THE INSIDE STORY
Behind the Scenes and Through the Readers' Eyes of the 1920s: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

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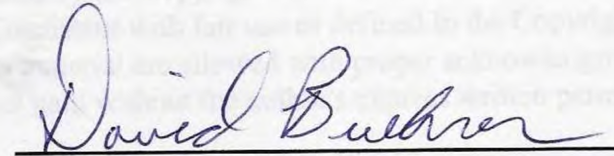

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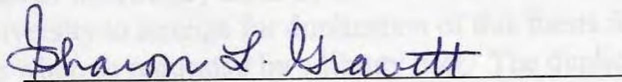

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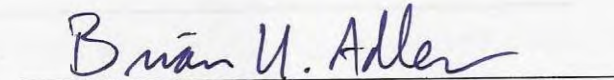

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ABSTRACT

"The Inside Story" traces multiple levels of the history of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Garnering only slight impact at publication in 1925, this study summarizes the novel's rise to a remarkable prominence in the canon of American literature. The novel's popularity increased as everyday knowledge of social and historical experiences from the novel's time period faded from readers' memories, leaving a purely American story imbued with a mythical tale of social and economic disparity. In academia, both Fitzgerald and the novel inspired critical analysis and debate. For teachers, the novel epitomized the critical theory New Criticism, and, today, both novel and author nearly define the literary criticism known as New Historicism.

"The Inside Story" also deconstructs the first person narrative, which Fitzgerald employed effectively in *The Great Gatsby*. The voice in the text breathes familiarity through allusions and references to a superabundance of real world events, people, products and printed materials from the 1920s—thus providing a nearly bottomless well of resources for the corpus of historical study surrounding this novel. For instance, the text exhibits a careless, offhand regard for *Simon Called Peter*, Clay's *Economics*, James J. Hill and *Hopalong Cassidy*. Also, in contrast to the colorful backdrop of major and minor allusions and references, certain people, places and events, such as William G. Harding and William Randolph Hearst, are conspicuously absent from the novel.

"The Inside Story" is distilled from hundreds of hours of reeling through newspaper microfilms, blowing the dust off aged periodicals, and purchasing era-sensitive, out of print books. It recognizes and credits existing scholarly study, with the overall point being the enrichment of the corpus surrounding *The Great Gatsby.*

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DEDICATION

Dr. David Buehrer

Friend and Fearless Leader

CHAPTER ONE

In American literature there are perhaps a half dozen novelists and novels that awaken in everyone a feeling of familiarity. The mere mention inspires from Americans of almost all walks a proverbial headshake and "oh yeah, I know that guy, or I've read that or seen the movie." Also, from these stellar writers and works, people can count on details to be drawn to generate questions for games like *Trivial Pursuit* or even on a near-weekly basis provide answers in one of the categories for *Jeopardy*.

Our list of most familiar novelists and novels is not etched in stone. But most slates likely include John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath.* Also, unlikely ever overlooked would be Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick,* and, of course, Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea.* Veering from mainstays such as those, lists diverge both by novels and novelists—however, a safe bet would be Faulkner and Fitzgerald, maybe even Wolfe, would make a majority of lists.

Obviously, this survey is not scientific. But if such a survey were undertaken, a good wager for one novel to show on almost every list would be *The Great Gatsby,* whether Fitzgerald's name as the author actually hits those lists or not. That novel's title simply sounds American—resonating baritone-like as if from Barnum & Bailey's ringmaster's lips. Also, speaking allegiance-wise, certain thoughts if not comments seem to come to mind almost naturally, like *whatever makes that guy Great has just got to be part of American culture.* Which, in fact, with eyes on the novel's theme, ironically

could not be truer. Aside from the novel's most apparent appeal, one question that seems simply to beg for an answer is the following: what, in fact, as a novel, is it about *The Great Gatsby* that makes it so compelling? So enduring? So American? These questions do not have easy answers. Indeed, volumes of critiques, theses, and dissertations have grappled for an answer. Various educated guesses have been forwarded, which have sustained the novel's popularity in the mainstream. While it is not the intent of this thesis to add yet another layer to existing claims, it is the intent to bring forward to the discussion new historical information about the era from which *The Great Gatsby* sprang. In other words, I intend to shed light on what readers of that era intuitively knew; or, that is to say, what most readers took for granted while reading the novel.

Appropriately, time is the most curious element surrounding *The Great Gatsby*, inside it and outside it. Time: for instance, when, inside the novel and in the fictional sense this and that and such and such happened—or didn't. Also, let us not overlook when Fitzgerald wrote the novel juxtaposed with real world goings-on; and, finally, other facts of how, when, and why *The Great Gatsby* eventually became popular.

Today, *The Great Gatsby* feels barely at all like yesterday—it is still dissected, analyzed, and appreciated in the twenty-first century as if it were contemporary—rather than nearly a century old. Many scholars tie the novel's aura and staying power to the fact that mythically it represents American Culture, which is derived, intentionally or unintentionally, from being shrouded in vagueness and mystery (Bicknell 556, Bruccoli 6-7, Matterson 2). To paraphrase a contemporary leading scholar on *The Great Gatsby* pertaining to myth, Stephen Matterson claims the ingredient behind creating myth is that

the subject and characters should be timeless, always pointing toward the universal, and not limited in anyway to anything so specific as time and place (2).

Truly, an assumption regarding most readers of *The Great* Gatsby is that they probably would not automatically set the novel during the 1920s. Despite allusions in the novel about time, there is, in fact, just one direct reference: a train schedule (68). If readers skimmed past it, this reference, the novel's circumstances, characters, and plot could indeed be fodder straight from today's newspapers.

Consider Fitzgerald's preliminary title, *Among Ash-Heaps and Millionaires* (Bryer 70). Although a title such as this does not exactly put the same exuberance in a reader's mind as *The Great Gatsby* does, it does speak universally about American culture—hence, Fitzgerald's first title would not have necessarily given away the novel's setting or era either. Moreover, even discerning readers find challenge in the novel's significant and hefty ebb and flow of liquor to discern with any degree of certainty that the novel's plot and era is set during Prohibition.

Ironically, when first published in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* was not a brisk mover—measured by the most telltale sign of all—it sold fewer than 25,000 copies and received at best mixed reviews (Gross xi). Not only did *The Great Gatsby* hold forth little for readers during its time, but in the early 1930s, The Modern Library, which gambled on a printing, eventually chose to cancel its run because of low-to-no public interest. Were that not telling enough, "When Fitzgerald died in 1940, the chances of *Gatsby*'s survival might well have seemed slim" (Tredell 7).

But often an artist's stock rises after he dies, and so is the case with Fitzgerald's. In 1941, Scribner's published a volume of Fitzgerald's popular short stories along with

his unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon* and, inexplicably, included *The Great Gatsby,* owing perhaps as much to the number of its pages as to its comparability to *Tycoon.* This time, however, reviews about *The Great Gatsby* were not so mixed. Clifton Fadiman wrote that *The Great Gatsby* was “unexpectedly readable” (qtd. in Bryer 369). James Gray wrote *The Great Gatsby* was a “beautifully articulated piece of craftsmanship” (qtd. in Bryer 358), and Margaret Marshall wrote, “Fitzgerald reached that plateau of objectivity and control in fiction which few American novelists attain” (qtd. in Bryer 364).

To unprecedented demand, Scribner’s began reprinting *The Great Gatsby* with other works of Fitzgerald as well as by itself. Printing-rights were also extended to other publishers such as Viking and Bantam, which included in 1941 an “Armed Services edition in which alone were printed 155,000 copies that were given away free to military personnel” (Tredell 42).

But central to *The Great Gatsby’s* ultimately secure placement into the American mainstream was its acceptance in academia. *The Great Gatsby*, in the 1940s, virtually defined a literary schema, or theory, known as New Criticism, a particular aspect of which happened to fit incredibly well in the real world.

New Criticism all but guaranteed literature professors and English teachers jobs. The theory’s school of thought held “that literary criticism could be a completely self-sufficient discipline … infused with a scientific spirit of analysis” (Selden 3). Essentially, New Critics assumed the role of interpreter and guide for students who were seen then as ill-equipped for venturing forth into well-charted territory. For instance:

> Each major work of literature was seen as a verbal icon, possessing an objectively achieved unity. A great poet [or novelist] creates an aesthetic structure which crystalises [sic] a complex response to a human experience, a response which could not be expressed in other (non-literary) terms. Literary language was regarded as a special form of language which uses specific literary devices (paradox, irony, tension, ambiguity) in order to achieve a concrete image of an otherwise inexpressible experience. (Selden 3)

Today, the profession in America of teaching literature most likely owes its entrenched existence to New Criticism and New Critics. It also should be noted that in the larger picture, *The Great Gatsby* contributed to the profession's entrenchment too, proving that it fit hand-in-glove:

> The 1950s was the golden age of academic literary criticism in America. The profession was expanding, a powerful technique of evaluation and interpretation emerged in the shape of the New Criticism, the teaching and criticism of literature could be felt to be socially and politically important, and there was a desire, in the USA, to construct a canon of great American writers and great American novels. In this context, Fitzgerald studies, and interpretations of *Gatsby* in particular mushroomed. In Fitzgerald, biographers and critics had a writer who had enjoyed a spectacular success and a subsequent failure that was very American but which could also strike a universal chord. In *Gatsby* they had a novel that was eminently

> readable, widely accessible, easily teachable, intricately patterned, and about the American Dream. (Tredell 8)

Talk about dreams? For pedagogy made up of folk who genuinely loved literature and sought only to share it with millions of returning American soldiers who, armed with the G-I Bill and were as eager to attend college as to produce offspring, *The Great Gatsby* must have symbolized the *ALL-TIME* American Dream.

New Critics, in the strictest sense, upheld a formulated, structured approach toward reading a literary work—in fact, they affirmed that the work itself was self-contained in conveying social and moral meaning and that it existed independently from the author. Inevitably this strict approach toward reading a novel was challenged. But in fairness to New Criticism, besides narrowing down viewpoints, it did, in fact, create debate, which in the 1960s, and later on, gave rise to personnel in teaching literature and to the alternative, insightful literary points of view we have today (Selden 3).

The debate over New Criticism opened a wide range of opportunities to read and appreciate an artist's work. As Selden said, it ushered onto the stage a "different way" to read the same old stuff (4). While it might be argued critics of late have adopted a license to rewrite an artist's work, it also can be argued that the work of some artists otherwise might simply have disappeared from the literary forefront.

Today, there are a host of academic approaches or critical theories utilized in teaching literature and employed for personal enjoyment in reading interpretation (Richter v). Such approaches range the gamut from the Romantic classical tradition, where scholars, top-down, teach what they have been taught, to theories like Reader Response, which, in sum, asks the subjective question, "how does this novel make you

feel?" (Selden 2, 10). There is also no shortage for names in between those extremes. For example, on stage for the past few decades are schools of theory such as Russian Formalism, Poststructuralism, Marxism and Feminism.

