THE GREAT GATSBY AND ITS MULTI-FOLDED PERSPECTIVES

Georgiana-Elena DILÃ[*]

Abstract: *Fitzgerald's masterpiece The Great Gatsby has fascinated both readers and cinemagoers for decades in a row always bringing something new to the attention of the public, who was able to reinvent the plot of the novel over and over again. The attractive story and the ups and downs of the events developing an identity for the characters might not have always been the author's intention. The novel and the films that portrayed Jay Gatsby's life offer powerful images and lines that may transform every reader and viewer into the creator of one's version of the events. The article aims at revealing more of Fitzgerald's style and its imprint on the directors' work and also on the public in general.*

Keywords: *imagery, object of desire, story, icon*

Many of the novels that people believe to be closest to their hearts are usually the ones appreciated by the critics as well, most of the times being part of a certain time frame, extending past decades into the present and even a foreseeable future in order to give birth to such kind of admiration no one could deny. This is also the case of F. Scott Fitzgerald, who worked on his every word, observing the way language should be used in his novels and so obtained great popularity with his works, trying to show his real value to the critics who, at times, might have disregarded him. However, there is one novel that he created, which is present even today in people's lives, continuing to be an inspiration for life, for fashion, for ideals, for merely everything human beings relate to.

> *The Great Gatsby* had been written and published in a relatively short time. And with this novel all of Fitzgerald's early promise had been fulfilled. He had produced a book that would acquire classic status, and had written off those critics who had regarded him as too immature and unintellectual ever to produce major literary work. (Hook 2002: 79)

The impact Fitzgerald's best known work, *The Great Gatsby*, had on the public was acknowledged by everybody as it was not just something readers might have appreciated but also the critics as one of the most quoted remarks regarding it was that of T.S. Eliot's mentioning that such quality American fiction had not been written since Henry James, expressing his hopes for the national literature to grow and develop into something that should be admired similar to what he had observed to be developing in Europe. There were people who approached his books out of curiosity and so it all became a trend, a circle of individuals trying to figure out what the novel actually stood for.

> People read Fitzgerald because the people they knew were reading Fitzgerald. People kept reading Fitzgerald because they were excited by what they read. Some new readers who discovered Fitzgerald after World War II were writers or apprentice writers who have acknowledged the impact of their first encounters with his prose. (Bruccoli, 2007: ix)

There are several themes that the novel explores and the connections it had with the biographical elements the author had found inspiration in, and also the events

[*] University of Craiova, georgiana_dila@yahoo.com

BDD-A24549 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 23:54:06 UTC)

of the period when it was written in made the novel seem more appealing to many of its readers. The American Dream that is clearly evoked in Jay Gatsby's story is not only Fitzgerald's idea of bringing the readers closer to his characters, but is equally meant to present hope for those who needed guidance on their path. There were many individuals who could identify with some of the characters of the novel, although there were not attending such lavishing parties and did not enjoy such a high maintenance lifestyle, without many cares in the world.

> Jay Gatsby, embodies America's divided nature, transcendental idealism versus the crass worship of success. Although Fitzgerald is a modernist writer, his conviction that the accidents of birth, the family and home one is born into, mold one's character, which, coupled with his deeply ingrained vision of the powerful in society crushing the more vulnerable, account for the deterministic themes that persist in his fiction. (Barks, 2013: 4-5)

By using Nick Carraway as the narrator of the novel Fitzgerald creates a bond between the reader and the action eliminating himself as an author and enhancing the power of his readers over what it was they believed to be true about the protagonist and his life story. Nick makes so many comments regarding Gatsby's transparency (even mentioning the way he smiles and the reassurance such a smile brings to someone) that one is inclined to believe his views, to take his arguments seriously and to forget about some details he might overlook when exploring his presentation of the facts. From the beginning of the novel there are several hints that the future events will change lives as Nick observes "And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees – just as things grow in fast movies – I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer." (Fitzgerald, 1991: 7)

There seems to be a revelation of the protagonist as one would describe a new acquaintance that could be met in real life, however, more passion is felt in Nick's descriptions as he seems taken aback at times by what he is witness to. We hear the story from him as he receives the bits and pieces of information and the legends created around Gatsby's character grow and sometimes may be called out of proportion as he is believed to be an Oxford man, a German spy, someone who killed a man earlier in his life, somehow connected to the underground pipeline in Canada and not even the owner of his house, as he was believed to be living on a boat. The increasing amount of pieces of news, the abundance of opinions and the mere speculation of people creates a confusion regarding the character of Jay Gatsby. The second half of the novel seems to be separating the protagonist from the image that others had created for him and his true self is made clearer to the readers. What Nick presents to the public from the summer when the events take place is regarded as one ordinary man would expose while telling the story of someone who had intrigued and fascinated him. However, there is always something which seems overstated about Gatsby, something that is not quite real.

