

## A VISION OF TRANSCENDENCE- SCOTT FITZGERALD'S THE GREAT GATSBY (1925)

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### ABSTRACT

Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) continues to engage our sensibilities even today. A journey through the book makes us realize that the people and the predicaments they face resonate in today's world too. Through the novel Fitzgerald showed the 'roaring twenties' but the novel's roar continues to be heard.

Scott Fitzgerald who belonged to 'The Lost Generation' has created a multi-layered character a paradox holding glitter and darkness. The chaotic age had to lead to a significant creativity and the result gave birth to Stephens, Gatsbys... who showed that though human existence is eternal, it has to face distinct tests born out of a particular time and situation.

The gamut of modernist writers had one thing in common and that was the anxiety or 'angst' that they shared. An anxiety that had given an impetus for 'expression'; an expression that showcased the load and the emptiness that life carried during the post-modern times. The American dream had lost its fresh appeal in this decade and seemed an empty container, filled by the hollow presumptions of the times. "Fraternity" carried no meaning; "liberty," was wrongly interpreted. There was no longer a "pursuit of happiness," but a "pursuit of pleasure." Thus the Jazz Age glowed brightly, so brightly that it had 'blinded' its people and the dark shadows were not noticed by them for a long time to come

The observation and then the transformation of the historical fact in an imaginative manner is the way the novelist uses his material in the fictional design. The process involves sifting and marshalling of the material of life by the author to create a work of art that would be valid not just as a verification of the past but that which would also serve to mirror the present. For, what determines a historical fact is its truthfulness and objectivity.

The paper addresses the aspect of how the transitory moments of history crystallize into an enduring world of fiction, a world of permanence, signaling the triumph of the imaginative powers of the novelist and at the same time delivering an ageless vision for humanity.

**KEYWORDS:** The Great Gatsby (1925), American Dream, Jazz Age, Treatment of History

### INTRODUCTION

What makes 'The Great Gatsby' speak even today? The adumbration of the behavioral and situational patterns of its characters is timeless. Through the novel Fitzgerald showed the 'roaring twenties' but the novel's roar continues to be heard.

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The gamut of modernist writers had one thing in common and that was the anxiety or 'angst' that they shared. An anxiety that had given an impetus for 'expression'; an expression that showcased the load and the emptiness that life carried during the post-modern times. The American dream had lost its fresh appeal in this decade and seemed an empty container, filled by the hollow presumptions of the times. "Fraternity" carried no meaning; "liberty," was wrongly interpreted. There was no longer a "pursuit of happiness," but a "pursuit of pleasure." Thus the Jazz Age glowed brightly, so brightly that it had 'blinded' its people and the dark shadows were not noticed by them for a long time to come. Fitzgerald was a historian in recording the impact of anxiety of his times. None other than a historian could say that "the stamp that goes into my books so that people can read it blind like braille" (Kazin 1971:14). The treatment of this anxiety forms the core of his writings like it was for many other modernist writes; an absolute in itself.

The observation and then the transformation of the historical fact in an imaginative manner is the way the novelist uses his material in the fictional design. The process involves sifting and marshalling of the material of life by the author to create a work of art that would be valid not just as a verification of the past but that which would also serve to mirror the present. For, what determines a historical fact is its truthfulness and objectivity. This is how the transitory moments of history crystallize into an enduring world of fiction, a world of permanence, signaling the triumph of the imaginative powers of the novelist. As expressed by Wright Morris, "facts are like faces. There are millions of them. They are disturbingly alike. It is the imagination that looks behind the face, as well as looks out of it" (Morris 1963:12). Written in 1925, it takes us back to that decade of the twenties when "the uncertainties of 1919 were over, America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history" (Fitzgerald 1974:59). This was the jazz age with all the glittering actualities. Living life 'for the moment', they intensified the present to experience it to the utmost limits. Money was in profusion, this being the age of excess and acquiring wealth was the new religion of the decade. *The Great Gatsby* embodies this new culture and this new religion, in a country whose early history started with a dream of soaring idealism positively asserting the limitless possibilities of man's achievement. However, gradually the priorities changed as the unrestrainable energy of the youth tried to shape itself differently after the war.

