
Rethink What You Read: The Gothic Gatsby

by

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Introduction: *The Great Gatsby* in American High Schools

If you had asked me five years ago what *The Great Gatsby* was about, I would have told you it was about the American Dream. This novel is widely perceived to be a story concerned with what it means to be an American and the dream that immigrants and born citizens share. The American Dream at the time of writing this novel, and arguably today, is to acquire a livelihood in which one has money to spare and to rise to the top of the class system. The novel appears to make clear that this is not how life in the United States works. In other words, the novel has been embraced as a critique of the idea that the American dream is accessible and fulfilling. Consider the sources cited on Wikipedia, the encyclopedia generated by the public. *The Great Gatsby* is described as “a cautionary tale regarding the American Dream.” Jeff Nilsson is cited noting that “if you work hard enough, you can succeed. Yet, Gatsby also explores the dream’s destructive power. Americans pay a great price for that dream” (Wikipedia).

It is true that the characters in the story represent different aspects of the class-based economy in which we live, showing the readers the American Dream through the eyes of each class. Tom and Daisy are the epitome of upper-class living, an upper class into which they were born. They are rich beyond their needs. Jordan Baker is part of the upper class because of her fame, something for which many Americans also strive. As a professional golfer, she is recognized by people everywhere. She symbolizes the desire that many Americans of all generations arguably share: to be adored by all. Nick, in contrast, symbolizes what most middle-class Americans are. He is working a nine-to-five job in stocks, lives within his means, and he

seems content with the money he has. Nick is the narrator of the story as he is telling the readers about this man named Gatsby. Gatsby shows us what it means to be a poor boy from the South fighting against all odds to overcome his poverty and rise to new riches. Gatsby represents the minority of people who have a get-rich-quick scheme that worked. As a bootlegger, he makes a dishonest living, but nonetheless an opulent living that many people arguably want. Tom is having an affair with a woman named Myrtle. Myrtle and her husband George are part of the lower class and struggle to make a living. Myrtle uses her sexuality and affair with Tom to get gifts and try to make her way up the social ladder through him. Many Americans are chasing what Fitzgerald describes as a green light across the bay, whether it be a person, fame or money.

Gatsby's attempt to live out his fantasy by bootlegging his way to the top is a reminder to readers that dishonest work, even though it might get you the money you want, will result in your personal downfall and self-destruction. Those striving to fulfill this dream will not be satisfied because they are constantly looking for what is next, whether it be the next woman or the next sport; they will not stop until they are happy. This happiness is not coming as easily as they hoped, however, because they are constantly trying to buy their happiness. As *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates, a person can only be so satisfied with the riches they have acquired from their work until they become bored realizing that material items cannot give them the happiness they want and look for either a way to spend it or a way to gain more. There will always be something in the way of total happiness and reaching the American Dream. Either your partner is cheating on you, like Tom, or you cannot get the woman you think you love, like Gatsby, or you are simply watching everyone else live their life from afar attempting to live vicariously through them, like Nick. There seems to be no pleasing anyone in any way. Everyone always seems to want something that they cannot have; there is always a void that they are attempting to fill.

The characters Tom, Daisy, and Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* are part of the rich upper class, something many Americans strive to be since they first arrived. Gatsby has all the money he could ever want or need, yet he is still empty. He is missing Daisy in his life, and is trying to do everything he can to get her in it. He attempts to lure her into his grandiose parties every weekend, which go on for days. When this fails, he conjures up a plan that involves Nick bringing the two together. Gatsby will stop at nothing until he has this already married woman in his grasp. He fell in love with her earlier in their life and now feels as though he is her savior from an abusive marriage, a marriage into which she wrongfully and unwillingly entered. Tom is the man who most men want to be, a hero. However, his heroism comes up short when Myrtle is killed by Daisy and he takes the blame. Gatsby being shot and killed by George is the reality of what happens to these so-called real-life heroes.

The Great Gatsby shows the readers what it is like to live in the upper-class society in a very critical way, exposing what being born into money can do to a person through Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Another very typical analysis, then, comes from Alberto Lena, who critiques the way the American Dream is perceived in his analysis of the character Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* in the article “Deceitful Traces of Power: An Analysis of the Decadence of Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*.” Lena argues that Tom shows the audience how the upper class living most people dream of is really a farce that shows when you “have it all,” you still truly do not have everything. In this article, Lena claims that the character of Tom is Fitzgerald’s “sharpest and most devastating attacks on the upper class” (20). This is because of the personality of the old money millionaire. Tom Buchanan is a man who did not have to work to obtain the status he is at, rather he spends his time playing different sports. Tom's appearance “suggest[s] a way of life that has nothing to do with the actual creation of wealth by means of

productive labor,” but rather it suggests that of leisure (23). Lena states that Tom is part of the “leisure class” which are people “who live on the fruits of the industrial community rather than within it” (23). Tom Buchanan is the epitome of upper-class living and searching for the next thing to make one happy, whether it be golf, parties, a boat, or an affair. In only caring about what he wants, Tom is clearly selfish and hungry to satisfy his own needs. The affair Tom has with Myrtle is a prime example of him satisfying his own needs. He has Daisy and his daughter at home, something that most men value over everything, yet that is not enough for him. Tom wants to have the thrill of the affair and does not have it because he loves Myrtle. Nick describes this selfishness by stating: “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...” (Fitzgerald 179). This passage comes at the end of the novel, after Daisy killed Myrtle and Gatsby took the blame. Nick was frustrated because Tom and Daisy brushed off their involvement with Myrtle’s death, packed up, and left the town.