Nick is chosen because he seems to desire to refrain himself from making any judgemental commentaries, which could be interpreted by his interlocutors and his attempt to state the facts and to analyse their outcome is something most appreciated. The admiration Nick feels for Gatsby does no actually come from his achievement of owing a considerable wealth, but from his romantic dream of loving Daisy and being able to fight for her even after all the time they had been separated. So, Daisy becomes the object of Gatsby's desire and so by being so intrigued with the story and what will happen to the protagonist, Nick is the one who has as object of his desire his

BDD-A24549 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 23:54:06 UTC)

neighbour's life. Through the presentation of the story he believes that he somehow owes it to the readers to keep the pace with the events Jay Gatsby is going through.

> Because of this analogy on the scopic level between the Gatsby–Daisy and Nick–Gatsby relationships, the story of Gatsby and Daisy as Nick tells it thematizes the problematic, reciprocal nature of imaginative vision and personal visibility: the problem of an individual imagination (a limited, first person narrator) who, though his insights are linked to a physical sight that necessarily entails his (social/theatrical) visibility, seeks a "keeping in view" of the physical object of desire so absolute that it demands omniscience, with its concomitant invisibility (either because of the narrative viewpoint's ubiquity or because of the invisibility of what is to be observed – the contents of a human heart), an omniscience that makes him, in effect, a direct intellectual descendant of Emerson's trope of the "transparent eyeball." (Irwin, 2014: 6)

The language the author uses is not only beautiful but precise making the reader want to get more acquainted to the story he/she is introduced to. Fitzgerald's use of imagery created important symbols of the American prose and the descriptions presented in the novel are viewed as touchstones: the party Nick attends and the overwhelming feeling he has while admiring the events taking place around him, the first description given to Daisy and Jordan, the was Myrtle's apartment looks like, the shirt display and the narrator's recollection of the Midwest. The suggestiveness of the presentation the novel offers to the readers brings the idea that all the elements can have a special meaning and could be used for creating one's own perspective.

> Fitzgerald knew as well as Bakhtin or Derrida that the spoken word itself cannot guarantee simple, direct, univalent exchanges of meaning. Indeed, throughout *Gatsby*, spoken voices are seen to generate considerable complications of their own. *The Great Gatsby* thus dramatizes the intricacies of all narrative transactions. By repeatedly underscoring the illusion-destroying, disenchanting effects of bodily presence, the novel demonstrates the strategic advantages of written over spoken language. (Hochman, 2010: 15)

The characters of the novel shine and they are perfect examples of the emerging Jazz Age as they did not take things quite so seriously when it came to approaching love, focusing on leisure and a considerable amount of alcohol. The lust people felt for drinking too much, relaxing excessively and being quite sexually promiscuous. Nevertheless is quite obvious that Gatsby does not exactly fit into the picture and this might be a reason why he is such a mysterious figure among the guests of his parties. The moment he tries to become part of the lifestyle Daisy is used to there appears to be the decline of his life. Although Tom does not feel at any moment ashamed of his affaires there is a considerable difference between him and Gatsby. The first thing Jay does is to fire all his servants to make sure there are no reasons why people should suspect anything wrong is going on and gossip does not spread around the town. His life becomes a roller coaster of emotions. He cannot quietly enjoy Daisy's company because Tom gets involved and makes different invitations to Gatsby, the last one being fatal as Daisy kills Myrtle and him being blamed for the accident without any type of remorse.

> From the idolization of a dime-novel cowboy hero, he progresses to the filiopietism, and patronage, of a debauched pioneer - a millionaire speculator in precious metals. Initiated into the world and its betrayals through Dan Cody and

BDD-A24549 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 23:54:06 UTC)

> his paramour Ella Kaye, Gatsby climbs higher, aspiring to the thing that lies behind or beyond earthly show. But Gatsby is no Ahab bursting through the world's pasteboard mask in search of the moral essence of the universe. His vision represents a kind of aestheticized materialism - the pursuit of a grail which conjoins wealth and power with all the beauty, vitality, and wonder of the world, which he incarnates in the fragile loveliness of the rich, well-born American girl. (Rowe, 1990: 102)

The way in which Fitzgerald chose his words, the careful manner of expressing his ideas, so close to the complexity of a poem as many might call it is not only impressive, but also an opportunity for people to create their own vision upon the novel as each new reading bringing a fresh insight upon the story. There was something for everyone, even though the age he portrayed was one of prohibition the constraints did not seem to bother anyone. People have enjoyed reading and re-reading the novel since its publication. *The Great Gatsby* inspired films, operas, ballets and it managed to have an impact on the way bars, outfits and even sugar packets looked like.