Fitzgerald imprisoned the decade in his novels representing all its manners and morals. The war brought about a mood of impermanence and dreams showed a way out. But ironically it also meant a struggle. Fitzgerald depicted this tragic struggle in the flight towards the dream. In reality, the dream symbolized a downward flight because in the pursuit of their goal, with all the imaginative intensity and promise, many lost the sense of values. Nothing could stop the blind headlong run towards spiritual nothingness. This mood of the decade is especially reflected in the theme of the *The Great Gatsby*. It shows us that dimension of the human being who is resolute to carry forward himself/herself with 'self-prescribed' beliefs and convictions. 'Breaking the norm' was the norm to make or break themselves. Gatsby with his incurably romantic sensibility and with all his "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (Fitzgerald 1988:8) lacks the control over the circumstances that carry him towards the achievement of his objective. The same fate works on each of the characters of the novel, though in different ways. All this is brought within the purview of the thematic pattern of the novel: the struggle amidst futility, the grace under pressure.

## DISCUSSIONS

It was the jazz age which created Gatsby and the other people like him who danced away to the music of the jingling coins. The novel asserts and affirms this spirit of the American world which denied soul and spirituality. This was the prohibition decade and Gatsby trades in the illegal underground activity of bootlegging pointing towards the loss and

denial of values.

The goal behind Gatsby's accumulation of wealth and power is Daisy Fay. Daisy personifies his dream. She is the golden girl he aspires for. Getting Daisy back is the dream to which Gatsby is totally committed. He not only lives by the dream also succumbs to it. However, money and dreams do not alter the reality of time that made Daisy Tom Buchanan's wife. Daisy has established herself as the golden girl, the flapper who rejects Gatsby in the beginning for the lack of his wealth and readily accepts the wealthy Buchanan. Charles R. Hearn described Gatsby as "the American Adam thrown out of the garden of Eden into a distorted and grotesque world of materialism and decadence" (Hearn 1977:46). Now, Daisy is more important as an acquisition, in an age where the differentiating line between objects and people is only a streak.

Fitzgerald has placed Gatsby on a 'pedestal' though a shaky one. But still Gatsby is admired by the supporting characters in the novel and by many who read the novel. Why Gatsby holds this attraction is an interesting question. The answer lies in the charm that he displays and by making himself an embodiment of the American Dream whose underlying *mantra* was 'securing'; securing wealth, position and possessions which could also include people. Gatsby's dream was securing Daisy and he is committed to his 'cause'. Gatsby holds on to his personal conception of life with immense conviction and his ambition and dream are layered with an urgency, innocence and shallowness. His power becomes his weakness and vice versa and Fitzgerald helps us all in witnessing a powerful character who 'believes' in himself but one who has taken the wrong road. The admiration could be an identification of many whose goals in the Jazz Age did not offer much choice in terms of 'quality'. When the world witnesses 'death' on many levels of the physical and the moral, a human being is misplaced and so are his/her choices. The admiration could also be a 'pity' that the reader feels for not just the character but also for the force of the situations he is placed in. Gatsby has formed his 'own ethic' to guide himself.

In his struggle to attain Daisy, Gatsby never ponders about her love for him. The intensity of Gatsby's wish to get back his girl is real but the means he adopts is through wealth. He never realizes that wealth cannot buy him everything he wants. His vision is untouched by values of a traditional society because he is a man of the twenties, a bootlegger "moving somewhere between his cocktails and his flowers" (Fitzgerald 1988:60).

Gatsby's involvement and commitment to the dream and his failure to convert his illusion into reality makes him a tragic figure. Gatsby's tragedy is to think that time is not incessant. This attitude, reflected the spirit of the age that made one feel that one would never age; the glittering moment of time would never pass. In this glossy world around him, Gatsby has fantastic sense of possibilities and this makes him the pioneer in search of the golden moment with his golden girl. Milton Stern says that (Stern 1970:169): "He pays for his demands by giving everything of his central, secret existence to the Girl, laying at her feet every labor and hope and wish that ever impelled him".

The young ladies who attend his parties are more thrilled about Gatsby than disgusted. May be they are reacting to their own inner restlessness and lawlessness. But immediately they cover it all up with a "reach me a rose, honey, and pour me a last drop into that there crystal glass" (Fitzgerald 1988:60). This reflects the social structure in which Gatsby is placed.

