

**F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S  
THE GREAT GATSBY  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL AS A  
TRAGIC ROMANCE**



**Literature**

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**Rafik Laceb**

**University Mouloud Mammeri of Tizi-Ouzou, Algeria.**

**Abstract**

This research explores the displacement of romance by tragedy in Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. Taking its theoretical bearings from the archetypal approach developed by Northrop Frye, supplemented by insights borrowed from Georg Lukacs, Aristotle, Hegel and many other scholars, the research aims to show how the romantic hero lands in a tragic situation because of his belief in ideals that are no longer viable in the consumerist American society of the 1920s. Among other arguments, it also seeks to illustrate how *The Great Gatsby* plays a thematic and stylistic variation on romance such as Shakespeare's *Midsummer Nights' Dream* and tragedy as elaborated around the House of the Atreus by Greek playwrights like Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus.

**Introduction**

In his analysis of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1994, All the in-text citations are to this edition.), Trilling (1950) has come to the conclusion that the novel is a principally a love story gone wrong in the American manner, in other words a tragic romance. "From Proust we learn about a love that is destructive by a kind of corrosiveness... From Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the night* we learn about love ... that is destructive by reason of its very tenderness, (p.232)" Trilling wrote. Trilling is also one of the critics who have contributed to the rehabilitation of Fitzgerald as novelist by comparing him to the originators of the novel such as Cervantes. This comparison indirectly qualifies the novel as a comedy of manners of the same standards as Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. So in nearly the same breath, Trilling has categorized the novel as a tragedy, a romance, a comedy, and irony or satire. Unless the archetypal approach, and most notably the concept of "displacement" is brought to bear on Trilling's critique of Fitzgerald's novel, his statements might sound as confused and confusing though he is to the point. Indeed, *The Great Gatsby* deploys all these types of *mythos* in the chapters of the novel, but every one of them prevails at particular moments of the overall plot structure before being displaced by another type of *mythos*, ranging from comedy to tragedy with romance and irony standing in-between.

Part of the complexity of *The Great Gatsby*, an apparently simple and straightforward novel to readers interested in love stories gone wrong, comes from the novel's sophisticated and intricate interweaving of a wide variety of *mythos*. This plot complexity of the novel has attracted the attention of a huge number of critics in their attempt to assign it to a particular category of fiction. In conferences such as the ones organized by the Scott Fitzgerald Society over these last few years, *The Great Gatsby* has maintained its proud place amongst all the works written by Fitzgerald in spite of its misleading simplicity and slenderness. In the research that follows, I

would address the displacement of romance by tragedy in the last chapters of the novel. My research in the last phase of the novel as a tragic romance aims to show how Fitzgerald plays a variation on both romance and tragedy in his quest for a modernist style all his own. As already pointed out above, scholarly research about *The Great Gatsby* has already addressed the various aspects of the novel. However, so far little critical attention has been accorded to how this displacement of the romance by tragedy operates in the novel. When the categorization of the novel as a tragic romance is referred to in the already available scholarly literature, it is often taken for granted as is the case with Frye (1976) who has forgotten about it as soon as he uttered the words (tragic romance), or hinted at it through analogy with fictions by other authors as is the case with Trilling (1950) in *The liberal imagination: Essays on literature and society*. Since this research is primarily concerned with the displacement of romance by tragic, I shall concentrate on the last phase of the Gatsby-Daisy romance that Frye calls the *agon*, or apex of conflict. This *agon* phase is reached toward the end of the novel with Gatsby's outing in New York in the company of the Buchanans, Jordan Baker, and Carraway.

### **The *Agon* or Verbal Battle Phase of the Romance**

The reader will probably remember that everything seems to be lost for Tom when he stops at Wilson's Gas Station to fill up the empty tank of Gatsby's yellow Rolls Royce only to see his old blue coupé driving ahead at all speed and his wife Daisy waving her hand to the rest of the group. It is at this precise moment that the principal romance plot interlocks with the subplot of another romance to give a tragic turn to the narrative as a whole. As Carraway puts it, whilst Wilson and Tom are arguing over the sale of his old coupé, and filling up the tank of the yellow Rolls Royce, a feminine shadow is looking in their direction from behind a slot of a drawn curtain. The woman is Myrtle, who is no one else but Tom's mistress who mistakes Jordan Baker for his wife Daisy. As we shall see shortly, the collision of the two love triangles Tom-Daisy-Gatsby and Wilson-Myrtle-Tom will turn romance into tragedy in the novel. But at this stage, it is important to point to the rapid increase in the conflict or *agon* between Tom and Gatsby over who will have the final favors of Daisy, with Tom boiling up for his wife's infidelity, and trying to catch up with Gatsby who is driving ahead with his wife. The tension drops for a moment after the excursionists have hired the parlor of a suite in Plaza Hotel on the south side of Central Park New York City to refresh themselves, but it flares up again when Tom verbally tries to silence his wife's "crabbing" about the Indian Summer heat. Her lover intervenes to defend her scolding Tom: "Why not let her alone, old sport?" first remarked Gatsby. He goes on to add, "You're the one that wanted to come to town" (p.133).