What is important to understand here about literary theory, or criticism, is that criticism's very existence depends on something beside itself. Something, for instance, that has been created by a writer or a poet—a novel or poem—which, finally, comes only to exist for better or worse in the eye of the beholder.

Stephen Matterson proposes that *The Great Gatsby* is practically a stand-alone example of a novel that "people discuss" and "critics debate," and a novel in which understanding it entirely "depends upon the perspectives from which they have chosen to view it" (xii). He goes on to illustrate the flexibility of the novel in the context of various critical perspectives. But Matterson concludes that in large measure *The Great Gatsby* might actually have created the need for theory where a theory as yet did not exist:

> In short, the critical perspectives that can be adopted towards *The Great Gatsby* are never necessarily fixed; they are always open to change, and it is a testimony to that continuing durability of Fitzgerald's work that we are still debating many of them. (Matterson xii)

Practicing literary theory is ultimately a kind of magnifying glass that readers put across the top of a work. All told, there are a variety of literary theories that potentially enhance every artist's work—helping readers appreciate nuances and define and redefine special meaning, which the author might have intended (or not) and which the passage of time might have worn away. Selden makes this point through example in his seminal work, *Practicing Theory and Reading Literature:*

> Teachers will no doubt wish to assist students to see the ways in which it would be possible to prioritise the questions one might ask about literary texts. For example, reader-response theories may provide useful concepts and methods to assist a materialist study of literature and ideology. After all, for ideology to work at the textual level it must be able to achieve the acquiescence of the reader. In this instance, questions about the reader's response are subordinated to those about ideology. (13)

The point behind this thesis, however, is not to spend time talking about or defining theory, but rather to put some form or another of theory into practice. As already stated, literary theory today spans a wide range, with many newcomers borrowing here and there amongst time-tested theories to new ones.

Most recently, and some might say out on the edge, is a theoretical amalgam of sorts wrapped up innocuously in the term known as "New Historicism," which can also go by the label of Cultural Poetics. For definition, let us not mire in semantics but instead turn straight to the source who coined the term, Stephen Greenblatt. From his piece "Towards a Poetics of Culture," which is included among other scholarly articles in H. Aram Veeser's *The New Historicism*, Greenblatt explains in forthright fashion his choice for the name:

> I collected a bunch of essays and then, out of a kind of desperation to get the introduction done, I wrote that the essays represented something I called a "new historicism." I've never been very good at making up advertising phrases of this kind; for reasons that I would be quite

> interested in exploring at some point, the name stuck much more than other names I'd very carefully tried to invent over the years.
>
> One of the peculiar characteristics of the "new historicism" in literary studies is precisely how unresolved and in some ways disingenuous it has been—I have been—about the relation to literary theory. On the one hand it seems to me that openness to the theoretical ferment of the last few years is precisely what distinguishes the new historicism from the positivist historical scholarship of the early twentieth century. (qtd. in Veeser 1)

Greenblatt's straightforwardness deserves attention. He and others posit that what makes New Historicism unique is that it is "not a theory or a set of doctrines but a practice" (Richter 1204-5). In that context, New Historicism in the literary field might be as something that exists both as a paradigm—encompassing several theories—and a method for implementing literary analysis.

David Richter, a renowned authority on literary theory, propounds that New Historicism is indeed inseparable from "contemporary theory," virtually engulfing all the theories. For instance, inherent in New Historicism, theoretically and methodologically, is the "structuralist realization that all human systems are symbolic and subject to the rules of language, and the deconstructive realization that there is no way of positioning oneself as an observer outside the closed circle of textuality" (Richter 1205). In short, the listener (reader) ultimately interprets meanings of words, and in which those words' meanings change over time, which are inevitably reinterpreted through ears of the listener's own culture: hence, every work is constantly taking on fresh meaning.

Michael Warner, another literary critic, explains that this abstract becomes tangible, as well as worthwhile, when actually put into practice. As such, Warner defines New Historicism this way:

> [It's] a label that historians don't like much because they understand something different from historicism. But nobody's asking historians; the people New Historicists are reacting against are the New Critics, and historicism seems an important term for that purpose because it emphasizes that meaning is established in concrete historical situations. New Historicism has a motto: "The text is historical and history is textual." The first part means that meaning does not transcend context but is produced within it; the second part means that human actions and institutions' relations, while certainly hard facts, are not hard facts as distinguished from language. They are themselves symbolic representations …. (Warner [fn. 2])

It might surprise Warner, but historians are not overly at issue with appropriating "historicism" like he suggests. Once again, turning to Richter to make the point, we find where he paraphrases R. G. Collinwood, whom he dubs "the philosopher of history":

> [He] made it clear several decades before the advent of the new historicism that historians are politically and culturally implicated in the history they write, that their work tells us as much about them as the period they investigate and explore. (fn. 3)

Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse, Essays in Cultural Criticism* makes the - valid case that historians indeed recognize their own inherent bias (27). White goes on to

show that there is a semi-unification or inseparable link between historians and novelists (97-98). For example, while historians aspire to write and convey factual stories—which inevitably are tainted if not fictionalized by the historian's being, place, and time; novelists strive to convey fictional stories, which, likewise, cannot help but be factually influenced by the novelist's being, place and time. Insofar that both strive to tell an interesting story, White contends that "readers of histories and novels can hardly fail to be struck by their similarities" (121). Slaves to language, "all written discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic in its means," which, White aptly concludes, makes historians and novelists inescapably flip sides of the same coin:

> Every fiction must pass a test of correspondence (it must be "adequate" as an image of something beyond itself) if it is to lay claim to representing an insight into or illumination of the human experience of the world. . . . . In this respect, history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation. (White 122)

In writing *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald succeeded admirably in implanting a believable "image of something beyond." For subject matter, Fitzgerald drew upon what was going on in real life, which easily explains why many students and scholars now point to the novel as an historical piece in order to show what life was like during the 1920s in America. Ironically, this may also answer why at the time the novel was published it received such minor interest from the public—essentially, it might not have been different enough from the news.

But as time passed, the novel gradually began to appear fresh and interesting to rank and file readers, particularly in the 1940s. Reviews from that time, which were

referenced above, give us a window through which to see how *The Great Gatsby* began taking root. As time went along, inevitably, companion guides became essential.

Thus, an often-utilized source for teaching *The Great Gatsby* is Dalton and Mary Gross' *Understanding The Great Gatsby: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. Throughout, these authors sift through Fitzgerald's era, the 1920s, seeking from newspapers, magazines, songs, and advertisements time-sensitive material that would likely have been familiar to the reading public in 1925. This approach, besides historically enlightening the reader's appreciation for what was occurring in Fitzgerald's world, illustrates New Historicism in practice versus "old."

New Historicism is attractive to scholars for many reasons, one of which is that the opportunity to delve deeply into the past is virtually endless. Dalton and Mary Gross make this point through example, referring to their own work:

> We will examine some of the major underworld figures and real criminal activities Fitzgerald drew on for his story, including the sort of New York nightlife created by Prohibition. Fitzgerald made skillful use of the scandals of the era—some briefly mentioned or just hinted at—to create the mood and tone he was seeking. Included in this book are documents on one of the worst scandals in the history of American sports, the fixing of the 1919 World Series, and on the greatest political scandal of Warren Gamaliel Harding's administration, the Teapot Dome case. (xxii)

The Grosses continued throughout their work to pose hypothetical questions that were concerned philosophically with what Fitzgerald might be saying about the "human

condition" and the "values of his society" (xiii). They compiled research to support their assumptions, "by examining *The Great Gatsby* in its literary and historical context" (xiii).

But I would argue it is tentative today to apply too strictly anyone's belief about what Fitzgerald might or might not have been seeking regarding his novel's "mood and tone." So much of what there is to know about Fitzgerald and his time is still waiting to be unearthed, and, frankly, always will be. Ronald Berman, in *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*, has said it aptly, "at this distance from the publication of the text a certain amount of archaeology is needed to get on the same level as the original audience" (46).

For curious readers, New Historicism affords an opportunity to chisel away at that past and to bring something new to the discussion of *The Great Gatsby*. Berman summarizes a worthwhile reason why we should continue exploring if we should ever hope in any historical vein today to comprehend *The Great Gatsby*:

> Fitzgerald's text reminds us of the existence of other texts. The enormous, imitative enterprise of mass literacy is perceptibly within the consciousness of characters in his own text. What Tom is hearing we will never know, but we can expect that the ideas of the moment are being read to him, and that they too are soothing and uninflected. More is involved than Norman Rockwell covers. (28-7)

"Rockwell covers" refers to *The Saturday Evening Post*, that All-American magazine about innocent daily life, prayer, and good feelings. This time, for metaphorical value, is highly significant, for Norman Rockwell illustrated covers for the magazine throughout the 1920s. His first issue, in fact, was January 1916, a time when history reflects the United States was at an almighty moment, teetering between

isolationism and, as James W. Peterson aptly observes, when “President Woodrow Wilson … envisioned the international stage as a space for applying a moral perspective” (252).

The theoretical thrust of this work will be an example of New Historicism, as it exists both as a paradigm and a method. This thesis will draw upon an assortment of sub-theories in order to help convey a better understanding of historical findings, particularly historical points in narratology. As a method, this thesis has entailed hundreds of hours of streaming through reel after reel of microfilms of the 1920’s issues of newspapers, and magazines. Also, it has drawn upon “hard to find and out of print” book sources. The goal was always to base research upon and link authentically as possible specific primary sources of the 1920s with original issues of books, magazines and subjects both alluded to and directly referred to by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*.

It is my intention to examine *The Great Gatsby* largely from a New Historical point of view, a dimension of study that is nearly endless for contributing new material. But I also will limit myself from predicting too many times what messages, if any, Fitzgerald might have been trying to deliver to his readers. That speculation, in large part, I will leave for others to conclude—but, hopefully, with newly unearthed findings, I will contribute to the discussion. That *The Great Gatsby* is timeless is easily seen, if also not overly obvious, but it also is only half of the story.

CHAPTER TWO

In large measure, *The Great Gatsby*'s endearing quality might rest behind the way the story is told, which is in the first person. Foremost, the stage on which examining this novel's historical insights, and the era when it was written begins with that character, Nick, our storyteller. It is important that we delve a little into the theoretical aspects of the first person narrative style, for in *The Great Gatsby* the voice that readers hear coming from the pages of the novel bears significantly on the lens through which readers envision and thus understand the story.

First, to state the obvious, note that between the inside and outside covers of the novel are collected pages of purportedly nothing but mere fiction. As fiction, the story coming forth from those pages, while intended to be perceived as sounding credible, in fact, makes no pretense about serving as the most aboveboard tale ever told—any more so, let us say, than the story coming forth from the pages of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. These two novels' narration and others like them uniquely sets them into a distinct category of fictional literature. In part, we read or hear the story entirely from the viewpoint of a fallible, fictional character.

