The Great Gatsby Study Guide

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

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Plot Summary

This classic novel, set during the "Jazz Age" (the 1920s) in a young postwar America, is the coming-of-age story of an idealistic young financier who, over the course of a memorable summer, learns uncomfortable truths about the relationships between truth and illusion, between past and present. The narrative, written during the time in which it is set by an author who was part of the high-living crowd within which the action takes place, has long been regarded by critics, scholars and readers as an indictment of the so-called "American Dream".

Narrator Nick Carraway, an ambitious beginner in the New York world of finance, describes the circumstances of his arrival in the East and of his discovery that his home is next to that of the wealthy, mysterious Jay Gatsby (who throws spectacular parties), and across a narrow bay from Daisy and Tom Buchanan, a distant relative and her husband. One evening, after returning from a visit to the Buchanans (where famous athlete Jordan Baker was also a guest), Nick sees Gatsby staring across the bay at the Buchanans' home.

Some time later, as Tom and Nick are driving into New York, they pick up Myrtle Wilson, who turns out to be Tom's mistress. All three spend the afternoon in the apartment that Tom has set up for her, which quickly turns into a drunken party. A few days later, Nick attends one of Gatsby's parties and is astonished by the size and exuberance of the crowd of guests. Although he barely manages to have a word with his host, he notices that Gatsby does have a lengthy, private conversation with Jordan, who later reveals that Gatsby asked her a favor - to ask Nick to invite Daisy for a visit, during which Gatsby would drop by "unexpectedly". It turns out that Gatsby and Daisy had a relationship several years previously, before Gatsby (like Nick, a veteran of World War I) went off to war, and that Gatsby is determined to win her back. It also turns out that Gatsby's real name is James Gatz, and that he created a new, wealthy identity for himself after returning from combat. Nick sets up the meeting, and Gatsby and Daisy are reunited.

Over the next few weeks, Gatsby and Daisy continue seeing each other, their feelings for each other returning and deepening. At one point, Daisy makes those feelings clear to Tom who, despite being shocked by what he has learned, insists that he, Daisy, Gatsby, Nick and Jordan do as Daisy has asked and go to New York. While there, Tom confronts Gatsby, who insists that Daisy never loved him. Daisy, however, says that she did, upsetting Gatsby. The high level of emotion becomes so uncomfortable that Tom insists that it's time to return home, and that Daisy ride with Gatsby in Gatsby's car:the car that, as Nick's narration reveals, is involved in the hit-and-run death of Myrtle Wilson.

The car driven by Tom and carrying Nick and Jordan, a few miles behind Gatsby and Daisy, stops at the scene of the accident, where Tom and the others learn what has happened. The upset Tom then drives home, he and Jordan going into the house to see Daisy and Nick encountering Gatsby, who says that at the time of the accident Daisy

was driving in an attempt to calm herself, but that he intends to confess. The next day, however, Gatsby is shot by Wilson's grief-stricken husband, who traced him through his unique car and who, after killing Gatsby, kills himself.

As Nick makes preparations for Gatsby's funeral, he is assisted by Gatsby's father, who read about his son's death in the papers and who comes in from the Midwest. Nick is surprised and saddened to realize that out of the hundreds of people who accepted Gatsby's hospitality at his parties, only two come to his funeral. He also learns that Wilson traced Gatsby with the help of Tom Buchanan, who says that Gatsby got what he deserved. Shortly afterwards, Tom and Daisy disappear.

The novel concludes with Nick returning to his Midwestern home, having become disillusioned about the giddy, hard-partying people he once so aspired to be like.

Chapter 1, The Great Gatsby

Chapter 1, The Great Gatsby Summary

Narrator Nick Carraway begins his story with commentary on how, in his youth, he came to "reserve all judgments" on people, giving himself time to form accurate, more detailed impressions of them. He then states that "when he came back from the East" his perceptions had changed, that he wanted everyone to be "in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever", but adds that only Gatsby was exempt from this belief. Nick then describes how he left the Midwest, where his family was socially prominent, to the East to pursue a career in finance, and how he found a small bungalow on Long Island next to an expansive mansion to rent. Finally, he describes being invited to the home (on the opposite side of the Island) of his distant cousin Daisy and her husband Tom, a former college football star from a very wealthy family.

When he arrives Nick is met by Tom, who shows him into the living room where Daisy waits with her friend, the evidently very bored Miss Baker. After some aimless small talk, the quartet goes out onto the terrace to eat, the course of their casual conversation interrupted by a telephone call for Tom. Shortly after he goes in to answer it, Daisy follows, and soon they are heard shouting at each other. Miss Baker tells Nick that Tom is seeing another woman in New York City.

Tom and Daisy eventually return, but conversation is tense, becoming even more so when the telephone rings again but is not answered. Shortly afterward, when Tom and Miss Baker go into the house, Daisy speaks in confidence with Nick about how bad a time she's had over the last few years and how she feels distant from her recently born daughter. She also speaks of how cynical she is, how she thinks "everything's terrible anyhow", and how everybody else thinks the same.

When Nick and Daisy go back inside, they discover that Jordan Barker, a well known athlete whose name is, in Nick's mind, associated with a dimly remembered scandal, and Tom have been reading to each other. Shortly after Jordan goes to bed Nick leaves and is walked to his car by Tom and Daisy. When he gets home, Nick sits in his yard for a while, and notices Gatsby come out of his house. Nick almost calls to him but stops as Gatsby, thinking he's alone and unwatched, stretches his arms towards the sea. Nick glances over to see what Gatsby is looking at, and can see virtually nothing - only a green light blinking at the edge of a dock across the water. When he looks back, Gatsby is gone.

Chapter 1, The Great Gatsby Analysis

When analyzing the first few paragraphs of a novel, it's often useful to do so in hindsight, with the knowledge of what happens at the end. In the case of this particular novel, knowledge of the ending is especially useful, in that at the end of the work, Nick

has come to a place of substantial disillusionment with the East and, perhaps more importantly, with the vagaries and unpredictability of people. This is the reason why he says what he does at the beginning, expressing desire for people to be at "a sort of moral attention", since the people he encountered in the East (the stories of whom he is about to tell) were nothing of the sort. Note also the military resonance of the image here (i.e., standing at attention), an echo of Nick's and Gatsby's shared history in the army, a history that on some level seems to have served the truth-sensitive Nick relatively well and the illusion-riddled Gatsby not at all. Finally, note the reference to the differences between West and East which, throughout the narrative, are portrayed as embodying what amounts to stultification and stagnancy in the case of the former and excitement and opportunity in the case of the latter. Here again, it's important to consider the book's ending, the point at which Nick has come to realize the promise of the East is, in fact, empty of realism and genuine fulfillment.

Other noteworthy elements in this section include the vivid characterizations of the other central characters - the racist, emotionally violent, self-righteous Tom, the manipulative, emotionally needy, self-indulgent Daisy, and the diffident, emotionally empty, self-serving Jordan. All three of these characters, in their varied ways and through their varied actions, clearly but unconsciously reveal to Nick the emptiness of the Eastern-centered, party-and-sensation filled life to which he aspired. Meanwhile, the lunch party introducing these characters foreshadows a similar party later in the narrative at which the guests are the same (with the addition of Gatsby), the level of emotional tension is the same, and indeed some of the events (i.e., the phone call) are the same. The sense here is that these sorts of characters, these sorts of people, are engaged in a self-indulgent, ultimately destructive, pattern of behavior and/or way of life.

The final moments of the chapter, with Gatsby gazing at Daisy's house and essentially reaching out to her and the dreams she represents, is also an important piece of foreshadowing in that it pre-echoes Gatsby's entire narrative and emotional journey, his reaching for a past that no longer really exists. The green light at the end of the dock, which reappears several times throughout the narrative (most notably at the end of the work), is a symbolic representation of that past.

Chapter 2, The Great Gatsby

Chapter 2, The Great Gatsby Summary

The chapter begins with a description of a deep, wide pile of ashes between the road and the train to New York and of an elderly billboard put up by an oculist in the city, the image highlighted by a large pair of watchful eyes. It was in the vicinity of the billboard, Nick says, that he first met Tom's mistress. He and Tom were on their way to New York, and when the train stopped at the station by the ash-heap, Tom quickly muscled him off and into a nearby used car dealership run by the pale, nervous-looking George Wilson. As Tom half-banters/half-bullies him, Wilson's wife Myrtle appears and goes straight to Tom, who tells her that he's taking her into the city.

As Tom and Nick are waiting for Myrtle to join them at the train station, Tom tells Nick that Wilson thinks she is visiting her sister. After Myrtle arrives, and after the brief journey into New York (during which Myrtle impulsively buys a puppy from a street vendor), they arrive at the apartment she and Tom share. Myrtle then quickly throws together a party, inviting her sister Catherine and a few others. Over the course of the afternoon and evening, as large amounts of alcohol and cigarettes are consumed and as Myrtle becomes more and more arrogant and pretentious, Nick hears from Catherine that she's heard that Gatsby is related to a German dictator, who is the source of his money. She also says that neither Myrtle nor Tom can stand the people they're married to, and that Tom's wife is a Catholic, which is why she won't give him a divorce. This, Nick comments in narration, is untrue - Daisy is not a Catholic.

Meanwhile, as the alcohol keeps coming and as Nick becomes simultaneously both in and out of the situation, Myrtle talks about her first meeting with Tom, how she felt immediate desire for him, and how she convinced herself that she had to take her chances for happiness when she could. Later, she and Tom argue over whether she has the right to say Daisy's name, leading to an eruption of violence from Tom in which he slaps Myrtle and breaks her nose. In the flurry of first aid and protecting the furniture from the spurting blood, Nick leaves and finds himself alone in a station waiting for an early morning train to take him home.

Chapter 2, The Great Gatsby Analysis

This chapter opens with descriptions of two of the narrative's most important symbols. The first is the pile of ashes, which both represent and foreshadow death—in particular, the deaths of Myrtle Wilson, of her husband, and of Gatsby—and destruction—principally of Gatsby's dreams of bringing his past into the present. Meanwhile, the second main image appearing here for the first time is the billboard with the eyes, which represents the watchfulness of both Nick and the reader, a steady gaze that observes, measures, and judges the actions of the other characters, and in Nick's case at least, finds them wanting.

