While the novel is now very favourably looked upon, when it was released it was a commercial and critical flop. The author died in 1940 well before he could see the praise that was heaped upon it, and praise did come after the book was sent overseas with American servicemen during the Second World War. Afterward, *The Great Gatsby* became a staple of American English literature high school courses, in part due to its relative brevity and because it is a fairly inoffensive book. Its stature has grown ever since, with two movie adaptations that I know of, for starters. A few years ago, *Entertainment Weekly* ranked *The Great Gatsby* at №2 in their Top 100 Novels of All Time list. That’s right — of all time. (*Anna Karenina* was, if I recall correctly, №1.)

Part of the love of this book in American letters is probably because Fitzgerald loved every $100 adjective that he ever met. The novel is floral in nature, and says a great deal about human nature and love in a limited amount of space — $100 adjectives be damned. But does *The Great Gatsby* still hold up? Or is the source of great dismay for high school English students in the United States? Well, I have to say that this book of the lives of socialites in Long Island, New York, during the roaring ’20s is still very relevant, maybe even more so than in the past. I probably don’t need to recount the plot as it is very well known, but it’s in the unknowns of the book that a lot winds up being said. We don’t really know much about Gatsby, even by the book’s end, and the mystery and enigma that surrounds him is very reminiscent of a Trump-like cult of personality.

I see in this book the foreshadowing of the Great Depression. Everyone here speaks in riddles, having nothing of import to say, and the endless partying and goings on of Gatsby and his followers seem oblivious to the fact that the party must end sometime. I see this a lot in tech start-ups today. Everyone’s after the buyout dough, everyone says important things that aren’t really all that important, and nobody wants to see an idea through to completion — only to the point where it is salable and then they can bail and start all over again with countless riches. The whole culture of today seems to be pointing to another Great Depression that will make the Great Recession of 2008 look like just a little housing bubble that burst.

There are other things going on in *The Great Gatsby* that still hold true. It is, after all, a small book about unobtainable love, and the lack of any sort of respect or decorum for marriage vows. One of the minor characters is carrying on with a mistress right out in the open, but when that character’s wife starts nosing around with Gatsby, he immediately becomes vicious and jealous. There’s a double standard here at work that Fitzgerald was quite apt to point out. In a sense, *The Great Gatsby* is a novel about the sexes, and the inequity between them.

Having now read the book, I seem to understand why it didn’t take hold with either the American public and the book critic establishment right away. The story would have cut too close to the bone for a lot of people — it may have been that Fitzgerald, who was a bit of a socialite himself, was mocking them (and maybe a bit of himself in the

process). I think this is true despite the novel’s opening gambit that the main character says he learned from his father that he wouldn’t criticize anyone because they may not have had the same advantages in life that he had.

I also have to say that the book is hardly Top 10 Books of All Time material. The reason is because there are so many dangling little plot threads and unanswered questions. I’m sure that’s the whole point, but everything about this book is all flash and pizzazz, all surface. The book is so short that we never really get to know these people, and who they really are. But I’m probably making an easy target of this book because the whole point seems to be about the illusions in the nature of the human condition.

All of that being said, this was maybe not the best 25 cents that I ever spent, but a pretty sound investment, still. I’m not sure if the average American teenager would agree with me — as much as we should encourage the reading of “classics,” modern or otherwise, amongst our youth. I think kids in English classes should be given some leeway to read things that will excite them and take hold of them. Despite what one movie director tried to do, there is no hip-hop in *The Great*

*Gatsby*, and I wonder how relatable it is to teenagers. (I know, I know — you have to read the classics first in the great canon of literature to be able to be intelligent about books and maybe other things. Still, I think there’s room to give kids a little John Green now and then, something they can feel passionate about reading. Even Stephen King has a bit of a literary streak in him.)

Anyhow, that’s my take — and you can take it or leave it. *The Great Gatsby* is good; not terribly great but not a travesty either. You can be taken with the language of this book, and be annoyed by the one big figurative MacGuffin this book offers. (If one person didn’t switch cars with another, the plot wouldn’t turn out the way it does.) It falls into that Twilight Zone between the turkey it was upon arrival and the lauded status it has now. Still, it’s an important read with a heavy moral lesson, one that people nowadays should take to heart. After all, it’s only a short walk to a window to jump out of when the stock market collapses.

# The Great Gatsby

## F. Scott Fidzgerald

General Info

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896, and named after his ancestor Francis Scott Key, the author of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Fitzgerald was raised in St. Paul, Minnesota. Though an intelligent child, he did poorly in school and was sent to a New Jersey boarding school in 1911. Despite being a mediocre student there, he managed to enroll at Princeton in 1913. Academic troubles and apathy plagued him throughout his time at college, and he never graduated, instead enlisting in the army in 1917, as World War I neared its end.

Fitzgerald became a second lieutenant, and was stationed at Camp Sheridan, in Montgomery, Alabama. There he met and fell in love with a wild seventeen-year-old beauty named Zelda Sayre. Zelda finally agreed to marry him, but her overpowering desire for wealth, fun, and leisure led her to delay their wedding until he could prove a success. With the publication of *This Side of Paradise* in 1920, Fitzgerald became a literary sensation, earning enough money and fame to convince Zelda to marry him.

Many of these events from Fitzgerald’s early life appear in his most famous novel,*The Great Gatsby,* published in 1925. Like Fitzgerald, Nick Carraway is a thoughtful young man from Minnesota, educated at an Ivy League school (in Nick’s case, Yale), who moves to New York after the war. Also similar to Fitzgerald is Jay Gatsby, a sensitive young man who idolizes wealth and luxury and who falls in love with a beautiful young woman while stationed at a military camp in the South.

Having become a celebrity, Fitzgerald fell into a wild, reckless life-style of parties and decadence, while desperately trying to please Zelda by writing to earn money. Similarly, Gatsby amasses a great deal of wealth at a relatively young age, and devotes himself to acquiring possessions and throwing parties that he believes will enable him to win Daisy’s love. As the giddiness of the Roaring Twenties dissolved into the bleakness of the Great Depression, however, Zelda suffered a nervous breakdown and Fitzgerald battled alcoholism, which hampered his writing. He published *Tender Is the Night* in 1934, and sold short stories to *The Saturday Evening Post*to support his lavish lifestyle. In 1937, he left for Hollywood to write screenplays, and in 1940, while working on his novel *The Love of the Last Tycoon,* died of a heart attack at the age of forty-four.

Fitzgerald was the most famous chronicler of 1920s America, an era that he dubbed “the Jazz Age.” Written in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* is one of the greatest literary documents of this period, in which the American economy soared, bringing unprecedented levels of prosperity to the nation. Prohibition, the ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol mandated by the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1919), made millionaires out of bootleggers, and an underground culture of revelry sprang up. Sprawling private parties managed to elude police notice, and “speakeasies”—secret clubs that sold liquor—thrived. The chaos and violence of World War I left America in a state of shock, and the generation that fought the war turned to wild and extravagant living to compensate. The staid conservatism and timeworn values of the previous decade were turned on their ear, as money, opulence, and exuberance became the order of the day.

Like Nick in *The Great Gatsby,* Fitzgerald found this new lifestyle seductive and exciting, and, like Gatsby, he had always idolized the very rich. Now he found himself in an era in which unrestrained materialism set the tone of society, particularly in the large cities of the East. Even so, like Nick, Fitzgerald saw through the glitter of the Jazz Age to the moral emptiness and hypocrisy beneath, and part of him longed for this absent moral center. In many ways, *The Great Gatsby* represents Fitzgerald’s attempt to confront his conflicting feelings about the Jazz Age. Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald was driven by his love for a woman who symbolized everything he wanted, even as she led him toward everything he despised.

Plot Overview

Nick Carraway, a young man from Minnesota, moves to New York in the summer of 1922 to learn about the bond business. He rents a house in the West Egg district of Long Island, a wealthy but unfashionable area populated by the new rich, a group who have made their fortunes too recently to have established social connections and who are prone to garish displays of wealth. Nick’s next-door neighbor in West Egg is a mysterious man named Jay Gatsby, who lives in a gigantic Gothic mansion and throws extravagant parties every Saturday night.

Nick is unlike the other inhabitants of West Egg—he was educated at Yale and has social connections in East Egg, a fashionable area of Long Island home to the established upper class. Nick drives out to East Egg one evening for dinner with his cousin, Daisy Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, an erstwhile classmate of Nick’s at Yale. Daisy and Tom introduce Nick to Jordan Baker, a beautiful, cynical young woman with whom Nick begins a romantic relationship. Nick also learns a bit about Daisy and Tom’s marriage: Jordan tells him that Tom has a lover, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the valley of ashes, a gray industrial dumping ground between West Egg and New York City. Not long after this revelation, Nick travels to New York City with Tom and Myrtle. At a vulgar, gaudy party in the apartment that Tom keeps for the affair, Myrtle begins to taunt Tom about Daisy, and Tom responds by breaking her nose.

As the summer progresses, Nick eventually garners an invitation to one of Gatsby’s legendary parties. He encounters Jordan Baker at the party, and they meet Gatsby himself, a surprisingly young man who affects an English accent, has a remarkable smile, and calls everyone “old sport.” Gatsby asks to speak to Jordan alone, and, through Jordan, Nick later learns more about his mysterious neighbor. Gatsby tells Jordan that he knew Daisy in Louisville in 1917 and is deeply in love with her. He spends many nights staring at the green light at the end of her dock, across the bay from his mansion. Gatsby’s extravagant lifestyle and wild parties are simply an attempt to impress Daisy. Gatsby now wants Nick to arrange a reunion between himself and Daisy, but he is afraid that Daisy will refuse to see him if she knows that he still loves her. Nick invites Daisy to have tea at his house, without telling her that Gatsby will also be there. After an initially awkward reunion, Gatsby and Daisy reestablish their connection. Their love rekindled, they begin an affair.

After a short time, Tom grows increasingly suspicious of his wife’s relationship with Gatsby. At a luncheon at the Buchanans’ house, Gatsby stares at Daisy with such undisguised passion that Tom realizes Gatsby is in love with her. Though Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair, he is deeply outraged by the thought that his wife could be unfaithful to him. He forces the group to drive into New York City, where he confronts Gatsby in a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Tom asserts that he and Daisy have a history that Gatsby could never understand, and he announces to his wife that Gatsby is a criminal—his fortune comes from bootlegging alcohol and other illegal activities. Daisy realizes that her allegiance is to Tom, and Tom contemptuously sends her back to East Egg with Gatsby, attempting to prove that Gatsby cannot hurt him.

When Nick, Jordan, and Tom drive through the valley of ashes, however, they discover that Gatsby’s car has struck and killed Myrtle, Tom’s lover. They rush back to Long Island, where Nick learns from Gatsby that Daisy was driving the car when it struck Myrtle, but that Gatsby intends to take the blame. The next day, Tom tells Myrtle’s husband, George, that Gatsby was the driver of the car. George, who has leapt to the conclusion that the driver of the car that killed Myrtle must have been her lover, finds Gatsby in the pool at his mansion and shoots him dead. He then fatally shoots himself.

Nick stages a small funeral for Gatsby, ends his relationship with Jordan, and moves back to the Midwest to escape the disgust he feels for the people surrounding Gatsby’s life and for the emptiness and moral decay of life among the wealthy on the East Coast. Nick reflects that just as Gatsby’s dream of Daisy was corrupted by money and dishonesty, the American dream of happiness and individualism has disintegrated into the mere pursuit of wealth. Though Gatsby’s power to transform his dreams into reality is what makes him “great,” Nick reflects that the era of dreaming—both Gatsby’s dream and the American dream—is over.