Truly, the character is an abstraction; yet, also, a tangible and honest sounding voice relating a story that he or she, *as a character*, feels is both

important to tell and will be interesting to hear. Arguably, in some dimension, that character exists from the quill, and therefore viewpoint, of the author, but this does not necessarily mean that the character speaks *for* the author. Soon, if not almost immediately into the book, readers forget or overlook or dismiss that this character is, in fact, an author's projection and not the author himself. On the one hand, the authority of the voice of the author feels front and center, while on the other hand, the author is in reality quite distant as the character spins the yarn.

An important relationship exists between the historical information occurring "inside" the story of *The Great Gatsby* and the novel's actual era "outside." From the outset, narrative style bears strongly on understanding the interaction between the two, for the first person narrator's voice is, indeed, like his author's, a product of the times—the 1920s.

One of the best examples in literature that illustrates the fine line that is ever-present between the first person character and the voice of the author—inside the story linked with what is going on outside the story—is found in the first two sentences of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Right off, Huck, the main character and the narrator, introduces himself, and, "darned" if he does not also go on to introduce and even editorialize about his own creator, Mark Twain (which, of course, is really the pseudonym for Samuel L. Clemens). Here is what Huck says:

> You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was

> made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. (Twain 1)

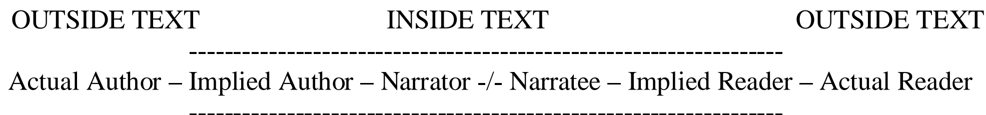
Readers rarely consider the first person's veracity; certainly, in Huck's case, ironically, his own credibility seems to increase by critically drawing attention to the author's, *his author and his creator*.

But there is a great deal more going on here with regard to narration in the theoretical sense than stated in the simple description above. Recall, for instance, *The Great Gatsby* lives on today as if it were current—for it is, if in no other vein, currently read as literature in schools. And consider this: Fitzgerald has been dead for more than sixty years; also, there are a rare few if any folk who are still alive that read this novel when it was first published, more than seventy-five years ago. Despite both instances, there still exists from the novel a familiar tone or voice that is perceived as if *right here and right now*. This bears some explanation.

Turning to Raman Selden's *Practicing Theory and Reading Literature*, we find extant his elucidation that proves beneficial in theory for us to apply to an important narrative passage to *The Great Gatsby*—and, therefore, by extension, throughout the rest of the novel. To begin with, Selden discusses two sub-theories of narratology: Narrative Theory (61-66) and Metaphor and Metonymy (67-72). Both provide a framework for analytically interpreting prose and each also seems to complement the other nicely, shedding light on the cozy, familiar feeling emanating from the novel.

Selden outlines the theory of narration under the broad theory of structuralism by referring to *Figures of Literary Discourse* by Gerard Genette (65, 202): "'narration' is the mode of writing or speaking used in the 'text'" (65, 202). On the surface the definition

seems simple, but it is complex. Graphically reproducing "the formulation" with its definitions (65) will assist in clarifying the theory before applying it to *The Great Gatsby*:



It is important to note at the outset that a structuralist reading does not consider the "actual author's" voice at all. Rather, the theory concerns itself with voices "that communicate the story to us" (65) *from within the text itself*, which accounts for the conundrum where Fitzgerald (or any deceased author for that matter) has long ceased to exist but whose work lives on, reading as if coming directly from him. Additionally, as seen above in the graph, the "implied author's" voice stands all alone also, independent from that of the "narrator's."

Equally disconnected, like the "actual author," at the far right of the continuum is the "actual reader." Again, however, like our "actual author," this entity, despite its disconnect, could easily be perceived both as the original audience from the time of the first publication—themselves, also, perhaps long-gone—as well as any current readers. Narration Theory superimposes two entities through which the "implied author" and "narrator" speak: a "narratee" and an "implied reader"—thus a continuum in which one artificial entity speaks to an assumed other artificial entity. The agent whose perceptions shape the presentation is called the "focaliser" (66).

Therefore, as Selden writes, applying the theory rests entirely upon analyzing the speakers and listeners inside the text. First, the "implied author" is found in the "overall point of view" in a "coherence" that is drawn from "indirect signals" (65). The "implied author's" presence is sensed—overarching and dominating the voice of the "narrator"—

throughout the story itself, in style of then current-day goings-on, as in animate and inanimate objects of the era, such as well known cars and people, which, setting-wise, ground the story in the 'actual."

The "narrator" is simply that "voice that communicates the story to us" (66). In *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator is in the first person and is also a character. So, applying Narrative Theory, we account for Nick Carraway's existence as the invention, and a reliable one, of an "implied author."

There is a "narratee" in *The Great Gatsby*. But it occurs only once, consisting of a single sentence paragraph (134). The "narratee" exists when Nick actually refers to the reader as if he were speaking directly to him or her. In this instance, Nick temporarily breaks away from telling the story and asks a rhetorical question, "What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured?" (34). In this case, the "you" is the "narratee" (Selden 66).

For us to understand the "implied reader," we must note the narrator's subtleties in speech—where the "narrator" assumes there exists knowledge and understanding in "a certain sort of reader" (Selden 65). The "implied reader," therefore, is he to whom the narrator does not speak to directly, but rather indirectly, and to whom the narrator assumes understands particular meanings behind what he is saying, such as peculiar and characteristic things of the times. As analysis will show, *The Great Gatsby* is the type of novel that is arguably enhanced when "actual readers" adopt as their own the frame of mind of the "implied reader," as the listeners of a tale told by Nick Carraway, the first person narrator.

The theory of Metaphor and Metonymy posits that "language is always figurative, whether it is 'poetic' or 'prosaic'" (67)—which, indeed, plays very well in our analysis of narration. For a story told through the mind's eye of an "implied author," who is projecting his story through the voice of a "narrator" toward that of an "implied reader," ultimately encompasses, at the very least, a one-on-one correspondence. The fact that language defines the existence of the narrative continuum, the transmission of ideas to the "implied reader" are in and of themselves merely figures of speech and, therefore, metaphorical.

But Selden takes this rationale a step further: the "actual author" and "actual reader" indeed exist on the outside of the continuum, where neither plays an entirely passive role. As Selden describes, "A literary sociology informed by structuralism recognizes the 'textuality' of every discourse" (72); there exists, therefore, "time-travel" of sorts—while of course not bodily, nevertheless, mental images of today give creation to mental images from the past. And this continuum will forever play itself out each time a reader opens the novel and begins to read it, and at different points in his life, too.

We will see where this significantly affects *The Great Gatsby* and supports Selden's opinion directed toward the critics of structuralism, who claim that "a structuralist position cuts off literature from its historical and social roots by denying it the power to represent an external reality" (64). Selden argues that through metaphor, the "outside" in the text is present, internalized in the mind of the metaphoric listener while being informed by the metaphoric narrator.

In effect, what is occurring in the story "inside" *The Great Gatsby* is analogous to real world society but stands alone as an anecdote in its own right, or as existing as

something that is self-enclosed. The actual author, while indeed absent in the narrative continuum of structuralism, imparts to the actual reader "already existing systems of meaning" (72) within the tightly confined theory of narration itself.

It is from the implied "outside" real world that we, and certainly the metaphorical speakers and listeners inside the story, are expected to turn keen eyes. Selden can be said to be asking in his analysis of structuralism whether there exists an important aspect occasionally overlooked: what, for example, do the "narratee" and the "implied reader" come to know from the "implied author's" and the "narrator's" story?

The basis for the answer, whether in poetry or prose, grows from the outside, although it is shown to exist exclusively inside the story. Structuralist Theory posits around the center of the narrative continuum at least two views. Yet, neither can be said to exist entirely inside the "implied author/narrator's" and the "narratee/implied reader's" world—in so far that what's meaningful depends on knowledge actualized by the (real) "actual author" and (real) "actual reader." Narrowing the analysis to the continuum provides an opportunity to read the work in a way that focuses attention especially on the structure inside the story itself—yielding, in particular, a viewpoint exclusive to the creation of the art.

Let us briefly consider the following passage from Chapter 1, fifth and sixth paragraphs in *The Great Gatsby* from the point of view of the "implied author," "narrator," and "implied reader":

> My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations. The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of

> Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother, who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War, and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on to-day.
>
> I never saw this great-uncle, but I'm supposed to look like him—with special reference to the rather hard-boiled painting that hangs in father's office. I graduated from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father, and a little later I participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War. I enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly that I came back restless. Instead of being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe – so I decided to go East and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I supposed it could support one more single man. All my aunts and uncles finally said, "Why – ye-es," with very grave, hesitant faces. Father agreed to finance me for a year, and after various delays I came East, permanently, I thought, in the spring of twenty-two. (8-9)

The second word of the first sentence of the first paragraph in the novel actually establishes the fact that the novel is using a first person narrator: it begins "In my…" (7). But for the sake of analyzing these two paragraphs out of context, let us note that the first word in our first paragraph re-establishes this narrator. So, behind the narrator's voice, we have an implied author asserting the storyteller. It is here, however, that for the first time the implied author *names* his main character—NO, it is not Gatsby, but Carraway—

the first person narrator. It is *Carraway's* main character that is in fact named "Gatsby." But, from the voice of the implied author, the main character is indeed simply Carraway.

And it is from *Carraway's* point of view that the story unfolds—raising the question, *to whom, as a character, is he speaking*? The obvious answer, *I, the reader*, is actually not correct. Carraway is speaking to an *implied reader*, a person whom he *assumes* will relate to real-world details that exist below the surface of his speech. Hence, the novel's implied author immerses himself within Carraway's voice, who then goes on to further define the implied reader to whom he is speaking.

An interesting aside here is that the implied reader does not learn Carraway's first name, which is, of course, "Nick," until later on in the first chapter. And, interestingly, Nick introduces his first name through the action and speech of one of *his* characters: "Tom Buchanan … rested his hand on *my* [italics added] shoulder.

"'What you doing, Nick'?" (14).

These two paragraphs convey to the implied reader a great deal of information—both about Nick as a character and the locale and era around which Nick intends to establish a setting. Thus, the implied author lays the novel's groundwork through implication—in other words, through metaphor in Nick as a creation and through Nick as a voice.

Throughout these two paragraphs, Nick endeavors to prove himself a companion to the implied reader through the voice of familiarity—relating with the implied reader, and vice versa. Nick speaks to that person (the implied reader) who intuitively understands phenomena of the time, absent explicit definitions or textual notes. For instance, relating in tone and facts that: "The Carraways are something of a clan [tongue in cheek]; "a substitute to the Civil War" [let somebody else fight]; "hard-boiled

painting" [his own likeness with his great uncle's portrait]; "delayed Teutonic migration"; "the Great War"; "enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly"; and, "the ragged edge of the universe," all in metaphors, indeed, overall, that a bond salesman probably wouldn't use.