Interestingly *The Great Gatsby* may very conveniently fit into the present times and Gatsby can never be an anachronism. Fitzgerald wrote the novel at a time in history which posed a challenge to the writers' imagination as a result of which there were many bold and experimental literary expressions and themes. Fitzgerald through Gatsby seems to be voicing out the concerns of the 'lost generation' and Gatsby is in a way is lost between the past and the present and the real

and the ideal. Gatsby wants to live ideally, he wants to arrest the ideal moment in the real present. So it all starts with an illusion because in a society where an upward thrust meant only materialism there could never be anything idealistic. There exists a strange combination of romantic idealism and a crass materialism in Gatsby and yet Fitzgerald expresses sympathy for his impulse and innocence to attempt to arrest the past. Fitzgerald was always obsessed with time. As Malcom Cowley observed, Fitzgerald (Cowley 1951:70)

Was hunted by time, as if he wrote in a room full of clocks and calendars. "After all" Fitzgerald said in an otherwise undistinguished magazine story, "any given moment has its value; it can be questioned in the life of after events but the moment remains.

Embodying the same spirit, Gatsby believes in the wondrous promise of the past and does not realize that the dream has been destroyed forever. The irony is clear when realizing that he is walking in a "desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favours and crushed flowers" (Fitzgerald 1988:106), Gatsby retains the vain optimism amidst Nick's realism and says "can't repeat the past ? he cried incredulously. Why of course you can!" (Fitzgerald 1988:106).

One can feel Gatsby's pathetic innocence as well as his arrogance of money. He is the Gatsby of the Twenties, the age which framed every illusion. The degenerated dreams have taken many shapes and here it is only one of them when a man feels that he can nail the past down with the help of wealth. Richard D. Lehan attaches a Keatsian perspective to Fitzgerald's vision and says that (Lehan 1966:117): "...there is the desire to cling to a sublime and perfect moment; but there is also the realization that all life, all beauty is subject to mutability and decay." This Fitzgerald knew and wanted future Gatsby's to know that time cannot be governed by will or wealth or power. Time has run out on Gatsby, as it has on the American dream and as it often does on all human desires and aspirations. But in its 'true' sense it has not. The clock's circle may not bring back the same moments but the vision they had shown continues to make its presence felt. In the present digital and technological world, novels of the 'lost generation' have the capacity to hold sway over our sensitivities. A reason for this is the influence of the subject matter and its treatment that continue to spell to and show how fragile life is and how we can become helpless in such situations. This realization might help us deal better with ourselves and life. The events of the novel are translated into feelings by Nick who becomes a good foil for Gatsby. Through Nick's musing we come to feel the intensity of Gatsby's loss. "Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something – an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words . . ." (Fitzgerald 1988:107)

The decade was a party, a carnival gaiety where the abnormalities of conduct did not matter. The beat of the dance was rising and the rhythm caught on and Fitzgerald set himself to the task of recording it. Many people partook in this dance where the intoxicant of money flowed and kept the flames of youth glowing. Amidst these people of the 20's apart from Gatsby there are also Nicks, Toms, Daisies, Myrtles, Wilsons and Dan Codys. Nick, is the spectator-narrator of the novel who perceives more than he sees and means more than he speaks. Nick's family and their previous generations hail from The Middle West where they had been based stably. But Nick moves away from it after The Great War to The East which flourishes with the 'bond business'. He has moved to The East as he was no longer satisfied with The Middle West and Tom and Daisy have 'drifted' towards The East too. In his words, these people are part of "an indefinite procession of shadows, who roughed and powered in an invisible glass" (Fitzgerald 1988:104).

Fitzgerald does not moralize but, through his artistic technique, he makes Nick the central consciousness of the novel providing an unobtrusive moral tone. It is Nick who shapes these jazz age figures for us. The device permitted Fitzgerald to manipulate his material without losing his objectivity. It is more of Nick's Gatsby we come to know in the

novel. We detest him through Nick and we like him also through Nick. Even as Nick asserts Gatsby's worth, he is compelled to say that he "disapproved of him from beginning to end" (Fitzgerald 1988:146). Fitzgerald wrote that "the test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function" (Fitzgerald 1965:39).

This "ability" we find not only in Nick but also in Gatsby. Gatsby believes in the very dream that is swamping him. His goal (Daisy) itself is a symbol of the shallowness of materialism. Gatsby's illusion is so complex that he has some complicated feelings about it when he says, "there must have been moments" when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams, not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion" (Fitzgerald 1988:92). When Gatsby invites Daisy to his house, he can see the change in her. She is more interested in Gatsby's multi coloured shirts. But, Gatsby can never separate Daisy who is his dream from himself. The tragic sense is evident here, in the paradox of hope and disillusionment. It is a pity that such committed intelligence should end up in such intellectual anemia.