Character list

**Nick Carraway** -  The novel’s narrator, Nick is a young man from Minnesota who, after being educated at Yale and fighting in World War I, goes to New York City to learn the bond business. Honest, tolerant, and inclined to reserve judgment, Nick often serves as a confidant for those with troubling secrets. After moving to West Egg, a fictional area of Long Island that is home to the newly rich, Nick quickly befriends his next-door neighbor, the mysterious Jay Gatsby. As Daisy Buchanan’s cousin, he facilitates the rekindling of the romance between her and Gatsby. *The Great Gatsby* is told entirely through Nick’s eyes; his thoughts and perceptions shape and color the story.

**Jay Gatsby** -  The title character and protagonist of the novel, Gatsby is a fabulously wealthy young man living in a Gothic mansion in West Egg. He is famous for the lavish parties he throws every Saturday night, but no one knows where he comes from, what he does, or how he made his fortune. As the novel progresses, Nick learns that Gatsby was born James Gatz on a farm in North Dakota; working for a millionaire made him dedicate his life to the achievement of wealth. When he met Daisy while training to be an officer in Louisville, he fell in love with her. Nick also learns that Gatsby made his fortune through criminal activity, as he was willing to do anything to gain the social position he thought necessary to win Daisy. Nick views Gatsby as a deeply flawed man, dishonest and vulgar, whose extraordinary optimism and power to transform his dreams into reality make him “great” nonetheless.

**Daisy Buchanan** -  Nick’s cousin, and the woman Gatsby loves. As a young woman in Louisville before the war, Daisy was courted by a number of officers, including Gatsby. She fell in love with Gatsby and promised to wait for him. However, Daisy harbors a deep need to be loved, and when a wealthy, powerful young man named Tom Buchanan asked her to marry him, Daisy decided not to wait for Gatsby after all. Now a beautiful socialite, Daisy lives with Tom across from Gatsby in the fashionable East Egg district of Long Island. She is sardonic and somewhat cynical, and behaves superficially to mask her pain at her husband’s constant infidelity.

**Tom Buchanan** -  Daisy’s immensely wealthy husband, once a member of Nick’s social club at Yale. Powerfully built and hailing from a socially solid old family, Tom is an arrogant, hypocritical bully. His social attitudes are laced with racism and sexism, and he never even considers trying to live up to the moral standard he demands from those around him. He has no moral qualms about his own extramarital affair with Myrtle, but when he begins to suspect Daisy and Gatsby of having an affair, he becomes outraged and forces a confrontation.

**Jordan Baker** -  Daisy’s friend, a woman with whom Nick becomes romantically involved during the course of the novel. A competitive golfer, Jordan represents one of the “new women” of the 1920s—cynical, boyish, and self-centered. Jordan is beautiful, but also dishonest: she cheated in order to win her first golf tournament and continually bends the truth.

**Myrtle Wilson** -  Tom’s lover, whose lifeless husband George owns a run-down garage in the valley of ashes. Myrtle herself possesses a fierce vitality and desperately looks for a way to improve her situation. Unfortunately for her, she chooses Tom, who treats her as a mere object of his desire.

**George Wilson** -  Myrtle’s husband, the lifeless, exhausted owner of a run-down auto shop at the edge of the valley of ashes. George loves and idealizes Myrtle, and is devastated by her affair with Tom. George is consumed with grief when Myrtle is killed. George is comparable to Gatsby in that both are dreamers and both are ruined by their unrequited love for women who love Tom.

**Owl Eyes** -  The eccentric, bespectacled drunk whom Nick meets at the first party he attends at Gatsby’s mansion. Nick finds Owl Eyes looking through Gatsby’s library, astonished that the books are real.

**Klipspringer** -  The shallow freeloader who seems almost to live at Gatsby’s mansion, taking advantage of his host’s money. As soon as Gatsby dies, Klipspringer disappears—he does not attend the funeral, but he does call Nick about a pair of tennis shoes that he left at Gatsby’s mansion.

**Meyer Wolfsheim** -  Gatsby’s friend, a prominent figure in organized crime. Before the events of the novel take place, Wolfsheim helped Gatsby to make his fortune bootlegging illegal liquor. His continued acquaintance with Gatsby suggests that Gatsby is still involved in illegal business.

Analysis of Major Characters

**Jay Gatsby**

The title character of *The Great Gatsby* is a young man, around thirty years old, who rose from an impoverished childhood in rural North Dakota to become fabulously wealthy. However, he achieved this lofty goal by participating in organized crime, including distributing illegal alcohol and trading in stolen securities. From his early youth, Gatsby despised poverty and longed for wealth and sophistication—he dropped out of St. Olaf’s College after only two weeks because he could not bear the janitorial job with which he was paying his tuition. Though Gatsby has always wanted to be rich, his main motivation in acquiring his fortune was his love for Daisy Buchanan, whom he met as a young military officer in Louisville before leaving to fight in World War I in 1917. Gatsby immediately fell in love with Daisy’s aura of luxury, grace, and charm, and lied to her about his own background in order to convince her that he was good enough for her. Daisy promised to wait for him when he left for the war, but married Tom Buchanan in 1919, while Gatsby was studying at Oxford after the war in an attempt to gain an education. From that moment on, Gatsby dedicated himself to winning Daisy back, and his acquisition of millions of dollars, his purchase of a gaudy mansion on West Egg, and his lavish weekly parties are all merely means to that end.

Fitzgerald delays the introduction of most of this information until fairly late in the novel. Gatsby’s reputation precedes him—Gatsby himself does not appear in a speaking role until Chapter 3. Fitzgerald initially presents Gatsby as the aloof, enigmatic host of the unbelievably opulent parties thrown every week at his mansion. He appears surrounded by spectacular luxury, courted by powerful men and beautiful women. He is the subject of a whirlwind of gossip throughout New York and is already a kind of legendary celebrity before he is ever introduced to the reader. Fitzgerald propels the novel forward through the early chapters by shrouding Gatsby’s background and the source of his wealth in mystery (the reader learns about Gatsby’s childhood in Chapter 6 and receives definitive proof of his criminal dealings in Chapter 7). As a result, the reader’s first, distant impressions of Gatsby strike quite a different note from that of the lovesick, naive young man who emerges during the later part of the novel.

Fitzgerald uses this technique of delayed character revelation to emphasize the theatrical quality of Gatsby’s approach to life, which is an important part of his personality. Gatsby has literally created his own character, even changing his name from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby to represent his reinvention of himself. As his relentless quest for Daisy demonstrates, Gatsby has an extraordinary ability to transform his hopes and dreams into reality; at the beginning of the novel, he appears to the reader just as he desires to appear to the world. This talent for self-invention is what gives Gatsby his quality of “greatness”: indeed, the title “*The Great Gatsby*” is reminiscent of billings for such vaudeville magicians as “The Great Houdini” and “The Great Blackstone,” suggesting that the persona of Jay Gatsby is a masterful illusion.

As the novel progresses and Fitzgerald deconstructs Gatsby’s self-presentation, Gatsby reveals himself to be an innocent, hopeful young man who stakes everything on his dreams, not realizing that his dreams are unworthy of him. Gatsby invests Daisy with an idealistic perfection that she cannot possibly attain in reality and pursues her with a passionate zeal that blinds him to her limitations. His dream of her disintegrates, revealing the corruption that wealth causes and the unworthiness of the goal, much in the way Fitzgerald sees the American dream crumbling in the 1920s, as America’s powerful optimism, vitality, and individualism become subordinated to the amoral pursuit of wealth.

Gatsby is contrasted most consistently with Nick. Critics point out that the former, passionate and active, and the latter, sober and reflective, seem to represent two sides of Fitzgerald’s personality. Additionally, whereas Tom is a cold-hearted, aristocratic bully, Gatsby is a loyal and good-hearted man. Though his lifestyle and attitude differ greatly from those of George Wilson, Gatsby and Wilson share the fact that they both lose their love interest to Tom.

**Nick Carraway**

If Gatsby represents one part of Fitzgerald’s personality, the flashy celebrity who pursued and glorified wealth in order to impress the woman he loved, then Nick represents another part: the quiet, reflective Midwesterner adrift in the lurid East. A young man (he turns thirty during the course of the novel) from Minnesota, Nick travels to New York in 1922 to learn the bond business. He lives in the West Egg district of Long Island, next door to Gatsby. Nick is also Daisy’s cousin, which enables him to observe and assist the resurgent love affair between Daisy and Gatsby. As a result of his relationship to these two characters, Nick is the perfect choice to narrate the novel, which functions as a personal memoir of his experiences with Gatsby in the summer of 1922.

Nick is also well suited to narrating *The Great Gatsby* because of his temperament. As he tells the reader in Chapter 1, he is tolerant, open-minded, quiet, and a good listener, and, as a result, others tend to talk to him and tell him their secrets. Gatsby, in particular, comes to trust him and treat him as a confidant. Nick generally assumes a secondary role throughout the novel, preferring to describe and comment on events rather than dominate the action. Often, however, he functions as Fitzgerald’s voice, as in his extended meditation on time and the American dream at the end of Chapter 9.

Insofar as Nick plays a role inside the narrative, he evidences a strongly mixed reaction to life on the East Coast, one that creates a powerful internal conflict that he does not resolve until the end of the book. On the one hand, Nick is attracted to the fast-paced, fun-driven lifestyle of New York. On the other hand, he finds that lifestyle grotesque and damaging. This inner conflict is symbolized throughout the book by Nick’s romantic affair with Jordan Baker. He is attracted to her vivacity and her sophistication just as he is repelled by her dishonesty and her lack of consideration for other people.

Nick states that there is a “quality of distortion” to life in New York, and this lifestyle makes him lose his equilibrium, especially early in the novel, as when he gets drunk at Gatsby’s party in Chapter 2. After witnessing the unraveling of Gatsby’s dream and presiding over the appalling spectacle of Gatsby’s funeral, Nick realizes that the fast life of revelry on the East Coast is a cover for the terrifying moral emptiness that the valley of ashes symbolizes. Having gained the maturity that this insight demonstrates, he returns to Minnesota in search of a quieter life structured by more traditional moral values.

**Daisy Buchanan**

Partially based on Fitzgerald’s wife, Zelda, Daisy is a beautiful young woman from Louisville, Kentucky. She is Nick’s cousin and the object of Gatsby’s love. As a young debutante in Louisville, Daisy was extremely popular among the military officers stationed near her home, including Jay Gatsby. Gatsby lied about his background to Daisy, claiming to be from a wealthy family in order to convince her that he was worthy of her. Eventually, Gatsby won Daisy’s heart, and they made love before Gatsby left to fight in the war. Daisy promised to wait for Gatsby, but in 1919 she chose instead to marry Tom Buchanan, a young man from a solid, aristocratic family who could promise her a wealthy lifestyle and who had the support of her parents.