But, continuing in that vein, Nick paints a character sketch of "all" his aunts and uncles who approved in laughably democratic form that he head East into the bond business: "Everybody I knew [was in it] … finally [they said] 'Why – ye-es' with grave, hesitant faces" (9). So, with Nick leading the way, the implied reader follows him "East, permanently, I thought, in the spring of twenty-two" (9). Thus, established in metaphor but backed with facts (metonymy), the implied author truly begins to fade into the background (seducing us, so to speak); having finally turned over the story to Nick to tell, we also forget it is really not Fitzgerald's voice and style, too.

It is here we enter the gray area of fiction seen through the eyes of structuralists. Selden argues in his chapter regarding structuralism that while stories (poetry or prose) lend themselves to analysis strictly within viewpoints found in the text itself, the social and cultural realities of the surrounding world cannot help but play a role. That role defines itself through the implied author and implied reader. *The Great Gatsby* does not pour itself from Carraway's voice either from or into a vacuum. The "spring of twenty-two" was a real year. The "Teutonic migration", "Great War," "counter-raid," and coming back from it "restless", were all "real things." The "East" also was a real place, and "bond trading" was a real business, thus linking historical and fictional realities on the same plane and level.

The story diverges into fiction through interpretation—by Carraway—around the edges of metonymy yet spoken in the voice of metaphor, for "the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edges of the universe" (9). Carraway's portrayal, by contrast, no doubt spoke volumes into the hearts and minds of actual readers, from none other than the pen of the actual author, Fitzgerald.

Regardless of the confines behind the narrative continuum, structuralism helps fulfill in its own right interpretation of a work such as *The Great Gatsby*. Carraway's voice is always current—not with respect to overlaying the spring of 1922 clear across the years of the twenty-first century, but rather from delving into the minds of the narrator and the implied reader to unveil a past that is presented by the implied author.

Selden arguably qualifies that aspects of structuralism coexist within narration, showing the "outside" is really "inside," insofar that it is "representing in different ways already existing systems of meaning" (72). While, indeed, under Structuralist Theory, freelancing biographical input of the real author and reader into the continuum is outside its bounds (72), that is not to say in order to understand the viewpoint of the implied author, narrator, and implied reader, that social and cultural history of the era does not have its place.

Within the overall context of New Historicism, bolstered by structuralist theory of narration linked with metaphor and metonymy, there is an infinite sum of fresh historical information to uncover. So, let us undertake a quasi-archeological, real world journey in time back to the era centered within the context of *The Great Gatsby*, delving into its implicit and explicit historical underpinnings and background stories.

CHAPTER THREE

> Once I wrote down on the empty spaces of a timetable the names of those who came to Gatsby's house that summer. It is an old timetable now, disintegrating at its folds, and headed "This schedule in effect July 5th, 1922 … " (Fitzgerald 57)

Nick Carraway, our first person narrator in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, primarily makes it clear from the quote above that a horde of people dined on Jay Gatsby's generosity, which he goes on tongue in check to list by name in the ensuing paragraph. Not so clear, however, is that Nick Carraway's story, as it actually unfolds, is set during the summer of 1922—in spite of his saying so directly at the narrative outset, "I came East, permanently, I thought, in the spring of twenty-two" (9).

Logical analysis within the text yields that Nick's story's setting indeed begins then; it is important to establish this point. Incidentally, nowhere else throughout the novel does Fitzgerald, or Nick, the narrator, indicate a day-date so specifically as in the opening quote above. Almost all other references are largely implied. Also, as Nick speaks, or writes, we have two time frames in play here: one, in which Nick exists in current time, where we have a feeling he is talking to us, and, the other, which he is reflecting upon, or telling us about. Because these time frames are closely and physically related to each other, we get a sense or feeling of currency and urgency—a feeling, so to speak, that the story Nick is telling is happening right now. Turning to the text, let us establish the novel's settings, which in many respects at first glance are not obvious.

First, considering the "timetable" is "old" can suggest a long time ago, or that it simply is no longer current. Just as well, "old," while of course implying time, can be mixed with distance, for instance the fact that Nick has returned to Minneapolis, where he writes or tells his story to us in 1923 and 1924. Nick says, "When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever," which would make it 1923 (8). Finally, wrapping up his story, Nick begins, "After two years I remember the rest of that day, and that night and the next day," which would now mean the year is 1924 (144). In the context of the real world, upon which this novel's plot both revolves and depends, that Nick might be writing or speaking other than in 1923 and 1924 would have seemed to readers of the time implausible, for Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* was first published in early 1925.

It is subtle time references, however, like spring, summer, and autumn, that bear significantly on establishing the novel's settings, and which today requires piecing together to understand that the story Nick is telling is indeed set in 1922 and the other, at the time he tells it, in 1923 and 1924.

What is required here is an historical journey, outlining events that happened beforehand and afterwards. Piecing together various time-gaps in dialogues and turning to Nick's sometimes-intimate narrative, readers can discern that the story's primary setting occurs decisively during the summer of 1922. In context of the broader picture of the story, place and time prove essential, both inside and outside the novel.

As day and dates that are implied are concerned, yet prove truly important, from Nick we learn that Jordan Baker recalled that Daisy "had her debut after the Armistice, and in February she was presumably engaged to a man from New Orleans" (69).

"Armistice" is a fixture in time referring to the landmark day in World War I when weapons were laid down and warfare stopped on November 11, 1919. Afterward, in the real world, everyone alive could hauntingly recite where they were at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1919.

So Daisy, engaged in February 1920, presumably to a gent from New Orleans, "In June [instead] married Tom Buchanan of Chicago" (69-70). The man from New Orleans might or might not suggest Gatsby (in fact, he was stationed in England [133])—irrespective, the relationship ultimately proved doomed by disparity of status, if not the added prospect that Daisy married up, to Tom Buchanan (134).

Backtracking from 1920, Jordan Baker also recalled the first time Daisy ever spoke to her in combination with a significant stage-setting fact. They both hailed from Louisville, and "One October day in nineteen-seventeen … [Daisy] was just eighteen" (68) and was starry-eyed over "'the officer [who] looked at [her] … in a way that every girl wants to be looked at … his name was Jay Gatsby'" (69). By deduction, in 1920, Daisy would have been about twenty when she married Tom (71), which was a time, Nick narrates, when "She wanted her life shaped … immediately—and the decision must be made by some force—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—that was close at hand" (134).

Considering the story in the context of Nick's narrative, this overall rationale fits with other facts generally relating to age and circumstance, such as Daisy's and Tom's daughter, approximately three, introduced to Nick when he comes to dinner at their home on East Egg in early spring of 1922 (12). Importantly, however, Nick goes to dinner there shortly after arriving "East" and finding a house to rent on the low-rent side of the

harbor from Tom and Daisy (11). His house, "an eye-sore," amounts to no more than servant-quarters sitting right next door to Gatsby's monstrosity, a gaudy, nouveau-riche statement of success "in one of the strangest communities in North America" (10).

From Nick we learn that according to Jordan Baker it is while he attended Tom and Daisy's dinner that Daisy first becomes critically aware that her former love, Gatsby, is nearby:

> "Well, about six weeks ago, [Daisy] heard the name Gatsby for the first time in years. It was when I asked you—do you remember?—if you knew Gatsby in West Egg. After you had gone home she came into my room and woke me up, and said: 'What Gatsby?' and when I describe him—I was half asleep—she said in the strangest voice that it must be the man she used to know. It wasn't until then that I connected this Gatsby with the officer in [Louisville]." (71)

Thus, indirectly, Nick himself sets in motion during the summer of 1922 not just the intrigue of a clandestine relationship between Daisy and Gatsby, which ends with fatal consequences, but also a story cast against a backdrop of a tumultuous era of the real world in transition. Indeed, it was an historical time that has proven a bookend kind of era, one stretching between a rigid pre-World War I isolationism, moral-stationary style of existence against a reject-everything-old mindset of the early 1920s. It was an era, in fact, that portended incredibly changing times, and America would never again be the same as it was before (Cowley 47).

What better to illustrate the feeling than the facts outlining the life of James Gatz, Jay Gatsby's legal name (88), which, in context, also eventually added up to 1922. Gatz at seventeen—by deduction, 1907 (88-90)—dropped out of a "small Lutheran college" in

"southern Minnesota," and by happenstance endeared himself to Dan Cody, a free-loving, drinking, multi-millionaire-miner (90). As Nick tells us, James Gatz, of North Dakota, changed his name to Jay Gatsby "at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career" (90). On that occasion Gatsby advised Cody about the subtleties of tidal shifts at a critical spot in Lake Superior—where, in reality, ebb and flow generally occurs swiftly and is as varied as a six-foot man is tall (GLIN). Cody, it turns out, at that spot in Lake Superior proved anchored in the most ironic of sites for Gatsby to meet him: a fictional place called "Little Girl Bay" (90).

When Gatsby's age is added up he is twenty-seven at the time he meets Daisy in Louisville in 1917 (90-91, 130-31). She is eighteen. Apart from their age difference, Gatsby surmises while telling Nick, "'she was in love with me,'" because "'She thought I knew a lot because I knew different things from her'" (132). For the first half of the previous ten years, 1907-1917, Gatsby had acted as attaché and captain for wild and woolly Dan Cody, sailing throughout the Caribbean and investing himself in service to him, which, upon Cody's death, only momentarily told of financial return. For in the latter half, after Cody died, his widow successfully nullified an intended twenty-five thousand-dollar inheritance left by Cody to Gatsby, rendering him penniless (91).

Tying together Gatsby's recollection of when he and Daisy were together in 1917 with Jordan Baker's account of when Gatsby looked deeply upon Daisy the way all girls would have liked (69), we have only yet to consider Nick's important narrative perspective on this relationship. His judgement is neither kind nor gentle, but is illustrative of a blue-blooded era intent on keeping its line pure:

> But he knew that he was in Daisy's house by a colossal accident. However glorious might be his future as Jay Gatsby, he was at present a penniless young man without a past, and at any moment the invisible cloak of his uniform might slip from his shoulders. So he made the most of his time. He took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously—eventually he took Daisy one still October night, took her because he had no real right to touch her hand. (131)

Nick tells us that Gatsby confessed to him that Daisy, at eighteen, was "the first 'nice' girl he had ever known" (131). Moreover, Gatsby had traded on a "false sense of security," instilling in Daisy a sense that he had a "comfortable family standing behind him" (132), when, in reality, "he was liable at the whim of an impersonal government [in 1917] to be blown anywhere about the world" (132). Which he was, but despite love letters back and forth between them across the ocean during the war, Daisy, back home among her own, "began to move again with the season [early spring of 1920]" (133). As much a case of far-away distance as status, Gatsby "After the Armistice … reassured that she was doing the right thing after all" (133).