It is left to Nick Carraway to register the loss and measure the disparity between Gatsby's dream and the actuality it stems from. He senses Gatsby's loyalty to Daisy beneath his corruption and that is why he pities him saying "he came alive to me, delivered from the womb of his purposeless splendor" (Fitzgerald 1988:76). Gatsby's heroic struggle against disenchantment is doomed to end in defeat. And after all, in the waste land of modern America, dreams do not seem to come true. A land which could provide the impetus for the dreams, assisted illusions and led the dreamer only to a mirage. There is the incident, after the ride in the car with Daisy, when Gatsby stands outside the Buchanan house "watching over nothing" (Fitzgerald 1988:139) in a sacred "vigil." What he is actually watching is the irresponsibility of Tom and Daisy. Daisy, the golden girl vanishes "into her rich full life, leaving Gatsby nothing" (Fitzgerald 1988:142). All these incidents make Nick say to Gatsby: "They're a rotten crowd, you're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (Fitzgerald 1988:146). Nick maintains the "ability to function with the opposed ideas" both "enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (Fitzgerald 1988:37).

The real difference between Gatsby and Nick is that Gatsby feels he can turn the clock back. For the romantic Gatsby, time is "a flight from reality, from normality, from time, fate, death and the conception of limit" (Hoffman 1962:245). But, Nick is willing to "go back home," is willing to accept the inescapable actuality and settle down. He too is "beating against the current" (Fitzgerald 1988:172) like Gatsby, but he consciously regrets the rush of time. Nostalgically he says "I just remembered that today's my birthday. I was thirty ... the promise of a decade of loneliness..." (Fitzgerald 1988:129). But immediately, he becomes assured and enthusiastic with the here and now. It is a pity that he is satisfied with the physical presence of Jordan "with the reassuring pressure of her hand" (Fitzgerald 1988:129). Thirty is not only bad for Nick, but it was for Fitzgerald. It was when the dream gave way to reality. The hangover had just started when the party was over.

In the end Nick learns what Gatsby is never able to, that dreams should be reexamined keeping in view the moral consequences. Nick's character records a moral growth and he stands out at the end to truly understand Gatsby. Nick takes a choric role like that of Tiresias in *The Waste Land*. He sees through the life of sterility, ardity and vacuity of the modern age, which, James E Miller summed up as (Donaldson 1984:249): The 'day scene' of *The Great Gatsby* is surely the valley of ashes, and its night scene is this El Greco Landscape, and its meticulously dressed characters performing meaningless actions in a meaningless world. This "Valley of ashes" (Fitzgerald 1988:26) is between West Egg and New York City in the novel. This is the place to which Tom goes. All the pseudo sophistication of this man comes to an end at this place.

In direct contrast to Gatsby is Tom Buchanan, a degenerate representative of the American materialistic power. His chief characteristic is his harsh physicality that is achieved at the expense of his spirituality and morality. He is untouched by idealism. He too drifts pointlessly and shares the restlessness like the other characters. In the words of Nick Carraway “Tom would drift forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game” (Fitzgerald 1988:12). Life for Tom is a football, an instinctual impulsive sensation.

The Emersonian ethos of possibilities has deteriorated to discontented desires for wealth. Tom Buchanan is “one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty one that everything afterwards savours of anti-climax ...” (Fitzgerald 1988:11). Despite his material possessions, Tom is a disillusioned man. He has a place in the East Egg, but is impatiently placeless. Tom is one of those rich men, created by sudden wealth that had spilled after the war. His social code allows him extra marital affairs. He chooses Myrtle who is outside his social class. But, both of them share the same visionless complacency of mere matter of substance without form. Tom is rich materialistically but is intellectually barren. All his hypocrisy is exposed when he says (Fitzgerald 1988:124):

I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white.

He is reduced to nothing but a vulgar and crude person, when he makes a “short deft movement” (Fitzgerald 1988:39) to break his mistress's nose. Tom feels nothing but pity for himself. He is the center of his world and nothing matters beyond that. Along with Daisy, he goes through the motions of indifferent actions because of the arrogance of their wealth. This bond of materialism holds Tom and Daisy together. Out of self-protection they divert Wilson to Gatsby. They appear to be the most common creatures, divested of humanity. They are too small to comprehend the inner vision of Gatsby.