The Wilsons themselves can be seen as symbolic, particularly when one takes into account the work's thematic consideration of how the so-called "American Dream" has become perverted. Specifically, the ease with which Tom and the other characters use and dismiss the financially struggling Mr. Wilson and desperately ambitious Mrs. Wilson, combined with the eventual deaths of both characters, can be seen as evoking the essential heartlessness driving the dark side of the Dream, the essential ruthlessness and capacity to destroy. Wilson can, in this context, be seen as a representation of a sort of everyman, the hard-working, lower-middle class person just trying to earn a living and do his best. Mrs. Wilson can be viewed in a similar metaphoric light as her husband, with one addition - she clearly has ambitions similar to those held by Nick Carraway, to become part of and live that dream. It may be, in fact, that the death of Mrs. Wilson can be seen as a warning to Nick of the emotional and moral destruction that awaits him if he pursues the Dream as passionately as she did.

Meanwhile, the New York party in this chapter does the same sort of thing as the Buchanans' party in the previous chapter - foreshadow a second party in similar circumstances with a similar outcome. Mrs. Wilson's struggle to embody her dreams at this party foreshadows Gatsby's struggle to embody his at the second party, while the physical violence that erupts at this party foreshadows the emotional violence that erupts at the second. Meanwhile, it could be argued that Nick's journey of transformation really begins at that first party - that is, here he begins to realize just how corrupt, how potentially destructive, Tom's self-indulgent and self-justifying version of the American Dream really is. He learns this not only as the result of the deluded, indulgent behavior of Mrs. Wilson (one can't help but wonder what is going to happen to that poor dog) but also that of her sister, Catherine's lies being one of only many examples of the lies that upset the truth-sensitive Nick Carraway.

Chapter 3, The Great Gatsby

Chapter 3, The Great Gatsby Summary

Nick describes the elaborate, extensive preparations made for the parties held seemingly every weekend at Gatsby's house - crates of fruit to be squeezed into juice, full orchestras, tents, caterers, and large amounts of alcohol. Narration switches into present tense as Nick recounts the usual order of events at those parties, and then back to past tense as he describes events of the first time he attended one, having received a personal invitation (unlike, he says, most people who simply just show up). Jordan Baker is also a guest, casually bored and, like Nick, looking for Gatsby in the midst of hearing rumors and stories about who he is and what he does. At one point, while they're searching the house, they encounter a drunken guest amazed that the books in the library are all real.

Later, Nick and Jordan are sitting at a table with a noisy girl and a quiet man who, after recognizing Nick as someone who also served in the First World War in Europe, admits that he's Gatsby. This takes Nick by surprise, as Gatsby is in his early thirties and good looking - Nick had expected someone older and fat. Later, after has been called away to the telephone and after the orchestra has started a jazzy new piece of music, Nick notices that while most of the guests are involved in relationships of some sort with the opposite sex, Gatsby stands alone. Later still, after Jordan returns from a private conversation with Gatsby, she tells Nick that Gatsby has told her some amazing things, but that she promised to keep them secret.

As the party winds down, Gatsby says goodbye to Nick, but is again interrupted by a telephone call. Nick starts for home, but becomes distracted by an automobile accident involving the man from the library and another man, too drunk to realize that one of the wheels has come off his car. As Nick nears home, he looks back at Gatsby's house, and is surprised to again see Gatsby all alone.

At this point, Nick's narration shifts focus, suggesting that while it may seem that his life was focused on parties, during the period he is describing he was also working - in New York, as a broker in a stock firm called the Probity Trust. He describes his daily activities, which include eating out regularly, studying the theory of the brokerage business, watching other people, and spending time with Jordan Baker. He writes of remembering the story about her he had vaguely recalled when they first met, the rumor that she had been guilty of moving a ball while playing in a golf tournament. This leads him to the comment that Jordan was fundamentally dishonest, a necessary tactic for her to protect herself. This, in turn, leads him to recollect an occasion when she described herself as careless, as hating careless people, and as liking Nick for being both careful and honest. Nick, in turn, comments that for a brief time he was in love with her, but that he realized he had to clear himself from that feeling as soon as he could.

Chapter 3, The Great Gatsby Analysis

The descriptions in the first part of the chapter of the party plans and of the party itself are vividly evocative of frivolous self-indulgence, of an atmosphere of money and carefree fun and, on the darker side of the coin, of anonymity and carelessness, both to the self and of the self. People are strangers—to themselves, to each other, and to their host, united in what appears to be a desire to play but what in fact comes across as a kind of desperate denial of emptiness, or as a filling of that emptiness with physical sensation and giddy joy. While the reader, like Nick, may well find him/herself superficially attracted to that kind of playfulness, the narrative suggests even at this early phase of the story that the spirit of Gatsby and his parties is hollow and mask-like, a sensibility carried even further when one acknowledges the likelihood of Gatsby's ulterior motive. This is his desire, made clear in the following section and foreshadowed in Jordan's mysterious comments to Nick, to attract Daisy, or at least to attract Nick so that he, in turn, will attract Daisy. The parties, it seems, are all an effort to impress her, knowing as Gatsby does that she is attracted to that world.

There are several other important elements of this chapter. The appearance of the drunken guest in the library, for example, is noteworthy for two reasons, both of which are related. His presence foreshadows his appearance in the novel's final chapter as the only guest from Gatsby's many parties who attends his funeral (i.e., other than Nick, the only person present in both death and what Gatsby presents as his life). The symbolic value of his presence at the funeral is hinted at by the circumstances of his presence at the party - specifically, his perception of something "real" in the midst of all the festivities. Gatsby's death is something "real" as well, perhaps the only "real" part of the new life Gatsby has constructed for himself. Then there is the car accident in which this party guest becomes involved, a foreshadowing of the car accident that takes the life of Myrtle Wilson, not just in terms of the physical accident itself but also in terms of the reactions to it. The drunken young man here sees what happens as not really that big a deal, and maintains a dismissive attitude that foreshadows similar reactions in those of Gatsby's circle, particularly Tom, Daisy and Jordan, after Myrtle's death.

Another important piece of foreshadowing is Nick's commentary about Gatsby's solitude, foreshadowing his memory of the moment in the final chapter which, in turn, becomes a component in Nick's realization of just how alone, and ultimately empty, Gatsby was in his struggle to realize his dreams of Daisy. Then there is the first active appearance of Gatsby in the narrative. Up to this point, he has been commented upon and observed, but never actually interacted with by narrator Nick or any of the other main characters. His introduction here is, on one level, apparently calculated to be surprising and intriguing but is, on a more metaphoric level, evocative of his real identity, his real reason for being present on Long Island, which is hidden and secretive. In other words, the party is, like his adopted name, a mask, a concealment from behind which he can pursue his true goal, which is to win Daisy back. Then there is the mysterious telephone call, which foreshadows several similar phone calls received by Gatsby throughout the narrative. The source of these calls is never explicitly explained, but when Nick accidentally hears what seems to be the other side of Gatsby's

conversations in Chapter 7, there is the sense that all the previous phone calls (including the call here) have involved similar, apparently shady, financial arrangements.

The final segment of this chapter focuses on Nick, on his life away from Gatsby and the parties in New York City. Important elements here include the name of the company for which Nick works and the ironic juxtaposition of that name with Nick's thematically central narrative contemplation of the issue of honesty.

Chapter 4, The Great Gatsby

Chapter 4, The Great Gatsby Summary

The chapter begins with Nick's extensive list of the people who attended Gatsby's parties regularly, or semi-regularly, that summer, and his hints at some of the scandals with which they were involved. Nick then describes how one day, Gatsby picked him up in his flashy, expensive car and drove with him into New York for lunch, passing the ash pit and the Wilson's gas station on the way. During the drive, Gatsby (much to Nick's surprise) reveals some of his background - born to a wealthy family in San Francisco, educated at Oxford, the beneficiary of their money when most of them died, a wealthy traveler (and collector of rubies), and a survivor of World War I (during which, he says, he tried several times to die). Just when Nick is starting to think that some of these stories are lies, Gatsby produces evidence that proves otherwise - pictures from Oxford and medals from the war among them. Gatsby also refers to an experience of sadness in his past, an experience which Nick will learn more about from Jordan Baker that afternoon.

Later, while Gatsby and Nick are at lunch, they encounter a friend of Gatsby's, a Mr. Wolfsheim. As the three men eat, conversation reveals Wolfsheim's assumption is the "connection" referred to by Gatsby in another conversation, but Gatsby tells him he's made a mistake and changes the subject. Nick's impending meeting with Jordan comes up, and while Nick expresses uncertainty about getting whatever news is coming from a third party, Gatsby assures him that Jordan would "never do anything that wasn't all right." With that, he rushes off to take another phone call, and while he's gone, Wolfsheim comments that Gatsby is a good man - he went to Oxford. When Gatsby returns, Wolfsheim quickly goes, Gatsby explaining that Wolfsheim gets too sentimental sometimes and that he is the man responsible for fixing/rigging an important baseball game several years before. The authorities, he says, just haven't been able to catch up with him. As Gatsby and Nick are preparing to leave, they encounter Tom Buchanan; or rather, Nick does. When Gatsby sees Tom, Gatsby quickly disappears.

Here the narrative shifts focus to a first person/past tense point of view as Jordan tells Nick her story. She describes being friends with Daisy when they were girls, and how in the early days of the war Daisy, spent time with someone named Jay Gatsby, who Jordan didn't realize was the man who lived next door to Nick until the day Nick came to the house. Jordan then describes how Daisy's parents kept her from saying goodbye to Gatsby when he shipped out, how Daisy quickly met and became engaged to Tom, and how on the night of the bridal dinner, Daisy got a letter. Its contents, Jordan says, led Daisy to get drunk, at which time the letter was accidentally destroyed. Daisy went ahead with the wedding, Jordan says, and had a wonderful honeymoon, which abruptly ended when Tom was in a car accident while driving with one of the chambermaids from the hotel where he and Daisy were staying. Shortly after that, Jordan says, Daisy had her baby, lived in Europe for a year, and then came back to America where, six weeks after arriving on Long Island, she realized Gatsby was there too. When Nick calls the

situation a coincidence, Jordan tells him that Gatsby bought the house across the water from Tom and Daisy's on purpose. This, Nick comments in narration, explains the strange gesture he saw Gatsby make. Jordan then reveals that Gatsby wants Nick to invite Daisy over for tea, where Gatsby will surprise her. For his part, Nick suddenly comes to realize how attracted he is to Jordan, puts his arms around her, draws her closer, and kisses her.