This traditional reading of the novel focuses on how the characters have a passion to change their lives, no matter the cost. They are always looking for the new high in their activities or in their people. Most critics focus on how the American Dream in the novel is that of selfish indulgences, thus creating a society of a narcissistic upper class. The force behind this drive is the idea that money and success will bring happiness. They note that, as shown through Gatsby, happiness and hope ultimately fails and leaves one struggling for their last breath with the hope of a new beginning being your untimely end.

Yes, *The Great Gatsby* is all of this, but as my project will show, there is so much more to consider.

CH 1: The Gothic and the Relationship with *Gatsby*

I argue in this senior project that *The Great Gatsby* is actually a rather Gothic novel. This novel contains many of the Gothic elements that we recognize in authors such as Edgar Allan Poe. *The Great Gatsby* actually shows traces of different Poe stories throughout the plot line, from the invited narrator, to the interest in women, and even down to the way Gatsby is spoken about by others and speaks about himself. I will be showing how this occurs through a series of Edgar Allan Poe stories and how they relate to *The Great Gatsby*.

Also widely taught in American high schools, Edgar Allan Poe is known for his poems and short stories that involve murder and mystery. According to research done by Kifah Al-Omar where he surveyed seven professors, teachers of Poe's stories focus on "his theory of "the unique or single effect," unity of the literary work, [and] variety of the human mind" (120). The unique or single effect" according to Al-Omar "is an end in itself; he usually seeks the effects of horror and terror" (Al-Omar 123). The "single effect" creates unity throughout all of Poe's works by creating a tone of horror through his stories, while also subtly commenting on the state of America and his own views of the government. For example, "The Fall of the House of Usher" has hidden connotations of the North and South division in America.

Two of Poe's short stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson," highlight his interest in darker story plots. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is about a man, the narrator, who is invited to spend some time at his friend's mansion, a friend he has not seen in a long time. His friend, who is named Roderick Usher, is ill and wants company in his sickness. The mansion has "black walls, vacant eye-like windows, few rank sedges, [and] a few white trunks of decayed trees" (Poe). This description alone makes readers "expect a coming danger,"

as rightly noted by the teachers interviewed by Al-Omar (125). The outwards appearance of this mansion parallels Roderick Usher himself. Roderick Usher is a very beautiful, yet very sick looking man who has “acute bodily illness - of a mental disorder which oppressed him,” much like his twin sister who is so ill that she falls into a trance and appears dead (Poe). These two siblings are the last in the line of the Usher name, with no heir to the family. Roderick and the narrator are talking, trying to get Roderick's mind off of his illness, when Roderick tells the narrator that his mansion is alive and the fate of Usher and the house are intertwined. A little while later Roderick informs the narrator that his sister has died and asks for his help entombing her and bringing the coffin downstairs. Roderick's sister is a mystery to the narrator, yet she seems to play an important role in why things happen in the story. She is the last woman of the Usher family, and Roderick seems infatuated by her.

This story shows how a house can cause a descent into madness, and the mysteriousness that surrounds the death of the characters causes the readers to question how the Ushers' souls became captured inside the house. This mansion is devoid of any and all joy and happiness, leaving the inhabitants, both Roderick and the narrator, to become very edgy and the reader does not know why or what has changed to make them feel this way. A storm begins and Roderick rushes into the narrator's room, which is directly above the vault where the sister is buried and throws open his window. The narrator looks out and sees the pond is glowing, despite there being no lightning. In order to calm down Roderick and get him away from the window, the narrator reads him a story in which a knight is attempting to flee from a storm and finds a place of gold that a dragon guards. While the narrator is reading, a cracking and ripping noise is heard from somewhere else in the mansion. As the part about the dragon shrieking while dying is read, a similar shriek is heard coming from the house again. The shield in the story falls off a wall and

a noise that parallels the metal falling rings out from the house. Roderick becomes paranoid and frightened by all the noises and tells the narrator that they are coming from his sister who was alive when they entombed her. Right after this, his sister flings the door open and falls on her brother, something that the narrator may have hallucinated too sooth his mind of seeing his friend drop dead in front of him. They both fall to the ground as corpses, which causes the narrator to run away from the mansion. As the narrator is running away, a sudden bright ray of moonlight catches his attention and he turns around to see the house has split in two. Roderick knew that his sister was still alive yet convinced the narrator to help entomb her for no apparent reason. This act of violence was not explained; however, it was punished by the sudden death of the siblings.

These stories, *The Great Gatsby* and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” are extremely similar in several ways. The repetition of nearly everything causes readers to feel uneasy. A sense of sin looms over the house and there is confusion as to why these connections are so strong and what has happened in that house. According to Al-Omar, this death of both siblings and the collapse of the mansion “emphasize the idea of doublings” (Al-Omar 126). Throughout the entire story Poe relies on the doppelgänger idea and creates parallels throughout characters, buildings and language. The narrator is reading Usher a story to calm him down from the storm outside, yet in the story the knight is running away from a storm as well. The siblings look alike and are both very ill. The siblings die together, and with the same breath the building collapses. Everything within this story is tied together, which is made known very early on when Usher claims that he feels his destiny is shared with the building.

Lastly, the woman who died in each was not known to be dead upon the initial incident. Myrtle in *The Great Gatsby* is run over and left on the ground as Daisy and Gatsby drive off.

