Gatsby pulses like a fitful star, one minute insignificant, the next gleaming brightly. Take, for example, Nick's response upon hearing Gatsby describe himself as a "young rajah": initially he with difficulty restrains his "incredulous laughter" at the image of "a turbaned 'character' leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne" (GG, 66). Once, however, Gatsby's Montenegrin medal and Oxford photograph corroborate elements of his self-portrait the image is accepted and flares vividly into life:

> Then it was all true. I saw the skins of tigers flaming in his palace on the Grand Canal; I saw him opening a chest of rubies to ease, with their crimson-lighted depths, the gnawings of his broken heart (GG, 67).

Once given corroboration, Nick is perfectly willing and able to accept Gatsby in all his gorgeousness. The drive to New York further illustrates Gatsby's exhilarating effect upon

Nick. "With fenders spread like wings we scattered light through half Astoria", Nick recalls (GG, 68), and further notes a sense of "promise" in the sight of the "white heaps and sugar lumps" of New York: "The city seen from the Queensboro bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world." And in Nick's euphoric state, "Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder. . . ." (GG, 69). To Nick the "promise" of the city represents what Dan Cody's yacht represents to young Gatz - "all the beauty and glamour in the world" (GG, 100-101). It is on these grounds - Nick's romantic sensitivity - that Gatsby appeals to him, and when on the same day Jordan reveals Gatsby's love for Daisy, Gatsby flowers for Nick much as Daisy later blossoms with Gatsby's kiss: "He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor" (GG, 79). Jordan's revelation having provided an intensely romantic, ideal context within which Nick can view Gatsby, his splendour is no longer "purposeless". Now it expresses the glorious nature of his commitment, and at this moment Gatsby as a symbol for Nick is born, "delivered suddenly".

Under the spell that Gatsby now casts upon him, Nick does all he can in the following chapter (V) to make the long-awaited reunion a success. With the exception of the arrangements that he makes following Gatsby's death, this is the only occasion in the novel where Nick acts forcefully, and the assumption must be that Gatsby's success matters to him enough

to make him willing to encourage the rift in the Buchanan marriage that so alarmed him earlier. For Nick is going against the values inherited from "a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name" (GG, 177).

Simultaneously with this vigorous prosecution of Gatsby's plan, however, a certain powerful fatalism emerges. Here, at the moment his dream is on the verge of realization, Gatsby's decline commences:

> He had been full of the idea so long, dreamed it right through to the end, waited with his teeth set, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity. Now, in the reaction, he was running down like an overwound clock (GG, 93).

This sense of Gatsby "running down" dominates the remainder of the scene. Gatsby remarks that Daisy's dock has a green light burning upon it at night: "Possibly", Nick wonders, "it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. . . . His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one" (GG, 94). Such is certainly the case, and it may well be that there were moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams - not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion" (GG, 97). But a certain likelihood in these remarks should not obscure the fact that the decline that commences here is only interpretation on Nick's part. The same is true of all Nick's remarks upon Gatsby throughout their relationship, for, as Stallman notes (see above, page twenty-seven), Nick "presents Gatsby only from the outside." Gatsby is never

realized from within, the exact nature of his disillusionment never known. Gatsby may fretfully complain that Daisy "doesn't understand" (GG, 111), but it is Nick's disillusionment, commencing in Chapter V, that drives the novel onward to its close. The Gatsby made aware upon his lonely walk to his swimming-pool of the loss of "the old warm world", of the "high price" paid "for living too long with a single dream", and of "a new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about" (GG, 162), this Gatsby is the imaginative creation of Nick Carraway. Whether Gatsby ever attains such self-knowledge is not known. In fact, he emerges from his final meeting with Nick as essentially undismayed. His remark that Daisy's love for Tom was "just personal" defies even Nick's conception of his soul: "What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured?" (GG, 152). And when Nick turns to yell his sole compliment to him, Gatsby, clad in his "gorgeous pink rag of a suit", first nods politely and then breaks into "that radiant and understanding smile" (GG, 154).