There was such a great impact of the novel on the world especially at the beginning of the 21st century that there were so many products one could find related to Gatsby in any field of our lives that the icon it had become reached people from all continents and all life stages. When people become so fond of something there is no limit to their involvement regarding things they truly appreciate.

> Google "Gatsby" and the hits you generate will travel far and wide beyond the literary realm. Aside from the links to predictable "Gatsby" – themed bars, restaurants, and other businesses, such a search will lead you to offerings as varied as the Japanese "Gatsby" line of haircare products; the Korean web comic strip *The Great Catsby*, featuring a cast of cartoon dogs and cats, with a storyline revolving around the travails and romantic entanglements of a young college graduate (later made into a live-action TV series in Korea, starring real humans); the computerbased video game, released in 2010, *Classic Adventures: The Great Gatsby*, in which the player, adopting the role of Nick Carraway, navigates scenes from the novel while finding and collecting hidden objects to advance inthe game (one must, as the game begins, immediately find five clocks hiddenin the surrounding scenery); and the 2010 "Gatsby" application forsocial networking devices like Facebook and Foursquare. (Beuka, 2011: 135)

What is important to mention is not merely the impact Fitzgerald's work had on the lives of its readers in general, but also on literature in particular and the creation of other novels, which found inspiration in it. Suzanne del Gizzo was the one pointing to the resemblance between *The Great Gatsby* and Chuck Palahniuk's well-known *Fight Club* (1996). Even though, at first, the two stories do not seem very similar having a contrast between the worlds presented in the novels, there exists Palahniuk's mentioning of the fact that he was just writing *The Great Gatsby* updated a little. *Fight Club* was not only popular as a novel but a film starring Brad Pitt and Edward Norton. Another novel considered a parallel of Fitzgerald's work is New York writer Ernesto Quiñonez's debut novel *Bodega Dreams* (2000). Even though the language is definitely very different from what we find in *Gatsby* the story portrayed is a similar one, "Willie Bodega being a mysterious power broker of East Harlem who tries to transmute his riches garnered from the heroin trade, into a rebuilt and revitalized neighborhood, a place populated by a powerful, educated Latino class" (Beuka, 2011: 138). Quiñonez admitted that he had considered Gatsby as a cultural outsider and that is the reason why he felt he should be the template of his work.

BDD-A24549 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 23:54:06 UTC)

The most recent film adapting the story of Jay Gatsby starred Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire and Carey Mulligan bringing the vision of the director, Baz Luhrman, in front of the audience and the film critics in a 3D production, which brought acclaim, but also criticism from the viewers and the reviewers, however, never remaining disregarded. Everything related to the novel receives attention and is not forgotten from the public eye so easily.

Jay Gatsby is one of those characters who do not belong only to the written page, but is considered an individual who should belong to a certain class or group, fact which reveals the welcome he received as a cultural element. People embraced his personality although it was not something they were quite certain about as the author had managed to create mystery and had revealed him in different stages making the readers more curious about what he was or was not hiding. However, one thing became certain: Daisy was actually the bad influence in his life bringing disappointment for those who had hoped for love and happiness.

> In 1999, almost seventy-five years after the book was first published, in a list of the greatest novels published in the last hundred years, as selected by authors, scholars and critics for the Modern American Library, *The Great Gatsby* came second, just under James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In a similar list, instigated as a response to the male-oriented first one, and chosen mainly by women in their twenties at Radcliffe College, Fitzgerald's novel actually came *first.* How's that for immortality? (Shephard, 2005: 14)

Not matter how much Fitzgerald's novel presents both glamour and desperation together with the dreams and disillusions it exposed, the book has undoubtedly become a truly American icon part of the national culture as it very well manages to represent. As Fitzgerald stated to Edmund Wilson before the publication of his novel "my book is wonderful" and very few people are able to deny it.

References

Barks, Cathy W. "Biography" in *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Context*. ed. Mangum, Bryan. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 3-15.

Beuka, Robert. *American Icon Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby in Critical and Cultural Context*. New York: Camden House, 2011.

Bruccoli, Matthew J. "Foreword" in *Critical Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. ed. Tate, Mary Jo. New York: Facts on File, 2007, pp. ix-xii.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. ed. Bruccoli, Matthew J. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Hochman, Barbara. "Disembodied Voices and Narrating Bodies in *The Great Gatsby*" in *Bloom's Critical Interpretations: F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby – New Edition*. ed. Bloom, Harold. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010, pp. 13-38.

Hook, Andrew. *F. Scott Fitzgerald. A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Irwin, John T. *F. Scott Fitzgerald's fiction: "An Almost Theatrical Innocence"*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

Shephard, Richard. *F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Great Britain: Cox & Wyman, 2005.

BDD-A24549 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 23:54:06 UTC)