They do not immediately know she was killed. Roderick entombs his sister claiming she was dead, yet there was clearly doubt in his mind since he stated she was alive before seeing her at the door. These women are, in a way, the focus of the story; the downfall of the men happens because of the women. The house and Roderick fall because a woman presumed dead, a woman whom he supposedly loved deeply, was actually alive and wanted to bring him down with her. Daisy Buchanan, the woman Gatsby loved, was his own downfall. Jay Gatsby took the blame for killing Myrtle, yet it was actually Daisy who hit her and kept driving. Since Gatsby took the blame, George shot him in the back in a rather sad and dramatic way. Gatsby has just emerged from the pool to answer a phone call he thought was going to be Daisy professing her love for him and readiness to run away together when he was shot. Yet, it was actually Nick on the phone calling him, and Nick who heard the gunshot. Jay Gatsby died thinking the love of his life was ready to love him publicly and Roderick Usher died in the arms of and with the only woman he seemed to have truly loved. While both stories share similarities in the Gothic genre, they also hold a form of political critique. As stated in chapter one, *The Great Gatsby* is taught in school as a critique of the class division.

The story of “William Wilson” by Edgar Allan Poe also has many similarities to *The Great Gatsby*. The story of “William Wilson” starts with a small incitement of Wilson’s childhood. He “grew self-willed,” much like Gatsby did to become the rich man readers are initially introduced to (Poe 314). Wilson believed that his “voice was a household law” and he was “left to the guidance of [his] own will, and became, in all but name, the master of [his] own actions” (Poe 315). Likewise, the young Gatsby found his way to fulfill his dreams through his actions in helping Cody. A young Gatz did not follow the will of his parents and stay home; rather, he decided to leave and make a new life eventually under a new name. Scholar Robert

Coskren wrote “‘William Wilson’ and the Disintegration of Self” and pulled some very important quotes in the story and explains them in a way which makes it easier for me to express the similarities to *The Great Gatsby*.

The structures that surround the characters in both stories play an important role. Coskren, the writer of “‘William Wilson’ and the Disintegration of Self,” points out that Poe often uses “external setting and particularly architecture almost invariably mirror the structure and condition of the mind that dwells within it” (156). In “William Wilson,” the school was a “palace of enchantment! there was really no end to its winding, to its incomprehensible subdivisions,” which directly paralleled the way Wilson felt about himself (Poe 315). The vast and awe-inspiring school “gives flight to Wilson’s imagination” (Coskren 156). Jay Gatsby’s mansion, with its elaborate decorations, fancy showrooms, and wealthy appearance was also very empty inside. This emptiness reflects Gatsby’s own emptiness and the reason why he is constantly trying to lure Daisy into his home. When Daisy enters his home, he exclaims that she makes it look full, as though this one small woman fills up the entire grandiose mansion. The reality is that Daisy is filling the whole within Gatsby’s heart and her physical appearance in the mansion represented this inward fulfillment.

William Wilson and the character he follows around are very similar, from the way they dress, speak, their ideals, birthday, and even height and looks. The first Wilson (older) seems to appear everywhere that the second Wilson (younger) is in schools and trips, wherever he seems to go. The first Wilson also stops the second from doing anything mischievous and wrong. In the article “Poe’s WILLIAM WILSON,” author Yonjae Jung brings up the crimes that Wilson commits: “dishonest gambling, collegiate dissipation, and sexual liaison” (83). These acts are quite similar to those of Jay Gatsby’s. Gatsby is a known gambler, and he has made a living out

of being a bootlegger, as well as being sexually free through his affairs with Daisy. Another person who is similar in these petty crimes is Tom Buchanan. He has a more aggressive approach to these crimes, as he often joins them with acts of physical violence. While William Wilson's doppelgänger is himself, but older, Gatsby's doppelgänger is Tom Buchanan. They are both similar in built, are having extra-marital affairs, and are gamblers as well. This idea of doubling plays an important role in the discovery of one's self. To identify themselves, they find the flaws in their double. For example, Gatsby is displeased with the way Tom so easily raises his voice and loses his temper, which leads Gatsby to do the same in front of Daisy causing her to cry. William Wilson learns that he is displeased with the crimes he has committed and attempts to stop his double from performing them so that he can be happy with himself.

The stories both share a similarity in how the name of the main characters reflect themselves. The story of young Gatsby shows Gatsby was originally Jay Gatz, a young poor boy from the south. Gatsby decided to change his name to give himself a new identity and essentially a new start to a life he would create and mold directly from his imagination. Likewise, William Wilson is not pleased with his name. Scholars often read his name as Will-I-am Will's-son, as in this boy is the son of Will named after Will. There is nothing about his name that leads him to his own proper identity away from his father and family. William wants to be known for who he is and not who's family he is from or whose son he is.

These two main characters often reflect upon another character to see what is wrong with themselves. They seem to have an identity crisis and aim to fit themselves to what they feel is proper, even if it is the case of criminal activity. Originally, finding the similarities between Gatsby and Wilson seemed like a challenge to me; however, when considering the way Gatsby came about his wealth and the life of crime that seems to be rumored around him it is easy to

identify the connections. These men wanted to make life their own and did that by any means necessary, nothing was going to get in the way of them achieving their goal.