In every sense they justify Nick's comment that “they are a rotten crowd.” Daisy repays Gatsby's “vigil” with death. Corrupted spiritually by wealth and by each other, they seek refuge in that element from where their corruption sprang. Gatsby and Myrtle are dead and Tom and Daisy escape with only material possessions. In the bargain they have lost their souls. This is the reason why, Nick calls them (Fitzgerald 1926:170):

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

In the end, Tom is seen buying a pearl necklace, which would become another addition to his possessions. Tom and Daisy are committed to the body whereas Gatsby is committed to the spirit. Gatsby is one of the finds of Fitzgerald in his search for the ideal when the world was losing out all its previous definitions of existence. The ideal of the ‘American Dream’. Daisy represents the materialism of her class as well as the one at the core of Gatsby's transcendental idealism. Hers is the life of an artificial society girl whose only aim is to remain “gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (Fitzgerald 1988:142). She is a creature of promises that have little hope of fulfillment. She is beautiful physically but is mentally impoverished. Her voice is only the “Voice full of money” (Fitzgerald 1926:115). It has become for Gatsby a voice, “no longer tangible.” Daisy sees purposelessness as characterizing her whole life (Fitzgerald 1988:130): What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon? and the day after that, and the next thirty years? Her voice struggled on through the heat, beating against it, molding it's senselessness into forms. Daisy cannot beat against the heat of

the confusion around her and is rendered helpless. Her indecisiveness reminds us of the lines spoken by a neurotic modern lady in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, who says "what shall we do tomorrow? What shall we ever do?" (Eliot 1930:56). And what Daisy does later are never deeds but just instinctive responses to a life of sensations. She is still looking forward to the future amidst all the sense of futility.

Daisy adds to her own nothingness when she kills Myrtle. She hides her guilt behind Gatsby's devotion and vanishes into her riches. Tom and Daisy, conspiring against Gatsby find comfort in moral indifference. They have displayed hollowness both internally and externally. Daisy can be summed up aptly in the words of Jhon McCormick (McCormick 1971:37):

Her dizziness is charming, and her final corruption is convincing. It is convincing because she is the agent of Gatsby's downfall, just as she had been the agent of his rise. Through Daisy's association with Gatsby, she moves far beyond flapperdom to that great good mysterious place of fictional heroines and heroes who achieve immortality not through psychological or sociological fidelity or mechanical relationship to plot but through their embodiment of fictional truth.

Gatsby has sacrificed himself for Tom and Daisy, who live on exploiting the business ethics and to their machinations Gatsby is both the exploited and the victim.

The other flapper in the novel (besides Daisy) is Jordan, who asserts her flapperdom throughout. She belongs to the same social class as Tom and Daisy and is also a tournament golfer. Nick reveals her world of hypocrisy: "she left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then lied about it." She is "incurably dishonest" (Fitzgerald 1988:58) and cheats her way through life. Nick, through initially drawn towards her, soon moves away Jordan, in her careless way is very much a Buchanan.

Myrtle, though living in the valley of ashes, is mentally living in the West-Egg with Tom. She hopes to escape the ash-heaps through her affair with Tom but succeeds only in being associated with the waste lands of New York and the East-Egg through her death. Ironically, there is no liberation for her from the wasteland. Myrtle, like Gatsby is ultimately the victim of illusions. Gatsby is more sophisticated, but their fates are the same. Myrtle is Gatsby without the power of his imagination because hers is the coarse vulgar aspiration which dispenses the energy of satisfaction to Tom. The Buchanans kill them both.

Members of the lower middle class, the Wilsons are led to ruin through their dreams of escaping from the dreary life into the world of glamour. Fitzgerald presents both the rich and poor as 'Wastelanders' because if the people with money have no true identity of themselves, those without money too end up placeless and nameless. The Wilsons represent the human energy and hope that are exploited in order to feed the materialism of the time. Wilson owns a garage. Though he is in the oppressive atmosphere of the valley of ashes, he is connected to the rich world outside him through the cars. The automobiles had played an important role in the twenties. They were possessed less for comfort and more as symbols of prestige. The motor cars symbolized the superficiality and the hazardous glitter of materialism. The automobile's speedy excitement concealed an immense destructive power.