After 1919, Gatsby dedicated himself to winning Daisy back, making her the single goal of all of his dreams and the main motivation behind his acquisition of immense wealth through criminal activity. To Gatsby, Daisy represents the paragon of perfection—she has the aura of charm, wealth, sophistication, grace, and aristocracy that he longed for as a child in North Dakota and that first attracted him to her. In reality, however, Daisy falls far short of Gatsby’s ideals. She is beautiful and charming, but also fickle, shallow, bored, and sardonic. Nick characterizes her as a careless person who smashes things up and then retreats behind her money. Daisy proves her real nature when she chooses Tom over Gatsby in Chapter 7, then allows Gatsby to take the blame for killing Myrtle Wilson even though she herself was driving the car. Finally, rather than attend Gatsby’s funeral, Daisy and Tom move away, leaving no forwarding address.

Like Zelda Fitzgerald, Daisy is in love with money, ease, and material luxury. She is capable of affection (she seems genuinely fond of Nick and occasionally seems to love Gatsby sincerely), but not of sustained loyalty or care. She is indifferent even to her own infant daughter, never discussing her and treating her as an afterthought when she is introduced in Chapter 7. In Fitzgerald’s conception of America in the 1920s, Daisy represents the amoral values of the aristocratic East Egg set.

Themes, Motifs & Symbols

**Themes**

*Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.*

The Decline of the American Dream in the 1920s

On the surface, *The Great Gatsby* is a story of the thwarted love between a man and a woman. The main theme of the novel, however, encompasses a much larger, less romantic scope. Though all of its action takes place over a mere few months during the summer of 1922 and is set in a circumscribed geographical area in the vicinity of Long Island, New York, *The Great Gatsby* is a highly symbolic meditation on 1920s America as a whole, in particular the disintegration of the American dream in an era of unprecedented prosperity and material excess.

Fitzgerald portrays the 1920s as an era of decayed social and moral values, evidenced in its overarching cynicism, greed, and empty pursuit of pleasure. The reckless jubilance that led to decadent parties and wild jazz music—epitomized in *The Great Gatsby* by the opulent parties that Gatsby throws every Saturday night—resulted ultimately in the corruption of the American dream, as the unrestrained desire for money and pleasure surpassed more noble goals. When World War I ended in 1918, the generation of young Americans who had fought the war became intensely disillusioned, as the brutal carnage that they had just faced made the Victorian social morality of early-twentieth-century America seem like stuffy, empty hypocrisy. The dizzying rise of the stock market in the aftermath of the war led to a sudden, sustained increase in the national wealth and a newfound materialism, as people began to spend and consume at unprecedented levels. A person from any social background could, potentially, make a fortune, but the American aristocracy—families with old wealth—scorned the newly rich industrialists and speculators. Additionally, the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, which banned the sale of alcohol, created a thriving underworld designed to satisfy the massive demand for bootleg liquor among rich and poor alike.

Fitzgerald positions the characters of *The Great Gatsby* as emblems of these social trends. Nick and Gatsby, both of whom fought in World War I, exhibit the newfound cosmopolitanism and cynicism that resulted from the war. The various social climbers and ambitious speculators who attend Gatsby’s parties evidence the greedy scramble for wealth. The clash between “old money” and “new money” manifests itself in the novel’s symbolic geography: East Egg represents the established aristocracy, West Egg the self-made rich. Meyer Wolfshiem and Gatsby’s fortune symbolize the rise of organized crime and bootlegging.

As Fitzgerald saw it (and as Nick explains in Chapter 9), the American dream was originally about discovery, individualism, and the pursuit of happiness. In the 1920s depicted in the novel, however, easy money and relaxed social values have corrupted this dream, especially on the East Coast. The main plotline of the novel reflects this assessment, as Gatsby’s dream of loving Daisy is ruined by the difference in their respective social statuses, his resorting to crime to make enough money to impress her, and the rampant materialism that characterizes her lifestyle. Additionally, places and objects in *The Great Gatsby* have meaning only because characters instill them with meaning: the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg best exemplify this idea. In Nick’s mind, the ability to create meaningful symbols constitutes a central component of the American dream, as early Americans invested their new nation with their own ideals and values.

Nick compares the green bulk of America rising from the ocean to the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. Just as Americans have given America meaning through their dreams for their own lives, Gatsby instills Daisy with a kind of idealized perfection that she neither deserves nor possesses. Gatsby’s dream is ruined by the unworthiness of its object, just as the American dream in the 1920s is ruined by the unworthiness of its object—money and pleasure. Like 1920s Americans in general, fruitlessly seeking a bygone era in which their dreams had value, Gatsby longs to re-create a vanished past—his time in Louisville with Daisy—but is incapable of doing so. When his dream crumbles, all that is left for Gatsby to do is die; all Nick can do is move back to Minnesota, where American values have not decayed.

The Hollowness of the Upper Class

One of the major topics explored in *The Great Gatsby* is the sociology of wealth, specifically, how the newly minted millionaires of the 1920s differ from and relate to the old aristocracy of the country’s richest families. In the novel, West Egg and its denizens represent the newly rich, while East Egg and its denizens, especially Daisy and Tom, represent the old aristocracy. Fitzgerald portrays the newly rich as being vulgar, gaudy, ostentatious, and lacking in social graces and taste. Gatsby, for example, lives in a monstrously ornate mansion, wears a pink suit, drives a Rolls-Royce, and does not pick up on subtle social signals, such as the insincerity of the Sloanes’ invitation to lunch. In contrast, the old aristocracy possesses grace, taste, subtlety, and elegance, epitomized by the Buchanans’ tasteful home and the flowing white dresses of Daisy and Jordan Baker.

What the old aristocracy possesses in taste, however, it seems to lack in heart, as the East Eggers prove themselves careless, inconsiderate bullies who are so used to money’s ability to ease their minds that they never worry about hurting others. The Buchanans exemplify this stereotype when, at the end of the novel, they simply move to a new house far away rather than condescend to attend Gatsby’s funeral. Gatsby, on the other hand, whose recent wealth derives from criminal activity, has a sincere and loyal heart, remaining outside Daisy’s window until four in the morning in Chapter 7 simply to make sure that Tom does not hurt her. Ironically, Gatsby’s good qualities (loyalty and love) lead to his death, as he takes the blame for killing Myrtle rather than letting Daisy be punished, and the Buchanans’ bad qualities (fickleness and selfishness) allow them to remove themselves from the tragedy not only physically but psychologically.

**Motifs**

*Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text’s major themes.*

Geography

Throughout the novel, places and settings epitomize the various aspects of the 1920s American society that Fitzgerald depicts. East Egg represents the old aristocracy, West Egg the newly rich, the valley of ashes the moral and social decay of America, and New York City the uninhibited, amoral quest for money and pleasure. Additionally, the East is connected to the moral decay and social cynicism of New York, while the West (including Midwestern and northern areas such as Minnesota) is connected to more traditional social values and ideals. Nick’s analysis in Chapter 9 of the story he has related reveals his sensitivity to this dichotomy: though it is set in the East, the story is really one of the West, as it tells how people originally from west of the Appalachians (as all of the main characters are) react to the pace and style of life on the East Coast.

Weather

As in much of Shakespeare’s work, the weather in *The Great Gatsby* unfailingly matches the emotional and narrative tone of the story. Gatsby and Daisy’s reunion begins amid a pouring rain, proving awkward and melancholy; their love reawakens just as the sun begins to come out. Gatsby’s climactic confrontation with Tom occurs on the hottest day of the summer, under the scorching sun (like the fatal encounter between Mercutio and Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet). Wilson kills Gatsby on the first day of autumn, as Gatsby floats in his pool despite a palpable chill in the air—a symbolic attempt to stop time and restore his relationship with Daisy to the way it was five years before, in 1917.

**Symbols**

*Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.*

The Green Light

Situated at the end of Daisy’s East Egg dock and barely visible from Gatsby’s West Egg lawn, the green light represents Gatsby’s hopes and dreams for the future. Gatsby associates it with Daisy, and in Chapter 1 he reaches toward it in the darkness as a guiding light to lead him to his goal. Because Gatsby’s quest for Daisy is broadly associated with the American dream, the green light also symbolizes that more generalized ideal. In Chapter 9, Nick compares the green light to how America, rising out of the ocean, must have looked to early settlers of the new nation.

The Valley of Ashes

First introduced in Chapter 2, the valley of ashes between West Egg and New York City consists of a long stretch of desolate land created by the dumping of industrial ashes. It represents the moral and social decay that results from the uninhibited pursuit of wealth, as the rich indulge themselves with regard for nothing but their own pleasure. The valley of ashes also symbolizes the plight of the poor, like George Wilson, who live among the dirty ashes and lose their vitality as a result.

The Eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are a pair of fading, bespectacled eyes painted on an old advertising billboard over the valley of ashes. They may represent God staring down upon and judging American society as a moral wasteland, though the novel never makes this point explicitly. Instead, throughout the novel, Fitzgerald suggests that symbols only have meaning because characters instill them with meaning. The connection between the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg and God exists only in George Wilson’s grief-stricken mind. This lack of concrete significance contributes to the unsettling nature of the image. Thus, the eyes also come to represent the essential meaninglessness of the world and the arbitrariness of the mental process by which people invest objects with meaning. Nick explores these ideas in Chapter 8, when he imagines Gatsby’s final thoughts as a depressed consideration of the emptiness of symbols and dreams.

#### Summary & Analysis

Chapter 1

**Summary**

The narrator of *The Great Gatsby* is a young man from Minnesota named Nick Carraway. He not only narrates the story but casts himself as the book’s author. He begins by commenting on himself, stating that he learned from his father to reserve judgment about other people, because if he holds them up to his own moral standards, he will misunderstand them. He characterizes himself as both highly moral and highly tolerant. He briefly mentions the hero of his story, Gatsby, saying that Gatsby represented everything he scorns, but that he exempts Gatsby completely from his usual judgments. Gatsby’s personality was nothing short of “gorgeous.”

In the summer of 1922, Nick writes, he had just arrived in New York, where he moved to work in the bond business, and rented a house on a part of Long Island called West Egg. Unlike the conservative, aristocratic East Egg, West Egg is home to the “new rich,” those who, having made their fortunes recently, have neither the social connections nor the refinement to move among the East Egg set. West Egg is characterized by lavish displays of wealth and garish poor taste. Nick’s comparatively modest West Egg house is next door to Gatsby’s mansion, a sprawling Gothic monstrosity.

Nick is unlike his West Egg neighbors; whereas they lack social connections and aristocratic pedigrees, Nick graduated from Yale and has many connections on East Egg. One night, he drives out to East Egg to have dinner with his cousin Daisy and her husband, Tom Buchanan, a former member of Nick’s social club at Yale. Tom, a powerful figure dressed in riding clothes, greets Nick on the porch. Inside, Daisy lounges on a couch with her friend Jordan Baker, a competitive golfer who yawns as though bored by her surroundings.

Tom tries to interest the others in a book called *The Rise of the Colored Empires*by a man named Goddard. The book espouses racist, white-supremacist attitudes that Tom seems to find convincing. Daisy teases Tom about the book but is interrupted when Tom leaves the room to take a phone call. Daisy follows him hurriedly, and Jordan tells Nick that the call is from Tom’s lover in New York.

After an awkward dinner, the party breaks up. Jordan wants to go to bed because she has a golf tournament the next day. As Nick leaves, Tom and Daisy hint that they would like for him to take a romantic interest in Jordan.

When Nick arrives home, he sees Gatsby for the first time, a handsome young man standing on the lawn with his arms reaching out toward the dark water. Nick looks out at the water, but all he can see is a distant green light that might mark the end of a dock.