Chapter 4, The Great Gatsby Analysis

The beginning of this chapter functions in the same way as the beginning of the previous chapter, to reinforce the sense of importance and excitement about Gatsby's parties. It's interesting to note, however, the juxtaposition of the list of party guests with the reference to the ash pit which, as previously discussed, carries with it resonances of destruction and death. The implication here is that the people at the party, not to mention Gatsby himself, are in some ways headed for spiritual and moral destruction - and, for Gatsby himself, physical destruction. This idea is supported by Nick's comments at the end of the narrative, which imply that the circle of people that attends Gatsby's parties are essentially morally dead, or at least dysfunctional.

The stories Gatsby tells Nick during the trip to New York can be seen as Gatsby's efforts to shore up Nick's trust and respect so that he (Nick) will do as Gatsby wants and arrange the meeting with Daisy. In other words, they are part of Gatsby's manipulations, revelations that contain enough truth to support the illusion and trigger enough respect and camaraderie in Nick that he will help Gatsby realize his dream. This is, perhaps, another thematically relevant illustration of how the so-called "American Dream", in all its promise and seductive capacity (as symbolically embodied in Gatsby), also has a capacity for careful manipulation. All that said, Gatsby's comments that he tried several times to die are particularly telling - it may be that they too are part of his manipulations, but it's also possible that his suicidal desires are genuine, a manifestation of his despair over his deteriorating relationship with Daisy.

The encounter with Mr. Wolfsheim is noteworthy for several reasons - as foreshadowing of the unsavory truths about his relationship with Gatsby that eventually emerge, and as a symbolic reiteration of the portrayal of New York City as a place for deceit and manipulation to take place (the conversation takes place in a New York restaurant). While it could be argued there is a faint whiff of anti-Semitism about the way Wolfsheim is portrayed, in the thematic context of the novel as a whole, the negative portrayal seems less a statement about being Jewish and more a statement about financial greed and moral corruption. Meanwhile, a comment made during the Wolfsheim scene is also interesting - specifically, Gatsby's comment about Jordan (i.e., that she would never do anything underhanded). His view of her character is a clear contrast to that of Nick, who has already indicated in narration that Jordan is, in fact, a liar, or at least has the capacity to be profoundly self-serving. This aspect of her character is borne out by the rumor he recalls here (foreshadowed in Chapter 1) about her cheating at golf. While Nick carefully reinforces the idea that this is just a rumor, there is the very clear sense about the character that the rumor is at least very likely to be a reality.

Also in this section, the layers of truth about the past relationship between Daisy and Gatsby begin to be revealed. Additional layers are added in Chapter 8, with Gatsby's narration to Nick (and Nick's subsequent narration to the reader) of what passed between him and Daisy. The most important element to note about the layers here is the fact that the contents of the letter Daisy receives are never revealed and never again referred to. It would be reasonable to suppose, however, that in all likelihood the letter was from Gatsby, written after receiving the letter she wrote him (referred to in Chapter 8) telling him of her engagement to Tom. It seems logical that only a letter from the man she once loved would trigger in her the intense reaction described here. Other important elements include Tom's car accident (another foreshadowing of the accident in Chapter 7 that kills Myrtle Wilson) and the hint of his affair with a chambermaid, reinforcing the impression that he is a serial philanderer and that he is mostly, if not entirely, focused on his own gratification above anything/everything else. The conclusion of this section, meanwhile, sets up the action of the remaining half of the novel, with Nick's embracing of Jordan metaphorically representing his embracing of the lie Gatsby has been telling Jordan, Nick and himself - the lie that the past can, and in Gatsby's opinion will, come back to life in the present.

Chapter 5, The Great Gatsby

Chapter 5, The Great Gatsby Summary

When Nick arrives home, and almost before Nick's taxi has left, Gatsby comes to find out how the conversation with Jordan went. Nick reveals that Jordan told him everything, and that he (Nick) is willing to ask Daisy to tea the day after tomorrow. The suddenly nervous Gatsby offers to have Nick's lawn cut for him, and then suggests the possibility of a job, adding when he sees Nick's suspicion that it wouldn't have anything to do with Wolfsheim. Nick refuses the offer, Gatsby goes home, and Nick calls Daisy, who accepts his invitation.

The day of the meeting is cold and rainy. A very apprehensive Gatsby comes by to wait, but Daisy is late. Just as he is about to leave, however, Daisy's car pulls up. Nick fetches her in, only to find the living room empty, but then Gatsby turns up at the front door as though he's only just arrived. As Gatsby hurries into the living room, Nick waits in the hall, following only when he hears Daisy and Gatsby talking quietly. When he goes in, Nick sees that Gatsby, in his over-emphasized efforts to seem casual, has knocked over a clock. Daisy, meanwhile, seems very nervous and ill at ease. As Nick's housekeeper brings tea, Gatsby quickly whispers to Nick that he thinks he has made a mistake, but Nick tells him to be patient and then goes outside, leaving him and Daisy alone.

After a while, the weather clears, and servants begin to open up Gatsby's house. Nick goes back inside, where he discovers both Gatsby and Daisy have become much more relaxed. Gatsby takes Nick and Daisy on a tour of his house, with Daisy commenting on how large it is and Gatsby saying that he likes filling it with interesting people, people that Nick imagines are present throughout the tour, and one of which actually is - Mr. Klipspringer, jokingly known as "The Boarder". After the tour concludes, Gatsby takes Daisy and Nick into his bedroom, where he shows them his stuffed closets and, in particular, his extensive collection of shirts, which he says are sent to him by a tailor in England. As he flings them out of his closet onto his bed, Daisy starts to cry at how beautiful they are.

Back in the living room, Gatsby points out the dock with the green light on the beach of Daisy's property. He is once again interrupted by a phone call, his conversation referring to a small town and to his being unable to talk for long. When he's done, Gatsby calls to Klipspringer, who he states plays the piano. When he comes in, Klipspringer says he's out of practice, but Gatsby insists. As he plays, Nick hears "a faint roar of thunder", the sound, he says in narration, of change.

As he finally says his goodbyes, Nick wonders whether Daisy had, at least to some degree, fallen short of Gatsby's expectations and hopes. "No amount of fire or freshness," he comments in narration, "can challenge what a man will store up in his

ghostly heart". He then leaves alone together with the "intense life" that seems to be building between them.

Chapter 5, The Great Gatsby Analysis

At this point, the emphasis of the narrative turns more to plot and relationship, as opposed to the emphasis on character, situation, and exposition that has gone before. Events, triggered by the cause-and-effect and/or action-and-reaction principles begin to move forward with increasing speed and emotional intensity, building to the twin shocks of Myrtle Wilson's accidental death and the more deliberate killing of Jay Gatsby.

None of this is not to say that this chapter is devoid of symbolic and/or metaphoric elements. The knocking over of the clock, for example, represents Gatsby's dismissive determination that time, as a potentially disruptive element in his relationship with Daisy, is not to be considered a factor. Then there is Daisy's reaction to Gatsby's shirts, which at first glance seems both unlikely and excessive but becomes less so when one remembers that Daisy is essentially both a sensualist and a gold digger, attracted to and appreciative of manifestations of wealth and success. Her reaction to the shirts, therefore, can be seen as a manifestation of her joy that the impoverished man she once loved is now financially worthy of her attention and affection. Meanwhile, the green light makes a return appearance here, again evoking Gatsby's dreams and the emotional distance he has to cross, not to mention the distance of time, in order to fully reclaim both Daisy and their live together. Then there is the "roar of thunder" commented upon in narration which is, perhaps, one of the most heavy-handed symbols in the novel, in that it clearly foreshadows the forthcoming traumatic change in perspective about to be experienced by Jay Gatsby. It could be argued that it is also something of a red herring, a false foreshadowing directing the reader's attention to a possibility that the coming change has more to do with Daisy and with her actual reuniting with Gatsby.

Finally, there is Nick's comment about Gatsby's "ghostly heart", which can be seen as a vivid metaphoric evocation of the narrative's thematic considerations of the relationships between truth and lies, and between past and present. The image suggests that the present truth (i.e., Daisy's "fire [and] freshness") has no real impact on the "ghostly", past-defined illusions/self-deluding lies inhabiting Gatsby's heart and mind.

Chapter 6, The Great Gatsby

Chapter 6, The Great Gatsby Summary

After brief commentary on the appearance of a reporter at Gatsby's house, ambitious and interested in what was becoming Gatsby's fame, Nick describes Gatsby's origins. Born James Gatz, Nick says, the man became Jay Gatsby as the result of his relationship with wealthy prospector Dan Cody in the last days of the latter's life. Gatz, Nick says, saw and took an opportunity to integrate himself into Cody's life and lifestyle, with the result that he (Gatz) assumed a new personality (Gatsby). This story, Nick says in narration, was told to him by Gatsby much later, but he recounts it at this point as a commentary on the rumors about Gatsby's history that began to circulate at the time Nick is writing about.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with Nick's narrative description of another of Gatsby's parties. Daisy and Tom Buchanan are invited, and over the course of the evening, in spite of dancing with Gatsby and of the presence of a famous, beautiful film star, Daisy has an increasingly evident bad time. As he describes the evening's events, Nick comments that all Gatsby wanted was for her to tell Tom that she doesn't love him and never did. That way, Nick says, Gatsby and Daisy could return to where they left things when they parted. When Nick tells him the past can't be repeated, Gatsby insists that it can and vows to "fix everything just the way it was before." Nick comes to understand that Gatsby wants to reconnect with the part of himself and his past that "had gone into loving Daisy" and, through doing so, bring some order into his life.

The chapter concludes with Nick's description of a memorable nighttime encounter between Gatsby and Daisy during which they kissed and Gatsby's dreams of a future with her became complete.

