

NOTES

1. John A. Higgins, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Study of the Short Stories* (New York: St. John's University Press, 1971), p. 105.
2. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925; rpt. Penguin Books, 1974), p. 8. Further references to this edition will appear parenthetically in the text.
3. Charles Hartshore, "The Reality of the Past, the Unreality of the Future," *The Hibbert Journal* 37 (Jan. 1939), p. 247, quoted in Samuel C. Chew, "Time and Fortune," *Journal of English Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (June, 1939,) p. 108.
4. John S. Whitley, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Great Gatsby* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), p. 20.
5. Ernest Lockridge, "Introduction" in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Great Gatsby: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ernest Lockridge (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 12.
6. John S. Whitley, p.20.

To sum up, Gatsby confuses between reality and dream. So, he rejects the present or the actual time because he lives in the past. The past becomes not only his world but partly also of those who are around him. He is not content to live alone in his past, but tries to impose it on others also. He refuses to think that Daisy belongs to the present world, and asks her to leave Tom and become a part of his dream world which, for him, is unaffected by passage of time. His attempt to arrest the past fails. The irony lies in his failure to see that the girl he strives to win is really not worth winning. His romantic dream collapses because of the compulsions of reality.

Gatsby's dream ends finally with his tragic murder. He takes the blame for a crime he did not commit; he covers up Daisy's crime of running over Myrtle, Tom's mistress. Myrtle was, in fact, killed by Daisy's careless driving, but Gatsby protects her in his loyalty to love, but she deserts him in a most calculated manner. Gatsby pays the final price for his love; he has lived "too long with a single dream" (p. 168).

Shortly before his death, Gatsby undergoes a state of disillusionment. He is disenchanted, aware of the fact that he has been let down by the woman he had loved with so much devotion and self-sacrifice. As Nick comments :

He must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about (p. 168).

Gatsby's dream turns into a nightmare. He is forced to return to the world of harsh reality.

Gatsby's attempt to impose his vision of ideal time on actuality is represented by the schedule he had made in his youth. It symbolizes the process of time. It is written on the fly-leaf of a cheap novel, *Hopalong Cassidy*. This schedule, Whitley argues, shows some pattern, but Gatsby does not seem to have followed it. Therefore, it is meaningless, because he wanted to get rich through short cuts. His ambition is first whipped up by his love of Daisy and then by the requirements of time(6). Hence, his dream world is betrayed by his involvement in illegal business.

the child's presence earlier. Nick notes that Gatsby "kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before" (p. 123). Gatsby is incapable of facing the actual world of the mother and her child as it exists now. Daisy does not think of running away from the present. Hence, she "tumbled short of his dreams"; she lacked the "colossal vitality of his illusion" (p. 103).

Gatsby tries to disregard the reality of the people who reject his dream world, but his dream of winning Daisy back starts shattering. This dream can come true only if she tells her husband that she never loved him, but he finds to his horror that she does not act up to his wish. She tells Gatsby that she did not love *him alone* but she loved him *too**. This "too", which he had never expected, gives him a cramp.

He gets so stunned and disenchanted that his "eyes opened and closed" (p. 139). His illusion collapses. Daisy rejects his world of romance and opts for her husband's world of reality. Hence, he is shocked, disillusioned at the failure of his attempt to re-live the past. His temporary union with her turns out to be a myth because she is incompatible with his vision, and her values are different from his own. His dream is reduced to mere dust.

The symbol of dust acquires a new significance. This is how Nick describes Gatsby's rooms:

There was an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere, and the rooms were musty, as though they hadn't been aired for many days. I found the humidors on an unfamiliar table, with two stale dry cigarettes inside (p. 153).

(*) My italics.

suggests the value of the moment, the momentary fulfilment of his dream. Being emotionally charged, he feels that even his property has been romantically idealized in the presence of Daisy. As Nick observes:

He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything according to the measure of response, it drew from her well-loved eyes sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real (p. 98).

This exultation, however, is only temporary, because soon in the novel Gatsby is going to be disillusioned and left alone to face death. He is then confronted with the reality; his great parties fail to impress Daisy, and she finally chooses to live with her husband and child.

Nick warns Gatsby of the utter futility of his attempt to recreate the present in the light of his own desires:

"I wouldn't ask too much of her,"

I ventured. "You cannot repeat the past."

"Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously.

"Why of course you can!" (p. 117).