*“I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.”*

**Analysis**

Nick Carraway’s perceptions and attitudes regarding the events and characters of the novel are central to *The Great Gatsby.* Writing the novel is Nick’s way of grappling with the meaning of a story in which he played a part. The first pages of Chapter 1 establish certain contradictions in Nick’s point of view. Although he describes himself as tolerant and nonjudgmental, he also views himself as morally privileged, having a better sense of “decencies” than most other people. While Nick has a strong negative reaction to his experiences in New York and eventually returns to the Midwest in search of a less morally ambiguous environment, even during his initial phase of disgust, Gatsby stands out for him as an exception. Nick admires Gatsby highly, despite the fact that Gatsby represents everything Nick scorns about New York. Gatsby clearly poses a challenge to Nick’s customary ways of thinking about the world, and Nick’s struggle to come to terms with that challenge inflects everything in the novel.

In the world of East Egg, alluring appearances serve to cover unattractive realities. The marriage of Tom and Daisy Buchanan seems menaced by a quiet desperation beneath its pleasant surface. Unlike Nick, Tom is arrogant and dishonest, advancing racist arguments at dinner and carrying on relatively public love affairs. Daisy, on the other hand, tries hard to be shallow, even going so far as to say she hopes her baby daughter will turn out to be a fool, because women live best as beautiful fools. Jordan Baker furthers the sense of sophisticated fatigue hanging over East Egg: her cynicism, boredom, and dishonesty are at sharp odds with her wealth and beauty. As with the Buchanans’ marriage, Jordan’s surface glamour covers up an inner emptiness.

Gatsby stands in stark contrast to the denizens of East Egg. Though Nick does not yet know the green light’s origin, nor what it represents for Gatsby, the inner yearning visible in Gatsby’s posture and his emotional surrender to it make him seem almost the opposite of the sarcastic Ivy League set at the Buchanans’. Gatsby is a mysterious figure for Nick, since Nick knows neither his motives, nor the source of his wealth, nor his history, and the object of his yearning remains as remote and nebulous as the green light toward which he reaches.

The relationship between geography and social values is an important motif in*The Great Gatsby.* Each setting in the novel corresponds to a particular thematic idea or character type. This first chapter introduces two of the most important locales, East Egg and West Egg. Though each is home to fabulous wealth, and though they are separated only by a small expanse of water, the two regions are nearly opposite in the values they endorse. East Egg represents breeding, taste, aristocracy, and leisure, while West Egg represents ostentation, garishness, and the flashy manners of the new rich. East Egg is associated with the Buchanans and the monotony of their inherited social position, while West Egg is associated with Gatsby’s gaudy mansion and the inner drive behind his self-made fortune. The unworkable intersection of the two Eggs in the romance between Gatsby and Daisy will serve as the fault line of catastrophe.

Chapter 2

**Summary**

Halfway between West Egg and New York City sprawls a desolate plain, a gray valley where New York’s ashes are dumped. The men who live here work at shoveling up the ashes. Overhead, two huge, blue, spectacle-rimmed eyes—the last vestige of an advertising gimmick by a long-vanished eye doctor—stare down from an enormous sign. These unblinking eyes, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, watch over everything that happens in the valley of ashes.

The commuter train that runs between West Egg and New York passes through the valley, making several stops along the way. One day, as Nick and Tom are riding the train into the city, Tom forces Nick to follow him out of the train at one of these stops. Tom leads Nick to George Wilson’s garage, which sits on the edge of the valley of ashes. Tom’s lover Myrtle is Wilson’s wife. Wilson is a lifeless yet handsome man, colored gray by the ashes in the air. In contrast, Myrtle has a kind of desperate vitality; she strikes Nick as sensuous despite her stocky figure. Tom taunts Wilson and then orders Myrtle to follow him to the train. Tom takes Nick and Myrtle to New York City, to the Morningside Heights apartment he keeps for his affair. Here they have an impromptu party with Myrtle’s sister, Catherine, and a couple named McKee. Catherine has bright red hair, wears a great deal of makeup, and tells Nick that she has heard that Jay Gatsby is the nephew or cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm, the ruler of Germany during World War I. The McKees, who live downstairs, are a horrid couple: Mr. McKee is pale and feminine, and Mrs. McKee is shrill. The group proceeds to drink excessively. Nick claims that he got drunk for only the second time in his life at this party.

The ostentatious behavior and conversation of the others at the party repulse Nick, and he tries to leave. At the same time, he finds himself fascinated by the lurid spectacle of the group. Myrtle grows louder and more obnoxious the more she drinks, and shortly after Tom gives her a new puppy as a gift, she begins to talk about Daisy. Tom sternly warns her never to mention his wife. Myrtle angrily says that she will talk about whatever she chooses and begins chanting Daisy’s name. Tom responds by breaking her nose, bringing the party to an abrupt halt. Nick leaves, drunkenly, with Mr. McKee, and ends up taking the 4 A.M. train back to Long Island.

**Analysis**

Unlike the other settings in the book, the valley of ashes is a picture of absolute desolation and poverty. It lacks a glamorous surface and lies fallow and gray halfway between West Egg and New York. The valley of ashes symbolizes the moral decay hidden by the beautiful facades of the Eggs, and suggests that beneath the ornamentation of West Egg and the mannered charm of East Egg lies the same ugliness as in the valley. The valley is created by industrial dumping and is therefore a by-product of capitalism. It is the home to the only poor characters in the novel.

The undefined significance of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg’s monstrous, bespectacled eyes gazing down from their billboard makes them troubling to the reader: in this chapter, Fitzgerald preserves their mystery, giving them no fixed symbolic value. Enigmatically, the eyes simply “brood on over the solemn dumping ground.” Perhaps the most persuasive reading of the eyes at this point in the novel is that they represent the eyes of God, staring down at the moral decay of the 1920s. The faded paint of the eyes can be seen as symbolizing the extent to which humanity has lost its connection to God. This reading, however, is merely suggested by the arrangement of the novel’s symbols; Nick does not directly explain the symbol in this way, leaving the reader to interpret it.

The fourth and final setting of the novel, New York City, is in every way the opposite of the valley of ashes—it is loud, garish, abundant, and glittering. To Nick, New York is simultaneously fascinating and repulsive, thrillingly fast-paced and dazzling to look at but lacking a moral center. While Tom is forced to keep his affair with Myrtle relatively discreet in the valley of the ashes, in New York he can appear with her in public, even among his acquaintances, without causing a scandal. Even Nick, despite being Daisy’s cousin, seems not to mind that Tom parades his infidelity in public.

The sequence of events leading up to and occurring at the party define and contrast the various characters in *The Great Gatsby.* Nick’s reserved nature and indecisiveness show in the fact that though he feels morally repelled by the vulgarity and tastelessness of the party, he is too fascinated by it to leave. This contradiction suggests the ambivalence that he feels toward the Buchanans, Gatsby, and the East Coast in general. The party also underscores Tom’s hypocrisy and lack of restraint: he feels no guilt for betraying Daisy with Myrtle, but he feels compelled to keep Myrtle in her place. Tom emerges in this section as a boorish bully who uses his social status and physical strength to dominate those around him—he subtly taunts Wilson while having an affair with his wife, experiences no guilt for his immoral behavior, and does not hesitate to lash out violently in order to preserve his authority over Myrtle. Wilson stands in stark contrast, a handsome and morally upright man who lacks money, privilege, and vitality.

Fitzgerald also uses the party scene to continue building an aura of mystery and excitement around Gatsby, who has yet to make a full appearance in the novel. Here, Gatsby emerges as a mysterious subject of gossip. He is extremely well known, but no one seems to have any verifiable information about him. The ridiculous rumor Catherine spreads shows the extent of the public’s curiosity about him, rendering him more intriguing to both the other characters in the novel and the reader.7

Chapter 3

**Summary**

One of the reasons that Gatsby has become so famous around New York is that he throws elaborate parties every weekend at his mansion, lavish spectacles to which people long to be invited. One day, Gatsby’s chauffeur brings Nick an invitation to one of these parties. At the appointed time, Nick makes the short walk to Gatsby’s house and joins the festivities, feeling somewhat out of place amid the throng of jubilant strangers. Guests mill around exchanging rumors about their host—no one seems to know the truth about Gatsby’s wealth or personal history. Nick runs into Jordan Baker, whose friend, Lucille, speculates that Gatsby was a German spy during the war. Nick also hears that Gatsby is a graduate of Oxford and that he once killed a man in cold blood.

Gatsby’s party is almost unbelievably luxurious: guests marvel over his Rolls-Royce, his swimming pool, his beach, crates of fresh oranges and lemons, buffet tents in the gardens overflowing with a feast, and a live orchestra playing under the stars. Liquor flows freely, and the crowd grows rowdier and louder as more and more guests get drunk. In this atmosphere of opulence and revelry, Nick and Jordan, curious about their host, set out to find Gatsby. Instead, they run into a middle-aged man with huge, owl-eyed spectacles (whom Nick dubs Owl Eyes) who sits poring over the unread books in Gatsby’s library.

At midnight, Nick and Jordan go outside to watch the entertainment. They sit at a table with a handsome young man who says that Nick looks familiar to him; they realize that they served in the same division during the war. The man introduces himself as none other than Jay Gatsby. Gatsby’s speech is elaborate and formal, and he has a habit of calling everyone “old sport.” As the party progresses, Nick becomes increasingly fascinated with Gatsby. He notices that Gatsby does not drink and that he keeps himself separate from the party, standing alone on the marble steps, watching his guests in silence.

At two o’clock in the morning, as husbands and wives argue over whether to leave, a butler tells Jordan that Gatsby would like to see her. Jordan emerges from her meeting with Gatsby saying that she has just heard something extraordinary. Nick says goodbye to Gatsby, who goes inside to take a phone call from Philadelphia. Nick starts to walk home. On his way, he sees Owl Eyes struggling to get his car out of a ditch. Owl Eyes and another man climb out of the wrecked automobile, and Owl Eyes drunkenly declares that he washes his hands of the whole business.

Nick then proceeds to describe his everyday life, to prove that he does more with his time than simply attend parties. He works in New York City, through which he also takes long walks, and he meets women. After a brief relationship with a girl from Jersey City, Nick follows the advice of Daisy and Tom and begins seeing Jordan Baker. Nick says that Jordan is fundamentally a dishonest person; he even knows that she cheated in her first golf tournament. Nick feels attracted to her despite her dishonesty, even though he himself claims to be one of the few honest people he has ever known.

*He had one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life.*

**Analysis**

At the beginning of this chapter, Gatsby’s party brings 1920s wealth and glamour into full focus, showing the upper class at its most lavishly opulent. The rich, both socialites from East Egg and their coarser counterparts from West Egg, cavort without restraint. As his depiction of the differences between East Egg and West Egg evidences, Fitzgerald is fascinated with the social hierarchy and mood of America in the 1920s, when a large group of industrialists, speculators, and businessmen with brand-new fortunes joined the old, aristocratic families at the top of the economic ladder. The “new rich” lack the refinement, manners, and taste of the “old rich” but long to break into the polite society of the East Eggers. In this scenario, Gatsby is again an enigma—though he lives in a garishly ostentatious West Egg mansion, East Eggers freely attend his parties. Despite the tensions between the two groups, the blend of East and West Egg creates a distinctly American mood. While the Americans at the party possess a rough vitality, the Englishmen there are set off dramatically, seeming desperate and predatory, hoping to make connections that will make them rich.