Chapter 6, The Great Gatsby Analysis

In this brief chapter, the narrative continues to peel away layers of truth about Gatsby, his origins and values and belief systems. Here the work develops its thematic consideration of the relationship between truth and lies, suggesting that while James Gatz adopted the identity of Jay Gatsby as a new truth, that truth is essentially an illusion. There is the sense, in fact, that everything about Jay Gatsby is illusion - his money, his identity, his social prominence and, perhaps most importantly, his dreams of love, life and success with Daisy Buchanan. There is also some question as to whether the story of Gatz and Cody can be seen as evoking, at least to some degree, the relationship between Nick and Gatsby. On some level and to some degree, Nick has done the same thing with Gatsby as Gatz did with Cody, only Nick, to his credit, discovers the emptiness at the core of that particular lifestyle and gets out while he's still morally intact.

Meanwhile, the narrative also peels away layers of the character of Daisy, revealing just how self-absorbed and self-focused she is. The descriptions of the party portray her as being resentful that she is not the centre of attention, the reason for her having an increasingly unhappy time. Ironically, however, this chapter also more clearly defines the depth and breadth of Gatsby's dreams of and about Daisy (i.e., his description of their nighttime encounter), and his determination to bring those dreams to reality, a determination that leads him to dismiss the practical but unwelcome commentary from Nick about the true nature of the relationship between past and present.

Chapter 7, Part 1 The Great Gatsby

Chapter 7, Part 1 The Great Gatsby Summary

Nick describes how, shortly after the party attended by Daisy and Tom, all Gatsby's servants were dismissed and the parties stopped. A week or so later, Gatsby telephones and explains that he needs servants who could be counted on to be discreet - Daisy, he says, often comes by to visit, and the servants (who he says once worked for Wolfsheim) would be exactly that. He also says that Daisy plans to invite Nick for lunch, and shortly afterwards Daisy does just that.

The next day, exceedingly hot, Nick goes to Tom and Daisy's, where he finds that Jordan and Gatsby have already arrived. Narration describes a similar set of circumstances to those of Nick's first visit (Chapter 1), including a shouted conversation between Tom and someone on the other end of the phone. Jordan whispers to Nick that he's talking with his girlfriend, but when Tom argues about the sale price of the car, it becomes clear that the conversation is, in fact, with his girlfriend's husband (i.e., George Wilson). The gathering is briefly interrupted by a visit from Tom and Daisy's daughter (in the company of her nurse), but after effusively expressing her love, Daisy sends the girl and the nurse back out, and the party sits down to lunch. As they eat, and in spite of Jordan's efforts to calm her down, Daisy's conversation makes it clear to the hitherto unsuspecting Tom that she and Gatsby are in love. The astonished Tom agrees to go into town, and he, Daisy, and Jordan go out to make preparations. Alone with Nick, Gatsby reveals his surprise at how much Tom has come to understand. Nick says it's because of Daisy's expressive voice, and Gatsby interrupts, saying it's full of money. When the others return, Daisy decides that she and Gatsby are going to drive in Tom's car, while the others will drive in Gatsby's.

As they drive in, Tom comments that he's done some digging into Gatsby's past, and has discovered he's not what he says he is. Before the conversation can go any further, and as they pass the billboard with the eyes (see Chapter 1), they realize they need gas, and stop at the Wilson's station. There, Tom and Wilson discuss the sale of Tom's car, with Wilson revealing that he is planning to take his wife out west. Meanwhile, Nick becomes aware that Myrtle is watching them from an upstairs window and seems to be paying particular attention to Jordan. Nick realizes that she thinks Jordan is Tom's wife. As they leave, Nick also realizes that Tom has become even more upset after hearing Wilson's news, and the rest of the drive is tense.

Chapter 7, Part 1 The Great Gatsby Analysis

There are several noteworthy elements to this section. The first is the vague hint of shadiness associated with Wolfsheim and his business activities (i.e., Gatsby's comment that his new servants once worked for Wolfsheim and can be counted upon to be discreet). The implication of this comment is that Wolfsheim had things going on in

his life that he needed to be discreet about. Taking into account earlier narrative comments about the reluctance of both Wolfsheim and Gatsby to discuss just what Wolfsheim does, as well as later narrative comments about the intense privacy practiced by Wolfsheim and encounters Nick has with people who seem to be Gatsby's "business" colleagues, there is the clear sense that the rumors are true. Gatsby did indeed make his money in unsavory ways.

The second point to note here is the repetition of several elements that first appeared in the narration of Nick's first lunch at Tom and Daisy's (Chapter 1) - the presence of Jordan, the telephone call, Daisy's nervousness. Elements added to this "version" of the scene include Gatsby's presence (adding an extra layer of emotional tension), the heat (a symbolic representation of the high level of emotional tension in the room), and the perhaps surprising but very telling cameo appearance of Tom and Daisy's daughter. The most important point to note about that appearance is what it reveals about Daisy, portraying her as excitedly loving, but only for a moment, and not really deeply loving at that. Her daughter, apparently quite desperate for genuine affection from her mother, is almost completely dismissed, her attempts to please basically glanced at and then forgotten. In short, the scene reinforces previous impressions that Daisy is profoundly and primarily self-interested and self-gratifying.

Other important elements include Daisy's brazenness about her feelings for Gatsby, which at first glance may seem somewhat unmotivated and unclear in intent. Upon further consideration, however, it's possible to see that her hints, combined with her insistence that she drive with Gatsby into New York, are intended to humiliate Tom by rubbing his nose in her affair like he rubbed her nose in his, albeit unintentionally (i.e., the car accident with the chambermaid, referred to in passing in Chapter 1). This, in turn, can be seen as another way in which this scene echoes and repeats a moment in the first scene, in that references are made in both sections to extra-marital affairs. One other point to note about this section's portrayal of Daisy is the reference to her voice being full of money, something else that agrees with what has been revealed about her before - specifically, that she is sensitive and attracted to money which, in turn, can be lavished on her. Money is one of the reasons she's married to Tom, money is one of the reasons she was uneasy about Gatsby in the beginnings of their relationship, money is one of the reasons she becomes re-connected with him - or, more specifically, one of the things he uses to successfully attract her.

Finally, the sense that the emotional temperature of the novel is increasing goes even further with the narrative comment about the eyes, which gives the metaphorical impression that the three sides in the romantic triangle (Tom, Daisy, Gatsby) are all watching each other very carefully, and are being watched (and evaluated) by Nick. There is also Nick's comment that Myrtle Wilson was watching them from her bedroom. The temperature goes even higher with the news that the Wilsons will be leaving soon, which sends Tom into an even greater emotional tailspin and provides yet another trigger for the emotional explosion that occurs in the following section.

Chapter 7, Part 2 The Great Gatsby

Chapter 7, Part 2 The Great Gatsby Summary

When the group arrives in New York, an argument about what to do next results in the rental of a hotel room, a place where they can drink in the cool. As the sounds of a wedding filter up from a room below and as the heat becomes more oppressive, Tom confronts Gatsby about his feelings for Daisy, and the two men quickly get into an argument. Daisy tries to mediate, eventually confessing that while Gatsby insists she never loved Tom, she actually did. Meanwhile, Tom accuses Gatsby of involvement in Wolfsheim's bootlegging business and hints that he is also involved in even shadier activities. Gatsby attempts to defend himself to Daisy, but Nick comments that Daisy pleaded with both Gatsby and Tom to stop. Tom sends her home with Gatsby in Gatsby's car. Nick writes that after they left, he suddenly remembered he was thirty, and felt a wave of despair.

Narration shifts focus at this point, interjecting commentary on the point of view of Michaelis, "the principal witness at the inquest". Nick's narration comments that Michaelis became perturbed when he went to the Wilson's garage and learned, from Mr. Wilson, that he had locked his wife in her room and was planning to leave with her in a couple of days. He later, according to narration, heard an argument between the two, after which Mrs. Wilson rushed out into the night, was hit and killed by a speeding car that fled the scene. A few moments later, the car driven by Tom and carrying Nick and Jordan arrives at the scene. After they glimpse Mrs. Wilson's body and learn what happened, Tom confronts Wilson, insisting that although the car that hit Mrs. Wilson was the same car he had been driving that afternoon (i.e., Gatsby's car), it was not his car and that Tom was now driving his own car. As the police continue the investigation, Tom, Nick and Jordan slip away to continue the journey home, the weeping Tom muttering to himself angrily about how Gatsby "didn't even stop his car".

When Tom, Nick and Jordan arrive at the Buchanans, Jordan goes immediately to bed and Tom goes in to Daisy. As Nick waits outside for a taxi, he is visited by Gatsby, who asks about Mrs. Wilson and, when he hears that she's dead, confesses that it was Daisy driving (she thought, Gatsby says, that driving would help her calm down) and that he Gatsby has every intention of saying it was him. He says he's waiting to make sure Tom doesn't harm her, leading Nick to go inside and find out what's happening. He discovers Tom and Daisy talking together calmly in the kitchen, and reports back to Gatsby, who repeats his intention to stay. Nick's taxi arrives and he goes, leaving Gatsby still staring at the house, "watching over nothing".

Chapter 7, Part 2 The Great Gatsby Analysis

The first point to note about this section is that the emotional and narrative momentum of the first section of the chapter continues in this section, with the escalating heat and

the presence of the wedding (an ironic commentary on the relationships being both constructed and de-constructed in the room above) increasing the sense of tension even further. The second point to note is that in the same way as the lunch at Tom and Daisy's echoed a similar scene in an earlier chapter (lunch at Tom and Daisy's in Chapter 1), the argument in this section echoes a similar scene in Chapter 2 (both arguments, incidentally, taking place in apartments in New York City). As previously discussed, the party and violence in that scene foreshadows the party and emotional violence of this scene, with the latter having more narrative weight. It's interesting to note, however, how the emotional violence at both parties results in physical violence done to Myrtle Wilson.

Other important points to note about this section include Tom's seemingly strange decision to allow Daisy to drive back to Long Island with Gatsby rather than with him. On one level, this may seem to be an authorial contrivance engineered to place Daisy at the wheel of the car when Myrtle Wilson is killed. Upon deeper consideration, however, there is another possibility—since Daisy has just admitted she loved Tom, he may be trying to humiliate Gatsby in the same way as Daisy has just humiliated him - that is, by forcing Gatsby to encounter a truth he seemed determined to deny, which is Daisy's love for Tom.

