

F. Scott Fitzgerald'S the Great Gatsby as A Significant Work of the Lost Generation



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Abstract:

Almost every critic of *The Great Gatsby* has stressed the powerful of Fitzgerald's achievement and his masterpiece *The Great Gatsby* as a significant work of the Lost Generation and its narrator, Nick Carraway, the character through whom Fitzgerald is able to achieve. *The Great Gatsby* is a 1925 novel written by American author F. Scott Fitzgerald that follows a cast of characters living in the fictional town of West Egg on prosperous Long Island in the summer of 1922. The story primarily concerns the young and mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby and his quixotic passion and obsession for the beautiful former debutante Daisy Buchanan. Considered to be Fitzgerald's magnum opus, *The Great Gatsby* explores themes of decadence, idealism, resistance to change, social upheaval, and excess, creating a portrait of the Jazz Age or the Roaring Twenties that has been described as a cautionary tale regarding the American Dream.

Keywords:

The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald, New World, The Lost Generation, American Dream, narrative technique.

Introduction:

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (September 24, 1896 – December 21, 1940) was an American author of novels and short stories, whose works are the paradigmatic writings of the Jazz Age. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century. Fitzgerald is considered a member of the "Lost Generation" of the 1920s.

The literary productions of this era are often sub-classified in a variety of ways. The gleaming and pleasure seeking in 1920s are sometimes referred to the "Jazz Age", a title popularized by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The same decade was also the period of the "Harlem Renaissance", it was known as the "New Negro Movement", which produced major writings in all literary forms by Countee Cullen, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, and many other African American authors. Many prominent American writers of the decade following the end of the World War I, disillusioned by their war experiences and alienated by what they perceived as the crassness of American culture and its puritanical repressions, are often tagged as the "Lost Generation". A number of these writers became expatriates, moving to either London or Paris in their quest for a richer literary and artistic milieu and a freer way of life. In the radical 1930s, the period of the "Great Depression" and the economic and social reforms in the "New Deal" inaugurated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, some authors joined radical political movements, and many others dealt in their literary works with pressing social issues of the time—including, in the novel, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Thomas Wolfe, and John Steinbeck, and in drama, Eugene O'Neill, Clifford Odets, and Maxwell Anderson.

Significance of F. Scott Fitzgerald:

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was the product of two divergent traditions; while his father's family included the author of "The Star-Spangled Banner" after whom Fitzgerald was named, his mother's family was a straight potato famine Irish.

As a result of this contrast, he was exceedingly ambivalent toward the notion of the American Dream; for him it was at once vulgar and dazzlingly promising. In France 1925, Fitzgerald completed his most famous and respected novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald's own divided nature can be seen in the contrast between the novel's hero, Jay Gatsby and its narrator, Nick Carraway. The former represents the naive Midwesterner dazzled by the possibilities of the American Dream; the latter represents the compassionate Princeton gentleman who cannot help but regard that dream with suspicion.

Fitzgerald connects Gatsby's dream, his "Platonic conception of himself," (G.G. 99) with the aspirations of the founder of America. *The Great Gatsby* is described as the most profoundly American novel of its time. Fitzgerald achieves something more than he intended, knowing that he always had difficulty in distinguishing himself from his characters. It is considered that Carraway's failure is Fitzgerald's failure, and that Fitzgerald himself was unaware of the dangers of romanticism. If Daisy is Gatsby's dream, and Gatsby is Carraway's dream, one suspects that Carraway is Fitzgerald's dream.

Plot summary:

The main events of the novel take place in the summer of 1922. Nick Carraway, a Yale graduate and World War I veteran from the Midwest – who serves as the novel's narrator – takes a job in New York as a bond salesman. He rents a small house on Long Island, in the (fictional) village of West Egg, next door to the lavish mansion of Jay Gatsby, a mysterious millionaire who holds extravagant parties but does not participate in them. Nick drives around the bay to East Egg for dinner at the home of his cousin, Daisy Fay Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, a college acquaintance of Nick's. They introduce Nick to Jordan Baker, an attractive, cynical young golfer with whom Nick begins a romantic relationship. She reveals to Nick that Tom has a mistress, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the "valley of ashes": an industrial dumping ground between West Egg and New York City. Not long after this revelation, Nick travels to New York City with Tom and Myrtle to an apartment they keep for their affair. At the apartment, a vulgar and bizarre party takes place. It ends with Tom breaking Myrtle's nose after she annoys him by saying Daisy's name several times.

As the summer progresses, Nick eventually receives an invitation to one of Gatsby's parties. Nick encounters Jordan Baker at the party, and they meet Gatsby himself, an aloof and surprisingly young man who recognizes Nick from their same division in the war. Through Jordan, Nick later learns that Gatsby knew Daisy from a romantic encounter in 1917 and is deeply in love with her. He spends many nights staring at the green light at the end of her dock, across the bay from his mansion, hoping to one day rekindle their lost romance. Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle and wild parties are an attempt to impress Daisy in the hope that she will one day appear again at Gatsby's doorstep. Gatsby now wants Nick to arrange a reunion between himself and Daisy. Nick invites Daisy to have tea at his house, without telling her that Gatsby will also be there.