CH 2: The Gothic Fitzgerald

While F. Scott Fitzgerald is known to high school graduates as the author of *The Great Gatsby*, he also authored Gothic stories that are similar to Poe's. I, along with many others, was unaware that F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote short stories about ghosts and other paranormal activities. He wrote many short stories dealing with ghosts, doppelgängers, and other unexplainable events, showing he was not only aware of the Gothic tradition, but could masterfully write about it. Derek Lee, who wrote "Dark Romantic: F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Specters of Gothic Modernism," discusses Fitzgerald's "poetic rhetoric, transcendent imagination, and heroic notions of the self," and often incorporated the Gothic into his more realistic works (Lee 126). Fitzgerald is known to have integrated "angels, poltergeists, demons, and other fabulous elements into otherwise "traditional" stories" (126). Lee argues that "most critics have ignored these works [Fitzgerald's Gothic short stories] led them as side experiments," which is something that they should not do since Fitzgerald incorporated the elements of these stories throughout his greater and better known works (Lee 126). One of the first stories of this genre that Fitzgerald wrote is called "A Short Trip Home." This story is about a man that is going to his home town to visit his first love and is haunted by an angry man. This man eerily followed the narrator around, telling him "Look out now," over and over again (Fitzgerald, Ch 1). Fitzgerald attempts to create an uneasy atmosphere by describing the town as "broken by its climb into triangles and odd shapes" (Fitzgerald, Ch 1). The narrator appears to go mad when he asks people where the man he had just seen went and no one can answer because no one else saw him. When the narrator realized that the man was dead was the point in which he had threatened

to “wipe [the narrator] out” (Fitzgerald Ch 2). However, now knowing that this man was dead, the narrator told him that he could not touch him since he was dead. In the next chapter, the narrator finds out that the man’s name was Joe Varland, a man who died a winter ago. This man was haunting the trains trying to prey on women like he did when he was alive.

Fitzgerald’s attempt at a gothic story shows that he was interested in the subject and wanted to create his own works in the genre. Ignoring such important works of Fitzgerald leads people to being blinded to any potential of finding hidden elements of other forms of literature. As Lee notes, scholars of Fitzgerald’s works did not see the Gothic stories that he created as “a serious aesthetic strategy,” which they rightfully should have (Lee 126). The number of stories that Fitzgerald wrote in this aesthetic proves that it was more than a simple dabble into the Gothic elements for fun. Lee argues that “gothicism permeates the structure of his most acclaimed novels” (127), which is the central argument of my senior project although specifically about *The Great Gatsby*. The Gothic is embedded within *The Great Gatsby* and can only be truly seen after understanding that this novel may have a different tone than what is taught to its readers. This understanding will “allow us to see his entire body of work in a different - and darker - light” (Lee 127). *The Great Gatsby* clearly has some dark elements since there is murder and affairs occurring and a whole section dedicated to a valley of literal ash covering the streets. This novel has more Gothic elements than are perceived, which is why a deeper reading is needed.

I will be arguing that while *The Great Gatsby* is a work of realistic fiction, or a genre consisting of stories that could have occurred to people or animals in a believable setting it can also be read as a work of Gothic literature. These stories resemble real life, and fictional characters within these stories react similarly to real people. *The Great Gatsby* contains Gothic

elements throughout the story so much so that it can actually be read as a Gothic. Fitzgerald manages to tie in the dark romanticism elements throughout *The Great Gatsby* that help to enhance the air of Gothic tradition within the novel (Lee 129).

The making of a classical Gothic novel includes the following elements, many of which we saw in the two Poe short stories: a castle or mansion setting, a mysterious and suspenseful atmosphere, omens/portents/visions, people with high and overwrought emotions, women in distress, male heroic characters, women threatened by powerful men, and a gloomy or horrific staging. *The Great Gatsby* contains a form of the Gothic mode throughout the entire novel, even buried within the characters themselves. There may not be the typical ghost, paranormal characters or the traditional Hollywood monster, but the characters themselves can be argued to have several characteristics that form the ideals around a human version of such entities.

To begin, Gatsby himself follows living in a mansion alone which adds a rather mysterious air to himself; he has high and intense emotions; and, he can be considered a hero for serving in the World War and his passion to save Daisy from her marriage. The character of Gatsby is described as extremely mysterious within the first chapter of the novel. There is no one who truly knows him or his story, and the guests at his own party prove to be mystified by him as nearly all have never even seen Gatsby. The stories that circulate the name of Gatsby range from drug dealing to murdering. This lack of knowledge about the host and the made-up stories surrounding him can reflect that of an actual ghost. Ghost stories typically begin with the legends of the unknown and the possible stories of when said ghost was alive, like in “The Fall of the House of Usher” where the narrator already knew Roderick since childhood but did not truly know the extent of his family’s history and why the mansion seems so strange and spooky.

Jay Gatsby is one of, if not the most, mysterious character that Fitzgerald has written in this novel. Nick Carraway creates the illusion of mystery and suspense that surrounds Gatsby. When the first-time reader is introduced to Gatsby he is surrounded by a gloomy and suspenseful haze as he is seen from afar reaching into the distance over the water towards a green flashing light at the end of another dock. This scene is at the end of Chapter I. Nick writes the following:

I saw that I was not alone -- fifty feet away a figure had emerged from the shadow of my neighbor's mansion and was standing with his hands in his pockets regarding the silver pepper of the stars. Something in his leisurely movements and the secure position of his feet upon the lawn suggested that it was Mr. Gatsby himself, come out to determine what share was his of our local heavens.