Nick knows well that Gatsby's dream is unattainable and its fulfilment far beyond his reach. But for Gatsby, the romantic dreamer, it is possible, because he, unlike Nick, is unable to perceive the reality. He does not believe, nor does he want to believe, in the passing of actual time. He seeks to recreate in his imagination an ideal, deathless world. Only in such a world can his romantic conception of himself exist.

Actual time poses an obstacle in the way of Gatsby's ideal time. This is backed up, as Ernest Lockridge remarks, by the real existence of Daisy's child and by Daisy's belonging to the world of social conventions(5). Gatsby did not think of

a past. The desolate landscape is incapable of change and the eyes overlooking them are blind and unchanging as well.

Further, the inevitable passing of time is signalled by the old, outdated timetable. One may quote a passage where Nick observes:

Once I wrote on the empty spaces of a time-table the names of those who came to Gatsby's house that summer. It is an old time-table now, disintegrating at its folds, and headed 'This schedule in effect July 5th, 1922' (p. 67).

Later we are told that a number of people listed in the schedule died of murder or committed suicide. The unrelenting time takes its own toll of human lives.

Gatsby's temporary reunion with Daisy after five years of separation is an event of immense happiness for him. It marks the re-living of the past for him. Yet the clock scene in the house represents the passing of actual time and the presence of mortality. This scene occurs when Gatsby and Daisy meet at Nick's house for the first time after five years: "Luckily the clock took this moment to tilt dangerously at the pressure of his (Gatsby's) head, whereupon he turned and caught it with trembling fingers, and set it back in place" (p. 93). When the clock falls and stops, actual time, temporarily, is dead. This death, John S. Whitley notes, suggests the moment of time idealized for Gatsby in his reunion with Daisy. But the clock is soon set right and the real time process triumphs. (4) Then they all go to Gatsby's house. In this meeting the past seems to turn into the present and the dream seems to come true. Gatsby exults in his triumph: "He literally glowed; without a word or gesture of exultation a new well-being radiated from him and filled the little room" (p. 96). Gatsby's exultation

Since the present is incapable of restoring the past, Gatsby aims at destroying the present. Platonically speaking, he attempts to create a timeless world by which he would like to control reality. As Charles Hartshorn observes, the "destruction of the present into the past balances the construction of the present out of the future. Time's cup cannot be filled, for the outflow is equal to the inflow" (3). The metaphor of the unfillable cup is in keeping with Gatsby's dream. He would not feel at ease until he has filled the present with the memories of the past and returned to the beginning, to the time when his past had died five years ago.

Right at the beginning of the novel, the futility of Gatsby's efforts to realize his dream is foreshadowed. The sense of the passing of actual time is suggested by the use of symbols. Perhaps, the two most thematically important ones are the valley of ashes and the dominating, unchanging eyes of Dr. Eckleburg, brooding constantly on the landscape. The valley of ashes is

a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smokes and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air (p. 29).

The eyes are an advertisement for spectacles; it is a sign-board abandoned by an oculist who "set them there to fatten his practice" and then forgot them and moved away, but the "eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground" (p. 29). Both these symbols work together and establish a reality that Gatsby cannot change and a present that cannot be replaced by

The Sense of Time in Fitzgerald's

The Great Gatsby

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The sense of time is, perhaps, the most dominant theme in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. It appears in his other novels and short stories too, but it is more developed in this novel than elsewhere. Fitzgerald's protagonists are often seen striving, unsuccessfully, to stop the process of time and "turn the clock back" (1). Gatsby's own concern is to arrest his past and halt the movement of time. Two concepts of time—the actual time and the ideal time—thus overlap in this novel.

Gatsby, the tragic hero of the novel, attempts to bring the past back by reviving a love affair he had five years ago. He is a dreamer—a desperate romantic trying to recover the past. Recovering the past is a normal human reaction and, therefore, does not, necessarily, have to be morbid. Everyone of us, at times, tries to capture part of the past; Gatsby is only more acute than many others in his perception of loss. However, when he tries to impose his world of dreams on the actual world of others, he exceeds the bounds of convention. Living in a world of dreams, he thinks it is possible to repeat his lost love affair with Daisy and build up an earthly paradise with the help of his immense wealth. He has an "extraordinary gift for hope," a "romantic readiness" and a "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (2). Nick Carraway, the narrator, observes that Gatsby "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself (p. 105). That is to say, he does not believe in the world of the senses; he is one for whom reality exists in timelessness and abstractions.