Fitzgerald has delayed the introduction of the novel’s most important figure—Gatsby himself—until the beginning of Chapter 3. The reader has seen Gatsby from a distance, heard other characters talk about him, and listened to Nick’s thoughts about him, but has not actually met him (nor has Nick). Chapter 3 is devoted to the introduction of Gatsby and the lavish, showy world he inhabits. Fitzgerald gives Gatsby a suitably grand entrance as the aloof host of a spectacularly decadent party. Despite this introduction, this chapter continues to heighten the sense of mystery and enigma that surrounds Gatsby, as the low profile he maintains seems curiously out of place with his lavish expenditures. Just as he stood alone on his lawn in Chapter 1, he now stands outside the throng of pleasure-seekers. In his first direct contact with Gatsby, Nick notices his extraordinary smile—“one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it.” Nick’s impression of Gatsby emphasizes his optimism and vitality—something about him seems remarkably hopeful, and this belief in the brilliance of the future impresses Nick, even before he knows what future Gatsby envisions.

Many aspects of Gatsby’s world are intriguing because they are slightly amiss—for instance, he seems to throw parties at which he knows none of his guests. His accent seems affected, and his habit of calling people “old sport” is hard to place. One of his guests, Owl Eyes, is surprised to find that his books are real and not just empty covers designed to create the appearance of a great library. The tone of Nick’s narration suggests that many of the inhabitants of East Egg and West Egg use an outward show of opulence to cover up their inner corruption and moral decay, but Gatsby seems to use his opulence to mask something entirely different and perhaps more profound. From this chapter forward, the mystery of Jay Gatsby becomes the motivating question of the book, and the unraveling of Gatsby’s character becomes one of its central mechanisms. One early clue to Gatsby’s character in this chapter is his mysterious conversation with Jordan Baker. Though Nick does not know what Gatsby says to her, the fact that Jordan now knows something “remarkable” about Gatsby means that a part of the solution to the enigma of Gatsby is now loose among Nick’s circle of acquaintances.

Chapter 3 also focuses on the gap between perception and reality. At the party, as he looks through Gatsby’s books, Owl Eyes states that Gatsby has captured the effect of theater, a kind of mingling of honesty and dishonesty that characterizes Gatsby’s approach to this dimension of his life. The party itself is a kind of elaborate theatrical presentation, and Owl Eyes suggests that Gatsby’s whole life is merely a show, believing that even his books might not be real. The novel’s title itself—*The Great Gatsby*—is suggestive of the sort of vaudeville billing for a performer or magician like “The Great Houdini,” subtly emphasizing the theatrical and perhaps illusory quality of Gatsby’s life.

Nick’s description of his life in New York likewise calls attention to the difference between substance and appearance, as it emphasizes both the colorful allure of the city and its dangerous lack of balance: he says that the city has an “adventurous feel,” but he also calls it “racy,” a word with negative moral connotations. Nick feels similarly conflicted about Jordan. He realizes that she is dishonest, selfish, and cynical, but he is attracted to her vitality nevertheless. Their budding relationship emphasizes the extent to which Nick becomes acclimated to life in the East, abandoning his Midwestern values and concerns in order to take advantage of the excitement of his new surroundings.

Chapter 4

**Summary**

Nick lists all of the people who attended Gatsby’s parties that summer, a roll call of the nation’s most wealthy and powerful people. He then describes a trip that he took to New York with Gatsby to eat lunch. As they drive to the city, Gatsby tells Nick about his past, but his story seems highly improbable. He claims, for instance, to be the son of wealthy, deceased parents from the Midwest. When Nick asks which Midwestern city he is from, Gatsby replies, “San Francisco.” Gatsby then lists a long and preposterously detailed set of accomplishments: he claims to have been educated at Oxford, to have collected jewels in the capitals of Europe, to have hunted big game, and to have been awarded medals in World War I by multiple European countries. Seeing Nick’s skepticism, Gatsby produces a medal from Montenegro and a picture of himself playing cricket at Oxford.

Gatsby’s car speeds through the valley of ashes and enters the city. When a policeman pulls Gatsby over for speeding, Gatsby shows him a white card and the policeman apologizes for bothering him. In the city, Gatsby takes Nick to lunch and introduces him to Meyer Wolfshiem, who, he claims, was responsible for fixing the 1919 World Series. Wolfshiem is a shady character with underground business connections. He gives Nick the impression that the source of Gatsby’s wealth might be unsavory, and that Gatsby may even have ties to the sort of organized crime with which Wolfshiem is associated.

After the lunch in New York, Nick sees Jordan Baker, who finally tells him the details of her mysterious conversation with Gatsby at the party. She relates that Gatsby told her that he is in love with Daisy Buchanan. According to Jordan, during the war, before Daisy married Tom, she was a beautiful young girl in Louisville, Kentucky, and all the military officers in town were in love with her. Daisy fell in love with Lieutenant Jay Gatsby, who was stationed at the base near her home. Though she chose to marry Tom after Gatsby left for the war, Daisy drank herself into numbness the night before her wedding, after she received a letter from Gatsby. Daisy has apparently remained faithful to her husband throughout their marriage, but Tom has not. Jordan adds that Gatsby bought his mansion in West Egg solely to be near Daisy. Nick remembers the night he saw Gatsby stretching his arms out to the water and realizes that the green light he saw was the light at the end of Daisy’s dock. According to Jordan, Gatsby has asked her to convince Nick to arrange a reunion between Gatsby and Daisy. Because he is terrified that Daisy will refuse to see him, Gatsby wants Nick to invite Daisy to tea. Without Daisy’s knowledge, Gatsby intends to come to the tea at Nick’s house as well, surprising her and forcing her to see him.

**Analysis**

Though Nick’s first impression of Gatsby is of his boundless hope for the future, Chapter 4 concerns itself largely with the mysterious question of Gatsby’s past. Gatsby’s description of his background to Nick is a daunting puzzle—though he rattles off a seemingly far-fetched account of his grand upbringing and heroic exploits, he produces what appears to be proof of his story. Nick finds Gatsby’s story “threadbare” at first, but he eventually accepts at least part of it when he sees the photograph and the medal. He realizes Gatsby’s peculiarity, however. In calling him a “character,” he highlights Gatsby’s strange role as an actor.

The luncheon with Wolfshiem gives Nick his first unpleasant impression that Gatsby’s fortune may not have been obtained honestly. Nick perceives that if Gatsby has connections with such shady characters as Wolfshiem, he might be involved in organized crime or bootlegging. It is important to remember the setting of *The Great Gatsby,* in terms of both the symbolic role of the novel’s physical locations and the book’s larger attempt to capture the essence of America in the mid-1920s. The pervasiveness of bootlegging and organized crime, combined with the burgeoning stock market and vast increase in the wealth of the general public during this era, contributed largely to the heedless, excessive pleasure-seeking and sense of abandon that permeate *The Great Gatsby.* For Gatsby, who throws the most sumptuous parties of all and who seems richer than anyone else, to have ties to the world of bootleg alcohol would only make him a more perfect symbol of the strange combination of moral decadence and vibrant optimism that Fitzgerald portrays as the spirit of 1920s America.

On the other hand, Jordan’s story paints Gatsby as a lovesick, innocent young soldier, desperately trying to win the woman of his dreams. Now that Gatsby is a full-fledged character in the novel, the bizarre inner conflict that enables Nick to feel such contradictory admiration and repulsion for him becomes fully apparent—whereas Gatsby the lovesick soldier is an attractive figure, representative of hope and authenticity, Gatsby the crooked businessman, representative of greed and moral corruption, is not.

As well as shedding light on Gatsby’s past, Chapter 4 illuminates a matter of great personal meaning for Gatsby: the object of his hope, the green light toward which he reaches. Gatsby’s love for Daisy is the source of his romantic hopefulness and the meaning of his yearning for the green light in Chapter 1. That light, so mysterious in the first chapter, becomes the symbol of Gatsby’s dream, his love for Daisy, and his attempt to make that love real. The green light is one of the most important symbols in *The Great Gatsby.* Like the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, the green light can be interpreted in many ways, and Fitzgerald leaves the precise meaning of the symbol to the reader’s interpretation. Many critics have suggested that, in addition to representing Gatsby’s love for Daisy, the green light represents the American dream itself. Gatsby’s irresistible longing to achieve his dream, the connection of his dream to the pursuit of money and material success, the boundless optimism with which he goes about achieving his dream, and the sense of his having created a new identity in a new place all reflect the coarse combination of pioneer individualism and uninhibited materialism that Fitzgerald perceived as dominating 1920s American life.

Chapter 5

**Summary**

That night, Nick comes home from the city after a date with Jordan. He is surprised to see Gatsby’s mansion lit up brightly, but it seems to be unoccupied, as the house is totally silent. As Nick walks home, Gatsby startles him by approaching him from across the lawn. Gatsby seems agitated and almost desperate to make Nick happy—he invites him to Coney Island, then for a swim in his pool. Nick realizes that Gatsby is nervous because he wants Nick to agree to his plan of inviting Daisy over for tea. Nick tells Gatsby that he will help him with the plan. Overjoyed, Gatsby immediately offers to have someone cut Nick’s grass. He also offers him the chance to make some money by joining him in some business he does on the side—business that does not involve Meyer Wolfshiem. Nick is slightly offended that Gatsby wants to pay him for arranging the meeting with Daisy and refuses Gatsby’s offers, but he still agrees to call Daisy and invite her to his house.

It rains on the day of the meeting, and Gatsby becomes terribly nervous. Despite the rain, Gatsby sends a gardener over to cut Nick’s grass and sends another man over with flowers. Gatsby worries that even if Daisy accepts his advances, things between them will not be the same as they were in Louisville. Daisy arrives, but when Nick brings her into the house, he finds that Gatsby has suddenly disappeared. There is a knock at the door. Gatsby enters, having returned from a walk around the house in the rain.

At first, Gatsby’s reunion with Daisy is terribly awkward. Gatsby knocks Nick’s clock over and tells Nick sorrowfully that the meeting was a mistake. After he leaves the two alone for half an hour, however, Nick returns to find them radiantly happy—Daisy shedding tears of joy and Gatsby glowing. Outside, the rain has stopped, and Gatsby invites Nick and Daisy over to his house, where he shows them his possessions. Daisy is overwhelmed by his luxurious lifestyle, and when he shows her his extensive collection of English shirts, she begins to cry. Gatsby tells Daisy about his long nights spent outside, staring at the green light at the end of her dock, dreaming about their future happiness.

Nick wonders whether Daisy can possibly live up to Gatsby’s vision of her. Gatsby seems to have idealized Daisy in his mind to the extent that the real Daisy, charming as she is, will almost certainly fail to live up to his expectations. For the moment, however, their romance seems fully rekindled. Gatsby calls in Klipspringer, a strange character who seems to live at Gatsby’s mansion, and has him play the piano. Klipspringer plays a popular song called “Ain’t We Got Fun?” Nick quickly realizes that Gatsby and Daisy have forgotten that he is there. Quietly, Nick gets up and leaves Gatsby and Daisy alone together.