I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone--he stretched out his arms towards the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward -- and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been at the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness.

(Fitzgerald 31)

In these last two paragraphs of Chapter I, Fitzgerald uses the element of a mysterious and suspenseful atmosphere, the same type of atmosphere that Edgar Allan Poe creates in "The Fall of the House of Usher" when the narrator first sees the mansion. The narrator in "The Fall of the

House of Usher” describes the first during “glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom prevailed [their] spirit... [the building had] bleak walls—upon vacant eye-like windows—upon a few sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees” (Poe 299). That mansion was surrounded by gloom; likewise, Gatsby seems to have appeared from nowhere, and disappeared just as quickly from the night's darkness. The odd stance of Gatsby trembling while he reached out his hands makes readers question what it is that this stranger is trying to accomplish and why it is that he shakes. Nick does not go into detail as to what he thinks Gatsby is doing or why he is reaching outwards, or even whose dock is at the other end. Considering that Nick was just at the Buchanan's house, one might imagine that he could give a vague “it seems as though he is reaching towards my cousin's house” description. Nick is constantly leaving out information to the readers that any other person would have given. This moment was purposely left in mystery to show the readers the depth of the mystery that surrounds Gatsby.

The mystery of Gatsby was beginning to be unraveled by Nick. Gatsby has told Nick that he is from the South, and reimagined himself to be a completely different man from the boy he grew up as. Gatsby tells Nick that he thinks Daisy

should go to Tom and say: "I never loved you." After she had obliterated four years of marriage with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were five years ago. (Fitzgerald 109)

This is an inclination of where Gatsby is from. The idea of going back to Louisville shows that either Gatsby has lived there previously or has some form of a connection with that area. This is

in Kentucky, a Southern state, and shares similar ideals about morality as Louisiana -- the state that is central in Colmenares' argument of the man/monster Southern trope in vampire novels.

The trope of the Southern vampire is one that resonates within many Gothic vampire stories including that of *Interview with the Vampire* (1991). The South "echoes the Gothic fascination with the dual good/evil nature of humanity as well as the man/monster aspect of the vampire" (Colmenares 403). Gatsby plays on the "man/monster" idea as he is a man of mystery. The ambiguity of Gatsby as a whole is similar to that of monsters of lure. There is no true story of the creation of many monsters, but rather everyone has a different version of how they came to be or what they actually do in the present day. Gatsby's vampiric actions and personality are a reflection of this idea of the South's duality. Gatsby believes that everything he is doing is good. The morality trope seems to be something that he is not fully concerned with, unlike someone from the North, such as Tom Buchanan, whose mind it weighs heavily on. Gatsby is a type of heroic figure, something that is very common to depict within Gothic novels. He claims to be an adorned war hero. Lee states that Gatsby is the character people can think about to see how Fitzgerald transcends "human values - life, love, liberty, hope, and joy" (128). Gatsby can be considered a hero in the sense that he is trying to save Daisy from her relationship with Tom. Daisy is in a mentally and physically abusive relationship with Tom Buchanan and is only with him because it is what her parents want. Daisy's family wants her to be with a man of old money who did not need to work. This guarantees a life of comfort and extravagance since Tom has enough money to last them a literal lifetime and keep their daughter happy and comfortable without a worry of fiscal responsibilities. Even though Tom can provide for Daisy in the material sense, with lavish clothing and a big house with maids, he lacks in providing mental and emotional security. He beats her and treats her as though she is below him. He does not provide

stimulating conversations nor give her real attention. Rather, he saves this type of stimulus for his mistress, Myrtle. Jay Gatsby attempts to sweep Daisy Buchanan off her feet and away from this type of abuse. Gatsby knows that Daisy deserves a better life than the abuse Tom is giving her and is attempting to do so, not realizing that he is actually putting himself and her in more danger of Tom's fury. Tom Buchanan is also heroic for serving in the war and his physical description adds to the visual image of a stereotypical hero, with his "cruel body" (Fitzgerald 7) which seems to be looming and overpowering. However, Tom is a man who repeatedly threatens and uses women for his own personal pleasure and gains, something heroes do not do. Daisy and Myrtle are damsels in distress and the women who are being threatened by Tom.

The characteristics of the characters Tom and Daisy can also be perceived as vampiric by nature. In the article "The Vampire as the Gender and Racial Construction of Western Capitalism's White Masculinity in English and American Gothic Literature," the author, Kristian Pérez Zurutuza, is discussing the idea that the "cannibalistic consumption" vampires thrust upon their prey is similar to that in which "capitalism itself possesses" (541). The vampires in Gothic novels throughout history feed off of living humans to gain their immortality, where those who thrive off of capitalism consume "both human and material," since capitalism is "required as the essential ingredients for perpetual, increasing growth" (541). This idea of capitalist masculinity will help further my point of reading *The Great Gatsby* characters as having vampiric qualities. Gatsby feeds off the wealth of a man whom he admired and looked up to, even adapting his "Old Sport" catchphrase. Gatsby acquired so much wealth that he throws extravagant parties to lure in the girl he desires most, Daisy Buchanan.