Gatsby's remarks sound as a throwing of a gauntlet between the two characters. This is symbolized by the "telephone book [that] slipped from its nail and splashed to the floor. (p. 133)" Carraway's tries to pick it up, but Gatsby replies suggestively: "I've got it." The narrator tells us that Gatsby "examines the parted string humming in an interested way before tossing the book on a chair" (p.133). All this looks as if Gatsby wants to settle his account with his antagonist by taking up the gauntlet, complying thus with the good old days of knights when challenges are

launched and accepted by throwing and taking up the gauntlet. The two challengers for the fight thus get on their high horses preparing for a jousting with verbal lances for the lady of their heart. The irony of it all is that while the two contenders are preparing to wage their battle on the upstairs suite parlor, downstairs in the ballroom a wedding ceremony is loudly celebrated by playing Mendelssohn's Wedding March inspired by Shakespeare's *Midsummer's Night Dream*. The irony resides in the fact that both Tom and Gatsby consider themselves as being married to Daisy, the former in reality and the latter in his "incorruptible dream." Daisy urges her husband to forget about the incident and to call up the reception for a bellboy to bring ice for julep refreshment. "As Tom took up the receiver," Carraway recounts, "the compressed heat exploded into sound and we were listening to the portentous chords of Mendelssohn's Wedding March from the ballroom below" (p.132).

The Mendelssohn's Wedding March provides an occasion for the excursionists to reminisce the marriage of Daisy with Tom five years earlier in mid-June of a hot boiling summer in Louisville. Shakespeare's *Midsummer's Night Dream* that inspired Mendelssohn's Wedding March, it has to be remembered, is a romantic comedy defying the law of forced marriage dictated by Egeus a noble who wishes his daughter Hermia to marry a man of his choice Demetrius, for whom she prefers Lysander. There is no need to go over the whole story here. It is sufficient to point out that the obstacle of the humor society is defeated through a complicated plot that involved fairies, love potions and induced dreams, and that finally ended with the desired society with the celebration with a group wedding. In *The Great Gatsby*, the same idea crops up as to why Daisy married Tom, with the heat blamed for her inconsiderate choice of the man who comes her way. There is no Oberon or a Puck love dropping love potions on the eyes of the lovers whilst asleep, and thus making them switch in their love objects, but the unbearable midsummer heat seems to have played the same role as in a waking dream, with a guest crasher known as Biloxi remembered by Daisy as having fainted during her wedding. This reminisced anecdote is soon followed up by a renewal of attack on the part of Buchanan who wants to expose Gatsby's underground activity as a dangerous bootlegger, having beforehand investigated his enemy's activities.

Tom's interrogation of Gatsby starts with the accusation that he is violating the sanctity of his home. "What kind of a row are you trying to cause in my house anyhow?" Tom outrageously asks Gatsby after the latter has answered convincingly a question about his education in Oxford. This reference to his "house" sounds as grand as the reference to big "houses" such as that of the House of the Atreus in Greek Tragedy. Whilst Daisy tries to calm down the situation and regain self-control, he has these ridiculous words coming from a mouth of an inveterate adulterer: "Self-control," repeated Tom incredulously. "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" (p.136). This verbal self-irony does not miss to trigger the narrator's comment that Tom "saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization" (p.136). Carraway does not spare Tom another sarcastic comment.

“Angry as I was, as we all were,” he says, “I was tempted to laugh whenever his opened his mouth. The transition from libertine to a prig was so complete” (p.136). Up to this point in the verbal battle, Tom is only making his case worse in the eyes of his wife, allowing Gatsby to put a wedge temporarily between Tom and Daisy, by reminding Tom that over the last five years that he had spent alongside with him, Daisy had never really loved him.