The figure of Gatsby disillusioned is in fact another instance of Nick's inability to face his own nature, for the disillusionment is his own. Once again the constant tension between enchantment and repulsion circumscribes his romantic commitment. Nick's attitude towards Gatsby's dream is that of Keats towards the lovers' pursuit around the urn: "She cannot

fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,/Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!" ("Ode on a Grecian Urn", 19-20). Just before he first embraces Jordan, in fact, an echo of Keats's sentiments beats in Nick's ears "with a sort of heady excitement: 'There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy and the tired'" (GG, 81). The failure or otherwise of Gatsby's dream has to be evaluated in the light of this streak of fatalism in Nick's character, for into the fable of James Gatz he injects his own sense of the transient nature of romance. When Nick broods upon "the old, unknown world" in the novel's splendid closing paragraphs he mourns for himself as well as for Gatsby, and his sense that the "transitory enchanted moment" is forever gone (GG, 182) becomes a justification for the lack of commitment revealed in the novel. That moment past, commitment becomes futile and he is left with brooding contemplation in its stead. Nick packs his trunk, sells his car to the grocer, and goes home, having learnt what he suspected was true all along.

In my final remarks upon Nick Carraway's role I must move into the second area to be discussed in this chapter, that of the novel's recurrent motifs. At the end of the novel Nick's dilemma is essentially unresolved. His interpretation of the events that he has witnessed becomes a justification for his own non-involvement. And subsequent to the moment at which Gatsby and Daisy are reunited Nick's role as an outsider is emphasized. His distant relationship with life's "inexhaust-

ible variety" is captured as he takes leave of the lovers at the end of Chapter V:

> They had forgotten me, but Daisy glanced up and held out her hand; Gatsby didn't know me now at all. I looked once more at them and they looked back at me remotely, possessed by intense life. Then I went out of the room and down the marble steps into the rain, leaving them there together (GG, 97).

Nick is always excluded from "intense life" because he is "slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on his desires" (GG, 59). In the second half of the novel this lack of spontaneity expresses itself in a motif of 'inarticulateness' at moments of emotional intensity. The most powerful of these follows Nick's reconstruction of Daisy's "incarnation" at the end of Chapter VI:

> Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something - an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was incommunicable forever (GG, 112).

This glimpse of an unknown impulse struggling for expression recalls the earlier allusion to his girl's "faint mustache of perspiration": both suggest that Nick's hard-boiled exterior and moral earnestness conceal intense emotional activity. Here he seems so close to a transforming identification with Gatsby yet struggles like a "dumb man" to give it expression. A similar spontaneous expression of identification is born yet unfulfilled in Chapter VII, when Gatsby justifies to Tom his

claim to being an "Oxford man": "I wanted to get up and slap him on the back. I had one of those renewals of complete faith in him that I'd experienced before" (GG, 130). Again, the night after Myrtle Wilson's death Nick's sleep is disrupted by "savage, frightening dreams", and on waking he makes straight for Gatsby's: "I felt that I had something to tell him, something to warn him about, and morning would be too late" (GG, 147). What the warning is we never discover, and in any case when he senses that Gatsby is "clutching at some last hope" Nick admits that he "couldn't bear to shake him free" (GG, 148). To the very end he remains detached, engaged in contemplation. Is it unjust to suggest, in fact, that Nick, knowing Daisy's responsibility for Myrtle's death, possesses knowledge that could avert the catastrophe? Fidelity to the dead dreamer does not prevent him mutely listening to Tom's tirade against Gatsby's 'callousness': "There was nothing I could say, except the one unutterable fact that it wasn't true" (GG, 180). His silence is tantalizing: it may stem from a reluctance to disrupt the Buchanans' repaired marriage, but it may well be a perverse desire to preserve his romantically fatalistic interpretation of Gatsby's fate. For to admit that Gatsby's death results from a simple case of error that could have been avoided is to rob that fate of the catastrophic significance that justifies Nick's failure to commit himself to "intense life". The fact that his one compliment to Gatsby is wrung from him at the last possible moment is

further evidence of his reticence, a tacit criticism of which may be seen in Wolfsheim's suggestion that we "learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead" (GG, 173).