If we think of vampires in such a way than I believe it is valid to argue the extravagant lifestyle of both Gatsby and Tom can be contributed to their role in the capitalistic society of the

1920's, and thus argue that they are not much different from the blood suckers of lore. Zurutuza describes how the vampires in the more famous novels, such as *Dracula* and the character Lestat in Anne Rice's vampire series, are all associated with the "ideas of aristocracy and travel" that "are not mere accidents, but core features when depicting the vampire and its caste origins as heir to former classic and medieval notions of masculinity, and its need as a social hierarchy constructor" (541-542). Gatsby, Tom, and Nick all show the different levels of wealth and how it is obtained in society. Tom comes from old money, meaning he was born into a family that has a lot of money. As Lena notes, Tom's "enormous inheritance renders him the diametrical opposite of the self-made man" (Lena 21). Nick works for whatever money he has, though he is not in the lowest class he is not as high up as Gatsby and Tom. Gatsby is from new money, meaning all of his riches he gained by himself since his family was poor. The "vampire depicts this imbalance of social and economic nature," in such a way that Nick, Tom and Gatsby do (Zurutuza 542).

Tom Buchanan is an angry upper-class man who believes he is entitled to everything. He is a character who, according to Lena, is Fitzgerald's "sharpest and most devastating attacks on the upper class" (Lena 20). This is because of the personality of the old money millionaire. Tom Buchanan is a man who did not have to work to obtain the status he is at, rather he spends his time playing different sports. Tom's appearance "suggest[s] a way of life that has nothing to do with the actual creation of wealth by means of productive labor," but rather it suggests that of leisure (23). Lena states that Tom is part of the "leisure class" which consists of people "who live on the fruits of the industrial community rather than within it" (23). This is a flaw in the sense that he looks down upon everyone that is not him. A man that never had to work, does not know the struggle of being poor, and will never know it looks down upon those who were not born into this wealthy lifestyle.

Tom can represent the vampiric lifestyle because he lives outside of the norm. A vampiric lifestyle is one which is lived outside of the normal society but will occasionally enter it to feed off the “fruits” of the working-class people. The vampires of lore are often seen hiding away, only to be seen when they need or want human blood. Tom Buchanan resembles this in the sense that he lives on the outside of Manhattan, the roaring city life, but will travel through the city to steal away his mistress for a while, only to satisfy his hunger for her and travel back to his Long Island life of seclusion from the rest of the working class. According to Lena, “money earned without labor was an invitation to corruption,” which is precisely why Tom acts in such amoral ways. Tom is corrupted to think that everyone and everything will bend at his word simply because of his wealthy status. He has never had to work for the money he possesses, but rather he can simply send whatever he pleases at whim. This form of leisure causes him to think that he can do whatever he would like and not suffer the consequences or can simply buy his way out of the situation. This is similar to the vampires of lore. They do not have to worry about the consequences of their amoral activities because they will simply hide away from society light, which is what Tom does at the end of the novel when he takes Daisy away from East Egg to escape the fact that she killed Myrtle.

Tom Buchanan is arguably the most gothic character that Fitzgerald created in *The Great Gatsby*. Tom is “always eager to affirm his physical superiority over everyone else,” (Lena 24), something that vampires are known for. Thinking of Tom in the sense of a vampire adds a sense of excitement to the novel that most first-time readers lack. When you read a story knowing that a character has this deep secret they hide from society, only to be shown at night or in dark alleys, the dramatic irony grasps the readers and transforms the book entirely. Tom Buchanan uses his physical status to break Myrtle's nose and dominate Daisy throughout the novel. This is

what a vampire will do to its prey, dominate and conquer, without consequences. The lack of consequences that vampires receive through human society is parallel to that Tom receives through the American society. His social power and status as a millionaire of old money protects Tom from any type of trouble with the law that a lower-class citizen would endure. This also hinders Tom from recognizing any type of negative impact he has on the lives of the people around him (Lena 25). This lack of acknowledgement towards the feelings of the victims of Tom's rage can be compared to the lack of compassion vampires feel towards the humans they prey on.

Tom Buchanan is wrapped up so tightly in his own world that he is essentially unaware of everything else happening in the world, as evidenced by his conversation with Nick Carraway over the work Nick does. Tom "clearly has no idea of the workings of even secondary industries such as the bond trade" simply because he does not have to know about it. His money keeps him living comfortably without any fear of becoming poor. This lack of care towards the world around him "represents a symbol of social decay, and, in this light, Buchanan's aggressive manners, chicanery, and obsession with sport prove not only his personal degeneration, but also highlight his place as a handicap to the progress of society" (Lena 26). Characters like Tom Buchanan who are born into wealth and use that as a scapegoat for not knowing what is happening within the world around him will be the reason society as a whole will collapse. The people who have the money to improve their society hoard it for their only pleasures such as sports and the ability to hire someone else to clean up their mess. This, unfortunately, will cause the fall of society as we know it and create a space for the vampires of the real world to run rampant. Those humans that are poor and greedy in search of their next meal will prey on those

who look like they may have some spare change in their pocket. They will attack without cause, and kill without remorse... much like Daisy. Tom and Daisy:

were careless people... —they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.

(Fitzgerald 179)

Tom Buchanan and Daisy never cared for anyone but themselves. They are the type of people to kill without remorse. These two were meant to be together since they each do not have a care for anything other than themselves and money. Throughout the novel it is quite easy to forget that these two monsters have a child. The girl is spoken so little about throughout the novel that readers often forget to mention her existence upon speaking about the novel. This shows the readers that Tom and Daisy are after whatever will please them in the moment. They do not look for long term pleasures within life, but rather a quick fix. This form of a quick fix can be seen throughout vampire novels, and to an extent other monstrous story. The monsters will find what they want, be it blood or even murder, gain hold of it until they are satisfied, and then leave as though nothing happened and repeat this cycle. This is the same cycle that Tom and Daisy seem to repeat, where they use the person or people for their immediate pleasure and then discard them.