Returning now to the opening quote beginning this discussion, Nick's reference that the timetable is "disintegrating at its folds" can suggest instead not age, but use. For instance, from one pocket to the next, Nick might have frequently resorted to it during his numerous trips back and forth from West Egg to New York, and then eventually on home again with it to Minneapolis (8).

Hugh Kenner, in *A Homemade World*, cites the same quote in our discussion at the start of this chapter as an example of Nick's ironic "purity of vision" compared to Gatsby's (39). Kenner makes this point based on Nick's farcical list of "extraordinary

names" (39). Using this passage as the example, Kenner contends that Fitzgerald's narrator, Nick, constructs the entire novel as an artificial world built on a factual foundation not at all unlike the "unreal," yet "real," world of the twenties. The reasoning behind this construct, Kenner says, is to "authenticate the work of fiction" (40). Kenner, to paraphrase his extension of logic, asserts that Fitzgerald, through Nick, intentionally projects—as a sign of the times—the "unreal as real" (40).

Kenner's perspective on the "real world" of the twenties—and as he attributes it to exist in *The Great Gatsby*—is itself an excellent construct to build upon. For example, there exists the possibility that Fitzgerald did not *randomly* choose "July 5th, 1922," as his sole, only, and specific date of reference. As a literary critic, working on this hunch like an investigative reporter through the microfilms of *The New York Times*, I discovered an unexpected and enlightening correlation.

With what, we might ask, would have Nick been treated had he read *The New York Times* on that specific Wednesday, July 5th, 1922—say, for example, on his train ride into work? On the front page, first column, is none other than a real life story about one of history's best (or worst) living examples of duplicity, skullduggery, graft, and ironic tragedy of the early 1920s. There, and in four more full columns on page ten, is President William G. Harding's 4th of July day speech, practically verbatim.

Harding delivered his speech in Marion, Ohio, his hometown, where, he said, he first arrived as a youngster on the back of a mule and now returns in a limousine as the President of the United States. For readers of the early twenties if it seemed Fitzgerald's fictional character, Jay Gatsby, had been touched by the "Horatio Alger" wand, then in real life it must have seemed William G. Harding had been whipped plum silly with it.

At this juncture, before getting into more of the contents of Harding's speech (which from a socioeconomic view overlays *The Great Gatsby* nicely), let us pause for a moment and reflect on what historians consider important to remember about Harding. Let us also bear in mind as we reflect that Fitzgerald/Nick was indeed living during the very era of the novel's depiction.

By way of introduction into that realm of history, it is worthwhile to link the world of fiction (in the quote that will follow) with what clearly seems to express why *The Great Gatsby*, in rather timeless fashion, has endured in both disciplines: "*The Great Gatsby* ... delineates no single world view, but the vortex of past, present, and future conditions of man in one venue" (Buehrer 19). And, from Richard Lehan, "Fitzgerald's novel not only caught the sense of the past, it at times caught the sense of the future" (7).

Thus, from *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia* (quoted here for the maximum effect of what general and obvious information there is available about Harding), we uncover the following. Harding was "elected on a Republican platform [of which he and it were handpicked] from what would soon become known [coldly] as the 'smoked filled room.'" His platform was "one pledging a nostalgic 'return to normalcy' following World War I; [however,] widespread corruption permeat[ed] his loosely run administration, [and] he died unexpectedly [if not mysteriously] during his third year in office [August 2, 1923]."

A notably relevant fact relating Harding with *The Great Gatsby* is that although Harding was dead when Scribner's published the novel in 1925, Harding was quite alive during the summer of 1922. Also that summer, Harding was fending off criticism over "favoritism" lavished on "cronies," such as "the oil Reserves, or Teapot Dome Scandal,

in which federal oil reserves had been secretly leased by Secretary of the Interior, Albert B. Fall, to [Harding's] associates in the business world" ("Harding"). It is against this backdrop of real world historical events and corruption that we have in play Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and, as Richard Lehan aptly characterizes, "*The Great Gatsby* suggests rather than develops the era of the twenties" (2).

Reviews from the era of the twenties agree with Fitzgerald's realistic and timely depictions. For instance, *The Great Gatsby* represents "one phase of the great grotesque spectacle of our American scene"; according to the book review posted in *The New York Times* on April 19, 1925 (Clark). Furthermore, the review continues, *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates "a conflict of spirituality caught fast in the web of our commercial life [and] discloses in … people a meanness of spirit, carelessness and absence of loyalties." Equally, William Rose Benet, writing for the *Saturday Review*, addresses *The Great Gatsby* as "An Admirable Novel" (739). And, like the review from *The New York Times*, Benet especially links the novel with the era, expressing—so to speak—that life's current percolation smells rotten:

> Fitzgerald surveys the Babylonian captivity of this era unblinded by the bright lights. …. The mystery of Gatsby is a mystery saliently characteristic of this age. … And Tom Buchanan … is an American university product of almost unbearable reality. (739)

Conspicuously absent, yet so otherwise front page newsworthy in the real world in 1922, William G. Harding's name is never mentioned in *The Great Gatsby.* Yet, like Jay Gatsby's and Nick Carraway's migration from the Midwest to the city (east), Harding's July 4th speech makes whoopee over being country, while at the same time, of

course, he has just returned for a visit after actually having migrated to D. C. and (apparent) success. This phenomenon is in keeping with Richard Lehan's analysis in *The City in Literature*, where he posits, "The city plays an immensely important role in *The Great Gatsby* because it marks the last link in a historical process from feudalism to modernism" (209). In subtle conflict—in the real world as in *The Great Gatsby*—are the earthy values of rural, Midwestern America, as Stavola says, "Nick possesses a sturdy set of ethical norms" (132), and while what Lehan describes as "the city takes [in] its being from money" (213).

The answer as to why Fitzgerald might not have directly referred to Harding could lie in what Brian Way says in *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction*:

> The War had made people tired of great causes [here he quotes Fitzgerald]; "[we were] cynical rather than revolutionary. Even the corruption of President Harding's administration … could only arouse a momentary concern once this attitude had established itself." (12)

Hence, the necessity, if not the will, behind why Fitzgerald chose to "suggest" rather than glaringly expose Harding's foibles.

The New York Times cites, among other things, that on this July 4th, Harding, for the first time during his administration, "referred publicly to the prohibition amendment": Harding defends it. For a man representing a philosophical platform that seeks a "return to normalcy," Harding characterizes the amendment in an uncommon and ironic way:

> "The Eighteenth Amendment," said the President, "denies to a minority a fancied sense of personal liberty, but the amendment is the will of America and must be sustained by the Government and public opinion,

else contempt for the law will undermine our very foundation." ("Harding Declares")

Perhaps the most interesting fact to note about his remark is that should "public opinion" fail in contributing to "sustain" the amendment, then the bedrock of the American system could crumble. Ironically, Harding himself was a boozer, memorialized for it, no less, than by another Ohioan James Wright, a Pulitzer Prize wining poet, in 1972 (119-121). As far as illustrating public opinion, *The Great Gatsby*, a transparency of the era itself, ebbs and flows liquor among each and every one of the characters with unabashed freedom, as if the amendment never existed. That is to say, all of the characters *except* Jay Gatsby, who doesn't drink from rational choice but is, ironically, the supplier—and a capitalist—on behalf of all those who do.

Compounding the irony behind Harding's personal declaration in speech is the added mention that distances himself—"the White House"—from his Secretary of War's "recently declared [support] for the sale of light wines and beer" ("Harding Declares"). In reality, no amendment could have been further away from the beaten path of the majority, a majority that Harding insultingly characterizes as undertaking "a fancied personal liberty."

Segueing from his passionate remarks on the subject of prohibition, Harding launches into a warning about insuring "the right to work and live by that work." This, ironically enough, understates "the mine massacre at Herrin, Ill." There, on June 22, 1922, armed striking coal union laborers purportedly ushered working non-union miners away from the mines, and, once in the open, told them to run: then they opened fire, killing more than 20. Amidst incredibly conflicting accounts of the incident, this ugly

chapter in American history played itself to the conclusion that there were no convictions, despite 214 indictments which were issued quickly after the slaughter ("Herrin").

From *The Great Gatsby*, the image of "ashes" and George Wilson's self annihilation—after, of course, being aimed by Tom Buchanan (who gets off, too) as the instrument of destruction of Jay Gatsby—come vividly to mind. Moreover, let us look closer at the date when the non-union miners were slaughtered: June 22, 1922. That, in fact, was the equinox, the longest day of the year, the day in *The Great Gatsby* when Daisy wonders aloud what they ought to be doing on that day (16).

Over the years in literary criticism much has been said about the "green light" (159) in *The Great Gatsby* as a symbol. In its trimmed-down form, even including Nick Carraway's accounting, Jay Gatsby is simply reaching for something that is past. Should the instance of either that which is in history or fiction requires a "green light," as if signaling "go," Marius Bewley rightly says, "the whole being of Gatsby exists only in relation to what the green light symbolizes" (qtd. in Stavola 139).

And lo, so it is that Harding on July 4th invokes the memory of the "fearless colonists … for their surpassing bequest of liberty and nationality;" and, along with them, "the builders of the West, the men and women who marched with the 'westward star of empire.'" Could, perhaps, this too not have taken on similar significance in Fitzgerald's narrator's accounting for "West Egg and East Egg?" This is an instance, ironically, where the migration is reversed, Westerners heading East. Certainly, by the novel's end Nick invokes the memory of the arrival of Dutch sailors at Long Island—and of his own era, when he says, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (159).

Dipping down in Harding's speech to nearly its conclusion, we find an ironic declaration espousing, and yet linking, fiction and fact:

> We are morally better than when we began. If there is seeming excess of exploitation, profiteering, dishonesty and betrayal it is only because we have grown larger, and we know the ills of life and read of them more than the good that is done. We need truth, only the truth, the wholesome truth, as the highest aid to Americanization and the manifestation of highest patriotism.

Janet Giltrow and David Stouck, in their essay, "Style as Politics in *The Great Gatsby*," contend that the novel's staying power is linked to "proverbial generalizations about human nature and human experience drawn from long reflection on the order of things" (486). That being so, they would probably not take issue with including Harding's last quotation with what they call Nick's similar "generalizations about life" (486). Substantiating their assertion, they say, "Maxims … convey a speaker's claim to knowledge, his or her access to established authority … [and are] grounded in paternal authority and wisdom" (486-87). Relying on the "truth" about what Giltrow and Stouck speak (and it is plausible) raises for illumination the most glaring irony in Harding's speech, when he says:

> My one outstanding conviction, after sixteen months in the Presidency, is that the greatest traitor to his country is he who appeals to prejudice and inflames passion, when sober judgment and honest speech are so necessary to firmly established tranquility and security.

Although Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* would not fall at first blush into Harding's definition of "treasonous," the work nevertheless when it was published fits the paradox. *The Great Gatsby* clearly illustrates the antithesis of "Americanization," or the death of the "American Dream," considering Gatsby gets shot where with the Horatio Alger phenomenon "poor boy makes good" ("Alger"). Applying Harding's logic of what makes for good citizenship, *The Great Gatsby* unmistakably illustrates ironic examples where unbridled corruption yields good profits at the expense of disfiguring names of blue-blooders and depicting the working class, like Wilson, as zombies.