"It was all very careless and confused", says Nick (GG, 180), and his final response is once again to make for the security and order of generalizations, classifying the moral problem in terms of a contrast between East and West. Against his vision of the East as "a night scene by El Greco" (GG, 178) he sets his childhood memories of the trip back home at Christmas (GG, 177). Not only does the retreat into childhood suggest a retreat from responsibility into protected security, but also Nick's 'moral geography' does not hold true. The novel is indeed "a story of the West" (GG, 177), for throughout the novel Nick's desire to see in East-West terms is undermined. The valley of ashes may be in the East, but so is the lovely Buchanan mansion to which Nick responds so lyrically. The division that Nick falls back upon is not there. As Robert Stallman notes, "geography is scrambled" in the novel[4]: when Nick asks Gatsby what part of the Middle West he hails from Gatsby replies, "'San Francisco'" (GG, 65). Stallman further remarks that "The confused identity of West and East is epitomized in the figure of Dan Cody as 'the pioneer debauchee, who . . . brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of

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[4] "Gatsby and the Hole in Time", p. 140.

the frontier brothel and saloon'".[5] The "confused identity" noted here parallels, of course, Nick's confused personality. He presents his return home as a return to order and to a moral integrity that contrast with Eastern carelessness and confusion. Yet he himself speaks of "the bored, swollen towns beyond the Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old" (GG, 177), while the valley of ashes carries connotations of Western aridity when described as "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat" (GG, 23). When at the Buchanans' home, Nick contrasts the sense of ease there with the West, "where an evening was hurried from phase to phase toward its close, in a continually disappointed anticipation or else in sheer nervous dread of the moment itself" (GG, 13). As Stallman writes, "The West . . . figures as the land of the unliving, and that is what Nick retreats to."[6] Working against Nick's generalization is a motif both simple and effective, the ambivalent significance of the city of Chicago. It is from that city's Union Station that Nick embarks upon that Christmas return home, but it is Chicago as much as New York that is the centre of the criminal activities of Wolfsheim and Gatsby. Nick's first meeting with Gatsby is terminated when a butler informs Gatsby that Chicago

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[5] Ibid., p. 140.

[6] Ibid., p. 136.

is "calling him on the wire" (GG, 49). The day of Gatsby's death Nick awaits a call from Daisy, but when a call comes from Chicago it is not Daisy but "Slagle" with the news of "young Parke's" arrest (GG, 167). And when Nick calls on Wolfsheim at the "Swastika Holding Company" the secretary attempts to convince him that her employer has "gone to Chicago" (GG, 171). This recurrent motif serves to reveal that Nick's final refuge is a deception, that the corruption he associates with the East is not confined there. Once again, "the inexhaustible variety of life" refuses to submit to his protective generalizations.

The primary function of the novel's other recurrent motifs seems to be that of expressing the confused variety of experience of which Nick is so wary. Thus they work in much the same way as the geographical 'confusion' just discussed. Throughout the novel there runs a motif of confused and mistaken identity that reflects Nick's own divided self. Perhaps the most remarkable instance of it is Nick's list of Gatsby's guests at the beginning of Chapter IV. Robert Stallman has undertaken an ingenious and revealing analysis of this, a brief quotation from which gives an idea of his discoveries:

> The names of Gatsby's house-guests that Nick records on the margins of a defunct railroad-timetable furnish, as it were, a forest of crossed identities. With the clan of Blackbuck . . . Cecil Roebuck - figuratively speaking - crossbreeds, and Roebuck shares what Francis Bull has in common with the Hornbeams.[7]

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[7] "Gatsby and the Hole in Time", p. 140.

There are many other instances. The dogseller in New York bears "an absurd resemblance to John D. Rockefeller" while his "Airedale" is of "indeterminate breed" (GG, 27). Myrtle Wilson, denying that she was no more "crazy about" her husband than "about that man there", points at Nick, who adopts an expression to suggest that he "had played no part in her past" (GG, 35). Gatsby's party is marked by "enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names" (GG, 40) and by the drunken tears of a young woman who has "had a fight with a man who says he's her husband" (GG, 51-52). There are, of course, the conflicting tales of Gatsby's origins, while Wolfsheim apologizes to Nick for mistaking him for one in search of a "gonnegtion": "I had a wrong man" (GG, 71). Lengthy discussion fails ever to establish just who the "Biloxi" who attended Daisy's wedding was (GG, 128-129). Myrtle Wilson mistakes Jordan for Tom's wife (GG, 125), while her husband takes an advertisement to be God (GG, 160) and hands out justice to the wrong person. And in Nick's "night scene by El Greco" the stretcher-bearers "turn in at a house - the wrong house. But no one knows the woman's name, and no one cares" (GG, 178). Thus Nick's confused identity both mirrors and is mirrored by the society surrounding him.