And one of these automobiles has destroyed Wilson's wife. She is killed by the "mobile extravagant, excitement" of Daisy. Her death becomes a symbol for the exploitation of the materialists. It is also a symbol for the wasted and misdirected human resources in pursuit of an unrejuvenating materialism. She dies grotesquely and meaninglessly, losing

her life in cheap successes. Wilson wants to avenge the death of his wife. But, he is unarmed in the valley of ashes because love has vanished and his concept of a God was, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, which have become merely an advertisement; which is, well expressed in the conversation shared by Michaelis the coffee shop owner and George Wilson; “God sees everything; repeated Wilson.” “It’s an advertisement; Michaelis assured him” (Fitzgerald 1988:152). The painted eyes of an oculist’s advertisement look out “of no face, but instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent man” (Fitzgerald 1926:26). The exchange between Wilson and Michaelis shows that the “God” of the “Valley of ashes” is a faceless nonentity to whom the lost souls pray.

The symbolism of depicting God as an advertisement helped Fitzgerald to express his modern experience of the twenties. The linking of business and religion played an important role in the post-war decade, as for instance, Bruce Barton’s *The Man Nobody Knows*, in which Christ was depicted as “the founder of modern business” (cited by Goldhurst 1963:39). This way, the Eckleburg image in *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates the depth of Fitzgerald’s awareness of one aspect of modern America and his dexterity at embodying contemporary attitudes.

Wilson has no vision left in the valley of ashes. This is what drives him to kill Gatsby. Susan Rusneck Parr says that: “The man who kills Gatsby is already dead when he commits murder... and his suicide is simply a belated acknowledgement of his condition” (Donaldson 1984:53). Wilson kills Gatsby erroneously and Daisy kills Myrtle in the same way. According to James E. Miller, “accident” rules a “world” that has become an “ash-heap” (cited by Donaldson 1984:249). Even meeting Daisy is a “colossal accident” for Gatsby, as is his meeting Dan Cody. The later meeting proves disastrous for Gatsby because becoming the adopted son of Dan Cody, “the pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon” (Fitzgerald 1988:97), introduces him to the world of corruption.

Meyer Wolfesheim is the most prominent figure of the 1920’s gangsterdom as is glimpsed in the short tale of the “Night they shot Rosy Rosenthal” (Fitzgerald 1988:68). He is a “gambler... who fixed the world’s series back in 1919” (Fitzgerald 1988:71). Behind the roaring twenties and the rich figures of the jazz age, there are Rosy Rosenthal and Meyer Wolfesheim. What these people share is just a “business gonnegtion” (Fitzgerald 1988:69). Fitzgerald, too, had shared similar experiences as that of his characters. What he did was to universalize his characters. In *Gatsby* we find a tragic yet rude awakening. His personal fate is transcended on to a universal experience. Fitzgerald was capable of celebrating Gatsby’s wonder while at the same time exposing its ultimate defilement. Both Fitzgerald and Gatsby exposed a world that was “... material without being real” (Fitzgerald 1988:154). Apart from Gatsby’s father and Nick, it is only Owl-Eyes, the counterpart of Eckleberg, who can see reality beneath it all and who can shower Gatsby’s grave with sympathies.

## CONCLUSIONS

The *Great Gatsby* belongs not just to American literature but to world literature because it speaks a universal language. Its song is of the soul. Though it has sprung from the jazz age, prohibition, big business, gangsterdom and uprootedness, it shows us the predicament of humanity as a whole. *The Great Gatsby*, as aptly expressed by James E. Miller, “reaches out beyond time and place, the here and the now, to snatch something precious and preserve it outside the ravages of time” (cited by Donaldson 1984:256). In actuality, we tend to identify ourselves with Gatsby. We share his romantic wonder and aspiration amidst all the futility of the modern age. As Nick has expressed, “we beat on” (Fitzgerald 1988:172). In the words of Malcolm Cowley, we swim (Cowley 1934:281), Like a swimmer who after battling the current, learns land swims with it in a magnificent burst of speed and vigor, each of his strokes been multiplied... by the power of

the stream, congratulating himself moving faster...Nick's and Gatsby's is the "Backward motion towards the source," a "tribute of the current to the source." As Robert Frost says, "it is this in nature we are from, it is most us" (Frost 1942:329). This is not only the helpless nostalgia of Nick and Gatsby but also that of Fitzgerald's.

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