Ironically, Gatsby, a living example of the American Dream—ambitious, a man of few words and the most likeable character in the novel—is physically last known of as laying in the drawing room of his magnificently grotesque home dead as a doornail (148). And of only three people all told to attend his last rites were Nick, Owl-eyes, and Henry C. Gatz, Gatsby's father, who brings to view, "'If he'd of lived, he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country'" (148).

To say that what Harding says should be taken with a grain of salt is the ultimate in understatements; not to mention, drawing strict attention to what Harding represented, what he says is, frankly, pure rubbish. In summary, insofar that Fitzgerald's narrator, Nick, appears to tell a story that turns the world upside down, William G. Harding just might be what we could find sticking up at the top.

Admittedly, the foregoing analysis stands up only by reading a lot into the text, relying, as it does, on unmentioned matters from the 1920s about which readers then might have speculated. But the exercise is worthwhile, and as the next chapter shows, Narrator Nick indeed makes direct reference where readers are left to fill in the blanks.

CHAPTER FOUR

That Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* provides a reliable window through time to the "flapper-era" of the early 1920s is a theme that has been developed to nearly mammoth proportions, writes Nicolas Tredell in *The Critical Guide*, *F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby* (5). Considering the amount of criticism and interpretation that exists about *The Great Gatsby*, fresh insights that critics and readers might want to apply would likely rest in essays that fall broadly into two categories. The first category is essentially a bundling of historical data, a summary, if you will, of interesting and hopefully relevant facts about the era itself. The second category analyzes or interprets Fitzgerald's novel along with what is known biographically and his era's views on cultural matters.

To engage in a discussion of the second category by no means excludes the first as an objective. Indeed, discussions of *The Great Gatsby* today depend on facts from the past, if for no other reason than the novel by its very nature is historical, by the fact that it was published nearly a century ago. Regardless, "New Historicism," originally defined around 1982 (Richter 1204), is a style of analysis, or reading, that *The Great Gatsby* seems almost naturally to fit. New Historicism is non-restrictive; it invites consideration of subjects outside the novel itself (1207).

Speaking strictly about literature, New Historicism is a practice in which readers and critics alike seek answers to questions beyond the work that they feel would more brightly illuminate the author's art. As Kenneth Johnston, an English professor at

Indiana University says, “You see the relation between text and context. The study of a literary work is larger than its text” (qtd. in Baude 8). In support of Johnston, Dror Wahrman, a history professor at Indiana University, remarks about historians, “All the boundaries are breaking down. Historians look to see how a population *imagined* what was going on during its era” (qtd. in Baud 9). A novel, it might truly be said, is *certainly* representative of an *imaginary* means by which both author and reader view the culture or its ideology during a given era.

History itself (few historians would argue this point) is quite fictional in its own right; it is at the same time both flawed and accurate. History is ongoing; it is not static. New Historians argue that the past never needs to be re-written; rather, it needs to be added to. The rationale is that even blatant lies that might have found their way into gospel did so in reflection of an ideology or culture about the era from which it was generated (Richter 1207). Besides “to the victor goes the spoils,” which naturally includes writing history in the first place, is added the cloud of innocent omission. This likely occurs when writers of an epoch perceived information as insignificant, or, perhaps, simply too obvious to include an explanation. Consequently, history’s framework fails to incorporate what later scholars might regard as incredibly important—construction of an Egyptian pyramid 4,000 years ago is an extreme but good example.

History’s missing links can be real brainteasers. Along this line of reasoning, there exists for those willing and able an opportunity to add valuable resources to the canons of English and History. In sum, John Brannigan, in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, defines practicing New Historicism in literature rather nicely:

> For new historicism and cultural materialism the object of study is not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature *in* history. This is to see literature as a constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making, and therefore rife with the creative forces, disruptions and contradictions of history. (4)

It seems logical, therefore, that uncovering or simply casting new light on phenomena from a given era enriches both History and English literature as fields of study.

In an effort to contribute something original to the discussion of *The Great Gatsby*, this work has undertaken a fresh look toward researching a few direct references and allusions from the text, regarding whether they are fiction or fact. Bearing on the validity that there indeed exists a plethora of analyses concerning this novel, this essayist humbly begs forgiveness if his “discoveries” are neither new nor original, but, instead, overlooked research among existing secondary resources. In that instance, he invokes for cover one of the main principles of New Historicism, which is that of merely adding on.

Under the umbrella of New Historicism, there is no end to the possibilities behind applying biographical facts about F. Scott Fitzgerald to his novel *The Great Gatsby*, and applying real world events to the novel itself. But, in each instance, for ties to truly bind, a logical connection must be clearly shown, or else risk dismissal, which is to say that loose connections prove no better than flimsy allusions.

After a close reading, certain direct references to goings-on “outside” the novel seem to beg greater understanding. But, please realize that unearthed “new” or “original” findings actually reveal no answers in and of themselves. Instead, they ought to be thought of as stage-setters for future analysis.

Before considering our handful of fresh examples, it needs to be noted respectfully that there are extant numerous contributions already covering historical and cultural curiosities within *The Great Gatsby*—upon which, incidentally, can be built additional analysis. Tribute must be given to seminal pieces, such as to Ronald Berman's *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*; Dalton Gross and Mary Jean Gross's *Understanding The Great Gatsby*; Stephen Matterson's *The Great Gatsby – The Critics Debate*; and, Katie de Koster (ed.), *Readings on The Great Gatsby*. Each of these fine works detail instances of historical facts and cultural events of the 1920s in *The Great Gatsby*, and, in some cases, biographical links about Fitzgerald himself to the text.

It is not the purpose here to repeat developed analyses, comparisons, and interpretations. Therefore, the ensuing will not include instances surrounding well-known, developed topics and insights such as the locale of East and West Egg in relation to Long Island, or references to the "rigged" World Series of 1919, which, in the real world, involved someone like Meyer Wolfsheim, a character in *The Great Gatsby*. Rather, taken at face value, the following nine examples are strictly possibilities where the practice of New Historicism answers curiosities for this reader, and there clearly exists the potential for more study of them.

To begin with, deeply into Nick's story one insight in particular seems oddly inserted, since, from its reference in regard to the other characters, there occurred no fanfare—except, in limited regard, from Nick himself. The scene is at the Plaza and present are Tom, Daisy, Jordan, and Gatsby. It is the showdown where Tom faces off Gatsby, humiliating him with reference to his social status, and where Daisy affirms that she is remaining with Tom and will not run away with Gatsby. Nick, after answering

Tom that he did not want another drink of whisky, mulls over out loud, "'I just remembered that today's my birthday.'" Then, speaking as narrator, he adds, "I was thirty. Before me stretched the portentous, menacing road of a new decade" (120).

Interestingly, deducing in chronological time within the novel, Nick's strange observation about his birthday places it in mid-September. Indirect evidence that establishes the approximate date comes from the story where Nick relates that this is the day Daisy kills Myrtle, in her hit and run accident that evening. Afterward, that night, Nick shows up outside Tom and Daisy's home and watches them through their pantry window. He describes his own movement, "crossing the porch where we had dined *that June night three months before* [italics added], I came to a small rectangle of light which I guessed was the pantry window" (128). Also, further cementing September as the month, Nick narrates Gatsby's father's arrival for Gatsby's funeral—four days after the hit and run: "… a solemn old man, very helpless and dismayed, bundled up in a long cheap ulster against the warm September day" (147). Perhaps it is just a coincidence, but Nick's birthday nearly matches Fitzgerald's; September 24, 1896, thus possibly narrowing the gap between Nick Carraway, narrator, and Fitzgerald, author.

Besides referencing mid-September 1922, which might narrow the link between narrator and author, there is another coincidence peculiarly around that specific time occurring outside the novel in the real world. But let's not rush to its conclusion; instead, bear along, and we'll ease into it. Continuing our examples …

The most casual reader of *The Great Gatsby* cannot help noticing Fitzgerald and Nick's extensive reference outside the novel to other publications of the era, such as newspapers, magazines, and books. Yet today, one reference in particular seems

completely to have fallen through the cracks; owing, perhaps, to the fact that *The Great Gatsby* did not create a large enough splash in its own time to have evoked analysis, whereby the reference might have drawn critical attention and subsequent staying power. Or, in its time, the implication was so evident it defied explanation. Later, when insight about it might have enriched reading, its nonchalant reference instead now passes virtually assumed in the obviousness of its title, taking on prima facie meaning: *Simon Called Peter*, obviously suggests a religious work (30). As such—especially considering where it is included in *The Great Gatsby*—it seems to reinforce Nick's ironic reaction to the setting overall.

"On the summer Sunday afternoon" (Fitzgerald 29)—which, chronologically from within the novel, is July 2, 1922—Nick reluctantly joins Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson for a rendezvous at their love-nest apartment in New York. No doubt, the reference, *Simon Called Peter* —a good religious read—proves at odds with the circumstance in which Nick finds himself: "I sat down discreetly in the living-room and read a chapter [of the novel] *Simon Called Peter*—either it was terrible stuff or the whiskey distorted things, because it didn't make any sense to me" (30).

Research reveals there is more going on here than meets the eye. *Simon Called Peter* was written by Robert Keable (1887-1927) and was first printed in September 1921—so far, so good. But by August 1922, the novel was enjoying its thirty-fifth printing—that's right, thirty-five—and by the end of 1923, the novel had reached a grand total of eighty-three printings (Keable), and by 1925, a zenith of nearly one hundred. At the time, in the early 1920s, Keable's novel was considered the raciest book of the ages, even drawing a fine of $100 from a judge levied against a woman for circulating it as

obscene ("Boston Judge"). In a nutshell, the novel is about a priest who volunteers to serve in WW I, hoping to keep troops on the straight and narrow path. In sum, however, an adage that applies best for how this priest, Peter, practiced his craft was, *while in Rome, do as the Romans do*. We certainly know what Nick thought about Keable's work, but let's see what a *New York Times'* reviewer had to say:

> More and more [Peter] came to feel himself "out of touch with men and life." Presently he wrote Hilda [his fiancée back in the states] that he was going "to eat and drink with publicans and sinners: maybe I shall find my Master still there."
>
> But long before that letter was written Peter had a very considerable acquaintance among sinners. A long procession of women of the street files across these pages. …. He is inclined to blame not the creed in which he still firmly believes, but the way in which he has been taught and the times. …. The novel is very well written, in a clear and vigorous style. ("*Simon Called Peter*")

Interesting facts about Keable's novel do not stop there. Keable, in fact, was a priest, and his novel especially came to take on genuine meaning outside the pages of fiction, precisely at the time when Nick is supposedly drawing his conclusion. Let us see what else the *New York Times* reported about Keable's novel on October 20, 1922—noting, among other important things, that it "was the object of a complaint several months earlier by Secretary John S. Sumner of the Society for the Suppression of Vice" ("Sumner"):

> Mr. Sumner asserted that it was a highly insidious book, because, published with a title savoring of religion and written by a clergyman, it had an innocent look which admitted it to society where the ordinary licentious novel could not circulate. Mr. Sumner denounced the book before the Catholic Club and elsewhere. Because of the easy stages by which the book progressed to its striking passages, it was an ideal weapon, according to Mr. Sumner, for accelerating an intrigue. ("Sumner")

Accelerating an intrigue? Oh, did it ever. For the majority of the *New York Times'* story cited above refers to a landmark incident in New Jersey on September 16, 1922, where Keable's novel might as well have been discovered among the love letters of a prominent, married clergyman. Who, on that date, was found next to one of his church's choir members—likewise neatly laid-out, under a crabapple tree, at the end of a deserted road where lovers went—murdered ("Rector and Woman").