After an initially awkward reunion, Gatsby and Daisy reestablish their connection. They begin an affair and, after a short time, Tom grows increasingly suspicious of his wife's relationship with Gatsby. At a luncheon at the Buchanans' house, Daisy speaks to Gatsby with such undisguised intimacy that Tom realizes she is in love with Gatsby. Though Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair, he is outraged by his wife's infidelity. He forces the group to drive into New York City and confronts Gatsby in a suite at the Plaza Hotel, asserting that he and Daisy have a history that Gatsby could never understand. In addition to that, he announces to his wife that Gatsby is a criminal whose fortune comes from bootlegging alcohol and other illegal activities. Daisy realizes that her allegiance is to Tom, and Tom contemptuously sends her back to East Egg with Gatsby, attempting to prove that Gatsby cannot hurt him.

When Nick, Jordan, and Tom drive through the valley of ashes on their way home, they discover that Gatsby's car has struck and killed Tom's mistress, Myrtle. Nick later learns from Gatsby that Daisy, not Gatsby himself, was driving the car at the time of the accident but Gatsby intends to take the blame anyway. Myrtle's husband, George, falsely concludes that the driver of the yellow car is the secret lover he recently began suspecting she has, and sets out on foot to locate its owner. After finding out the yellow car is Gatsby's, he arrives at Gatsby's mansion where he fatally shoots both Gatsby and then himself. Nick stages an unsettlingly small funeral for Gatsby, ends his relationship with Jordan, and moves back to the Midwest, disillusioned with the Eastern lifestyle.

Lost Generation:

In a period of four years and three months, from August, 1914, to November, 1918, more than nine million men were killed in combat or died of wounds or diseases incurred during the war. World War I, or the Great War as it was then known, began with the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand. The war pitted the Central Powers (Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) against the allied forces of Great Britain, France, Russia, and Italy who were joined in 1917 by the United States. The revolutionary change in manners that occurred during this period was accompanied by a sudden flourishing of talented writers. These are the writers whom Gertrude Stein somewhat misleadingly named "The Lost Generation" – Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Lewis, and the rest. Writers of fiction are grouped according to their prospective qualities as a sign of the historical process. The prospective writers are those whose techniques and perceptions were determined by the past. They were dominated, consciously or otherwise, by tradition.

As a result, many members of the Lost Generation viewed the war as an extended act of brutality which destroyed the innocence of the society at the turn of the twentieth century. This generation is referred to as "Lost" not because it has faded from memory, but because the individuals in the Lost Generation often expressed a sense of emotional confusion, feeling lost in their society. They were anything but "Lost" in the sense of being in uncertainty or doubt. "Lost", meant not perdu, as the owner of a garage in Paris had said, "You are all a generation perdu" to his mechanic, meaning of incompetent, or lacking in a sense of duty to the job, but a change in sensibility brought about by the impact of war. It meant the revelation in life, and above all in art, of existence, moral attitudes, and views of society that the older generation could not understand or accept.

Fitzgerald Style of Art in the 1920s :

Fitzgerald spoke for his own time and perhaps, in a broader sense, for all generations of Americans as the ending of *The Great Gatsby*, with its reference to the American past suggests, he himself felt. Fitzgerald was, as Glenway Wescott said at the time of Fitzgerald's death, "our darling, our genius, our fool".

The 20s was a time of greatness in American literature and a time of radical transformation in American society. In the 20s writers thought it was possible to tell the truth about the inner experience of Americans, to describe "the way it was," as Hemingway put it, and their subject was the making of Americans, in a sense that Americans were "new men," the products of a novel social experiment which had dominated men's experiences in previous generations. (Mizener 10) Fitzgerald had been recognized as a significant and serious American novelist and short story writer. He is widely considered the literary spokesman of the Jazz Age, the decade of the 1920s. Part of the interest of his work derives from the fact that the morally and spiritually hard up men and women he wrote about led lives that closely resembled his own. Both his life and his works offer a commentary on the disillusion and depression of the 1920s and the 1930s. Although Fitzgerald's fictional materials were originally out of his own experiences still the influence of some serious writers, whether technically or thematically was plain; those young brilliant intellectuals whose writings became remarkable pieces in American Literature.