Remaining true to his dream, Gatsby reinforces his argument by saying that the only reason why she married Tom is that he was poor and that Daisy was tired of waiting. Completely bewildered and alarmed by what he has heard, Tom turns to Daisy and seeks to understand how this could be true. When he finally comes to understand that what Gatsby has recounted is just a love story with a proletarian slant gone wrong, he regains confidence asking how a man of his condition could have approached Daisy in her childhood home, concluding that Daisy is in love with him just as she used to be at the time of marriage. Pulled into the argument, Gatsby urges Daisy to avow that she never loved Tom, an avowal that she reluctantly makes before taking it back at Tom’s reminiscences of the loving situations they lived together. A second reversal of the situation happens when Daisy comes to admit that she loved Tom “once” beseeching Gatsby as follows: “Oh, you want too much!” she cried – isn’t that enough? I can’t help what’s past. She began to sob helplessly. ‘I did love him once – but I loved you too. (p.139)” Because of the restorative nostalgia still nudging him, what the narrator calls the incorruptible dream, Gatsby cannot accept an argument about the sharing of his one love even if that happened in the past. For him, the past has to be rewritten to suit his dream of Daisy as having been spiritually married to him from the very beginnings. The chapter of her history with Tom is just an interlude to be obliterated from her memory and his own.

It is because of his incapacity to move from a restorative to a reflective nostalgia (Graebner,2007). For him, it is never late for him to take over his romance with Daisy. As he tries to pull her apart to make her admit that the chapter of romance that she lived with Tom has never taken place, Tom blows Gatsby’s cover by revealing his underground, illicit activities as a gangster bootlegger “in the bunch that hangs around Meyer Wolfshiem ... selling grain alcohol over the counter” (p.140), and with a probable participation in the betting scandal of World Football Series of 1919. Such a stunning blow completely tilts the balance in favor of Tom, for even as Gatsby desperately tries to save his face by denying Tom’s accusation Daisy is described as gradually changing sides as regards her lover. Carraway reports how “with every word [by Gatsby] she was drawing further and further into herself, so Gatsby gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly [Sic.] toward that lost voice across the room” (p.141). The midsummer night’s dream for marrying Gatsby evoked as a counterpoint in the Mendelsshon’s Wedding March celebrated in the ballroom is dead for Daisy, who is now being alarmed at being left in the company of a gangster bootlegger.

Tom who all through novel is described as the humor standing as an obstacle for the birth of the desirable society of romantic comedies such as the one described in Shakespeare’s

*Midsummer Night's Dream* avails him of the privilege of giving his frightened wife the lesson of going home in the company of Gatsby. The romance that Daisy has to date lived with Gatsby is momentarily displaced by what sounds as a cautious tale to women who want to live their own romances outside the wedlock: "You two start on home, Daisy," said Tom. He goes on to say in defiance: "In Mr. Gatsby's car." This is followed up by the description of Daisy's frightful attitude at her husband's suggestion: "She looked at Tom, alarmed now, but he insisted with magnanimous scorn." "Go on. He won't annoy you. I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over" (p.141). The word "portentous" attached to the description of the Mendelssohn's Wedding March assumes its tragic meaning with the shape that Gatsby's incorruptible dream will take shortly afterwards.

### **Discussion of the Tragic Turn of the Romance**

In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye (1990) argued that the difference between comedy and romance on the one hand, and tragedy on the other is the position of the hero in his society. In comedy just as in romance, the society is inclusive. In tragedy, the hero is isolated from society. Gatsby's isolation from society in the last round of his fight with the humor (Tom) is expressed in the contrapuntal contrast between the situation of our hero at the end of his row with Tom, and the society celebrating the wedding downstairs in the ballroom. It is in these oppositions between the excluding society of the excursionists in the parlor upstairs and the inclusive desirable society of the celebrators of the group wedding of Shakespeare's *Midsummer's Night Dream* that inspired Mendelssohn's Wedding March that we see the parodic variation that Scott Fitzgerald plays on Shakespeare's romantic comedy and Mendelssohn's Wedding March that it inspired. The isolation of the tragic hero Gatsby is expressed by Carraway in the following comment at his leaving the Plaza Hotel in the company of Daisy: "They were gone, without a word, snapped out, made accidental, isolated, like ghosts, even from our pity" (p.141). Such a comment anticipates the tragic fall of the hero from the dream of Platonic love he still clings to by underlining his isolation even from Daisy with whom he drives back home.