Another seemingly strange comment is Nick's reference in narration to that day being his thirtieth birthday, again seeming like something of an authorial contrivance - how easy is it, after all, for someone to forget his own birthday? There is the possibility that Nick is so preoccupied with the events going on around him that he forgets all about himself, and if this is in fact the case, there may be a comment here on the intensity of the drama being constructed by Daisy and Gatsby and Tom. Their self-involvement, their self-dramatization is so intense that they draw people around them into it, perhaps another reason why Nick, as the narrative concludes, rejects the self-involvement of the people who have essentially taken over his life.

The reasons for Nick's forgetting aside, it's important to note the reference to age. The self-indulgence of the Jazz Age in general, and of the characters in "Gatsby" in particular, is tied to their relative youth - specifically, their determination that while they're young, they're going to enjoy themselves as much as possible, especially since so many young men, recently killed in the war, never got the chance to do so. Then there is the shift in narrative focus as Nick describes the circumstances of Myrtle Wilson's death. On one level, this stylistic choice simply intrigues the reader and gives Nick the opportunity to provide information that he (and the reader) otherwise would not have had. On another level, there is the implication that Nick and the self-interested others don't seem interested enough on their own to find out what happened that day, but have to rely on the words and reportings of other people.

Finally, there are the events at the Buchanan house in the aftermath of the accident. First, there is the apparent conspiracy of denial being built up between Daisy and Tom in which, it must be noted, Daisy does not confess the truth that she was driving. Tom's comment about Gatsby's guilt in Chapter 9 makes this clear, and also makes it vividly plain, if it weren't already plain enough, that Daisy is profoundly, frighteningly self

interested. Then there is Gatsby's stated intention to sacrifice himself for Daisy's freedom and well being.

It could be argued that this intention is a manifestation of genuine love, and if the reader is inclined to give Gatsby the benefit of the doubt, it would be a reasonable argument. It could also be argued, however, that Gatsby's intention is, perhaps subconsciously, a last-ditch effort to win Daisy's absolute love. While it's never revealed what she said to him in the car, the argument in the city makes it plain that she doesn't love him, or value their relationship, in the way he loves her and/or values the relationship. In other words, Gatsby's choice may, in this moment, be another tactic in his attempt to win Daisy back - even if it means going to jail, she'll love him for giving her her freedom.

Chapter 8, The Great Gatsby

Chapter 8, The Great Gatsby Summary

When he gets home and is unable to sleep, Nick goes to Gatsby's, where he finds the latter also still awake. They settle down and talk, "because 'Jay Gatsby' had broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice". It's at this point, Nick comments, that Gatsby told the story of his involvement with Dan Cody (see Chapter 6), and then went on to talk about how Gatsby had been drawn to first Daisy's beauty (just like so many other soldiers of the time) and then to her way of living. Gatsby also describes how he "took her", how afterwards they became even closer and more intimate, how they continued their relationship while Gatsby was at war, how Daisy became increasingly desperate to make a decision about her life, and how the appearance of Tom Buchanan eased that decision. Gatsby concludes his story by saying that as far as he was concerned, "it was just personal".

At this point, day is breaking. After having breakfast, the poolman appears and suggests that because fall is coming, it's time to drain the pool, Gatsby says he wants it left, that he'll take one more swim. Meanwhile, Nick prepares to go to the city for work, but lingers for a couple of hours out of concern for Gatsby. Eventually he does leave, crying out as he goes that Gatsby is worth more than anyone who ever attended his parties put together. "It was the only compliment I ever gave him," he comments in narration, "because I disapproved of him from beginning to end." As he drives off, he remembers seeing Gatsby at his parties, and thanks him for his hospitality, as he and the others had always done.

An unproductive day at work is interrupted by Jordan, whose self-centered conversation results in an argument, and in Nick realizing he no longer cares for her. He then shifts the narration to events at Wilson's garage following the accident. While spending the night being comforted by Michaelis, Wilson reveals that a while ago his wife came back from the city with her face battered, that he found a dog's leash in her drawer, that he realized she was having an affair, and that he told her God would punish her. As he's telling the story, he comes to the conclusion that the affair was with the driver of the car that hit her and deliberately killed her. The whole while, Nick comments, Wilson was looking out at the oculist's billboard. Narration them sums up Wilson's search, through the night, for the owner of the yellow car and how the search led him to Gatsby who, after ordering that his car not be disturbed and asking that he be called if a particular phone call came, went to the pool. Nick wonders in narration whether he actually believed the phone call would come and then describes how, just as he was arriving, he and the servants heard shots coming from the pool. The chapter concludes with Nick's description of carrying Gatsby's body to the house, and of, while doing so, spotting Wilson's body nearby.

Chapter 8, The Great Gatsby Analysis

Nick's comment in narration about Jay Gatsby breaking "like glass against Tom's hard malice" suggests that at this point, all Gatsby's dreams not only about Daisy but about himself are in the process of falling apart, shattered by Tom's hatred, if they have not already been entirely destroyed. There is the sense that on some level Gatsby senses this - otherwise, one wonders, why would he open up so much to Nick, if not because he's got nothing left to either gain or lose? That said, there isn't a great deal that's too surprising about Gatsby's story, the majority of it having been implied throughout the narrative. The one detail that does surprise, however, is Gatsby's comment that he "took" Daisy, "took" in this case being a euphemism for having sex. In other words, before he left for war, they had a sexual relationship - or at least Gatsby says they did. Whether anything actually happened is a point of reasonable conjecture, since throughout the narrative, Gatsby has revealed himself to be at worst a liar, at best a stretcher of the truth.

Another of Nick's narrative comments is also interesting; his reference to thinking badly of Gatsby from beginning to end. This doesn't quite have the ring of truth, partly because at the beginning of the novel Nick seems to have at least some degree of empathy with Gatsby. Also, and as Nick himself suggests in his very earliest narration, he tries to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, time to prove themselves to him. His statement here seems to belie that initial statement, implying that he formed a negative opinion of Gatsby right with his first impression. This, combined with Nick's actions in the following chapter (concealing the truth about Daisy's role in the accident from Tom), suggests that he (Nick) isn't quite the paragon of honesty he thinks himself to be and seems to want the reader to think he is. In other words, it's starting to look as though he may be as much of a self-fabricator as Gatsby, and therefore, an unreliable narrator.

Other important elements here include a repetition of the stylistic choice to reveal circumstances and events through the experience of Michaelis (again placing Nick at a less-involved distance form what he's describing), and the reference to the watchful billboard (again a metaphoric representation of people's actions being watched and recorded, in this case by Michaelis). Then there is Gatsby's reference to the expected telephone call, hearkening back to the other mysterious telephone calls he received and foreshadowing the call Nick takes in the following chapter that seems to confirm the almost universal suspicion that Gatsby is a crook.

Finally, there is the murder of Gatsby and the suicide of Wilson, which can both be seen as consequences, albeit indirect ones, of the self-interest of the Buchanans - and, by symbolic extension, the entire sub-class of self-absorbed wealthy, those who live the American Dream that they themselves perverted (see "Themes"). In other words, lower class striver Wilson, like his more desperately striving wife, and deluded Gatsby are all determined to establish some self-fulfillment through connection with, and absorption of, that dream, and all wind up destroyed. This, the novel thematically contends, is because the self-serving, self-absorbed, success oriented American Dream lived by the

Buchanans, as opposed to the dignity and integrity-oriented version of the Dream arguably envisioned by the founders of America, simply has no time or space for them.

Chapter 9, The Great Gatsby

Chapter 9, The Great Gatsby Summary

Writing from a perspective that narration indicates is two months after the event, Nick says the newspapers covered Gatsby's death with a tendency towards sensationalism, that Mrs. Wilson's sister Catherine testified at the inquest that her sister had never been unfaithful, and that Tom and Daisy disappeared. Also, while at Gatsby's house, Nick takes a phone call in which the caller speaks about some kind of bond scheme set up in a small town that seems to be in trouble, but hangs up when Nick reveals that he isn't Gatsby. Meanwhile, Gatsby's father (Mr. Henry Gatz) arrives, having read of his son's death in the paper and immediately traveling out. Over the next few days, it seems to Nick that Mr. Gatz's pride in his son's success and achievements is greater than his grief.

As Mr. Gatz and Nick are making funeral arrangements, Nick makes a few selective phone calls to people who he thinks might attend the funeral. Very few respond, with one of them (Mr. Klipspringer, the piano player) proving to be more interested in the return of his missing tennis shoes. Nick hangs up on him. Nick also meets with Mr. Wolfsheim, who expresses his regret that he is unable to attend the funeral but insists that that's his way. "Let us learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive..." he suggests. "After that, my own rule is to let everything else alone". It rains on the day of the funeral, which is attended only by Nick, Gatz, the funeral director, some of Gatsby's servants, and the drunken man from the library (see Chapter 3), who marvels at how few people are there when there used to be hundreds at the house.

Nick's narration then shifts focus once again as he recalls the pleasures of returning home to the Midwest on his Christmas breaks from school, suggesting that even while he knew the East was superior in so many ways, he felt its truths were distorted. Ultimately, he says, he decided to go home. As he's tying up loose ends, he has a conversation with Jordan, who listens to his explanations of why he doesn't want to see her with no reaction, except for saying she's engaged. She also recalls an earlier conversation (Chapter 3), in which she said she liked him for being honest, and accuses him of actually not being honest and of letting her down. "I'm thirty," he says. "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor."

Finally, he also has an encounter with Tom Buchanan, demanding to know what happened in the hours after Gatsby's death - specifically, when Wilson came to the house looking for the yellow car. Tom insists that Wilson was crazy with grief and that he had his revolver in his hand, and that even if Tom did say who owned the yellow car, Gatsby got what he deserved. "He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's, but ... he ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car." Nick comments that there's nothing he could say, "except the one unutterable fact that it wasn't true." He then writes in narration of seeing clearly that Tom believed everything he did was justified, but also the truth of who he and Daisy really were.

On his final night on Long Island, Nick visits Gatsby's house one last time, then goes out to the beach, where he looks at the same view Gatsby must have had (see the end of Chapter 1) and contemplates the journey, emotional and physical, that Gatsby made in pursuit of his dream. "He did not know," Nick comments in narration, "that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night." Nick stares at the green light on what used to be Tom and Daisy's dock, remembering.