Skipping the macabre and gory details reported again and again throughout the press, suffice to say Keable's book played prominently in the court stories. Reverend Edward Wheeler Hall, it turns out, evidently had given "this spicy book" to Mrs. Eleanor Reinhardt Mills, wife of the church gardener, who, from love letters scattered around their bodies, referred to how Keable's book had "fired my soul" ("Rector Hall'). Despite two trials, which were extensively reported in the press spanning from September 1922 through late 1927, there actually resulted no conviction.

To this day, their murders remain unsolved. But to fully appreciate in the public's eye how sensational both the murders and the trials were, we need only consider the quantity of entries found in *The New York Times Index*. In 1922, between September 17

to December 31, there were 213 stories—on average, in the *New York Times* alone, nearly four a day.

Neither the interest in the murders nor the reference to Keable's book waned in the ensuing two years, 1923 and 1924 (*Times Indexes*)—notably, turning to *The Great Gatsby*, when Nick is home in Minneapolis writing his own account of Tom, Myrtle, Gatsby, and Daisy (Fitzgerald 8). Specifically, throughout those two years, the Hall-Mills murders—as the affair came to be known—were fueled by the victims' bodies being exhumed; a booze-hound private investigator leaking clues to the press; an appeal to the governor by Hall's widow insisting the press leave her and her two brothers alone (who were tried for the murders and acquitted); and, involvement, if not ultimately where guilt might rest, by the Ku Klux Klan (Kunstler). Concerning *The Great Gatsby*, the mere mention of Keable's novel, *Simon Called Peter*, would have indeed inspired interest, linking the goings-on inside the novel with the outside real world.

Another example from *The Great Gatsby* that seems to invite closer examination also comes from the same setting. In review, at the love-nest apartment, where Nick was shanghaied into joining Tom and Myrtle, Nick claims to have gotten drunk; drunk, for only the second time in his life, "so everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it" (30). Afterward, very early the next morning, Nick apparently decides to find his own way home—which, by deduction, is Monday, July 3, 1922. Nick refers to himself as "lying half asleep in the cold lower level of the Pennsylvania Station, staring at the morning *Tribune*, and waiting for the four o'clock train" (38).

A microfilm copy of the front page of the *New York Tribune* reveals some interesting goings-on that day. Noteworthy at the outset is that the *Tribune's* banner

reads, "First to last—the Truth." Below that, dead in the center and above the fold, is a story about Canada's only female parliament member, Miss Agnes MacPhail—who had intended to set an example to other members:

> Miss Agnes MacPhail, the only woman member of the Canadian Parliament, has returned to Minister of Finance Fielding $1,500 of the $4,000 paid her as "sessional indemnity," or salary as Parliamentarian.
>
> "I can use the money," Miss MacPhail explained in a letter to the Minister. "Anybody can use $4,000. But I object to the increase of the indemnity from $2,500 to $4,000 at a time when our men were overseas and the cry was economy. There is no use preaching economy unless we give the people a lead in economy." ("Returns")

To the right of the article about Miss MacPhail's noble gesture, upon which Nick's eyes would have likely fallen next, are two more stories. One next to the other, but both tucked beneath nearly headline-size print that reads, "450,000 More May Get Rail Strike Call To-day" ("Rail Strike"). Next, under the headline but in smaller print, reads "Joyous Crowds Hail Harding Auto Caravan" ("Joyous").

A couple of things are worth pausing over here. Recall from the previous chapter where we discussed in some detail Harding's Fourth of July speech, and, as importantly, the financial swindle for which his administration became famous. That Nick's eyes would have feasted on stark contrast in the *Tribune* early that morning of July 3rd is certainly self-evident. Also, referring to the "strike call" set that day, we also can better understand the meaning behind Nick's reference to the "new train schedule in effect for

July 5th, 1922," on which he wrote the "names of those who came to Gatsby's house that summer" (57). Gatsby's guests, to take the liberty, were:

> … careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or the vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made …. (158)

Recall also from the previous chapter the slaughter that had occurred merely two weeks earlier on June 22, 1922, in Herrin, Illinois, when non-striking miners were led into an open field and told to run—and then were gunned down. People today might not find it hard to imagine the polarized times of the 1920s, when government policy seemed, at best, to serve profit-minded businessmen and high ranking officials; and, there existed quietly-granted no-bid contracts; and, there was ever growing disparity between folk who have and have not.

Another example where Nick slips into the text a current-day reference about the 1920s is at a critical point when he hosts Gatsby and Daisy at his house; outside it is raining. Nick engages Gatsby in idle conversation while they wait for Daisy to arrive. Out of the blue, Gatsby concludes, "'One of the papers said they thought the rain would stop about four. I think it was *The Journal*'" (77). Naming that paper might not be accidental or merely filler. For William Randolph Hearst—a notorious person in so many ways—owned *The Journal*, and *everybody* in the United States during *The Great Gatsby* era knew it, which bears a deeper answer in just a moment. But at the outset, *The Journal's* reputation for telling the truth was plainly suspect, and, most likely, with readers, only trustworthy for predicting the weather—when a person could confirm it by

going outside. Reflection of this sort could have come easily, merely mentioning *The Journal* to readers of the 1920s.

William Randolph Hearst at 59 (1863-1951) had already established his legacy by 1922. For a summary of how it had snaked along, let us turn to Clinton Rogers Woodruff's book review of *Hearst: Lord of San Simeon* (1936), an unauthorized biography by Oliver Carlson and Ernest Sutherland Bates. Woodruff writes:

> As the creator of modern yellow journalism, Hearst has misled, not to say debauched, the American press. As Senator Norris, of Nebraska, in his comments … declared in an open letter to Hearst himself, "The record demonstrates that the Hearst system of newspapers, spreading like a venomous web to all parts of our country, constitutes the sewer system of American journalism."
>
> Hearst's varied and variegated political activities are described in excellent perspective. His two efforts to be elected mayor of New York City, his campaign for the governorship of New York State, and his two attempts at the Presidency … make an interesting, if not an inspiring story. …. A veritable Monte Cristo in his lavish use of money and his disregard of individual or community rights and the ruthlessness, not to say mendacity, of his methods, he has failed in all his major and most of his minor political undertakings, he has failed in his immediate ends, and he has failed to impress the American public with his sincerity or his public spirit. (222)

More to the point, however, Hearst's unfettered cunning and running amuck, like any of the named blue-blooded characters in *The Great Gatsby*, rests inherently in a system that protects and abets them naturally. As Helen MacGill Hughes writes in a review of yet another unauthorized Hearst biography, *Imperial Hearst: A Social Biography* (1936), by Ferdinand Lundberg, "The forces that make possible a career like Hearst's lie deeply in the organization of American life" (751). Finally, from a modern day assessment of Hearst, Sharon Gravett notes, "Oddly enough, what Hearst ultimately could not control was the way he would be immortalized in fiction" (25).

That Hearst was alive and kicking in the early 1920s, and might in some small way hang in the air as an unnamed character in *The Great Gatsby*, also indirectly reveals itself in "Dan Cody," silver, gold, and copper miner (84-91). Cody is a dead-ringer for William Randolph Hearst's father, George Hearst (1820-1891). As much as ever, George Hearst was still openly discussed during *The Great Gatsby* era (Carlson and Bates 208). Foremost, he was one of the most notorious robber-barons of the nineteenth century, profiting from fraudulent deals, false claims, and exploited mine laborers (Lundberg 19). In 1919-1920, the memory of George Hearst emerged in Americans' minds. For in that year's presidential election, his son had energetically sought the Democratic nomination, only to lose it to James M. Cox, who was trounced by William G. Harding, Republican, and who Hearst, in spite, then enthusiastically supported (Carlson and Bates 209).

William's political opponents had for the umpteenth time dredged up the source of his wealth, which mainly was inherited when his father died in 1891. And, shortly after George's death, William proved beyond any doubt that the apple had not fallen far

from the tree. Incidentally—and admittedly far reaching—in *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby's birthday can be deduced as 1891, precisely the time George Hearst died.

Another example where events of the 1920s seemingly gets drawn into *The Great Gatsby* occurs when Nick and Gatsby wait for Daisy to arrive at Nick's little house—a reference already cited above relating to the weather as reported in *The Journal.* Inside Nick's house, Gatsby, leaning on the fireplace mantle, picks up and "looked with vacant eyes through a copy of Clay's *Economics*" (77).

Yes, this book really exists and, at the time, according to its Preface, was prime reading for would-be bond and security salesmen, "with reference to the experience and interests of the ordinary man" (Clay vii). For nearly 500 pages, it goes on blandly to explain itself, and it is anything but a "how to" book. Reading through it, readers discover it slants toward philosophizing and justifying behavior in an environment of "free enterprise or *laissez faire*" policy (423). For instance, multiply its message below by ten-thousand and the gist of Clay's *Economics* becomes clear:

> The greatest social evil of the day is not the inequality of wealth, but the selfishness and insensibility to the sufferings of others that makes all attempt to secure greater equality so difficult. If the Christian Churches' preaching of the importance of wealth and the duty of unselfishness were effective, the path of reform would be smoothed. (422)

Essentially, Clay's convoluted logic centers on the notion that stock and bond salesmen assist rank and file Americans by helping them buy their way out of mainstream poverty. In other words, skilled salesmen favor Americans when they take their money.

Interestingly enough, this brings us to another example where Nick relates outside, true-life examples that figure into his story, and, strangely, where Clay's philosophy seemingly shows to have successfully shaped the mindset of middle-Americans toward admiring their economic-overlords. "If he'd [Gatsby] lived, he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country," says Gatsby's father, Henry C. Gatz, as his son is laid out cold in the parlor—a victim of mistaken identity, in more ways than one (148). But here is the irony: James Jerome Hill (1838-1916) was a real person, a railroad tycoon from Minnesota, later turned banker and eventually busted in 1904 for violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. He also wrote a book in 1910, *Highways of Progress* ("Hill").