In tragedy as defined by Aristotle, we are familiar with concepts like fate, *harmatia* or weakness, the wheel of fortune, *hybris* or over-ambition and more particularly the notion of catharsis consisting of fear and pity. Much has been said about the car as a symbol expressing social status. What I agree with this interpretation, I would contend that it does not exhaust all the meanings attached to it in the novel, for sometimes the car constitutes a character on its own. For one thing, the car as a motorized vehicle indicates greater social mobility. It is as transformative of the degree of transport movement as the train in the nineteenth century, and the plane in the twentieth. Much more importantly, as some sociologists have already underlined it, the car brought out a social transformation in the moral fiber by allowing the young people much more freedom for sexual flirtation. It is significant that the first time Jordan Baker saw Gatsby it is in Daisy's car wherein they are flirting. As far as the final tragic scenes of the novel are concerned, I have to point out the fact that the car stands for the traditional wheel of fortune that goes up and down according to the state of the hero in the drama of his life. One of the features characteristic

of both the car and tragedy is “accident.” We remember that Gatsby and Fay Daisy left the Plaza Hotel for home in Gatsby’s car and that in the course of their travel, near George Wilson’s garage in the Valley of Ashes, Daisy who is behind the driving wheel hits and runs down Myrtle, being surprised by the appearance of the victim in the middle of the road. It is explained to us that Myrtle’s dashing in front of Gatsby’s car is due to her thinking that it is transporting Tom whom she wants for herself as a husband.

Later in the story, Gatsby recounts to Carraway how he has desperately tried to turn the wheel in the right way to avoid the deathly collision. Gatsby’s car came to be referred to as the “death car”, the car that hit and run and remains as invisible as death itself. In addition to Gatsby’s falling into the motorized world of the wheel, the panicked driver is fate itself since her surname Fay sounds as fate or *fatum* in Greek. For the moment, I shall skip the tragedy of the Wilsons to concentrate on the tragedy that befalls Gatsby. Readers familiar with the concept of *harmatia* or flaw and *hubris*, both of them standing for moral concepts as Frye reminds us, will certainly ask themselves in what ways Gatsby has gone against the law of nature to deserve a tragic end. I would argue that if one has to speak about a weakness in the character of Gatsby, it is sentimentality. Notwithstanding his association with gangsterism and the world of the bootleggers, he remains at the core a sentimental lover. It is often said in the novel, that he killed a man, that is he is a murderer, but to my mind the sole man he killed is his former self as a rugged individual. His sentimentality has much to do with his passion for his beloved. In the novel, he is often associated with the romantic image of his hands ever stretching toward the ineffable. I shall come back to the romantic pattern of imagery shortly, but I suggest that we call his romance with Daisy as a sentimental romance. Being sentimental is not negative in itself, but it is definitely so in the callous and cruel world in which Gatsby evolves. It denotes fragility, and vulnerability to colossuses such as Tom who is always described as being “fractious.” As Carraway comments “Jay Gatsby had broken up like glass against Tom’s hard malice” (p.154).

As for *hubris*, we see it in the passionate, obsessed or soaring mind of Gatsby’s attempt to reverse time to correspond with his wish to take over his love experience with Daisy where he left it over when he went on military service in France. In his restorative nostalgia, Gatsby is in a way involved in the breach of law against Chronos or Father Time, a figure that comes in all modernist literature from Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* to Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*. At this stage it is worth underlining that the soaring mind of Gatsby’s being a friend of God through the inspiration of his love for Daisy echoes Plato’s *The symposium* (2002) in its last section when Socrates envisions love or the acting of loving beauty as a ladder leading rung by rung until it reaches the vastness of beauty itself which is God himself. But these last words in the eulogy of love by Socrates ends with an attenuating carnivalesque scene that brings all the Platonist ideas about love down to their true dimensions. As soon as Socrates finishes his eulogy, the company of philosophers forming *The symposium* is disturbed by a “knocking at the door, followed by the notes of a flute and the sound of festive brawling in the street” (Plato, 2002: 563). This festive crowd guided by the heavily drunk Alcibiades burst into Agathon’s courtyard as if the carnivalesque body reinstates its place by right amidst all the idealism about love celebrated by the

philosophers. If Gatsby falls victim to a tragic irony at the end of the novel romance it is because he is incapable to bring his soaring mind down to earth, that is to say to the carnivalesque dimension of life as *The symposium* suggests, even when he realizes that Daisy is no longer the ideal object love that he has imagined her to be.