**Analysis**

Chapter 5 is the pivotal chapter of *The Great Gatsby,* as Gatsby’s reunion with Daisy is the hinge on which the novel swings. Before this event, the story of their relationship exists only in prospect, as Gatsby moves toward a dream that no one else can discern. Afterward, the plot shifts its focus to the romance between Gatsby and Daisy, and the tensions in their relationship actualize themselves. After Gatsby’s history with Daisy is revealed, a meeting between the two becomes inevitable, and it is highly appropriate that the theme of the past’s significance to the future is evoked in this chapter. As the novel explores ideas of love, excess, and the American dream, it becomes clearer and clearer to the reader that Gatsby’s emotional frame is out of sync with the passage of time. His nervousness about the present and about how Daisy’s attitude toward him may have changed causes him to knock over Nick’s clock, symbolizing the clumsiness of his attempt to stop time and retrieve the past.

Gatsby’s character throughout his meeting with Daisy is at its purest and most revealing. The theatrical quality that he often projects falls away, and for once all of his responses seem genuine. He forgets to play the role of the Oxford-educated socialite and shows himself to be a love-struck, awkward young man. Daisy, too, is moved to sincerity when her emotions get the better of her. Before the meeting, Daisy displays her usual sardonic humor; when Nick invites her to tea and asks her not to bring Tom, she responds, “Who is ‘Tom’?” Yet, seeing Gatsby strips her of her glib veneer. When she goes to Gatsby’s house, she is overwhelmed by honest tears of joy at his success and sobs upon seeing his piles of expensive English shirts.

One of the main qualities that Nick claims to possess, along with honesty, is tolerance. On one level, his arrangement of the meeting brings his practice of tolerance almost to the level of complicity—just as he tolerantly observes Tom’s merrymaking with Myrtle, so he facilitates the commencement of an extramarital affair for Daisy, potentially helping to wreck her marriage. Ironically, all the while Nick is disgusted by the moral decay that he witnesses among the rich in New York. However, Nick’s actions may be at least partially justified by the intense and sincere love that Gatsby and Daisy clearly feel for each other, a love that Nick perceives to be absent from Daisy’s relationship with Tom.

In this chapter, Gatsby’s house is compared several times to that of a feudal lord, and his imported clothes, antiques, and luxuries all display a nostalgia for the lifestyle of a British aristocrat. Though Nick and Daisy are amazed and dazzled by Gatsby’s splendid possessions, a number of things in Nick’s narrative suggest that something is not right about this transplantation of an aristocrat’s lifestyle into democratic America. For example, Nick notes that the brewer who built the house in which Gatsby now lives tried to pay the neighboring villagers to have their roofs thatched, to complement the style of the mansion. They refused, Nick says, because Americans are obstinately unwilling to play the role of peasants. Thomas Jefferson and the other founding fathers envisioned America as a place that would be free of the injustices of class and caste, a place where people from humble backgrounds would be free to try to improve themselves economically and socially. Chapter 5 suggests that this dream of improvement, carried to its logical conclusion, results in a superficial imitation of the old European social system that America left behind.

Chapter 6

**Summary**

*The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself.*

The rumors about Gatsby continue to circulate in New York—a reporter even travels to Gatsby’s mansion hoping to interview him. Having learned the truth about Gatsby’s early life sometime before writing his account, Nick now interrupts the story to relate Gatsby’s personal history—not as it is rumored to have occurred, nor as Gatsby claimed it occurred, but as it really happened.

Gatsby was born James Gatz on a North Dakota farm, and though he attended college at St. Olaf’s in Minnesota, he dropped out after two weeks, loathing the humiliating janitorial work by means of which he paid his tuition. He worked on Lake Superior the next summer fishing for salmon and digging for clams. One day, he saw a yacht owned by Dan Cody, a wealthy copper mogul, and rowed out to warn him about an impending storm. The grateful Cody took young Gatz, who gave his name as Jay Gatsby, on board his yacht as his personal assistant. Traveling with Cody to the Barbary Coast and the West Indies, Gatsby fell in love with wealth and luxury. Cody was a heavy drinker, and one of Gatsby’s jobs was to look after him during his drunken binges. This gave Gatsby a healthy respect for the dangers of alcohol and convinced him not to become a drinker himself. When Cody died, he left Gatsby $25,000, but Cody’s mistress prevented him from claiming his inheritance. Gatsby then dedicated himself to becoming a wealthy and successful man.

Nick sees neither Gatsby nor Daisy for several weeks after their reunion at Nick’s house. Stopping by Gatsby’s house one afternoon, he is alarmed to find Tom Buchanan there. Tom has stopped for a drink at Gatsby’s house with Mr. and Mrs. Sloane, with whom he has been out riding. Gatsby seems nervous and agitated, and tells Tom awkwardly that he knows Daisy. Gatsby invites Tom and the Sloanes to stay for dinner, but they refuse. To be polite, they invite Gatsby to dine with them, and he accepts, not realizing the insincerity of the invitation. Tom is contemptuous of Gatsby’s lack of social grace and highly critical of Daisy’s habit of visiting Gatsby’s house alone. He is suspicious, but he has not yet discovered Gatsby and Daisy’s love.

The following Saturday night, Tom and Daisy go to a party at Gatsby’s house. Though Tom has no interest in the party, his dislike for Gatsby causes him to want to keep an eye on Daisy. Gatsby’s party strikes Nick much more unfavorably this time around—he finds the revelry oppressive and notices that even Daisy has a bad time. Tom upsets her by telling her that Gatsby’s fortune comes from bootlegging. She angrily replies that Gatsby’s wealth comes from a chain of drugstores that he owns.

Gatsby seeks out Nick after Tom and Daisy leave the party; he is unhappy because Daisy has had such an unpleasant time. Gatsby wants things to be exactly the same as they were before he left Louisville: he wants Daisy to leave Tom so that he can be with her. Nick reminds Gatsby that he cannot re-create the past. Gatsby, distraught, protests that he can. He believes that his money can accomplish anything as far as Daisy is concerned. As he walks amid the debris from the party, Nick thinks about the first time Gatsby kissed Daisy, the moment when his dream of Daisy became the dominant force in his life. Now that he has her, Nick reflects, his dream is effectively over.

**Analysis**

Chapter 6 further explores the topic of social class as it relates to Gatsby. Nick’s description of Gatsby’s early life reveals the sensitivity to status that spurs Gatsby on. His humiliation at having to work as a janitor in college contrasts with the promise that he experiences when he meets Dan Cody, who represents the attainment of everything that Gatsby wants. Acutely aware of his poverty, the young Gatsby develops a powerful obsession with amassing wealth and status. Gatsby’s act of rechristening himself symbolizes his desire to jettison his lower-class identity and recast himself as the wealthy man he envisions.

It is easy to see how a man who has gone to such great lengths to achieve wealth and luxury would find Daisy so alluring: for her, the aura of wealth and luxury comes effortlessly. She is able to take her position for granted, and she becomes, for Gatsby, the epitome of everything that he invented “Jay Gatsby” to achieve. As is true throughout the book, Gatsby’s power to make his dreams real is what makes him “great.” In this chapter, it becomes clear that his most powerfully realized dream is his own identity, his sense of self. It is important to realize, in addition, that Gatsby’s conception of Daisy is itself a dream. He thinks of her as the sweet girl who loved him in Louisville, blinding himself to the reality that she would never desert her own class and background to be with him.

Fitzgerald continues to explore the theme of social class by illustrating the contempt with which the aristocratic East Eggers, Tom and the Sloanes, regard Gatsby. Even though Gatsby seems to have as much money as they do, he lacks their sense of social nuance and easy, aristocratic grace. As a result, they mock and despise him for being “new money.” As the division between East Egg and West Egg shows, even among the very rich there are class distinctions.

It is worth noting that Fitzgerald never shows the reader a single scene from Gatsby’s affair with Daisy. The narrative is Nick’s story, and, aside from when they remake each other’s acquaintance, Nick never sees Gatsby and Daisy alone together. Perhaps Nick’s friendship with Gatsby allows him to empathize with his pain at not having Daisy, and that Nick refrains from depicting their affair out of a desire not to malign him. Whatever the reason, Fitzgerald leaves the details of their affair to the reader’s imagination, and instead exposes the menacing suspicion and mistrust on Tom’s part that will eventually lead to a confrontation.

Chapter 7

**Summary**

Preoccupied by his love for Daisy, Gatsby calls off his parties, which were primarily a means to lure Daisy. He also fires his servants to prevent gossip and replaces them with shady individuals connected to Meyer Wolfshiem.

On the hottest day of the summer, Nick takes the train to East Egg for lunch at the house of Tom and Daisy. He finds Gatsby and Jordan Baker there as well. When the nurse brings in Daisy’s baby girl, Gatsby is stunned and can hardly believe that the child is real. For her part, Daisy seems almost uninterested in her child. During the awkward afternoon, Gatsby and Daisy cannot hide their love for one another. Complaining of her boredom, Daisy asks Gatsby if he wants to go into the city. Gatsby stares at her passionately, and Tom becomes certain of their feelings for each other.

Itching for a confrontation, Tom seizes upon Daisy’s suggestion that they should all go to New York together. Nick rides with Jordan and Tom in Gatsby’s car, and Gatsby and Daisy ride together in Tom’s car. Stopping for gas at Wilson’s garage, Nick, Tom, and Jordan learn that Wilson has discovered his wife’s infidelity—though not the identity of her lover—and plans to move her to the West. Under the brooding eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, Nick perceives that Tom and Wilson are in the same position.

In the oppressive New York City heat, the group decides to take a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Tom initiates his planned confrontation with Gatsby by mocking his habit of calling people “old sport.” He accuses Gatsby of lying about having attended Oxford. Gatsby responds that he did attend Oxford—for five months, in an army program following the war. Tom asks Gatsby about his intentions for Daisy, and Gatsby replies that Daisy loves him, not Tom. Tom claims that he and Daisy have a history that Gatsby could not possibly understand. He then accuses Gatsby of running a bootlegging operation. Daisy, in love with Gatsby earlier in the afternoon, feels herself moving closer and closer to Tom as she observes the quarrel. Realizing he has bested Gatsby, Tom sends Daisy back to Long Island with Gatsby to prove Gatsby’s inability to hurt him. As the row quiets down, Nick realizes that it is his thirtieth birthday.

Driving back to Long Island, Nick, Tom, and Jordan discover a frightening scene on the border of the valley of ashes. Someone has been fatally hit by an automobile. Michaelis, a Greek man who runs the restaurant next to Wilson’s garage, tells them that Myrtle was the victim—a car coming from New York City struck her, paused, then sped away. Nick realizes that Myrtle must have been hit by Gatsby and Daisy, driving back from the city in Gatsby’s big yellow automobile. Tom thinks that Wilson will remember the yellow car from that afternoon. He also assumes that Gatsby was the driver.

Back at Tom’s house, Nick waits outside and finds Gatsby hiding in the bushes. Gatsby says that he has been waiting there in order to make sure that Tom did not hurt Daisy. He tells Nick that Daisy was driving when the car struck Myrtle, but that he himself will take the blame. Still worried about Daisy, Gatsby sends Nick to check on her. Nick finds Tom and Daisy eating cold fried chicken and talking. They have reconciled their differences, and Nick leaves Gatsby standing alone in the moonlight.

**Analysis**

Chapter 7 brings the conflict between Tom and Gatsby into the open, and their confrontation over Daisy brings to the surface troubling aspects of both characters. Throughout the previous chapters, hints have been accumulating about Gatsby’s criminal activity. Research into the matter confirms Tom’s suspicions, and he wields his knowledge of Gatsby’s illegal activities in front of everyone to disgrace him. Likewise, Tom’s sexism and hypocrisy become clearer and more obtrusive during the course of the confrontation. He has no moral qualms about his own extramarital affairs, but when faced with his wife’s infidelity, he assumes the position of outraged victim.