Another obvious motif is that of careless driving. In Chapter III Nick and Jordan have "a curious conversation about driving a car" (GG, 59), where careless driving becomes a metaphor for the absence of moral restraints (Nick's "brakes").

The motif originates a few pages earlier. As he leaves Gatsby's party Nick comes across the owl-eyed man from Gatsby's library contemplating his car, which lies in a ditch "violently shorn of one wheel" (GG, 54). Disclaiming all responsibility, the owl-eyed man remarks only that "It happened, and that's all I know" (GG, 54), which perhaps foreshadows the "careless and confused" catastrophe at the end of the novel. The fact that he is not in fact the driver of the wrecked automobile certainly prefigures the confusion surrounding Myrtle's death. In the next chapter the motif is picked up in Tom's Santa Barbara accident, shortly after his marriage, while accompanied by a hotel chambermaid (GG, 78). Finally, there is Myrtle's death: when Daisy turns toward the oncoming car to avoid Myrtle, only to turn back (GG, 145), her instinct for self-preservation, soon to condemn Gatsby to death, is captured brilliantly.

As a symbol in Gatsby the car is, in Stallman's terminology, "ambivalent". One recalls Nick's exhilaration as Gatsby's car "scattered light through half Astoria", while for Gatsby Daisy's Louisville home hints at "romances that were not musty and laid away already in lavender, but fresh and breathing and redolent of this year's shining motor-cars" (GG, 148). Finally, however, the car becomes associated with death, the newspapers referring to Gatsby's yellow monster as "the 'death car'" (GG, 138).

These two motifs - of confused identity and of careless

driving - are perhaps the most obvious. But the novel is a tapestry of less obvious ones that demonstrate the attention paid by Fitzgerald to detail. To catalogue all of them here would make this already lengthy chapter even longer, and I intend only to give a brief summary in conclusion. I have already noted the recurrent allusions to perspiration (see above, pages fifty and fifty-one). A variation on this may be seen in the motif of water: the grotesque tears wept by the young woman who has decided "that everything was very, very sad" (GG, 51); Gatsby's letter to Daisy on the eve of her marriage "squeezed into a wet ball" and "coming to pieces like snow" in the soap-dish (GG, 77); the rain that provides a sombre backcloth to the lovers' reunion in Chapter V, and so drenches Gatsby that when Nick opens the front door he finds him, "pale as death, with his hands plunged like weights in his coat pockets, . . . standing in a puddle of water glaring tragically into my eyes" (GG, 86). This last instance may be a foreshadowing of Gatsby revolving slowly in the pool (GG, 162-163), for the comparison between his hands and "weights" suggests death.

From the valley of ashes comes the motif of dust, heralded in the "foul dust" that floats "in the wake" of Gatsby's dreams (GG, 2), and picked up in the "white ashen dust" that covers George Wilson's suit as it covers everything in that arid environment which smothers Myrtle Wilson's smouldering vitality (GG, 26). After the accident, Myrtle, "her life viol-

ently extinguished," kneels in the road and mingles "her thick dark blood with the dust" (GG, 138). In Gatsby's house on the day after her death, Nick notes "an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere" (GG, 147), and the motif finally appears in Tom's warning to Nick that Gatsby "threw dust in your eyes just like he did in Daisy's" (GG, 180). Just as the "ash-gray men" in the valley of ashes wield their spades and "stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight" (GG, 23), so this dust prevents Tom learning the truth and closes out Nick's interest "in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (GG, 2).

With regard to Long's perception that the "central symbolic scene" in the novel is Daisy's marriage to Tom, there also seems to be a slight 'wedding motif' in the novel. Long notes that "the portentous chords of Mendelssohn's Wedding March" punctuate the confrontation scene in the Plaza Hotel, but there are two other possible allusions to the wedding. When Nick enters the "bright rosy-colored space" at the Buchanans' and meets Daisy and Jordan, he notes that the breeze blows the curtains "up toward the frosted wedding-cake of the ceiling" (GG, 8). There may be a possible echo of this in Chapter II, when the cab taking Tom, Myrtle and Nick to the New York apartment stops at "one slice in a long white cake of apartment-houses" (GG, 28): here it would serve the purpose of counterpointing Myrtle's temporary contentment with a reminder of the barrier represented by Tom's marriage.