At one occasion of the novel, Daisy and Jordan are described as a “silver idols weighing down their own white dresses against the singing breeze of the fans” (p.121). At another occasion, Gatsby confirms Carraway’s impression of Daisy caused by her indiscreet voice by haltingly saying, “It’s full of ...” “Her voice is full of money.” And for Carraway to give the full image: “That was it. I’d never understood before. It was full of money – that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals’ song of it ... High in a white palace the king’s daughter, the Golden Girl” (p.126). These comparisons of Daisy to a silver idol and to the Golden Girl speaks about the transformation of Gatsby’s quest of the grail into a search for a crass materialism of the gold coast, a name given to Long Island in that novel carrying the same name, written by Nelson de Mille, one of Fitzgerald’s favorite writers. However, set in the context of the quest for a lost platonic ideal of love, the metaphors associated with Daisy reveals Gatsby’s high illusions that make him overlook the fact that he is worshipping a “Golden Calf” while wrongly thinking that he is following the spiritual idea of love. Every one of us, Conrad says in his *Heart of Darkness* bows before an idea or ideal of his/her own, it happens that Gatsby falls into idolatry or fetishism under the compulsory power of a false illusion. In this case, we can say that Daisy like Kurtz’s Intended is the greatest fetish of all, herself bowing down before money.

In his “Meaulnes, Gatsby and the Possibilities of Romance,” Coyle (1987) writes that “The books (Alain Fournier’s *Le Grand Meaulnes* and *The Great Gatsby*) are parallel exercises in writing a roman in a post-romantic age” (p.15). Whilst I agree with the historical incongruity of the romantic mode of writing in an ironic age, I would tend to cite in this case Georg Lukacs’ definition of the hero of the novel as “the product of estrangement from the outside world. (p.66)” For Luckas (1971) “the psychology of the novel’s heroes is [objectified] as seekers (p.60)” but they are seekers “in a world that has been abandoned by God” (p. 88). Such heroes of the novel, and we may say romance because the novel is a genre that absorbs other genres, are called by Luckacs problematic hero because of the inherent contradictions in their character. Like the heroes of the novel, those of modernist romance seeks a Platonic love in a world in which love or God is no longer central to the life of his community. By looking nostalgically backward, he becomes the enemy of time and the object of an ironic tragedy. We might also argue that the *harmatia* or flaw and *hubris* or the obsessive soaring mind of our hero can be taken as indications of his morally faulty character as an irresistible bootlegger. Both Aristotle and Hegel have looked at the fall in tragedy in terms of ethics. However, I would contend that the underground activities of Gatsby do not really support such ethical interpretation of tragedy because the pursuit of money in this case is undertaken for the single purpose of winning back Daisy redeems his venture. As far as I am concerned, I would give up ethical theories of tragedy for the non-ethical one developed by Frye (1990) in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, and to which Georges Lukacs gives credit in his qualification

of the problematic hero as a hero who lives in a world abandoned by God. It is worth underlining that God in Christian theology is associated with love.

With Frye's idea in mind, one might ask what *nemesis*, the Greek word for unbalance, or disequilibrium that Gatsby has caused to deserve his tragic fall. Putting the tragic fall of Adam in the background, Frye (1990) argued that man "enters the world in which existence itself is tragic. Merely to exist is to disturb the balance of nature." "Every natural man," he added, "is a Hegelian thesis, and implies a reaction: every birth provokes the return of an avenging death." Echoing modern existential theories, Frye concluded that "This fact, in itself ironic and now called Angst, becomes tragic when a sense of a lost and usually higher destiny is added to it" (p. 213). So though I have tried to provide the reasons for Gatsby by invoking the two elements of tragedy, the flaw and the state of hubris, I might as well have not done it because the tragic is inherent to man's existence no matter his degree of innocence. A huge number of critics have already pointed out that death lurks at every corner of Fitzgerald's novel, and shows explicitly in the overwhelming elegiac tone or mood of the whole narration.