Hill's opening sentence of his 353 page treatise is as pleasantly puzzling as Clay's philosophy about American economics; "The highest conception of a nation is that of a trustee for posterity" (3). Eventually, for Hill, "a trustee" translates into flesh and blood beings where "the various states furnishes a broad and intelligent foundation upon which to build up a new era of national progress and prosperity" (327). Not at all unlike sounding as if he were advocating brainwashing, Hill goes on to promote the following:

> If this patriotic gospel is to make headway, it must be by organized missionary work among the people, and by the people. It cannot go on and conquer if imposed from without. It must come to represent the fixed idea of the people's mind, their determination and their hope. (327-28)

Apart from drawing attention to any intended symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* behind citing Jerome Hill, and his and Clay's philosophy, suffice to say that Myrtle Wilson's husband, George, proved effective as a manipulated, misguided instrument of destruction

aimed by Tom Buchanan (157). Tom Buchanan, who, spoken of by Nick, was "nibbling at the edge of stale ideas" (23), and who, about Gatsby, had avowed, "'That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's, but he was a tough one'" (157).

Finally, considering examples imploring greater clarity, there emerges in *The Great Gatsby* an offbeat, almost humorous instance that plays out in a serious setting during one of the most serious moments in the text, when Gatsby's father speaks with Nick about his son's dedication toward self-improvement. The setting, of course, is the occasion of the funeral, where Gatsby lays in the parlor of his magnificent home while his father and Nick wait hopelessly for other attendees for his funeral. There, as Nick relates, "He [Henry Gatz] pulled from his pocket a ragged old copy of a book called *Hopalong Cassidy*. …. He opened it at the back cover and turned [to] … the last fly-leaf [where there] was printed the word SCHEDULE, and the date September 12, 1906" (152).

Gatsby, at 16, had outlined rigorous events for self-improvement, right down to every minute of the day. Both Nick and Gatsby's father agreed, "'It just shows you.'" Shows us what? Readers might ask, rhetorically. Gatsby's father renders, that "'Jimmy was bound to get ahead'" (153). The pathos of this moment, however, is challenged by certain facts outside Nick's story, suggesting that there is more here than meets the eye.

For instance, research revels that *Hopalong Cassidy's* copyright and its first edition occurred in 1910—making it a bit unlikely if not impossible that on September 12, 1906, Gatsby drew inspiration from the work and wrote down his schedule for self-improvement. Incidentally, Clarence E. Mulford, author, also was very much alive in

1922, the year in which Nick's story occurs, and 1925, when Fitzgerald's novel was first published.

Mulford (1883-1956) is a suspiciously curious sort of fellow. Through the years, he has come to exist as one of the most published authors of Western lore (Barnes). But the fact remains that Mulford, renowned for writing Western short stories as early as September 14, 1904, *actually had never been out West himself*. Born in Streator, Illinois, he lived and wrote in Fryeburg, Maine. He visited out West—perhaps feeling the call—for the very first time in 1926. The character, Hopalong Cassidy—truly a popular figure in the early 1920s—is notably portrayed as:

> The Old West's champion of the oppressed and guardian of peace against the frequent machinations of villainous outlaws. …. Millions of people around the world were thrilled by the debonair cowboy. He dressed in black, wore a big iron on each hip, had a lightning draw and a deadly aim: Cassidy was a dashing figure on a white horse. The romantic idealism that goodness always triumphs over evil was never shattered. (Barnes)

Hopalong Cassidy, larger than life, is like all of the other outsiders toward whom Nick refers or alludes: grand, triumphing examples of modern American men, but who, while appearing to promote the greater good, also are just a little hollow. Certainly, on the surface in *The Great Gatsby*, the serious tone underlying the Horatio Alger-theme of "rags to riches" seems plausibly applicable to Jay Gatsby. But there also could be overlooked by readers and scholars another consideration, that Nick's story intends making nothing more than fun of the whole lot.

In closing, there is an excellent case in point. Consider the occasion in Nick's story when he, Tom, and Myrtle go to New York. The episode includes a tiny instance where Tom reluctantly decides to buy Myrtle a puppy, and, in Nick's assessment, "We backed up to a gray old man who bore an absurd resemblance to John D. Rockefeller" (28). The question that basically begs an answer is why, in fiction, compare the panhandler selling mixed-breed puppies to, of all people, Rockefeller? What, if any, deeper meaning lies in taking such a potshot? Frankly, we'll never know. But, beyond face value, it gives pause for readers to reflect upon yesterdays, and thus engage the feeling of what it would have been like to understand outside of context the goings-on that inspired folk, like Nick, of *The Great Gatsby* era to see such things as they did.

CONCLUSION

F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925, rose from obscurity in 1940 and went on to occupy a position today of near dominance over all others in the canon of American literature. The reason for its mediocre acceptance during the era in which it was written and the era in which it portrays might in large part be attributable to the fact that it was all but indistinguishable from the ordinary stories dished out by the newspapers and magazines of the day. While having an undeniably conventional story line encompassing interesting characters cloaked in intrigue—along with a believable plot—the tale itself perhaps blended too easily into the fabric of the everyday life of the 1920s.

Ironically, what might have rendered *The Great Gatsby* obscure in the 1920s and 1930s arises today as one of the main features endearing it to academicians in the fields of English and History. As a time piece work, it provides a means of seeing how rank and file Americans viewed and interacted within their society and culture, whether truthfully portrayed or not—which, by extension, includes the way writers of the era imagined the society in which they lived.

Outside the novel, yet spurred from allusions and references from within it, *The Great Gatsby* provides an opportunity to seek out real world occurrences to which the novel is inexorably linked. Through the voice of Nick Carraway, we hear tales of actual people, places, and events entwined in a make believe sounding society struggling

to make sense of itself; a sense, in fact, of reclaiming a quasi-wholesome time of innocence—which might not have really existed anyway—and the harsh reality that life indeed proved entrenched in change.

The Great Gatsby's emergence in modern popular culture and the academic world parallels the rise of literary critical theory and is arguably credited for giving rise for new theory from its very existence. Aided by the unfolding first person story, readers feel little if any distance from the storyteller. Close and cozy with Nick Carraway, a reader buys into Nick's story despite the fact that he is a fallible, fictional character produced from an artist's quill. In fact, only by deconstructing the narrative style is it possible to distinguish that the voice heard inside the reader's head is not that of Fitzgerald's, but of Nick.

That *The Great Gatsby* lives on today as a piece readers regard as current bears testimony to both the novel's mythical nature, inherently derived from its timeless characteristics, and the timelessness of the issues themselves around which the story revolves. Were it not for a single day-date reference—which could easily be overlooked—and a few allusions to era-sensitive goings-on, much of the novel's intrigue could come straight from our own twenty-first century newspapers and magazines, or even from the World Wide Web.

Illustrating how far American society seemingly has not progressed sociologically from the 1920s—that is to say, times have not really changed much—the literary theory known as New Historicism works well, if not perfectly, for analyzing and researching this novel.

Venturing back in time to *The Great Gatsby's* era proves remarkably interesting, allowing us to see how readers of the 1920s would have intuitively understood the political and sociological matters spoken of by Nick. On the surface, there is a good story, but for us to fully appreciate the novel in context, there also is a compelling need, if not a desire, to know more about Nick's time.

We will likely never know if Fitzgerald, through Nick, intentionally planted the large quantity of time-sensitive touches with the intention of having his novel live on to be later explored for its real-world details. Regardless, *The Great Gatsby* did endure, and there is available, for those willing and able, an opportunity to add to the present day discussion evidence supporting those true life, important historical facts alluded to and referred about the 1920s in the story, or texts "speaking" to texts.

There presently exists an assortment of fine works that aid readers in understanding broadly significant goings-on outside the novel. It appears, however, that there are only a few works that delve into specific details. But to the extent that it seems almost every page of Fitzgerald's novel touches upon something familiar about its own era, the task and potential for bringing forward significant details and adding them to the current discussion is all but endless. Of course, tying together meaning from the outside to the inside is at best speculative.

Nevertheless, certain details beg greater scrutiny. But, the reality remains that there are not many living human beings, as primary sources, toward which we can turn to and ask for help filling in the blanks or clarifying some direct or indirect references in the novel. Accounting for the fact that the setting is 1922—eighty-two years ago—any living sources whom would have interacted as adults in that society would be nearly one

hundred today. For sure, it is still possible to find someone and such a source as he or she is, in his or her own right, might prove invaluable—before father-time one way or another catches up.

Meanwhile, the books, newspapers, and periodicals to which we can turn are frozen in time. From a close reading of the novel, there appear here and there particular references and allusions that research reveals have not yet been questioned beyond their face value. And, in a few instances, a logical leap is required from the reference or allusion toward that tidbit which might illuminate the era's background, but which then also from the novel's setting can be cast in some small measure against the larger picture of real-life.

July 5th, 1922, a date directly referred to by Nick is an example that begs the question; is anything in history "special" about this day? In the larger scope of life, the answer is a resounding—no. But in terms of fictional character-Nick, there is, at the very least, one newspaper, the *New York Tribune* of July 3rd, which reported in the real world a railroad strike that will affect him. Such as it is, there is mentioned in the novel that Nick has a new train schedule, effective July 5th, 1922, upon which he writes the names of the people who came to Gatsby's parties that summer.

Conspicuously absent from Nick's narrative are any direct references to William G. Harding or William Randolph Hearst. Yet, like every adult alive at the time, those culprits from the real world would have been a part of Nick's conscious thought. In that vein, it is worthwhile to look for clues as to where Fitzgerald, through Nick, deemed the era's "outside" world to have played a subliminal part in the mind's eye of his audience,

the contemporary reader. While indeed purportedly fiction, *The Great Gatsby* did not fail in any obvious ways to represent truthfully its own era.

At the minimum we need only turn to four direct references. These are the actual existence of Clay's *Economics*, the truthful existence of James J. Hill, the phenomenal existence of a cowboy legend known as Hopalong Cassidy, and the authentic existence—in its own time and in the likeliest of settings in *The Great Gatsby*—of Robert Keable's *Simon Called Peter.*

It has been the intention of this thesis to share a better understanding that, hopefully, enhances appreciation for Fitzgerald's superbly crafted novel by delving more deeply into each of these instances from *The Great Gatsby*. But this research can also be said to have raised more questions than it answers.

Examining the novel's narrative style alone raises questions, for instance, what did Fitzgerald read? And how might have that influenced him, especially writing *The Great Gatsby*? Also, what similarities were there between Fitzgerald and the likeliest audience toward whom he might have aimed his work? In literary critical analysis, there virtually exists little similarity between Fitzgerald's era and today, which raises the question, how is the "mind's eye" different today from then? Seeking answers raises a host of opportunities, both toward informing perspectives regarding narration and historically linking readers from the past with readers of today.

But we do not need to know explicitly the footing of the 1920s in order to appreciate *The Great Gatsby*. The proof lies in the fact that as a stand alone reading it brings forward to the present common elements about life that are transparent in time.

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