Also to be noted is the frequency with which images of death occur in Nick's narrative. As Henry Dan Piper notes, in the pencil manuscript of the novel a certain powerful awareness of mortality was given to Nick as early as the conclusion of Chapter I, where following his visit to the Buchanans' his "thoughts turn to death, and he longs for some violent experience that will jar him out of this state of mind."[8] And perhaps this awareness was the artistic expression, later deleted, of Fitzgerald's response to a similar awareness in Conrad's Marlow. For the latter's loathing of lies stems from such a sense of mortality: "There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies - which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world - what I want to forget" (HD, 89). In any case, such an explicit awareness on Nick's part having been deleted, these recurrent images of death are all that remain, and they testify to that romantic fatalism discussed earlier (see above, page fifty-seven). Gatsby's hands "plunged like weights in his coat pockets" represent such an image. There is also the sight of the "dead man . . . in a hearse heaped with blooms" that follows Nick's response to New York's "promise" (GG, 69), and later we learn that when Gatsby bought his house "the black wreath" to the memory of the previous owner (another disappointed romantic) was still on the door (GG, 89). The

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[8] F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait, p. 139.

hearse reappears at Gatsby's funeral, of course, in the "motor hearse, horribly black and wet", where the motifs of death and water come together (GG, 175).

Another group of motifs are concerned with the novel's chief characters. Gatsby, of course, is often described as "gorgeous", and the other characters have their own 'key' words. Jordan has "a jauntiness about her movements" (GG, 51), a "hard, jaunty body" (GG, 59), waves "a jaunty salute" (GG, 53), and leans back "jauntily" into Nick's embrace (GG, 81). Tom seems to Nick to be searching "a little wistfully" for the drama of his college football career (GG, 6), and to like him "with some harsh, defiant wistfulness of his own" (GG, 7). Daisy's voice is characterized on two occasions as containing a "thrilling scorn": the first when she tells Nick of her recent cynicism, in which pronouncement Nick senses a "basic insincerity" (GG, 18); the second when, with "thrilling scorn", she turns on her husband in the Plaza Hotel (GG, 132). In the second instance the repetition of the phrase may be intended to suggest that the same "basic insincerity" lies behind her anger. Also to be noted is Fitzgerald's use of certain physical characteristics to suggest changing circumstances. When Nick first sees Jordan she is "completely motionless, . . . with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall" (GG, 8). As Gatby's dream fades in the Plaza Hotel, Nick notes that Jordan

. . . had begun to balance an invisible but absorbing object

on the tip of her chin" (GG, 135). Here Jordan's absorption suggests the return to the state of affairs prior to the lovers' brief affair. Likewise Tom's anger at Myrtle's death expresses itself vividly in Nick's sight of "the wad of muscle back of his shoulder" tightening "under his coat" (GG, 141), which recalls his earlier allusion to the "great pack of muscle" that makes Tom's body "capable of enormous leverage - a cruel body" (GG, 7).

These various motifs woven into the novel testify to the attention that Fitzgerald paid to detail, to the "intricacy" that he worked into the deceptively "simple" narrative structure derived from Conrad. They also lend support to James E. Miller's thesis that in Gatsby Fitzgerald completed his transition from the novel of "saturation" to the novel of "selection", for they are clearly devices of a selective nature, endowing particular moments with significance and with notable economy. Their effect can be seen in microcosm, as it were, in the following instance. When Nick notes that Tom, after they have shaken hands, goes into a "jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace - or perhaps only a pair of cuff-buttons" (GG, 181) Tom's wedding present for Daisy (GG, 77) connects with Wolfsheim's "finest specimens of human molars" (GG, 73) in a powerful and compressed expression of Nick's disgust. As I have attempted to show in this chapter, such care and compression characterizes The Great Gatsby and makes the novel the unified and original achievement its author intended it to be.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

As I stated in the Introduction, this thesis was 'generated' by two seemingly conflicting intentions: firstly, to explain the artistic unity and authorial control of The Great Gatsby by establishing that the novel reflects the profound influence of Joseph Conrad upon its author; secondly, when certain critical studies suggested an influence so pervasive as to jeopardize the novel's claim to originality, to demonstrate that while the 'scaffolding' of Gatsby derives from Conrad, Fitzgerald adapted and added to it according to the demands of the story that he had to tell.