At this stage of the research, I shall turn instead to the way the other characters react to Gatsby's tragic. Carraway recounts the gap between the moment of the crash and the tragic death of the hero through what he hears during the coroner's inquest and what newspapers have reported about what is called the tragic death of Gatsby and Georges Wilson. We remember that Tom, Jordan Baker, and Carraway who are driving far behind Gatsby's car stop at Wilson's home to see what has happened only to realize that Myrtle is fatally run over running in the direction of New York city. The whole scene turns into a detective whodunit story. This brief outline that Frye gives of the detective story will allow us to understand the conventions that preside over it. The fact that we are now in ironic phase of literature largely accounts for the popularity of the detective story, the formula of how a man-hunter locates a *pharmakos* and gets rid of him. However, as Frye (1990) put it so well,

*as we move away from this we move toward a ritual drama around a corpse in which a wavering finger of social condemnation passes over a group of suspects and finally settles on one. The sense of victim by lot is very strong, for the case against him is only plausibly manipulated. (p. 46)*

Frye's definition of the detective whodunit story superbly summarizes the whole drama played around the badly mutilated corpse of Myrtle. Michaelis the owner of a coffee joint close to Wilson's home is interrogated as a first witness by the coroner about what has really happened. The coroner manages with difficult to grasp his strange-sounding Greek name, Mavromichaelis. Michaelis gives his version of two cars crossing in their way to and back from New York City. "A pale well-dressed Negro" comes in as a second witness to say that the car that ran over Myrtle is of a yellow color. A first finger of accusation is pointed to Tom by the grieving Wilson who heard his voice in the surrounding crowd. Tom pushes through the crowd to reach Wilson to forcefully clean his name saying that he has just arrived from New York in his blue coupé and that the

yellow car that he has filled up some time earlier in the day is not his. As the interrogation of witnesses goes on, it becomes clear that the accident is not all that arbitrary, because Myrtle in fact is trying to stop it imagining that Tom is in there. To avoid all further suspicion, Tom slips away after having put the grieving Wilson in his office and closed the door after him. Wilson for a second time points a finger of accusation at Michaelis as a suspect lover of his wife while recounting how he has discovered that his wife is cheating on him. In the meantime, Tom together with Jordan and Carraway arrive at home in the East Village. Declining Tom's invitation to enter home for a bite, Carraway stays outside to wait for a taxi to be ordered for him and take him to West Egg. It is whilst waiting for the taxi that Carraway sees Gatsby hidden in the foliage of Tom's garden waiting to see whether Tom will molest Daisy, planning to intervene in the case she sends an agreed signal.

However, as Frye (1990) put it so well, the sense of a victim chosen by lot is very strong, for the case against him is only plausibly manipulated in detective stories (p. 46). The manipulation is discovered by Carraway as he curiously approaches the pantry section of Tom's to see through a rift in the windowsill. He tells us that "Tom and Daisy sit[ting] opposite each other at the table, with a plate of cold fried chicken between them, and two bottles of ale" (p.152). From Tom's holding of Daisy's hand, and her nodding of her head in agreement, Carraway infers that husband and wife have reconciled themselves at the expense of the gullible Gatsby, who wrongly thought that the day would end with the husband's molestation of his wife. Carraway qualifies all this show as a conspiracy against the victim, Gatsby. Offstage, Tom has also managed to manipulate Catherine, the sister of Tom's dead mistress Myrtle, in order not to testify against him. Carraway just writes that the day after the fatal accident, Catherine came to the Wilsons heavily drunk and that "Someone, kind or curious, took her in his car and drove her in the wake of her sister's body" (p.162). The implication is that Tom has succeeded to smother his affair with Myrtle, and that probably he has substituted one sister for another as his mistress, for at the end of the novel, Carraway tells us that Tom has renewed his womanizing practices, having come out of jewelry's shop with a gift for a mistress of his. Tom's manipulation does not stop here, for as he avows later to Gatsby he has designated Gatsby as the author of the hit and run accident that took the life of his mistress Myrtle.