The Great Gatsby as an American Work:

The *Great Gatsby* is about all of America. Nick Carraway's journey from the Midwest takes him from the heartland to the economic capital of New York. Fitzgerald forces us to note certain biographical facts: his Midwestern birth and middle-class childhood in St. Paul, Minnesota; a New Jersey Roman Catholic preparatory school; then Princeton, World War I, early marriage, money and reputation from the publication of *This Side of Paradise* (1920); a daughter, intermittent residence in France, his wife's mental illness; his own physical decline and early death. (McCormick 28)

As a result, Fitzgerald drew his single, pervading theme: the theme of the sentimental education with its allied depiction of the character's failure to grasp the disparity between youthful illusion and the world's mauling of that illusion in maturity. It is, historically considered, the great theme that the romantics made available to fiction, and one which many writers found useful after World War I. Fitzgerald's theme lies at the center of all his fiction, He was able to realize it fully in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and to approach it again in *Tender Is the Night* (1934).

The moral conflict in the novel is determined into a conflict between East and West, the ancient and corrupt East and the raw and virtuous West. Nick Carraway refers to his moral attitude through his Middle Western background. At the end of the story, he asserts, "I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all – Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life." (G.G. 177) Nick's experience in the East results in his return with relief to the West.

The American Dream:

The Great Gatsby is an exploration of the American Dream as it existed in a corrupted world, and it is an attempt to divide the reality from the illusion. The illusion seems to be more real than the reality itself embodied in the characters in the novel. The reality that is embodied in Gatsby is opposed to the illusion. It is Gatsby's dream that superimposed reality upon the world. The reality is in his faith, in the goodness of creation, and in the possibilities of life. These possibilities are related to such romantic components that distorted his dream, and finally left it helpless in the face of the Buchanans. Gatsby realized that the illusion was there, where Tom and Daisy, and the generations of small minded, ruthless Americans had found it. After this realization, Gatsby's death is only a symbolic formality, for the world into which he had been created has to embody the traditional dream from which alone it could awaken into life. At the end of the novel, Gatsby's experience and his broken dream becomes the focus of that historic future for which he stands.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby: Techniques Narrative Construction :

In the opening pages of the book, Fitzgerald establishes his narrator in some kind of moral position. Nick Carraway says, on the advice of his father, "I'm inclined to reserve all judgments," because he knows that "a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth".

Narrative Technique:

In The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald uses the first-person narration, much as Conrad uses it in Heart of Darkness. The similarity between the two novels is the use of the first-person narrator as a character in the story.

In both novels an intellectual man (Carraway, Marlow) narrates his moralized tale of the fate of an exceptional man (Gatsby, Kurtz). Their tales are adventure stories in dramatic justification. Both narrators are served by restlessness to seek odd experience, facing their "hero" by chance, become unwillingly influenced by him, and are caught up in an attachment which ends with the hero's death. Both are forced to lie in the form of their dead (Marlow to Kurtz's fiancée; Carraway at the inquest), and finally they retire for their understanding moralizations. Both men are alike in nature as well as in function. Both feel an attraction for their heroes. Both men are pretended to be open-minded, morality, and honesty. It is sure that Marlow learns something from Kurtz's fate just as Carraway learns from Gatsby's failure.

Form, Dream, and Image in The Great Gatsby:

In The Great Gatsby, the first four paragraphs represent the form of the novel. In the first three paragraphs, the narrator, Nick Carraway, introduces himself; in the fourth he introduces the subject of his narrative, Jay Gatsby. Carraway's small cottage on the edge of Gatsby's estate suggests the role that he plays in the novel: the role of observer and spectator, critic and interpreter of a scene and an action characterized by Gatsby.

Conclusion:

Fitzgerald's thought dropped to the deep; to the center of the American mind, deeper than Hemingway and Faulkner, deeper than the Mississippi and the Big Two-Hearted River, down to the sunken island that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes, and that was where the dream began. Like Gatsby, he believed in the green light, "the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us," (G.G. 182) leading back into the past, where the Big Two-Hearted River flows into the Mississippi, and the Mississippi flows, like time, backward into the mythic past. It is because this past, Gatsby is a pathetic figure; and it is because Fitzgerald's past is the same past that he cannot make Gatsby tragic. Gatsby founded a Platonic conception of himself and a dream of a romantic vision that he focused on Daisy Fay. Daisy is the center of Gatsby's fictional world, risking everything and eventually losing his life as a result.

“He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God,” and when he kissed her “At his lips’ touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete,” (G.G. 112) and to this conception “he was faithful to the end.” (G.G 99) But that Gatsby’s material society prevented him to complete this vision “A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about ... like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees.” (G.G. 162) Gatsby, unlike the other Fitzgerald’s heroes, sacrifices his life on the altar of his dream, unaware it is composed of the passing stuff of the past. There is no doubt that Fitzgerald has selected for representation those events of the past which are keys to Gatsby’s vision and dream.

The juxtaposition of a moral critique of human nature is very important in American civilization. Fitzgerald’s basic plot is the human imagination in the New World. Juxtaposing the two characters, Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, provides the good versus evil and drives so much American culture through the great magic of Fitzgerald’s novel, that is to forgive Jay for his crimes because his romantic and the purity of his dreams. Tom is a snob, philanderer and racist. He, symbolizes the corruption of American capitalism and represents the idea that if one has enough money, he can stand above the law.

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