Fitzgerald incorporates the “excessively natural figure” as the “innocent maiden” who can be perceived as Daisy and Myrtle (Lee 139). Daisy is innocent in the sense that she acts rather passive and like a fool. She attempts to act as though nothing bothers her, even when her husband leaves the dinner table to answer a call from his mistress. It is obvious that this does

bother her, but she attempts to play it off as though nothing is wrong and she does not know what is happening. Myrtle is the innocent lady who gets killed at the end of the novel. She is not so innocent in the sense that she is sleeping with a married man while being married herself, but she did not deserve the fate handed to her.

The plot motif of dangerous and illicit sexuality is prevalent throughout the entire novel. Tom and Myrtle have arguably the most dangerous sexuality, since it ends in the death of two people. Their affair is one that is not hidden in the slightest. Everyone around the couple knows that Tom and Myrtle are having an affair and seem to brush it aside and pretend it is not happening. No one around this couple cares to stop them or even attempt to tell the couple that they should either divorce their legal spouse or end the affair. Daisy and Gatsby also take part in their own illicit affair. They both know that they should not be seeing each other, so as an attempt to cover up their affair they drag Nick along when they are out in public. By doing this, they know that outsiders will assume that the three are simply all friends and will not think that Daisy Buchanan is having an affair with the infamous Jay Gatsby. Fitzgerald took the affair with Tom and Myrtle and mirrored it with Daisy and Gatsby, but showed it through a better, calmer light. The affair between Tom and Myrtle is the more dangerous and dynamic couple, especially since Tom breaks Myrtle's nose and attempts to justify this by stating it was because she would not stop talking about Daisy.

It is clear that Fitzgerald may have incorporated these elements as a nod to his Gothic short stories. Lee argues towards the end of his article that there have been “two Fitzgerald's all along: the Romantic Fitzgerald we have always admired for his inimitable prose, and the Gothic Fitzgerald lurking close behind, always cast in shadow—not because he was hiding, but because we refused to see him” (138). This statement shows my argument clearly since there is another

scholar that sees the second Fitzgerald. This second Fitzgerald, the Gothic Fitzgerald, is the one who should be focused on more. This Gothic Fitzgerald is the one that society needs to consider more while reading his romantic works. There is always a way to see the undertone of Gothicism within the romantics as a critique of what Fitzgerald wants his readers to truly gather from his stories. The Fitzgerald we are told to understand and read in high school and upper level courses is a Fitzgerald that society wants us to understand simply to push the American Dream narrative. Instead of pushing the American Dream to readers, teachers should let their students read *The Great Gatsby* without any previous understanding or influence. This is how I came to understand that *The Great Gatsby* does have Gothic elements throughout the entire novel, and not just a single character that portrays some elements.

The elements of setting that Fitzgerald uses in *The Great Gatsby* clearly portray his use of the Gothic. The Valley of Ashes is the most obvious use of the Gothic, since it 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 smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight...

(Fitzgerald 23)

This paragraph clearly shows that Fitzgerald has at the very least an understanding of how to describe a setting that contains a rather eerie feel that foreshadows the future. This is also the

area where Nick tends to lose time. While he is there with Tom and Myrtle, he tells the readers that since he got drunk his memories are shrouded in a haze. This haze is Nick losing temporal time. This happens several times throughout the novel, but the first time this loss of temporal time and having a haze over his memories is in this weird part of the town.

The Valley of Ashes is quite literally in a smoky haze, being covered in soot and smoke. The Valley of Ashes is “where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the form of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air” (23). The Valley is surrounded by intense mystery through the watchful eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. These were the eyes on a giant billboard that peer over the city, giving you a sense of constantly being watched. These eyes bring a sense of uneasiness since they are watching over all of the sins and secrets that the characters commit.

The Valley of Ashes is the epitome of what a gloomy scene should be. This area holds many dark and intense secrets which the readers later find out. This is where Tom’s mistress lives with her husband, who runs a worn-down car shop; and where Nick Carraway forgets most of the days. Nick Carraway is a character with immense flaws, the biggest being his constant lying. The novel starts off with Nick stating that he applauds himself for reserving all judgment over his peers, however since the whole novel is written from his perspective it is all about his judgements (1). In Chapter II, Nick is with Tom at his house of adultery partying with Tom’s mistress, Myrtle, and their friends. In this scene Nick claims that this was one of only two times that he has ever been drunk. In this, the Gothic element is prominent through Nick stating that “everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it,” showing that even in his memories of events that happened near the Valley of Ashes they are covered in this smokiness.

The other area that may not seem to be as shrouded in the Gothic elements as the Valley of Ashes is where Tom and Myrtle have their affair and the small apartment where it happens. This place is described as having “a small living-room, a small dining-room, a small bedroom, and a bath” (Fitzgerald 29). This repetition of how small everything is giving the area a more jail-like quality to it. While reading it, the readers get a sense of claustrophobia. This sense is heightened when Nick carries on saying that it is decorated lavishly with “tapestried furniture entirely too large” (Fitzgerald 29). The way this room is described fits the Gothic setting category because its smallness is prison-like and it is the fortress for the love affair for Tom and Myrtle. These small walls contain Tom and Myrtle’s secret affairs, dog, and abusive matters.