The importance of time and the past manifests itself in the confrontation between Gatsby and Tom. Gatsby’s obsession with recovering a blissful past compels him to order Daisy to tell Tom that she has never loved him. Gatsby needs to know that she has always loved him, that she has always been emotionally loyal to him. Similarly, pleading with Daisy, Tom invokes their intimate personal history to remind her that she has had feelings for him; by controlling the past, Tom eradicates Gatsby’s vision of the future. That Tom feels secure enough to send Daisy back to East Egg with Gatsby confirms Nick’s observation that Gatsby’s dream is dead.

Gatsby’s decision to take the blame for Daisy demonstrates the deep love he still feels for her and illustrates the basic nobility that defines his character. Disregarding her almost capricious lack of concern for him, Gatsby sacrifices himself for Daisy. The image of a pitiable Gatsby keeping watch outside her house while she and Tom sit comfortably within is an indelible image that both allows the reader to look past Gatsby’s criminality and functions as a moving metaphor for the love Gatsby feels toward Daisy. Nick’s parting from Gatsby at the end of this chapter parallels his first sighting of Gatsby at the end of Chapter 1. In both cases, Gatsby stands alone in the moonlight pining for Daisy. In the earlier instance, he stretches his arms out toward the green light across the water, optimistic about the future. In this instance, he has made it past the green light, onto the lawn of Daisy’s house, but his dream is gone forever.

Chapter 8

**Summary**

After the day’s traumatic events, Nick passes a sleepless night. Before dawn, he rises restlessly and goes to visit Gatsby at his mansion. Gatsby tells him that he waited at Daisy’s until four o’clock in the morning and that nothing happened—Tom did not try to hurt her and Daisy did not come outside. Nick suggests that Gatsby forget about Daisy and leave Long Island, but Gatsby refuses to consider leaving Daisy behind. Gatsby, melancholy, tells Nick about courting Daisy in Louisville in 1917. He says that he loved her for her youth and vitality, and idolized her social position, wealth, and popularity. He adds that she was the first girl to whom he ever felt close and that he lied about his background to make her believe that he was worthy of her. Eventually, he continues, he and Daisy made love, and he felt as though he had married her. She promised to wait for him when he left for the war, but then she married Tom, whose social position was solid and who had the approval of her parents.

Gatsby’s gardener interrupts the story to tell Gatsby that he plans to drain the pool. The previous day was the hottest of the summer, but autumn is in the air this morning, and the gardener worries that falling leaves will clog the pool drains. Gatsby tells the gardener to wait a day; he has never used the pool, he says, and wants to go for a swim. Nick has stayed so long talking to Gatsby that he is very late for work. He finally says goodbye to Gatsby. As he walks away, he turns back and shouts that Gatsby is worth more than the Buchanans and all of their friends.

Nick goes to his office, but he feels too distracted to work, and even refuses to meet Jordan Baker for a date. The focus of his narrative then shifts to relate to the reader what happened at the garage after Myrtle was killed (the details of which Nick learns from Michaelis): George Wilson stays up all night talking to Michaelis about Myrtle. He tells him that before Myrtle died, he confronted her about her lover and told her that she could not hide her sin from the eyes of God. The morning after the accident, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, illuminated by the dawn, overwhelm Wilson. He believes they are the eyes of God and leaps to the conclusion that whoever was driving the car that killed Myrtle must have been her lover. He decides that God demands revenge and leaves to track down the owner of the car. He looks for Tom, because he knows that Tom is familiar with the car’s owner—he saw Tom driving the car earlier that day but knows Tom could not have been the driver since Tom arrived after the accident in a different car with Nick and Jordan. Wilson eventually goes to Gatsby’s house, where he finds Gatsby lying on an air mattress in the pool, floating in the water and looking up at the sky. Wilson shoots Gatsby, killing him instantly, then shoots himself.

Nick hurries back to West Egg and finds Gatsby floating dead in his pool. Nick imagines Gatsby’s final thoughts, and pictures him disillusioned by the meaninglessness and emptiness of life without Daisy, without his dream.

**Analysis**

Gatsby’s recounting of his initial courting of Daisy provides Nick an opportunity to analyze Gatsby’s love for her. Nick identifies Daisy’s aura of wealth and privilege—her many clothes, perfect house, lack of fear or worry—as a central component of Gatsby’s attraction to her. The reader has already seen that Gatsby idolizes both wealth and Daisy. Now it becomes clear that the two are intertwined in Gatsby’s mind. Nick implicitly suggests that by making the shallow, fickle Daisy the focus of his life, Gatsby surrenders his extraordinary power of visionary hope to the simple task of amassing wealth. Gatsby’s dream is reduced to a motivation for material gain because the object of his dream is unworthy of his power of dreaming, the quality that makes him “great” in the first place.

In this way, Gatsby continues to function as a symbol of America in the 1920s, which, as Fitzgerald implies throughout the novel’s exploration of wealth, has become vulgar and empty as a result of subjecting its sprawling vitality to the greedy pursuit of money. Just as the American dream—the pursuit of happiness—has degenerated into a quest for mere wealth, Gatsby’s powerful dream of happiness with Daisy has become the motivation for lavish excesses and criminal activities.

Although the reader is able to perceive this degradation, Gatsby is not. For him, losing Daisy is like losing his entire world. He has longed to re-create his past with her and is now forced to talk to Nick about it in a desperate attempt to keep it alive. Even after the confrontation with Tom, Gatsby is unable to accept that his dream is dead. Though Nick implicitly understands that Daisy is not going to leave Tom for Gatsby under any circumstance, Gatsby continues to insist that she will call him.

Throughout this chapter, the narrative implicitly establishes a connection between the weather and the emotional atmosphere of the story. Just as the geographical settings of the book correspond to particular characters and themes, the weather corresponds to the plot. In the previous chapter, Gatsby’s tension-filled confrontation with Tom took place on the hottest day of the summer, beneath a fiery and intense sun. Now that the fire has gone out of Gatsby’s life with Daisy’s decision to remain with Tom, the weather suddenly cools, and autumn creeps into the air—the gardener even wants to drain the pool to keep falling leaves from clogging the drains. In the same way that he clings to the hope of making Daisy love him the way she used to, he insists on swimming in the pool as though it were still summer. Both his downfall in Chapter 7 and his death in Chapter 8 result from his stark refusal to accept what he cannot control: the passage of time.

Gatsby has made Daisy a symbol of everything he values, and made the green light on her dock a symbol of his destiny with her. Thinking about Gatsby’s death, Nick suggests that all symbols are created by the mind—they do not possess any inherent meaning; rather, people invest them with meaning. Nick writes that Gatsby must have realized “what a grotesque thing a rose is.” The rose has been a conventional symbol of beauty throughout centuries of poetry. Nick suggests that roses aren’t inherently beautiful, and that people only view them that way because they choose to do so. Daisy is “grotesque” in the same way: Gatsby has invested her with beauty and meaning by making her the object of his dream. Had Gatsby not imbued her with such value, Daisy would be simply an idle, bored, rich young woman with no particular moral strength or loyalty.

Likewise, though they suggest divine scrutiny both to the reader and to Wilson, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are disturbing in part because they are not the eyes of God. They have no precise, fixed meaning. George Wilson takes Doctor T. J. Eckleburg’s eyes for the all-seeing eyes of God and derives his misguided belief that Myrtle’s killer must have been her lover from that inference. George’s assertion that the eyes represent a moral standard, the upholding of which means that he must avenge Myrtle’s death, becomes a gross parallel to Nick’s desire to find a moral center in his life. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg can mean anything a character or reader wants them to, but they look down on a world devoid of meaning, value, and beauty—a world in which dreams are exposed as illusions, and cruel, unfeeling men such as Tom receive the love of women longed for by dreamers such as Gatsby and Wilson.

Chapter 9

**Summary**

Writing two years after Gatsby’s death, Nick describes the events that surrounded the funeral. Swarms of reporters, journalists, and gossipmongers descend on the mansion in the aftermath of the murder. Wild, untrue stories, more exaggerated than the rumors about Gatsby when he was throwing his parties, circulate about the nature of Gatsby’s relationship to Myrtle and Wilson. Feeling that Gatsby would not want to go through a funeral alone, Nick tries to hold a large funeral for him, but all of Gatsby’s former friends and acquaintances have either disappeared—Tom and Daisy, for instance, move away with no forwarding address—or refuse to come, like Meyer Wolfshiem and Klipspringer. The latter claims that he has a social engagement in Westport and asks Nick to send along his tennis shoes. Outraged, Nick hangs up on him. The only people to attend the funeral are Nick, Owl Eyes, a few servants, and Gatsby’s father, Henry C. Gatz, who has come all the way from Minnesota. Henry Gatz is proud of his son and saves a picture of his house. He also fills Nick in on Gatsby’s early life, showing him a book in which a young Gatsby had written a schedule for self-improvement.

Sick of the East and its empty values, Nick decides to move back to the Midwest. He breaks off his relationship with Jordan, who suddenly claims that she has become engaged to another man. Just before he leaves, Nick encounters Tom on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Nick initially refuses to shake Tom’s hand but eventually accepts. Tom tells him that he was the one who told Wilson that Gatsby owned the car that killed Myrtle, and describes how greatly he suffered when he had to give up the apartment he kept in the city for his affair. He says that Gatsby deserved to die. Nick comes to the conclusion that Tom and Daisy are careless and uncaring people and that they destroy people and things, knowing that their money will shield them from ever having to face any negative consequences.

Nick muses that, in some ways, this story is a story of the West even though it has taken place entirely on the East Coast. Nick, Jordan, Tom, and Daisy are all from west of the Appalachians, and Nick believes that the reactions of each, himself included, to living the fast-paced, lurid lifestyle of the East has shaped his or her behavior. Nick remembers life in the Midwest, full of snow, trains, and Christmas wreaths, and thinks that the East seems grotesque and distorted by comparison.

On his last night in West Egg before moving back to Minnesota, Nick walks over to Gatsby’s empty mansion and erases an obscene word that someone has written on the steps. He sprawls out on the beach behind Gatsby’s house and looks up. As the moon rises, he imagines the island with no houses and considers what it must have looked like to the explorers who discovered the New World centuries before. He imagines that America was once a goal for dreamers and explorers, just as Daisy was for Gatsby. He pictures the green land of America as the green light shining from Daisy’s dock, and muses that Gatsby—whose wealth and success so closely echo the American dream—failed to realize that the dream had already ended, that his goals had become hollow and empty. Nick senses that people everywhere are motivated by similar dreams and by a desire to move forward into a future in which their dreams are realized. Nick envisions their struggles to create that future as boats moving in a body of water against a current that inevitably carries them back into the past.

*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.*

**Analysis**

Nick thinks of America not just as a nation but as a geographical entity, land with distinct regions embodying contrasting sets of values. The Midwest, he thinks, seems dreary and pedestrian compared to the excitement of the East, but the East is merely a glittering surface—it lacks the moral center of the Midwest. This fundamental moral depravity dooms the characters of *The Great Gatsby*—all Westerners, as Nick observes—to failure. The “quality of distortion” that lures them to the East disgusts Nick and contributes to his decision to move back to Minnesota.