Chapter 9, The Great Gatsby Analysis

Important elements in the very early moments of this chapter include the reference to media sensationalism (familiar to any media watcher in contemporary culture), and the lies told by Catherine. These are another manifestation of the narrative's thematic interest in the tension between truth and honesty and also another nail in the coffin, as it were, of Nick's perhaps naïve belief in honesty and integrity as general human values. Yet another nail is driven in by the disappearance of Tom and Daisy, who were clearly planning their disappearance in their kitchen table meeting at the end of Chapter 7, and who demonstrate their complete self-absorption and lack of integrity by taking off.

Other important elements include the appearance of Mr. Gatz and his subsequent, apparent focus on Gatsby's success as opposed to his death, making him, unfortunately, just as vulnerable as his son to the allure of that fateful, fatal "American Dream". Then there are the appearances of the two party guests. Klipspringer's attitude, it seems, represents the self-serving attitudes of just about everyone who attended one of Gatsby's parties, while the appearance of the guest from the library, as previously discussed, links Gatsby's death to reality. This is in contrast to the perspective offered by Klipspringer, who links Gatsby's life with shallowness and the fantasy that his money made him worthwhile (particularly to Daisy). This same link (life/fantasy, death/reality), manifests in Nick's conversation with Jordan, who is portrayed here as being even more self-deluded than she was originally depicted. Finally, there is the narration of Nick's conversation with Tom, which contains the revelation that Tom told Wilson where to find Gatsby, a representation of the self-justification and self-interested self-preservation at work in the lives and attitudes of those "American Dreamers" that Tom represents and embodies. On the other hand, the narration of this sequence also contains the revelation that Nick didn't tell Tom what Gatsby told him about who was driving when Myrtle was killed. In other words, Nick tells a lie by concealing the truth, thereby making himself less honest than he seems to want the reader to be. The question, though, is why Nick doesn't tell Tom.

The last important elements in this section all relate to Nick's commentary on East and West, specifically his suggestion that the alluring economic and social prosperity promised by life in the East is as much of an illusion as Gatsby's belief in Daisy's love. The idea that the two journeys are parallel, that Nick's attempt to enter that eastern prosperity is as deluded and empty as Gatsby's attempt to re-enter his past with Daisy, is reinforced by the work's final image, Nick standing in the same place that Gatsby stood where Nick first saw him, face to face with his dream across the bay. The

difference between the two men, Nick and Gatsby, is that Nick is still alive, physically and emotionally, and can return to the truth that he left behind, a life of integrity which, his physical journey back home suggests, still exists. Gatsby, on the other hand, is dead, his attempt to return to his past ending in failure because his past (i.e., his relationship with Daisy) doesn't any longer exist.

Finally, it's important to note a particular word choice here - Nick's use of the word "republic" to define the world to which he is returning. In the context of the work's thematic exploration of the dark side of the American Dream, the word is particularly apropos, and can, in fact, be seen as the key component of this particular thematic premise. "Republic" is a term used in the founding documents of America, meaning that the word carries with it resonances of integrity and true freedom and also, therefore, meaning, that Nick is, consciously or not, returning to the land of the true, original, American Dream and the "republic for which it stands".

Characters

Nick Carraway

Nick Carraway is the novel's central character and narrator, an observer of and commentator on events rather than an active participant. It could be argued that his essentially reactive nature makes him something other than a protagonist, a valid point if the term "protagonist" is taken to suggest a character who drives the action, who makes things happen, who defines the story and themes through choices and intention. If, on the other hand, the term "protagonist" is taken to mean a character who undergoes the most significant journey of transformation over the course of a narrative, Nick definitely qualifies.

The series of discoveries that Nick makes about the economic and social world that he has dreamed of inhabiting and that he has moved across the country to delve into, clearly move him from a place of innocence and hopefulness to a place of cynicism and despair. The point is not made to suggest that he is destroyed by his experiences, but he is transformed, awakened from his dreams to an awareness of some fundamental human realities, essential human truths that define, and are defined by, the work's central thematic considerations. In short, as the result of the chain of events he experiences and contemplates in his narration, Nick discovers that the past is an illusion, that trying to recapture the past results in suffering, and that an over-emphasis on pleasure leads to a hollow, empty, self-corrupting life. In making these discoveries, and by being so changed by them that he reverses his choices, returning from what he had viewed as the land of hope to what he has come to regard as the land of true identity, he of all the central characters is the one most consciously engaged in, and by, the meaning of the narrative.

Jay Gatsby

It could be easily and fairly argued that Gatsby is the novel's protagonist - he is, after all, the character driving the action and defining the narrative. Everyone talks about him, everyone reacts to him, everyone places him in the forefront of their consciousness and activities. For himself, he is driven and defined by a single objective (i.e., to claim Daisy Buchanan for himself), again as many traditionally viewed protagonists would be. It could also be argued, however, that he is more of a powerfully effective antagonist than a protagonist, if the term "antagonist" is taken as referring to a character who, by action and/or by attitude, triggers transformation in a protagonist. In Gatsby's case, both his actions and his attitude cause clear, and profound, transformation in the life and perspectives of Nick Carraway. In other words, although he is simultaneously, and perhaps paradoxically, both a vividly portrayed character and an enigma (truths about how he made his money, for example, are never fully revealed), and although his is undeniably the dominant presence in the narrative, he is still the measuring stick by

which the transformation in the central character is measured. He is, in short, a catalytic antagonist.

Daisy Buchanan

Daisy is Nick's second cousin and the beloved of Jay Gatsby, a beautiful woman with an enchanting voice, a self-indulgent and irresponsible attitude to life and relationships, and an almost arrogant sense of self-entitlement. For Daisy, the world revolves around her - her wants, her feelings, her needs, and her resentments - and has, the narrative clearly suggests, ever since she was a girl. Nick's narrative comment about how she speaks seems to reinforce this idea, in that she seems to be deliberately pitching her voice at a place where people need to pay even closer attention to her. She is frustrated when her husband Tom seems to be moving out of what she clearly thinks should be his perpetual orbit around her, she barely mothers her daughter, and after some initial surprise, she clearly revels in being the center of Gatsby's renewed attention. Her response to the one party of his that he attends is very telling - she is not the center of attention and therefore does not have a good time. She, like Gatsby, is selfish in her love of others and in her self-love. Therefore, and also like Gatsby, she and her attitudes are important triggers for Nick's transformation, vivid jolts of the self-indulgent truths at work in the society to which he wants to belong and which, as the result of experiencing those truths, he eventually turns from.

Tom Buchanan

Tom is Daisy's husband, in his own way as self-indulgent and self-righteous as Daisy. He is physically and emotionally violent, unable and/or unwilling to see how his actions and attitudes are harmful to himself and to those around him. Several times, particularly at the novel's conclusion, Nick refers to Tom's attitude of both entitlement and almost delusional self-justification. He is controlling and destructive and as such, he is, like the other main antagonists (Gatsby, Daisy, Jordan) embodiments of a dominant societal attitude in the upper classes of the time in which the novel is set, attitudes which the author seems thematically intent upon condemning. Indeed, the self-serving attitudes of all these characters can ultimately be seen as the core of his (the author's) contemplation on the perversion of the so-called American Dream.

Jordan Baker

Jordan, a renowned athlete and childhood friend of Daisy's, is another of the work's four principal antagonists, triggering transformation in protagonist Nick. Where Daisy's self-indulgence is emotionally volatile, where Gatsby's is obsessive and where Tom's is violent, Jordan's is judgmental and cutting. She views and measures everyone around her according to standards of "honest" behavior that have very little to do with objective honesty and more to do with how people react to her views of honesty. In other words, if people believe and act the way she believes and acts, she holds them to be honest. If

they believe and act differently from how Jordan acts, or would act, but from a place of their interpretation of honesty, to Jordan they are liars, careless and not worth her time. She can be charming and charismatic, and exercises a sensual charm over the eager-to-be-accepted Nick. But once he becomes aware of her self-absorption, he begins to distance himself from her, thereby triggering both her resentment and her anger.

Myrtle and George Wilson

George is a used car dealer, lacking in drive, personality and charisma. Myrtle is his wife, sensual and ambitious. Myrtle is the mistress of Tom Buchanan, indulged by him and allowed to live the life she believes she deserves. She is still, however, loved by her husband - or, at least, viewed as his wife. His efforts to resume control over her result in her death which, in turn, triggers in him an obsession with her killer that leads to Gatsby's death. In the portrayals of the Wilsons, as in the portrayals of so many of the other secondary characters, self-indulgence in feeling and desire is the dominant, and ultimately destructive, trait.

Mr. Wolfsheim

This enigmatic Jewish businessman is a colleague of Gatsby's in New York. While the narrative never makes it explicitly what enterprises Wolfsheim, and through him Gatsby, are involved in, there are strong hints that they are illegal - the illicit trade in alcohol, shady stock dealings, etc. Wolfsheim's reluctance to attend Gatsby's funeral in the book's final chapter, and even his reluctance to meet with Nick, suggest a strong instinct for self-preservation combined with an edgy pragmatism. His comment that, after death, friendship with a man should essentially be abandoned, suggests that for him, loyalty is a fleeting concept, as transitory and as temporary and as exploitative as the friendships of the hundreds of partiers at Gatsby's house.

Mr. Klipspringer, the Man in the Library

Klipspringer and the Man in the Library are two of the hundreds of guests at Gatsby's many parties. Klipspringer becomes known as "the boarder" as the result of his habit of simply staying with Gatsby during the week between parties. The Man in the Library, who comments on his amazement that all Gatsby's books are real, is initially encountered by Nick and Jordan as they search, during one of the parties, for their host (see Chapter 2). The relative importance of these two characters becomes apparent in the final chapter, as Nick plans Gatsby's funeral. Klipspringer reveals himself to be as superficial in his friendship as so many of Gatsby's other party guests - in spite of everything Gatsby did for him, he is not interested in his death, only in a missing pair of shoes. In terms of the Man in the Library, however, it's interesting to note that of all those party guests, he is the only one to show up at Gatsby's funeral. There is a suggestion here of a link between his perception of and his comment on at least an

element of "reality" in Gatsby's life and his acknowledgement of the "reality" associated with his death - that his life was, in fact, less real than his books.