Conclusion: The Great Big Screen

Overall, *The Great Gatsby* seems to have a lot more depth to it than what is taught in high school. This novel shows how a work of fiction so deeply rooted can surprise the readers with hidden allusions to one of Fitzgerald's inspirations, Edgar Allan Poe. While starting the reader's understanding of the novel through the generic way can be helpful in comprehending the story, this new way of reading can enlighten and expand the reader's mind and creativity.

In reading *The Great Gatsby* as Gothic, a new change to the production of filmic adaptations of the novel can be made. A production of a Gothic version of this film may alter the appearance of the characters, set, music and editing. Tom Buchanan, for example, might be casted with a larger, even more brooding man, a man that is very tall and muscular, nearly monstrous looking, with a voice so deep it sounds threatening even when he is joking. This type of man would cause the audience to know immediately that Tom is up to no good from the very start, without even reading the novel. Daisy would still be as beautiful, but potentially with more drastic features like those of a typical model, long and nearly emaciated as well give her dark brown, nearly black hair. A soft, airy voice to go along with her soft features to make Daisy seem as fragile as possible. Daisy is a fragile woman in the story, stuck in a loveless marriage because she is not strong enough to get out. This visual form of her will show that. As for Gatsby, he would look sick. Instead of being this bright eyed, blonde and strong character, Gatsby would be thin and weak looking to show how he obsession with Daisy is eating away at him. Nick Carraway would be smaller, and mousy. This type of visual would reflect on Nick's personality and the fact that he seems to trail around everywhere to compose his story. Nick knows nearly everything about the lives of everyone around him because he is always around, like a mouse you cannot get rid of.

The movie's newest adaptation of the novel directed by Baz Luhrmann relies heavily on a lighter, airy, and almost whimsical visual aspect to make the viewers understand the story as a love story. When the audience is first introduced to Tom, they are greeted with a man dismounting a horse in polo gear. The sun is shining up him and the luscious green scenery that surrounds Tom. His mansion is just as grand and brightly lit, something I would change immediately. Instead of having this bright, grand mansion, my adaptation, potentially directed by Tim Burton, would have the Buchanan residency gloomy, unwelcoming and composed of great stone walls with large Gothic styled gates in the front. Tim Burton is known for his haunting aesthetic, making use of the darkness to highlight character flaws and can source the right Gothic castle to shoot the movie in. The interior of the house would be decorated accordingly to match this dark, mysterious and haunting exterior.

The scene in which we are first introduced to Daisy, she is laying on a couch and dainty white curtains flow around the room. This scene is one that I would not change because this represents perfectly the light and airiness that is Daisy's personality. Daisy is a character of little words and has a shallow personality that Fitzgerald does not flush out. She is attractive to Gatsby because of her looks, since their first meeting shows they barely spoke. Tom is attracted to Daisy because she is a beautiful woman who comes from a family of old money. This type of shallow woman is present throughout the entire story but is not played upon properly. To represent any woman whose personality is not past that of a few simple words and good looks, the costuming is what should be accentuated. Daisy and Myrtle should be adorned in extravagant clothing and any speaking words should be very softly spoken. This will show that they are women of mainly looks and nothing else.

The beautiful visuals create a sense that the affair between Daisy and Gatsby is, in a way, good since everything around them is bright and sunny. When Daisy and Gatsby first see each other again in Nick's house they are surrounded by an intense amount of light to support the beautiful flowers. This scene immediately assures the audience that this is a good thing, that Daisy and Gatsby are meant to be together. If the director read the novel through the Gothic lens, I believe they would have intensified the storm that was happening outside and make the scene appear darker, alluding to Gatsby's unfortunate ending. The meeting between Daisy and Gatsby would be near black and white with hints of red throughout the clothing and flowers. Perhaps Gatsby will have a red handkerchief in his pocket resting on his chest. This pop of color placed properly will foreshadow the red blood that spills out of him when he is shot by Wilson.

Gatsby's mansion would not change drastically, rather just a few tweaks to the design. Instead of having the mansion as brightly lit as Disney World, the lighting would be strategically placed around the main characters. The background parties will be in a haze and the colors will be desaturated. This type of atmosphere shows that this place will be the setting for Gatsby's demise. While everyone is having a great time in their blur of a party, Gatsby is hyper focused on Daisy and awaiting her every moment of his life. The ending of the movie will show Gatsby's death with the focus on the blood running from his chest and having Wilson as a blur in the background, just like everyone else. Instead of the butler telling Gatsby there is a call for him, the last thing Gatsby will hear is the screaming phone. This is where the movie will end, without any conclusion as to if it was Daisy who called. Gatsby's life was a life of mystery and therefore I feel his death should be veiled the same way.

The Great Gatsby is a powerful work of fiction that will be taught in schools for many more years to come. As it is 2020, revisiting this work seemed necessary as it was one of the

most popular pieces of literature about the 1920's that is the favorite of many students and adults alike. A new way of reading your favorite classics can enhance your reading experience and revamp your creativity. *The Great Gatsby* is the perfect example of this, as it not only excited me as a student but also many adults who revisited the work with this thought in mind. Literature is subject to interpretations of all kind, and this is why revisiting works that you have previously read with a fresh mind and new intention can open a new world of possibilities.

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