There is another significance to the fact that all of the major characters are Westerners, however. Throughout American history, the West has been seen as a land of promise and possibility—the very emblem of American ideals. Tom and Daisy, like other members of the upper class, have betrayed America’s democratic ideals by perpetuating a rigid class structure that excludes newcomers from its upper reaches, much like the feudal aristocracy that America had left behind. Gatsby, alone among Nick’s acquaintances, has the audacity and nobility of spirit to dream of creating a radically different future for himself, but his dream ends in failure for several reasons: his methods are criminal, he can never gain acceptance into the American aristocracy (which he would have to do to win Daisy), and his new identity is largely an act. It is not at all clear what Gatsby’s failure says about the dreams and aspirations of Americans generally, but Fitzgerald’s novel certainly questions the idea of an America in which all things are possible if one simply tries hard enough.

The problem of American dreams is closely related to the problem of how to deal with the past. America was founded through a dramatic declaration of independence from its own past—its European roots—and it promises its citizens the potential for unlimited advancement, regardless of where they come from or how poor their backgrounds are. Gatsby’s failure suggests that it may be impossible for one to disown one’s past so completely. There seems to be an impossible divide separating Gatsby and Daisy, which is certainly part of her allure for him. This divide clearly comes from their different backgrounds and social contexts.

Throughout the novel, Nick’s judgments of the other characters are based in the values that he inherited from his father, the moral “privileges” that he refers to in the opening pages. Nick’s values, so strongly rooted in the past, give him the ability to make sense out of everything in the novel except for Gatsby. In Nick’s eyes, Gatsby embodies an ability to dream and to escape the past that may ultimately be impossible, but that Nick cherishes and values nonetheless. *The Great Gatsby* represents Nick’s struggle to integrate his own sense of the importance of the past with the freedom from the past envisioned by Gatsby.

“Whenever you feel like criticising anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had.” Scott Fitzgerald starts his masterpiece with this quote and I feel like I should follow in his footsteps while starting this review because it straightaway warns us that the story would be filled with diverse characters entangled in complicated situations and in the end, we would be left with a list of characters divided into like and dislike categories. After reading the novel twice, I can firmly say that no two readers would have an identical list as I found myself contradicting my first list after my second read. That being said, I feel that the Great Gatsby is one of the most interesting and informative pieces of fiction I’ve read in a long time. “Informative” is not a common adjective for a fictional story but the way Fitzgerald juxtaposes the imagery of the roaring twenties in his fictional narrative, one cannot deny absorbing some part of America themselves. In its core, the story is a romantic tragedy which revolves around a character who shares his name with the title of this novel. A plethora of themes, symbols and metaphors are employed by the author throughout the story to tickle our brain cells which we shall try to uncover in the paragraphs below.

The Great Gatsby is set in the 1920s which is now fondly remembered as the “roaring twenties”. The Great War was over and America was roaring along the route of economic prosperity. This was the time when the jazz and flapper culture actually grew momentum. The sale of alcohol was not permitted during this time but since humans and alcohol have a bond older than time perhaps, bootlegging business was rampant. Fitzgerald plausibly depicts this era in the background of his story giving us a feel of the America then. A major part of the story takes place in the summer of 1922 in the New York City and Long Island, specifically the fictional towns of East and West Egg which were separated by a sound and housed the wealthiest of families. The route from the West Egg to the New York City was through a town known as the Valley of Ashes which served as the dumping ground of the rich. This contrasting town layout is similar to the upper and lower decks of the ship in the Hairy Ape. The entire novel is written in first person and narrated by Nick Carraway who is essentially an outsider looking in. At times, you’ll find Nick present at the scene and talking about the scene through his eyes whereas at other times, the scene is described by Nick without him being present there. This transition between Nick and Fitzgerald is really subtle and gives a unique flavour to the novel. The tone of the novel keeps shifting from joyful romance to melancholic drama. By the time you finish the novel, you’ll feel as if you’re getting down from an emotion-filled roller-coaster ride.

As I mentioned in the first paragraph itself, the Great Gatsby is a romantic tragedy similar to Romeo and Juliet and would have perhaps been identical in terms of the main plot line had Juliet married Paris whilst she was in love with Romeo. The story starts with our beloved narrator, Nick Carraway, moving into a cottage beside Jay Gatsby’s mansion in the West Egg. In the early parts of the story, Nick’s information about Gatsby is limited to that fact that he is a millionaire who throws extravagant parties for all. Their bond slowly builds up over the course of the story until they become the very best of friends in the end. Nick has a cousin sister by the name Daisy who lives in a mansion in the East Egg along with her husband, Tom Buchanan who serves as the primary antagonist of this story. Now here’s where things get complicated. Tom is cheating on Daisy with another married girl, Myrtle and our protagonist, Gatsby, is madly obsessed with Daisy and wants to win her over at all costs. Consequently, the entire plot hinges on Daisy’s dilemma and can go either way based on her decision. Every good piece of fiction has a climax and so does this story. As you may have already guessed by now, there occurs a battle between Tom and Gatsby with Daisy being the prize. No, not a battle with swords and guns but with words and secrets which we all know can get just as ugly and messy. The climax of this story is the event when Daisy accidentally kills Tom’s mistress. So what happens in the end? I’ve already spoiled the reader of my review enough but I’m sure that the comparisons that I’ve made to Romeo and Juliet as well as the Hairy Ape give you a fairly clear image of the tragedy that befalls our protagonist.

Now that we’re familiar with the setting and the plot, let’s take a look at the diverse cast of characters that Fitzgerald cooked up for this story. We have to start with our narrator Nick Carraway since we’re seeing everything from his perspective. Nick, as most men in the early 1900s, participated in the Great War. His family hailed from the Mid-Western part of America and after his graduation from New Haven in 1915, he moved to the East to study the bond business. He is an epitome of a typical middle class working salaryman who had casual affairs by the side, especially with Daisy’s friend Jordan Baker who is a slender but stern sportswoman with a self-centered attitude and is portrayed as a regular 20th century flapper girl. Nick has a very friendly and understanding personality making people open up to him naturally. As he himself states, “I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known”. He is one of those gifted people who stay by their friends even in the hour of need. The central character of this story is, no surprises here, Jay Gatsby himself. The main question that even the title subconsciously asks is, “Is Gatsby really great?”. When we are first introduced to Gatsby, he seems like a lavish, successful and extravagant person and has, as Nick says, something gorgeous about him. Not only does he reside in a grand mansion, he throws extraordinary parties even for strangers. Mysterious, ain’t it? In the initial pages of the novel, you can’t help but interpret “great” as used for successful historical figures like Alexander or Caesar. But as the story progresses, Nick and therefore we find out about his obsession with a married woman, Daisy and about the fact that his wealth resulted from his bootlegging business. At this point, many of us would have perhaps mockingly enunciated, “Oh! That’s just ‘great’!”, giving another interpretation to the title. All in all, Gatsby is a war veteran who has an extraordinary gift for hope and romantic readiness. He is so passionate about Daisy that we can’t help but award him with the title of Romeo, a quixotic Romeo perhaps. Even though he was born in a poor family, he never let his American Dreams out of his sight and died in pursuit of it. Throughout his life, Gatsby played many different roles and to perfection making us wonder whether Fitzgerald used the term “great” as a stage name like that of the Great Houdini. The story is incomplete without our beautiful Juliet, Daisy Buchanan. She is cynical about most people and acts in a rather superficial manner making it difficult for us to actually interpret her real emotions. She fell in love with Gatsby when he was an officer but moves on to marrying Tom after waiting several years for Gatsby to show up. The lack of responsibility she exhibits after killing Myrtle and her decision to leave Gatsby in the hour of need shows that she is in love with money and material luxury. She is capable of showering genuine affection towards others but not of sustained loyalty. Her husband, Tom Buchanan, unlike Gatsby, comes from a wealthy household and has a sturdy muscled body with an equally arrogant attitude. Arrogance is something that the rich inherit along with their wealth. His single-minded and racist comments puts off people like me who are reading this novel in the 21st century. Swinging his wife in one hand and Myrtle in the other seems natural to him. Myrtle is married to George Wilson who is, fortunately for Tom, a lifeless exhausted worker in the valley of ashes but like Gatsby, wants to pursue the fantasy of love and the American Dream. In my judgement, Myrtle is just trying to elevate her status in the society by running away with Tom.

Being a romantic tragedy, love, marriage and relationships constitute the central theme of the story. Fitzgerald explores many different types of relationships in his narrative. Tom and Daisy and George and Myrtle are the only two couples in the story and both the marriages lack the spark of love and feel more like an advantage than matrimonial unification. Both Tom and Myrtle are unfaithful to their marriage partners and Fitzgerald shows us the melancholic consequences that such relationships yield in the long run. On the sidelines, Fitzgerald also explores casual relationships that people strike up at parties through the lens of Nick. Then we have Gatsby’s all consuming passion for Daisy which is a consequence of their shared history. Gatsby and Daisy’s relationship explores the theme of how our past defines and shapes us. Gatsby’s childish whim of not letting go of the past and moving on with his life takes a heavy toll in the end. Another important theme which is not discussed explicitly but clearly shown in the background is on society and class during the roaring twenties. The diverse imagery that is described through the window of a train ride from the West Egg to NY City says volumes about the conditions that the rich and the poor thrived in. The Valley of Ashes, like the coal deck in the Hairy Ape, represents the moral and social decay that results from the single-minded pursuit of wealth by the upper class. This pursuit of wealth is a part and parcel of the American Dream that everyone wants to achieve but very few can. Gatsby came very close to achieving his dream but ultimately, succumbed to the wrath of the upper class. George, on the other hand, couldn’t even break the shackles that the society had imprisoned him in to take the first step. Clearly, both our hairy apes fail in their endeavour. One interesting thing to note is that almost everyone in the story wears a facade of some sort and lies for convenience. Even our beloved narrator, who tells us to be neutral to people’s characters, ends up clouding his own neutral lens towards the end. To be fair, if everyone in the story was an honest saint, we’d be reading a holy scripture and not a dramatic piece of fiction.

Every writer has some weapons in their arsenal and symbolism is Fitzgerald’s weapon of choice in this story. Symbols and metaphors give a very authentic and satisfying feel to the reader. Nick often finds Gatsby staring at a bright green light present at the dock of the East Egg with his arms trying to reach for it. For Gatsby, this light is the personification of Daisy herself who constitutes a big portion of his American Dream. When Daisy and Gatsby are together for a brief period, this light disappeared from Gatsby’s life. So in general, the green light symbolises his hopes and dreams. Another very clear symbol that Fitzgerald points to multiple times is the billboard poster with the fading, bespectacled eyes of T. J. Eckleburg overlooking the Valley of Ashes. The Valley itself is a symbol depicting the social and moral decay through the plight of the poor resulting from the rich not paying any attention to anything but wealth and luxury. The eyes of T. J. Eckleburg may represent the all mighty God looking down upon the moral wasteland that America has embraced in pursuit of the American Dream. Fitzgerald also takes a lot of liberty with colours. The light that Gatsby chases after is bright green, a colour often associated with hope and liberation. He drives a yellow coloured car which which the author might have used to show his wealth and nobility. Moreover, we often see Daisy, Jordan and Gatsby in white clothes which is a striking contrast to their grey personalities. Speaking of grey, the Valley of Ashes is painted in black and white as though the author wanted us to observe the contrast between the rich and poor societies.