Dan Cody

Cody was the industrialist who James Gatz took as his role model for transforming himself into Jay Gatsby, wealthy, powerful, and indulgent. A physical and moral apprentice to Cody, Gatsby was excluded from Cody's will by the actions of the industrialist's sister, leaving Gatsby on his own, searching for the economic means to have the lifestyle he came to believe he deserved.

Michaelis

Greek immigrant Michaelis operates a coffee shop near the garage/car dealership run by the Wilsons. He provides most of the details of what happened the night Myrtle Wilson was run over and killed, most importantly information about the car involved. His information leads George Wilson eventually to Gatsby, and both men end up dead.

Henry Gatz

Gatz is Gatsby's well-meaning father, who arrives at Gatsby's home just in time for his son's funeral. Bewildered of his son's life but loving, supportive, and proud, he seems more emotional about Gatsby's success than he does about his son's death. Again in this character, the author seems to be commenting on how the perversion of the American Dream into worship of evident material success overwhelms other, arguably less superficial and more meaningful, aspects of existence.

Objects/Places

New York City

New York City is the center of financial activity in the United States, and for decades was also viewed as the center of social activity (in the view of many, it still is). Narrator Nick Carraway works in New York and several of his important encounters with the dissolute, self-indulgent social world of his friends and acquaintances take place there.

Long Island

Long Island is on the Atlantic Ocean coast of New York State and is connected to the island of Manhattan by the Brooklyn Bridge. The eastern end of the island evolved into a vacation/party community for the city's well-to-do and socially ambitious.

West Egg, East Egg

These two communities on the east side of Long Island are marked by a pair of egg-shaped land formations and separated by a bay of water. Gatsby and Nick live in adjoining houses in West Egg, while Daisy and Tom have a house in the more socially up-market East Egg. The distinctions between the two communities reflect the distinctions made in Nick's mind between the high-society, financially successful Eastern part of the country and the lower-society, economically disadvantaged west.

Gatsby's House

Gatsby's large, ornately decorated house in West Egg is the setting for several of the novel's key scenes, including its many parties, important meetings between characters (particularly between Gatsby and Daisy) and, ultimately, of Gatsby's death. As the narrative reveals, he rented the house (in spite of its unfashionable location) in order to be near to Daisy.

The Buchanans' House

Tom and Daisy Buchanan live in a house across the bay from Gatsby in the more fashionable East Egg. Like Gatsby's house, the Buchanans' house is the setting for several important scenes, including Nick's meeting with Tom and Daisy and the dinner party at which Tom realizes Gatsby and Daisy are in love.

The Green Light on the Dock

At the end of the dock connecting the Buchanans' house with the bay, there is a green light, referred to several times in Nick's narration as a focus of Gatsby's attention to Daisy's presence. There is the sense that it symbolically represents the hope she offers him, a "green light", as it were, for him to act on his dreams a life with her.

The

Beside the highway leading to the Brooklyn Bridge that connects Long Island with Manhattan, there is a "valley of ashes", the source of which is never clear but which symbolically evoke a sense of decay, destruction, and death.

The Oculist's Billboard

Above the valley of ashes is a billboard, constructed and set up to advertize the work and services of an oculist, Dr. T. J. Eckleburg. The billboard is dominated by a representation of giant blue eyes, evoking a sense that the actions and attitudes of the characters are being watched and judged. It could be argued that the eyes of the billboard are, in some ways, suggestive of the eyes of Nick, who himself is watching and evaluating the attitudes and actions of those around him.

Gatsby's Car

The gold-colored expensive roadster is, like Gatsby's parties, a somewhat ostentatious manifestation of his wealth. The fact that the car is the means by which the poor but ambitious Myrtle Wilson dies seems to make the metaphoric suggestion that wealth, and the pursuit of it, is as physically destructive as it is morally corruptive, one of the narrative's central thematic contentions.

The Apartment in New York

Tom Buchanan has an apartment in New York which he sets up for his mistress, Myrtle Wilson, a place where they can have a kind of home life and relationship together. It is the setting for a small party at which Nick witnesses the self-indulgent, debauched, and ultimately violent behavior of the social set (as embodied by the wealthy Tom) with which he is becoming involved.

The Hotel Room in New York

Later in the novel, Nick attends another party in the city, this one again hosted by Tom Buchanan but at which Daisy and Gatsby are present. Again, the behavior Nick witnesses is self-indulgent and violent, although the violence here is more emotional

than physical. The fact that both these parties, with their associated violence, take place in New York suggests that the financial and social priorities associated with the city and the people who make their lives there are corrupt and ultimately destructive.

The Probity Trust

This is the company for which Nick works as a broker, its name an ironic evocation of one of Nick's personality traits and one of the narrative's key thematic issues. "Probity" is another word for honesty, or integrity, an aspect of his identity that Nick seems to pride himself on and a virtue that few, if any, of the other characters seem to relate to and/or experience.

Gatsby's Shirts

During her visit to Gatsby's home, Daisy becomes strangely overwhelmed and emotionally stimulated when she sees the high quality of Gatsby's shirts. There is the sense that the richness and variety of the shirts is an indication to her that the man she loves has finally become a man she can, and wants to, consider her social equal. In other words, the shirts seem to represent, for her, how her dreams of love, wealth, and social prominence have finally come together.

Themes

Coming of Age

The term "coming of age" is analytical shorthand for a story (fiction, non-fiction, drama) in which a young character, innocent (at least to some degree) about the ways of the world comes to a more mature understanding of life, relationships and himself. A character in such a story emerges into a new wisdom, a new sensibility, and/or a new maturity. This is what happens to Nick Carraway, the narrator and protagonist of The Great Gatsby. As he himself says in his narration, he came out East (where the novel takes place) with ideas about who he wants to be and wants to relate to the world, particularly the world of finance and fashionable society. As the result of the people, relationships, and situations he encounters, however, he "comes of age", learning that his ideas, in effect his dreams, are in fact illusions and essentially wishful thinking, that the happiness he believed not only possible but inevitable is, in fact, empty and soul destroying. It's important to note that the same sort of realization, the same sort of "coming of age", also happens to antagonist Jay Gatsby, whose dreams of renewing his idealized relationship with one-time beloved Daisy Buchanan are themselves revealed to be empty. It's interesting, however, that while Nick moves on with his life, taking it in a different direction as a result of his realizations (i.e., his "coming of age"), Gatsby never does - he is shot dead by the vengeful George Wilson before he has the chance. His coming of age is, therefore, in a sense, aborted.

Truth versus Lies

Several times throughout the narrative, particularly when it comes to the relationship between Nick and Jordan Baker, the question of honesty comes up. Nick, for example, comments that he is one of the most truly honest people he knows, and seems genuinely uncomfortable when he encounters and/or is forced to confront the falsehoods and misrepresentations of the other characters. On the other side of the coin, Jordan says she's honest, but is ultimately too self-interested to be entirely truthful. Her rumored cheating in sports feels as though it's a true and accurate expression of her character and of how she sees her relationship with the world (i.e., that no matter what it takes, her interests come first). Daisy is, interestingly enough, more truthful (particularly when it comes to her feelings about Gatsby) than is probably good for her, while the self-interested, self-righteous Tom is essentially living a life composed of a tissue of lies, all of which are sustained by money. This leaves Gatsby, whose entire identity is built on at worst a series of lies and manipulations, at best a series of secrets about his personal origins and the origins of his money. But perhaps the most significant component of the package of lies that define Gatsby's identity is the one that he is least consciously aware of - the lie he tells himself that the past (i.e., his past intimacy with Daisy) can be recaptured and reborn. This particular aspect of his character, and indeed of the narrative, is at the core of the third of the work's primary themes.

The Past as Illusion

Nick clearly indicates it, in narration, in the work's final chapter. The most important thing he learned as the result of his experiences, what the reader can see as the key trigger and/or component of his coming of age, and the reason for his return to what he has admitted is the lesser life of the west, is his discovery that the past is an illusion. He further discovers that any attempt to recapture and/or recreate the past in the present, or to define the future in terms of the past, is essentially futile. He learns this through the attitudes and actions of antagonist Jay Gatsby - more accurately, as the result of what happens when Gatsby acts on those attitudes and takes those actions. Gatsby's attempts to bring his cherished, idealized past into the present end ultimately in failure, perhaps even in what might be described as tragedy, in the classic sense of the word, and indicate to Nick that a life lived and defined by the present is a life lived more truly, and more effectively.

In this context, it's interesting to consider the attitudes and actions of Daisy, drawn for a while into the passion and power of Gatsby's illusions, not to mention his lingering love for her. Why does she allow this to happen? Because she has such high regard for herself that any attention that comes her way, particularly of the intensely adoring, or adoringly intense, sort proffered by Gatsby, is not only welcome, but perceived as being essentially right, or just. In other words, while she at first appears to be as drawn to a recreation of the past as Gatsby, thus fueling his dreams and illusions and intentions, she in fact has no interest whatsoever in the past except in terms of how it can enliven her present. She, unlike Gatsby, has the past in perspective - a perspective that, as he returns home, Nick probably shares.

The Perversion of

Over the years, and particularly in the twentieth century, the so-called American Dream", as a concept, has undergone considerable revision and reexamination. Originally, both phrase and concept originated from, and were defined by, the founding principles of the United States of America - the right to life, liberty and justice. Over the years, however, the phrase has come, in the minds of both Americans and non-Americans alike, to mean the entitlement to success, happiness, and independence, primarily financial but also social and emotional. The narrative and themes of The Great Gatsby have, in the years since its publication, been generally perceived by critics and commentators not only as manifestations of this evolution but as a condemnation of this apparent "perversion" of the ideals upon which America was founded. In other words, the self-indulgence, self-righteousness, insensitivity, and self-delusion of the main characters (Nick Carraway excepted) have been perceived and regarded as the dark side of that dream, manifestations of which have, it could be and often is argued, become increasingly common in American culture in the near-century since the novel was written and first published. It could be argued, in fact, that another of the work's primary themes, the idea of the past as illusion, is also a manifestation of this theme, Gatsby's

loss of Daisy and their original intimacy and love reflecting America's loss of its original values.