It follows from the above that Gatsby falls in the category of tragic characters known as the *pharmakos*, or sacrificial victim. He is a willing sacrificial victim because he tells Carraway that he will lie for Daisy's sake by telling the police that it is he who is behind the driving wheel at the time of the accident. What strikes us is that Daisy does not return all the trust and the love he has put in her. Still overwhelmed by the illusion that she loves him, he stays all the night outside the Buchanans' house expecting her to send a rescue signal for him, not aware that loyalties has shifted. Advised by Carraway to escape in order to avoid arrest, he refuses to do so preferring to stay close to his beloved on behalf of whom he is willing to testify. Serenity, Frye tells us, is one of the hallmarks of tragedy. So after a whole night spent as vigil on Daisy in her husband's home, Gatsby comes back home completely depressed. It is not long before Carraway joins him to warn him about the premonitions that he has had about his arrest and conviction for the hit and run

accident. However, Gatsby remains very serene, preferring instead to share cigarette smoking with his friend, refusing to run away for the simple reason that “he couldn’t possibly leave Daisy until he knew what she was going to do” (p.154). The narrator adds that “he was clutching at some last home and I couldn’t bear to shake him” (p.154).

Tragedy, romance, and comedy, Frye sustains, end with *anagnorisis* or recognition. It is during these twilight hours of the day that Gatsby recounts his real story, that is to say the story about who he is really, to the reader and the narrator-character. As the latter tells us, “It was this night he told me the strange story of his youth with Dan Cody – told to me because ‘Jay Gatsby’ had broken up like glass against Tom’s hard malice” (p.154). This recognition story is arranged not at the moment of its telling because it is arranged in a modernist plot that does not abide by the law of linear narrative characteristic of storytelling in realist modes of writing. The character-narrator in his comment underlines the vulnerability and fragility of the tragically romantic hero in front of the malice of his enemy. It is also during these twilight hours that Gatsby delivers his whole love story with Daisy whilst he is stationed as officer in Camp Taylor, in Saint Louis, Kentucky. What is remarkable in this recognition scene is that romance in Gatsby’s case has a “proletarian element.” After all, his romance espouses the outline of the American success story of going from rags to riches. Frye (1990) showed clearly how the proletarian element is inherent to romance in the following quote: “There is a genuinely ‘proletarian element in romance too which is never satisfied with its various incarnations, and in fact the incarnations themselves indicate that no matter how great a change take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on” (p.186). I would argue that it is this hope against hope that is romantic illusion or idealism that finally brings the tragic end of Gatsby. Gatsby, to paraphrase Frye in another context, flings off his beggar’s rags just as the American dream promises it, and stands forth in the resplendent cloak of a prince as a realization of that dream.

However, he ultimately fails to wake up from his dream because he is not satisfied with its present incarnation. He clutches to the hope of marrying into established wealth, knowing well that his wealth is new and tarnished with crime in the eye of the public. As the saying goes, at the source of every wealth or fortune there is a crime. But that crime has first to be forgotten by allowing time to elapse before that wealth becomes socially legitimate in the public opinion. This is the case, for example, of Carraway’s grandfather’s wealth as well as that of Tom. Gatsby has unsuccessfully worked to give legitimacy to his newly acquired fortune by entertaining the rumor that his health was inherited from fortunate parents. Looking at it deeply, then, the situation of Gatsby reminds us of a similar situation as regards the black man’s wish to marry a white woman in order to enter white civilization that Fanon (1968) summarizes so well for us in his *Black skins, white Masks* (p.63). Ignoring even the etiquette of the established class in, for example, confusing polite invitation for a true invitation, and completely in the dark as to the malice behind the polished behavior of the wealthy, Gatsby is turned into a sacrificial victim shot dead in his swimming pool by a man (Wilson, Myrtle’s husband) who is himself a tragic victim of a manipulation.

The tragic turn that Gatsby's romance has taken toward the end of the novel closes with the isolation of the hero, overwhelmed by a romantic illusion about love in a world that has turned its back to such idealism. He is a modern Don Quixote believing in the world of romance ignoring the fact that time has elapsed, and that values are liable to change. If one has to look for the chorus that reflects this tragedy, one has to find it in two chorus characters, Carraway and the owl-eyed man. We remember that at the end of the novel, Carraway, for the first time, is carried away by that exaltation of the hero characteristic of romance and tragedy. Shaking hands with our hero, after a long chat with him following the fatal accident, Carraway tells us what follows: "Before I [Carraway] reached the hedge I remembered something and turned around." The exaltation of the hero follows up in a shout in the direction of Gatsby: "They are a rotten crowd ... You're worth the whole damn lot of them together" (p.160).