But these intentions are only seemingly in conflict. Given the fact that Conrad's Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness" undoubtedly exercised a powerful influence upon Gatsby in matters of basic structure, plot-situations, characterization, and prose style, the evaluation of the novel as an artistic achievement must, it seems to me, take into account not only the extent and nature of that influence but also the extent and nature of Fitzgerald's adaptations and innovations. Of the contributions discussed at length in Chapter II none undertakes such a twofold task. Beneath the surface of Robert Stallman's stimulating but uneven analysis one senses a certain

hostility towards Fitzgerald, as if the existence of numerous correspondences redounds solely to the credit of Conrad. Consequently the derivative aspects of Fitzgerald's novel are overstressed. While he notes that Fitzgerald's narrator differs considerably from Conrad's the difference is not pursued and its significance remains undiscovered. James E. Miller's strict concentration upon Fitzgerald's technical development lies at the opposite extreme from Stallman's study. The evidence he cites to establish Fitzgerald's technical debt to the earlier novelist is sound and uncontroversial, but by the very nature of his enquiry the question of a larger indebtedness is avoided. Thus Robert Long's criticism of Miller's approach seems valid. Of the three contributions discussed, Long's seems the most illuminating. The correspondences he notes are perfectly reasonable and highly likely, and in noting that Fitzgerald's adoptions from Conrad do not explain "how Fitzgerald was capable of assimilating and transforming the material from which he drew"[1] he gives a salutary warning that a consideration of the novel's artistry does not begin and end with the discovery that it derives in large part from another novelist.

In Chapter III I have attempted to demonstrate how Fitzgerald added to the framework that he adopted, to make

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[1] "The Great Gatsby and the Tradition of Joseph Conrad", p. 419.

this thesis, in other words, the twofold study that seems to me to be necessary. While Conrad's Marlow was undoubtedly the model for Nick Carraway, Fitzgerald endowed his narrator with a distinctive individuality. In the previous chapter I elaborated at length the case for Nick Carraway as the dominating and unifying centre of interest in the novel, fulfilling this function to a greater degree than does his literary prototype. By endowing Nick's narrative with a dubious reliability that makes the reader identify with him less than with Marlow, Fitzgerald added an extra dimension to that "characteristic Conradian ironic combination" upon which the novel is patterned. Distanced from Nick, the reader watches as the conflict between romantic illusion and unromantic reality works itself out in Nick's complex and highly individual consciousness. While Nick seeks for an integrated self-sufficiency, moreover, the novel's numerous recurrent motifs ensure that the reader remains aware of the "inexhaustible variety" of experience that will not submit to simplification.

That Fitzgerald was not a novelist content with being merely derivative becomes clear from a reading of his correspondence, for his letters are full of instances where he condemns those novels that lack the spark of innovation. And one month after the publication of The Great Gatsby we find Fitzgerald writing to Perkins of his planned next novel:

> The happiest thought I have is of my new novel - it is something really NEW in form, idea, structure -

> the model for the age that Joyce and Stien [sic] are searching for, that Conrad didn't find.[2]

It is an ambitious announcement, and even if Tender Is the Night fails to live up to it, it is yet evidence of Fitzgerald's innovatory zeal.

At the very beginning of this thesis I said that Gatsby represented the zenith of Fitzgerald's career. From his correspondence it emerges that he himself realized this. During the personal disasters that plagued him to the end of his life Fitzgerald seems to have looked back to his third novel with a wistful sense of what might have been, and it was back to Gatsby that he turned in his last novel, The Last Tycoon. To Zelda Fitzgerald he wrote: "It is a constructed novel like 'Gatsby', with passages of poetic prose when it fits the action, but no ruminations or side-shows like 'Tender'. Everything must contribute to the dramatic movement."[3] Since The Great Gatsby is the only fully-achieved testimony to Fitzgerald's talent that we possess, the question of its claim to originality is important. This thesis has been an attempt to demonstrate that Fitzgerald was a serious and original craftsman, conscious of and willing to adopt from the work of Conrad, yet aware that only his own innovation justified his debt.

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[2] Kuehl and Bryer, Dear Scott/Dear Max, p. 104.

[3] Andrew Turnbull, The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 146.

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