Style

Point of View

The narrative unfolds from the first person, past tense point of view - specifically, from the perspective of narrator Nick Carraway. There are three main points to note here - first, the various aspects of Nick's perspective. He is relatively young—turning thirty over the course of the narrative—and a veteran of World War I, meaning that like so many men of the time, and perhaps of any time newly returned from combat, he's looking for both a focus for the remainder of his life and an experience of pleasure after an intense experience of suffering. He is also from the American Midwest, a trait he shares with the author and which played a defining role in Nick's decision not only to move to the financially and socially stimulating East (since for Nick, it seems that the Midwest is equated with a financial and social flatness that echoes the area's geography), but to move back. In other words, the narrative's initial perspective is that of an idealist eager for transformation, but the events recounted by that narrative, however, transform that perspective into that of a cynic eager for a return to a life of integrity.

Another key aspect of the novel's point of view is its subjectivity - specifically, the fact that events are viewed and interpreted through Nick's above mentioned perspectives and transformations. The interesting thing about first person narratives is that if their perspective shifted to that of another narrator, the story would be entirely different, a circumstance suggesting that in first person narratives, perspective and theme are closely linked. In other words, the transformation of Nick's point of view—from eagerness to what amounts to cynicism—is a key manifestation of, and clue to, the work's important themes.

Finally, there is the distance of time - specifically, the idea that Nick is writing from the perspective of two months having pased since the events in question. Two months is an interesting period of time - long enough to have gained a degree of perspective, but perhaps not quite long enough for emotional resonances of traumatic experiences like those experienced by Nick to be fully resolved. In other words, there is a sense of fading freshness about his point of view, of wounds barely healed, of not quite enough time having passed for objectivity to be un-colored by subjective memory.

Setting

The novel's setting, in both time (the 1920s) and place (wealthy, fashionable New York and its suburbs) is a fundamental component of both story and theme.

Around the world but particularly in North America, the 1920s were a time of exploding vitality, a desperate hunger for sensation and happiness in the aftermath of the tragedies and suffering of World War I. It was also a time when young people, such as those upon whom the narrative of The Great Gatsby focuses and particularly those with

access to substantial amounts of money, searched for some form of meaning in their lives and settled on sensation. It was a time of parties and drinking and excess, of the sort chronicled in The Great Gatsby with a vivid sense of detail that walks a fine line between realistic and exaggerated. New York City, particularly the fashionable areas of Manhattan and Long Island, was the center of this sort of heightened, giddy playfulness in North America and possibly even the world.

Watchful, eager narrator Nick Carraway lives on the fringes of the period's excesses, commenting on them with a clear bemusement that, at the work's conclusion, becomes reluctantly cynical, his central journey of transformation triggered and defined by the way of life of those people at that time. It's important to note, however, that particularly for many Americans of the period, the excesses of money and sensual pleasure were manifestations and/or benefits of the success perceived as the result of pursuing the so-called "American Dream". In other words, they had been blessed with (although in many cases not actually earned) prosperity. What else was there to do but to celebrate it?

Language and Meaning

Richly poetic and with an expansive vocabulary, the language of the work is powerfully evocative, compelling and engaging. It could be argued that at times, the expansiveness, the breadth and depth of language and imagery, undermines, at least to a certain degree, the work's credibility. Would a central character like Nick, whose background, intellect and experience seems somewhat, if not fairly, pedestrian, express himself in words and images like those used incorporated into his narration? Probably not, but ultimately, the point is less relevant than the fact that he is writing from a place of instinct and insight, from a perspective that has moved beyond that of his life of origin, through the life of his damaged dreams, and into a life of reflection and acquired wisdom. It is the language of a man who has thought about what has happened to him and what he has witnessed, who has considered and contemplated and analyzed it, and put the pieces together into something not quite a whole. It is also the language of a man who has intuited meaning through instinct and through contemplation, who has come to new insight after moving through both dream and nightmare. The question is, of course, whether the language of The Great Gatsby is, in fact, the language of the author's own experience - which, given the similarities of experience between author and narrator (i.e., similar localities of origin, similar wartime experiences) and given events in the author's biography (a history of partying hard and of lost love), is entirely possible.

Structure

The work's structure is complex, but not impenetrable. There is a central, forward-moving narrative line, following Nick's experiences and journey of transformation from a point where it begins (his arrival on Long Island) to where it ends (his departure). Events on that narrative line are essential presented chronologically, narrated one after the other in the order in which they occurred. There are occasional exceptions, however

which take the work out of the narrative line portraying "what" happened and into explanations of "why". A key example is Nick's recounting of the story of Gatsby's relationship with Dan Cody, taking the reader from the "present" narrative line into "the past". There are also points, particularly at the end, in which the narration leaves the "present" narrative line and jumps back in time to comment upon what else was going on at the same time as the events just recounted. A noteworthy example here are the narratives of Michaelis' actions at the garage after Myrtle Wilson's death and the later narrative of Wilson's actions before arriving at Gatsby's.

Finally, there are points at which the narrative's forward movement is interrupted by commentary from the narrator, again brief explorations of "why" giving added weight or insight into the "what". Examples include Nick's interjection in Chapter 6 of a description of a portrait of Cody in Gatsby's bedroom, the commentary on Gatsby's guest list at the beginning of Chapter 4, and his commentary on his personal experiences of New York at the end of Chapter 3. All these variations in narrative line provide a structural manifestation of the novel's thematic and emotional complexity, its layering and complexity of texture.

Quotes

"[I]t was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never founding any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again ... it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short winded elations of men."
Chap 1, p. 2

"I had no sight into Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game."
Chap. 1, p. 6

"I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming."
Chap. 1, p. 9

"For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face ... then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk."
Chap. 1, p. 14

"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."
Chap. 1, p. 21

"[H]igh over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life."
Chap. 2, p. 36

"People disappeared, reappeared, made plans to go somewhere, and then lost each other, searched for each other, found each other a few feet away."
Chap. 2, p. 37

"It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world."
Chap. 3, p. 44

"It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it ... it faced, or seemed to face, the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey."
Chap. 3, p. 48

"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."
Chap. 3, p. 56

"At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others - poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner - young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life."
Chap. 3 p. 57

"Every one 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."
Chap. 3, p. 60

"'I didn't want you to think I was just some nobody. You see, I usually find myself among strangers because I drift here and there trying to forget the sad thing that happened to me ... you'll hear about it this afternoon."
Chap. 4, p. 67

"The modesty of the demand shook me. He had waited five years and bought a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths - so that he could 'come over' some afternoon to a stranger's garden."
Chap. 4, p. 80

"He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house 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."
Chap. 5, p. 92

"Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now

vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one."
Chap. 5, p. 94

"All the lights were going on in West Egg now; the electric trains, men-carrying, were plunging home through the rain from New York. It was the hour of a profound human change, and excitement was generating on the air."
Chap. 5, p. 96

"She was appalled by West Egg ... appalled by its raw vigor that chafed under the old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that herded its inhabitants along a short cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand."
Chap. 6, p. 108

"Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees - he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder."
Chap. 6, p. 112

"It was full of money - that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it - high in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl ..."
Chap. 7, p. 120

"Thirty - the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair. But there was Jordan beside me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age ... the formidable stroke of thirty died away with the reassuring pressure of her hand."
Chap. 7, p. 136

"[H]er left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long."
Chap. 7, p. 139

"They weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale - and yet

they weren't unhappy, either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together."
Chap. 7, p. 146

"There was a ripe mystery about it, a hint of bedrooms upstairs more beautiful and cool than other bedrooms, of gay and radiant activities taking place through its corridors, and of romances that were not musty and laid away already in lavender, but fresh and breathing and redolent of this year's shining motor cars and of dances whose flowers were scarcely withered."
Chap. 8, p. 148

"What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured?"
Chap. 8, p. 152

"I thought of the night when I first came to his ancestral home, three months before. The lawn and drive had been crowded with the f aces of those who guessed at his corruption - and he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream, as he waved them goodbye."
Chap. 8, p. 155

"[H]e 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 ..."
Chap. 8, p. 162

"I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all - Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life."
Chap. 9, p. 177

"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 ..."
Chap. 9, p. 181

"Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter - tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther - and one fine morning - so we beat on, boats against the current, borne

back ceaselessly into the past."
Chap. 9, p. 182

Topics for Discussion

Consider the quote from the opening of the novel (p. 2). What do you think it was that "preyed" on Gatsby? What forces do you think were primary in causing his destruction?

After his confrontation with Gatsby (Chapter 7, Part 2) why do you think Tom suggests that Daisy ride home with Gatsby? What do you think he believes is going to happen?

Discuss the parallels, other than the city in which they take place, between the two New York parties - the one hosted by Tom and Myrtle (Chapter 2) and the one hosted by Tom and Daisy (Chapter 7, Part 1). Consider the changes in the various relationships, the sources and triggers for the confrontations that take place, and the outcomes.

What do you think would have happened if George Wilson had not shot Jay Gatsby? Consider two main factors - Gatsby's intention to say that he was driving the car that killed Myrtle Wilson (what do you think this would have meant for his relationship with Daisy?) and the novel's thematic interest in "coming of age". Would Gatsby have "come of age"? Would he have reached a new maturity? Or would he have stayed essentially as he was, his life and perspectives defined by his hopeless, lingering love for Daisy?

In Classical Literature (i.e., Greek, Roman), the term "tragedy" describes a narrative in which an essentially good or noble character is brought to destruction as the result of a single personal flaw. Would you say that Gatsby's story is a tragic one and that he is a tragic character? If yes, what is his flaw? If no, why not?

In what ways are the attitudes and actions of the "guests" at Gatsby's parties, and of the celebrities like Jordan Baker, reflected or manifested in contemporary American society?

How valid, do you think, is the criticism that The Great Gatsby is a condemnation of how the "American Dream" has become corrupt? Explain your answer.

What do you think the author intended by having the two New York parties (Chapter 2 and Chapter 7) result in physical violence being done to Myrtle Wilson? Consider the context of that violence, the emotional and thematic content of both parties, and the persons involved.

Why, do you think, does Nick not tell Tom the truth about who was driving the car that killed Myrtle Wilson?