Indeed, the hero of our romance does not survive, but in the eyes of the character-character and implicitly he remains a tragic hero who stood steadfastly to his ideal love. In the rest of the novel, Carraway plays the role of a chorus character complaining about the ingratitude of all the people who sponged on Gatsby's generosity when he was at his highest fortune. Tom and Daisy packed up and left New York without leaving any address where they can be joined; His Mephistophelian master Wolfshiem does not want to be mixed up with the "crime" arguing that friends are friends when they are in this world; Jordan left Daisy's home and could hardly be located; Klipspringer, Gatsby's musician called up not in order to announce his participation in the funeral obsequies but to recuperate a pair of shoes he left in Gatsby's home. As Carraway put it, "I found myself on Gatsby's side, and alone" (p. 170). It is only three days later that "a telegram signed Henry C. Gatz arrived from a town in Minnesota ... [saying] that the sender was leaving immediately and to postpone the funeral until he came" (p.173). The telegram is sent by Gatsby's father who has read about the murder of his son by a man deranged by grief in newspapers. Another scene of *anagnorisis* or recognition related this time to tragedy is delivered by the father as to the childhood ambitions of his son in the form of a self-improvement book with annotations at the backside of it. The father says something that is true in the light of what I have said earlier about crime being at the centre of every imaginable fortune: "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" (p.175).

A few words deserve to be said about the chorus to show the variation that Fitzgerald plays on this convention. According to Frye (1990), "in tragedy the chorus, however faithful, usually represents the society from which the hero is gradually isolated. Hence what it expresses is a social norm against which the hero's *hybris* may be measured"(p.218). I would argue that to have a chorus needs some amount of social consensus about values to be defended and measured according to an ethical moral standards, but in the case of *The Great Gatsby*, what we have instead are exasperated social tensions. The community that is described in the novel, as I shall shortly contend, is a community at loose ends. In this particular case I would sustain that what remains as an option for the author is the inclusion of a chorus character, not all that virtuous as he pretends to be as I shall show below, but who in accordance to function of the chorus in tragedy tries to

restrain the central character's *hybris*, by reminding the hero, for example, that time elapses and that it would be futile to attempt to reverse it.

The catharsis, that is to say fear and pity, peculiar to tragedy, is played out not by suppliants but the heavy rain that fell during the funeral ceremony. As the character chorus (Carraway) says in this regard, he dimly hears one of the very few attendants murmur 'Blessed are the dead that the rain falls on.' He follows up this report with the owl-eyed man's response to the blessing. He writes that the latter responds with an 'Amen... in a brave voice' (p.183). A huge number of critics have tried to find out the reason for the inclusion of the owl-eyed man in *The Great Gatsby*, especially at this stage of the narrative. I would claim that this character's role, as Frye (1990) argues about similar characters popping up at the end of tragedy, is that "of focusing the tragic mood of the novel" (p.218). It has to be noted that the owl, in Greek mythology, is the messenger of Atropos, the oldest and most inflexible of the three Fates of Destiny or Moirae, whose function is to cut the thread of life, once it is measured and spindled respectively by her two sisters Clotho and Lachesis.

### Conclusion

It follows from the above discussion that *The Great Gatsby* is marked by at least three displacements in its overall plot structure or *mythos*. The distinctive feature of the first chapters are comical in the sense that they set the scene by narrating the arrival of Carraway in New York, divulging the opposition between the two distinctive societies of West Egg and East Egg. In the middle chapters, the comic structure shifts to the mythos of romance as we move from the end of spring to the hot season of summer. In the final chapters, a second shift from romance to tragedy takes place by the narration of how Gatsby falls from the high wheel of fortune downward to his murder in the swimming pool by Wilson. Gatsby's characterization comprises all the elements of tragedy. His *hybris* is embodied in his refusal of change, and his desperate attempt to turn back the clock to the time when he was dating Daisy. This leads to the exclusion of the hero from the society that has moved into another ethos whilst the hero is tragically trapped by his restorative nostalgia. The hero's *harmatia*, or flaw, can be located in Gatsby's display of an excessive sentimentality in the face of a hard social reality exemplified by Tom. Catharsis is expressed in the lament of the chorus-character Carraway, who deeply regrets his oversight of the central character's heroism in a loose-end community. These elements, amongst others like *anagnorisis* or recognition, *nemesis* or unbalance, the wheel of fortune or accident that I have mentioned in the discussion section of this research, shift the romance structure into the plot structure of tragedy. It is the predominance of the plot structures of romance and tragedy that accounts for the title of this research, "F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: An Analysis of the Novel as a Tragic Romance."

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